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**THE USE OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PICTURE BOOKS TO ENHANCE
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN A FOURTH GRADE CLASSROOM**

by

Kelly Livingston

A Thesis

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

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

Rowan University

January 20, 2020

Thesis Chair: Susan Browne, Ed.D.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my late father in law, David Livingston. Your belief in my abilities as an educator, and constant encouragement pushed me to go beyond what I believed I could. Thank you for being my inspiration to make a difference in a child's life every day.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Susan Browne and Dr. Valerie Lee for igniting the desire to make it my mission as a literacy specialist and school leader to insist on cultural relevance within our classrooms. I promise to continue to lead educators towards embracing multicultural pedagogy through literacy.

To my Superintendent and dear friend, Karen Macpherson, your unwavering support, pep talks and most importantly your hugs over the past two years have been imperative throughout this journey. Thank you for believing in me.

Finally, I would have given up numerous times had it not been for the love and support of my husband. I am forever grateful for your patience and ability to give me the space I needed when my brain would shut down and frustration set in. It is now our time to take on the world. I look forward to multicultural experiences and travel with you that I can share with my students, teachers and our boys. I love you.

Abstract

Kelly W. Livinston

THE USE OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PICTURE BOOKS TO ENGAGE
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN A FOURTH GRADE CLASSROOM
2019-2020

Susan Browne, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of using culturally relevant picture books to enhance social and emotional learning in a fourth grade classroom. The study utilized the expertise of three different educational professionals, the literacy coach, the school social worker and the fourth grade teacher. Two Social Emotional Learning competencies were paired with three multicultural picture books. Students followed the procedure of discussion based upon what they already knew, what they wanted to learn and finally, after the reading and dialogue, what they learned. Students were asked about their prior knowledge of particular cultures and what they knew about a particular competency goal such as what it meant to be self-aware. A K-W-L chart was utilized throughout the three lessons as well as a written portion of reflection at the end. Through the study it was determined that students felt that they related to the stories as they related to either their own culture or that of someone they knew. Students who recognized themselves in the readings were more involved in the dialogue as well as through written expression.

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Chapter 1

Scope of the Study

“The teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom. To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them.” (Delpit, p.32)

Introduction

Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasized that students’ culture is significantly relevant in teaching and learning environments. It is particularly difficult for learning to take place when students are consistently disconnected between their home culture and their school culture. Ladson-Billings (1995) proposed three dimensions of culturally relevant pedagogy: 1. Holding high academic expectations and offering appropriate support such as scaffolding. 2. Acting on cultural competence by reshaping curriculum, building on students’ funds of knowledge, and establishing relationships with students and their homes; and 3. cultivating students’ critical consciousness regarding power relations.

Purpose Statement

Based upon the overwhelming need to connect home and school cultures through culturally relevant pedagogy and how this can affect a child’s social and emotional well-being, motivates me to analyze the connection and the best method of uniting the two. The overall purpose of the study is to determine how to enhance the New Jersey Department of Education social emotional learning competencies through culturally relevant interactive reading activities.

Statement of the Problem

The research question guiding this study asks, How can the use of culturally relevant picture books enhance social emotional learning for fourth grade students?

Similarly, I ponder what social and emotional conversations develop among students when addressing the issues of equity through multicultural literature. In addition, the research was conducted to determine the significance of using culturally relevant literature to create an equitable, social, emotional classroom learning environment.

The setting of the research took place at a public school consisting of pre-k through eighth grade students, 453 students in all. The school is located in a small, blue collar town that is only one square mile. Quite a few community members are a part of our support staff (cafeteria, playground assistants, secretary, teacher's aides). In addition, three teachers out of forty are former students of the school. There is an array of diversity amongst the student population. The majority of students are Caucasian, followed by African American and then Latino, Asian and Middle Eastern. However, as I look into the classrooms, I see much of the English Language Activities and Reading curriculum revolving around Caucasian, middle class scenarios, stories and main characters. I do not see the curriculum connecting to the cultural representation of the faces I see sitting in these classrooms.

Story of the Question

As the newly appointed chairperson of the social, emotional learning committee as well as the district's literacy leader, I have spent a great deal of time trying to figure

out how we can best support our diverse student population through culturally relevant pedagogy.

As the concept was addressed more in depth through my graduate studies, the more I realized the lack of this practice within our school. Therefore, the more I learned, the more passionate I became about addressing diversity. Gollnick & Chinn, (2002) noted:

As more and more students from diverse backgrounds populate 21st century classrooms, and efforts mount to identify effective methods to teach these students, the need for pedagogical approaches that are culturally responsive intensifies. Today's classrooms require teachers to educate students varying in culture, language, abilities and many other characteristics. To meet this challenge, teachers must employ not only theoretically sound but also culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must create a classroom culture where all students regardless of their culture and linguistic background are welcomed and supported, and provided with the best opportunity to learn. (p. 64)

Theorist Sonia Nieto's work discusses the importance of multicultural education of which there are multiple aspects. This includes areas that correspond with the social and emotional learning competencies, in areas such as affirming student identity, and self-awareness, worth and belonging. Nieto defines multicultural education as "a process of comprehensive and basic education for all students. Multicultural education challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts

and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, gender, etc.) that students, their communities, and teachers represent” (1992, p. 208).

Through this research culturally relevant texts were selected that align with social emotional competencies and build upon student’s unique cultures. Texts were collaboratively chosen between the school psychologist, school social worker and myself. Text selections will also focus on gender equality, students with special needs and different nuclear family dynamics. The texts will be used within an interactive read aloud format to allow for students to not just dialogue about the situation but to engage in the decodification process and identify with aspects of the situation, feel themselves in the situation and reflect critically.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter two provides a literature review of culturally responsive pedagogy, critical text selection strategies, Pairing Culturally Relevant text with the Social Emotional Competencies, and how interactive read alouds can provide a venue for dialogue and self-reflection for the student. Chapter three will discuss the design and context of the study. This will include the implementation of the study, as well as the research design, procedure and data collection methods and sources of data as well as data analysis. Chapter four will discuss the findings of the study. Finally, chapter five will provide a summary of the study, its limitations implications, and the conclusion.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Currently, “The 21st century brings a new and diverse group of learners into the public schools. By 2020, 50% of the students in our schools will be minorities (Webb, Metha, Jordan, 2000) and 85% of our nation's teachers will be white females, who differ from their students racially, culturally, and in social status. Because schools are becoming much more culturally and linguistically diverse, educators need to learn more about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all students. They should strive to provide experiences in the classroom that closely mirror the cultural and linguistic environments of their students. Tea le and Yokota (2000) contend that "children need to see themselves and others in our diverse society reflected in the selections read by the teacher" (p. 15). One method of providing diversity for both students and teachers is through literature, specifically a quality multicultural literature program. Canales, J., Lucido, F. & Salas, R.G. (2002)

In addition, according to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional learning the practice of social-emotional learning (now made into standards by the New Jersey Department of Education), has five different components which include, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These competencies guide teachers to help students manage their environments and become self-aware as students and human beings.

Therefore, as I researched this topic, four areas guide this literature review. These are 1. Culturally responsive pedagogy 2. Critical Literacy Theory 3. Addressing social emotional learning competencies through multicultural text selection and finally, 4. Instructional strategies.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Children learn about themselves and the world around them within the context of culture (Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, 2002). Students from minority cultures may feel pressured to disavow themselves of their cultural beliefs and norms in order to assimilate into the majority culture. This, however, can interfere with their emotional and cognitive development and result in school failure (Sheets, 1999). Today's classrooms require teachers to educate students varying in culture, language, abilities and many other characteristics (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002) To meet this challenge, teachers must employ theoretically sound but also culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must create a classroom culture where all students regardless of their cultural and linguistic background are welcomed and supported, and provided with the best opportunities to learn. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) is a theoretical framework that seeks to close the opportunity gap. It was originally conceived in response to a need for schooling to be more relevant to the lives of African American students. Ladson-Billings defines CRP as: A theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate.(1995) Unfortunately, even teachers who are supportive of culturally relevant teaching may struggle to enact in their pedagogy (Black, 2010).

