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**CASE STUDY: READING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE TO AN
EMERGENT READER IN THE HOME**

by
Kiyna Twisdale

A Thesis

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

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Felicity. I could not have done this without you, and I am thrilled that we will always share this special project: “Our Thesis.” I love you, Baby Girl.



Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis chair, Dr. Marjorie Madden, for her continual support, feedback, guidance and direction throughout this massive undertaking. Many thanks to my other professors and classmates during my time at Rowan for helping me stretch and grow professionally and personally. I could not have undertaken this journey without the help of Ellen, who dealt with my countless questions and mirrored my stress levels for the past two years.

I'd like to recognize all my family and friends who believed in me. Words cannot express my gratitude to my husband, Andrew, for his sacrifice that allowed me to chase my wild dreams. I am forever indebted to my sister, Kinsey, for her constant listening ear. Finally, to my sweet children, Maddie, Thomas and Felicity; Mom is almost done with her homework.

Abstract

Kiyona Twisdale

CASE STUDY: READING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE TO AN EMERGENT READER IN THE HOME

2022-2023

Marjorie E. Madden, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

This case study was conducted to find what happens when a parent reads multicultural books to their young child at home. The qualitative data collected was used to determine the child's reactions to the similarities and differences between them and the characters, as well as how multicultural books can be used to address sensitive topics and complex themes in the home. A caregiver, the researcher, collected data from read aloud sessions with her five-year old daughter. After reading seven multicultural books together, the research found that the child was able to make simple and concrete connections with the physical appearance and actions of the characters in the story. Complex themes were best discussed with books that had high quality pictures and when the emotional state and physical setting were ideal for the child and caregiver. Through reflective journaling, the caregiver notes feelings of inadequacy, hesitation, and fear when discussing sensitive topics with her daughter, but found that the support of the book created a shared space that challenging conversations could happen at home.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Baby Girl, it’s time to get ready for bed and it’s your turn to pick the story tonight.” The mother sits down heavily in the old rocker after a long day of doctors’ appointments, karate classes, and household chores. The young girl finishes putting on her favorite mermaid pajamas and heads to the shelves lined with books. The five-year-old has over 100 books to choose from, board books, picture books, chapter books, classics, fairy tales, award winners, and fresh-off-the-press stories. She picks up a favorite, one that has been read time and time again, but then a different story catches her eye. This is one that Mom just put on her shelf last week. She grabs the book, hugs it tightly to her body and crawls into Mom’s lap.

“Can we read this one tonight, Mommy?”

The mother sleepily opens her eyes, spies the new title, and smiles faintly to herself. She has been waiting for the day this story would be chosen. “Of course, we can, love.” They snuggle close and begin to read.

Educators carry a heavy load. As a teacher I felt constantly stressed, overwhelmed, and a sense of inadequacy as an endless stream of questions filled my thoughts: Did we reach today’s objective? Are we falling behind in math? Am I teaching enough social emotional skills? With all my good intentions, I still felt as if I was falling short. These feelings have been mirrored in motherhood. The load of a parent weighs heavy: have they gotten enough nutrients? Are they going to bed on time? Am I teaching them how to be a good person? Raising and rearing young ones has been the primary focus of my life.

As I entered my graduate studies, I had completed five years as a working professional, and took some time off to be a stay-at-home mom. My mornings were filled with diaper changes, nursery rhymes, and juggling little ones while making dinner. When the kids were tucked into bed, I would pull out my computer and write discussion posts, practice administering reading assessments, and even tutor older kids through video technology. Each of my courses had a strong emphasis on social justice in the classroom and taught me, a future reading specialist, how to choose literature that was authentic and accurate representations of various cultures and people of color. I was introduced to new books and websites that gave me a plethora of inclusive and multicultural stories that I could read to my students- but... wait! I didn't have any students. I wasn't actively teaching. I was a stay-at-home mom. How would I be able to apply all my new knowledge and resources?

So, I taught my most important students. I taught my kids. From the comfort of our home, snuggled in jammies, eating snacks, and between episodes of children's shows, I opened books to my little ones, and I began to experience a new understanding of my role as a teacher and how it overlaps with my role as a mom.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine what happens when a child with emergent reading skills reads diverse and multicultural texts in the home with their caregiver. This is significant because there is very limited research on multicultural texts read in the home, with most research focused on the school setting. Multicultural texts have been shown to help build empathy and understanding of other cultures (Pattnaik,

2003; Vasquez, 2007), and these skills can be practiced at home before children reach school-age.

The work of many prominent researchers such as Nieto (1992) and Banks (1993) brought about the current focus on multicultural education within schools. Nieto developed a framework to support all students to be successful regardless of race, while also acknowledging the need to reform schools to remove structural factors that promote prejudice and racism. Banks created the Five Dimensions of Multiculturalism, which are used to provide educators a framework for supporting multicultural education within the school. These dimensions include Content Integration, Knowledge Construction, Equity Pedagogy, Prejudice Reduction, and Empowering School Culture and Social Structure.

As an educator I have found many resources for addressing a class of students with varying cultures and identities and responding to their needs to provide greater success for each child. I have read articles that teach teachers how to be more culturally aware and lays out “dos and do nots” when it comes to multicultural education in the classroom (Pattnaik, 2003; Jones & Miranda, 2021; Angelo & Dixey, 2001). There has been research to document the journey of educators as they reflect inward on their own practices to remove racism from their own teaching and to completely reconceptualize social justice in education (Browne & Jean-Marie G, 2023; Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021). As an educator, I felt supported in navigating my own internal quest to become the culturally responsive teacher that I long to be in the classroom.

Despite this feeling of empowerment professionally, I found a lack of resources as a parent of young children. Throughout my journey I’ve looked back through my past and seen ways in which I was reinforced in the system of racism, that I was not able to

look outward from my own bubble and comprehend a bigger, more complex world, than my own middle-class suburban Western American lifestyle. While I was making inner changes, I longed to make conscious choices in my parenting to allow for my children to have an accurate and authentic global understanding of other people. But I didn't know what to do to achieve this goal. I was running two parallel identities: my teacher self and my mom self and this research question is where my identities collided. I decided to study the process of reading authentic multicultural books with my five-year-old daughter and analyze our conversations and her responses to these books.

Educators of medical students have found a hidden curriculum that students do not feel prepared for when they enter the field: the ability to have conversations with patients that are emotional, grim, and possibly about the death of a loved one (Browning et al., 2007). Conversations with challenging topics is a universal challenge that requires skills that may have overlap from field to field. Is there a space for the research done regarding having hard conversations with children in the classroom to have a place in assisting parents communicating with their child at home?

Statement of Research Problem and Question

The case study was designed to provide an authentic and safe environment in which my emergent reader could explore multicultural texts at home with her caregiver. The main objective of the study is to discover what happens when a kindergartner is exposed to diverse multicultural read alouds in the home with a caregiver? From this original question, the research also explored other sub questions such as the following: How does the child relate and respond to a text with a character who looks like them? How does the child relate and respond to a text with a character who does not have

obvious similarities? How does the child respond when more complex themes are presented in a story?

When I started my project, I didn't anticipate how much my own thoughts and feelings would be important in data collection and analysis. While reviewing the data I added two more sub questions that viewed the caregiver role in the case study. How does a parent react verbally to a child's question about complex themes in a story? How does a parent react internally to a child's question about complex themes in a story? Although unanticipated, these questions were important to explore as the case study progressed.

Story of the Question

A quick stroll through the "Parenting" section of Barnes & Noble will elicit a huge range of books that offer advice and knowledge to parents on the "best way" to raise their children. Often these books will have evidence-based theory or professional authors, but not necessarily. Parents are left looking for help in navigating an 18+ year journey without a manual. What does the African American father tell his thirteen-year-old son when he is stopped by the cops on the way home from school for "suspicious behavior"? How does the conservative Christian mom respond when her seventeen-year-old daughter announces her desire for a gender transition? What does the caregiving aunt say to her now permanently placed children after the death of their parents? How does one address and explain abuse? How do you teach your child about America's history of enslaving people? What should a parent say when a child comes home and talks about the "retarded kid" at school? The Middle Eastern parents of a third grader could be stuck trying to explain why their child is being accused of committing a terrorist attack that was done years before their child was born.

In some ways, this case study was created for selfish reasons. I wanted to improve my parenting to give my daughter a broader cultural perspective. Yet in my own perusal of the books at Barnes & Noble, as well as my discussions with other parents, I found a lot of debate and tension around books that were being used (or banned) in schools. Multicultural literature seemed to be a car that both parents and school staff are grappling for the steering wheel and veering the car from side to side. This firestorm coats many pages of American news reports over the last few years.

As early as 2003, a Virginia based parental group has been actively advocating against controversial books in public education. Parents Against Bad Books in Schools (PABBIS) created lists of books that should not be shared with students according to their perceived standard of decency. Their website contains a list of over 1,300 books that PABBIS believes are controversial and should not be read in school (PABBIS, 2007). The blog style website reviews books that have been placed in school libraries that they deem are inappropriate for children, and then will use quotes and summaries from the book to explain the reasons behind this determination of indecency. Many themes that are considered indecent are sexual, including sexual identity, sexual acts, and nudity. They also flag books for language and drug use.

More recently (Hixenbaugh, 2022) an article displayed on NBC news website about 50 books that Texas parents are lobbying to have banned from schools with nearly all “related to titles dealing with racism, gender or sexuality.” In Tampa, Florida, a book freeze was enacted, at the beginning of the 2022 school year, based on a new law that requires all incoming books to be pre-approved by state-certified media specialists. This freeze prevents the scheduling of book fairs, any form of book donations, and teachers

adding books to their own classroom libraries (Golgowski, 2022). It appears that books are under attack. Text selection has become a crucial task for educators with parents lobbying for and against a variety of books.

Conversely, there are many on the opposite side of the debate that feel a ban on books within school libraries is harmful to students. The New Jersey Education Association (NJEA, 2022) posted a statement regarding such book bans stating their concern for the direct attack on the values of democracy and freedom of speech based on a censorship of books in schools. Their statement concludes with, “History never celebrates individuals who ban books or societies that attempt to squelch freedom and access to information... We call on all Americans who value freedom, democracy and truth to stand against these efforts to deny our children access to important books.” Organizations are fighting the barrage of attacks on inclusive and diverse books in schools.

With the loud voices on both sides of the debate, there was a space of conflict that lends itself to research. A common thread in the debate seems to be parents feeling that their personal values are under attack by book selectors in schools (PABBIS, 2007). Are inclusive and diverse books that show an alternative set of family values influencing children to change and leave their parent values and embrace that of the book? Are the fears of these parents well founded? What if the parent exposed the child to the alternative view while they are at home? These questions swirled in my mind as I considered my own home. Do I offer my children books that teach about the world, or do I censor too strictly? Am I creating a space where we can discuss controversial, complex,

or heavy topics? I knew she would hear them in school, but was I building the culture I wanted to build for her at home?

