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Using multicultural picture books to motivate students and foster critical discussions on identity and social justice

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USING MULTICULTURAL PICTURE BOOKS TO MOTIVATE STUDENTS AND FOSTER CRITICAL DISCUSSIONS ON IDENTITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

by

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A Thesis

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Dedications

This thesis is dedicated to my family. Each and every one of you were invaluable as I traveled along this journey. To my children, Kate, Cole and Ashley. so many times when I was supposed to be supporting you, you became my caretaker, feeding me when I just couldn't step away from the computer, comforting me with supportive hugs, making me laugh when I just wanted to cry, and giving me the same words of wisdom I had so often said to you but seemed to forget when it came to myself. You saw me at my worst but gave me your best. Thank you for making me the proudest mom in the world.

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to examine the significance of integrating multicultural literature in culturally responsive book clubs to improve student motivation, foster awareness of one's identity and promote discussions about social justice. Prior to this research, student discourse about their own identity and the nature of social injustices related to prejudice, stereotyping, and racism was limited. Qualitative research was employed utilizing student artifacts such anticipation guides, literature role responses, and reflection journals. Data was also collected from audio recording transcripts of book club and class wide discussions as well as a teacher's reflection journal. Using triangulation and coding of student responses, themes emerged: using multicultural literature inspired students to self-reflect and acknowledge that maintaining one's cultural identity is critical, though challenging at times. Also, students saw a need for empathy after reading literature that was both "mirrors" and "windows" into the other's needs if social justice was to become a reality. Some students, however, continued to express discomfort discussing social injustices that stem from racial inequalities, supporting the idea that students need time and continued exposure to topics such as racism and bias if students are to become truly comfortable taking social action.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (Continued)

Table of Contents (Continued)

List of Figures

Chapter 1

Introduction

People only see what they are prepared to see. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Racism. White privilege. Implicit bias. Words such as these spew forth during the virtual seminar class. The professor adds, "Teaching is political; we must acknowledge this as educators if we are to face the White privilege that exists in our educational system."

Not my class. Not my school. I am thinking confidently. "Implicit bias is everywhere, even in the most "equitable school settings" the professor's voice echoes as if she is reading my mind. *How dare she make such a generalization!* I scream in my head. She doesn't know me…she doesn't know my school, my district, the community where I live and where my own children are educated.

A feeling of indignation begins to simmer as our graduate class discussion regarding an article, "From Situated Privilege to Dis/abilities: Developing Critical Literacies Across Social Issues" (Bernstein, 2017) ensues. As I stare at the screen seeing the faces of my cohort, six graduate students, all women, five of whom are White and one who is Black, I can't help but wonder if anyone else is feeling as uncomfortable and as offended as I am at the professor's insinuation that many White people, including myself are racist, even if it is unintentional. How could I be racist? I provide my students with text selections about historical figures such as Martin Luther King and Harlem Renaissance poets such as Langston Hughes. I have books in my classroom library by authors such as Mildred Taylor and Walter Dean Myers; my students read Francisco Jimenez's autobiographical novel, *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*,

as a class novel. Most importantly, I treat all my students fairly. Of this I am certain.

There is no way I am racist. "Reflect on your own classrooms and your own schools.

What kinds of racism exists?" the professor probes.

This is my chance to speak up. Normally, I do not engage in confrontational

discussions, yet I just cannot sit back feeling that my treatment of students is unjust or

"unequitable". I pride myself on the rapport I establish with all of my students. "Just as

important as me teaching you reading and writing, is me teaching each of you to be

accepting and compassionate members of a community" I often say in my classroom of

seventh graders. If what Dr. Leeds is implying, if I'm not living what I preach to my

students, does that mean I'm a hypocrite in addition to being a racist?

"Dr. Leeds, I don't see the color of my students. Truly, we are all the same.

Racism just isn't an issue in my classroom," I state proudly. Dr. Leeds simply nods, her

expression saying everything; no words are needed. Dr. Leeds has heard this before,

undoubtedly from other students who had not come to terms with the fact that implicit

bias exists in all of us. Her choice to not respond to my statement leaves me conflicted.

How dare she not acknowledge that I am supportive and responsive to the needs of *all* my

students? Yet, I am also left with another sinking feeling…Can Dr. Leeds be right in her

assumption? Could what I have always believed in my heart about my treatment of all

students be a lie?

Dr. Leeds's choice of article and her further probing us to self-reflect end up

becoming the beginning of a transformation for me. Whether I wanted to acknowledge it

or not, White privilege does exist in my classroom, and until I come to terms with this

new understanding, I cannot make my classroom truly equitable and inclusive of all students.

Story of the Question

Though I didn't realize it in that moment, Dr. Leeds was preparing me to see not what I wanted to see, but what I needed to see. Through the subsequent lessons and presentations by my peers on revolutionary culturally relevant theorists such as Paulo Freire, Lisa Delpit, Gloria Ladson Billings, and Sonia Nieto, I came to the realization that in not seeing color, or being "color blind", I was inadvertently refusing to accept the differences that make culturally diverse students unique. After twenty-four years of teaching, I was beginning to realize that treating students as "equals," did not mean treating them the same. In contrast, my color blind stance served to reinforce the idea that students should conform to the norms of a dominant culture (Nieto, 2018).

This was a shocking revelation, yet the more I learned of Freire's seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), and its call for teaching to be a reciprocal relationship between teacher and student, my wall of ignorance began to crack. What do I know about my students' backgrounds? How could my students' share their identities to shift the color-blind mentality of the classroom setting? How could their stories be used as "windows" and "mirrors" (Bishop, 1990) for their peers? Could my students' discussions about cultural diversity encourage them to be critical thinkers, challenging power and promoting social justice?

The simmering feelings of anger that I had experienced were slowly beginning to boil, yet now as bubbles of excitement. I was ready to see what I had been blind to before my seminar course began. As I learned of Sonia Nieto's work in multicultural

learning, my wall of ignorance crumbled. I was so inspired by a peer's presentation on Nieto's seminal work, *Affirming Diversity* (1992), I ordered the most recent addition, *The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (2018). Reading the case studies provided in each chapter, I began to see the faces of former culturally diverse students emerge, realizing with chagrin that I had missed opportunities to better connect with them not only academically but socially and emotionally as well. I had not been the compassionate and accepting teacher I had so prided myself as being. This was my "Aha Moment." I realized that with a growing number of diverse students in my school, especially a Latino(a) and Turkish population, I owed it to my students to make our seventh grade classroom a more inclusive and accepting place; where equality means everyone is valued and instruction is multicultural, where we learn from one another and about one another; and where we promote social justice in our daily interactions. Just as Dr. Leeds had helped me to see what I could not seem to see on my own, the next step in my journey of becoming a better teacher would require me to prepare my students to see the importance of honoring cultural diversity in their lives both inside and outside the classroom settings.

  With a clear understanding of what I needed to do, my next challenge was ascertaining the best way to prepare my students to examine the cultural diversity that existed within our classroom. Remembering my own discomfort when discussing the notion of White privilege, how was I going to present this topic to my students, 78% of whose families identify as White? I knew that the manner in which I presented the idea of implicit bias in my classroom would be crucial to preparing my students to partake in self-reflection; I needed to find a way to ease my students into some of the difficult

discussions that would need to take place if my students were to see the need for social justice. According to Gay (2002), a culturally responsive classroom is one where a teacher seeks to "help students to understand that knowledge has moral and political elements and consequences, which obligate them to take social action to promote freedom, equality, and justice for everyone" (p. 110). So, in addition to encouraging my students to be kind and compassionate, I was realizing that it was also my responsibility to encourage my students be advocates for equity and justice for all people in our diverse world, beginning first in our own classroom.

As a reading teacher, I knew the best way to generate meaningful discussion was through the use of engaging literature. I had to find text selections that would not only keep the attention of all my students, whose reading levels would vary from fourth grade to eighth grade levels, but also encompass a variety of protagonists from difficult cultures so as to provide a unit that was inclusive for all of my students. I recalled a unit I had done two years prior using picture books with my seventh graders to review literary elements. The students, who formed reading pairs, were each given a different picture book. Student pairs created a mind map of story elements and then presented their findings to their peers by conducting a read aloud. The results from an end of the year student survey indicated that the picture book activities were enjoyable; students loved becoming "teachers" for the day and the students liked that the text selections "were short but also taught a lesson." Could using picture books be the instrument through which I could motivate students to become introspective? By exposing students to picture books that not only provide a glimpse of cultural characteristics but also raised awareness about the struggles faced by students of diverse cultures when their heritage is not understood

by their peers, would my students become more "open to one another"? A clear picture began to develop. Picture books, with their short but powerful text and expressive illustrations, could provide students with both mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990) into various cultures as well as shed light on the inequities diverse cultures face as a result of being different from the "norm".

Purpose Statement

As classrooms become more culturally diverse, culturally responsive pedagogy is instrumental to fostering feelings of inclusion among all students. Understanding the importance of preparing students to meet the needs of the global society in which they live, Gay (2002) explained that educators must not only encourage students to examine and develop their own cultural identities, but they must also present them with cultural values and contributions of other ethnic groups. By presenting students with an overview of diverse cultures, educators provide students with the knowledge that the differences among cultures can actually become a uniting force. It is important to note that educators must resist falling into what Banks (2004) referred to as the "Heroes and Holidays Approach" whereby multicultural education is limited to special ethnic days, weeks or months. Culturally responsive pedagogy is not simply adding a new unit to an existing curriculum; it is dynamic, ever-changing in content and process of instruction, evolving with the needs of all students in a classroom. Gay (2010) explained how that at the heart of this learning theory is the belief that learning travels beyond the confines of academics in a classroom; education should provide students with the knowledge and skills to serve their community in many ways, including a commitment to social action.

Based on this knowledge, I sought to design a research study that both kept students engaged as well as prompted them to examine their own ethnic identity and their relationships with others who share different cultural identities in a nonthreatening manner. Information gathered from prior studies supports the use of multicultural picture books in book club settings.

According to a study by McKenna, Kear, and Elsworth (1995) students' attitudes toward reading decline as they get older beginning in upper elementary grades. Often middle school students are reluctant to read for various reasons, especially books that they deem challenging. The challenge in motivating middle school students to read is to find text selections that are engaging for all types of readers. Rosenblatt (1968) explained that reading is a transactional process requiring the reader to draw on past experiences or knowledge about people, events, or ideas and reflect on the attitudes, moral ideals and social implications created through the reader's transaction with the text. Picture books provide a viable text selection option as they are attractive to middle school students, especially reluctant readers, because they often evoke fond memories of when reading was enjoyable. In addition, their preconceived "simplistic" nature allows for students of any ability to feel confident discussing cultural implications. In addition, in his study about the use of picture books to examine racism, Husband (2019) affirmed that using multicultural picture books with young children not only provides cross-cultural experiences but also promotes empathy for marginalized people using the social injustices faced by diverse protagonists.

The importance of dialogue cannot be ignored when it comes to discussing social justice issues and is a critical component of the research design. Freire (1968) believed

7

that teachers and students are co-creators of knowledge; such knowledge resulted from a dialogue between students and the teacher through continuous inquiry. By implementing book clubs whereby students would talk to each other in addition to classroom wide discussion, the dialogue that transpired could foster critical conscientiousness and "offer sites of possibility for collective reflection," so to "act critically to transform reality" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 99). Husband (2019) also noted the importance of dialogue with regard to social justice issues when he asserted, "Multicultural picture books can provide spaces in the classroom where early childhood teachers and children dialogue about and reflect on issues of race, racism, and racial justice in direct and critical ways" (p. 1072).

Although Husband (2019) referred to the use of multicultural picture books in early childhood classrooms, the use of such text selections in a middle school classroom may make the difficult but needed discussions about social issues such as prejudice, stereotyping and racism less intimidating for both teacher and student. By reading multicultural literature, in particular picture books, and encouraging small book club dialogues and classroom wide discussions, students' understandings of their own identity as well as their perceptions and appreciation of others of diverse cultures may deepen.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

Classrooms today are a tapestry made up with students from diverse backgrounds. According to the most recent data published by the United States Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) regarding the racial/ethnic enrollment in public schools, of the 54.5 million students enrolled in public schools in 2017, 24.6 million were White while 25.9 million were considered students of color, comprised of Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska

Native students, in addition to students of two or more races (NCES, 2020). Moreover, population projections over the next ten years show an increase in diversity as the number of White students is projected to decrease and the enrollment of Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander students increase. Additionally, in 2009, 31% of public school students were foreign born or had at least one parent who was foreign born; this number, too, is expected to increase as we move into the next decade (NCES, 2020).

These statistics point to the relevance of educators acknowledging and understanding the importance of one's cultural identity so as to provide a classroom that is inclusive and supportive of all students. As Nieto confirmed, "The changing landscape of our world, our nation, and our schools confirms the pressing need for interethnic understanding and cooperation, a need that is more evident than ever before." (2018, p. xvii). Educators must find ways to promote acceptance and foster inclusion of all students in classrooms; more importantly, educators need to prepare students to be advocates for social justice when they leave the confines of the classroom. The purpose of this study is to examine how multicultural literature can motivate students and foster critical discussions about identity and social justice. More specifically, the aim is to determine if using culturally relevant picture books keeps middle school students engaged, promotes self-reflection of their own identity and beliefs, and encourages discussion about social issues including stereotyping and prejudice that face marginalized people. By providing students with stories of diverse characters, students will be able to view the issues from different ethnic perspectives and points of view (Banks 2004), possibly developing empathy and inspiring social justice.

