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**USING MULTICULTURAL TEXTS TO HELP SHAPE STUDENT
PERCEPTIONS REGARDING INDIVIDUAL BELIEFS AND VALUES WHILE
DEVELOPING EMPATHY FOR DIVERSE CULTURES**

by
Megan N. Karpinski

A Thesis

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

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education

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Education

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my stepdad, Bill. You have always pushed me to get my masters degree and were my motivation throughout this whole process. I hope you're looking down on me and proud of me.

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First, I would like to thank the professors at Rowan University who have helped shape me into the educator I am today. Without your continued help and support, I would not be where I am today. I have learned so much over the past two years and have applied so much acquired knowledge into my own classroom. For that and so much more, thank you.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my girls. Without your late night texts and constant support, I would not have made it through this program, especially throughout a pandemic. I have not only acquired my masters degree, but also gained new friendships that will last a lifetime.

Lastly, I want to thank my boyfriend, Brian. You were my rock throughout this educational journey and I am sure you are so happy to not see me on my laptop every waking hour anymore. Thank you for being so understanding throughout the past two years. I love you!

Abstract

Megan N. Karpinski

USING MULTICULTURAL TEXTS TO HELP SHAPE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS REGARDING INDIVIDUAL BELIEFS AND VALUES WHILE DEVELOPING EMPATHY FOR DIVERSE CULTURES

2021-2022

Valerie Lee, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the effects of multicultural literature in a second grade classroom and how it impacts students' perceptions of other cultures, beliefs and values while showing empathy and acceptance of other cultures. Throughout the study, students read and connected to a variety of multicultural literature. They participated in activities while expressing their own experiences, thoughts and feelings while connecting to the texts. The assessment tools used throughout this study were questionnaires, surveys, observations, interviews, class discussions and student notebooks. Through discussion and analysis of the texts, students were able to make connections while emphasizing with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Many recurring themes emerged from the lessons, including critical discussions, showing empathy for diverse cultures, clinging to the known and using their prior knowledge in order to make connections. The study raised implications for implementing classroom practices that enable students to connect and emphasize with diverse cultures. The findings also call for more time and exposure to multicultural literature would help build students' knowledge, understanding and awareness of other cultures.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Story of the Question

Growing up in a close-knit family and community, I always thought and assumed that every family had the same privileges and advantages that I had growing up. From kindergarten through eighth grade, I attended a private catholic school where the majority of the students were white, having little to no exposure to any diverse cultures or ethnicities. It wasn't until I attended a very diverse high school where I realized how blind I had been for so many years to other's beliefs, cultures and values. All through high school, I made tons of friends that were so very different from me, including skin color, values, family dynamics, ethnicities, beliefs and so much more. As each day passed, I was intrigued to learn more about their cultures and how they were raised. I know that when I became a teacher, I would make sure to make every student feel accepted while learning all about their cultures and families, unlike how I grew up and went to school.

In September of 2017, I began teaching in my current school district, a very diverse and evolving district that understands and promotes inclusivity within each school and classroom. As I walked into my classroom over the summer with my principal, I couldn't help but notice how different this school looked and felt compared to my own experiences. The culture of learning that was evident and promoted in each classroom as well as the conversations I had with my new colleagues was truly inspiring. Instantly, I fell in love with my new school and couldn't wait to meet my students. I vowed to learn different ways to meet the diverse needs of my students while promoting

acceptance and empathy for others. However, what I wasn't prepared for was their lack of background knowledge about diverse cultures and diversity. Although my students came from different backgrounds and parts of the world, they had little experience of knowledge of how different they were from one another.

When I began teaching in my current district, I can remember attending "New teacher orientation" and thinking, "Wow, I have so much to still learn and adapt to." What I have learned over the past five years teaching in my current district is remarkable. From having my first class of students to having the opportunity to attend professional development trainings with other colleagues across the district, I have learned so much about myself as an educator and areas in which I wanted to grow and improve my own practice. During my first year, I taught second grade in a full year leave replacement classroom. Being unfamiliar with the dynamics and norms of this new school district, I often followed the lead of my mentor teacher and other colleagues on my grade level. Around this time that year, I remember asking my students what they were doing to celebrate Christmas, making the assumption that all of my students did indeed celebrate. The look of disappointment came over many of my students' faces as they told me that they do not celebrate Christmas. One student looked at me and said, "Ms. Karpinski, I don't celebrate Christmas, but I celebrate Diwali instead." While standing there in complete awe, I quickly wanted to take back the question that I had asked. The question that clearly made some of my students feel uncomfortable and sad. After this, I talked with the instructional assistant in my room at the time and learned that many of the students do not celebrate Christmas. It was then that I realized I had a lot to learn about my understanding of diverse cultures, traditions and even my students. I needed and

wanted to understand the celebrations, traditions and holidays that my students celebrated in their own homes without making any assumptions based on my own experiences. My own background knowledge and experiences prevented me from realizing just how different we all really are.

Looking back at these pivotal moments in my teaching career, I missed many valuable teaching moments and experiences with my students. Since that day, I have made it a priority to learn all I can about my students and their cultures. This includes inviting parents in to speak and teach us about their child's cultures, having the families bring in foods from their cultures for us all to try, and interviewing family members to learn more about their lives. This year, I had my students go home and interview their parents to find out more about their names. We talked about how our names often have meaning and show significance in some way or another. At first, my students were confused and did not understand why I was having them do this. However, they were so eager to come in and share the interesting facts they learned about their own names. Not only did I need to make it a point to improve my own understanding of diverse cultures, it was also important to share this same knowledge with my students. I have realized that my students only understand and are aware of their own beliefs, traditions and cultures and therefore needed to be exposed to other cultures in as many ways as possible. Providing my students with the resources and tools needed to become more culturally aware and accepting of diverse cultures around them. This is one reason why multicultural literature has significantly influenced my research for this thesis work.

Sonia Nieto (2012) believed that multicultural education should be integrated in schools in a natural and accepting way, allowing students and families to feel valued in

many ways. She believed that classroom interactions and antiracist curriculum was just one way that students could open up and feel safe talking about these topics with their peers.

Working in this district has truly opened my eyes to notice how diverse and culturally different my students are to my own culture and traditions. After looking in my classroom library, I realized that I had many types of multicultural texts that I just did not know how to implement into my daily lessons with my students. After talking with my assistant principal, I joined the literacy council which includes a group of teachers who come together to create, adapt and modify the curriculum to create a more diverse and culturally aware way of learning and including the whole child. In this group, we talked about how crucial it is to expose our students to multicultural literature as much as we can, especially in cross curricular ways; allowing students to see how they are connected. This work resonated with me as I recalled learning all about Sonia Nieto (2012) and her belief in multicultural education. We then brainstormed and created a list for each grade level that not only included diverse text sets, but also texts on different family structures, making assumptions about other cultures and LGBTQ+ community members. Living in a diverse society we want our students to become problem solvers and critical thinkers, both inside and outside of the classroom. However, if we are not providing them with the resources needed to develop and expand their knowledge about diverse cultures, then our expectations for our students become unrealistic.

Purpose Statement

Living in such a diverse and ever changing world, it is extremely important to expose students at an early age to the diverse cultures in our world today. Kathryn Au

stated that, “Our student population will be even more diverse than it is today, and the need for critical literacy will grow exponentially, and the interconnections among language, culture, and literacy will become stronger” (2000, P. 173). Working in a very diverse school district has allowed me to see not only my lack of awareness but also how that impacts the students’ lack of awareness about other cultures around them. As an educator, my job is to play a significant role in the lives of my students while creating a safe and comfortable learning environment within my classroom. Therefore, it is crucial that students begin to learn and hear about other cultures if they are ever going to understand and accept others for who they truly are. Thinking back, I wish I was familiar with the work of the many theorists, such as Kathryn Au and Lisa Delpit that I have learned about over the past few months in my graduate program. She viewed multicultural education as a perspective from which to focus on achieving excellence in the classroom. Since cultural gaps are evident in schools across the world, getting to know the students in which we teach is prudent when trying to make connections within our classrooms. A meaningful way to begin this process is with the use of multicultural literature within the classroom. Students love listening to read alouds and connecting with the characters and events within a story. However, if they cannot see themselves in the story or relate to the characters, then how can they begin to have empathy for what others go through? Multicultural literature would provide students with knowledge about different cultures and allow them to interact and engage in conversations with their classmates (Morgan & York, 2009).

It is crucial to introduce and expose students to multicultural literature not only that they are familiar with, but also ones that they have little to no experience with

whatsoever. Providing students with adequate background knowledge is required while promoting acceptance and tolerance of other cultures and beliefs. The use of multicultural literature will open a doorway and allow students to feel comfortable having conversations about topics that they may have had no experience with before (Bishop, 2012). Oftentimes I have noticed that students have been unable to understand topics because they struggle to see themselves within a book or connect with the characters and events taking place. Making sure that students can relate and see themselves within the books that we read is so important when teaching about new and unfamiliar things, especially when we want our students to connect in various ways. Rudine Sims Bishop stated that, “the concept of multicultural literature is an outgrowth of the multicultural education movement which seeks to transform schools so all students can reach their full potential as learners” (2012, P #8) ,It is my hope that by completing this study, my students will not only understand and show empathy for diverse cultures, but also will become more accepting of other cultures, values and beliefs.

Statement of Research Problem and Question

Students in elementary schools should be exposed to multicultural texts in as many ways as possible. The purpose of this study is to notice and observe how the use of multicultural literature can impact and shape students’ perceptions regarding individual beliefs and values while developing empathy for other cultures. How can students relate to multicultural literature within their own classroom? How can they accept and understand that others have different values and beliefs than they do? How do multicultural texts help foster engagement, acceptance and understanding of cultural differences in the world today?

In classrooms all across the world, issues regarding diversity and equity are occurring. Unfortunately, students do not feel accepted, heard, welcomed or valued within our schools. The State of New Jersey has attempted to address curricular gaps by enacting the Amistad law as well as LGBTQ+ curriculum. The purpose of the Amistad law is to ensure that the Department of Education and public schools of New Jersey implement materials and texts which integrate the history and contributions of African Americans (New Jersey Department of Education). My district has four strategic goals that we implement and practice each and every day. With these goals, we believe that embracing diversity enriches and empowers the community and that people reach their full potential when encouraged to believe it is possible. In fact, each school tries its best to implement these four goals within their schools in their own ways. For example, the high school in my district has formed an LGBTQ+ group involving students who want to make a difference by making sure they are accepted and welcomed within their own school. Although these issues should be addressed and talked about openly with students, educators often feel hesitant to branch out and open these lines of communication as they fear they will receive backlash from parents or even administrators. The constant fear of not knowing how one will react takes over our mindset of what we know is right and should be talked about within our classrooms. The use of multicultural literature within classroom libraries could be a great stepping stone into having these conversations. If students saw these diverse books each and everyday, chances are they would become more interested to learn and speak about these topics with their peers and teachers.