Teachers and administrators who work and teach in schools often reflect the social and economic levels of society (Valencia, 2000). The teacher population represents the European American dominant culture of society, and teachers are generally white, middle class, and female (Fine & Weis, 2003) Compounding this problem is that little is known about how teachers can be prepared to enact CRP. Goodwin (2002)writes that this problem “must galvanize teacher preparation programs to rethink how their curriculum prepares pre-service teachers to work effectively with diverse students” (p.157) Sleeter, 2008 found that many white teacher candidates developed “deficit-oriented stereotypes” towards students of color (p.217). These teachers bring negative assumptions to the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasized that the students’ culture absolutely matters when it comes to teaching and learning environments. Learning cannot take place in the classroom when students experience a discontinuity, or a mismatch between their home culture and the school culture (Gay, 2000; Nieto, 2002) Thus the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy. A large part of being culturally responsive in the classroom means ensuring students are exposed to multicultural texts.

Teachers need to implement such texts as a way to develop students' knowledge base of cultural diversity. Teachers need to be selective of the literature they read to students, put on display, or place in their classroom libraries. When they choose literature that represents culture, and then use that literature for their instruction students are given opportunity to learn about their own and others sociocultural backgrounds (Gay, 2002a). Nieto (2000) states, “Educational inequality is repugnant in a society that has pledged to provide an equal education regardless of race or circumstance. Yet educational inequality is commonplace in schools all over the country.” (p.5) she has

designed her research on the thought that it is still unfortunately evident in society that students are shortchanged by educational policies and practices that favor social class and zip codes. She insists that the inequality of funding and lack of attention towards the importance of linguistic and cultural differences drastically affect the quality of education. Through her studies, Nieto suggests that hope is not lost when teachers become conscious of their own cultural identity, and that of others, shift their cultural perspectives. She found that participants became more confident in how they interacted with their students. They were able to label their assumptions and biases, which helped them to “challenge and even shatter commonly held stereotypes.” (p.13) this of course cannot be the sole answer to a larger systemic issue, however, in the classroom is the best place to start.

Critical Literacy Theory

Theorist, Paulo Freire’s name has become synonymous with the very concept and practice of ‘critical literacy.’ “The basic premise of critical literacy is that it requires the reader of a text to adopt a critical and questioning approach. It encourages readers to actively analyze texts and offers strategies so that the underlying messages can be uncovered. This concept is closely linked to the idea of critical pedagogy, also heavily influenced by the works of Freire. He strongly endorsed the learners’ ability to think critically about their education situation and recognize connections between their individual problems and experiences and the social contexts in which they are embedded. Realizing one’s consciousness (“conscientization” in Freire’s terminology) is a needed first step of "praxis," which is defined as the power and know-how to take action against oppression, empowered by liberating education.” (Rahman, 2012)

“Critical literacy is the ability to actively read text in a manner that promotes a deeper understanding of socially constructed concepts; such as power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships. Critical literacy encourages individuals to understand and question the attitudes, values, and beliefs of written texts, visual applications, and spoken words.” (Tompkins, 2010 p.11) Critical literacy moves the reader’s focus away from the “self” in critical reading to the interpretation of texts in different environmental and cultural contexts (Luke, 2000). This provides teachers and students an opportunity to read, evaluate, and reflect on texts.

Embedded in literacy practices, critical literacy provides opportunities for readers to determine their ability to discern the purpose of texts and also their ability to identify ideologies presented in the texts. As they read, individuals can accept, reject or reconstruct the ideologies presented in the text (Cervetti, Pardales, Damico, 2001) to support their own life experiences (Luke, 2000). This knowledge construction, or reconstruction, of content empowers students to embrace their own conceptual perspectives and enables them to more critically evaluate other aspects of their lives.

Christensen (2003) added that becoming critically literate within school contexts is also about engaging in academically rigorous work that is grounded in students’ lives, always connected to larger contexts, and work that invites students to be filled with hope as they work toward creating a world in which they want to live. The work of Harste et al. (2000) advocates the use of social issues books to initiate critical conversations to shape our evolving understanding of classroom literacy practices. Many educational researchers and practitioners work to understand what is meant by critical literacies (Comber, 2001; P. Freire, 1972; Giroux, 1993; Janks, 2000; Lewison et al., 2002;

Shannon, 1995, 2002). Beginning with the notion that social worlds are discursively constructed (Gee, 1996, 1999) and that various discourses communicate different degrees of power, those concerned with critical pedagogy are dedicated to the interrogation of spoken, written, and visual texts. In addition, the work of Vasquez (1998, 2000), O'Brien (2001), Christensen (2000), Edelsky (1999), and others. These classroom accounts of critical literacies portray the ways in which young children negotiated critical literacies, how everyday texts became sites of critical inquiry, how classroom language and literature facilitated acting for justice, and how social action transpired in elementary classrooms. It is recognized that literate activity involves people engaged with texts (written and visual) and each other. Therefore, to study classroom literacy practices, one must examine the discourses that permeate classroom life. Classroom discourse involves more than just language. It includes all social and semiotic practices that shape classroom life (Gee, 1996; Hicks, 1995).

Reader Response: Dialogue and Interaction

In regards to this study, there is the focus on Reader response theory. This can be seen through the work of Louise Rosenblatt. She states that meaning occurs within the reader in response to a text or somewhere between the reader and the text through a "transaction". In a 1999 interview, *Theory and Practice, An Interview with Louise Rosenblatt* she states "my transactional view of reading as a dynamic, fluid process in time. It helped to show that reading is selecting, organizing, and synthesizing activity. It helps to explain the back-and-forth, spiraling influence of the reader and the text on the emerging meaning: the creation of tentative meanings, their influence on the possibilities to be considered. It acknowledges the entire context of the reader, their culture, past

experience, and cognitive ability. The "transaction" between the text and the reader as a thinking and feeling individual with a personal history, to produce the "poem" or evoked work. It speaks to dialogue and interaction happening before reading, during reading and after reading. Rosenblatt (1978) explains that readers approach the work in ways that can be viewed as *aesthetic or different*. The question is why the reader is reading and determine the purpose or intent of why they are reading. Is it primarily to help readers gain information, or is to create an aesthetic experience? In Efferent reading, focus on particular bits of information that the reader will "take away" or focus on obtaining some sort of piece of information. She states, "the reader's attention is primarily focused on what will remain as a residue *after* the reading — the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out. In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text." [p. 25]

The focus on Reader Response in the classroom is to stress the importance of the reader's role in the construction of meaning. Aesthetic responses offer readers a continuum for attending to the experience of reading. The readers are expected to explore a range of possible meanings (Purves, 1993) "The term aesthetic was chosen because its Greek source suggested perception through the senses, feelings, and intuitions. The aesthetic reader pays attention to—savors—the qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities, and emotions that are called forth and participates in the tensions, conflicts, and resolutions of the images, ideas and scenes and they unfold." (Purves, p. 11) For Rosenblatt (1977), in aesthetic reading learners attend to the quality of the experience they are exposed to under the surveillance of the text; conversely, in efferent

reading learners attend to information and directions that reside in practical situations. The distinction between aesthetic or efferent readings springs from “what the reader does, the stance that he adopts and the activities he carries out in relation to the text” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 27)

Reader-response theory is based on an effort to illuminate the relationship between the reader and the text. The underlying idea is that “literary texts frequently contain social dilemmas and conflicts. Such reading demands personal responses from readers” (Yang, 2002, p. 50). In order for readers to make sense of these literary texts, the theory tends to focus on a range of different roles readers should adopt when they are engaged in the process of reading. Reader response theory is grounded upon the assumption that in a reading experience readers actively create their own meaning from texts and express their individual responses and understandings. When responding, students are encouraged to reflect on what they bring to the text as readers. This includes experiences, knowledge, emotions, and concerns. (Layne, 2015) Therefore, Layne suggests that when readers respond to a text they weave their personal ideas, feelings, thoughts and experiences together with the words, images and ideas in the text. There is no one correct response or one ‘right’ answer but as readers have opportunities to talk with other readers and to reflect on what they are thinking, initial responses deepen and new understandings are uncovered.