Organization of the Thesis

The following chapters outline the organization of the thesis: Chapter Two focuses on a review of the literature supporting the use of picture books in a middle school classroom as well as the need to infuse culturally relevant literature in reading instruction and the importance of student dialogue when examining social issues in a classroom setting. Chapter Three discusses the context of this study, the research design, and methodology. Chapter Four explains the data that was collected during the study as well as the major findings. Chapter Five concludes with a summary of the findings, conclusions drawn from the study including its limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

We want our classrooms to be just and caring, full of various conceptions of the good. We want them to be articulate, with the dialogue involving as many persons as possible, opening to one another, opening to the world. (Greene, 1995, p. 167)

Introduction

Just as educational philosophies have changed over time, so, too, have the emotional, social and academic needs of students. Today's classrooms are a kaleidoscope, reflecting the intersection of identities such as race, ethnicity and culture. In today's complicated and charged social climate, it is critical that educators honor the diversity of the ever-changing student population. Using multicultural literature is one way to respect all student identities.

Chapter Two presents a review of literature that proposes the use of multicultural literature in the form of picture books to support the social, emotional and academic needs of all stakeholders in the classroom. Section one proposes the theoretical frameworks of Rosenblatt and Vygotsky: reading as an aesthetic experience based on one's experiences that should be shared with others in order to promote higher level thinking. Section two examines the importance of student motivation to reading success and proposes the use of picture books and literature circles to increase student engagement. Section three examines the work of Gay and Nieto and presents a theoretical framework on the importance of culturally responsive teaching. The next section, section four, builds upon the idea of culturally responsive teaching proposing the use of

multicultural picture books to increase student motivation as well as support students with the sometimes difficult task of self-reflection of their beliefs about their own identity as well as the identities of others. Despite the many changes in educational philosophy throughout the years and the call for educators to use culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy, the use of culturally responsive practices will be a new experience for many teachers and students. This section also discusses the need to choose authentic texts that are middle school appropriate in complexity and content to facilitate genuine and reflective conversation. The last section investigates the significance of dialogue when fostering critical conscientiousness about the social issues students face daily. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993) presents the validity of using book clubs to facilitate difficult but needed conversations. This section also examines findings on how middle school students feel about discussing topics such as race and provides insight into best practices when conducting such conversations.

Reading as a Literary Transaction and Social Occurrence

Dating back to the late 1800s, educators have analyzed and theorized about the process of reading. However, Louise Rosenblatt's Transactional/ Reader Response Theory was revolutionary in its belief that each reader has a unique reading response based upon his/her own life experiences. According to Rosenblatt (1982), "Reading is a transaction, a two way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time and under particular circumstances" (p. 28). This process requires the reader to draw on past experiences or knowledge about people, events, or ideas and reflect on the attitudes, moral ideals and social implications created through the reader's transaction with the text. Recognizing that students approach reading with preconceived ideas is critical to

12

understanding their motivation to read as well as their reaction to texts that are multicultural in nature. Acknowledging that students come from different backgrounds and belief systems will impact student discussion in book clubs.

In addition to reading being a complex internal process, Vygotsky (1978) maintained that learning in itself is a social process. "Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers" (as cited in Palinscar, 1998, p. 352). Despite the challenge using social justice multicultural pictures in book clubs might present due to a reader's background and belief systems, the social nature of learning supports using this forum. Woolfolk (1999) in her book, *Educational Psychology*, further explained how interactions with other students can lead to higher order thinking as well as a self-examination of ideas, attitudes and values. Understanding that the reading process is a personal transaction between text and self and that learning is facilitated through social interaction, how could fusing these two philosophies improve the reading of reluctant readers and foster discussion on identity and social issues?

Motivating Middle School Reluctant Readers

Educators would agree that students' feelings about reading have become increasingly negative over the past decade. The effects of this reluctance to read can been seen in recent data collection. According to the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Assessment administered to 294,000 fourth and eighth graders, average reading scores decreased when compared to the 2017 results (nationsreportcard.gov). Such findings suggest that reading competency is declining in students across grade levels; this regression may be directly related to student motivation

to read. Pitcher et al. (2007) explained that motivation is a "complex construct that influences a readers' choice of reading material, their willingness to engage in reading and thus their ultimate competence in reading" (p. 379). Research by McKenna, Kear, and Elsworth (1995) found that students' attitudes toward reading decline as they get older beginning in upper elementary grades; to improve a negative attitude toward reading, their research suggests teachers need to provide an engaging approach to text prior to reading, reduce frustration during reading experiences, and allow collaboration with other students who have had positive reading experiences.

Massey's 2015 review of picture book studies found that picture books could also be a motivational tool for middle school students. Citing the Commission on Adolescent Literacy of the International Reading Association which states, "adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read" (p. 46), Massey explained that adolescents should have choice in the type of reading they engage in, including texts of varying lengths and types. Picture books should not be ruled out due to the brevity. Their brevity and the use of visual images can stimulate reading. Massey added that picture books can provide step by step learning experiences that improve overall comprehension. Thus, picture books may be a viable way to improve student's willingness to read as well as assist in improving comprehension.

Venegas (2018), commenting on the self-efficacies of reluctant and struggling readers, echoed the importance of improving a reader's overall attitude toward the reading process. Self-efficacy is defined as confidence in one's ability to complete a task; reader's with low self-efficacy approach reading tasks with reluctance as they may perceive it to be too difficult or have had negative prior reading experiences. Using

14

picture books may alleviate reluctant readers' anxiety as the very nature of a picture book seems simplistic and enjoyable. Thus, picture books may be a viable way to improve student's willingness to read as well as assist in improving comprehension.

In addition, Venegas' research confirmed that literature circles can increase student motivation and improve enjoyment of reading as hypothesized in prior studies by Cameron et. al (2012). Literature circles increase confidence of struggling readers as through discussion students observe how to use critical literacy skills to comprehend text as well as increase the motivation of reluctant readers as reading becomes an active process. These findings reaffirm how the use of book clubs that provide specific roles for each participant allow for sharing of responses that increases motivation in reluctant readers.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Clearly, the use of picture books is one method of improving motivation in reluctant readers. Ivey and Broadus' (2001) survey of what made middle school students want to read found that increasing motivation required that teachers provide a meaning-centered curriculum that honors students' voices and their need for self-expression. More specifically, educators needed to "create culturally responsive instruction that is responsive to not only the students' cultural backgrounds, but also to the social and political forces that shape literacy development." as well as "connect literacy with real-life out of school issues and personal interests" (p. 354). This leads to the question of what constitutes "culturally responsive instruction"?

A leading theorist of culturally responsive teaching, Geneva Gay (2015), defined culturally responsive instruction as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences,

frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 50). Gay asserted that culturally responsive teaching requires that educators create caring learning communities that value and use knowledge of cultural diversity in instruction, encouraging students to challenge racial and cultural stereotypes and reject prejudice, injustice, and oppression while advocating for social justice. At the heart of culturally relevant education is the belief that culture and difference are an inherent part of the human experience. An individual doesn't choose to be cultural or different. Rather than try and neutralize these humanistic ideals, educators should see them as empowering factors in education, incorporating cultural diversity in all aspects of instruction. Gay insists that, "Education must be culturally pluralistic and convey to all students that they and their heritages are important components of what constitutes the essence of society's cultures, values, and ideals" (2015, p.52).

Sonia Nieto, another educational theorist, affirmed Gay's beliefs about the importance of infusing culture into instruction. Nieto (2018) defined culture as "the values, traditions, worldview, and social and political relationships created, shared and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, religion, or shared identity" (p. 137). Nieto views culture as displayed in methods of communication and as attitudes and family relationships that affect how students learn. She referred to this blending as multicultural education or education that is for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, language, social class religion, gender, sexual orientation, or ability; it is critical pedagogy as it "values diversity and encourages critical thinking, reflection, and action making students active

learners" (2018, p. 41). Considering the value both culturally relevant pedagogy and multicultural education has on all students, it should be viewed as a critical component of classroom instruction, especially in literacy classes.

 Bias in Classrooms

In order to employ culturally relevant pedagogy, educators must address the role of bias, and specifically implicit bias in the classroom. Often, bias is not intentional but rather an unconscious act whereby a person is unaware they are acting unjustly. Such implicit bias can be found in even the youngest of students and in the most well -meaning classrooms. Greene & Abt-Perkins (2003) explain that acknowledging implicit bias is particularly difficult for people of White, middle class backgrounds; people do not want to be put in the position of being judged and have not been taught to question inherent biases that exist in institutions such as schools. Beach, Thein, and Parks (2008) supplemented that the discussion of topics such as racism and bias can cause minority students discomfort as well as they risk being labeled "defensive victims" during discussions about social injustices (p. 281). The knowledge that reading is a transactional experience between a students' background and personal experiences with text (Rosenblatt, 1968), reinforces the concept that culturally relevant pedagogy can be a powerful tool to connect all students. However, as Greene and Abt-Perkins (2003) caution, teachers have to make careful choices about how to have their students engage in discourse about racism and social injustice.

One important and necessary choice is to recognize the importance a student's culture has on his/her engagement with literature and comprehension of text has never been more relevant. Rosenblatt (1982) theorized that literature is responsible for "aiding

us to understand ourselves and others, for widening our horizons to include temperaments and cultures different from our own, for helping us to clarify our conflicts in values, for illuminating our world" (p. 276).

Bishop (1990) advocated the significance of culturally relevant literature sharing that books should provide readers with reflections of their own life experiences as well as offer insight into the lives of those different from themselves. Bishop further explained that children must be presented with all types of books, both mirrors of their own lives and windows into the culturally diverse world in which they live. Literature not only provides students with a deeper understanding of their own identity but encourages them to discover ways to connect with diverse individuals. Bishop (1990) championed, "When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all of our children, they will see that we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities, because together they are what make us all human." (p. 11).

It is evident that using multicultural text selections can enhance students' experiences with literature. In her 2013 book about multicultural children's literature, Norton reaffirmed this concept when she wrote, "Positive multicultural literature has been effectively used to help readers identify cultural heritages, understand sociological change, respect the value of minority groups, raise aspirations and expand imagination and creativity" (p. 2). She further explained how recognizing the commonalities among seemingly diverse people cannot be achieved until the differences are explored and acknowledged. Not only can multicultural literature improve student engagement, but it can bridge the gap between understanding one's own identity and the identities of others who are culturally diverse.

Picture Books and Cultural Identity

Understanding the great potential of multicultural literacy as well as the benefits of using picture books to improve student motivation, combining these methods could yield significant benefits. Vacca and Vacca described, "A picture book has the potential to act as a magnifying glass that enlarges and enhances the reader's personal interactions with a subject" (as cited in Massey, 2015, p. 46). Massey expanded on Vacca and Vacca's analogy, explaining how multicultural picture books serve different purposes: one is to provide a place where culturally diverse students can authenticate their cultural identities; another is to provide mainstream students with an awareness of the cultural diversity that exists in the complex world in which they live. In essence, picture books could be used as agents to raise awareness of social issues and promote social justice.

Social Justice

Further evidence to support using picture books as vehicles to address social issues can be found in Husband's (2019) review "Using Multicultural Picture Books to Promote Racial Justice in Urban Early Childhood Literacy Classrooms". Husband cited Williams and Steel's 2019 study which suggested that children start developing implicit biases at a young age, many developing a pro-White bias. Husband maintained that exposing children to a wide range of authentic images and information that relates to all diverse groups in society may help reduce bias. Husband detailed many positive effects of using multicultural picture books including, but not limited to, helping children develop empathy towards other racial groups in society and towards the experiences of people who have been and are currently marginalized or oppressed in society.

In addition, Enriquez (2014) echoed the power of using social justice picture books in her case study, "Critiquing Social Justice Picture Books: Teacher's Critical Literacy Reader Responses". Enriquez detailed the effect utilizing social justice picture books had on teachers as well as students. In this qualitative study, Enriquez examined how teachers in a graduate course reacted to the images and messages in picture books considered mentor texts to promote social justice discussion. Graduate students were to critique select picture books to ascertain their usefulness in classroom instruction. Prior to critiquing the select books, the graduate students were taught how to evaluate literary and illustrative qualities of picture books; this proved to be critical to their understanding of selecting appropriate and authentic multicultural picture books. Her findings, based on discussion and reader response journals, demonstrated how the graduate students, based on their new knowledge of evaluative criteria, noted patterns of "simplistic portrayals of social inequity, compliance with dominant paradigms, and expedient resolutions to complex issues" (p. 30) in select picture books. In other words, the graduate students would not have noticed such patterns as stereotypical images or oversimplification of complex societal issues had they not been taught to look for such patterns.

While these results may seem counterintuitive to the goal of social justice education, Enriquez (2014) explained that the results reaffirm the use of picture books as a teaching tool. She maintains that teachers have great power when they select books to be used to raise awareness of social injustices. They must consider the backgrounds of their students when choosing topics that will support meaningful and impactful discussion of cultural diversity (Cunningham & Enriquez, 2013). In addition, Norton (2013) reiterated the importance of text selection for social justice picture books

explaining that selection of authentic literature is critical. Norton's categories to consider

when assessing the cultural authenticity include: geographical and social settings, values

and beliefs, political ideologies, events, themes, conflicts, reactions and responses.

However, while teacher selection of picture books is important, students need to

be taught to be critical evaluators as well. Enriquez (2014) asserted the value in teaching

students to be critical evaluators of the text they are reading explaining, "To truly teach

towards social justice and change, teachers need to teach students to question texts in

terms of power and positioning especially when they revolve around a social issue

fraught with arguments about rights and ethics, and questions about who benefits and

who does not" (p. 35). Teachers and students need to develop a critical stance towards the

picture books being used, interrogating the message the book sends as well as the

message the illustrations convey (Enriquez, 2014). Teaching students to look at literature

through a critical lens will promote deeper explorations of social issues being

investigated. Using picture books to uncover social injustices enables teachers and

students to see learning in a new way promoting social action as a goal towards social

justice.