In my district, we are now beginning to explore our classroom libraries and units of study while incorporating diverse text sets that are appropriate for each grade level.

Each grade level is piloting a new social studies unit that includes diverse text sets that teach students about equity, inclusivity and acceptance. Students are able to learn about different cultures while having a better understanding of the world around them. Current units of study are being looked at and modified to include multicultural literature within reading and writing units. Teachers have the opportunity to have an opinion about which books they think would benefit their students and then try it out in their classrooms. By allowing teachers to have a voice in this decision making process, it gives them the comfort needed to move forward with these difficult topics and conversations within their classroom environment. Continuing education about diversity is especially important for teachers because of the increasing cultural and ethnic gap that exists between the nation's teachers and students. Effective professional development programs should help educators to uncover their own personal attitudes toward racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups (Banks et al, 2005).

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two of this study provides information about the benefits of utilizing multicultural literature within a classroom setting. It highlights the pros and cons of multicultural literature while discussing how some teachers feel when controversial or difficult topics are brought up within their classrooms. Chapter three explains the data collected, the population of the students used in the study, as well as the qualitative research methods used to help analyze the data taken throughout the study. Chapter four goes more in depth and analyzes the data while providing a detailed description of the findings within each lesson taught. Chapter five concludes the research study by

discussing the limitations and implications for future research of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

Student engagement with multicultural literature allows students to appreciate other cultures while having a clearer understanding of diversity. Using multicultural literature in the classroom has become even more critical in recent years as classrooms have become more and more diverse. “Multicultural literature helps children identify their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the dialogue on issues regarding diversity. “Children need to receive affirmation of themselves and their culture through literature” (Colby & Lyons, 2004, p. 24).

It is crucial then that students are being exposed to multicultural literature that enriches their understanding of diverse cultures. We teach our students to be problem solvers, critical thinkers and collaborators in the ever-growing world that we live in. Multicultural literature allows students to think about a text in a new and unfamiliar way while reflecting on their own experiences and perspectives. Also, students have the opportunity to connect with their peers in a more personal way (Lopez & Haney, 2017).

This chapter is a review of literature that examines multicultural literature and how it impacts student perceptions, beliefs and views on diverse cultures. It also discusses the benefits of multicultural literature within the classroom environment as well as a lack of student experiences and background knowledge of these diverse cultures. Chapter two also focuses on cultural awareness, beliefs and values, empathy for diverse cultures and student perceptions.

Multicultural Literature

Multicultural literature can be defined as literature that embraces many cultures and where culture itself is an integral part of the story. It can be viewed as a mirror, window, or sliding glass door (Bishop, 1990), windows through which students can see a bit into the lives of individuals who are different from them, mirrors in which they see aspects of their lives reflected in the literature, and sliding glass doors where the reader can “walk through in imagination to become part of the whatever world has been created or recreated by the author (Bishop, 1990, p. 1). Multicultural education is a process because its goals are ideals that teachers and administrators are constantly trying to achieve. Banks (1997) believed that, “Multicultural education is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process. As an idea, multicultural education seeks to create equal educational opportunities for all students, including those from different racial, ethnic, and social-class groups” (p. 15). Banks (1995a) further identified five dimensions of multicultural education as being content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy and an empowering school culture and social structure. An important goal of multicultural education is to help students acquire the knowledge and commitments needed to make reflective decisions and to take personal, social, and civic action to promote democracy and democratic living (Banks, 1997).

One of the main goals of multicultural education is to help students feel good about themselves while preserving students’ native languages and cultures. Nieto (1996) defines multicultural education as “anti racist basic education for all students that permeates all areas of schooling, characterized by a commitment to social justice and

critical approaches to learning. It accepts and affirms differences in race, ethnicity, religion, economics, sexual orientation, gender, and other differences that students, communities, and teachers encompass” (p. 1). In multicultural literature for upper elementary students, all aspects of culture, language, beliefs, and attitudes are conveyed through literacy elements presented in chapters. Multicultural literature highlights characters that participate within and across multiple cultures to differing degrees (Bishop, 2012). Using multicultural literature in the classroom has become a focus in recent years as classrooms have become more diverse. While offering teachers and students many opportunities to gain broader understandings about the world, the use of multicultural literature also presents challenges. The challenge is not only obtaining high quality multicultural texts, but the greater challenge may be creating an awareness among teachers of the important role multicultural literature plays in the lives of children (Colby & Lyon, 2004).

Authenticity is very important in the selection of literature that depicts the values, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds of various groups (Norton, 2013). Oftentimes, books can portray an image that is stereotypical while shedding a negative light on a particular culture or ethnicity. It is extremely difficult to teach about a culture if the information in a book is not accurate for that culture. Just because a book has a family of Asian descent does not mean that it is necessarily an authentic text. The need for authenticity and accuracy is emphasized in numerous articles about multicultural literature. For example, Hearne (1993) emphasized the importance of authenticity in picture books, stating, “How do you tell if a folktale in picture-book format is authentic, or true to its cultural background? What picture books have met the challenge of presenting authentic folklore

for children? These two questions are especially pressing in light of our growing national concern about multicultural awareness” (p. 22). Hearne further discusses the importance of establishing cultural authority, citing the sources for folklore, and training adults who select and interact with the literature (as cited in Norton, 2013). Providing educators with the adequate training and expertise on this literature will help enhance their own understanding and appreciation for diverse cultures. Hearne’s concerns about cultural authenticity are valid with any of the genres of literature.

Dialogue

As important as it is to authenticate a piece of literature, it is just as crucial to involve children in the study of literature, too. Multicultural literature contains many contexts that may be outside students’ own experiences. These types of literature as well as activities related to the literature allow students to synthesize, analyze, and solve problems through dialogue and written papers (Norton, 2013).

According to Osario (2018), “Multicultural literature should be seen as a tool, but it is more important what you do with the literature than just having it in your classroom (p. 47). Osario, a second grade teacher, described how she used multicultural literature as a tool to promote or develop an appreciation for diversity, honor students’ voices, connect to students’ rich linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and promote critical consciousness. She decided to implement culture circles in order to bring in her students’ experiences into the classroom. Culture circles begin with the codification of generative themes. Through dialogue, the participants share their various perspectives and move towards problem solving through action. She argued that it is, “more important that the classroom engages with multicultural literature than it is to simply be present as mirrors

and windows” (Osario, 2018, p. 51). Osario concluded at the end of the study that through their inquiry, students began to examine their experiences and see its complexity, while problematizing issues related to power and privilege.

According to Rouse (2018), “Living in such a diverse and divided country, it is extremely important to expose students at an early age to the range of cultures in our nation.” Rouse, a Rowan University graduate, conducted her thesis on the idea of improving student engagement and acceptance through multicultural texts. She began the study by providing students with a multicultural literature survey in order to assess their background knowledge about culture, identity and acceptance. Throughout the study, she and her 3rd grade class read *The Day Gogo Went to Vote*, highlighting what students notice about South African culture. Students were then asked to voice their opinions about the family in the story. As Rouse walked around and observed student behaviors and conversations, it allowed her to hear how students connected to and interacted with the characters within the text. The student responses showed each students’ true reflective thinking about issues and problems that were encountered in the texts. After analyzing the findings, Rouse noticed that her students began to develop and redefine their original definition of culture after engaging in various multicultural texts and discussions. The students began to show empathy towards the characters when they read about the discrimination and inequalities people in their cultures had to face (Rouse, 2018). They began to apply what they read to their own lives while allowing them to connect on many different levels.

Mirrors and Reflections within Multicultural Literature

It is crucial for students to be able to make connections and see themselves within the books that they are exposed to. “My assertion was that there is a difference between writing *to* someone and writing *about* someone, and I was trying to learn whether such a difference manifested itself in these books” (Bishop, 2012, p. 7). In 1980, Bishop completed a study which included analyzing a text set of African American children’s literature books from her own perspective as a black female doctoral student in education. She states that, “much of the scholarly attention to children’s books featuring African Americans in the 1970s and early 1980s focused on critiquing the visual and verbal representations of black characters in such books” (Bishop, 2012, p. 6). As she read, she was curious to see what stories were being told and whether she could discern any recurring thematic or stylistic features that might distinguish the literature as a cohesive body of work. Her study investigated the primary audience for black-inclusive books, the extent to which a distinctive African American cultural experience was reflected in the books, and the author’s implicit cultural perspective and effect on the books’ themes. Later, Bishop then placed these books into three categories. These categories included social conscience, melting pot, and cultural conscience. Bishop found that within these books, topics are being discussed and addressed that had rarely been addressed in literature before. The issue that has received the most attention related to multicultural literature has been how to define multicultural literature, or who gets to be included under the multicultural umbrella. The concept of multicultural children’s literature is an outgrowth of the multicultural education movement, which seeks to transform schools so all students can reach their full potential as learners (Bishop, 2012).

Narrative Inquiry

As students make connections within the books they read, they think about and reflect on their own lives and experiences, comparing it to characters they meet in books. “An important part of narrative inquiry is to examine and understand how the participant links experiences and circumstances together to make meaning, realizing also that circumstances do not determine how the story will be told or the meaning that is made of it” (de Silva et. al, 2018, p. 23). In a recent study, Ladson-Billings (2018) examined the context of her own biography. “The use of narrative inquiry allows for a deeper understanding of the issues that Ladson-Billings has researched, illustrating how her personal story is connected to her research and work as a multicultural educator” (de Silva et.al, 2018, p. 24). According to Ladson-Billings, “Successful pedagogy begins with student-centered teaching where students are treated as competent individuals whose individual experiences and skills are valued” (2018, p. 24).

Considering how students with diverse backgrounds are entering our classrooms each and every year, it is important to make sure we are meeting the needs of our students while considering their own experiences and prior knowledge of situations. “Student population will be even more diverse than it is today in years to come. The need for critical literacy will grow exponentially, and the interconnections among language, culture, and literacy will become stronger” (Au & Raphael, 2000, p. 170). Au and Raphael (2000) studied three groups of participants in the process of literacy education and research were targeted, these three being teachers, students and researchers - and issues of equity that affect each of them. Au and Raphael concluded that the literacy gap is likely to pose concerns for educators and researchers for years to come, and further

research on language and literacy practices in non mainstream communities is needed. A need for research on how a greater number of teachers of diverse backgrounds can be brought into the profession is also crucial. Teachers with diverse backgrounds will have the opportunity to share their own experiences and connect with students on a different level. As mentioned before, it is important that students see themselves within the books they are reading. With that being said, it is just as important for students to see themselves and connect with the teachers they are with each and every day. If students feel a connection, they will feel more comfortable opening up and having potentially difficult conversations in the future.