Reader response-based teaching pedagogy offers communicative attainments for learners (cf. Hirvela, 1996) by which they can get involved in interactive communication among the learners’ peers in sharing ideas as reader responses. This is also seen through Lee’s (2010) qualitative case study revealed the integration of Bakhtin’s theory and

reader responses to improve second language reading comprehension. Lee further argues that through dynamic dialogic interaction between readers and the texts more understanding of learners can possibly take place. In addition, another earlier study conducted by Newell et al. (1989) also revealed the benefits of reader response strategies for encouraging and triggering readers as writers to elaborate and explore responses to literary works being enjoyed. This study was done to compare to previous studies of writing and literary understanding that have demonstrated the value of analytic essay writing for enhancing story understanding, it focused on student's initial interpretations without considering the effects of a teacher's support and direction. After revising initial drafts in two response modes (directive and dialogue), the students wrote paragraph-length responses to posttest questions of story understanding. Results indicated main effects for response condition and grade level, with the dialogue condition enhancing story understanding more than the directive condition, as well as attaining higher posttest scores. Data from composing-aloud protocols revealed that the dialogue condition supported the students' reformulation of their own interpretations constructed in the initial drafts, while the directive condition seemed to shift the students away from their own initial interpretations of the stories.

Multicultural Literature as a Support for Social and Emotional Competencies

“Social and emotional learning (SEL) is defined as the process through which people acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Social and emotional learning focuses on knowledge, attitudes, and skills in five

competency areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.” (Atwell and Bridgeland, 2019) Schools throughout the country are being mandated to address these competencies within their daily curriculum. This becomes a challenge to educators as to how best to do this. Therefore, a possible solution may be through the use of culturally relevant literature.

Culturally relevant literature is literature that represents a culture authentically, and realistically, while upholding a culturally conscious ideology. Giving students the chance to read high quality books written about people of their culture can engage their emotions and encourage them to find literature they like” (Harris, 1997, McNair, 2010) The concept of “engaging their emotions” is a key factor in successful implementation of SEL. In addition, “Students are often asked to make connections to what they are reading, so it is important that they are able to find characters and situations that they can relate to in the books that they are reading. Multicultural literature can be used to create a classroom where all students are valued.” (Colby & Lyon, 2004). What is the importance of students reading about themselves? What is the importance of children relating to characters and situations found in books reflective of their own culture?

Research suggests that students need to be able to make connections between literature and their everyday lives. Literature can provide children with a sense of affirmation about themselves and their culture (Colby & Lyon, 2004). This ability to relate to characters and situations in books can be a major factor in book selection (Colby & Lyon, 2004). When children don’t find themselves reflected in books, they are less likely to be engaged in the reading process. Also, they receive the subtle message that school is not for people like them (Colby & Lyon, 2004). Students are often asked to

make connections to what they are reading, so it is important that they are able to find characters and situations that they can relate to in the books that they are reading.

Multicultural literature can be used to create a classroom where all students are valued (Colby & Lyon, 2004). Multicultural literature can be used as a tool to open students' minds.

Salovey and Mayer (1990) commenced the study of the role of emotional abilities in student learning and social adaptation by proposing a theory of emotional intelligence. Since the development there has been a great amount of research conducted. Studies such as that conducted by Goleman's (1995) *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* and Elias et al. (1997) *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators*. These studies sparked interest in the idea of SEL among educators and policy makers. The term SEL was officially introduced by the Collaborative of America, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) based out of the University of Illinois- Chicago, providing educators, and other youth development practitioners a framework for addressing social and emotional needs in a methodical manner, while still focusing on their primary academic task (Zins et al. 2004)

Salovey and Mayer (1990) commenced the study of the role of emotional abilities in student learning and social adaptation by proposing a theory of emotional intelligence (EI). Since this development, EI is increasing substantially and researchers have been studying this term for the greater part of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In addition, numerous studies have focused on the role emotions play with students learning. The publication of Goleman's (1995), *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can Matter More Than IQ* and Elias et al. (1997) *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines*

for Educators interest in Social Emotional Learning among teachers and policy makers, in particular relationships between SEL and intercultural education.

Theoretically, SEL can be embedded within the framework of the learner-centered psychological principles that lead to understanding students as knowledgeable generators, active participants in their own learning, and co-creators of learning experience and curricula (McCombs 2004)

Conclusion

“Unfortunately, implementing school-wide SEL continues to lag behind the understanding of its benefits. Like academic skills, social and emotional skills are best developed when students and teachers are given the opportunity to continuously hone these skills and build upon them through daily practice and support. To ensure these skills are being adequately developed, schools must push for systemic, schoolwide programming that allows students’ social and emotional skills to grow alongside their academic abilities and creates a common culture for SEL throughout the school

“(Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019; Greenberg et al., 2003; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Meyers et al., 2015; Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016) According to C.A.S.E.L the practice of Social Emotional learning has five different components, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. These competencies guide teachers to help students manage their environments and become self-aware as students and human beings.

This is where I feel my study is helpful in showing educators how merging the use of culturally relevant literacy to create dialogue and encourages students to see themselves within the pages will enhance their social and emotional learning. These important and essential areas will develop students to be literate, empathetic, and intrinsically motivated human beings that seek the best within themselves and those that surround them. Our goal as culturally responsive educators is to introduce students to their own personal identities at which cultural identity is at the forefront. Therefore, the more this topic was researched the themes of this literacy review evolved. Thus, the areas of culturally responsive pedagogy, critical literacy theory, identifying multicultural text that aligns with the social emotional learning competencies and Readers Response strategies.

Chapter 3

Research Design/Methodology

Context of the Study

This study was designed with the anticipation that the collaborative efforts of the school social worker, ELA fourth grade teacher and the researcher, will enhance the social and emotional learning competencies of fourth grade students. The three professionals mentioned will work together to develop interactive read aloud lessons that are based upon the New Jersey Department of Education's Social and Emotional competencies. The researcher is considered the "literacy specialist" and will assist with multicultural book selections as well as modeling appropriate interactive reading techniques, developing graphic organizers as well as data collection pre and post lessons. The social worker used her skills to enhance dialogue through questioning students about how certain situations within the text made the students feel and self-reflection and dialogue. The fourth grade teacher developed the pre lesson activities such as vocabulary introduction, activating prior knowledge, comprehension questions and post lesson writing activities. The three professionals worked together to expose students to texts with diverse characters, and dialogue pertaining to the situations and plot of the story. Furthermore, the goal was that students connect with and see themselves or someone they know within the story and relate and comprehend the message of the text.

Community

Oaks Borough is a one-square mile town in Camden County, NJ (pseudonym). The total population is 4,404.9. The median age for the town is 36.9. Racially, the towns make up is 71% white, 11% black, 10% Hispanic, and 3% Asian, 2% reports as "other". The median household income is \$53, 592.00 a year, with 12.3 % below the

poverty line, 5% of which are seniors over the age of 65. There are approximately 1643 residences with 63% owner occupied. The median value of owner occupied homes is \$154,000.00. In regards to educational attainment, 96% graduate high school, while 20.7 % have a bachelor's degree. There is a 4.9% foreign born population, with 50% from Latin America, 41 % from Asia and 8% from Africa.

School

Oaks Public School (pseudonym) is the only school in the district and consists of grades pre-k to eighth. According to the 2017-2018, NJ Performance Report the percentages of Economically Disadvantaged, is 40.5%, the amount of students with disabilities is 20.9%, English Learners: 0.9%. The ratio of teachers to students is 1 to 11. The ethnic makeup of the school is 52.6% white, 18% Hispanic, 21% black, 2.1% Asian and 6.2% other. The total of students that met or exceeded the state expectations on standardized testing in ELA was 51.4% and in Math was 27%.

Participants

This study was conducted at Magnolia Public School, in a fourth grade ELA, inclusion classes. One ELA teacher with three years teaching experience, the school social worker, with 12 years professional experience and the researcher with 23 years as an educator and district literacy and student services leader will collaborate in the study.

