

Assessing The Scope: Examining How Primary Teachers Use Multicultural Texts For Classroom Read Alouds

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Abstract

As diversity grows in schools, educators must consider how to create environments where students develop respect and empathy toward others. Integrating high quality multicultural literature provides meaningful experiences for students to investigate society and acknowledge and interrogate their own beliefs and biases. While many teachers acknowledge the importance of incorporating literature that reflects the diverse populations of schools, effectively implementing multicultural literature into the learning environment is both a complex and analytical task. This phenomenological research design examines how primary teachers use multicultural texts for classroom read alouds.

Keywords: multiculturalism, multicultural literature, diversity, read alouds

Introduction

As schools begin to accurately reflect our nation's demographics, educators must be prepared to equip students to be contributing members of our multicultural society by providing an education that values and promotes all perspectives. (Suh & Samuels, 2011; Vittrup, 2016). To develop this belief and respect, educators must cultivate multiculturalism and create equal opportunities for all students regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social class, religion or exceptionality to experience educational equality (Banks, 1993; Günay & Aydin, 2015). Multicultural education “is grounded in ideals of social justice, education equity, and a dedication to facilitating educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings, locally, nationally, and globally” (Gorski, 2001, p.1). It assists students in developing morally and becoming citizens who respect, embrace and understand others regardless of differences in an effort to help students develop positive attitudes and empathy toward other cultures (Banks & Banks, 2005; Howlett & Young, 2019). Varied environmental experiences shape individuals' perspectives, emotions, and behaviors, and these behaviors impact their sense of self in the world. To nurture this development, teachers must “cultivate cooperation, collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual responsibility for learning among students and between students and teachers” (Gay, 2010, p. 45) and “integrate students’ culture and language in the teaching and learning process, respect their culture, reinforce their cultural identity, and use instructional strategies that meet students’ cultural and linguistic needs” (Lindo & Lim, 2020, p. 34). In addition to shaping our perspective, our experiences and sense of self impact how we communicate and receive information, therefore classrooms need access to

materials to support application of new learning in context.

Multicultural literature has been identified as one of the most powerful components of multicultural curriculum (Bishop, 1990b). Literature is a social agent, serving as a catalyst in students discovering various cultures and its values, which behaviors are acceptable and appropriate, and how one must function to be a contributing member of society (Bishop, 1990; Ebarvia et al., 2020). By providing students with high quality multicultural literature and meaningful experiences to investigate society, students learn to question, inquire, and be active participants in the learning process. While many teachers acknowledge the importance of incorporating literature that reflects the diverse populations of the school environment, effectively implementing multicultural literature into the preschool through high school (PK-12) learning environment is both a complex and analytical task. This implementation involves the educator feeling competent in effectively selecting high quality multicultural literature for classroom use and purposefully integrating it into the curriculum. When teachers feel competent integrating multicultural literature, it “create[s] an environment that is supportive of multiple perspectives, experiences, and democracy” (National Association of Multicultural Education, 2016, para. 5). This paper uses a phenomenological research design to examine how primary teachers use multicultural texts for classroom read alouds.

Literature Review

Developing Definition of Multicultural Literature

Multicultural literature has been defined in terms of the degree or phases of multiculturalism. Its purpose was to help individuals explore diverse cultures and perspectives differing from the mainstream. When beginning to define multicultural literature, Cai and Bishop (1994), first explained that multicultural literature “challenges the existing canon by expanding the curriculum to include literature from a variety of cultural groups” (p. 59). It was during the 1980s that the term multicultural literature was commonly used to refer to books with characters of color (Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013). Bishop (1997) then extended the definition to embody the diverse racial, ethnic and social perspectives that existed in society. Multicultural literature validates all sociocultural experiences and develops the readers’ social and cultural consciousness (Gopalakrishnan, 2011; San Antonio, 2018). The purpose of defining this literature was to ensure that students were exposed to various perspectives and cultures that were authentic to both their lives and the lives of others.

Instructional Integration of Multicultural Literature

Access to high quality literature is one of the most essential elements of any school curriculum or resource for educators to increase student achievement and motivation (Ciercierski & Bintz, 2015; Trelease, 2013; Van Kleeck et al., 2003). Literature, such as children’s books, not only provides essential foundational knowledge and skills to students, but also provides a critical lens into the world in which they live.