Facilitating Difficult Discourses

The importance of discourse when discussing social issues cannot be

underestimated. Paulo Freire proclaimed, "A teacher is no longer merely the one who

teaches; but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while

being taught also teaches. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all

grow" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 99). Freire (1987) continued to explain that knowledge

comes from a dialogue between students and the teacher through continuous inquiry

where teachers and students are co-creators of knowledge. Such dialogue can foster critical conscientiousness and "offers sites of possibility for collective reflection, to "act critically to transform reality" (p. 99). Rosenblatt (1982) supported Freire's stance on the critical nature of using dialogue as a means of transformation when she explained that through sharing their responses to literature, older students partake in valuable learning experiences whereby they are faced with different interpretations and alternate viewpoints that can lead to new self-awareness. It is through discussion with others who have diverse backgrounds that students are prompted to self-reflect on their own beliefs and how these beliefs shape their interactions with others.

While some educators may feel that such discourse may be uncomfortable, there are many studies that warrant such discussion and provide insight into how to make these conversations transformative for students and teachers. According to Zuniga, Nagda, and Sevig (2002), "By encouraging open and reflective communication about difficult topics, especially issues of power and privilege, intergroup dialogues help students build skills for developing and maintaining relationships across difference" (p. 7). With regard to discussions on social justice topics including, but not limited to race, research has been conducted that examines student responses to critical dialogue. Flynn's qualitative study, "Middle School Students Discuss Racism and White Privilege" (2012) examined how both White students and students of color responded to a unit on racism and White privilege. This study followed two content area teachers, language arts and social studies, and their interaction with their eighth grade students (2012). Flynn's data, in the form of interviews, observations and student artifacts, revealed that most students, including middle school students want to talk about racism if given the opportunity.

However, it must be understood that discussions will be difficult. Trust must be established in the classroom setting among all stakeholders. Of particular importance is the teacher-student relationship, noting that these discussions cannot take place unless students have a strong rapport with their teachers.

The results of this study demonstrated that students reacted differently to the stories shared by their peers; some students shared that the discussions opened their eyes up to racism and its prevalence in society. While others, "Whether out of a genuine desire for fairness and justice, or an inability or unwillingness to acknowledge modern racism, were not able to move past their guilt and resistance" (Flynn, 2012, p.105). The study also revealed the frustration of students of diverse cultures such a Latino and Asian who feel left out of the discourses about racism, feeling they centered on the issue of Black vs. White. While Flynn's study provides a glimpse into the complexities that exist when engaging in critical dialogue, she maintains the importance of having such discussions as "The classroom, therefore, helps us envision how an alliance between the oppressed and the oppressors can form in a dialogic space, embodying critical multicultural practice" (Flynn, 2012, p. 96).

An empirical study by Laman et. al (2012) also provides insight into conducting meaningful classroom dialogue around social justice issues. Their research encompassed five empirical studies across grade levels examining "practices that best support learners of all ages in understanding how structures of power, privilege, and oppression are socially constructed and how those structures could be deconstructed and transformed" (p. 197). One of the studies was conducted in a middle school classroom using picture books in book clubs to promote critical discussion of immigration. Findings based on

transcripts of students' discourses showed that dialogue must be participant-driven and participant-focused; it needs time: to self-reflect on the oppressive issue at hand, examine the issue from multiple viewpoints of group members, construct a possible new understanding of the issue and suggest social action.

The teacher's role is also significant to fostering thoughtful discussion. Teachers must be able to encourage purposeful, critical discourse in student book clubs without stifling book club autonomy; students must feel that their responses can be honest and genuine, with no fear of "disappointing" the teacher (Laman et. al, 2012). Clearly, there seems to be a delicate balance between teacher and student discourse with the teacher's role as a neutral facilitator, stimulating deeper thinking and encouraging authentic, valued discussion.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed suggests using picture books in a book club format may be a valuable teaching strategy in a middle school classroom setting. Research has shown that utilizing picture books as supplemental texts improves student engagement and motivation. Considering student motivation is directly connected to student competency, increasing student enthusiasm is crucial at a time when reports on national reading scores are declining. Studies that examine the use of book clubs, and more specifically literature circles, have also proven to be successful tools for increasing the self-efficacies of reluctant readers as well aiding these students with comprehension acquisition.

Upon reviewing the literature that examined using picture books as a platform for infusing critical dialogue in the classroom, it is obvious that such classroom discussion is

warranted. Research has shown that facilitating critical discussions around social issues must be thoughtful and genuine, taking place in a respectful, trusting environment. While studies have confirmed the need to promote critical dialogue and supported the use of picture books to increase motivation, more research is needed to evaluate how middle school students feel about using picture books in the classroom to discuss social justice. The aim of this study is to investigate how students react to picture books that provoke judicious self-reflection and facilitate authentic discussions of the social issues that face culturally diverse students.

Chapter 3

Research Setting and Design

Educators need to know what happens in the world of the children with whom

they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with

which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world,

what they know independently of the school and how they know it. (Freire, 1998,

p. 72)

Introduction

This study, conducted during the Fall of 2020, explores how using multicultural

texts, picture books in particular, motivates reluctant readers and encourages all students

to examine their cultural identity, and in doing so, promotes social justice. In this

chapter, the context of the study and the methodology used are discussed. The chapter

begins with the context of the study. Included in this are the descriptions of the

community in which the school is located, the specific demographics of the district, as

well as the demographics of the school. In order to maintain confidentiality, the

community, district, school and student participants have been given pseudonyms. The

context is followed by a discussion of the methodology that outlines the research design,

data collection and data analysis components of this study.

Community

This study took place in a public middle school in a New Jersey community.

According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2019 the population of Delview in

2019 was estimated to be 16,492. The racial demographics were estimated to be 82.9%

White, 9.4 % Black or African American, 4.8% Asian, 1.8% Hispanic or Latino, 1.6%

two or more races, and 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. In addition, 11.4%
were persons born in a country other than the U.S. With regard to education levels, 95%
of residents achieved at least a high school diploma and 39.9% hold a bachelor's degree
or higher. The average median household income between 2014-2018 was $89, 855 with
5.3% of the population living below the poverty line.

District

Delview District comprises four schools, each school serving students of specific
grade levels. The elementary school educates students in grades pre-kindergarten
through second grade; the intermediate school instructs students in grades three through
five; the middle school hosts students in grades six through eight, and the high school
teaches ninth through twelfth grade students. Approximately 2,954 students enrolled in
schools in the district during the 2018-2019 school year. Of these students, 23.9% were
economically disadvantaged, 17.7 % were students with disabilities and 7.7% were
English Learners. On the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and
Careers (PARCC), the 2019 results for students that met or exceeded expectations for
language arts across the district were 51.6% and 38.6% for mathematics.

In 2018-2019, there were 245 teachers in the Delview district, averaging 11.8
years of teaching experience in public school and 9.6 years teaching in the district.
Female teachers accounted for 76.7% of the teacher population. With regard to race,
93.9% of teachers identified as White, 2.0% as Black or African American, 1.6% as
Hispanic, 2.0% as Asian, and .4% as American Indian or Alaska Native. Approximately
55% of teachers have a bachelor's degree and 45% have obtained a master's degree as
their highest level of education.

School

Delview Middle School had approximately 688 students enrolled in the 2018-
2019 school year of whom 51% were male, 25.4% were economically disadvantaged, and
4.5% were English Learners. In terms of race, 72.2% identified as White, 11.2%
identified as Hispanic, 8% as Black of African American, 3.8% as Asian, 4.8% as two or
more races. Of the sixty six teachers in this middle school, 93.9% identified as White,
3.0% as Asian, 1.5% as Black or African American, and 1.5% as Hispanic. Female
teachers accounted for 74.2%. Teachers averaged 12.9 years of teaching experience in
public schools and 10.4 years teaching in the district. Higher education degrees are
equally distributed as approximately 50% of teachers have a bachelor's degree and 50%
have obtained a master's degree as their highest level of education.

Methodology

The research methodology for this study is qualitative research whereby I am
seeking to understand how using multicultural texts, in particular, picture books, motivate
reluctant readers and foster discussions about cultural identity and social justice.
Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) explained that qualitative research is best suited for
teacher researchers as action research occurs in the natural setting of one's own learning
environment using data such as narratives, journals, observations, interviews and student
artifacts. Thus, teacher research is defined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle as "the
systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers about their own schools and
classroom work" (p. 7). Although qualitative research is systematic, it is not rigid but
rather fluid based on the inquiry and responses of participants. As such, qualitative
research proved to be most appropriate for this study due to the changing learning

environment that resulted from the ever-changing instructional format Covid-19

regulations caused. In addition, the process of obtaining data in its various forms is just

as critical as the final analysis. Qualitative methods allow teacher researchers to look at

their participants as individuals to be valued. As Cochran-Smith (2012, p. 109) advised,

"Always consider whose interests are served (or not) by your research, whose voices are

heard or silenced, and whose perspectives and knowledge traditions are or are not valued

(2012, p. 109) In essence, researchers and participants learn from one another as the

classroom can be viewed as a community of learning. Considering that my research

questions would examine the impact of student interaction in book clubs on one's identity

and its role in promoting social justice, my students' voices and the perspectives shared in

their artifacts would be critical pieces of data; this qualitative research would honor my

students' responses in all forms making them more than a number on a data sheet.   Most

importantly, the findings from the diverse sources of data collected would serve to make

us a stronger community of learners, educating each other using our own funds of

knowledge (Moll, et al., 1992).

The data collected in this action research was a maximum variation sampling

from seventh grade students in on-level and accelerated classroom settings. Maximum

variation samplings, a purposeful sampling using a variety of participants, is effective in

providing insight into "documenting uniqueness" in select cases as well as tracing

"shared patterns that cut across cases" (Patton, 1990, p. 172). Although this study was

initially designed to focus on a smaller sampling of reluctant readers, the effects of the

COVID-19 pandemic on the learning environment proved to be significant and led to

many changes in the original research design. As a result of a changing hybrid/remote

and synchronous/asynchronous instructional schedule, constraints were placed on the time allotted per lesson and the grouping of students. Consequently, a larger sampling of student artifacts and observations were needed to provide a more complete analysis given the changing dynamics of the study.

Initially, the study was designed for on-level seventh grade students; however, due to Covid-19 restrictions, our school experienced a reduction in class sizes, a hybrid instruction schedule, and synchronous learning for remote students. As a result, the study was opened to students in an accelerated class to allow for a better sampling of students and data collection. Consequently, there were a total of 31 participants, 13 of whom were males and eighteen of whom were females. There were 14 students reading on grade level and 17 students reading above grade level. Of the participants, 21 identified as White, two as Black or African American, two as multiethnic (Black and White), three as multiethnic (White and Hispanic), and three as Asian American.

The qualitative data collection methods across all three classes included *Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile* surveys (Gambrell et al., 2013-2014), anticipation and post anticipation guides, family interviews and subsequent Google slide presentations, literature circle role responses, student reflection journals, student responses during small group and class discussions, Google Meet transcripts, and my observations noted during discussions as well thoughts and reflections recorded in my teacher researcher journal. It is important to note that as the instructional format and duration of lessons were amended due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, data collection also varied.

The research study was conducted in my seventh grade reading classroom for the course of approximately seven weeks from September to November. Due to Covid-19 social distance requirements this school year, the number of students allowed in a classroom setting was limited. As a result, students district wide were divided into two groups for instruction: Group A and Group B. These two groups were then separated into two groups: hybrid and remote. Hybrid students were taught in person two days a week for a 45 minute reading class period and worked asynchronously at home two days a week. The remote student groups were formed to accommodate families who wished to receive remote instruction from home synchronously while hybrid students were receiving in person instruction. One day a week, all students met remotely as a full class for ten minutes to preview their work for the day which they would all do asynchronously. In essence, there were four groups of students per class period receiving live instruction twice a week. Three class periods participated in this study, resulting in twelve groups over the course of the week. However, eventually, Delview Middle School was forced to close for three weeks due to an increasing number of Covid-19 cases. At this time, all students were taught in a remote format as a full class, four days a week during a shortened period of 30 minutes. This change required a change the study paradigm as will be outlined in the weekly procedures that will follow:

- Week 1 Hybrid Instruction: Students completed Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile surveys (Gambrell et al., 2013-2014). Students also interviewed an elder family member to learn "cultural" traits or historical implications that shaped their identity; students created a Google slide illustrating the information gained from interviews.

● Week 2 Hybrid Instruction: Students presented Google slides to their peers and class wide discussion was audiotaped; students were introduced to vocabulary such as: bias, stereotyping, prejudice, diversity, inclusion and culture. Students learned of familial, religious and cultural values found in Native American literature. In book clubs of two or three students, heterogeneously paired, choose to read either *Fry Bread* or *When We Were Alone*. Students were given a specific literature circle role to complete upon finishing the picture book and then discussed their findings and feelings as I observed and took notes. Students also completed reading nonfiction articles independently dealing with current social injustices facing Native Americans, so I was able to observe a few book club groups each day. Following book club discussions and class discussions, students completed a personal reflection in an online journal.

● Week 3 Complete remote instruction for all students: Students learned of familial, religious and cultural values found in Asian Literature. Book clubs were kept intact and chose to read either *The Name Jar* or *My Name Is Yoon* independently using online read-alouds as students were working from home. Students were given a different literature circle role to complete upon finishing the picture book and then discussed their findings and feelings as I observed and took notes. Students also completed reading a nonfiction article independently dealing with current Asian social justice issues as well as a realistic short story "Who's Hu" or "Fish Cheeks". Additional multicultural literature selections were added to provide time to use Google Meet breakout rooms to observe and obtain

audiotape recordings of book club discussions. Students completed a personal reflection in an online journal after completing all readings and discussions.

● Week 4 Complete remote instruction for all students: The same format followed this week focusing on Middle Eastern culture. This week students were allowed to independently choose their picture book, *My Name is Bilal* or *The Proudest Blue* and their literature circle roles. Breakout room groups were larger and created according to book choice as opposed to initial book club groupings. Students also read an excerpt from *Other Words for Home*. Students completed a personal reflection in an online journal after completing all readings and discussions.