I used “purposeful sampling” (Patton, 1990) in particular “maximum variation” (Glaser & Straus, 1967). When using a maximum variation sampling method this researcher selected a sample size of approximately eighteen students that maximized the diversity relevant to the research question. This included a sample of multiple ethnic groups, gender, and learning abilities heterogeneously selected from the class. There are

five students with IEPs in this class. Two are communications impaired and three have a Specific Learning Disability diagnosis. Four of these students have received Response to Intervention which is a Tier 2 intervention model that targets specific deficits using scientifically researched based intervention tools. Students were selected to provide representation of a heterogeneous make up of culture, race, ability levels, and sex, for data collection purposes only. Student names will not be included to protect identity. This class also benefits from a co-teaching model with a special education teacher and general education teacher. Permission slips were given to parents for the use of student data in the study. All students in the class were invited to participate. There were no exclusions for willing participants.

Research Design/Methodology

The design of this qualitative study is to determine students' beliefs and views, analyze their ability to discuss cultural issues, and their interpretations of multicultural literature (Merriam, 1998). A qualitative methodology was chosen for this research study as it provides an expressive, narrative description within a natural setting (Creswell, 1998) This study focused on "maximum variation sampling" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which looks at a fourth grade class. Heterogeneous grouping of students were included to allow the researcher to look at a "small sample of great diversity" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) such as students representing different genders, reading abilities, and cultural backgrounds. This study is also designed to analyze students' ability to enhance comprehension and critical thinking strategies pertaining to the social emotional learning competencies. This study also uses Creswell's Triangulation validation strategy. This is where the researcher makes use of multiple and different sources to provide corroborating

evidence Ely et al., 1991; Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980, 1990). This researcher used methods, investigators and theories.

The methodology of this study is that of constructivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1985) Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) explain that “ in the book *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*, Norma Gonzalez, Luis Moll and Cathy Amanti (2005) showed vividly how teachers can document the competence and life from experiences held by families and use this knowledge embedded in communities within their teaching.” In addition, Gordon Wells (2001, 2003) analyzed the affinities of teaching and research, the centrality of communities of inquiry, and the ways “dialogic inquiry” builds social-cultural theory.

Finally, as recommended by Creswell (2013), the researcher, used the procedures of triangulating among different data sources, writing with detailed and purposeful description, and taking the entire written narrative back to participants for dialogue and feedback.

Procedure of the Study and Data Collection Methods

Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to collect data which is relevant to how students enhance their discussions and their understanding of stories. According to Patton (2002), “purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.” This qualitative research study contained a pre-questionnaire that gained data about students ethnic make ups, traditions, religions, and countries of origin if not the United States. It also includes qualitative data collection about the particular Social

Emotional Learning competency topic, such as what the student already knows, wants to know and what they learned from the multicultural picture book interactive read aloud. This is done through graphic organizers, observational notes from group discussions before, during and after the reading. After collecting the questionnaires, and review of the SEL competencies the researcher and school social worker collaborated to which multi culturally relevant picture books would merge the goals of the study, increase student motivation and participation, activate prior knowledge and expose students to new cultures or see themselves within the texts . In addition, data collection about the particular SEL topic and cultural connections students had such as what the student already knew, what they wanted to know, and what they learned through the interactive read aloud. This was done through the use of a K-W-L graphic organizer, observational notes taken during group discussions before, during and after the lessons.

The duration of the study took approximately six weeks. Two weeks for preliminary data collection and then take the remaining four weeks were to perform the activities and analyze the data from the study. The overall activities and data collection took place from October to mid-December.

Procedure of the Study

Three different perspectives towards the lessons were guided through the researcher (literacy leader and SEL coordinator), the school social worker (SEL team member) and the fourth grade ELA teacher (also an SEL committee member). Each brought to the lesson a different perspective and contribution. This team met weekly, for 45-60 minutes. The team wanted to assure through the lessons that the behaviors of young people from culturally diverse populations need to be viewed from a cultural

perspective and that instruction should affirm students and empower them to achieve maximally as well as to benefit others. This researcher (serving as the literacy specialist) developed a lesson plan template that was shared through Google Docs. with the social worker that focused on incorporating the critical thinking questions pertaining to the SEL goals, the classroom teacher who focused on activating prior knowledge and anticipatory setting, supplemental writing activities, and observational note taking during the lessons. The researcher also focused on how to utilize Reader's Response strategies throughout the lesson and read aloud to the students. She and the social worker took turns asking questions and engaging the SEL objectives.

For each of the three lessons the classroom teacher prior to the lesson would activate prior knowledge by discussing the cover of the story, the author's purpose, the central theme and vocabulary. She also addressed the locations (Korea) and geographical terms such as urban, rural and suburban, location and specific cultural characteristics through her Social Studies lessons as well.

The actual interactive read aloud component of the lesson was conducted by the classroom teacher, however, the social worker interjected SEL questioning that was discussed prior to the activity. A little yellow post it note with the SEL question was on the page of the text when she was going to interject a question and encourage dialogue. The researcher took observational notes during the lesson and would assist with the overall whole class K-W-L chart in the front of the room as needed. Students were placed on the carpet in front of the reader. The lighting in the classroom was dimmed and students participated in a three minute meditation (closed eyes, and heads down) before coming to the carpet for the activity.

Lesson One

The first lesson of the study consisted around the *Social Emotional Competency #3: Social Awareness*. The goals of this competency are to...

1. Recognize and identify the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others.
2. Demonstrate an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups, and others' cultural backgrounds.
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the need for mutual respect when viewpoints differ.
4. Demonstrate an awareness of the expectations for social interactions in a variety of settings.

The multicultural text utilized to support these goals was *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi. This story is about a girl who is new to her school, her insecurities of fitting in and a name that no one can pronounce. Having just moved from Korea, Unhei is anxious that American kids will like her. So instead of introducing herself on the first day of school, she tells the class that she will choose a name by the following week. Her new classmates are fascinated by this no-name girl and decide to help out by filling a glass jar with names for her to pick from. But while Unhei practices being a Suzy, Laura, or Amanda, one of her classmates comes to her neighborhood and discovers her real name and its special meaning. On the day of her name- choosing, the name jar has mysteriously disappeared. Encouraged by her new friends, Unhei chooses her own Korean name and helps everyone pronounce it—*Yoon-Hey*.

Lesson Two

The second lesson of the study we focused on *Social Emotional Competency #4: Responsible Decision-Making*. The goals of this competency include...

1. Develop, implement, and model effective problem-solving and critical thinking skills
2. Identify the consequences associated with one's actions in order to make constructive choices
3. Evaluate personal, ethical, safety, and civic impact of decisions

Multicultural Text utilized to support goals was *Those Shoes* by: Maribeth Boelts

The main character, Jeremy, is an African American boy that resides in an apartment building on a limited income, with his grandmother. There are no other individuals residing with them, the apartment is in an urban setting, grandmother does not drive, and they take a bus throughout the text. The story's main character, Jeremy wants is a pair of shoes, the ones everyone at school seems to be wearing. Though Jeremy's grandma says they don't have room for "want," just "need," when his old shoes fall apart at school, he is more determined than ever to have those shoes, even a thrift-shop pair that are much too small. But sore feet aren't much fun, and Jeremy soon sees that the things he has — warm boots, a loving grandma, and the chance to help a friend — are worth more than the things he wants. The primary focus of this lesson was to address differences in wants versus needs as well as compassion towards others.

Lesson Three

The third week of the study we stepped a bit more in depth with the self-awareness competency and the goals of recognizing and identifying the thoughts,

feelings, and perspectives of others. As well as, demonstrating an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups, and others' cultural backgrounds. The text chosen was a narrative, nonfiction picture book, *For the Right to Learn: Malala Yousafzai's Story*, written by: Rebecca Ann Langston-George. This true story tells the story of a girl that grew up in a world where women were supposed to be quiet. But Malala Yousafzai refused to be silent. She defied the Taliban's rules, spoke out for education for every girl, and was almost killed for her beliefs. This powerful true story of how one brave girl named Malala changed the world proves that one person really can make a difference.