Beliefs and Values

Conversations

The need for inclusivity, diversity and acceptance within our classrooms is evident. “Given the social, historical, and political contexts of race in the United States, an argument can be made that race is ubiquitous in conversations within and across social institutions, including classrooms” (Brown, et al., 2017, p. 454). This study examined classroom conversations about race with a theoretical framing oriented to understanding how such conversations may disrupt social and educational inequalities. The review considers research across P-12, and covers research on how classroom conversations on race contribute to students’ and educators’ understandings of racialized society, their construction of and reflection on relationships among students, as well as to their learning of academic content knowledge.

Teachers being hesitant to have sensitive conversations with their school-aged children within their classroom plays a key role in why educators are timid to discuss

certain issues or topics in their classrooms. “It is well accepted in the field of home-school relations and child development that parents and teachers must work together to build common expectations and to support student learning” (Joshi, et al., 2005, p 11). This study’s main goal was to facilitate parent’s understanding of one school’s values, beliefs, and practices so they can create a congruent learning environment at home . The goal was to learn more about how teachers currently understand their students’ family cultures, and how dialogue played a big part in this experiment as the responses and surveys helped to form a clear picture of how teachers felt about parent involvement within their school. When asked to define parent involvement, the most common response was participation in school activities. Teachers also stated that written communication and conferences were the strategies that they most often employed in their efforts to involve parents. The survey also tried to investigate the teachers’ perceptions about the reasons for lack of parental involvement; about half identifying parents’ other time commitments as being the number one reason for lack of participation. The second part of the survey focused on identifying the respondents’ beliefs and knowledge of their students’ culture. In the interaction with families, teachers stated that they addressed culture through their own awareness of holidays and celebrations, through discussion of culture, and by translating communication into the families preferred language. In closing, dialogue played a huge role in helping these teachers discover more about their students' cultures as well as their own biases about parental involvement within their schools.

Student Perceptions

Multicultural Communities

One of the most important things we as educators can do for our students is to make them feel safe, secure and heard within our classrooms. “While community has become a popular educational concept, research has identified a variety of dilemmas that may interfere with attempts to create successful literacy communities - particularly in multicultural and multilingual elementary classrooms” (Turner & Kim, n.d. p. 22). A qualitative study was conducted by two literacy teachers who are effective with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Throughout the study, these teachers create vibrant multicultural and multilingual literacy communities within their classrooms. The teachers used four specific practices, which were including building relationships amongst community members, fostering collective responsibility, promoting ownership of literacy for all, and reflecting on community learning. The findings showed that while teachers used these four common practices, they also developed specific community-building strategies that were congruent with the strengths and needs of the culturally diverse students in their classrooms.

In another study (Lopez & Haney, 2017), two teachers focused on children’s own schema as a way to guide their own learning within the classroom. “Through extended engagement with a multicultural children’s literature text, the instructors created an opening for students to share and appreciate their different experiences as a foundation for building classroom community” (p. 49). Two elementary school reading coaches collaborated on action research projects for a few years where the main focus was children’s multicultural literature. They believed that the power of allowing children to

see people like themselves represented in the curriculum and classroom is to expose students to multicultural texts on a daily basis. Through their work, they sought to engage children in ways that view their experiences as a foundation upon which to build and to use multicultural literature as a powerful pedagogical tool to provide children experiences with literature that serves as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors . Lopez and Haney (2017) share some of the connections the children made between their lives and the books they read as they explored how a single multicultural children's literature book was used in the classroom to help create a classroom community. As one of the closing activities, students were asked to close their eyes and think about the best part of themselves. Students then had the opportunity to share with their peers before beginning to write. Each child then told the class about his or her favorite part. During the sharing, students were making connections and realizations that they had never done before. Some comments included, "Ah, that's what I chose" or "Oh, I didn't think of that." As they shared, students also began to share personal connections and experiences with one another.

Narrative Inquiry

Mongillo & Holland's (2017) qualitative study was conducted to determine how multicultural literature was used and perceived by 26 U.S. elementary school teachers, and how the beliefs of teachers shape perceptions, selection, interpretation, and the teaching of multicultural literature. Findings revealed that all participants used multicultural literature sometime during the school year. Other findings included how teachers felt more comfortable using multicultural literature within their classrooms when they had strong administrative support, regardless of their students' or their own

ethnicity. Although the importance of teaching with high quality, authentic literature has been greatly discussed, simple exposure to these texts is not enough. Multicultural texts should be integrated into the curriculum as a natural classroom activity, allowing students to become familiar and comfortable with these types of texts.

Critical Conversations

Whether acknowledged or not, racism takes place all over the world, including right within our own classrooms. “Literature discussion groups in a fourth-grade bilingual English language arts classroom identify a critical incident in a story that provides opportunities for students to examine personal beliefs and societal realities” (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006, p. 158). Two researchers observed a fourth-grade classroom as part of their interest in the development of literacies among bilingual students, documenting the conversations of four girls regarding their critical encounter with racism in the novel *Felita*. The members of the study were part of an ethnic group, making the conversations more powerful within the discussion groups. In this urban classroom, the primary research question considered was, *How do students in literature discussion groups access cultural and linguistic resources to build collective understandings of multicultural literature*. The teacher’s goal was to immerse all of her students in a process through which they would become full participants in the new literacy practice of literature circles. At the end of this study, the researchers found that elementary bilingual students were able to think critically about the imprint of racism on children their age, a topic that ought to be discussed with more frequency within classrooms.

Empathy for Diverse Cultures

Dialogue and Think-Alouds

“Although multicultural children’s literature has become very popular in the past few decades, exposing children to this literature without guidance can lead to little or none of the benefits it is intended to provide” (Morgan & York, 2009, p 308). In this article, two teachers demonstrate and discuss the instructional creative potential of using the strategy of the think-aloud in the form of role-play to help students explore multiple perspectives and to understand how such perspectives inform problem solving. When analyzing a text from a critical literacy stance, one objective of teaching is to guide students to develop the ability to use their personal experiences to help them evaluate what happens in a given text. Choosing the right books, raising core questions and considering multiple points of view are just a few ways to support new learning with creative think-alouds.

Conclusion

It is clear that multicultural literature plays a significant role in elementary schools. Multicultural literature provides both teachers and students a window into learning about diverse cultures, beliefs and values while having an open mind about how we perceive the world. It promotes students to challenge their own thinking while changing their perceptions about the world around them. Students who have an open mind are more likely to understand how other cultures and families are different from their own while showing empathy. Students who approach a text with a critical lens will often question both the text and their own beliefs and experiences while trying to understand and connect with the characters and events taking place. It is crucial that our

students are exposed to this type of literature in the early stages of school so that they become more comfortable discussing it when they are in middle school.

Chapter three will discuss the procedure of the study as well as the research and methodology that took place throughout the study including data sources.

Chapter 3

Research Design/Methodology

This qualitative study explores how multicultural literature impacts students' awareness and perceptions regarding diverse cultures. Qualitative research can be defined as the study of the *nature* of phenomena and is especially appropriate for answering questions of *why* something is (not) observed (Busetto, 2020). The most common methods of data collection within a qualitative study include observations, student interviews, videos, and dialogue between the researcher and participants. This dialogue between the researcher and participants provides qualitative data that can be used to help gain a better understanding of the problem set forth in research study (Busetto, 2020).

For this study, I am piloting a new Social Studies unit for Second Grade called, "Celebrating Differences and Respecting Others." This unit was designed to guide students in developing acceptance and empathy in order to create a more inclusive environment, where all community members are welcomed and valued. Throughout the lessons, students were exposed to a variety of perspectives and identities through literature and other resources. Although multicultural texts were suggested for second grade to use, I had the ability to choose other texts as I saw best fit the diverse needs of my students. By the end of the unit, students will have grown their understanding of the world around them and challenge the status quo about making a change in the world.

Given that qualitative research is characterized by flexibility, openness and responsibility to context, the steps of data collection and analysis are not as separate and consecutive as they tend to be in quantitative research. "Sampling, data collection, analysis and interpretation are related to each other in a cyclical (iterative) manner, rather

than following one after another in a stepwise approach” (Busetto, 2020, p #3). The researcher can make educated decisions with regard to the choice of method, how they are implemented, and to which and how many units they are applied. Furthermore, the interviews, observations, and artifacts provided me with qualitative data that was critically analyzed to measure my student’s development throughout the study.

Throughout this study, students were exposed to multicultural literature that required them to “put themselves into the shoes of others.” They were engaged and involved in conversations that they may never have been exposed to before. Qualitative research approach applies best to this study because students have to engage, reflect, and analyze information in order to modify their way of thinking and seeing others.

Procedure of the Study

Before I began collecting data, I had a discussion with my students about cultures other than their own. The majority of my students come from India and are unaware of the diverse cultures around the world. To begin, we talked about the holidays and how they celebrate Christmas. Most of my students mentioned that they do not celebrate Christmas and only a few said that they do. This raised some questions from many of my students as a few asked, “How can some people celebrate things differently than others?” The students really struggled to understand that just because you may not celebrate something does not mean that others carry the same traditions. Before we began the lessons, students were given a survey to complete that had them think about and connect their background knowledge to multicultural literature. Students were asked to think about how they see themselves within the books in our classroom library or how they feel different compared to their classmates. Based on their responses, it was evident that my

students needed to be exposed to a vast amount of literature and different views and cultures other than their own.

After observing the population of my class, I decided that my students needed to be exposed to a range of diverse cultures around the world, including different family backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures. The participants in this study were predominantly Indian therefore I wanted to expose them to cultures they were not familiar with, including my own. I explained to the students that over the next several weeks, they would participate in activities such as read alouds while expanding their knowledge about diverse cultures and family dynamics.

During the first forty-five minute lesson, students were introduced to new unfamiliar read alouds called *Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry and *Sparkle Boy* by Leslie Newman. Both of these stories discussed what identity means in two completely different ways or scenarios. For this lesson, students were first exposed to both stories, then compared and contrasted the characters, their feelings and identities in both stories. As students discussed and noticed how the characters were both similar and different, I observed and collected anecdotal notes that would be used for data analysis. Next, we had an open discussion about what identity meant and how both characters in the stories brought their true identities to light. Students were then asked to reflect and think about what it would be like if we had a student in our class that was like the main characters in the stories, having them think about the identities of these characters in a new way. Finally, students were given a survey to complete about the two texts that we read. This gave me the opportunity to notice how my students' perspectives have changed from before reading to after reading these texts.