● Week 5 Complete remote instruction for all students. The same format followed this week focusing on Latino(a) culture. This week all students read two excerpts: one from the picture book, *My Name is Jorge on Both Sides of the River* and an additional excerpt from *Harbor Me*. Instead of Google breakout rooms, class wide discussion was recorded in the form of anecdotal notes comparing the trials of the two main characters.

● Week 6 Complete remote instruction for all. This week students were allowed to independently choose their picture book, *Last Stop on Market Street* or *Those Shoes*, Students watched a read aloud and completed their choice literature circle roles. Also, students read an excerpt from *Harbor Me* independently and responded to it in the online reflection journal. Class wide discussion was audiotaped as students tried to determine a common pattern in all text selections.

● Week 7 Hybrid Instruction: Students completed post anticipation guide and

reflected on effectiveness of picture book unit in online reflection journal.

Students wrote identity poems expressing their understanding of their own

identity.

Data Analysis

To determine the effectiveness of using multicultural literature to increase student

motivation, encourage cultural identity, and foster awareness of social justice, various

sources of data were collected. The data collected before, during and after the study was

analyzed using a general inductive approach. According to Thomas (2003), an inductive

approach examines patterns that emerge upon close inspection of raw data. This type of

data analysis, referred to as the Constant Comparative Method (Glasser & Strauss, 1967)

involves close readings of text and subsequent coding of data into meaningful segments

or categories. Using data triangulation, categories are compared thus resulting in the

development of key summary themes (Thomas, 2003). This process was used to examine

the various means of data collected during this study.

Data collection took many different forms in this qualitative study. First, students

completed Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile surveys (Gambrell, et al., 2013-2014)

to assess their reluctance to read. Students scoring below 60% or 48/80 points were

considered "reluctant" readers, or students who show little interest or value in reading.

This would provide a sampling of select students whose responses would be analyzed to

see if motivation changed throughout the picture book unit. In addition, pre-and post-

anticipation guides, containing the same statements, were used to see if students' beliefs

about their own identity and the cultural values of others had changed after their reading of multicultural selections.

A second source of data were the students' interview slides as they provided context for all of the text selections students would be reading; the slides not only ensured that all students' cultures would be represented in the literary selections, but it also allowed for some students to be "experts" sharing their cultural perspective. These slides were referred to throughout our subsequent classroom discussions about the picture books; they provided the framework for cultural values.

A third source of data was students' artifacts literature circle role responses and reflection journals. These documents were scrutinized to find recurrent patterns or themes that emerged over the course of using the various cultural texts. Initial stereotypes, misconceptions, or lack of background knowledge were identified as well as if such preconceptions changed or did not change over the course of the study. I was able to identify areas of growth and insight, as well as recognize areas of discomfort and naiveté through categorizing and coding student responses in the literature circle roles and their student reflection journals.

Audio recordings of book club discussions, whole class discussion as well as transcripts from a Google Meeting chat box between students enabled me to analyze how student to student interaction affected reading motivation in addition to how students reacted to the comments of their peers. By comparing the written work of students in the journals with what they shared orally, I was provided insight into the comfort level of my students sharing their opinions during what could be perceived as difficult conversations. These transcripts, as well as the notes that I had taken during classroom conversations,

were instrumental in analyzing emerging trends such as students saying what they thought was "right" or the "popular response" as opposed to how they might actually be feeling.

By analyzing all these data sources, I am able to provide an overview of students' reactions to using picture books, in conjunction with nonfiction and realistic fiction excerpts, as a means of developing their identity and nurturing its interconnectedness with the cultural identity of others.   The findings discovered over the course of this study are further explained in Chapter Four. Following this analysis, information on the limitations of the study as well as implications for future research are outlined in Chapter Five.

Chapter 4

Findings of the Study

My greatest challenge as a teacher educator has been to help white students and

students of color understand that racism is not simply a personal attitude or

individual disposition and that feeling guilty or "being nice" are not enough to

combat racism. (Nieto, 2018, p. 198)

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the data collected during a six week study that explored

how using multicultural texts, picture books in particular, could motivate reluctant

readers and encourage all students to examine their cultural identity and possibly promote

social justice. I begin by explaining how student motivation was surveyed prior to

implementing multicultural texts so to identify students considered to be reluctant

readers. A brief discussion follows describing the use of family interviews to introduce

students to the concept of cultural identity. The remainder of the chapter outlines four

themes that emerged during data analysis: an understanding of the importance of

fostering one's identity; a desire for people to be empathetic; a need to make sense of

social injustice in the world; and the notion that changing implicit bias takes time and

exposure.

Assessing Student's Motivation to Read

Prior to beginning the study, students' reading motivation was measured to use as

a baseline for future data collection. Since this study was taking place at the beginning of

the 2020 school year, following the interruption of the students' prior year of schooling

due to 2020 Spring Covid-19 school closure, I was reluctant to use comprehension levels

from the 2019-2020 school year as they were assessed in the Fall of 2019; I believed the information would be outdated and invalid. I chose, instead, to use the Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrel, et al) reading survey (Appendix A) to gauge the motivation of students when it came to their reading. The survey contains twenty multiple-choice statements worth eighty points total. For the purpose of the study, I determined that participants who scored below 50% would be considered "reluctant" readers: students who show little interest or value in reading and have a low self-concept of themselves as a reader. Of the thirty one participants who completed the survey, thirteen students scored forty eight points or below. The written artifacts of these students were analyzed during the course of the study to see if using multicultural picture books, in particular, would motivate these reluctant readers to provide more developed responses to literature.

Accessing Students Funds of Knowledge About their Culture and Identity

Additionally, before beginning the Multicultural Picture Book/Literature Unit, I wanted my students to have an understanding of their own cultural heritage as a means of activating background knowledge and to use as a reference point during the upcoming Multicultural Picture Book/Literature Unit. These interviews also provided me with an idea of the different cultures embodied in our classroom and guided the literature selections that were representative of all students. For the interview, students were provided with a list of interview questions (Appendix B) to ask an older family member to learn more about their family's history, culture, and traditions; students then created a Google Slide and shared their findings with their peers through informal presentations.

Initially, when students began interviewing family members, it seemed as if many were simply asking their parents the questions. However, once I began sharing bits and pieces of my own history as well as having other students share what they learned from grandparents and great grandparents, students' slides became more detailed and diverse. While students were presenting, the pride they felt could be observed through class discourse as many students provided additional information that did not appear in the slide (Figure 1). Students warmly welcomed questions from their peers. The following oral responses occurred during slide presentations that took place prior to students having to go on remote instruction. These presentations demonstrated how students not only learned about their cultural identity but learned many other lessons as well:

David: My great-grandpop won a Purple Heart. I didn't know what it was but I looked it up and it said it's given to people who save lives in war.

Derek: I had no idea my grandmother's great grandmom was an Indian. See here on my slide -this is a picture of her grave. There is also some of her stuff in a museum.

Kathleen: My grandma was so excited to tell me things. She just kept talking and going on. My mom said later that my grandmom said she was so happy I asked her.

Raul: My grandma taught me to never be embarrassed. She loves to teach me to dance the bachatea and be proud of my Puerto Rican culture. Can I show the class? (Raul proceeds to dance for the class).

Maureen: I sometimes have to translate for my Mom and Dad, but I don't mind. I mean I know it is hard for them, but I just rather speak English at home.

Vishi:	Our culture has many traditions. For example, our family and friends go to the temple and do garba which is a type of dance. It is fun but not so easy.

(Audio Recordings of Student Presentations 10/1/20 and 10/2/20)

Figure 1. Student interview Google slide presentation

Many students shared how there was so much they did not know before the interview and how their interviewees loved sharing their knowledge. Students learned that their relatives were war heroes for various countries, saw pictures of students whose families still reside in other countries/villages, and learned of the many diverse cultures/traditions within our class. Based on the student's engaging presentations, their willingness to share personal anecdotes, and the lively discussions that took place, it is apparent that students and their families enjoyed fostering their cultural identity. A few of the students even shared how their relatives who came from other countries had to change

their name to be "Americanized" so they would be accepted and their businesses patronized.

This activity proved to be a very effective transition to the Multicultural Picture Book/Literature Unit as the interviews and subsequent presentations showed students that many cultures have been marginalized throughout our history, even those of their own ancestors. Moreover, themes such as America being a land of "opportunity" and people becoming "Americanized" emerged.

Anticipation Guide

Prior to reading the first multicultural picture book, students completed an anticipation guide to stimulate their thinking about the topics before engaging in class discourse and book club meetings; the student responses would also provide a baseline to gauge how students' beliefs changed over the course of the unit. The anticipation guide (Appendix C) was a series of ten statements; students could select "Agree", "Not Sure" or "Disagree" and then choose any five of the statements to explain their reasoning.

As demonstrated in Figure 2, the results, based on the 31 study participants, indicated that 77% of students understood that different cultures value different things and 84% believed that understanding different cultures may reduce prejudice and racism prior to reading multicultural literature. Many students (94%) also disagreed strongly that to be "American" you had to give up all other cultural beliefs. Areas that seemed to cause more dissention included topics such as prejudice, stereotyping and diversity. For example, 61% of students disagreed with the statement, "Prejudice is a learned behavior that cannot be changed" while 32% were not sure and 7% agreed. The statement, "Stereotyping, although offensive, is often true and allows people to understand others"

also garnered mixed reactions as 58% disagreed, 26% were not sure and 16% agreed. However, the statement where students seemed to be the most divided was "Diversity is respected and celebrated in today's society" with 26% disagreeing, 42% not sure and 42% agreeing.
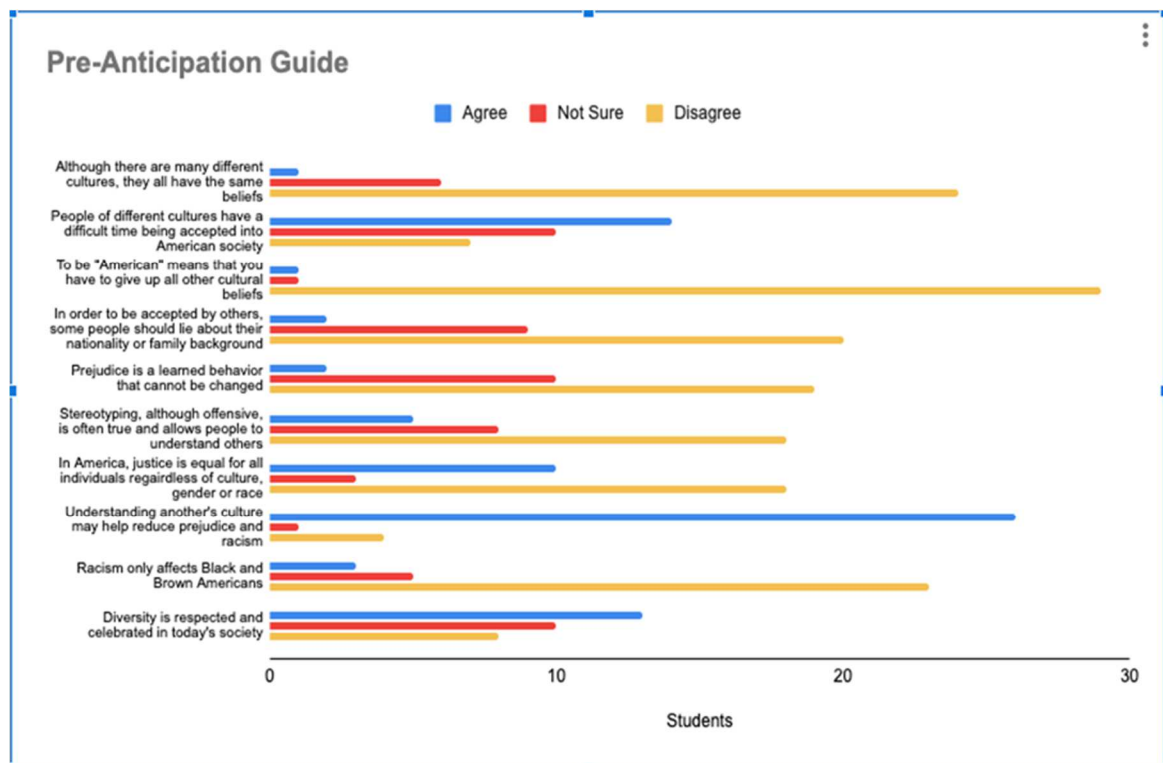

Figure 2. Anticipation guide results

In addition to the statistical data, some of the written responses to the following statements provided insight into student thinking and revealed that there was a wide range of students' knowledge about the concept of social justice:

Statement: In America justice is equal for all individuals regardless of culture, gender, or race.

- Everyone is equal in alot [sic] of ways. (Valerie)

- I agree because all men and women are created and treated equally. (Andy)

- Many people such as Rodney Reed and Pervis Payne have been wrongly accused because of racism. (Hannah)

Statement: Diversity is respected and celebrated in today's society.

- We have a whole month for it. (Anita)

- This is celebrated in some places but others they are the opposite. (Alice)

- Yes and that is a good thing. (Justine)

Statement: Stereotyping, although offensive, is often true and allows people to understand others.

- Sometimes it is true and sometimes it is not, and it does help people understand others. (Vadwa)

- Stereotyping is offensive and can be racist. (Armin)

- I think stereotypes are there because they are true. (Jake)

(Student artifact: Pre-Anticipation Guide 10/8/20)

These statements provided the baseline for students' perceptions and beliefs around diversity, equity, and social justice. Their responses show that students have varied experiences and opinions when it comes to these sometimes uncomfortable topics. Whereas some students expressed discontentment with the notion of diversity in

America, other students seemed to believe that America is a place where all people are celebrated.