Plan for Data Analysis

Chapter Four of this thesis will discuss the results of teacher questionnaires, student responses of the K-W-L charts, student reflection work samples.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

Chapter four discusses findings in response to the research question that asks, how does the use of culturally relevant picture books enhance social emotional learning competencies in fourth grade students? An analysis of the data revealed the emergence of two major themes, response to multicultural literature supports understandings around social awareness and responsible decision-making.

Findings

Parents were given a survey to complete before the study began in order for the researcher to gain a sense of the cultural differences, traditions, and the overall cultural dynamics of the group. Through the analysis of these surveys we learned a great deal about their cultural and ethnic association and traditions. This included questions pertaining to cultural background information, school involvement and interests, perspectives, concerns and interests. The results informed us that 4 of the 18 families are of Asian background, and have moved to the country in the past 30 years with extended family. In addition, it was also revealed that there are three African American students that live with a grandparent or caregiver other than a parent, over the age of 55. Finally, a student new to the district is from Pakistan, and the family is practicing Muslim. 44% of the class was different than the cultural dominance that is focused upon in the district's current fourth grade reading curriculum, where characters are predominantly Caucasian and the settings take place in suburban neighborhoods.

Responding to Literature to Support Social Awareness

The objectives of this competency are for students to: 1. recognize and identify the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others, 2. demonstrate an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups, and others' cultural backgrounds, 3. demonstrate an understanding of the need for mutual respect when viewpoints differ, and 4. demonstrate an awareness of the expectations for social interactions in a variety of settings . The multicultural text utilized to support these goals were *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001) and *For the Right to Learn: Malala Yousafzai's Story* (Langston-George, 2015)

***The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001) and the SEL Competency: Social Awareness**

The assertion was that students in the study from the Asian cultures will be able to identify with this story, and those children that are not, would gain an understanding of how names are chosen within the culture. The parents' questionnaire responses indicated that the four students in the study all have names that coincide with their cultural background. According to the survey, one student in the class, Ji-Ji's family, is originally from Vietnam. The parents stated that her name was chosen by the maternal grandmother. The grandmother wanted her name to reflect upon strength as Ji-Ji's mom's pregnancy with her was difficult. Ji-Ji's Vietnamese name means strong. Another student, Kevin, whose Chinese name is Junkie means "Handsome". Parents stated they chose this name because, "He is a beautiful boy."

The first day the teacher explained that this book was going to be used for a fun reading activity over the next three days that would help them to become more aware of another student's culture and how she tries to assimilate to her new home in America.

The teacher then showed the cover of the book and said that the main character named Unhip is from Korea. The teacher displayed on the Smartboard a map of the distance between Korea and America. She pointed to Korea and gave a brief discussion of how far it is. She then passed out the KWL graphic organizer to the children. She also had a large KWL chart on display next to the Smartboard. She began with a brief reminder of how they would use the KWL chart. It was not the first time the students had used this tool.

Day One: What Students Claim They Know

The **K** section of the lesson was utilized to activate prior knowledge as well as provide an anticipatory setting. Students were able to give brief scenarios of what they knew about the culture and the overall theme of the story (SEL objective). An example of the **K** (What I know) portion of the text, as written by Lucas (pseudonym) and Avrianna (pseudonym).

Lucas commented, “What I know about Korea is that it is very far away, they speak a kind of Chinese and they have different names than kids in America.” Avrianna added “What I know about Korea is that you have to take a plane to get there and they eat different foods and I think my friend Ji-Ji is from somewhere near Korea.”

This opened up an enthusiastic discussion. The teacher took Avrianna’s response and used it to introduce the next portion. She replied, “Well, Ji-Ji is actually from Vietnam, which is here.” She was able to scan out on the Smartboard to show other parts of the world in comparison to America. Underneath the map she had a guided question, “Does your family come from somewhere other than the USA? Where?” One student

responded with “My dad is from Camden!” at which the teacher responded “Well Camden is still in America which is here. (She pointed on the map) I’m looking for countries which are places like South America (points) or Spain (points) or maybe China or Vietnam (points) and how about Iran which is here (points). Is anyone in our class from Iran?” At this, Lucas yells out that Raja is from Iran. Raja chimed in, “Yes, my cousins all are still in Iran! That is where my mom, dad and grandparents all lived when they were growing up! It is very far so I don’t get to see them a lot.”

The teacher then asked the class if there were any other ways we say grandmother in America or in another culture. She told them that in Italy where her father is from and they say Nona. And that that is what she calls her grandmother. Some student responses were “mom mom, nana, gi go, and grandma. The teacher then picked up the picture book again and gave a brief summary of what the story was going to be about and did a picture walk. She explained the story would be read the following day by the researcher and the social worker. The students responded with “Cool” “awesome”, “fun.” The climate in the classroom was enthusiastic and engaged. This particular lesson was done right before their lunch period and students left the classroom and could be heard talking about where their families were from.

The researcher and classroom teacher met and reflected upon my observational notes and what we noticed about this component of the lesson. The researcher questioned her as to how this introduction to a story was different than what she has done in the past. She stated that she was embarrassed to say that she really doesn’t think enough about cultural relevance when choosing text and that she felt badly about that. She was also excited that the students were much more engaged. I asked her what she

contributed to this. She responded that she thought this was because they were able to identify the various lifestyles of their peers in the discussion, and if they didn't identify they at least learned where their classmates were coming from. I also made reference from my notes, about how she shared with students that she calls her grandmother "Nona" as well as the mention of her father being from Italy. The students were captivated by this as a couple of students stated, "I have none!" "I think I'm from Italy too!" This played a significant part in the lessons tone. The teacher stated she didn't even realize how her personal connection affected the lesson.

Day Two: What Students Want to Know

During the read aloud the questions used to guide discussion and reflection were based upon the SEL competencies and the unique goals tied with them. The questions were chosen to enhance critical literacy and provide thought proving responses. Before the story was read aloud, she asked the students if they could change their own names, would they. The observer noted 10 out of the 18 responded that they would. The figure shows the questions tying together the SEL objectives with the text.

Developing Self Awareness

<i>The Name Jar</i>	<i>The Name Jar</i>	<i>The Name Jar</i>	<i>The Name Jar</i>
<p>Obj: Recognize and identify the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others.</p> <p>Question:</p> <p>“Why do you think UnHei decided to stick with her Korean name and not pick one from the jar?”</p>	<p>Obj: Demonstrate an awareness of the expectations for social interactions in a variety of settings.</p> <p>Question:</p> <p>Do you think UnHei acts differently at home with her family than she does at school with her friends?</p>	<p>Obj: Demonstrate an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups, and others’ cultural backgrounds.</p> <p>Question:</p> <p>What are some similarities on how parent’s in America select children’s names?</p>	<p>Obj: Demonstrate an understanding of the need for mutual respect when viewpoints differ.</p> <p>Question:</p> <p>“What happens to Unhei on the bus? Does anyone help Unhei? What could you have done to help Unhei if you had been on that bus?”</p>
<p>Sample Student Responses:</p> <p>-”She realized that her name was specially picked for her.”</p> <p>- “Her classmates were kind to her and she felt she didn’t have to change it.”</p> <p>-”She didn’t want to make her family sad by picking an American name.”</p> <p>-</p>	<p>Sample Student Responses:</p> <p>-“She probably speaks Korean at home. Like I speak Pashto in my house, and when I come to school I speak English.”</p> <p>-”Sometimes I get scared to have a friend come to my house because they won’t understand some of the foods we eat and what my grandmother is saying.”</p> <p>-”My parents speak English but sometimes they don’t know the English words for things.</p>	<p>Sample Student Responses:</p> <p>-”My mom picked my name because it is the same as my grandpa’s, and she wanted me to be named after him.”</p> <p>-”Parents pick names sometimes because they have a special meaning to them.”</p>	<p>Sample Student Responses:</p> <p>“I would talk with and try to make her feel better.”</p> <p>-” I would tell an adult.”</p> <p>-”I would tell the kid that was doing it to stop.”</p> <p>-”I would sit next to Unhei and show her a YouTube video on my phone to distract the mean kid.”</p>