The next two forty-five minute lessons, lessons two and three, dealt with cultural identity and special qualities that we all possess. I read aloud the story The Ocean Calls by Tina Cho. Before reading the text, students viewed the cover, title and back blurb to get a better understanding and make a prediction about what the book would be about. As we took a sneak peek, students noticed that there was a girl on the cover and that it looked like she liked to swim. As I read aloud, I stopped frequently to ask driving questions related to the text, checking for comprehension along the way. Students were asked to put their thumbs up when they noticed anything that related to the girl's identity, letting me know that they had some kind of understanding of what identity meant. After reading the text, students watched a three minute wordless video about a free diver called, *We Are Haenyeo: Free Diving & Breathing*. This clip related to the text as students were able to explore the culture and traditions of a group of women “free divers” from South Korea. Students expressed their thoughts and opinions about the video and text with their partner. Finally, students created an “Inside/Outside” poster to represent their own individual identities. They had the opportunity to think about how they view themselves from both the inside and outside before sharing their final products with the rest of their classmates. For lesson three, the next forty-five minute lesson, students were exposed to the book *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts.. Next, I introduced the book to the students before taking a closer look at the front and back covers, making predictions as to what the book may be about. We then talked about the difference between “wants” and “needs” and how sometimes what we want is not as important as what we need. To close this lesson, students were again exposed to a wordless video from Better World Ed called, *I Am Mario*. This was a story about a man named Mario who turned bicycles into machines

for the people in his community. I explained to students that we call this a special talent and each and every one of us has talents. We then talked about how Mario used bicycles to help people in his community fulfill their needs in order to survive. Finally, students went around and talked about what their special talents are and how they can help others around them. To close, students were given a white piece of construction paper and were asked to illustrate a picture of them using their special talent or quality to help another person. Students were then able to share their posters with the rest of the class.

The next forty five minute lesson, lesson four, dealt with replacing assumptions with curiosity. To launch this lesson, students were shown a two minute wordless video. In this video, students will dive deeper into the dangers of making incorrect assumptions or “judgements” about others before getting to know them. Students were able to make an assumption about Monica before realizing and learning more about her in the video. Next, I introduced the book *Milo imagines the World* to the students. This book is about a boy named Milo on a train ride to visit his mother. As he travels, he meets many people and makes assumptions based on how they look or act. At the end, we come to find out that the assumptions that were made were not only untrue, but also unfair to the people in the story. To end our lesson, I explained to students the idea of “mirror, window and sliding door” when talking about connections. Students were then asked to think about how they connect to Milo or any other character introduced in the story. Students shared their thoughts and opinions based on how they felt connected.

The next two forty-five minute lessons, lesson five and six dealt with family values and traditions. To begin, students were shown portraits of families from all over the world. They were then asked to think about and discuss what makes a family unique

and special. Next, students were introduced to two texts, *My Family, Your Family, Our Families* by Emma Carlson Berne and *My Day with the Panyes* by Tami Charles. As I read both of these stories aloud, I stopped and asked questions for my students to think about and reflect upon before sharing. Next, we talked about family traditions and what special traditions we have in our families. Students shared about the traditions that they know about and celebrate each year, making it special within their families. To close, students were given a family interview sheet where they were able to interview one family member at home and learn more about their family traditions. On the next day, students shared their interviews with the class.

During the last three lessons, we continued to discuss diverse families around the world. To begin, we completed a *What is a family* activity where students listened to special characteristics about a family and were asked to stand up every time a family was being described. This allowed students to notice just how special, unique and different families can be and that they come in all shapes and sizes. Next, I introduced the book *Same, Same But Different* by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw. I told students that as we read today, we are going to be learning about two boys from different parts of the world. In order to keep track, we completed a Venn diagram together while comparing and contrasting both boys to each other. As I read, I stopped and had students help me complete and add to our class Venn diagram, having students notice how both boys are the same and different. Next, students will think about their own homes and what wants and needs they have, comparing it to other families around the world. To close this unit, students will create a *The Best Part of Me project* to reflect all they have learned throughout these past few weeks. I explained to students that they would think about their

most favorite part of themselves and how they could use it to make a difference in the world. We celebrated by sharing our projects with the class.

Data Sources

The data for this qualitative study was collected in multiple ways. I began by using a survey as a way to pre-assess my students' awareness of diverse cultures and multicultural literature. Using this information, it gave me insight as to which texts I should include in my lessons that were not directly related to my students' individual beliefs, cultures and backgrounds. After choosing the texts, students were asked to reflect, connect and discuss their own beliefs and cultures both through group/class discussions as well as surveys. Some of the group discussions were recorded as a way for me to analyze the data at a later time. As I walked around and observed their discussions, I took notes and recorded information that I found to be important in my teacher journal. This journal allowed me to keep track of significant conversations between my students, organize my own thinking, and write down questions I had about what I heard. I had another teacher come in and teach while I recorded students' questions and conversations throughout the lessons. Throughout the study, I had conversations with individual students in a one- on-one setting to gain a better understanding of their knowledge about cultures, identity and multicultural literature. Although we had many class discussions, the student response journals allowed students to share their thoughts and connections in a more personal way. I was also able to gather a tremendous amount of data from the small group and one-on-one interactions that I had with my students throughout the lessons. I also worked with students individually while recording our conversations about a specific text or topic. I collected the students' surveys and post-it notes that were

used to record their thinking throughout the lessons. At the end of the unit, students created a “Best Part of Me” project where they thought about the best part of themselves and explained why they felt that way. Together, we also completed the last part of our KWL chart as we reflected on all that we learned about multicultural texts and what it means to be unique. These were some of the great ways to end our unit and allowed students to reflect on all they have learned about being unique and different from others.

Data Analysis

The data collected throughout this study was used to help draw conclusions about the awareness and importance of including multicultural literature in a second-grade classroom while helping to promote empathy and perspectives about different cultures. Although many of the multicultural texts were previously chosen, I used the surveys that I gave to my students to assess their understanding of what multicultural literature means to them. I looked for recurring themes throughout the surveys and data to help grasp a better idea of just how much students were relating and making connections throughout each lesson. I used this information to decide how I wanted to expand my students' background knowledge of multicultural literature within the lessons. While teaching the lessons, I observed and jotted down notes of conversations between my students and I. The observations allowed me to hear how students connected to and interacted with the elements of the text. The interviews allowed me to notice how students were making connections to their own lives while pushing them to think deeper about the connections they were making. The Venn diagrams and student artifacts also served as a tool that would help me dig deeper into students' responses by analyzing their thinking. Student response journals were also used throughout this unit as a way to track and assess

students' understanding and progress while noticing any misconceptions that may have been made. Although we had many class discussions, the student response journals allowed students to share their thoughts and connections in a more personal way. I was also able to gather a tremendous amount of data from the small group and one-on-one interactions that I had with my students throughout the lessons.

In order to analyze the data collected in this study, I looked through my data and made charts that had common findings and themes within. I sorted through the data by each lesson, looking for commonalities between student responses that I had noted or observed. The themes emerged from a variety of data sources, including student responses and artifacts, anecdotal notes, recordings, notes from transcribed interviews and student response journals. According to Anderson (2010), "The findings should be presented in the context of any similar previous research and or theories (p. 1). It was important to carefully analyze my data while looking for commonalities involving themes to ensure that the data was coinciding with one another. In order to understand the learning that occurred throughout this study, discussions, observations and graphic organizers were analyzed using a coding system that looked for commonalities and themes across lessons. Some of these included student engagement, connections between students and texts, critical discussions, schema and making assumptions. As connections were being made, observation notes and discussions were being noted in my observation journal. According to Anderson (2010), "Participants do not always state the truth and may say what they think the interviewer wants to hear. A good qualitative researcher should not only examine what people say but also consider how they structured their responses and how they talked about the subject being discussed, for example, the

persons' emotions, tone, nonverbal communication, etc" (p. 5). This was an important consideration for me as I take notes.

Context

Community

The study site is located in Northern New Jersey and is a very diverse and large school district. Approximately 42,000 residents reside in this community and the area has been recognized in several publications as one of the top suburban communities in the area. According to the Census Reporter, fifty-two percent of the population are females while 48% are males. The median age is approximately 39 years old and the median household income is \$133,356. Only 2.5% of the population are considered to be living below the poverty line and 98.4% of the population have received a high school diploma or higher (US Census Bureau, 2019).

School District

The school district's mission statement is "to empower all learners to thoughtfully contribute to a diverse and changing world with confidence, strength of character, and love of learning." The district's strategic goals highlight the belief "that every individual has intrinsic worth, that embracing diversity enriches and empowers our community, and that people reach their full potential when encouraged to believe it is possible."

Approximately 10,000 students are enrolled in PK-12 with a student-teacher ratio of 12 to 1. According to state test scores, 74% of students are at least proficient in math and 80% in reading. There are ten schools within this school district; six being elementary, two middle and two high schools. Of the students attending this school district, approximately 65.3% are Asian, 24.7% are White, 5.2% are Black, and 3.9% are Hispanic. Also, 48% of

students are female, and 52% of students are male. At schools in this district, 2.9% of students are eligible to participate in the federal free and reduced price meal program and 5.9% of students are English language learners. Approximately 994 students have IEPs and need additional support throughout the day. Additional support includes Basic Skills Math, Basic Skills Reading, Reading Recovery, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Literacy Groups.

The approach used by the school district regarding literacy instruction is balanced literacy. Teachers are given adequate training in Fountas and Pinnell Reading Inventory, Lucy Calkins Readers and Writer's Workshop and Phonics Workshop materials. Programs such as Reading Recovery, Basic Skills Reading support, Reading A-Z, Fountas and Pinnell and Scholastic used to help improve and enhance students' literacy skills. The school district offers a variety of professional development opportunities for teachers to help enhance their understanding of multicultural texts within their classrooms. Teachers' opinions are valued as the curriculum is often being changed, modified and looked at to further meet the diverse needs of the students.

School

Approximately 450 students attend this school with the population of 50% being female and 50% being male. Only 4% of students come from families identified as living below the federal poverty line. This study site is located in Plainsboro New Jersey in a large suburb setting. Students have the opportunity to participate in afterschool programs such as art, basketball and tutoring. The school was placed in the top 10% of all schools in New Jersey for overall test scores (math proficiency is top 10%, and reading proficiency is top 20%) for the 2018-19 school year. The diversity score of this school is

0.34, which is less than the diversity score at state average of 0.70. The school's diversity has stayed relatively flat over five school years (US Census Bureau, 2019). Over the past year and a half throughout the pandemic, teachers had to adjust their teaching styles in many new and unfamiliar ways. As few teachers were asked to teach in person, many other teachers had the opportunity to teach from home. Although there were both advantages and disadvantages to both scenarios, it most definitely caused some tension between staff members as each group of teachers dealt with their own struggles along the way.

Classroom and Students

The classroom layout is very spacious due to the small class size. Students participate in centers and have the opportunity to work with their partners throughout the day. Due to COVID guidelines and regulations, students worked in the same small group partnerships to control the spread of germs. Students and partnerships remained in their seats throughout the lessons to avoid being too close to one another on the carpet. Eleven second grade students were selected to participate in this study from my classroom which is a general education elementary classroom. All students have been invited to take part in this study to achieve maximum variation sampling, highlighting common patterns among variations within the group. Participants' parents received parental consent forms with consent to audio/videotape within the classroom. The students whose parents consented to participation do not have IEP's or 504s; however, one student has been referred to the child study team. The information below (Table 1) represents the student demographics.