The activities throughout the study aimed to see how using multicultural picture books and supplemental realistic fiction excerpts motivated students to think critically about self-identity and acknowledge the social issues that face our diverse populations. During the seven weeks that followed, six themes emerged: the importance of identity, sources of empathy, response journals as emotional connections, the nature of social injustice, discomfort and bias, and a limited knowledge about social justice.

Importance of Identity

Beginning with the interview presentations, it was apparent that students felt that one's identity should be celebrated and respected. The anticipation guide reinforced these ideas as 94% of the participants disagreed that being "American" meant that you have to give up all other cultural beliefs. Yet, 64% of students agreed that people of different cultures have a difficult time being accepted into American society. Although students believed everyone should be accepted, they acknowledged that, in reality, this often is not the case. As we began reading multicultural picture books and supplemental excerpts (Appendix D), it became apparent through class discussion and literature circle role responses (Appendix E) that students saw the importance of remaining true to one's self despite how others may react.

Much discussion was generated when it came to the importance of maintaining your identity as demonstrated in book club discussions about the following books:

My Name is Yoon:

> Andy: I think she was afraid of being judged and made fun of because of her name.

44

Raul:	You know, when someone makes fun of someone's name even though words don't matter, they can affect how people see themselves.

The Name Jar:

Kaitlyn:	She wants to fit in but at the same time want to stay true to her family. She feels insecure and thinks about changing her name to fit in.
Hannah:	But it's terrible she feels this way. Just because you move away you shouldn't have to change who you are.
Armen:	Yeah, but she wants to be like everyone else – she wants to be American.
Sarah:	I feel bad for her. Her name is unique to her and her family. She loves her name, she's just afraid of the other kids.

The preceding discussion between both book club groups focused on the importance of one's name. The importance of honoring one's name also emerged on the literature circle role responses:

My Name is Jorge on Both Sides of the River:

● By calling Jorge "George" it's being hurtful by not referring to him by the name he holds his identity to and it is also disrespecting his culture by whitewashing his name. (Hannah)

● When he answered the girl when she called him by the wrong name, it made him feel ashamed because he isn't being himself, he is turning into an American. (Anita)

● Your name is your name. That is what you go by. It is the worst when someone calls you something that you're not. People are pronouncing his name which is who he is. It describes you. (Renee)

My Name is Bilal:

● I think it is important that Bilal said, "My name is not Bill, it is Bilal" because it shows that Bilal is finally proud of his name and proud to be Muslim. (Alice)

● Bilal proves that even though you may have a different culture than other, you should not change yourself just to fit in, learn to express yourself instead. (Vadwa)

(Student artifact: Literature Role Responses)

Students felt strongly that a person's name was critical to their identity; they voiced how they were concerned that someone would want to change something as unique as their name to fit in. These responses indicate how students felt comfortable sharing their beliefs about maintaining one's identity, both orally and in writing as well.

The picture book, *The Proudest Blue*, elicited responses from students about being true to one's cultural identity. The theme of respecting one's self and being true to one's culture recurred in many student statements:

Raul:	You can't expect others to respect you if you don't respect yourself.
Jeremiah:	But I think some people are afraid others won't like them, so they don't stick to their culture. Not like in this book but in life.
Susanna:	You have to believe in yourself. Be proud of who you are.

Jeremiah: It's not that easy. You can say that, but it's not easy.

(Audio Recording of Book Club Discussions 10/20-10/26)

The discourse among students in their book clubs demonstrates that they wish people would be self-confident and "proud" of themselves, yet they acknowledge that this is often not easy. Their written literature circle role responses echo this sentiment:

The Proudest Blue:

● This book shows how much pride she has in her culture and how she sees right through stereotypes. (Armen)

● Expressing and being yourself is important even if people don't understand. (Susanna)

● This book shows that you have to have thick skin. Some people in the world dislike other cultures and show it and they might say [so] mean and hurtful words. But if you have thick skin then you can take it and remember to be you. (David)

(Student artifact: Literature Role Responses)

All of these sources of data illustrate that students feel strongly that individuals need to remain steadfast in their beliefs but realize that it can be challenging. Students who are considered "different" often face stereotyping or prejudice many times based on skin color, culture, ethnicity or gender; these seventh grade students are not blind to this unfair treatment as their responses demonstrated. However, upon further examination of the data, another theme emerged: students realized there needs to be change in our current society and it begins with us in our classroom.

Sources of Empathy

Examining student responses in their reflection journals and literature circle roles, I was reminded of the words of Paulo Freire when he shared, "Looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future" (Freire, 1968, p. 71). Data analysis revealed that some students saw "mirrors" of their own experiences being marginalized while others saw "windows" (Bishop, 1990) into the lives of those who have been treated unfairly or made to feel like an "outsider". The multicultural literature picture books and supplemental excerpts proved to be a means by which some students engaged in self-reflection as demonstrated by the students' own words.

Empathy as Mirrors

Although 21 of the 31 participants identified as White, some students of color could identify with the experiences and feelings of the characters in the multicultural literature selections as expressed across various student artifacts. For example, Raul, expressed in his anticipation guide, "i am latino and i have experienced racism alot [sic]". Nesyari explained in her reflection journal after reading *My Name is Jorge on Both Sides of the River*, "When people say my name wrong it bothers me a little because they say it in so many ways but it is not the right way."

Other students who found the *Harbor Me* text selections to be mirrors wrote in their reflection journals:

● It reminds me of the things i have to be careful of doing being a black boy.

● Honestly I understood and felt for Esteban of being worried and afraid to tell people what you've been through. The feeling of being asked about your past

48

when it's not very good, isn't a good feeling. Being vulnerable is hard when there

are so many people who want to manipulate that against you.

<p align="right">(Student artifact: Online Reflection Journal)</p>

Another student, Susanna shared, "My grandparents are Native Americans. They

are Cherookee [sic], and it makes me mad that they were treated bad. I didnt [sic] know

about resident schools. They had to act like everyone but not be treated like everyone" in

reference to the picture book *When We Were Alone*. It is important to note that Susanna is

a reluctant reader and writer; the fact that she wrote a response was a testament to the

power of using literature that students can view as a mirror (Bishop, 1990). Examining

the role of motivation in the use of picture books was one of my research questions, and I

had hoped that Susanna would be just one of the reluctant readers who would be more

engaged reading picture books. However, this pattern did not emerge as the written

responses of most of the other reluctant students did not demonstrate any significant

change in elaboration. Although thoughtful, responses remained brief and unsupported.

This finding will be further discussed in Chapter 5 as a limitation.

Response Journals and Emotional Connections

Initially, the methodology of the research design included the use of only

multicultural picture books. However, due to a sudden change to full remote learning in

the second week of the study because of COVID-19 restrictions, supplemental resources

were used in the study. Book Clubs took the form of Google breakout rooms, and

students were given excerpts to read silently while I met with book club groups in

breakout rooms. One such excerpt, a selection from *Harbor Me*, a novel by Jacqueline

Woodson, mimicked current events in our country, in particular police brutality. This

excerpt was referenced often in student reflection journals as both a mirror and a window for students. For Jeremiah, this was a mirror as he shared in his reflection journal, "Well I am half black so the thing characters face maybe I will face. It reminds me of the things I will have to be careful of doing being a black boy."

Another "mirror" student reflection in particular stood out for its raw emotion. Asana used her reflection journal as an outlet for the anger and anxiety she was feeling; it gave her a voice to share her feelings and concerns:

● It makes me feel, disgusted. Like I said in part A, we shouldn't have to live in fear. Do I live in fear? Yes. Why? Because, I see all these people dying because of police and the KKK. Breonna Taylor... where's her justice? It took many riots and protests for George Floyds killer to get arrested. It shouldn't take that much just for someone to get arrested for *Murder*. They should be arrested right then and there. Breonna Taylor's killer? Oh yeah, they're just running around living their best life, not suspended, not fired, and not even arrested. And our "Oh so great" President won't do anything about it and he says "I've done more for the blacks than Abraham Lincoln." Uh, no sir- you haven't done *anything* at all, because if you did, so many different cops would be in jail for police brutality. This president hasn't done anything. All he wants to do is: act all goody goody, get re-elected (which I'm hoping he doesn't), and take away lgbtq+ rights, black rights, this man can put us all in danger. One boy was hanged (a black boy btw) and all the little trumpets are saying "Oh it was just a suicide" If it was a suicide why was he outside in the open? On a tree...? It's pretty obvious it was a hate crime? From the KKK maybe. Anyways that's how this selection makes me feel,

it made feel like I had to vent about all the trouble blacks are facing, and as a

black person I feel like one day maybe even soon, my life will be in danger

because of this man who we sadly have to call our president.

<div align="right">(Student artifact: Online Reflection Journal)</div>

Asana's emotional response illustrates the need to provide students with

opportunities to see characters that represent the world they live in and provide an outlet

to share their feelings. Asana is not a student who writes extended responses, yet her

reflection journal is demonstrative of the power of journaling. She explained in the entry

that she "had to vent" and although the topic of racial discrimination was addressed in

class discussion, Asana, as well as others, were hesitant to publicly share their fears and

concerns. Many other students also revealed personal sentiments in their response

journals yet did not share in book club discussion or class discourse. Some of these

responses include:

● It taught me that racism and issues we are dealing with today have always been

an issue for our country and that it is okay to express my opinions on the issues.

● We all accidentally stereotype people when we don't mean too. We always get

told "don't judge a book by its cover" but we all do. This unit shows us what it's

like to be a person judged by their cover.

● This unit makes me feel like talking more about issues that are happening right

now that I don't get a chance to talk about. I want to talk about modern day

issues like racism like the characters have, but I don't have a group I can talk to so

I have to express my feelings in other ways.

<div align="right">(Student artifact: Online Reflection Journal)</div>

The revelation that students felt that they could be honest in their reflection journals but did not yet feel comfortable sharing these ideas with their peers was an important discovery. It showed that students were connecting to the text in personal ways, but it also exposed that our classroom was not a true "safe space" for students to share their feelings. This topic will be addressed later in the findings.

Empathy as Windows

It was evident that students also viewed multicultural picture books and excerpts as windows (Bishop, 1990) that promoted self-reflection. Students shared that some of the selections made them sad, angry, and even confused as Renee wrote:

> ● This selection makes me feel confused. I don't understand why our country is like this. I'm confused why the police who is supposed to protect us, can shoot someone for playing with a toy. I respect the police and am thankful for what they do, but it's things like that that confuse me.

Other students shared feelings of shame as demonstrated in the following response journal responses:

> ● It makes me feel terrible that this is happening now, nobody deserves to be treated like this, some may disagree but I know that White people are privileged
>
> ● Its [sic] not freedom if people who are almost same don't get the same rights. It makes me feel ashamed to be American, most other countries don't discriminate or have ever discriminated. The chaos that is going on in America, while most of the other countries are peaceful. It makes me feel bad for being privileged. while little kids playing with toys guns get shot or could get shot.

<div align="right">(Student artifacts: Online Reflection Journal)</div>

Student self-reflections also revealed how students defined freedom as it applied to the current climate in society especially when they responded to excerpts from *Harbor Me*. Students seem to be in agreement that the idea of America being the home of the "free" only applied to select member of society, namely White citizens:

● It is not fair that the color of a person's skin determines whether they are treated with respect or not. Especially children. It is not free, and until racism ends, it never will be.

● Our country states that we all have freedom. But, when people favor others and make it dangerous for other races, that's not freedom.

● I think that freedom is where you can be independent and do what you want to. But making it so only one race can do something that one other race can't is not freedom. it actually takes your freedom away.

● So you're telling me "freedom" is living in fear, while seeing someone else who is the exact same age, size, gender, and personality as you get better treatment, respect, care, and comfort than you? That's not freedom at all.

(Student artifacts: Online Reflection Journal)

These reflections validated that the multicultural text selections did prompt students to self-reflect and think critically about the role stereotyping, bias and prejudice play in their own lives and society. Not only did students acknowledge the inequalities faced by marginalized people, but students also described how reading these selections pushed them to be more empathetic to others by being less judgmental and considering their own actions towards others. Many students responded that learning about diverse cultures can reduce stereotypes and help, "show students how to rebel against prejudice,"

53

and "accept diversity and include others" so to "lead to inclusion and diversity everywhere." However, while these reflections seemed to be the answers students wanted me to hear or thought they should write, some students actually shared responses about their own implicit bias:

● When you don't know about something you stereotype even if you don't mean to. Everyone judges without even knowing it. I always thought about terrorists whenever I thought of the middle eastern culture because that is all I know about them. Now I won't do that anymore.

● I think it helps me with prejudice, because sometimes I am prejudiced toward spanish people and now I realize that they could be going through something. Also I am prejudiced toward the way they talk sometimes. Also i kinda understand the language because it very much like portugues, and im brazilian.

(Student artifacts: Online Reflection Journal)

It was evident that reading multicultural literature did prompt students to reevaluate their own behaviors and some students offered explained how learning about different cultures could help all people. When asked how this unit benefitted them, participants shared the following responses which allude to the theme of being more empathetic:

Anita: It can teach us that making others feel uncomfortable has a huge effect on how they act.

Andy: Like if you judge someone before you really meet them it could hurt their feelings.

Bailey: Maybe if we would stop stereotyping people based on their race and looks… Maybe if we learn what people who are judged go through, we could put ourselves in their position and see how we would feel about being judged by things we can control.

Chris: It opened up my eyes to all the problems these kids had to go through. I can use this in my life to try and level with people and go into their shoes and understand what they are going through.