I found a place of fear in myself that kept me from bringing diverse content into our daily stories, but this directly conflicted with my belief that such conversations are essential for my child's development. I wanted to push that responsibility to someone else! Her teacher, the media, her friends, even a school counselor could handle those hard conversations about race, sexual identity, families that are different than ours, people who are experiencing incarceration, or the vast impact of America's history of slavery on our world today. I didn't want to do it. I was afraid to rock the boat of our comfort.

Yet our comfort zone rarely provides growth. I tipped the boat. I plunged headlong into a project that would bring me face to face with purposefully challenging conversations as I brought home a box of fresh books from the local library and invited my daughter to join me while we read.

Sociocultural Framework

The study has been completed using a sociocultural framework. More commonly seen in psychology research, but often cross referenced in the educational field of study, the sociocultural framework allows the researcher to focus on the building of culture within the home and between the child and caregiver. This framework considers that the child and family are already immersed in a life with a backstory of ancestors, individual and familial experiences, family values, and a style of communication that are inherently unique to each participant. The sociocultural framework allows culture to be viewed as a dynamic and constantly evolving construct. It opens the doors to view the variables of culture that are likely to have an impact on the implications of the study (Eshun &

Boburka, 2017). While sensitive topics are addressed in the study, the sociocultural component can help bring the variables of culture into focus to look for trends among the participants of the case study.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter two will review the role of the sociocultural framework and how this informs the basis of the case study. It will also discuss the literature about the impact of multicultural literature in the classroom and the connections it has with literature in the home. There will be a bridge between these two topics as it informs the space that is being explored throughout the case study. Chapter three describes the context of the case study, including details about our family life and a profile of my daughter. This section will outline the methodology and how data is collected throughout the study. Chapter four will analyze the data through triangulation of topics. Each section will review trends that were discovered. Chapter five will conclude with implications for further study in the field of multicultural read alouds being used in the home.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A part of life is having difficult conversations that are uncomfortable and emotional. Issham, Bradbury-Jones, and Hewison (2019) conducted a study that dove deep into the implications of children engaging in such research and defined sensitive conversations as “emotive, personal topics, such as death, abuse, intimate relationships and sexuality, which are difficult to talk about because of their complexity or because discussing them is not permissible in light of social and historical norms” (Isham, Bradbury-Jones & Hewison, 2019 as cited in Powell et al., 2020 p. 326). Best practice regarding the teaching and approach of ‘sensitive conversations’ in both home and school were the driving point of this research.

Throughout this literature review the following topics will be discussed. While it isn’t possible to fully cover the entire breadth of multiculturalism, the review will first address the foundational works that the study has drawn upon. Secondly, it will look at the benefits educators have seen in using multicultural and diverse books with students, and specifically how educators have successfully used multicultural literature to support addressing challenging topics. Then it will review types of sensitive topics that may be handled between family members and how those conversations have been approached within various studies. Finally, a discussion of what research is available specifically regarding multicultural texts in the home.

Foundations of Multicultural Education

Teachers are faced with the challenge of balancing a classroom of children ranging in backgrounds, cultures, values, and experiences. Teachers strive to find ways

for children to be represented and feel “seen” in their classroom with an emphasis on following best pedagogical practices for sustaining cultural identities (Brown et al., 2019; Angelo & Dixey, 2001; Vasilache, 2020). In her book, *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Asking a different question*, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021) describes culturally relevant pedagogy as “a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically” (p. 29). This current research and emphasis are built upon the backs of multicultural education that rocketed forward decades ago.

In the early 1990s, multicultural education was brought forward as a theoretical framework. Theorists such as Sonia Nieto (1992) and James A. Banks (1993) provided a foundation for affirming diversity in the classroom. Nieto called for school reform and fostering environments that promoted all student success. Banks presented five dimensions of multicultural education: knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, empowering school culture and social structure, and content integration. His work opened the door for further research to spring from these dimensions. The multiculturalism framework emphasizes the need for members of minority groups to maintain their distinctive collective identities and practices. As educational politics were moving towards a core curriculum, Ogbu argued that the cultural diversity among minority cultures would have greater difficulty crossing cultural boundaries to learn with a core curriculum implemented that supported “the American mainstream culture” (Ogbu, 1992 p. 5).

According to author Christine Bennett (2001) multicultural education rests on four broad principles:

(a) the theory of cultural pluralism; (b) ideals of social justice and the end of racism, sexism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination; (c) affirmations of culture in the teaching and learning process; and (d) visions of educational equity and excellence leading to high levels of academic learning for all children and youth (p. 173).

Using a multicultural curriculum can positively impact students' development of cultural identity, intergroup connection, and democratic understanding, as noted in a quantitative study done among a group of 117 university students. Martin (2014) found that by using the multicultural curriculum within an elective sociology class there was a greater frequency of positive cross-racial interactions. Multicultural curriculums have become more prominent within the past few years and resources have become more accessible across the country (Doran & Singh, 2018; VandeHei-Carter et al., 2021; Wernick et al., 2021).

Diverse and Multicultural Literature in Schools

Educators use books in the classroom to support learning on a variety of topics and across different curriculums. Some books are informational, giving facts and details about the world, while others are narratives that tell a story.

Stories are the way our minds make sense of our lives and world. Stories create our views of the world and the lens through which we construct meaning about ourselves and others. We tell stories to make connections, form relationships, and create community with others (Short, 2012 p. 9).

Short's insight points to an unexpected difficulty: Multicultural literature can be challenging to define. All diversity could be considered multicultural and thus all

literature would fall into the category of multicultural, however in practice multicultural literature tends to be a subset of all literature (Sims-Bishop, 1997). Common practice among educators, librarians, authors and experts is to focus multicultural literature on “the call for inclusion and curricular reform by groups that have traditionally been marginalized in this society” (Bishop, 1997 p. 2). Bishop cautions against using this as a full definition because it can create a sense of “the other people” and reinforce old social patterns of white middle class Americans as the norm. In her own words she states, “I believe that multicultural literature should be defined in a comprehensive and inclusive manner; that is, it should include books that reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world” (p. 3). She explains that her own work focuses on literature by or related to people of color because she believes race to be one of the most divisive issues in society. Her hope is that educators who adopt multicultural literature will contribute to alleviating the effects of such a serious problem (Bishop, 1997).

Multicultural literature and critical texts can be used to help teachers build a shared understanding through a story as they read a book together and anchor the characters through discussion. Sensitive topics can be discussed and handled as hardships arise in the lives of students. Bowen and Schutt (2007) explained that “adults instinctively wish to shelter children from the harsh realities of life,” (p. 4). However, through their research they found that written literature on tough topics can help children in a variety of ways by providing comfort and support to those experiencing hardships, promoting understanding and empathy and even allows them to take control of their own problems and find a solution. The sensitive topics that are explored in this research

include family issues, war and violence, racial and cultural issues, and death (Bowen & Schutt, 2007). Lewison cites Gallo's 1994 work *Censorship, a Threat to Reading, Learning and Thinking* that states "If we do not provide our students with a variety of literature - however controversial - and teach them to read it and discuss it critically, we cannot hope that they will ever develop into sensitive, thoughtful, and reasonable adults" (Gallo as cited in Lewison et al., 2002 p. 224).

Benefits of Multicultural Literature

Many researchers have explored ways in which multicultural literature has benefitted students within the classroom. O'Neil (2010) asserts that diverse books can promote new ways of thinking among children, as well as allowing students to consider alternative perspectives from their own. The same work also shows that using multicultural literature can help break through cultural stereotypes (O'Neil, 2010). With increasing emphasis on emotional regulation, multicultural literature has been demonstrated to nurture emotional, social, creative and cognitive development while affirming the identity of everyone as well as promoting greater empathy and understanding of others (Adam, Barratt-Pugh, & Haig, 2017; Piper, 2019; Vasilache, 2020).

Children benefit from building feelings of caring and acceptance and are encouraged to take more risks when exposed to multicultural stories, and they can also become more motivated when they feel seen in literature (Jones, 2007). As explained by Jones:

When students see visions of people who look and live like those of their culture (both currently and historically), it not only breeds interest but also provides

motivation for students to believe they can achieve, and that their achievement is not only expected but valued (p. 16).

Critical interactive read alouds have made an impact on Black students' racial identity development and have shown to give opportunities to critically discuss and understand historical and current Black identity development (Piper, 2019). Teacher researcher Vivian Vasquez has worked with lower elementary age students in small group settings, working through critical texts, to demonstrate that age does not seem to be a barrier in thinking critically and discussing alternative perspectives (Vasquez, 2007). Another teacher researcher found that across seven elementary classrooms within three various schools, she was able to read a text about incarcerated loved ones and the criminal justice system. Her project showed that children can connect and empathize with characters in the story (Oslick, 2013).

Teachers are continuing their own journey in learning how to use multicultural education and literature to explore building their own identity and improving their pedagogical practices (Ciampa & Reisboard, 2021). Additionally, teacher research has given a great number of qualitative studies (Klefstad & Martinez, 2013; Bowen & Schutt, 2007; Tenorio, 2005) that illustrate how multicultural literature can be used to address sensitive topics such as race, global calamity and hardship, as well as stigmas and stereotypes. As noted by Lewison's case study of four teachers using critical texts to address sensitive topics, teachers felt such conversations put them in a risky place where they weren't always able to anticipate questions that students would bring up during discussions (Lewison et al., 2002), but other teachers have found the work among critical and diverse texts with young children to be liberating (Vasquez, 2007).

In 2005 a class of first graders was read a story called *The Colors of Us* by Karen Katz to recognize that “brown” is a whole range of colors that is a combination of many other colors. Then the class read *All the Colors of the Earth* by Sheila Hamanaka and were invited to bring an object from home that matched their skin color. The teacher, Rita Tenorio, used these stories to discuss race and skin color with her students to help build an understanding of skin tone variation while hoping to break down racial stereotypes (Tenorio, 2005).

Other teachers are using multicultural books by embedding them into their curriculum and presenting multiple perspectives that include various cultural identities. This is seen in the article published by Harper and Brand (2010) that gives teachers practical strategies for infusing multicultural literature into the curriculum. Concept maps, vocabulary cubes, Venn diagrams, and open-portraits are used as supporting comprehension strategies that can be employed with multicultural literature (Harper & Brand, 2010). In Beaty’s (1997) book *Building Bridges with Multicultural Picture Books for Children 3-5*, she explains how children bond with the characters in multicultural books, and this text-to-self connection she terms as book bonding. The book bonding strategy is used to develop appreciation and acceptance of a more global society. With a focus on cultural sensitivity, two professors from the University of Wisconsin-Stout offered a full-day workshop to present book bonding to teachers using multicultural literature. The teachers were then observed sharing the stories with their students and asking key questions about the lives of the characters followed by a discussion and extension activity. The conclusions of the study found that rich cultural stories help

young children develop respect for one another and affirm the experience of children from diverse backgrounds (Klefsaad & Martinez, 2013).