Multicultural education originated in the 1970s and was identified as a reason for

minority achievement gaps. In 1973, the focus shifted to teacher development. This focus continued into the 1990s when Bishop (1990a) referred to literature as a social agent. When community, cultural, and family factors are utilized to help students find their sense of self, funds of identity are born. As outlined by Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014), funds of identity refer to “historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person's self-definition, self-expression and self-understanding” (p. 31). When children see their lives and perspectives in the curriculum and literature used in the classroom, it heightens engagement and awareness in the learning environment.

In addition to access, students need meaningful opportunities to explore various cultures and perspectives, examine and question their assumptions and beliefs, and develop acceptance and respect for all members of society (Harper & Brand, 2010; Muhammad, 2020; National Association for Multicultural Education, 2016). When environmental conditions recognize which elements of cultural surroundings are conducive to growth, it impacts motivation, recollection, and self-perception (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). When opportunities to reflect, engage in discourse (Cangia & Pagani, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014) and evaluate our own culture are included, it supports the development of cultural competence (Feize & Gonzalez, 2018). The incorporation of multicultural literature creates opportunities for students to explore other cultures and perspectives that are different from their own. This knowledge and appreciation for others can combat prejudice and bias while promoting acceptance and empathy (Holland & Mongillo, 2016). By creating an environment for students to critically examine and explore various cultures and perspectives, their understanding and awareness of diversity increases and their capacity to act against social injustice expands.

Multicultural Literature and its Impact on Students

High quality multicultural literature can increase students’ awareness of others in the world like them. This encourages students to share their own stories and perspectives with others which builds connections with their own individuality and school community (Lopez-Robertson & Haney, 2017). When children feel a personal connection to the culture portrayed in the literature, a child’s self-esteem increases (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Lopez-Robertson & Haney, 2017). This leads to students feeling valued both in the classroom and the pluralistic society of which they are part.

The use of multicultural literature can also result in more culturally and socially conscious individuals. For students to mature in understanding and acceptance of others, they need to explore concepts or topics from multiple perspectives to understand the various viewpoints that surround it. By immersing students in a variety of literature that reflects diverse cultures and perspectives present in both the classroom and society, students’ understanding and acceptance of various cultural groups is enhanced (Morgan & York, 2009). Analysis and exploration of a variety of cultures and perspectives can also create opportunities for students to examine their own understanding, beliefs, and biases through a different lens. This can harvest other perspectives and transform students’ beliefs and actions. (Szecsi et al., 2010). Multicultural literature can extend or enlighten a students’ understanding, which can combat prejudice or encourage a student to take action to obtain social justice or equity.

Teacher Perceptions towards Multicultural Literature

To meet the needs of students in the classroom, educators should understand the framework and goals of multicultural education, specifically multicultural literature, and be sensitive to the diverse perspectives in the classroom and adjust instruction or content to ensure that the titles selected for classroom use offer divergent and counter narrative perspectives. Teacher attitudes and perceptions toward the use of multicultural literature has a profound impact on students (Holland & Mongillo, 2016). Teachers' beliefs and behaviors can shape students' interactions, awareness of diverse perspectives and cultures, and their acceptance and empathy of others (Irwin, 1999).

The National Association for Multicultural Education (2016) produced standards of multicultural education and educators demanding that, School staff that is culturally competent, and to the greatest extent possible racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse. Staff must be multi-culturally literate and capable of including and embracing families and communities to create an environment that is supportive of multiple perspectives, experiences, and democracy (para. 5).

Teachers are a critical factor in the implementation of multicultural education and the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. For teachers to be responsive to the diverse cultures and backgrounds present in the learning environment, teachers must equip themselves with the knowledge, skills, and disposition to explore concepts from various viewpoints. With the goal being to have culturally competent teachers in schools, teachers need to have opportunities to interrogate their own beliefs, biases and perspectives and consider how this might impact or influence their instructional decisions as teachers. They must consider what factors influence their thinking and how their experiences translate into the classroom environment and resources they use. Questioning one's bias and the barriers these create in honoring all students is an important step in implementing an inclusive approach in teaching students. When analyzing bodies of research that explore teachers' perceptions and attitudes, the results indicate that while teachers along with their administrators and colleagues value multicultural education and specifically multicultural literature, they do not effectively implement multicultural components to promote diversity and students' understanding of various cultures (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Tucker, 2014; Vargas 2020).