(Audio Recordings of Discussions 11/3/20)

Clearly, the theme of empathy was evident across various data sources. Students could identify the unfair treatment of characters in books and indicated that there was a need for people to be more cognizant about the harmful effects of bias, prejudice, and stereotyping. Students suggested how they themselves needed to change their thought processes to become more compassionate when it comes to the struggles faced by others treated unfairly. In fact, during one of our Google Meets, three students put their learning into practice as they responded to comments made by other students in the chat box regarding the wearing of Muslim clothing by Muslim women. Below is a transcription of what appeared in the Google Chat Box:

Student 1: Ok the third one's just blind

Asana: I think it has mesh so they can still see

Student 1: well yea

Student 2: They're like I can't see but I'll keep wearing this for my country.

Jeremiah: that's disrespectful

Student 1: I was just joking

Raul: You are doing the oppistite [sic] of what the lesson is about respecting cultare [sic]

(Student artifact: Google Meet Chat Box)

This event demonstrated that students were striving to make our classroom a more inclusive and empathetic place by holding their peers accountable for their comments. Although this was an isolated case of students reproaching one another to promote social

55

justice, the fact that it was in front of a group of 21 of their peers demonstrates that students see that social justice is the responsibility of everyone, even when it may be difficult or unpopular as illustrated in the picture books read in this unit.

Nature of Social Injustice

As students read the multicultural literature text selections, it was apparent that some students had more knowledge of the current social and political unrest in our society confirming what the data from anticipation guides had suggested. However, it should be noted that many students did not have knowledge of the unfair treatment of the first Americans in our country. When we began our Multicultural /Picture Book/Literature Unit, Native American literature was the first culture examined. Both picture books, *Fry Bread* and *When We Were Alone* referenced the unfair treatment Native Americans experienced; *Fry Bread* alluded to the historical implications of Native Americans suffering from disease and having to give up their land, both consequences of the arrival of White men. Most students were aware of this dark time in our history. However, most students had no knowledge of Native American children who were sent to residential boarding schools hundreds of years later, forced to assimilate to the "American" way of life. During a book club discussion, teacher observation captured the following field notes from student discourse:

Saadar:	The government was trying to split school and culture. In school, they had to be a new person.
David:	They wanted to make everyone the same. They took who they were and made them different in a bad way.
Raul:	So our government was trying to make everyone the same? Isn't that racism…making everyone the same.

(Teacher Field Notes 10/13/20)

This conversation was important as it revealed that students were trying to make sense of a point in history that illustrated racism in a way that they had not considered. This new revelation was shocking to students who, according to their anticipation guide, as 94% students believed that you did not have to give up all other cultural beliefs to be "American" and yet they were seeing how years ago their government forced Native Americans to abandon their cultural identity. In this study, the picture book *When We Were Alone* was the first example of social injustice being seen through the "window" (Bishop, 1990) of a text of into an event in history that is seldom discussed in classrooms. It would be a precursor to the discussions and reflections that followed with regard to social injustices that are relevant to students' lives today.

An examination of all student artifacts revealed that the selection that seemed to elicit the most developed responses were those that referred to excerpts from the novel *Harbor Me*. Students read two excerpts that dealt with the topics of illegal immigration and police brutality against people of color; their responses show that students see the events in the book as "mirrors" of the troubling events in their world and demonstrated in their reflection journal:

● In my opinion, both of these books were meaningful, but I'm going to focus on the one with Esteban. It described events like a father getting taken away after sneaking into the country, which is, unfortunately, not rare, from a child's perspective, and it showed the possible devastating effects of taking a parent away from the rest of their family; Papi was the 'neck, face and ears' of their family, and their family was left with just a bunch of useless puzzle pieces.

57

● *Harbor Me* stood out because it showed the challenges of finding a new life in America. It showed me that even if you successfully make it over to America you are going to have to deal with prejudice and a whole new language. Another thing, if you're in America illegally you basically have to live in fear of ICE figuring out about you.

● This excerpt I feel is really important and is really meaningful. It talks about modern issues and really focuses on how racially unfair things can get. A boy was killed for playing with toy gun just because he was colored, if there was a white boy playing with the same toy no one would think twice about it. I think this is good because things like this need to be brought to attention.

(Student artifacts: Online Reflection Journal)

These statements made by students who identify as White reveal that even students who are not marginalized and can relate to the fears of the most vulnerable members of society reaffirming the notion that using culturally relevant literature can foster empathy in all students. One student (Hannah) was so moved by the fictional excerpt about a young Black man being shot as he played with a Nerf gun, she researched and found that this was based on the actual case of Tamir Rice, "a black boy who was shot and killed by a cop at 12". This is reminiscent of the words of Freire when he said, "Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge" (1968, p. 81). Hannah was inspired to take action into her own hands and investigate the inspiration for this anecdote in *Harbor Me*. It is important to note that I did not know that this fictional account was based on an actual story; Hannah ended up educating me

illustrating Freire's (1968) belief that education is a two way path with teacher and student learning from one another.

Perhaps, though, it was the responses of diverse students that were most poignant as they reflect the emotions some students experience on a daily basis:

● The way the world is right now, a black person can't even wear their hood, or play with NERF guns because they're afraid. It shouldn't be like this, it shouldn't be so bad to the point where we're afraid to be warm, to the point where we're afraid of playing with a NERF gun; a TOY gun, to the point where we can't walk/be with a white person without some Barbara coming along asking the other person "Are you ok? Do you need help?". One thing I don't understand is why do we have to get petrified when we see a cop? Why when we actually comply someone still ends up getting shot? Why do we have to live our lives in fear? Because of this screwed up, twisted, police system, that's why.

● I personally like the second book because it's a little bit more relatable. Because it could happen to me at any time. Also this happened to my friend. But my friend's dad is back so that is good.

(Student artifacts: Online Reflection Journal)

It was evident that many students were acknowledging the need for social justice and some even shared that they would take steps in their lives to promote equality and honor diversity. Yet, while it was apparent that many students did make lasting personal connections to the text selections, data analysis did reveal that lasting change requires more than just reading and discussing a few literary selections.

Discomfort and Bias

As I reflected on all the sources of data including literature circle roles, individual book club and class discussions, field notes and students' personal reflection journals, I could not help but notice that one final theme emerged: students need time and much exposure to confront their implicit bias – much like I did. My own teacher journal echoed this sentiment on two occasions:

> Another thing I am noticing is how difficult it is for my students to talk to each other in their book clubs. Truly, I am noticing such a lack of communication in all of my classes. Students seem to just want to read what they wrote without any discussion. They seem uncomfortable talking about their ideas, but I don't think it is because they are afraid their answers are not correct.
>
> (Teacher Journal 10/24/20)

> I can't help but feel conflicted. On the one hand, I love that our unit did inspire some students to look at their own actions with regards to other culturally diverse people; yet, I can't help but question if it was merely a matter of "going through the motions" for most. Did I do enough with my students to promote actual change in their daily interactions with others so to foster social justice...
>
> (Teacher Journal 11/5/20)

From the onset of the study, I did notice that students were not inclined to share their feelings through discussion without prompting and questions presented by me. This reminded me of prior research studies (Flynn, 2012) that examined how students reacted to discussions about race. My findings resonate with what similar studies found: students

60

are afraid to talk about race for various reasons. During our final session on our multicultural unit the following discussion took place during a Google Meet with one class of students:

Mrs. D: Should we talk about race in a classroom setting?

No students respond

Teacher: Can anyone share their feelings? I know this may seem uncomfortable, but I value your opinions. It will help me be a better teacher as I plan for this unit next year.

Seven seconds elapse before a student responds

Chris: I mean we should, but I think some people are afraid. You know they are afraid they might offend someone.

Alice: But I think that is why we should talk about it. I think we can learn how to approach race for the real world.

Mark: I don't think we should talk about it.

Silence for four seconds

Teacher: Mark, can you explain why you feel that it shouldn't be discussed.

Mark: I can't speak for other people. There's different situations.

Teacher: Okay, can you tell me more about that?

Mark: You know things are different for everyone. *(Mark does not expound on this and appears agitated)*

Teacher: Can anyone else share their words of wisdom?

Silence for five seconds

Baily: I think we should learn about it because maybe if we earn from the people being judged maybe if we put ourselves in their position we can see how they feel.

(Audio Recording of Class Discussion 11/4/20)

This snapshot of our final discussion reveals that students were very hesitant to share even after we had spent seven weeks discussing issues associated with social injustice such as prejudice, stereotyping and racism. Chris's explanation that students were afraid to offend others is a very valid concern. It seemed that throughout the whole unit, students felt uncomfortable talking about race. Even when referring to excerpts in *Harbor Me* where the characters referred to themselves as "Black", students struggled to refer to the skin color of the characters when sharing their literature circle role responses in book clubs and class wide discussion. While this discomfort could have been a result of a changing classroom dynamic both physically and emotionally as students toggled between hybrid and remote instruction as well as class sizes vacillating from small hybrid groups of twelve or fewer to full class instruction of up to 22 online students, I believe that it was the nature of the discussion that caused students to be so reluctant to share. Regardless, it apparent that students need more time and exposure with talking about racism if their comfort level is going to improve.

Limited Knowledge About Social Justice

In addition to students struggling with talking about race, their reflection journal responses also confirmed that students were still in the beginning stages of understanding the need for change to promote social justice. Three students shared sentiments to the effect that they were fortunate that they did not have to deal with "these kinds of problems" here, explaining racism was happening in other parts of the "USA". Other students' responses demonstrated implicit bias as revealed in these statements:

● Now that we have learned about different cultures I can understand why they are the way they are.

● Knowing culture can help us in real world situations when someone is racially being made fun of. We can stand up for them and tell them what they have to go through and show the people how lucky we are to who we are and how we look.

● I like this unit because it helped me understand why others don't do the same things as us.

● I will keep including different people in activities so that they don't feel left out because they are different.

(Student artifacts: Online Reflection Journal)

Some students were much more vocal expressing their feelings that some of the issues described in books were not true reflections of what occurs in society or that they did not feel it necessary to discuss such issues:

● Ashton can play with a nerf gun because he is white. But Amari can't because he is black. I agree that it is not fair; everyone should be able to do what everyone else can. This section makes me feel kind of angry. It wrongly stereotypes cops and black people. It wrongly stereotypes cops as racist, hateful, and white supremacists when they are far from it. It also makes it seem like people don't allow non white people to play with nerf guns and all that when it is far from the truth. Nobody does this. I don't find it as a good example because they are making it up. If cops do shoot people it is because they are a threat. Not because the color of their skin.

● The only suggestion that I really have is that I'd much rather be focusing on the actual culture and cultural beliefs/values, instead of just the characters' sob

stories. I mean, people of literally every culture may have gone through the same

sort of things, so I'd suggest that we'd focus more on their actual unique values

and beliefs.

(Student artifacts: Snapshots of Online Reflection Journal)

Although these responses were not what I had hoped would surface after a month

of reading multicultural literature, they are critical to my study. These students'

reflections validate the need to present students with literature that causes them to feel

discomfort, exposing them to "mirrors" and "windows" (Bishop, 1990) repeatedly

because as Freire encouraged, "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-

invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings

pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (1968, p. 71-72). Just because

students may not have realized the importance of these selections or have yet to grasp the

understanding that we are all responsible for the treatment of marginalized people, does

not mean that culturally responsive pedagogy in the form of multicultural literature

picture books and text selections does not have a place in a seventh grade middle school

classroom. On the contrary, it is exactly the reason why educators need to provide their

students with these opportunities to look outside the confines of their own small worlds.

Post Anticipation Guide

At the conclusion of the Multicultural Picture Book/Literature Unit, students

completed a post anticipation guide to assess how students' views changed as a result

of the readings and discussions had during instruction. The results are shared in Figure 3

on the following page.

While there were not significant changes on the Pre and Post Anticipation Guides with regard to certain statements as most students were in agreement, there were substantial changes for three specific statements. For the statement, "People of different cultures have a difficult time being accepted into American society", initially 45% of the participants agreed, 32% were unsure, and 23% disagreed. On the Post Anticipation, 64% agreed, 23% were not sure, and 13% disagreed. This increase in the number of students who agreed with this statement demonstrated that students are more aware of the additional challenges people of diverse cultures face in America.

Another statement, "Stereotyping, although offensive, is often true and allows people to understand others" also showed a transformation in student thinking. On the Pre-Anticipation Guide, 16% agreed, 26% were not sure, and 58% disagreed. In contrast, 10% agreed, 13% were not sure, and 77% disagreed. One student, Saadar, who initially chose "Not Sure" explained his changing viewpoint when he wrote, "People can change their behavior by learning from others" on the Post Assessment.

Finally, there was a noticeable change in students' attitudes about the nature of diversity in our country. For the statement, "Diversity is respected and celebrated in today's society", on the anticipation guide, 42% agreed, 42% were not sure, and 26% disagreed. In the post anticipation guide, students' growth was seen, as only 19% agreed, 45% were not sure and 35% disagreed. These results illustrate that students are more aware of challenges that people of diverse cultures face and the social injustices that may result. The following student responses were taken from the post-anticipation guides:

● I wish that differences were celebrated, but sometimes they are not. People of

different cultures or races are made fun of by people. They are treated badly

(Vadwa)

● Diversity is not always celebrated. It can be a form of criticism to others.