Books on sensitive issues can be used to build complex thinking and problem solving (Bowen & Schutt, 2007). Teachers have found success in navigating calamity and hardships, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, by using multicultural literature to support times of crisis (Minkel, 2020). Amidst the chaos of the pandemic, a group of educators worked through an afterschool program to distribute 410 high quality multicultural children's books to the homes of families within a low-socioeconomic community. They built book bags that included a postcard that parents could use to provide feedback on the program. They also contacted families through surveys and phone interviews to see how the books were used in the home during the shutdown. They found that there is value in increasing access to multicultural books in the home and providing support to parents to engage in shared reading with their children (Gunn, Bennett & Peterson, 2022).

Many other ways to incorporate diverse stories into the classroom are being explored, researched, and analyzed every day. The benefits of multicultural literature and its uses in addressing sensitive or challenging topics are vast and likely innumerable, with a constant growth as more authors put a boundless number of books on the shelves and teachers are picking them up and reading them to students.

Sensitive Topics

Parents, guardians, and caregivers are faced with sensitive topics that lead to feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, confusion, conflicting beliefs, polarizing societal opinions, and countless other reasons that a topic might be difficult to address at home. If the topic is private, stressful, or sacred and generates an emotional response, it can be

considered a sensitive topic (McCosker et al., 2001). These sensitive topics can be triggering or highly charged (Freed, Frost & Simmons, 2021). Each parent will likely have a different reaction and response to such topics due to the cultural variability and uniqueness of the family. Topics that relate to the books selected for this thesis are race and social justice, gender and sexuality, income disparity, disability, and familial incarceration.

Race and Social Injustice

Studies show that children start to show their own-race bias as early as three to six months old (Apfalbaum, Norton & Sommers, 2012). When presented with pictures of faces of their own and other races, babies showed a greater liking and affinity towards those faces that were the same color as their caregivers. Bar-Haim concluded that early preference for own-race faces may contribute to biases related to race later in life (Bar-Haim et al., 2006). Race and ethnicity are prevalent early on in a child's life and even if the caregiver isn't discussing it, the child is likely to form understanding and viewpoints from their environment.

Many systems in our society are influenced by racial structures that lead to systemic racism that elevates some while diminishing other populations of people (Freed, Frost & Simmons, 2021; van der Valk, 2018; Hagerman, 2019). Historically, the United States of America has socially unjust ways of treating people such as the influence of slavery, (Hinton, 2022), the effects of racial segregation (Ananat, 2011; Rothwell, 2012), Native American mistreatment (Chaudhri et al., 2015; Sleeper-Smith & Andersen, 2015), and abuse of Asian and Asian Americans (Lightfoot & Lee, 2014). Researchers Gibson-Davis and Percheski (2021) did extensive research on the effect of historical redlining of

neighborhoods and the effect that the great recession of 2008 had on African American and Hispanic communities brought a significant number of families into debt without any assets. Their research showed that many lenders targeted families in these communities causing greater loss for these populations with limited ability of recovery (Percheski et al., 2021).

Sexuality and Gender

Author and clinical psychologist Savin-Williams (2001) gathered anecdotes and experiences from 164 LGBTQ+ adolescents and used their stories to help build a resource for parents in his book *Mom, Dad, I'm Gay: how families negotiate coming out*. Other research has been done by the advocacy group Parent Resource for Increasing Sexual Minority Support (PRISMS) to create an intervention to build self-efficacy for parents who are supporting a sexual minority child. The data collected within their study focused on 84 parents of sexual minority adolescents and provided them with a five-module online intervention. Although this study did not bring about a significant association between the use of the PRISMS online intervention program and building parental self-efficacy, it does present a need for further research among parents of sexual minority youth (Goodman & Israel, 2020).

In the health and medical field, the *Journal of child and adolescent psychiatric nursing* published an article in 2010 that measured items of data quantitatively from previous qualitative studies with 245 participants and found that family acceptance is a predictor of general health and self-esteem for LGBTQ adolescents (Ryan et al., 2010). Other research has looked towards intergenerational conflict as a barrier between parent and child communication regarding sexuality (Mulholland et al., 2021). This Australian

study looked at the impact of intergenerational conflict on families who had migrated from other countries and concluded the conflict often stemmed from differences between social norms, customs and values from the originating country and the current country. The research also found that it made a difference when conversations about sexuality were discussed as creative and imaginative negotiations and not viewed as intergenerational tensions, thus resulting in the conversations yielding more positive resources and outcomes (Mulholland et al., 2021).

Other conversations related to sexuality that might be found challenging and present similar intergenerational conflict are the gender identification, sexual orientation, or nonbinary gender selection of surrounding people in the environment.

Wealth and Income Disparity

There is a wide range of wealth and income among individuals and families, and this disparity can be complicated to understand from all perspectives. Fagereng's (2021) research found that family background can significantly affect a child's likelihood of obtaining wealth if their parents were wealthy regardless of genetic dispositions (Fagereng et al., 2021). In the United States the resources that children need to succeed are often tied to wealth (Percheski et al., 2021).

In 2006, Films Media Group produced an hour-long film following seven elementary aged children from different parts of the world and "focused on the plight of the underprivileged across the world." This film case study gave insight into how children experiencing poverty view their own world through interviews. The ethnographer concluded that as children reach a certain age, they start to realize poverty "could rob them of aspiring to their dreams" (Guinness & St. Vincent Welch, 2006).

Discussing wealth inequality with children and explanations of one's own family versus that of another can be challenging and sensitive for parents to navigate especially based on the disagreement among policy makers on what is an appropriate level of income disparity (Percheski et al., 2021).

Physical Differences and Disability

Some families are in the position where they (or a loved one) are experiencing a disability or a physical difference, and yet other families are wholly unfamiliar with the different lifestyle that is present when one has a disability. A qualitative study from the United Kingdom (Zelihić et al., 2021) interviewed 18 parents of adolescents with visible differences and the trending themes found among these parents in discussing the adolescents' differences. It was found that the setting for conversations proved important and many parents felt uncomfortable raising appearance issues and feared that it would fuel the child's concern about their appearance. The result of the study stresses a need for additional support to facilitate open communication about physical differences among parents and their children (Zelihić et al., 2021).

Harkins explained that when one has a disability, they are marginalized from society and “forced to the fringes” leading to an exclusion from the mainstream of society because of power imbalances within the system (Harkins Monaco et al., 2022). A case study of a young boy from Mexico with Lissencephaly - West Syndrome and his mother's experience with stigmas and discrimination explains an example of life as a mother of a child with a disability like this:

There is a lot of misinformation in society and that talking about children with disabilities should be treated with total normality ‘we should not talk about this, it

is delicate,' it is a phrase that silences and does not allow information to reach us and this becomes a discriminatory cycle, where we fall into stigmatizing attitudes because we do not know how to deal with the subject, nobody teaches us anything and at a social level, we are only taught not to look and much less, to ask.”

(Translated by Content Engine, L. L. C., 2022 p. 2)

With disability and neurodiversity, at least, there are many resources available specifically for parents of children with a disability or neurodiversity such as the works by Camarata (2014) whose book *Late-talking Children: a symptom or a stage?* gives support to parents who are experiencing concerns about their child’s progress through speech milestones (Camarata, 2014). Another example is the work of Muddle (2022) who found success in helping parents of children with intellectual disabilities by engaging in parent support groups and discovered that attachment between parent and child was significantly important to parents within these groups (Muddle et al., 2022). Other works have shown similar types of support for parents (Doak, 2021; Martin Zion & Martin Zion, 2007; Muddle et al., 2022; Trindade et al., 2020).

Incarceration

According to a press release from the Prison Policy Initiative (2023), almost 2 million people are in a criminal justice system. This includes those being held in state prisons, federal prisons, local jails, juvenile correctional facilities, immigration detention facilities, military prisons, civil commitment centers, and state psychiatric hospitals (Sawyer & Wagner, 2023). Geller’s research (2013) used the ongoing Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study (2014) and analyzed the data to look at father-child relationships of fathers that were incarcerated. It was found that a significant decrease in

probability of visitations and co-residence between the father and child was likely to occur after the father was incarcerated.

Another quantitative study (Geller, 2012) using the same data set, found that children with incarcerated fathers had a significant increase in aggressive behaviors as well as an increase in attention problems. Geller suggested that children of incarcerated fathers will likely need additional support from caregivers, teachers, and social service providers due to a greater likelihood of family hardship (Geller, 2012). Other studies address the effects on children when a loved one has been incarcerated (Goldman, 2019; Murray, 2014), yet there is not significant research about ways to approach conversations about incarceration with children.

Addressing Hard Topics at Home using Multicultural Literature: The Bridge

The educational world is finding multicultural literature to be beneficial to children in so many ways and can be used to build personal identity and cultural awareness (Piper, 2019). Parents could lean into the benefits of multicultural literature by intentionally choosing to read more diverse books to their children at home. This bridge between school and home - regarding multicultural education and literature - has been explored in research, (Bennett et al., 2021; Pattnaik, 2003; Chase & Morrison, 2018) but there is room for expansion.

In 2003, Pattnaik published a review of literature filled with ideas to support parent involvement in multicultural education at home. The article discusses creating cultural experiences at home, participating in advocacy activities, and collaborating with teachers on curriculum ideas (Pattnaik, 2003). More recently Johnson (2016) explored what would happen in a critical family book club, using the Critical Race Theory to drive

his exploration of how parents, children, and educators would discuss race and power in a book club setting. During the COVID-19 pandemic, children were forced to be home and teachers reached out to bring the classroom into the living room. Bennett (2021) explains the process one district took to facilitate conversations between parents of elementary aged students and found success in increasing family engagement by delivering high quality multicultural books to families during the global crisis (Bennett et al., 2021).

Related concurrently, there has been a push within the homeschooling community to include a greater multicultural curriculum to support students that are autonomous in their content selection (Chase & Morrison, 2018). Chase and Morrison (2018) provided a content analysis of a magazine *Growing Without Schooling* (GWS) that is targeting families within the unschooling community. Chase and Morrison found that the content within the first 19 issues (1977-1981) showed those children who are homeschooled, also known as unschoolers, were rarely given opportunities to engage in perspectives of multicultural and marginalized groups, and that there is a gap in research between homeschooling and multicultural education (Chase & Morrison, 2018).

Parents have also been given greater voice in educational research regarding how schools represent cultural festivals and events with a need for continual exploration into this partnership between parents and school (Dewilde et al., 2021). Dewilde et al. (2021) interviewed minority families in Norway about their feelings regarding cultural events within school. Although such events have been criticized as counterproductive (Hoffman, 1996), the interviews within the study found that the parents believed the events to be an important space for expanding cultural identities and expanding the gap between school and home (Dewilde et al., 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, multicultural education has been heavily studied and the foundation of many research studies. Specifically, teachers have used its tenets to look closely at the effects of authentic multicultural literature and the benefits it has for students. There is research that supports the use of multicultural texts in the classroom to address complex themes, sensitive topics, and critical thinking. Sensitive topics have been defined and examples of such topics discussed with relevant research surrounding the importance of having conversations about sensitive topics. Finally, there was a review of the sparse literature supporting using multicultural texts in the home to address sensitive topic conversations between child and caregiver. This gap and lack of empirical research is where this case study fits into the scholarly world.