Figure 1. Social emotional learning goals, questions and student responses

Through analysis of the student responses it was evident that this text successfully addressed the lessons objectives of the social awareness competency. One objective of this competency was for the students to recognize and identify the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others. It was observed by the students' responses that they were recognizing the character UnHei's struggle with trying to conform to the Americanized name or maintain, the uniqueness and cultural respect of her Korean name. This discussion also addressed an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups, and others' cultural backgrounds. Students were discussing how their own names were chosen. The class discussion reflected students were unsure how somewhat unsure of how the majority of American children get their names. Once we started talking about being named after someone they were able to relate to the significance of the connection of names being connected to a child somehow, and the similarities among the cultures in that way. In regards to demonstrating an understanding of the need for mutual respect when viewpoints differ, connections were made as one particular student shared that sometimes he feels embarrassed to have a friend come over to the house because his parents have broken English. The other students in the class were encouraging that student not to feel that way because all families are different... Finally, we analyzed how students were able to demonstrate an awareness of the expectations for social interactions in a variety of settings. Student responses primarily showed that they would choose to be upstanders in the situation of other students teasing UnHei. The students were sympathetic to the main character and expressed their opinions passionately during this particular discussion.

Day Three: Learner's Response Through Journal Writing

In order to perform the writing prompt and align with the SEL competency of “Self-Awareness”, the homework assignment from day 2’s lesson was for the students to interview their parents or guardian about the story of their name.

They were given a question and answer hand out with the questions:

-How was my name chosen? Who chose my name?

-Was I named after someone in our family?

-Did you pick my name because of the meaning?

And finally, as a self-reflection, the students were asked “If they could change their name, would they?”

16 out of 18 students returned to school on day three with the assignment completed. Two students stated that their mom wasn’t home and they couldn’t ask. Therefore, the literacy specialist worked to complete it with them. We went on a name origin website to find the meaning of their names which both students were content with and intrigued by what they discovered. They both knew that they were not named after someone. They were able to write in their journals based upon the story and what they had learned about their own names. The question “If I could change my name, I would or would not?” was asked again and written as the student’ reflective journal topic for day three.

The results of this assignment showed...

How was my name chosen?	Who chose my name?	Was I named after someone in our family?	Did you pick my name because of the meaning?	If I could change my name, I would or would not?
<i>Sample Responses:</i> “Named after my parent or relative.” “The bible.” “Celebrity parents liked.” “Thought the name was pretty.”	-2 out of the 18 responded “a grandparent.” -10 out of the 18 responded mom -2 responded “dad”. -4 responded “mom and dad.”	-5 out of the 18 responses stated they were named after a family member or parent.	- 6 out of 18 responded yes	<i>Pre Read-Aloud</i> 10 out of 18 said they would <i>Post Read-Aloud:</i> 1 out of 18 said they would. He stated that he was named after his dad and his dad did not live with him anymore.

Figure 2. “My Name” Results

The students were able to volunteer to read their responses with the class before reflecting on their social awareness towards how their name makes them special. Six students volunteered. Through analyzing the observational notes, taken from analysis of student’s journals, only one stated they would change their name if they could. He stated that this was because he was named after his father who is no longer living in the home. Other writing samples included three students stating that they did not know where their name came from before this activity. In addition, six students claimed they felt special because their parents and/or relatives thought specifically about them when determining what to name them. Students’ journal writings indicated that after reading the story they

had a better sense of self awareness, in particular the objective of “Recognizing and identifying the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others.”

Responding to Literature to Support Responsible Decision-Making

The goals of this competency are for students to: 1. develop, implement, and model effective problem-solving and critical thinking skills, 2. identify the consequences associated with one’s actions in order to make constructive choices and 3. evaluate personal, ethical, safety, and civic impact of decisions. The multicultural text chosen to support these goals was *Those Shoes* by: Maribeth Boelts.

In addition, the use of graphic organizers such as KWL charts and a knowledge rating scale were used. The researcher kept a journal and took notes on the responses from these charts during the lessons, in order to analyze after.

***Those Shoes* (Boelt, 2007) and the SEL Competency: Responsible Decision-Making**

The second text selection was *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2007) the main character, Jeremy, is an African American boy that resides in an apartment building on a limited income, with his grandmother. No other individuals reside with them, and there is no mention of a mother or father. They live in an apartment, and grandmother does not drive, therefore they take a bus in order to get places.

Day One: What Students Claim to Know

The discussion topic was how many students live with someone other than a mom or dad? Maybe a grandparent or aunt/uncle, foster parents etc... Three hands went up. She also asked, “How many people live in an apartment?” Seven hands went up,

including the teacher. From observation, the students raising their hands about acknowledging they lived with someone else without reluctance. In addition, after some students saw that response volunteered that their grandmothers or an aunt or cousin lived at their residence. The students raised their hands about living in an apartment were a little slower to do so, until the teacher raised her hand. This again showed a positive connection between the teacher and students.

The teacher briefly explained the summary of the story leading to discussion of the main character as a black American boy that lives in an apartment with his grandmother in the city on a fixed income. She talked about what they recognize or think about the boys' facial expressions and body language portrayed by the characters on the cover of the book. The **K** question here was “What do I know about living in a city and how it is different from living in this town? Ava stated “I know living in an apartment is not as nice as living in a house. It means you don’t have as much money.” A’Jay: said, “I used to live in an apartment before I moved here, and it gets loud from the neighbors.” and Kylie said, “I know that cities have more apartments than towns.”

In addition, before the actual read aloud the social worker and the literacy specialist briefly the “Know” part of the chart For the story, *Those Shoes*, prior to reading, the researcher told the students to “ Think about the picture we just looked at from the story, and ask yourself, what you want to know from what you saw in our picture walk?” Tommy shared, “I want to know if he is getting picked on because he doesn’t have cool shoes?” Lily replied, “I want to know if his grandmother won’t let him have those shoes because he was bad.” Ava also said, “I want to know if those boys are

looking at him like that because of the color of his skin and because he lives in an apartment.” (Ava lives in an apartment)

Day Two: What Students Want to Learn

During the read aloud the questions used to guide discussion and reflection were based upon the SEL competencies and the unique goals tied with them. The questions were chosen to enhance critical literacy and provide thought proving responses.

Significant growth in the articulation of the learner’s response from the initial “What I Know” responses to “What I learned” was evident from the responses during the read aloud questioning. The following is a sample of student responses to SEL questions...

<p><i>Those Shoes</i> SEL Competency: <i>Responsible Decision-Making.</i></p>	<p><i>Those Shoes</i> SEL Competency: <i>Responsible Decision-Making.</i></p>	<p><i>Those Shoes</i> SEL Competency: <i>Responsible Decision-Making.</i></p>
<p>Obj.: Develop, implement, and model effective problem-solving and critical thinking skills Question: What do you think Jeremy is contemplating doing with his too small, cool shoes when he watches Alfie play ball in his worn out sneakers? -Why does he keep saying, “I’m not going to do it</p>	<p>Obj: Identify the consequences associated with one’s actions in order to make constructive choices. Question: Do you think it was a good choice for Jeremy to give his sneakers to Alfie? Do you think it was a good choice for grandma to get him boots instead of those shoes?</p>	<p>Obj: Evaluate personal, ethical, safety, and civic impact of decisions Question: How would you feel if you were Jeremy and you realized that your grandmother thinks those shoes are too expensive? Do you think Jeremy made a wise decision buying those shoes at the thrift store? Discuss. Have you ever done anything like this?</p>
<p>Sample Student Responses: -” He’s going to ask him what size shoe he wears and probably sell them to him.” -”He’s not going to “sell” them to him, he’s going to give them to him. Because he feels bad and understands how Alfie feels.” -”He keeps saying “I’m not going to do it.” because he is embarrassed and doesn’t know how to talk to Alfie about giving him the shoes.”</p>	<p>Sample Student Responses: -”I think it was really nice of him to give Alfie his shoes. They didn’t fit him anyway and Alfie’s shoes had lots of holes and had tape on them.” -”Jeremy was not happy about the boots when he first got them from grandma but then when he could play outside in the cold he was happy.”</p>	<p>Sample Student Responses: -”My grandmother gets me whatever I want.” -” Sometimes if I don’t get something I want from my mom, I ask my Nana. She always says if it’s okay with my mom.” -”My grandma has a lot of bills to pay so I wouldn’t ask her, I would save my money from my birthday and stuff to buy them like Jeremy.”</p>