(Bidshi)

● It should be but unfortunately it is not. (Erica)

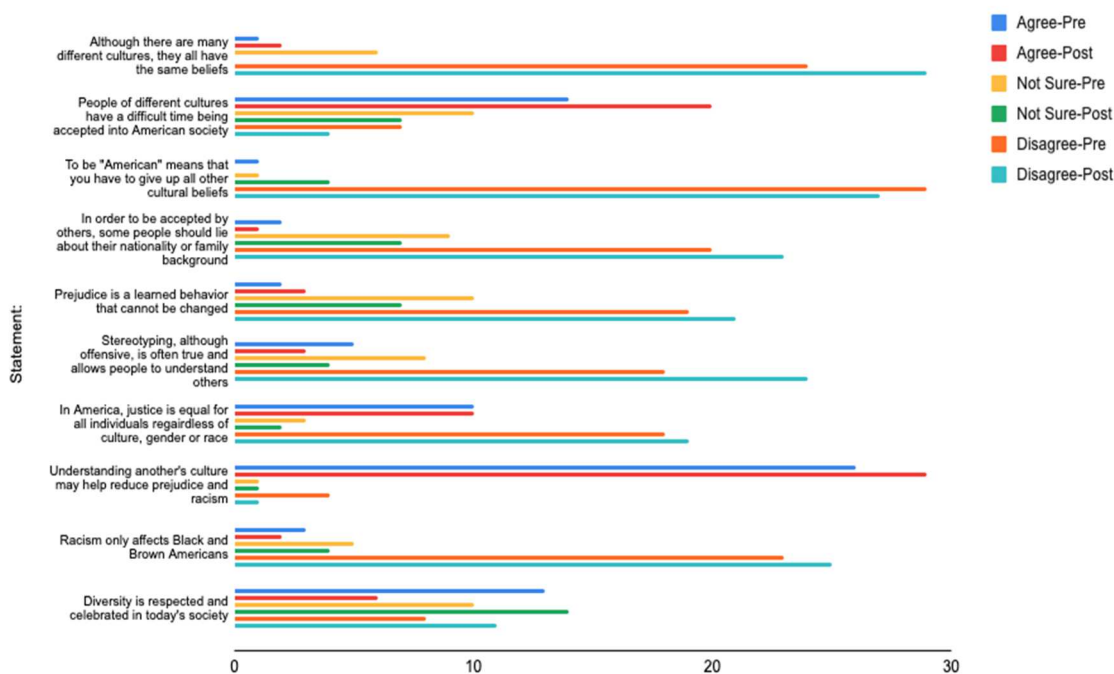(Student artifact: Post-Anticipation Guide 11/4/20)

Figure 3. Comparison of anticipation guide and post anticipation guide results

Conclusion

       The findings of this study suggest that students feel strongly about remaining true to one's identity, even though they recognize that this can be challenging. Using picture books, supplemented with relevant young adult novel excerpts prompted students to self-reflect on their treatment of others considered diverse or marginalized by society. From this examination of self, many students expressed the need for people, including themselves, to be more empathetic to the needs of others. In order to create a more empathetic society, students seek to make sense of the nature of social injustices that exist in our society. While students were willing to share their fears, concerns, confusion and anger with the racism and discrimination that they see in society, they were reluctant to discuss these topics in class wide and book club conversations. This leads to the conclusion that students need more time and exposure to topics that cause discomfort such as stereotyping and prejudice if a true transformation in thinking and reduction of implicit bias is to occur. The following chapter outlines conclusions and implications from the study. In addition, suggestions for further research are discussed as well.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The teacher is of course an artist but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.

(Paulo Freire,1990, p.181)

This final chapter provides a brief summary of the findings of the study followed by overall conclusions that are based on the findings and how they relate to the theoretical framework. In addition, implications of the study, as well as recommendations for future researchers, will be presented.

Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine how multicultural literature can motivate students and foster critical discussions about identity and social justice. For six weeks, seventh grade students were observed in dual hybrid/remote learning instructional format in lieu of a traditional classroom setting. Data was collected from the thirty one participants in the form of student artifacts such as interview slide presentations, literature role responses, student reflection journals, teacher field notes, audio recordings of small book club discussion and class wide discourse, and a teacher research journal. Participants also completed a motivation survey and an anticipation guide prior to beginning the Multicultural Picture Book/Literature Unit; these informal assessments were used as a baseline to measure student enthusiasm about reading as well as their feelings about issues of identity and social justice. Analyzing these varied sources of

information provided data that suggested how middle school students feel about the concept of cultural identity and the need for social justice both inside the classroom and in the outside world also.

During critical examination of the data, six themes emerged that revealed how students see themselves and others in the world and how that relates to social justice: (a) the importance of identity, (b) sources of empathy, (c) response journals as emotional connections, (d) the nature of social injustice (e) discomfort and bias and (f) limited knowledge about social injustice. Additionally, it was noted that, although using picture books was initially thought to improve student motivation, there was not any noticeable change in the quality of student written responses. In other words, most of the students who were reluctant readers prior to using the multicultural picture books, did not show any more interest in reading based on the brevity and lack of detail in their literature role responses and reflection journals.

Data analysis did reveal that students felt very strongly about embracing cultural identity even though they acknowledged that it can be difficult. Many students engaged in self-reflection, recognizing their own need to be more empathetic to the needs of others. It was evident that most students interacted with both "mirrors" and "windows" (Bishop, 1990) using multicultural literature, especially when it is relevant to what is going in currently in our society. It was also noted that while students had much to say about social justice issues such as stereotyping, racism and prejudice, they preferred to write about their feelings rather than discuss them in class or even their book clubs. Most students were still not comfortable discussing issues of race at the end of the unit, and some students did not feel it was something that should be discussed in a classroom.

69

Conclusions of the Study

In this study, student participants were exposed to various types of multicultural literature such as picture books and young adult novel excerpts to see how such text sources could motivate reluctant readers, foster an understanding of identity and promote discussion about social injustices. The goal was to get students to understand that identity is multifaceted; by self-reflecting on their own identity as well as understanding the cultural identity of others, students would develop an awareness of social injustices that often result from prejudice, stereotypes, and racism.

To find ways to make this goal achievable, I researched methods to motivate students and encourage them to express their feelings about social justice in a nonthreatening, supportive environment. Bishop's (1990) analogy of "mirrors" and "windows" became a starting point for my study as I realized my students had to first look at the "mirror" of their own cultural identity before they could see through the "windows" of literature into the cultures of others. Ivey and Broadus (2001) explained that student motivation is dependent upon a meaningful, student centered curriculum that honors' students voices and their need for self-expression as well as reflects students' cultural background. With that being said, the decision to have the participants interview their relatives to gain a better understanding of their family's culture proved to be most worthwhile. Students learned a great deal about their family's past, and, in many cases, their own cultural background. Students sharing their findings with their peers helped to shape their understanding of not only the trials and tribulations of their ancestors but also afforded all students the opportunity to see the many cultures that existed within our own classroom. In essence, students became teachers, providing them with a voice to impart

their knowledge to others. Moreover, student engagement during their informal presentations was measurable as demonstrated by the length of student presentations, the many questions asked by class members and the detailed, enthusiastic answers of presenters. The conclusion can be drawn that students are engaged when they feel that a task is meaningful, their personal responses are valued, and they are the co-creators of their knowledge (Freire, 1987).

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that students feel strongly about the importance of maintaining one's identity. Initially, students thought of identity in more simplistic terms such as gender, age, or the roles they played such as child, friend or student. As students read the picture books about diverse cultures, some participants referred back to prior student presentations in their discussions, reminiscent of Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader/Response Theory (1982). Students were drawing on their newly acquired knowledge about their family's own past as well the challenges shared by their peers as they reflected upon the literature selections they read. Based on the cultural knowledge shared by their peers and the conflicts faced by the protagonists in multicultural literature selections, students seemed to develop a new understanding that identity is a complex amalgamation with culture being an intrinsic component. The participants' concept of identity widened, and the importance of maintaining one's identity was a critical concern for these seventh graders. The transformation that was beginning in these students was a benefit of what Nieto (2018) refers to as multicultural education or that which "values diversity and encourages critical thinking, reflection, and action making students active learners" (p.41). Students became acutely aware that very often prejudice, stereotypes and racism are, in essence, personal attacks against a

person's cultural identity; their oral and written responses to this unsettling awareness are proof that with this understanding comes a call for action.

As students engaged in self-reflection while reading the multicultural texts, it was apparent that students saw the need for all people to be more empathetic, including themselves. Some students saw "mirrors" of their own lives in the characters they read about writing about mispronunciation of their names to their fear of being targeted because of the color of their skin. These students wanted the world to be more empathetic to their needs and concerns. However, students who saw such text selections as "windows", were even more candid as many shared how they realized that they had inadvertently stereotyped others that they considered "different". Some students expressed feeling confused about why racism and White privilege exists; others shared they felt ashamed that America is the home of the free for only select members of society. Such responses echo what Taliaferro (2009) found in her study using picture books with high school students: the new images students see about those who are diverse help students develop a greater sense of empathy for others, establishing the first step to fighting for social justice in the world.

As students became more empathetic to the needs of others, it was evident that they were attempting to make sense of the social injustices that are pervading our society; many students shared they wanted to discuss uncomfortable topics including racism and immigration. While some students had limited knowledge of the social and political unrest of the past year, many students were very vocal about topics such as harsh reality of police brutality and the ramifications of illegal immigration on family members. Excerpts from the young adult novel *Harbor Me* garnered the most developed and

heartfelt responses of all the literary selections. This is a critical finding in that, although the primary focus of the study was the use of picture books, students seemed to be most engaged with the stark reality of the young adult fiction selections as opposed to the simplicity of the picture books. Enriquez (2014) expressed the importance of selecting books, especially books that will require students to be critical evaluators, to question texts in terms of power and positioning. In retrospect, the picture books chosen for this study, although all centered on social injustices due to cultural identity, may have not been a true reflection of what middle school students fear in terms of "real world" experiences. Clearly, the power and positioning these students are questioning are much more complex than the situations in most of the picture books used. Unfortunately, my own naivete about the students' genuine concerns may have affected their overall engagement with the text selections.

With that being said, another important conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that changing implicit bias takes time and exposure. While a majority of the students expressed a desire to talk about concepts such as discrimination and racism, there were students who felt that such discussions should not take place in a classroom setting. Students cited various reasons for not talking about uncomfortable topics including "I can't speak for another person", "Everyone has their own opinion" and "I'm afraid I am going to say the wrong thing so it's best not to say anything". One student even shared that police brutality is not as the media portrays it while another referred to some of the negative experiences of the protagonists in the selections as being "sob stories". In addition, some students' written responses demonstrated implicit bias as they referred to diverse people as "others" who are "not like us". All of these instances

support when Husband (2019) explained that children often start developing implicit biases at a young age. However, Husband also encouraged that by exposing students to literature that presents information relating to all diverse groups in society such bias may be reduced. In other words, it is only through repeated exposure to texts that are authentic reflections of students' lives that students' discomfort will lessen; thus, this highlights the need for culturally responsive teaching in all classrooms.

Finally, one outcome that was not expected but proved to be a valuable learning tool was an understanding that students used their written response journals as an outlet for the feelings they were not willing to share in discourse with their peers. It became apparent that students much preferred to write about their feelings, frustrations, fears in the online response journals as opposed to engaging in small group or class wide discussion. Despite prompting and sentence starters, students were reluctant to engage in conversation, especially about racism. However, when I read their reflection response journals, students were very honest, and sometimes angry, about the social injustices they were reading about. The emotional tone of many entries was proof that students were making text to world connections, illustrating Rosenblatt's Transactional/Reader Response Theory (1982).

The fact that students were so willing to write about their feelings on social injustices, yet so reluctant to talk about such issues was not completely unexpected as both studies by Zuniga, Nagda, and Sevig (2002) as well as Laman *et al*. maintained that discourse about social injustice requires open and reflective communication, and more importantly, time: time for self-reflection, time for the sharing of multiple viewpoints, and time to reconstruct a new viewpoint before social action can be discussed.

Considering the limitations due to Covid-19 which will be discussed later, lack of time became an issue. In hindsight, students were never given the time for such reflection and discussion to occur, thus preventing them from becoming comfortable with such difficult discourse. In essence, their journals became indispensable as they provided students with a place to channel the feelings they were not ready to share aloud with their peers. Students' reluctance to engage in conversations about social injustice is more evidence that facing the issues of prejudice, stereotyping and racism in a classroom setting requires a great deal of time and exposure, but is a necessary part of instruction.

Implications

Infusing culturally responsive teaching into every day instruction will have lasting benefits in a classroom setting. As Gay (2015) explained, using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 50). Learning about the background of all students, especially in a middle school setting whereby educators have class rosters totaling over 60 students, can seem like an insurmountable task. Yet, teachers can present their students with activities such as interviewing family members, creating cultural collages or Funds of Knowledge self-portraits (Moll, et al 1992); these are examples of motivating and engaging tasks that provide students with opportunities to investigate and reflect on their own cultural identity. Such activities also provide educators with invaluable knowledge about the needs of all students and help to create a classroom environment that is a safe space for all.

Once an educator has identified the cultural identity and needs of all students, they can then use culturally responsive text selections to broaden the awareness of all cultural identities and thus promote an understanding and discussion of social justice. Using multicultural literature selections provides students, in this case middle school students, with both "mirrors" and "windows" into the lives of others. This understanding can have a positive impact on the classroom environment as well as the resources used in the curriculum. As Banks (2004) cautioned, multicultural education cannot be limited to simply a few culturally responsive text selections, or special ethnic days, weeks or months. The use of "mirrors" and "windows" text selections and culturally responsive instruction must permeate the curriculum and be diverse and ever-changing like the nature of our students.

In addition to the use of culturally responsive literature, students must be exposed to text selections that address social injustices prevalent in our world. As uncomfortable as both student and educator may feel, this study has demonstrated that students need to be exposed to these situations so they are ready to face real world challenges. Students themselves shared that they want to discuss topics such as racism, as unnerving as it may be. While some educators may feel it is not their place to discuss the nature of race in a classroom, Freire (1968) reminds us, "All education is political; teaching is never a neutral act."

However, it is important to note that discussing topics that may unintentionally cause discomfort for both teachers and students requires teachers to educate themselves prior to holding such conversations. Teachers need to be prepared to address the difficult questions that will be raised and honor the feelings of all stakeholders in the classroom.