Chapter 3

Research Design

As noted by Gillham (2000) a case study, although difficult to define, can be seen as “a unit of human activity embedded in the real world, which can only be studied or understood in context, which exists in the here and now, that merges with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw” (p. 1). A case study strives to investigate human activity in its most organic state and look for the trends that emerge. Case studies have a qualitative dimension and rely on description and inference to draw conclusions, and although they often will have a quantitative element, the qualitative aspect is primary in the data collection. Often these means are considered “soft” in scientific research, yet Gillham argues that such interpreted facts have their place among quantitative research and can often allow for preliminary research that will bring about more formal research later.

For this project, it is a case study of myself and my daughter. It is an exploration of our lives as they exist right now. It is embedded in a busy family with three kids and my strong desire to raise them as culturally conscious individuals. This case study wrapped around dinner times and after school extracurriculars. It wove its way through a brand-new baby entering the family, and new skills my daughter was learning in school. It grew and morphed as I studied myself as a mom and how I interact with my oldest child through literature. It became filled with conversations in the car and in the bathtub. It captured my journaling thoughts, like a dream catcher, as I sat up at night trying to figure out my next parenting move to address the challenging topics of life. Although it will never capture everything, the case study framework allowed me to look through this

project from various lenses and spaces and its qualitative nature gave permission for all of it to “count” as data.

Context of the Study

This research study will be a case study following my daughter and her responses to multicultural texts being read aloud to her in the home by her caregiver. The case subject is Felicity, a five-and-a-half-year-old female living in southern New Jersey. She is in her first few months of kindergarten after completing one year of public preschool. Felicity lives at home with her mother, father, toddler-aged brother, newborn baby sister, and her maternal aunt. Felicity’s father is biracial (Black and White) and I, her mother, am White. We participate actively in a Christian church where Felicity attends a Sunday school class. When asked, Felicity states that she enjoys spending time with her family, swimming, going on trips and playing with her cats.

At the onset of the study Felicity portrayed the following reading skills, but as she progressed through the data collection, her time in kindergarten improved her skills each day. Felicity is an emergent reader with a knowledge of her upper- and lower-case letters and their phonemic sounds. She can create rhymes and can decode some CVC words following vowel patterns she’s learning at school. She enjoys writing words based on the letter/sound correspondence knowledge and loves to write notes for her family and friends with invented spelling. We take turns reading a bedtime story to Felicity every night and her aunt will often read to her for a sustained period during the day. Her favorite books include *I’m a Unicorn* by Mallory Loehr, *Whatever After: Cold as Ice* by Sarah Mlynowski, and *Barbie in Princess Power* by Marsha Griffin (adapted by Kristen L Depken).

Although Felicity is the child in the case study, I also will gather data about myself, so a profile of me will enhance the background of the study. I am a thirty-one-year-old, white female, who was born and raised in a suburban home in western America. I am the fourth of twelve children, and for most of my childhood my mother was home, and my dad was the primary breadwinner. I have fond memories of reading. Our home was filled with bookshelves lined with age-appropriate books from various genres. My mom would often read chapter books aloud to us during long road trips as we traveled to places like Disneyland, the Four Corners, and the red rock state parks in Utah. Our family would read from the Bible and other religious texts each night. From a very early age, I was expected to read verses aloud and follow along as my siblings and parents would read and discuss these scriptural texts.

My love of reading and learning was encouraged at home, and I knew that I would grow up to become a teacher. I taught upper elementary school for five years, and during my second year of teaching, Felicity was born. She loved coming to my classroom and exploring the whiteboard markers, the books on the shelves, and pulling apart all my sticky notes. I believe that I have instilled my love of learning and zeal for reading into Felicity and she brags that her mom is a teacher and a reading specialist. When I invited her to help me with the case study, she began to talk about “Our Thesis” with her family and friends and provide them with details about the project.

The Project: Procedures and Methods

After having my third child, I was at home during the day in the fall of 2022. This is when our study started. I chose six books (that later became seven) that I felt highlighted multicultural themes and topics. Over the course of a few weeks, Felicity and

I read the books together. I allowed Felicity to choose the book that we would focus on for that day. I reminded her that she can make connections and ask questions during our reading time and that I was happy to talk about anything relating to the story that she wanted to discuss. At the end of the reading, I invited Felicity to create some sort of response to the story (drawing, writing, etc.) Felicity explained her response in her own words to me and I asked her questions to clarify as needed.

At the end of each read aloud section, I recorded notes about our discussions. I reflected on my feelings as the parent and how I responded to Felicity's questions or themes that popped up during the story. This journal contained my feelings, quotes from Felicity that I found impactful, as well as incidental moments during our day where relevant conversations or actions occurred.

Data Sources

I used three main methods of data collection for this case study: audio recordings of our read alouds, images and or video of Felicity's response to the stories, and my anecdotal notes recorded in my journal.

Audio Recordings and Transcriptions

At the onset of each story, I would begin a voice memo on my phone that would record Felicity and I reading and discussing the story together. These recordings were then reviewed for data analysis, looking for themes and trends that appeared during the readings. Using audio enabled me to capture Felicity's exact words without paraphrase or editing. This also allowed me to review my responses to the complex topics verbatim without sugar coating or down-playing what I had said during the story.

Felicity's Responses

This data collection is more open-ended because Felicity had the freedom to choose how she responded after reading the story. A formal reader response originates within the Transactional Theory and allows reading teachers (or in this case a mom/teacher researcher) to look carefully at the interaction the child is having with the text to see how the reader is communicating and creating an experience with the literature. Reader response gives insight into the type of interaction at play, either an efferent stance - fact oriented and surface level responses, or an aesthetic stance - filled with emotional personal responses (Rosenblatt, 1982). One recent study used the reader's response framework in a classroom of first grade students who were given an opportunity to respond to a picture within a picture book and asked, "Where would you be in the picture?" The qualitative research concluded that using reader responses allows teachers to better understand children's world and lived experiences (Scherer, 2022). Reader responses can be a wealth of qualitative data to be used in analysis of literacy skills, perceptions, and learning.

For our data collection, I made suggestions to Felicity that gave ideas on the ways she could respond to the story. She could draw, write, talk about, make a video, act out, use blocks, tell a friend, or any other way she chose to respond to the story. These responses were recorded in the most appropriate way based on the modality Felicity chose for her response such as images or video recordings.

Research Journal

The primary research question was focused on Felicity and her response to the stories, however as I began to take anecdotal notes, I found myself reflecting on my own "teaching" and parenting. My own thoughts and feelings were put to paper in this journal

and this data was instrumental in bringing the trends and themes that emerged. The research journal was kept on my phone, so it was accessible from virtually any location. I would record stories and conversations that I had with Felicity that related both directly and indirectly to our project throughout the months I was actively collecting data.

Plan for Data Analysis

After all the data was collected, I took time to search for trends and themes that appeared across all three data sources. These trends and themes were triangulated and determined to be significant or not significant based on their appearance within the data sources. Audio recordings were listened to and transcribed as needed. Felicity's responses were viewed from various angles asking myself different questions to find evidence of themes within her feedback. My journal was read, highlighted, annotated, and reread again looking for connections and implications. The themes that emerged and that data analysis that supports them are discussed in chapter four.

Chapter 4

Data Collection and Analysis

Chapter four will dive into the data and review the findings that I found in the triangulation process between my transcriptions, Felicity's reader responses, and my research journal. Before the findings, I give an overview of the seven different reading sessions to provide context about the books and the setting of each reading. The findings section shows how Felicity responded to similarities and differences within the stories, her reactions to complex themes and sensitive topics, and an in-depth analysis of a series of conversations. Finally, I will give my own personal introspection and what I learned about myself through the process.

The data was collected over the winter of 2022-2023. Felicity and I read seven stories together in various settings of the home. The main research question is: *What happens when a kindergartner is exposed to diverse multicultural read alouds in the home with a caregiver?* I also looked at four sub-questions inside of the data.

- How does the child respond to similarities and differences with the characters in the story?
- How does the child react and respond to the complex themes/sensitive topics as they are discussed?
- How does the caregiver verbally react and respond to complex themes/sensitive topics as they are discussed?
- How does the caregiver internally react to discussing complex themes/sensitive topics with their young child?

In this section I share the context of what was happening in our home and the feelings and emotions that I felt or that I perceived Felicity was feeling. A self-case study is multifaceted with many factors affecting the data and I recognize that my analysis is likely biased due to my perspective as the mother of the home. A summary of each of the books is also included and key topics that were brought up during the readings.

Session 1: Going Down Home with Daddy

Saturday November 19, 2022, at 4:00 PM.

Felicity chose this book from the basket, and we sat down on the couch in our family room to read it together. Her aunt, Kinsey, was in the room with Felicity's new baby sister, Maddie, sitting on another part of the couch, and the baby was sleeping. Maddie was less than a month old, and I was less than a month postpartum, and Felicity had been feeling the strain of the family dynamics shifting as a new baby was brought into the family. We had not had a lot of time together with focused attention over the past few weeks so we both were excited to begin our journey of reading books together. After the reading Felicity discussed her feelings in a vlog (video blog) and then acted out her favorite scene from the book. She acted out the initial cousin reunion where the characters saw each other for the first time in over a year. Felicity lives far away from her own cousins and can see them about once a year when we travel to Utah.

Going Down Home with Daddy by Kelly Starling Lyons was published in 2019 and received a Caldecott Honor in 2020 for the illustrations. It tells the story of a family headed to their great-grandmother's house for an annual family reunion. The main character, Alan, is worried about not having anything to share with the family during the

large celebration ceremony. After riding with his father on a tractor through the cotton field, he considers his ancestors' history as enslaved people planting the cotton and uses the idea to present a tribute regarding his family's roots. Alan is happy with his presentation and can't wait to attend the reunion next year.

Key Topics for Discussion: family dynamics, race (African American), history of slavery

Session 2: *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners*

Tuesday November 22, 2022, at 7:30 AM.

Felicity and I were awake early before school with extra time before the bus came, so we chose to read one of our thesis books. We were sitting on the couch together in the family room with her aunt taking care of baby sister in the same room. We were both a bit sleepy in the early morning, and we had the time crunch of the bus coming, but overall, this reading had a positive environment. We felt that surge of excitement to share a new story together. Her reader response for this book was a vlog before she left for school. Since finishing data collection, Felicity has told me many times that this is her favorite book! I bought her a copy of her own that she likes to look through before she goes to bed.