Table 1

Student Demographics

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Sex
Simon	8	Non Hispanic/Latino	M
Samuel	7	Non Hispanic/Latino	M
Diana	7	Non Hispanic/Latino	F
Alex	7	Non Hispanic/Latino	M
Anna	7	Non Hispanic/Latino	F
Louie	7	Non Hispanic/Latino	M
Henry	7	Non Hispanic/Latino	M
Peter	7	Non Hispanic/Latino	M
Nigel	7	Non Hispanic/Latino	M
Delsa	8	Non Hispanic/Latino	F
Sara	7	Non Hispanic/Latino	F

Note. All names are pseudonyms to protect student privacy.

Diana, Delsa, Anna and Alex are all performing at or above grade level in literacy. They enjoy participating in class discussions and share their thoughts about topics with the rest of the class. They often like to be the “leaders” in their groups and will help guide their peers in the right direction. Although they are often paired with students that struggle, they look forward to helping their peers and thinking deeper about a topic. They were extremely eager to participate and looked forward to the days when we were introduced to a new multicultural literature text. Diana is a student who likes to

share a lot and likes to be in control. Anna is very quiet and sometimes shy, although she has lots to say when she is confident in herself.

Sara, Peter and Henry are all performing below benchmark in reading and receive remedial reading support from the basic skills reading teacher. They also received remedial support in math and benefited from one on one support. These three students are often pulled for small group instruction to assure they understand the task. They have many friends and enjoy sharing their thoughts with their classmates.

Nigel, Simon and Samuel are active participants in the classroom who enjoy sharing their thoughts and ideas with their peers. They are easily distracted and often need to be redirected in group discussions. They often become excited and call out without having consideration for their peers. These three students tend to work better during group conversations/assignments if they are not together so as to enhance their focus. Louie is extremely hyperactive and often needs to be refocused throughout lessons. Although he is social with his peers, he needs reminders for how to be a good partner and listener with his classmates. Repetition and routines really benefit Louie in the classroom setting.

The results from the survey indicate that the students have minimal experience and background knowledge regarding multicultural literature and diverse cultures.

In Chapter four, I will analyze and discuss the results from the observations, videos, reader response notebooks, surveys, my own teacher journal and the charts.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Introduction

Chapter four will present the findings of my research study addressing the following question: How can the use of multicultural literature in a second-grade classroom help shape student perceptions regarding individual beliefs and values while developing empathy for diverse cultures? After carefully organizing and analyzing the data, three recurring themes emerged: identifying student perceptions about identity, recognizing the benefits of culture and family, and showing empathy for diverse cultures. Before beginning this unit, students were given a survey to assess their level of understanding regarding multicultural literature. Throughout the readings of each multicultural text, students engaged in whole class and small group discussions, interviews, small group instruction and reflecting. In addition, students reflected and responded to each multicultural text either in their reader response notebooks or through a questionnaire/survey. Throughout the study, I kept my own teacher journal that I used to take notes after each lesson. I also recorded my own thoughts and feelings throughout the research process.

Revisiting the Study

As explained in chapter three, I collected data for twenty forty-five minute periods over the course of eight weeks. Eleven second grade students ranging from seven to eight years old participated in this study. The study took place in my classroom approximately three to four times a week. To begin, students were given a survey to assess their prior knowledge of multicultural literature. Some questions had students

reflect on their own understanding of being and feeling “different” as well as how they see themselves within our classroom. After analyzing the results of the survey, I took a closer look at each question and response as I analyzed how my students felt related to, different from and connected to their peers. I used this survey as a form of assessment to help track their progress throughout the unit. I gave students this survey to complete before introducing any new multicultural literature books to see what they already knew and how they felt seen within the classroom setting. The question I focused on was: *How do you see yourself?* The results of the survey were charted below.

Table 2

Student Survey Question #1

Name	Response
Simon	“As a soccer player”
Samuel	“I have glasses because I cannot see with my left eye”
Diana	“As a child”
Alex	“I am good because my Dad teaches me math”
Anna	“As a girl”
Louie	“As a white boy in 2nd grade”
Henry	“I am different and smart”
Peter	“As a smart kid”
Nigel	“I am a boy in second grade”
Delsa	“I see myself like a scientist learning different things”
Sara	“We have different colors”

Note. All names are pseudonyms to protect student privacy.

Based on the results of the survey, it was evident that students had varying ideas about how they saw themselves. Many students stated that they saw themselves using physical features and others mentioned how they saw themselves as a learner.

Student Perceptions about Identity

I began this study by introducing two multicultural literature texts to my students, *Sparkle Boy* (Newman, L., & Mola, M. 2017) and *Hair Love* (Cherry, M. 2019). I read each text on separate days, allowing students to reflect and have a whole class discussion

about each text. I started by reading *Hair Love* first, telling students that this is a story about a girl named Zuri who does not like her hair. Her father tries his best to make her see just how special and unique her hair really is. As we read, we talked about the word “identity” and discussed parts of the book where Zuri’s identity was evident. Since this was the first lesson and multicultural text introduced, students needed a lot of explanation to understand what this word meant. After reading a few pages, I stopped and asked students what they noticed or thought so far about Zuri’s hair. Delsa said, “It sounds like Zuri’s hair is an important part of who she is.” As I kept reading, Zuri’s character and how she felt about her hair was coming into play. A special day was coming up and she woke up extra early to choose the perfect hairstyle. As we continued reading, we soon realized that Zuri’s mother was coming home and that is why it was such a special day for her. I asked students, “Have you ever had a special day like this before”? Students began to call out times that they had a special day as I reminded them to “raise their hands and be respectful of their classmates.” As I listened to my students’ responses, I noticed that each had a different meaning of what “special” meant to them. For example, one student mentioned when their grandmother visited from India while another student said he feels a connection when his dad comes home from work every night because “that’s special to him because it means we can have ice cream.” Either way, each student was able to share what special meant to them.

On the next day, I introduced the book *Sparkle Boy* to the students. A few hands were raised as I asked students if they recognized or read this story before. Nigel said, “I never read the book but I saw it at the Plainsboro Public library before.” Before I began reading, I asked students to examine the cover and begin to think about what they think

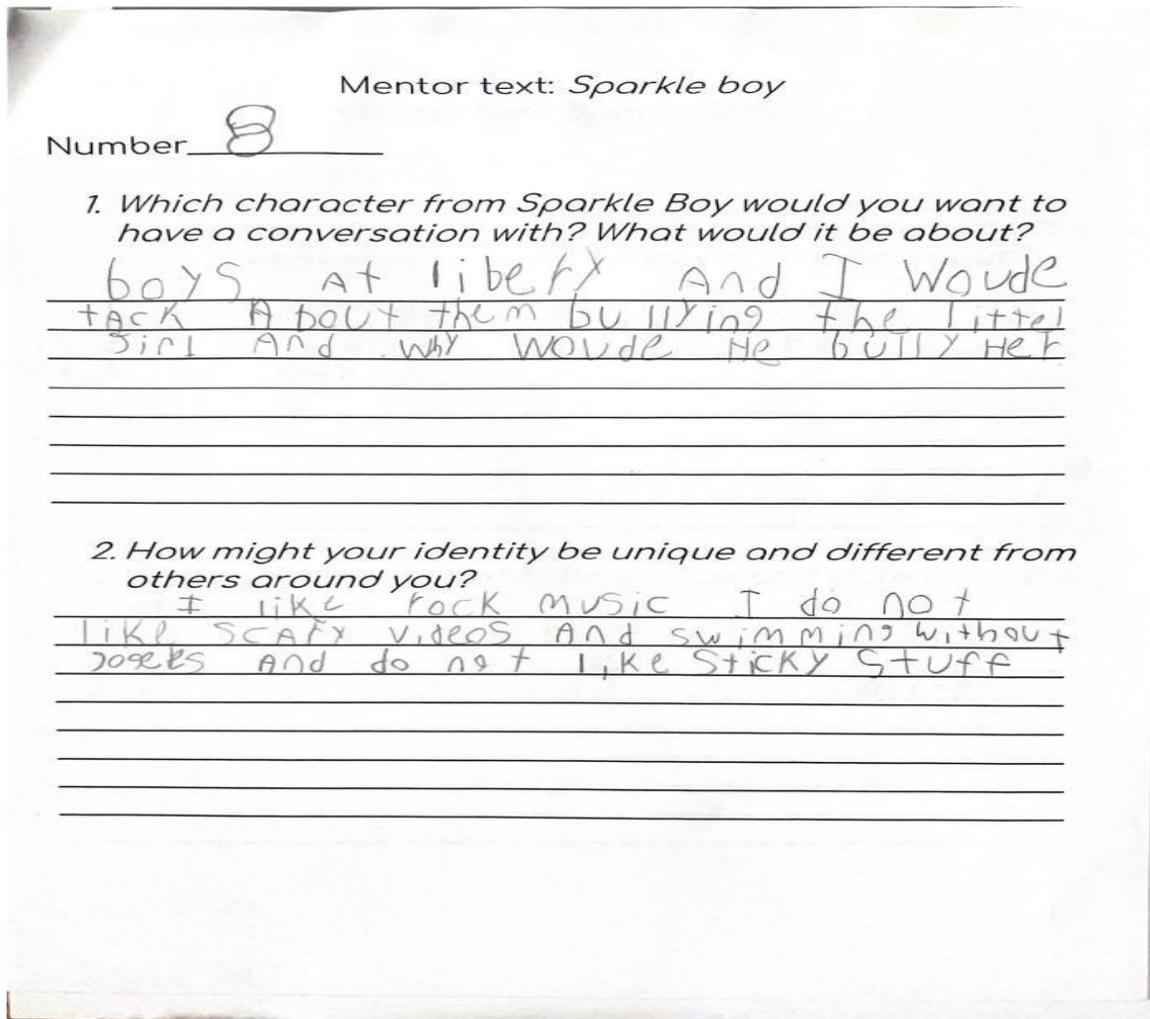
the book will be about. Henry raised his hand and said, “I think it’s about a boy who wants to wear dresses.” Then, Sara raised her hand and said, “It looks like the boy wants to be a girl.” These comments and noticings were able to give me a clear picture as to how my students just looked at the cover and were able to identify what it would be about. As I read, I stopped at appropriate parts of the book that allowed me to assess my students' understanding of what was happening thus far. I asked, “Why is Jessie acting this way?” Anna raised her hand and said, “She is afraid that kids will make fun of Casey.” I said, “Great observation, it must be difficult to be in that type of situation.” I took this time to address to the entire class how important it is to stand up for what is right even if it is the most difficult decision to make. I explained that if you see someone being made fun of, the right thing to do is to stick up for that person and make them feel better. Peter then chimed in and said, “How would you feel if you were being bullied and everyone laughed at you”? This opened up a deeper conversation with the class as we discussed times when someone was being mean and how it felt to be on the other side of the situation. I then asked the question, “How did Jessie change throughout the story”? This had a few students puzzled as they didn’t know how she changed. Delsa raised her hand and said, “She now understands what it is like to be made fun of and is relating to Casey.” Another student, Alex, said “It doesn’t matter if you’re a boy or a girl, you can like whatever you want and it should be okay.” I was amazed how well my students were able to identify how Jessie changed throughout the story.