Figure 3. *Those Shoes* Student Responses

Through the analysis of the student responses it was evident that this book helped the students to meet the objectives of this competency. During the reading of the text students were asked to think critically about what they thought the main character was going to do with his shoes that were too small. It was noted that the girls were more responsive with this question. There was only one response from a boy in the class when this was asked and he thought Jeremy would “sell” the shoes to Alfie. The one girl responded to this by modeling her thoughts of the emotional connection that Jeremy was

making with Alfie about feeling badly about not having cool shoes. The dialogue also showed how the students were able to identify the consequences associated with one's actions in order to make constructive choices. For example, when they discussed Jeremy using his own money to buy shoes that he knew were too small. They discussed how they knew Jeremy wanted to be like the other kids so badly, he wasn't able to make a good decision. They also discussed how Jeremy turned that situation into a positive for another person. The final objective of the competency had students Evaluate personal, ethical, safety, and civic impact of decisions. This was observed during the dialogue in regards to Jeremy's grandmother making the decision to use her limited funds to buy him snow boots instead of the cool shoes Jeremy wanted. Two of the boys stated that they didn't think this was a decision they would have wanted their grandmother to make and that their grandmothers, "Give them whatever they want." The point about the snow boots being more of a necessity recognized by the grandmother, needed further explanation. After they realized how grandma was thinking they said they understood that she wasn't trying to be mean.

Day Three: Learner's Response Through Journal Writing

Those Shoes. Students were told to write about what they consider their most important needs. This was interesting to read as 15 out of 18 students wrote about relationships such as friendship, family, and teachers. The other three wrote about necessity items such as clothing, water, food and air. It was also interesting to note that these three students often have behavioral issues that stem from the inability to see others' perspectives. They often complain that other students are picking on them, don't like them, are mean to them at recess and have trouble making and maintaining friends.

***For the Right to Learn: Malala Yousafzai's Story* (Langston-George, 2015) and SEL Competency: Social Awareness**

The final selection was *For the Right to Learn: Malala Yousafzai's Story* (Langston-George, 2015) This book involves a progressive family living in the Middle East struggling with cultural conflict and gender bias towards educational equality of women.

Day One: What Students Claim to Know

In the Malala story, it was determined (through questionnaires) this culture was the least represented culture to the group, yet there was still a student representative of the Middle Eastern culture. In addition, her mother wears a burqa, and students see Raja get picked up and dropped off by her mother every day. It was determined by the study participants this would require some additional activating prior knowledge before reading. The teacher incorporated this into a Social Studies activity as an extension since she also teaches Social Studies. Some student responses about “What They Know”, included...

Isaiah: “I know that girls from the Middle East wear a scarf on their head.”

Marcus: “I know Raja is from the Middle East.”

Lily: “I know there are some bad people from this country.”

The story *For the Right to Learn, Malala Yousafzai's Story*. At the conclusion of each of the day one activities, student's responses about what they know about the cultural relevance of the upcoming text were limited and often contained stereotypes.

Day Two: What Students Want to Know

During the read aloud, the questions used to guide discussion and reflection were based upon the SEL competencies and the unique goals tied with them. Responses to what students wanted to learn were seen through A'Jay who said, "I want to know why girls have to wear something covering their hair and why they can't go to school?" Lucas: replied, "I want to know what happens when the government finds out that Malala is learning?" and Ava who said "I want to know why her parents let her do this, since it wasn't safe?"

Students were inquisitive and beginning to think critically about how the problem of the story affected the main character's self-awareness.

A summary of student responses through observational notes...

<p><i>For the Right to Learn: Malala Yousafzai's Story</i> SEL Competency: <i>Social Awareness</i></p>	<p><i>For the Right to Learn: Malala Yousafzai's Story</i> SEL Competency: <i>Social Awareness</i></p>	<p><i>For the Right to Learn: Malala Yousafzai's Story</i> SEL Competency: <i>Social Awareness</i></p>	<p><i>For the Right to Learn: Malala Yousafzai's Story</i> SEL Competency: <i>Social Awareness</i></p>
<p>Obj: Recognize and identify the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others. Question: Malala is known for saying, "One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world? " What does this mean and do you agree with her?"</p>	<p>Obj: Demonstrate an awareness of the expectations for social interactions in a variety of settings. Question: "How do you feel about the way she went about defying the Taliban's rules?" Do you think that breaking the rules here was a good thing?"</p>	<p>Obj: Demonstrate an understanding of the need for mutual respect when viewpoints differ. Question: "Do you think the majority of the girls in Pakistan agree with Malala?"</p>	<p>Obj: Demonstrate an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups, and others' cultural backgrounds. Question: "How is education in our country different? Is it equal for both boys and girls?"</p>
<p>Sample Student Responses: -"This means that even though you are a child you are still special and important." -" She means that when you really want something you have to listen to your heart." -"It means that with help from a good teacher you can do lots of great things."</p>	<p>Sample Student Responses: -"She was really brave because those people are really bad." -"Breaking rules is not bad if it means someone is going to get hurt, or they are being bullied."</p>	<p>Sample Student Response: -"They probably do but are too scared to do anything because they don't want to get themselves or their families killed or put in jail." -"I think some girls don't know what school is like and just want to stay home with their moms and do chores."</p>	<p>Sample Student Responses: -"Our country lets boys and girls both go to school. Everybody is treated the same in school, except in the gym. Most girls aren't picked first, boys are." -"It's different in our country because everyone can come. Sometimes I think girls are smarter than boys." (said by a male student with a learning disability)</p>

Figure 4. Malala Student Responses

Analysis of this observation data led the observer to conclude this particular text was beneficial to the objectives of the self-awareness competency. The students were

able to engage in meaningful discussion throughout the text, however, this text required more frontloading with vocabulary and activating prior knowledge. The conversation about Malala defying the Taliban rules engaged students in a dialogue of when and if it is ever okay to break the rules. Student's all agreed that they felt she was a hero for representing the young women of her culture. Three girls stated they didn't think they were brave enough to do what Malala did, but said they thought she was very brave. The objective of demonstrating an understanding of the need for mutual respect when viewpoints differ, was emphasized throughout the reading of the text as evidenced through the observational notes. Students were engaged throughout the reading and both boys and girls disagreed with the notion of girls not being permitted to an education. One student in the class is from the Middle East and said that she could relate to Malala's story as her family wants her to get a good education in America.

Day Three: Learner's Response Through Journal Writing

The journal writing topic for this text was "How did Malala show that "One Child. One teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world?" The majority of responses revolved around Malala's point that girls should have the right to education and that everybody has the right to education. Some of the boys in the class elaborated on the discussion about girls not being the same in gym class, as well as the comment about girls are smarter than boys, as written by a student with a learning disability. The theme of her bravery and determination resonated throughout their writing and five of the students claimed she was a "hero" and that they would hope that they would do the same if they were in her shoes. One student wrote that she felt sorry for the girls that aren't brave enough to stick up to the Taliban, and that the Taliban was afraid of girls being

super smart and taking their jobs. These all proved to be significant critical literacy concepts.

Summary of Data Analysis

A quote from chapter two states, "Because schools are becoming much more culturally and linguistically diverse, educators need to learn more about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all students. They should strive to provide experiences in the classroom that closely mirror the cultural and linguistic environments of their students. Tea le and Yokota (2000) contend that "children need to see themselves and others in our diverse society reflected in the selections read by the teacher" (p. 15). One method of providing diversity for both students and teachers is through literature, specifically a quality multicultural literature program. Canales, J., Lucido, F. & Salas, R.G. (2002) this was evident in the findings of how student's conversations and comprehension were enhanced through the combination of utilizing multicultural text, reader's response strategies and social emotional learning competencies.