Eyes that Kiss in the Corners by Joanna Ho, was published in 2021. It shares the feelings and reflections of a young Asian girl who notices that her eyes look different from her peers. Throughout the story she notices that mama has the same eyes as her as well as her Ama (grandmother) and her little sister. She tells of her own beauty and shows empowerment from herself and the strong women in her life.

Key Topics for Discussion: race (Asian), physical differences and appearances, women, and gender roles

Session 3: *And Tango Makes Three*

Saturday November 26, 2022, at 4:30 PM.

This was the Saturday following Thanksgiving. Felicity's little brother, Thomas, was in the hospital with RSV and her dad was there with him for a few days. Felicity and I were home with Kinsey and baby Maddie. We read this story in the family room on the couch and Felicity used her blocks on the floor for her reader's response. Felicity was happy and I was stressed, but I was grateful for a distraction from my son being in the hospital. Prior to reading this book, we had discussed the premise of the story, so she was excited to read this book together. After the reading she used blocks to create a nest and stuffed animals to represent the penguins. She explained her creation in a video recording that captured her feelings and understanding of this story.

And Tango Makes Three by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, was published in 2005 and is the story of two male penguins in the Central Park Zoo. The zookeeper notices that these penguins are inseparable and that they mimic nest building of the other couples but are unable to start their own family. The zookeeper gives them an egg to help it hatch and they create a family with their new baby chick, Tango. The book is based on a true story.

Key Topics for Discussion: family dynamics, sexual identity, LGBTQ rights, same-sex families

Session 4: *Visiting Day*

Tuesday November 29, 2022, at 7:00 PM.

Felicity and I read this story together while side by side on my king-sized bed. My husband, Andrew, was in the bed too, playing on his phone and not interrupting during the story, but he did interact when I asked him questions. At one point in our reading, I asked him if he knew anyone who had gone to jail, and he shared that his biological father spent a few days in jail for neglecting to pay child support. This brought the story to a more personal place that helped address the sensitive topic in a more focused manner. During this reading Felicity was trying to avoid bedtime, so she seemed to be dragging out the discussion and questions far beyond her typical story time. Overall, we were all in good spirits and ready to read another story together. After the reading Felicity did another vlog - it seemed to be her favorite reader response modality. She shared her impressions from the story and connections she made to the text before she headed off to bed.

Visiting Day by Jacqueline Woodson, was published in 2002. The story follows the preparations of a young girl preparing to visit her father. They have breakfast early, grandmother helps her get ready in her Sunday dress, and they take the bus ride to visit her dad who is in prison. The story is told in a lyrical fashion with the reader relying on the illustrations to know the nuances of what is happening within the story. It depicts the smiling faces as she is reunited with her father, but forlorn looks as she is pulled away when the visiting hours are over.

Key Topics for Discussion: incarceration, crime, race (African American), family dynamics

Session 5: *Last Stop on Market Street*

Wednesday November 30, 2022, at 7:45 PM.

We read this book the very next day, on my bed, and even closer to bedtime. I was feeling rushed to get things completed and Felicity was showing signs of boredom. We were a bit frustrated with each other and I ended up ignoring a lot of her comments and she took multiple opportunities to stand up and walk away during the story. We also have read this story before, so it was not a new book for her. Overall, we were feeling the burn out of data collection, plus the stress of parenting combined with the frustration of childhood. After the reading Felicity drew a picture in her journal of the bus and the soup kitchen. She explained the connections in a video where I asked questions about her drawing.

Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Peña, was published in 2015 and has received multiple awards including 2016 Newbery Medal, 2016 Caldecott Honor, and 2015 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor. It tells the story of young CJ and his grandmother on their trip across town through the public transit bus. CJ asks a lot of questions that address the different circumstances of those around him and his grandma responds with a positive way of seeing all people. At the end of the ride, they serve in the soup kitchen and CJ has a positive attitude towards the differences around him.

Key Topics for Discussion: inequity, differences in socioeconomic circumstances, food scarcity, kindness, and charity

Session 6: *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey*

Tuesday January 17, 2023, at 7:30 AM.

Following our session five, Felicity and I were both a bit burnt out from data collection. Plus, December was filled with weeks of viruses and infections alongside attempting to celebrate holidays with family. I had mentioned to Felicity many times that we had this book to read, but she had told me it was too long, and she was not ready to read it. Finally on a Tuesday morning nearly two months after our last session, I was able to convince her that it wasn't as long as it looked - it has a long foreword, and it is told in two languages - and we would be able to finish it before she went to school. She agreed and we sat down on a chair, with her on my lap, in the front room and read *Stepping Stones* while waiting for the bus. At the end of the story, she pulled out my binder filled with my former classroom pictures, and we talked about my students that were refugees with their own journeys. This story and moment made a large impact on Felicity, and she discussed it many times afterward. We did not have time to do her reader's response that morning, so her illustrations with rocks did not happen until a few weeks later. She used shiny rocks to create a boy and girl figure and explained that they were running away.

Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey by Margriet Ruurs, was published in 2016. The author discovered the artwork of Syrian artist Nizar Ali Badr who uses stones and rocks to create images of people. The foreword explains the journey it took to connect with Badr, find a translator, and create the story while working through language and distance barriers. The book is about a young girl, Rama, who lives in Syria, but her family is forced to flee due to war in her country. She depicts the life she loved in a home

she cherished before the war, and the sadness and fear that she experiences in finding refuge in Europe.

Key Topics for Discussion: refugee journeys, war, race (Syrian), fear and loss

Session 7: *You Are Enough: A Book About Inclusion*

Saturday February 11, 2023, at 4:30 PM.

This was our final session, and it was on a happy Saturday afternoon. We had spent the earlier part of the day doing yard work and prepping for the next day's Superbowl party to cheer on our team. Her brother, Thomas, had just taken a nap and we read this story upstairs in Felicity's room with Thomas. Felicity has owned this book for about a year and was familiar with the story. We have a personal love for the book because it shows children with disabilities and Thomas has a disability. Thomas has a genetic syndrome that causes physical and cognitive delays. He uses a wheelchair and a gait trainer to get around and has been practicing with a communication board. Felicity loves her brother and is protective of him and proud to talk about his disability with others. She often tells people "My brother is rare!" and how his rareness is part of what makes him so special. That is why I chose to have Thomas with us during this session, to give context of our family's own experience with disability. After finishing the story her reader's response was a family vlog where we looked through the book to find pictures that looked like each member of the family. Felicity ran into the other room to show her dad the picture that she felt represented him. This session was filled with family bonding and positive discussion.

You Are Enough: A Book about Inclusion, by Margaret O'Hair and Sofia Sanchez, was published in 2021. It was written by Sofia Sanchez, an eleven-year-old girl with

Down Syndrome who has become a model and an advocate for celebrating Down Syndrome. The message of the story is to be yourself and be confident in your differences. The illustrations are filled with physical differences that range from race, gender, size, adaptive needs, skin conditions, cultural clothing, and more. The book strives to represent everyone at some point within the pages and encourages the reader to be proud of who they are and echoes the sentiment that “you are enough.”

Key Topics for Discussion: physical differences, disability, adaptive resources, genetic syndromes, differences in clothing

Findings Analysis

The findings came from reviewing the data collected within the transcriptions, Felicity’s responses, and my own research journal. Each of the findings was evident in all three sources and interpreted through my own experience and knowledge of the subject and content.

Felicity’s Reactions to Similarities and Differences to Characters in the Story

Felicity and I read a variety of stories that showed characters from many cultures and backgrounds. I observed Felicity’s comments about similarities and differences to the physical attributes of characters that look like herself. In reviewing the data, I found trends that showed Felicity often points out physical similarities or differences between the characters and other people that she knows. She was able to make connections to herself, but only did so when directly prompted by a question. Finally, I provide an analysis of a discussion about the physical differences of disability and how it relates to our family and Thomas’s disability.

In review of the transcriptions, reader responses, and my own reflection journal, I found that Felicity often would point out physical similarities to other people in her life. This excerpt shows her connections between the character and her brother, Thomas, followed by a connection she made with a character like her dad while we were reading *Last Stop on Market Street*.

Felicity: [pointing to the African American main character] I like how he has curly hair like my brother Thomas!

Me: Wow! Yes he does!

Felicity: [pointing to a character on the bus with tattoos] Dad would like the tattoos. I think that would look good on Daddy.

Me: Yeah, Dad does like tattoos.

Felicity: Dad wants staying tattoos like this guy. (Session 5, Transcription)

I saw this trend continue when we read through *You Are Enough* and we had a family discussion where we found ourselves in the pictures. Felicity was easily able to point to different characters and explain where she could find Thomas - a character with curly hair, one with glasses, and one in a wheelchair. She also pointed out which one looked like me, and which one she thought looked like dad (Session 7, Reader Response). I found my response to her reactions within my research journal when I stated. "As the caregiver, my job seems to be to point out the similarities and differences without any moral judgment. Felicity is fine with the things that are different. She sees them and appreciates them" (Session 2, Research Journal). It might be that Felicity connects to the people around her in the story because she sees them in daily life. She is not constantly looking at herself through a mirror but does observe people around her and can make connections to the physical appearances of characters in the story to her loved ones.

I did notice a self-connection was made when I specifically asked her where she saw herself in the story.

Me: Could you make you out of these? [referenced a spread of various characters in *You Are Enough*]

Felicity: Ooh, let me see here. One did look like me. That one, the face kinda looks like me, I'm shy, and it looks like she's shy.

Me: Are there other parts of other people that you relate to?"

Felicity: I think I would wear this outfit. (Session 7, Transcription)

This portion stood out to me as I reflected on it in my journal, "During our reading we had a lot of conversations about seeing ourselves in pictures. Felicity found herself in the pictures and based it off the physical looks of the characters, but she also related to someone she thought was shy and pointed out the outfit of one character as an outfit she would like to wear." (Session 7, Research Journal).

This book was specifically chosen because I knew the main character had physical similarities to Felicity, a young girl with light skin, light colored hair, and a big smile. I also knew that children with disabilities were represented in the illustrations, which is important to our family, because my son has a syndrome. In her Reader Response, we discussed the traits of Thomas's syndrome and how they are manifested in his body. When I asked Felicity what parts of Thomas were caused by his syndrome, she said "his brain is different" (Session 7, Reader Response). I talked to her in further detail about the physical differences that come from the syndrome: the shape of his eyes, his pointy chin, his heavy eyebrows, his upturned ears, and the flat bridge of his nose. It seemed to Felicity that these physical differences were not significant, because she just

listened and commented on her own ears and Daddy's eyebrows. In my reflection of this moment, I said:

“It's amazing to me that she just sees her brother as his whole self. She doesn't differentiate his syndrome traits and label them as weird or different. I think I did that a lot as a kid with my brother. I was raised with a thought of 'will he ever be normal?' and was greatly affected when we received his autism diagnosis, because I was holding out some hope that he would not be different forever. I don't think Felicity feels that way about her brother. I think she gets annoyed as all siblings do, but she doesn't blame or attribute it to his syndrome.” (Session 7, Research Journal)

With any case study, it is obvious that the layers of data are so tangled in the many facets of myself. The way I view Felicity's responses are wrapped around my own experiences as a child growing up with a brother with autism, mixed with my understanding of Felicity and Thomas as siblings and as my kids, tied up in my background as an educator, and interspersed with my projection on how I want Felicity to act and think. It is impossible for me to objectively look at the data and know *exactly* what is going on, and likely if an outside source came in to analyze the same data, they would probably make different conclusions to this qualitative case study.