After we finished reading the book, students were given two questions to reflect and respond on. The questions were: *Which character from Sparkle Boy would you want to have a conversation with? How might your identity be unique and different from others*

around you? Students responded to these questions in their reader response journals (as a way to accommodate some of my students, I typed up the questions and had them tape it into their notebooks to help with their handwriting - See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Student Artifact



Many students said that they would like to have a conversation with the boys at the library and tell them to stop being mean. The term “identity” was evident throughout

both of these read-alouds, allowing students to see and use their own prior knowledge of culture to guide them in the right direction while using their own perception about gender, culture and identity. As I looked through the reflections, I noticed that many students wanted to have a conversation with mom because, “I want to know how/why she knows that boys can wear sparkly clothes.” To me, this was a great example of just how my students were thinking deeper about the texts they were being exposed to. They were so interested to know about other’s perspectives of things that it intrigued them to want to have a conversation about it. Henry wrote that he feels unique because, “he likes dragons” while Sara said, “My name makes me unique.” Although both responses represent what makes each child unique, I noticed that one student was thinking of concrete objects while the other was thinking deeper in terms of internal feelings and characteristics. This showed me just how unique my class really is and how they think in different ways.

Another text that I read involving and highlighting identity was called *The Ocean Calls* (Cho, T. 2020). After reviewing what identity meant once again, I began reading the text aloud. As I read, I was amazed to see how engaged and intrigued the students were throughout the entire lesson. The conversations that we got into as a whole class was truly remarkable. I was speechless with some of my students' comments and thoughts.

We completed the second lesson in this new Social Studies unit. This lesson focused on identity and how what we see or feel on the inside doesn’t necessarily reflect how we see or feel on the inside. We listened to a story called, “The Ocean Calls” which is a story about a young girl named Dayeon growing up on the island of Jeju in South

Korea. Once we finished reading, students thought about their own identities by creating an “inside/outside” poster of themselves. This was an activity in which I was anxious to learn how my students reacted and felt about their own identity. One student wrote on her poster that, “even though she is a girl, she does not like unicorns and instead likes dragons.” This opened up a conversation about how things portrayed to be “boy” or “girl” items or toys are simply not true - anyone can play with whatever they would like! I feel as though this lesson really helped my students to see others for who they are and also notice that how we feel on the inside does not always reflect us on the outside.

Clinging to the Known

A theme that was evident throughout the unit was how my students tended to cling to the known in regards to what they were familiar with and used to. *Sparkle Boy* was the text that really allowed me to see how my students viewed identity. Throughout the lessons, “That’s not right” or “That’s not what my Mom and Dad said” were recurring phrases that my students shared quite frequently. For example, during the lesson where we read *The Ocean Calls*, we later reflected on what happened in the story. One student raised his hand and said, “My sister and I were playing with toys in her room. I picked up her dolls and started to play with them. When my Mom came in to check on us, she said “Boys can’t play with girl toys, put that down.” This child in particular had a lot of trouble seeing how one's identity can be different from what he is used to and that’s okay. Later on during a whole class discussion, I asked my students if they felt different from their classmates and if so, how or why? One student raised her hand and said, “I don’t feel different because we all come from India so we are the same.” To me, it was clear

that my students thought that just because they came from a similar place, they thought it meant they were all the same.

I also saw this theme emerge from some of the student artifacts that were used throughout this unit, including a Venn diagram that was completed as students thought about their own identity and compared it to their classmates. In this activity, students were asked to think about what makes their identity unique as they completed the left side of the Venn diagram independently before being paired up and with another student to discuss and compare their identities with one another. As I looked through this data, I noticed that my students were solely thinking about their physical appearance and characteristics rather than what makes their identity unique on the inside as well. Responses such as, “I have dark hair” or “I am from India” were typical answers that were shown throughout this data. This was a follow up activity to the book *Sparkle boy*. The inability for my students to know and understand that we all come from different backgrounds, ethnicities, experiences and beliefs was something that I wanted to work on throughout the unit.

Critical Discussions

The original goal of my study was to use a variety of resources to help create appropriate conversations within my second grade classroom. Although I assumed I would get the most information from the student response journals and artifacts, it turns out that the discussions I had with my students, both whole-class and within small groups, were more powerful and meaningful in more ways than one. Much of the learning was occurring from the conversations we were having rather than from the concrete artifacts, such as the graphic organizers. For one of the lessons, students were

asked to create an inside/outside poster of how they saw themselves. This was a formative assessment given to notice what my students have learned and connected to in regard to identity. As I analyzed the inside/outside posters, I noticed that some students' responses were more detailed than others. For example, one boy stated that, "Even though I am a boy, I prefer coloring over playing with toy cars." On the contrary, another student mentioned, "I like to play with the normal girl things like dolls." This sparked difficult discussions when we shared and some students had trouble understanding how boys and girls could have different opinions about what they can and cannot do or play with. One of my students made a comment stating, "My mom and dad always told me that I HAD to play with boy things, like trucks and cars. I really want to try and play with other things that I never played with before."

Another example of how critical discussions occurred was through the read-alouds, in particular *Sparkle Boy*. As we were reading, one student raised his hand and said, "Wait, I don't understand how Casey thinks it's okay to wear a skirt when he is a boy." It did not take long for another student to chime in and say, "Casey should be able to wear what he wants." Oftentimes, discussions stemmed from the artifacts, read-alouds, graphic organizers and student response journals were some of the effective ways that proved how my students were connecting and comprehending the message and purpose of the lessons. Students were able to listen to other students' ideas and thoughts while making connections with their own experiences. Many times, students would share their thoughts or connections to the text and this would spark other students' responses which helped promote their own understanding and acceptance. For example, Delsa mentioned how her brother started playing field hockey and how she thought it was a "girl" sport.

Another student chimed in saying, “I can connect to that because my sister plays field hockey too”! This conversation was an example of how my students were making connections between the read-aloud as well as one another throughout the lessons.

Showing Empathy for Diverse Cultures

As we completed a lesson about families being unique and different, I introduced another multicultural text to my students called, *Same, Same but Different* (Kostecki-Shaw J.S. 2011). In this story, students learned what it means to be the same and different. Before I began reading, we completed a “What is a family” activity?” During this activity, students listened to the family descriptions and stood up every time they thought a family was being described. Some descriptions included an African American mother and her adopted Chinese daughter, a boy and his foster parents and two moms and a son. When we finished, I told students that they should have stood up for each description because each of them were a family. Once this activity was finished, I told students that they would be learning about two boys from different parts of the world. When a reader compares two characters, they can use a Venn diagram to track their thinking. I told students that as we read today, we will keep track of both characters by adding to our class Venn diagram. This will help us identify the similarities and differences between both boys in the story. I first asked the students where they thought both boys were from and got some interesting responses. Anna said, “I think it shows a couple of places including India and China.” Peter chimed in and said, “Yeah, it looks like India and I have been there before.” As we continued to read, I stopped to add to our Venn diagram whenever we learned something new about either boy. As I was reading, Simon shouted, “I really think this takes place in India because the one boy said he lives

with twenty-three people, just like many families do in India.” Students were not only connecting to the story but also were having mirror and window connections as well, which is something we hadn’t talked about yet. As a way to reflect on the story and lesson, students were given their own Venn diagram to complete with a partner. Just like the two boys in the story, students were to work with a partner that they hadn’t worked with before, allowing them to really get to know someone different in our class. Students interviewed one another as a way to see what they had in common and then dug deeper to see what differences they also shared. Students completed this Venn diagram together before handing it to me. (See Figure 2).

The lesson of this book was to show students that although two friends can have many similarities, they can also share many differences. Understanding and showing empathy for other cultures and how one lives can really put into perspective how things are often different than what they seem or appear. The theme that emerged from this lesson was how my students used their own schema and prior knowledge of their own lives to connect to both boys in the story. As students were completing the Venn diagram, I overheard one partnership say, “Oh, we have a lot more in common than we thought or knew!” This was especially interesting to hear because these two students tend to argue throughout the day and having them realize their similarities may have turned over a new leaf. Another pair wrote that although they both are from India, they like different holidays. Louie said, “I love Christmas.” His partner, Simon said, “Well I love Diwali, why don’t you like Diwali if you’re Indian”? This sparked a whole class conversation as we talked about what an “Indian” holiday was. “Oh, it’s a holiday that is only celebrated in India.” Another student chimed in and said, “That’s not true because I celebrate it here

and I don't live in India anymore!" This activity allowed my students to open up their minds to how they perceive themselves based on where they are from. It allowed me to listen in as my students talked about their thoughts and feelings about what makes them similar as well as different from one another.

Figure 2

Venn Diagram

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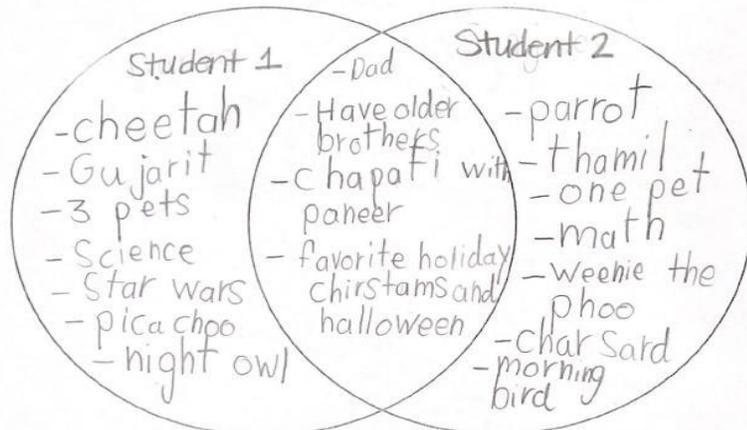


EARLY GRADES ACTIVITY

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

We Are the Same. We Are Different.

In this activity, you have learned what it means to be the "same" and "different." Families can be the same and different, too. In fact, your family probably has something that is the same as and something that is different from every one of your classmates' families! Can you figure out what that is?



Choose a partner. Look at the diagram above. In the space where the two circles meet, write three things that are the same about your family and your partner's family. In the spaces where the circles do not meet, write three things that are different about your family and your partner's family. If you need ideas, look at the questions on the next page.