Through the analysis of the lessons it was determined that the more the students related to the characters the more they were able to empathize with scenarios, understand cultural differences and see themselves within the text. This led to enriched conversation from multiple perspectives amongst students and staff. Student's writing included new vocabulary and self-reflected emotions and connections to cultures they could relate to and those that were unfamiliar. Journal writings proved that students were able to empathize with characters and make connections to the text that allowed them to think

about different perspectives other than their own. Chapter five will present conclusions and implications of the study as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Limitations and Implications for the Field

Summary of Study

In summary, the purpose of this study was based upon the overwhelming need to connect home and school cultures through culturally relevant pedagogy and how this can affect a child's social and emotional wellbeing through the New Jersey Department of Education's social emotional learning competencies. The research question guiding this study asked how the use of culturally relevant picture books can enhance social emotional learning for fourth grade students. The research was conducted to determine the significance of using culturally relevant literature to create an equitable, social, emotional classroom learning environment.

The setting of the research took place at a public school consisting of pre-k through eighth grade students, 453 students in all. The school is located in a small, blue collar town that is only one square mile. Quite a few community members are a part of our support staff (cafeteria, playground assistants, secretary, teacher's aides). In addition, three teachers out of forty are former students of the school. There is an array of diversity amongst the student population. The majority of students are Caucasian, followed by African American and then Latino, Asian and Middle Eastern. As stated in Chapter four, Parents were given a survey to complete before the study began in order for the researcher to gain a sense of the cultural differences, traditions, and the overall cultural dynamics of the group. Through the analysis of these surveys we learned a great deal about their cultural and ethnic association and traditions. This included questions pertaining to cultural background information, school involvement and interests,

perspectives, concerns and interests. The results informed us that 4 of the 18 families are of Asian background, and have moved to the country in the past 30 years with extended family. In addition, it was also revealed that there are three African American students that live with a grandparent or caregiver other than a parent, over the age of 55. Finally, a student new to the district is from Pakistan, and the family is practicing Muslim. 44% of the class was different than the cultural dominance that is focused upon in the district's current fourth grade reading curriculum, where characters are predominantly Caucasian and the settings take place in suburban neighborhoods. However, as I looked into the classrooms, I noticed much of the English Language Activities and Reading curriculum revolving around Caucasian, middle class scenarios, stories and main characters. I did not see the curriculum connecting to the cultural representation of the faces sitting in these classrooms.

Finally, this study involved three different perspectives towards the lessons were guided through the researcher (literacy leader and SEL coordinator), the school social worker (SEL team member) and the fourth grade ELA teacher (also an SEL committee member). Each brought to the lesson a different perspective and contribution. This team met weekly, for 45-60 minutes. The team wanted to assure through the lessons that the behaviors of young people from culturally diverse populations need to be viewed from different cultural perspectives and that instruction should affirm students and empower them to achieve maximally as well as to benefit others. This researcher (serving as the literacy specialist) developed a lesson plan template that was shared through Google Docs. with the social worker that focused on incorporating the critical thinking questions pertaining to the SEL goals, the classroom teacher who focused on

activating prior knowledge and anticipatory setting, supplemental writing activities, and observational note taking during the lessons. The researcher also focused on how to utilize Reader's Response strategies throughout the lesson and read aloud to the students. She and the social worker took turns asking questions and engaging the SEL objectives.

In conclusion of this study, I found that students were much more engaged and able to identify with peers culturally through dialogue based upon culturally relevant picture books.

In addition, the benefit of having the perspective of three different educational professionals provided a specific intent for the lesson. It allowed for a more meaningful lesson since each member's strengths contributed to the plan. I also recognized the extreme importance of a student's Funds of Knowledge. The information gathered through a family's cultural profile is so beneficial in choosing multicultural texts that speak to the students. In addition, it creates a connection between the class and the teacher which in turn creates a welcoming and accepting classroom environment.

During the six week time span, it was evident that students grew more comfortable and open with discussion between peer to peer and teacher to student. Children spoke freely without having to wait to be called on, breaking away from the generic "question-answer" of who, what, when, where responses. Student's initial responses of what they knew about or connected with in a particular culture went from being very generalized and stereotyped to a much more elaborate understanding of how culture affects social and emotional perspectives of an individual. Students also vocalized connections amongst cultures and how they see themselves within this.

Furthermore, I learned from the teacher that culturally relevant pedagogy is an area in need of development. The teacher recognized this and was greatly affected by the study. She is committed to improving in this area.

Through the analysis of observational data, and collaboration with the classroom teacher, it was determined that using culturally relevant texts, with themes tied to the specific competencies was successful. This study was helpful in showing how through careful text selection and engaging critical thinking questions creates enriched dialogue and provides students the opportunity to see themselves or their peers within the pages. This study overall enhanced social and emotional learning by delivering the content in a manner they could connect with and relate to. These important and essential areas will hopefully provide students with the necessary tools to be literate, empathetic, and intrinsically motivated human beings that seek the best within themselves and those that surround them.

Lastly, I recognized through this study the lack of culturally relevant material utilized within the curriculum. This is an area that is going to be investigated throughout the school as a result of this study by the curriculum and instruction director and the researcher (reading specialist). In addition, the authenticity of what some consider as culturally relevant text is an area that needs improvement.

Limitations

Time together to discuss lesson plan development was a limitation. Having three different individuals working to develop a comprehensive lesson plan with multiple objectives was tricky. However, the incorporation of utilizing the technology of Google

Docs. was considered by all parties a huge benefit considering we were on different schedules and it was difficult to be together as often as they would have liked. All parties were able to go into the document and add their parts as well as comment or make a suggestion to each other's contribution.

The other limitation would be deviating from the already constructed curriculum that was intended for that time in which the study took place within the school day. The classroom teacher was extremely flexible and willing to cooperate. However, if the format of this instructional pedagogy is to continue, grade level ELA curriculums need to be analyzed with the objectively focus being cultural and social emotional relevance. Fortunately, this study was of great interest to the Curriculum and Instruction supervisor and will be using this information moving forward.

Implications for the Field

Through data analysis, collaboration and articulation amongst educational professionals within the study, it was determined that through culturally relevant literature creates an equitable social, emotional learning classroom environment. More time to develop research on what is considered authentic, culturally relevant material as well as incorporating this into everyday pedagogy and not just during times such as Black History Month.

Another implication would be not just limiting to a particular grade level but as a school wide initiative. This will need to start with all teachers gaining a student's funds of knowledge as well as more involvement from families to guide literacy instruction.

Through this study it was evident that through the connections made by the students and the text, critical thinking increased as did their enthusiasm towards literacy.

A unique contribution to this study was the collaboration of three different perspectives of educational professionals.

Conclusion

Finally, I conclude with a quote as stated by Johnston, Montalbano and Kirkland (2017) through their work with NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools....

“When districts embark upon the necessary but arduous work of culturally responsive education, the challenge is how to solidify the theory of cultural responsiveness into concrete policies and practices that can support learning for all students. To this extent, its critical lens has been applied to curriculum, classroom design, instruction, home-school relationships, disciplinary policies, and school-wide initiatives to promote equity, social justice, community outreach, improvements to school climate, and academic achievement.” (p.11)

As I move forward in this district as a reading specialist and as the Social Emotional Learning coordinator I will work diligently with administration, teachers and support staff to analyze how we as a district are embracing culturally relevant pedagogy. Through this study it is evident that through CRP we are also able to connect with students' social and emotional wellbeing and create an environment where curriculum is seen as relevant to their lives and needs. A place the curriculum and instruction connects

with the students and provides them with a vision as to how see themselves in their society. A place where they are welcome, accepted, appreciated and valued.

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henna:

intimidate:

pen name:

prime minister:

United Nations:

Taliban:

Appendix B

Know, Want, Learn

Culturally Relevant Text: *The Name Jar* by: Yang Sook Choi

What I **Know**

What I **Want** to know

What I **Learned**

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