Despite that disclaimer, I noticed the trend that Felicity doesn't point out a lot of differences unless prompted. She is much quicker to make broad connections to characters in the story “I like to play with my cousins” (Session 1, Reader Response), or “I like to cuddle with my mom too!” (Session 2, Transcription). When I asked her about the differences, she would often point out something very specific, “She has black hair

and I have brown hair.” (Session 1, Transcription). “They had five characters in the story, but I only had room to build two.” (Session 6, Reader Response). When I pointed out some differences, she didn’t respond at all. During our reading of *Eyes that Kiss in the Corner*, the family is drinking tea and I said, “Our family doesn’t drink tea, so that’s a difference” (Session 2, Transcription). Felicity made no comment, so I kept reading.

Throughout the seven sessions, we came across a great variety of families, individuals, and circumstances. Felicity showed very little bias in her reactions and responses to differences between the characters and her own life. When I asked her, she often was able to verbalize a similarity or difference. When we discussed complex themes and sensitive topics, she had unique reactions to the characters and circumstances of the story.

Reactions to Complex Themes and Sensitive Topics

The research centered around the idea of using stories at home to bring up conversations about sensitive topics or complex themes. Within that lens, I found many interesting insights when reviewing that data: how the setting and emotional state affected conversations, the impact of the illustrations on our discussions, my use of explanation and leading questions to elicit more from Felicity, and the patterns of empathy building. Each of these insights is broken down into further detail. Finally, this section provides an in-depth look at a series of conversations that resulted from one of our read alouds and how Felicity and I responded to the complex theme: slavery.

Setting and Emotional State

When it comes to having conversations about sensitive topics, it was apparent that where we were and how we felt had a large impact on the quality of the discussion. Many

of our sessions took place on our couch in the family room during the afternoon on the weekends, or even in the morning before school started. This setting seemed to be ideal for having powerful discussions. Felicity's personal favorite session, *Eyes that Kiss in the Corners*, was done sitting next to each other on the couch, before she had to leave for school. My personal favorite session was also in the morning when we read *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey* sharing the same space on a comfy chair, right after breakfast, while waiting for the bus.

During our fifth session, we read *Last Stop on Market Street*, while sitting on my bed right before bedtime. Originally, I felt that this would be the ideal setting for discussion, complex conversations, and addressing sensitive topics. However, as I looked back on the session, it was the least effective for such conversations. In the middle of my reading, Felicity got off the bed and strummed her dad's guitar. I said, "Come on, you keep running away." She replied, "Because I'm wiggly." With irritation in my voice, I said "Get over here then." I continued reading (Session 5, Transcription). I also found that I interrupted her when she would go off topic about butterflies and scooters and I could hear my impatience to get the task completed. When she did her reader response for this session, she did not mention any of the sensitive topics that I had originally planned to discuss such as wealth disparities, people experiencing homelessness, or the diversity of individuals on the bus. She mentioned in her explanation to "avoid a catastrophe" but she does not give any context for the comment, and I did not press further to try to understand what she meant (Session 5, Reader Response). In my reflection journal immediately after the session I wrote my shortest response which included the following:

Felicity was much more off the walls and hyper today and I felt like she wasn't really listening to the story. I was getting frustrated because I really felt like it was an easy message to understand. In retrospect she was listening but making a lot of connections that - to me - didn't feel very important or impactful but it's possible they were relevant. (Session 5, Research Journal)

I expected the bedtime story set-up to be our most powerful setting and held that as my vision when I came up with the research idea. However, I think this time was more stressful and held a lot of external pressure. At our house, the hours between dinner and bedtime are hectic and messy. We have bedtime routines but trying to load the routine with a weighty sensitive topic did not work out very well in the data collection. I found a lot more success when we weren't pressed for time and there wasn't as much going on in my mind.

Impact of Illustrations

An unanticipated finding was the significant impact the illustrations had on Felicity's comprehension and my ability to connect the story to complex themes. It seemed that the pictures held more than the words themselves in most of the books we read. For example, when we read *Visiting Day*, without the pictures, the reader would not know where the daughter was visiting her dad. The only clue within the text is when it states, "the bus pulls up in front of the big old building where, as Grandma puts it, Daddy is doing a little time." (Woodson, 2015 p. 19) This same page shows a fence with barbed wire and a watch tower. Other image clues in the story show security guards standing patrol during the visits, and other incarcerated individuals wearing beige-colored jumpsuits. More subtle clues include the pictures on the walls, and a calendar with a

circled date. During the reading of this book, I pointed these clues to Felicity and asked her if she knew where the girl was going to visit her dad. Felicity did not know, so I explicitly explained, “See right here, this stuff is called barbed wire, and it’s a tall fence. And you can’t climb over it because the barbed wire is usually electric or pokey. And then this is a watch tower, and these things tell us that he is in jail or prison. And doing a little time means he broke the law, and he is in jail because of that.” (Session 4, Transcription). After I explained the images and Felicity was aware that the girl was visiting her father in jail, we continued to discuss incarceration and how it affects families. She asked how long do they have to stay there? How would you stay in jail for such a long time? Why has he been in there for so many months? (Session 4, Transcription). The images in this story greatly enhanced our discussion and understanding of incarceration as a sensitive topic.

During *Eyes That Kiss in the Corners*, Felicity and I discussed the cultural elements of the pictures such as the lotus flower, the tea they drink, and the great wall of China. These pictures also led us to looking up information on the internet and watching videos to learn more about Chinese culture. In her reader response Felicity stated that her favorite part was to see all of the pretty pictures, and I agree that the family uses a lot of art to tell their story (Session 2, Reader Response). I made note in my journal that I was learning it was my role to objectively point out observations in the text or pictures and ask questions (Session 2, Research Journal). The images within picture books should be high quality art in order to support the comprehension of the complex topics discussed. The quality of illustrations and visuals is essential for using picture books as vehicles for dialogue about diversity and issues of fairness (Kelly-Ware, 2018). Many of the books

that I chose have received awards for their artwork, however, I don't feel that I accurately addressed the art within our conversations, and I want to improve my own skills in using the art as a vehicle for dialogue to increase comprehension and understanding of the complex themes within future books Felicity and I read together.

Explanations and Leading Questions to Extend Conversations

When I first came up with the research topic, I wanted to know what would happen when the caregiver didn't ask any questions and just see how a child naturally responds and reacts to a multicultural story being read at home. However, as time went on and I dug deeper into what the case study would look like, I realized that (a) that structure would likely yield less data, and (b) I am incapable of not talking and asking questions, so it would have been a very unnatural environment for Felicity and myself. I removed that stipulation from the project, and instead found that I used direct explanations and questions to extend conversations about complex themes, to search for comprehension, and to pull more information from Felicity during our discussions.

When we discussed different types of families while reading *And Tango Makes Three*, I was curious how Felicity would react to families with two moms or two dads. When I chose this book, I was the most nervous to share it because we don't typically talk about LGBTQ+ perspectives in our home. Both my husband and I come from Christian backgrounds and the church we attend has strong opinions about marriage between a man and a woman. We are on a continuous journey to understand how to support and love others without feeling that we are going against our faith. This journey, while challenging and unfinished, led to me feeling nervous about introducing *And Tango Makes Three*, because I didn't know what elements of the story Felicity would connect

with, and I felt unprepared to answer questions regarding our own familial values and how they relate to LGBTQ+ family dynamics. Here is how a portion of our conversation unfolded, for a full transcription see Appendix A.

Me: Anyway, but all families are unique and different. And this family [referencing the penguins in the book] there's a lot of people that think it's not okay to have two daddies or two mommies, but we just let everyone make their own choices and let them love who they want to love. Do you have any questions?

Felicity: Why do people have to have two dads and some people have two moms?

Me: Well, they don't have to. They choose to.

Felicity: Why?

Me: Because they fell in love. Just like I fell in love with dad and decided to get married to him. I didn't have to, but it was my choice. And Kinsey's not married. Instead, she lives with us, her sister and her sister's husband and her silly niece!

For her response, Felicity said her favorite part was how they [the male penguins] sat on the egg and it cracked, so she made a nest out of blocks. I asked her what she learned about the book from families, and she responded with, "You can have two moms or dads." (Session 3, Reader Response). I asked her what our family's nest would look like, but she responded that she didn't know, so I rephrased, and she was then able to explain all the members of our family and the dynamics of our home. In the journal reflection for this session, I noted that it seemed Felicity understood that families can be different. I also made a note that I wanted to meet with my friend and his husband and their son, who came to their family via surrogate. The meeting was planned, but didn't end up happening because of scheduling conflicts, but I found that I longed to create real connections between characters in the story and people in our lives.

Other examples of direct explanation and questions were found throughout the sessions as well. I gave a direct explanation of why a family would have to leave their home when we discussed refugees (Session 6, Transcription). When we read *Last Stop on Market Street*, I defined and discussed dignity and reiterated the idea that a person is a person regardless of their financial circumstances or their current level of need (Session 5, Transcription). During session two, *Eyes that Kiss in the Corners*, I asked Felicity if it's wrong to have eyes that look different from other people. Finally, I reflected on how challenging it is to know how to explain complex themes like slavery, differences in cultures that are not my own, sexual identity, and disability (Session 1, 2, 3 & 7, Research Journal). The final section of this chapter will be a detailed reflection about my personal feelings and experiences throughout the data collection process.

When prompted, Felicity often was able to provide a connection, understanding, or explanation within the sensitive topic, but rarely divulged such responses unprompted. Felicity is a kindergartener, and I believe that age and cognitive development likely has a large impact on this finding. Further research could be conducted to see if children of varying ages have matching results.

Patterns of Empathy Building

Multicultural literature is often used to build empathy among children by helping them see different perspectives and experiences (Bowen & Schutt, 2007). One of my goals for this case study was to watch for patterns of empathy building and look for evidence that Felicity was stretching her emotions outside of her own world. Almost all sessions showed some sort of emotional response from Felicity. As we read about the refugees leaving their homes that had been bombed during war, Felicity stated, "I wish

their home would get fixed.” (Session 6, Transcription). When she explained the daughter leaving her dad in *Visiting Day*, she used a sad voice with a frown and said, “It was very sad because her dad couldn’t see her that much, but he was happy when he did see her. (Session 4, Reader Response). I acknowledge that she seems excited and connected during several sessions when reflecting about her emotional responses to the characters and their circumstances (Session 2 & 3, Research Journal).