Many resources exist to support teachers who are willing to engage in these challenging but necessary conversations. Websites such as www.teachingtolerance.org and www.teachingforchange.org provide teaching strategies and lesson plans that facilitate education about social justice. There are also many resource books that provide the framework for engaging students in critical race discourses as well. Preparing for the critical race discussions will make discourse less threatening for educators and more meaningful for students.

In addition, educators should reassure students that feeling uncomfortable during discussions with their peers is actually a sign that one cares; it is moving from that discomfort to a place of understanding and then action that shows learning and growth. However, it is critical that students be given time and guidance to work through their struggle and frustration when it comes to acknowledging their own implicit bias. The use of journaling has also proven to be invaluable as a means to help students express the feelings they are not ready to voice in front of their peers.

Encouraging students to take pride in the cultural identity and respect the cultural identity of others, as well as providing students with authentic text selections that expose them to the very real social injustices that exist in their world will better prepare them to be empathetic citizens who honor and respect all people, promoting justice and equality in their everyday lives.

Limitations

Unfortunately, there were many limitations that altered the methodology and consequently, the results of this study. First and foremost, Covid-9 restrictions affected all facets of instruction. Due to the safety requirements, class size was reduced by 50%,

resulting in two groups of students who alternated in person instruction. In addition,

there were students who received instruction virtually from their homes and

synchronously with their peers who were receiving in class instruction. In essence,

student in person learning was reduced from five days to two days a week with

approximately one third of the students never entering the classroom. The nature of these

split groupings most definitely hindered the camaraderie of the classroom learning

community; students were separated not only physically, having to sit in rows, socially

distancing six feet apart, but also in many cases, emotionally distanced from their friends

who were learning from home.

Despite efforts to make our classroom a compassionate, supportive unit, the

constraints caused by the pandemic made this challenging as well. Only a week after the

Multicultural Picture Book/Literature Unit began, we were forced to adopt a completely

remote schedule with teachers and students working from home. This pivot presented

additional obstacles as instruction time was reduced by fifteen minutes and class size was

increased; instead of two groups of hybrid students and two groups of remote students,

students were instructed as a whole class, doubling the number of students per class.

Though instruction was provided four days a week, virtual instruction of twenty plus

students made the original book clubs difficult to manage. Flynn's (2012) assertion that

trust must be established for all stakeholders in a classroom if authentic discussions

between and among students can be proved true; students were reluctant to engage in

class wide discussion of uncomfortable topics such as stereotyping and race, especially

since they were now facing an additional twelve or so new students. It was as if students

started a new school year all over again. Expecting them to share personal values in front of "strangers" was unrealistic and unfair.

Although the research study was a brief to begin with, six weeks, the actual instruction time was much less than a normal academic setting. Shortened instructional time and larger class size resulted in less time for book club discourse as well as class wide discussion. This lack of time also negatively affected the nature of student talk. Laman et al. (2012) cautioned that when conducting classroom dialogue around social justice issues, it needs time. Students need time to self-reflect, examine the issue from multiple viewpoints of their peers, and time to construct a new understanding of the issue. It is evident that the students were not given the time needed for such critical thinking to occur as demonstrated by their reluctance to engage in class wide and book club discussion.

Finally, student engagement and motivation were hindered as students were forced to wear gloves while reading picture books in addition to sitting six feet from their book club partners while sharing during the first week of the Multicultural Picture Book/Literature Unit. It was evident that students were frustrated; this was not the kind of book club they were used to working in. For the following weeks, students had to watch read aloud versions on the internet as they were learning from home. While students seemed to enjoy the narration of such books, they were not able to enjoy and appreciate the significance of the illustrations which are critical to the concept of social justice in the chosen picture books. Actually handling the picture books and reading them with their peers would have provided a more engaging experience and possibly motivated the reluctant readers to become more actively involved in discussion.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further research that examines ways to foster cultural identity and promotes discussion about social injustices would be very beneficial. Clearly, educators need to investigate ways to make culturally responsive pedagogy more prevalent in today's classrooms as well as advocate for discourse about social justice for those marginalized in society.

With regard to this study, one suggestion would be to provide picture books that seem to be more characteristic of the current climate in our country. For example, literature that dealt with the issue of illegal immigration and racism were books that seemed to resonate more with middle school students. One way to select texts would be for teachers to survey students about issues that matter to them either through class discussion or through student journaling. Allowing students to have a voice proved to be not only very enlightening but also appreciated by middle school students in this study. Also, time was a constraint in this study as class time was reduced from forty fives to thirty minutes of instruction. This did not provide nearly enough time for students to have meaningful conversations in their book clubs, to discuss their feelings or see the differing points of view of other members; nor did it allow time for the researcher to meet with groups on a consistent basis. By not being able to sit with groups and listen to their reactions, the researcher was not able to form the type of bond needed to push students' thinking beyond that of discomfort into reflection. Students need to have time to share their thoughts as well as have a role model to facilitate the difficult conversations that need to be had when discussing topics including but not limited to racism.

Final Thoughts

In closing, using multicultural texts as a means of fostering cultural identity and promoting an understanding of social injustice can be a worthwhile experience for both teacher and student. Prior research suggests that using culturally responsive teaching is one way to reach all students in a classroom, and the use of multicultural literature is one method of instruction that motivates and engages learners. My study confirmed this to be true; watching my students proudly share their interview slides and confidently address questions of their peers, I realized just how much I did not know about my students up to this point. This was just the beginning of my transformation as a teacher, twenty four years after my teaching career began.

First and foremost, through this research, I have learned a great deal about myself as an educator. As I reflect back to when I first considered approaching the concept of social injustice, namely discussing concepts such as stereotyping, racism and White privilege, I was intimidated by the mere thought of introducing such words to seventh graders in a predominantly White populated district. Now, four months later, I realize just how important this study was for my students as well as myself. Seeing many of my students engage in self-reflection that led them to acknowledging their own inherent bias was truly life changing for me. I witnessed students beginning to question not only their beliefs and, at times, actions, but also to question and think critically about the inequalities marginalized people face in society today. Just as this study has led to a transformation in my teaching, so too did it ignite a spark within my students that I hope will continue to burn, inspiring them to extinguish the flames of social injustice.

It is also my hope that research educators will be inspired to accept the challenge of making their classrooms a place where identity is honored, students are encouraged to self-reflect, and difficult discussions are encouraged and supported, making everyone a valued member of the learning community.

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Appendix A

Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile Reading Survey

Figure 1
Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile reading survey

Name: _____   Date: _____

Sample 1: I am in _____.
- ❑ Sixth grade
- ❑ Seventh grade
- ❑ Eighth grade
- ❑ Ninth grade
- ❑ Tenth grade
- ❑ Eleventh grade
- ❑ Twelfth grade

Sample 2: I am a _____.
- ❑ Female
- ❑ Male

Sample 3: My race/ethnicity is _____.
- ❑ African-American
- ❑ Asian/Asian American
- ❑ Caucasian
- ❑ Hispanic
- ❑ Native American
- ❑ Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic
- ❑ Other: Please specify _____

1. My friends think I am _____.
- ❑ a very good reader
- ❑ a good reader
- ❑ an OK reader
- ❑ a poor reader

2. Reading a book is something I like to do.
- ❑ Never
- ❑ Not very often
- ❑ Sometimes
- ❑ Often

3. I read _____.
- ❑ not as well as my friends
- ❑ about the same as my friends
- ❑ a little better than my friends
- ❑ a lot better than my friends

4. My best friends think reading is _____.
- ❑ really fun
- ❑ fun
- ❑ OK to do
- ❑ no fun at all

5. When I come to a word I don't know, I can _____.
- ❑ almost always figure it out
- ❑ sometimes figure it out
- ❑ almost never figure it out
- ❑ never figure it out

6. I tell my friends about good books I read.
- ❑ I never do this
- ❑ I almost never do this
- ❑ I do this some of the time
- ❑ I do this a lot

7. When I am reading by myself, I understand _____.
- ❑ almost everything I read
- ❑ some of what I read
- ❑ almost none of what I read
- ❑ none of what I read

8. People who read a lot are _____.
- ❑ very interesting
- ❑ interesting
- ❑ not very interesting
- ❑ boring

9. I am _____.
- ❑ a poor reader
- ❑ an OK reader
- ❑ a good reader
- ❑ a very good reader

(continued)

Name: _____   Date: _____

10. I think libraries are _____.
❏ a great place to spend time
❏ an interesting place to spend time
❏ an OK place to spend time
❏ a boring place to spend time

11. I worry about what other kids think about
my reading _____.
❏ every day
❏ almost every day
❏ once in a while
❏ never

12. Knowing how to read well is _____.
❏ not very important
❏ sort of important
❏ important
❏ very important

13. When my teacher asks me a question about
what I have read, I _____.
❏ can never think of an answer
❏ have trouble thinking of an answer
❏ sometimes think of an answer
❏ always think of an answer

14. I think reading is _____.
❏ a boring way to spend time
❏ an OK way to spend time
❏ an interesting way to spend time
❏ a great way to spend time

15. Reading is _____.
❏ very easy for me
❏ kind of easy for me
❏ kind of hard for me
❏ very hard for me

16. As an adult, I will spend _____.
❏ none of my time reading
❏ very little time reading
❏ some of my time reading
❏ a lot of my time reading

17. When I am in a group talking about what we are
reading, I _____.
❏ almost never talk about my ideas
❏ sometimes talk about my ideas
❏ almost always talk about my ideas
❏ always talk about my ideas

18. I would like for my teachers to read out loud in
my classes _____.
❏ every day
❏ almost every day
❏ once in a while
❏ never

19. When I read out loud I am a _____.
❏ poor reader
❏ OK reader
❏ good reader
❏ very good reader

20. When someone gives me a book for a present, I
feel _____.
❏ very happy
❏ sort of happy
❏ sort of unhappy
❏ unhappy

Appendix B

List of Interview Questions

Name of Interviewee: _____   Relation to you: _____

Biography:

Where and when were you born?

Where did you grow up?

Where have you lived?

What jobs have you had?

Family Name:

What do you know about your family name?

Are there stories about its history or origins?

Has it undergone any changes? (Has it been shortened? Changed completely?)

Are there any naming traditions? (Are names of significant importance?)

Family History:

Do you know any stories about how your family first came to the United States?

Where did they first settle? Why?

How did they make a living?

Did your family stay in one place or move around?

How did they come to live in this area?

Family Languages:

What languages do you speak?

Does your family have any special sayings or expressions? How did they come about?

Do you speak a different language in different settings, such as home, school, or work?

Family Traditions/Beliefs:

How are holidays traditionally celebrated in your family?

What holidays are the most important?

Are there special family traditions, customs, songs, foods?

What are they? How did they come about?

Is there any special skill associated with your traditions?

(How did you learn this skill? Who taught you? What was it like?)

Implications of History:

How have historical events affected your family and community?

Appendix C

Anticipation Guide

Prior to the start of our picture book lesson, read each of the statements below and check if you agree or disagree. Pick 4 of the statements that you checked and explain why you choose the answer you did.

Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Statement	Your Thoughts
			Although there are many different cultures, they all share the same beliefs.	
			People of different cultures have a difficult time being accepted into American society.	
			To be "American" means that you have to give up all other cultural beliefs.	
			In order to be accepted by others, some people should lie about their nationality or family background.	
			Prejudice is a learned behavior that cannot be changed.	
			Stereotyping, although offensive, is often true and allows people to understand others.	
			In America, justice is equal for all individuals regardless of culture, gender, or race.	
			Understanding another's culture may help reduce prejudice and racism.	
			Racism affects only Black and Brown Americans.	
			Diversity is respected and celebrated in today's society.	

Appendix D

Literature Selections

Culture	Picture Books	Author
Native American	*Fry Bread*	Kevin Noble Maillard
	When We Were Alone	David A. Robertson
Asian	*The Name Jar*	Yangsook Choi
	My Name is Yoon	Helen Recorvits
Middle Eastern	*My Name is Bilal*	Asma Mobin-Uddin M.D.
	The Proudest Blue	Ibtihaj Muhammad
Latino(a)	*My Name is Jorge on Both Sides of the River*	Jane Medina
African American	*Those Shoes*	Maribeth Boelts
	Last Stop on Market Street	Matt de la Pena

Culture	Short Story/Excerpts from Young Adult Novels	Author
Asian	*Who's Hu?*	Lensey Namioka
	"Fish Cheeks"	Amy Tan
Middle Eastern	*Other Words for Home*	Jasmin Warga
Latino(a)	*Harbor Me*	Jacqueline Woodson
African American	*Harbor Me*	Jacqueline Woodson

Appendix E

Literature Role Response Sheets

Name: _____   Group Members: _____

Title of Book: _____   Author: _____

Conflict Critic

After reading the picture book, find examples of both external and internal conflicts. Once you have located these struggles, complete the chart below evaluating what caused conflicts for the protagonist in the book.

Be ready to share the lines with your Book Club and discuss why these lines were important to you.

Culture: _____

Page	External Conflict lines of text	Who or what is the cause of the conflict?
Page	Internal Conflict: Lines of text	Who or What is the cause of the conflict?

Name: _____   Group Members: _____

Title of Book: _____   Author: _____

Culture Connector

After reading the picture book, go back and find examples of the cultural traits we discussed before reading the book. Consider traditions, beliefs and values. Once you have located traits, complete the chart below connecting what you know about the culture and its importance in the book.

Be ready to share the lines with your Book Club and discuss why these lines were important to you.

Culture: _____

Page	Lines of Text	How and why is this trait used in the book?

Name: _____   Group Members: _____

Title of Book: _____   Author: _____

Literary Luminary

After reading the picture book, go back and re-read some sections that you found the most interesting. Think about the parts that were meaningful or thought provoking. Once you have located lines that are worthy of discussion, complete the chart below shining light on their importance to the theme of the book.

Be ready to share the lines with your Book Club and discuss why these lines were important to you.

Culture: _____

Page	Lines of Text	Why did you pick this statement?