Towards the middle of the study, I introduced the text *Those Shoes* (Boelts, M. & Jones, N. 2007). Students began to make predictions about the text before we began discussing it which showed me how interested they were to learn more about the boy in the picture. Samuel yelled out, “The boy is definitely going to get a new pair of shoes - it shows it on the front cover!” I then told students that this story is about a boy named Jeremy who really wants a pair of black, high-top shoes. His grandma tells him that they can’t afford the expensive shoes because he needs winter boots. When Jeremy’s old shoes break, his guidance counselor gives him a pair of shoes that everyone makes fun of - except Antonio. Just as I finished giving the students an overview of the book, their expressions amazed me. When I asked what was wrong, two students shouted and said, “I can’t believe he couldn’t get shoes when he needed them - that is so sad.” Right then and there, I knew just how connected my students were to this unit and text. They were able to clearly show empathy for diverse cultures and in this case, a boy whose family did not have a lot of money. To hear how concerned my students were about a fictional character really put into perspective for me just how amazing this group of eight year olds really are. As a way to close this lesson, we had a discussion about what we learned. I asked students, “What did you learn from reading this book?” As students’ hands shot up, I was eager to hear how my students felt after hearing this story. One student said, “I thought whenever you needed something like shoes your mom and dad just bought them for you at Costco.” Another student connected to that statement by saying, “Yeah, my parents get my clothes at Costco too! I didn’t know that parents did not always have money to buy you things.” It was evident in their responses that my students were using their own schema of how they live their lives and connecting it to the boy in the story. My goal was

to have my students notice how Jeremy struggled with this decision to give away his own shoes because they were something he wanted for so long. He knew that, like himself, Antonio was in need of new shoes and they would be a perfect fit. He realized he could help someone in need even though it would mean he would be giving up something he has wanted for so long.

Next, we talked about a “want” and a “need”. Students turned and talked to a friend about what they thought the difference between the two were after finishing this book. “A want is something that you do not need” I heard one group say. Another group mentioned how, “I want a lot of things but needs are more important to live.” Students then were given a piece of paper and were asked to think of their own homes/lives and identify the wants and needs they have. It was amazing to see the different wants and needs that the students came up with on their own. Each student had very similar needs, being clothes and a house to live in. A few students wrote that after reading the story, they “do not want some of the things like toys and games because they are already lucky.” Seeing this through their own perspectives while comparing it to Jeremy in the story really captured the true meaning or lesson of this text (See Figure 3).

Figure 3

Student Artifact #2



Schema/Prior Knowledge

Throughout the unit and these two lessons in particular, a theme that emerged was how my students used their schema and prior knowledge of topics to connect to the text. As we read and discussed the text, *Same, Same but Different*, students were able to show empathy for others by using their schema and prior knowledge of things to relate in various ways. For example, as we read this particular text, students were connecting their own knowledge of India to where the story might take place. One student even said, “it looks and sounds just like India, that’s where my family is from.” Students then used their own similarities and differences with one another and compared it to the boys in the story. In the next book, called *Those Shoes*, students used their experiences and knowledge of living in India and connected it to the boy in the book who wants new shoes. One student said, “India is so different from where I live now, my family that still lives there has no money and I never had new shoes, either.” My students’ knowledge of wants and needs was truly eye opening. Although they were able to distinguish between a

want and a need, their understanding of just *how* that happens was minimal. For example, one student who is not from India said, “I thought whenever we needed something, our parents would just go buy it for us.” This knowledge that this child portrayed showed just how little he knew and understood about truly needing or wanting something. This theme emerged throughout this part of the unit and was able to truly paint a picture of my diverse group of students.

Recognizing the Benefits of Culture and Families

Making Assumptions

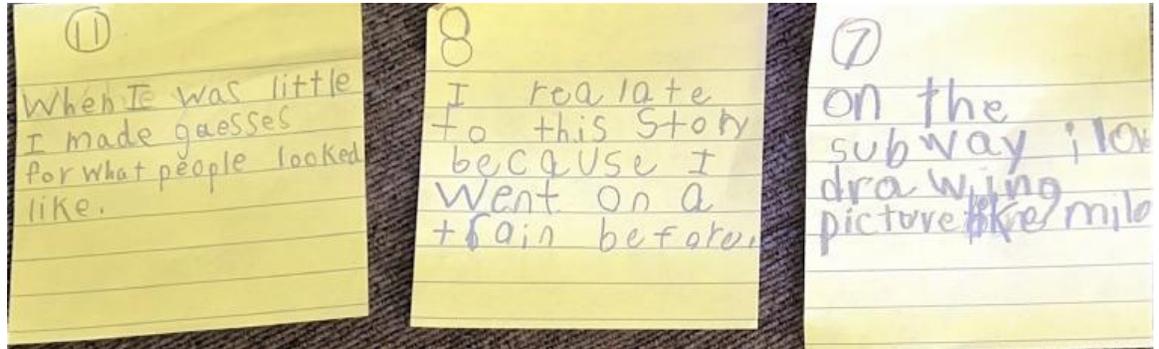
Each of the diverse texts lent themselves to conversations involving culture and families in one way or another. I introduced the text called, *Milo Imagines the World* (Matt & Robinson, 2021). To begin this lesson, I showed my students a *Better World Ed* video called, *I am Monica*. As we watched the video, students were asked to notice what they “see, think and wonder” about the video. Students turned and talked with a partner before sharing out with the rest of the class. This was a great segway into having my students begin to become curious about one’s culture and beliefs. Next, I introduced the new text, *Milo Imagines the World* and told students that it is about a boy named Milo who learns a very important lesson about making assumptions. I then displayed the cover and asked students to make predictions about the main character, Milo. After reading page eight, I stopped and posed the following question: *Milo imagines this man living in an apartment all alone, with no one to keep him company except his pets. He doesn’t seem to have a family. Why would Milo make this assumption?* Anna raised her hand and said, “I know what an assumption means - it’s when you assume something but it isn’t always true.” I immediately commented and said, “That’s exactly right”! As we were

ready to continue reading, another student raised his hand and said, “My mom told me it is bad to make assumptions about people because it is not always true.” These responses let me know that my students had prior knowledge of assumptions and what they meant. As we finished the book, I introduced the concept of mirror and window connection. I explained to students that if you have a mirror connection, it reflects your own culture and helps you build your identity. However, if you have a window connection, it offers you a view into someone else’s experience or perspective. As I knew this would be a tough concept for my students to fully grasp, I then gave some examples of each to give them something to relate to and think about.

During the next part of this lesson, I explained to students that it’s okay to be curious about someone else’s identity. However, it is not okay to make assumptions about one’s identity before getting to know that person. To close this lesson, I gave each student a post-it note and asked them to reflect on the story by posing the following question: *What was a mirror or window connection to you from the story?* Students’ responses were a reflection of what they learned and took away from this story, as well as the other multicultural texts that we have read.

Figure 4

Post-It Notes



As I read through each students' responses, I noticed a common theme among them all. Each student connected to the story by using something that they remember happening in their own lives. Students' schema was evident throughout the responses. One student connected by saying how he rode a train before while another connected it to their love of drawing. Henry raised his hand and said, "When I was little I made guesses for what people looked like before I met them." This sparked a discussion as another student raised her hand and said, "Oh, I forgot me and my brother used to do that too! We loved to imagine what people would wear, too!" To their surprise, I, too, was able to make a connection as I shared my own experiences with imagining things. I told my students how I used to imagine and dream about what it would be like to be a teacher, and then I would practice in my room. The looks of confusion came across my students' faces as they weren't expecting their teacher to share about her experiences, too. Throughout this lesson, it was clear that my students tried their best to make their own connections based on their own understanding and experiences growing up.

Connections

The next lesson focused on students learning and identifying *What is a family*. To begin, I told students that we would be reading another new story called, *My Day with the Panye* (Ella Turenne, 2021). I explained to students that this book is about a girl who lives in Haiti who is learning how to carry a panye, just like her manman (her mother). It is a great story about traditions, culture and language. As I read, I stopped to discuss what students were noticing. When asked about what types of families we see, Delsa's responses were as followed:

Delsa: "This is a mirror connection to me because this is similar to what families do in India. Women carry clay pots filled with butter, just like a panye."

Miss Karpinski: That is so interesting that women do that - you taught me something new today!

To end this lesson, students were given an interview sheet where they had to interview a family member to learn more about their family traditions that are special in their home. One student, Peter, said "I already know a lot about my family so do I still need to do this"? This allowed me to have a conversation with the students about traditions and how their parents and family members had traditions of their own when they grew up. This was a great opportunity to learn more about your family members, even if you think you know them really well already. When students brought their interviews back into school, each student shared what they learned about their family members. The conversations were remarkable and it was great to hear just how much my students learned about their own parents. As we discussed the interviews, most of the students mentioned how celebrating Diwali is an important event that takes place in their

families. Although I am familiar with Diwali, I was able to learn more about each of my students and how their families celebrate. One student said, “I like to decorate the house with lights” and another said, “My family eats lots of crackers and sweets.” It was interesting to learn how each family celebrates in a different way. When I asked what they found most interesting, this was some of their responses:

Anna: My family tradition is called Navaratri - which celebrates female power and strength by displaying dolls.

Samuel: The most special tradition to my family is celebrating Diwali – we set off firecrackers together.

Louie: When I asked my dad what traditions he had when he was a kid, he told me it was the same tradition we celebrate now as family – going to New York to see the Christmas lights.

The discussion about my student’s and their families traditions was very eye opening to me. It not only allowed me to learn more about their traditions and cultures, but it also allowed my students to talk about their own traditions while learning about one another. Students were then able to make connections to others as we discussed our interview questions and answers. This lesson was part one of two lessons where students focused on identifying culture and families.

During the next lesson, we again focused on the idea of what makes a family, a family. To begin, I displayed pictures of different families and asked students to talk about what they notice. I posed the following questions: *What do you notice? What can love and caring look like in our homes?* Students shared out before I introduced another text, called My Family, Your Family, Our Families. As we read the first couple pages, an interesting new word came up that I knew my students wouldn’t be familiar with. To

foster means to help grow and develop. A foster parent is an adult who takes a child into their family for a period of time. As I read the story, I guided students to think about and understand that part of our identity is our family. When we finished, I allowed students to think about the story and share how they felt connected in any way. Diana said, “This story is a mirror connection to her because her family eats dinner together every night.” Henry then raised his hand and said, “This is a window for me because my family does not eat dinner together at night because my dad works really late.” The connections that my students shared allowed me to notice the progress my students have made throughout this unit.