Many of the phrases Felicity used to show patterns of empathy building were with simple sentences and basic emotions. After I explained the history of slavery in the United States, Felicity responded with, “That’s really sad” and “I don’t think they should do that” (Session 1, Reader Response). “I think they are happy to be with their family” was her reaction when we read about the family reunion in *Going Down Home with Daddy* (Session 1, Transcription). She used the term lonely, when she reacted to *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family’s Journey* and how the characters probably felt because of the attack on their home. She said, “They felt lonely when they had to leave” (Session 6, Reader Response). A lot of emphasis has been focused on offering children social-emotional learning during school. These curriculums often include emotion recognition, empathy building, and perspective taking. When I asked Felicity what emotions she thought the characters were experiencing she was able to provide basic emotion recognition based on the illustrations and conversations.

When discussing diversity of appearances while reading *You Are Enough*, Felicity brought up some students in her school that wear headphones to prevent auditory overstimulation. Felicity also experiences overwhelming feelings in places that are too loud, like the bus and the cafeteria, but she does not have noise canceling headphones

that she is able to wear at school. The way she connected and explained her perception of these students with such compassion, empathy and understanding, was inspiring and fascinating to me.

Me: That one's listening to music. You like to listen on your headphones.

Felicity: Mommy, but I know something.

Me: What?

Felicity: In school, I seen, like kids and they wear headphones too.

Me: Yeah, sometimes headphones have music, and sometimes headphones are used to block out extra sound.

Felicity: Like, I think they're kids who don't understand as well, so they need teachers to help them. And they wear headphones since it's really loud. (Session 7, Transcription)

We know from the research, multicultural literature has been demonstrated to nurture emotional, social, creative, and cognitive development while affirming the identity of everyone as well as promoting greater empathy and understanding of others (Adam, Barratt-Pugh, & Haig, 2017; Piper, 2019; Vasilache, 2020). Felicity has demonstrated that within these previous examples. I think that by providing more culturally diverse books that hold sensitive topics and complex themes, Felicity has been able to increase her empathy faster than if books were only reflecting her own experiences and perspectives.

An In-Depth Look at a Series of Conversations about a Complex Topic

One of the most interesting complex and sensitive topics surrounded our very first read aloud *Going Down Home with Daddy*. I am going to share a lot of direct transcription of our conversations for this story and include my own analysis. This series

of conversations captured the essence of the whole project in an enlightening moment with my daughter and gave me a raw picture of what happens when you read multicultural literature to an emergent reader in the home with a caregiver.

After we read, discussed, and Felicity created her reader response to the book, I wrote the following reflection in my research journal. I am sharing this first, because it is interesting to see how I perceived the conversation to go versus the way the transcript shows what I said during the read aloud.

Today we read our first book *Going Down Home with Daddy*. Felicity did not know about slavery, one of the main themes in the story, so I chose to discuss it within the context of the story. I explained how many years ago people that were African American were owned and forced to work by other people. It's illegal now, but it wasn't illegal but still a wrong thing to do. She seemed to listen intently and then tried to retell and summarize slavery on the page with Lil Alan and the cotton. I could have let the whole slavery theme slide, and she wouldn't have understood this part of the story, but by explaining it in context, it gave her a sense of empathy - she explained that it was wrong, and it would be sad. I don't know that she understood the racial connection between slavery and Black people. I want to keep my eyes open for more information on this. (Session 1, Research Journal)

This transcription is a portion of the actual conversation between us while reading the story, an extended version of the transcription can be found in Appendix B.

Me: Kinda like sheep's wool is what it looks like, but you pick it, it's like a flower. And back during slavery time, people that were African American were forced to. They were slaves and they had to pick the cotton. People can't be slaves anymore. That means

someone owned them. That's not allowed. That's illegal. That's really rude. You can't buy a person and make them work for you. You can pay someone to do work, but you can't own a person, right? And that was a really wrong thing that happened in our country is that they tried to force, they DID, they didn't try, but they did force people into slavery and his family were enslaved. They had to pick cotton for their people that owned them. And so that's what they were saying back here [referencing pages 21-22] Our ancestors used to have to pick cotton here, because they were slaves, but now we own the land for our family. And so Lil Alan picked some cotton and he's talking about his ancestors that were slaves that people mistreated. They were not treated fairly. They didn't get to do anything, they just had to work.

Felicity: This is good for your audio! I actually think this picture is showing you never to do it. And I think he's just trying to show you don't be a slave. To never try to own someone to be - work for you. And he's trying to show us in this book how you can do it, and that actually does look like a cloud. (Session 1, Transcription)

After we read the book, Felicity acted out her favorite scene from the book by pretending she was meeting with her cousins during a family reunion. The three-minute video did not include any reaction or response to the topic of slavery. I completed my reflection in my journal, and we moved on.

A few days later, our family gathered to celebrate Thanksgiving. The long row of tables with mismatched chairs stretched across Pop's dining room. Each person filled their plates with turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, and green beans. Felicity was sitting down at the end with other kids in the family. I handed her a plate of food and seemingly from nowhere she stated, "It was really sad for the African Americans, they had to be slaves." I felt an immediate sense of dread. I felt that she had crossed an invisible line and brought up a taboo topic. I said, "Yes, Felicity it is sad, but let's talk about it later." I tried to quickly redirect the conversation to something innocuous and filed away this moment to be recorded in my journal.

The next week, I was giving the kids a bath, when I decided it was time to bring up the conversation. I remember feeling very nervous that I would say something wrong or offensive without intending to be hurtful. However, I felt it was important to have this sensitive conversation so we could discuss more about the impact of slavery on the African American community. Unfortunately, I did not record the audio of our conversation, so I don't know exactly what I said, but I did include the following in my research journal:

We had to have a conversation about not pitying African Americans, because at Thanksgiving dinner, Felicity said, "It's really sad for the African Americans." We discussed how people don't want us to feel bad for them, people tend to want understanding for times that are hard. I related it to Thomas. We don't want to change our circumstances with him, but we want people to understand how his life has different challenges than someone without a disability. (Research Journal, November 26, 2022)

I remember Felicity being really quiet as I explained the difference between pity and understanding. Allow me to share my own experience with pity versus understanding. As a fairly recent member of the Special Needs Mama community, I felt frustrated when I would explain my son and his needs and people would show pity. Comments like, 'Oh, that's really awful' or 'I don't know what I would do if I were you.' and even when people said, 'I'm sorry you have to go through this!' I felt that I couldn't talk about my feelings and struggles without being misunderstood. I remember telling my therapist that I didn't feel comfortable telling others, even my mom, about the late nights, the emergency room visits, the specialist appointments, or the constant screaming and

hair-pulling, because I didn't want people to feel sorry for me. I felt there was no space for me to vent or complain without people thinking that I blamed Thomas or resented him. I love my son, and I wouldn't change him for the world. Yet, life as a special needs mama is hard! It is isolating and lonely. In the thick of those moments, I discovered that I wanted people to understand that we were more than his diagnosis, and our life was bigger than his needs, yet his needs and my pain is still very real. This personal experience and insight have been massive in helping me to understand how it feels to be marginalized. I don't want pity for my circumstance, but I desire that people understand.

I used this phrase, "People want us to understand, but not pity them," throughout several of our sessions. I found that building empathy and compassion for the experience and circumstances of others requires us to open our hearts to understanding.

I also learned how hard it is to speak about a community that you are not a part of. My husband is half white and half black, so he has more footing within the black community than I do, but he doesn't have strong connections or interactions with the African American side of his family. We seem to be on the messy side of life. I am unsure how to navigate conversations with my kids about racism, African American history, and social justice issues, because there is familial drama that wraps around the path, like vines in a jungle. It is a constant journey that requires clear communication between myself and my husband, and how we intend to raise our children in a multicultural world.

In conclusion, the findings from this case study included Felicity's reactions to similarities and differences often focused on people she knew and not about herself, the physical environment and emotional state of the child and caregiver affected the quality

of conversations, illustrations have a great impact on the complex themes and can be a vehicle for discussion, it was necessary to explain complex themes and ask questions to extend conversations with Felicity, and I saw patterns of empathy building in the way she responded to the characters' emotions.

What I Learned about Myself

This section shares insights into my experience collecting data, reading stories, personal feelings, conversations with loved ones and how I am continuously trying to figure out the best path for parenting young kids. I do not have triangulated data points to back up these as official findings, yet the qualitative storytelling is beneficial to understanding the greater picture of the case study of Felicity and myself. My experience is completely unique. Everyone will have a different journey in this work, so here is my story.

When reviewing the words I used in my journal I saw that this experience gave me a rollercoaster of emotions. In writing this reflection, I wanted to edit my thoughts, my words, and my feelings to be more of what I think I should be as a parent and as an educator. However, the journey of myself is continuous. I live by the phrase Maya Angelous stated, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." Throughout this journey, I acknowledged the feelings that I had, analyzed the cause with curiosity, and then moved forward with a new perspective. Here are some of the feelings that I experienced.

"I felt hesitant and anxious about explaining [slavery] on a 'child appropriate' level. I wasn't sure how to discuss the racial connection and I tried to be politically correct, but it might have affected the clarity of what I was saying. I was embarrassed

when Felicity discussed slavery with others at Thanksgiving” (Session 1, Research Journal). “I feel nervous that I’m misrepresenting a culture and that I might get caught in my ignorance. Kinsey and I have had a lot of discussion about how to avoid appropriation and stick with appreciation. I also don’t know how to avoid cultural tourism, I feel clueless” (Session 2, Research Journal). “I struggled to know what adjectives to use when describing LGBTQ+ families. I did not bring up our religion’s view on morality or LGBTQ+ dynamics” (Session 3, Research Journal). “I heaved a long sigh before I explained why a person would be incarcerated. I show a desire to ‘get it right.’ I wanted more support in the topic from Andrew and I asked for his opinion. I want complex themes to be open communication with Andrew too, but I feel nervous that he might not agree with how I’m explaining things” (Session 4, Research Journal). “I felt rushed and impatient with Felicity when she wouldn’t listen. I felt disappointed in her response and that she missed the whole point of the story” (Session 5, Research Journal). “This story I felt deeply connected to and I wanted to share the lives of my students with my daughter. I felt a lot more comfortable because I personally know a lot of people with refugee backgrounds. I find it very important that Felicity understands that they love their home. I didn’t understand this. This was an internal journey that I took late in life, and I wish I had known sooner” (Session 6, Research Journal). “I definitely felt more prepared and capable of teaching the reality of rare, neurodiverse, disabled children because of my experience with Thomas. I’ve had to personally think about my own and society’s reaction to people who are developmentally atypical. I felt confident in this topic” (Session 7, Research Journal).

At this point in writing my thesis, I broke down to my husband and told him I felt like a fraud. I felt like I had spent months doing this work, and I had no answers for how to do it any better. We discussed the struggle of parenting children. We went back and forth on who should be responsible to teach our children about complex topics. He made valid points about maturity and cognitive development. I brought in the research that I collected to show him that kids, as young as Felicity, can understand sensitive topics.

After an hour, we concluded that there is a line. There is a line that is different for every family, and it changes for each child within that family. The line moves as the child grows and develops. The line expands as knowledge expands. We decided that we can teach Felicity about certain sensitive topics - especially about race, slavery, and LGBTQ+ perspectives - within her realm of understanding. Andrew and I talked about how we want her to feel safe in asking questions. We want to be able to provide her curiosity with true and honest answers. Yet, we don't need to dump everything we know onto our child.

These conversations are necessary and will continue throughout parenting. I learned from this experience that I am incapable of having all the answers to parenting. I have not cracked the code. In many ways I now have more questions than I did before I started this project! Yet that is the beauty of education. I am committed to learning and growing. As a parent I desire to find good ways to teach my children. I might not always find the best way, but I want to be sure that I am parenting in a good way.

Parenting is riddled with anxiety, fears, expectations, disappointments, hopes, and mistakes. Andrew and I feel the weight of the world on our shoulders as we brace ourselves for these complex and sensitive topics. However, I have learned that I can use

children's multicultural literature to address many of these topics. I can use the illustrations and the character's emotions to help talk to Felicity about the matters of concern. We can use the library to our advantage, and we can keep a dialogue open, so that she will be able to communicate with her parents as she matures from childhood to adulthood.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Books are treasures. Teachers have known this for a long time. In the classroom books are not only used for teaching the mechanics of reading, building comprehension, and improving fluency, they are also used to build empathy, increase perspective taking, discuss challenging topics and allow for children to feel seen in their world. Parents often hear from schools that they need to read to their young children. Twenty minutes a day has been a standard recommendation for a long time. Yet what if parents were empowered to know how to unlock the treasure within books?

My identity as a teacher and a mother brought me to this project, and my love for books along with my passion to raise culturally conscious children guided me through my research question. Using my own home as our laboratory, and myself and my daughter as study subjects, I set out to see what would happen when a caregiver reads multicultural books to their kindergartener at home in order to address similarities and differences as well as allow for conversations about complex themes. I collected data about five-year-old Felicity's reactions as we read seven different books together while nestled in the comfort of our home. I gathered audio from our sessions, I allowed Felicity to respond through a variety of modalities, and I recorded my observations in my research journal. This data was triangulated between all three sources and the findings were eye opening.

Summary of Findings

Felicity was able to make connections between the physical appearances of the characters and the people she knows in life. Most comments were about how the character looked like her brother, Thomas, or that they look like Dad. She voiced

awareness of hair color and texture, adaptive equipment like glasses and wheelchairs, tattoos, beards and skin tone. When prompted, she was able to find herself in the pictures. She connected to the hair, clothing, and the look of shyness on the face of the character that she felt best represented her in the story. She made a plethora of connections to the actions of the characters. Felicity related to Lil' Alan visiting his cousins at a family reunion, and she felt the joy of snuggling with Mama when we read *Eyes that Kiss in the Corners*.

The books were used to address complex themes and sensitive topics with Felicity with the hopes of broadening her perspective and understanding of lives that aren't parallel to our own. I found that the setting and the emotional state of myself and Felicity made a great impact on our ability to have conversations. Ironically, bedtime was the least effective time for story reading. The stresses of the day and the childish tendency to avoid bedtime made a perfect storm of frustration. We found much more success on the weekends and the early mornings before school.

The illustrations became extremely important in addressing the overarching themes and building perspective taking skills. I chose books with illustrations rich with color, symbolism, and authentic representation of the communities that were present. I found that Felicity relied more on the pictures than on the words. She used the pictures as references in her reader response and in follow-up conversations about the text. The illustrations were also used as support for me to explain abstract ideas in a concrete way, which is essential for a child as young as Felicity.

The findings led me to realize that the weight of my words are vastly important. The way that I explained complex themes would directly impact the way Felicity

responded. It was invaluable to have a recording of my explanations and to be able to go back and listen. Just as the great athletes watch their tapes to improve their plays, I was able to see the transparency behind how I approached a topic and decide if I made a good move or if I needed to change the way I approached it. Parenting takes practice. Luckily, I found resilience and patience in Felicity and discovered that she was able to listen to my fumbling explanations and she would often ask questions to clarify. This dialogue was clunky, yet it was where the most impactful data came from to support my research questions.

The study showed that Felicity was connecting with the emotions of the characters and building empathy for their circumstances. She would use facial expressions and changes in her voice to mirror the emotions of the characters. She was able to name the emotions with simple human feelings; sad, lonely, happy, excited, etc. Felicity seemed to connect deeply with certain characters and would refer to their stories for the months following the initial reading and seek to have the stories read again and again.

Finally, I found that I experienced my own rollercoaster of emotions while navigating this parental jungle. I felt feelings of fear, uncertainty, disappointment, and embarrassment. I was hesitant and nervous to address topics that I felt unprepared to discuss or unqualified to teach. I was strained in connecting with my husband, Andrew, and knowing his views. We felt the ache of disunity and that space of growth that comes when you look deep inside yourself. I faced feeling like a fraud, like an imposter, like a misrepresentation of everything I stand for in the educator world. I felt scared and had immense amounts of doubt. I spent many hours laying in bed and trying to figure out how

to “do it right.” Constantly, I was trying to perfect the system. Not surprisingly, I wasn’t able to do that. I found myself with more questions than answers. I found myself vulnerable and I felt myself grow.

Limitations

This case study of myself and Felicity is unique. It will not yield the same results for all parents. The context of the home, the temperament of the child, the attitudes surrounding reading and the way a family deems a topic sensitive will affect how the data forms. I was limited by my ability to catch everything, and I was affected by my own bias within my role as the mother of the home. I know more about Felicity than I could ever put into qualitative research, and that deep knowledge of my child affected the way I interpreted the data. It is impossible to take all of that into account and thus the study is limited.

However, the structure of the study could be replicated by other parents to increase research for how multicultural books can be used in the home to build more culturally conscious children and address the sensitive topics that arise during parenting.

Implications and Concluding Thoughts

Parents should be given greater access to multicultural books. Local libraries could be using book displays to support parents in finding books that address topics that will arise with their children. Educators can be supportive in providing book lists to parents that give ideas for how to use books at home to support conversations about sensitive topics. Parents can group together to find resources from each other and build a community that uses multicultural books in the home to support parenting.

My case study is unique. From my review of the literature surrounding parenting, sensitive topics, and multicultural books, I was not able to find any research that mirrored the work that I have done. This work can open the door for other stakeholders - parents, educators, librarians, authors, social workers, and family related professionals - to dive into the possibilities of using multicultural books at home to support children. Research can be conducted with children of varying age groups, families with multiple children, and looking at the different ways families with a variety of backgrounds would benefit from broadening the way books are used at home.

If nothing else, further research will bring more parents and children to the same space, whether at the bedside during bedtime, snuggled up on the same couch cushion, quietly around a rickety table in the back of the library, or through the long hours of a family road trip with a mom reading aloud to a van of kids. It will create more moments where stories are read together and thus bonding experiences between caregiver and child with that special place where a story can change their world.

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Appendix A

Partial Transcription from *And Tango Makes Three*

- Me: What do you think of that story? Anything interesting that stood out?
- Felicity: Um, I really, it was kinda, um, it was actually kinda cool talking about it. I didn't think, I kind of do... um... but Jenny [her friend], I guess... actually no, I thought Jenny had two moms, and then I realized it was actually her grandma. I like how the story really tells us that there is more just couple that don't have a husband or a wife.
- Me: There's different types of families, huh?
- Felicity: Yep.
- Me: And that's totally fine for their family?
- Felicity: Yeah.
- Me: And it's um, not weird, and it's just kind of interesting and unique. So if you ever meet someone at school, and you probably will, and they have two moms or two dads, you can just say, 'hey, that's really cool, I have one mom and one dad.' Some people have different families because they're parents got divorced, so maybe they have a dad and a stepdad, or a mom and a stepmom, or maybe a grandma that raises them. Our family is unique because you have an aunt that lives with us.
- Felicity: [goes on a tangent about ants]
- Me: Anyway, but all families are unique and different. And this family [referencing the penguins in the book] there's a lot of people that think it's not okay to have two daddies or two mommies, but we just let everyone make their own choices and let them love who they want to love. Do you have any questions?
- Felicity: Why do people have to have two dads and some people have two moms?
- Me: Well, they don't have to. They choose to.
- Felicity: Why?
- Me: Because they fell in love. Just like I fell in love with dad and decided to get married to him. I didn't have to, but it was my choice. And Kinsey's

not married. Instead, she lives with us, her sister and her sister's husband and her silly niece!

Appendix B

Partial Transcription from *Going Down Home with Daddy*

- Me: Ok, let's listen. 'Our people were stolen from Africa and shipped to this continent in chains, Daddy says, but no one could lock away their dreams. They dreamed on this land during slavery. They dreamed on this land as they made a way out of no way and fought Jim Crow. Seventy-five years ago, a farmer and teacher bought this land. Daddy gazes at Granny. Look at us now. One after another cousins offer their tributes. Sis's songs make Granny's eyes shine, Isaiah's poem gets everyone nodding. Then I step forward. I feel like a spotlight is blazing just on me. I look down and say nothing. 'It's ok, Lil Alan,' Sis whispers. I lift my head and see gleaming smiles. I try again. Cotton for the quilt granny made to keep her kids warm, I say holding a white cloud in my fingers' (Lyons, 2019, p. 21-26). This is cotton. Cotton is the type of flower that you make clothes out of or quilts like he's talking about for Granny.
- Felicity: Mommy, like sheep's wool?
- Me: Kinda like sheep's wool is what it looks like, but you pick it, it's like a flower. And back during slavery time, people that were African American were forced to. They were slaves and they had to pick the cotton. People can't be slaves anymore. That means someone owned them. That's not allowed. That's illegal. That's really rude. You can't buy a person and make them work for you. You can pay someone to do work, but you can't own a person, right? And that was a really wrong thing that happened in our country is that they tried to force, they DID, they didn't try, but they did force people into slavery and his family were enslaved. They had to pick cotton for their people that owned them. And so that's what they were saying back here [referencing pages 21-22] Our ancestors used to have to pick cotton here, because they were slaves, but now we own the land for our family. And so Lil Alan picked some cotton and he's talking about his ancestors that were slaves that people mistreated. They were not treated fairly. They didn't get to do anything, they just had to work.
- Felicity: This is good for your audio! I actually think this picture is showing you never to do it. And I think he's just trying to show you don't be a slave. To never try to own someone to be - work for you. And he's trying to show us in this book how you can do it, and that actually does look like a cloud.