The last lesson discussed families all over the world. This lesson was the last lesson of the unit and allowed students to reflect on all they have learned. During the lesson, I presented a slideshow of four different families, all different in their own ways. As I showed the first picture, students quickly were able to connect and thought the family was in India. When I asked why they thought that, Delsa raised her hand and said, “Because it looks like India and there’s small houses.” As I showed each picture, students were able to connect in some way. We talked about the wants and needs of each picture and family, remembering what we learned in previous lessons. To close and as a way for me to assess their understanding, I gave each student a paper with three questions. These questions challenged my students to think about how they connected to each picture or family and what they found that was similar to their own families. It was interesting to see how some students felt like the families were poor just because there wasn’t a lot of food on the table. An example of the questionnaire is found below.

Table 3

Questionnaire

12/14/2021 Untitled document - Google Docs

Number 3

Lesson 8: Families all over the World

Which of the four photos do you relate to the most?
the 4th one because
my kitchen is small and
we have a good amount
of food! and we're
always happy!

What do you see that is similar to your family?
Small kitchen always
happy have pizza a lot
good amount of food!

What do you notice about the needs of each culture?
#1 more supplies and food.
#2 bigger house and beds.
#3 need to be happy.
#4 bigger kitchen.

This questionnaire allowed me to see how my students viewed other families around the world. Some of their responses were connections they had to their own lives. For example, one student said that he “sees a similarity in one of the families because they have milk and so does his family.” Another student said, “Yeah, the fourth family had a lot of the same foods that are in my kitchen.” When asked what they noticed about the needs of each culture, the most common response was that each family needs food to

survive. When I asked why they thought that, two students said similar things, “Well it doesn’t matter how much food you have as long as you don’t starve.” This was an interesting comment as many students often think that the more food you have, the better or luckier you are. When many of the students first looked at the last picture, they assumed this family was rich because “they have so much food on their table.” I explained that just because it looks like there may be a lot of food, doesn’t mean they are more fortunate than any other family or culture.

To conclude this unit, students had an end of the unit celebration by creating a “The Best Part of Me” project. They thought and reflected on all they have learned about their own unique identities. I explained to students that they now must think about their favorite parts of themselves and how they can use it to make a difference in the world. Next, I showed students the template as well as an example of what they needed to do. Below is the example I used to show my students what their completed project would look like. This was a great way to end our unit and celebrate all we have accomplished and learned throughout this study.

After reflecting on the unit and my students’ finished portraits, I noticed how much we all have learned throughout the past few weeks. In the beginning, many of my students often thought that their way of living was the only way and that if they celebrated something, that means everyone does, too. The biggest takeaway I got from this experience was seeing how my students' thoughts and mindset changed just from being exposed to different multicultural texts, conversations and thinking about situations from others’ point of view. Being able to understand and have empathy for diverse cultures was also something I noticed my students portrayed throughout the unit. They

were able to look at something and begin to understand why things are the way they are while taking into consideration how others may feel if you assumed something about them or their situation. This unit allowed me to see my own students in a new light that I continue igniting each and every day.

Table 4

The Best Part of Me



Summary of Data Analysis

After analyzing my findings, I noticed that students were able to redefine their understanding and definitions of culture and identity as we engaged in numerous multicultural texts. The texts and activities provided throughout the study allowed students to engage in conversations that challenged them to think of others perspectives while putting themselves in others' shoes. Students showed empathy for other cultures

and realized how others may not be as fortunate as they are. Wants and needs were discussed and differentiated throughout many read-alouds. Students were able to identify their own wants and needs while thinking about how their wants and needs may differ from someone else. By the end of the study, students were able to identify the benefits of being unique and different while putting themselves in others' shoes. Furthermore, they expressed their true interest in the books we read and were very eager to continue learning all about other cultures, values and beliefs.

Chapter five of this study presents the findings, conclusions, implications, limitations and recommendations for further research related to this study.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Limitations and Implications

Summary

The purpose of this study was to expose students to multicultural texts in hopes to create age appropriate conversations about diverse cultures, ethnicities and values. The study examined the types of age appropriate conversations that took place as second grade students are exposed to multicultural literature. The results of my study indicate that students engaged with multicultural literature while having an understanding and open mindset to diverse cultures around the world. Students used their prior knowledge and schema in order to comprehend and make connections throughout the read alouds. The texts lent themselves to critical thinking and discussions throughout the unit that challenges students to think critically while showing empathy for others.

Conclusions

At the beginning of the study, my students had difficulty identifying their own similarities and differences with one another. They thought hair color was the only difference they may have had with someone else, not realizing that just because they are from India doesn't mean they are necessarily the same. Based on their pre-assessment results, students were unaware of what made them unique and different from one another. However, by the end of the study, students showed a more in depth understanding of diverse cultures and were able to empathize with others' way of life and beliefs. According to Norton (2013), "Positive multicultural literature has been used effectively to help readers identify cultural heritages, understand sociological change, respect the values of minority groups, raise aspirations, and expand imagination and creativity" (p.

2). With the help of multicultural literature within the classroom, it opened up a pathway for students while being able to emphasize with others points of view and values.

Limitations

Virtual learning and the pandemic were the largest limitations for this study. As uncertainty took over each of our days, it was extremely difficult to try to navigate and include all students as some were virtual, isolating or in quarantine. As I would plan out my lessons each and every day, my plan would often change due to the limited amount of students I had in my classroom. Virtual learning made it a huge challenge to try to assess just how my students were connecting to and comprehending the literature we were being exposed to. With that being said, it took a lot longer than anticipated to complete lessons and we would often have to stretch lessons over the course of many days in order to finish them. This affected how long I was able to teach each lesson as students were often missing from the conversations. Although each piece of literature was read, discussed and reflected upon, it was difficult to expand our thinking as we needed to review what was missed in previous lessons. If students were in school every day, it would have been more beneficial for my students as they would have felt more connected to each text as well as their classmates.

Moreover, if quarantine and virtual learning were not evident throughout this unit, all students would have been included in the discussions, activities, lessons and reflections that took place each day. If more time was made available, more connections would have been made between the students. Due to lack of time, not all areas of critical literacy were explored as they should have been. Although we were able to complete each lesson, some extensions were cut short due to the number of students I had in my

class at any given time. Although I often had students on zoom, internet connections as well as lack of technology played a crucial role in how my students were either able or unable to connect with the class. Considering this was a brand new unit to my grade level, I did not have the prior knowledge needed of the unit in order to make changes or have an idea as to how intense each multicultural text and lesson would become. Further research on how more time with diverse texts can affect and change these thoughts may help create a deeper understanding of how multicultural literature can be integrated within the classroom setting.

Implications for Future Research

The analysis from this study proved to highlight areas that could be further explored in order to ensure multicultural texts are included in the curriculum. If this study was completed again, I would recommend exposing students to these texts ahead of time and throughout cross-curricular areas of the day. Many of my students expressed how much they enjoyed reading these books and learning all about different cultures around the world. With that being said, more time for exposure of these texts would be necessary if completed again. It would be beneficial to have longer conversations and reflections about each text, too. Another suggestion would be to have virtual students record their thinking/responses so they can also be included in the discussions. This would entail showing students how to record their responses and sending them to me so they can be included in the data collection.

Implications for Teaching

More time and exposure with multicultural literature would continue to build students' knowledge, understanding and social awareness of other cultures and values.

After realizing just how interested my students were in these texts, it would be beneficial to allow myself more time for my students to fully become one with each of the texts. As they made connections, they soon realized that they were making connections with one another, too. I think we as educators need to remember just how much our students are able to handle and relate to within lessons we teach. According to Duke and Cartwright (2021), “Explicitly drawing practitioners' attention to the role of cultural and other content knowledge may lead to more instruction aimed at building students’ knowledge. Readers who are rarely provided with opportunities to read texts that reflect their cultural background will experience the reading process differently than those with the privilege of a frequent match of their cultural background and the knowledge assumed by an author/text” (p. 6). When students feel heard, accepted and valued within their classroom setting, they are more apt to make connections with their peers and themselves. Teachers must have the proper training and background knowledge themselves in order to meet the needs of their students on this level. Professional development programs should help teachers understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups within U.S. society (Banks, et al, 2005). Exposing educators to these texts before expecting them to share with their students would make a huge difference in how teachers choose to share these texts. It can be implied that many teachers feel that they do not have the appropriate training or exposure to what is expected of them to teach to their students. By eliminating this implication or feeling, teachers will feel more comfortable exposing their students to these texts while having age appropriate conversations as well. Effective professional development programs help educators uncover and identify their personal attitudes

towards racial, ethnic and cultural groups while becoming acquainted with the diverse perspectives that exist within classrooms (Banks, et al, 2005).

In the future, one way for teachers to implement multicultural literature into their everyday lessons is to create book clubs. Texts can be chosen based on students' individual cultures and beliefs, or even preferences. A student survey could be given to learn more about their knowledge of cultures and what they would like to continue exploring. Book clubs can allow students to interact and engage not only with multicultural texts, but with their peers as well (Osario, 2018). As students were exposed to the texts, I noticed that some texts resonated with some students more than others. For example, I thought students would be excited to read texts where they had mirror connections too, but I was wrong. Students were more interested in learning about things they had little experience or knowledge of. Understanding what interests students the most when selecting these texts will help future educators create powerful and effective lessons, small groups and book clubs for their students. Through the participation in book clubs or culture circles, students were able to explore their understanding of social and cultural tensions, as well as used the texts to help them make sense of the world by reflecting on their own lived experiences (Osario, 2018).

Finally, it is important for students to be able to make connections to the books they are being exposed to in order to really understand how cultures differ from one another. It is crucial for students to be able to talk through their feelings, emotions, connections and questions they have about the texts they are being exposed to. Oftentimes, you can find out more about how a student is connecting or feeling about a text when you have an open line of communication within your classroom. According to

DeNicolò & Franquiz (2006), “Critical encounters emerge when a word, concept, or event in a story surprises, shocks, or frightens the reader or readers to such a degree that they seek to inquire further about the vocabulary or event selected by the author” (p. 163). Modeling these types of appropriate conversations would also be beneficial. Continuing education and professional development programs about diversity is especially important for teachers because of the increasing cultural and ethnic gap that exists between the nation’s teachers and students (Banks et al, 2005). Teachers should become knowledgeable about the distinctive cultural backgrounds of their students while becoming skilled to translate that knowledge into effective instruction. Educators can show pairs of students how this accountable talk works and how it can be beneficial for both students and the teacher. Setting clear expectations for students is important to ensure students understand how effective conversations can work.

Conclusion

There are so many ways and reasons why it is important for students to make connections to the books they are reading and being exposed to. Some students enjoy using their schema of things to make connections while others prefer to make connections with the characters within their books. Either way, making connections can help students emphasize unfamiliar cultures and backgrounds that they may not be familiar with. Students will also benefit from having their teachers share their own experiences as a way to make them feel comfortable being exposed to multicultural literature within their classrooms.

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