Studies have found that though teachers believe that literature should reflect diverse populations, some teachers do not use multicultural literature in their classroom often due to the lack of diversity of the school or classroom population (Tucker, 2014). Other teachers reported not using multicultural literature because they were uncomfortable using books to explore cultures or perspectives unfamiliar to them or that they had little knowledge about (Holland & Mongillo, 2016).

Another study showed that while teachers understood what it meant to be culturally responsive educators, they did not actually engage in culturally responsive teaching practices due to lack of time and resources. The results imply that teachers perceive multicultural literature as stand-alone content and separate from the curriculum and content they teach (Vargas, 2020).

These findings display that a teacher's attitude and perception toward multicultural

education impacted teachers’ actions regarding their integration of multicultural literature and critical exploration of diversity in the classroom and society. The failure to create opportunities to explore diverse cultures and perspectives reinforces a “Euro-dominate culture” which keeps students from diverse cultures marginalized both in the classroom and in society (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Tucker, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

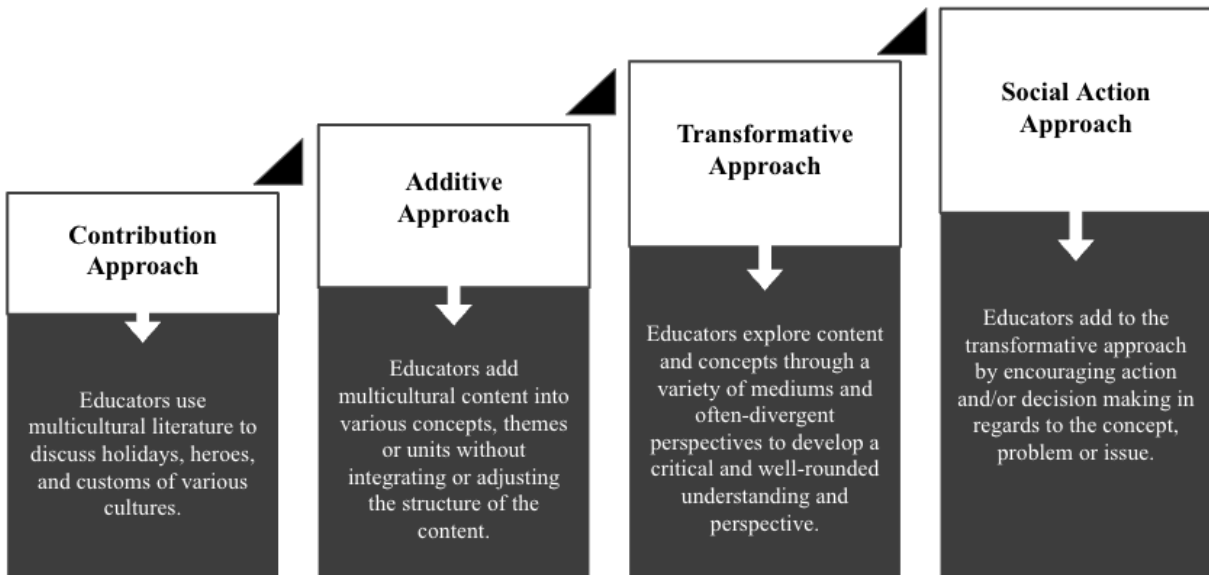
Educators must not only cater to students’ academic needs but incorporate instructional procedures and materials that are inclusive to all students’ perspectives and cultures. In consistency with the four phases of multiculturalism, Banks (1989) outlined a four-tier approach to assist educators in the inclusion of multicultural content: contribution, additive, transformative, and social action. While the approach was not specific to literature, this approach is applicable to the implementation of multicultural literature in the classroom (Banks, 1989; Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013). See figure 1.

Figure 1

Bank’s Four-Tier Approach to Integrating Multicultural Content (Banks, 1989. Used with permission.)

Figure 2

Bank’s Four-Tier Approach to Integrating Multicultural Content (Banks, 1989. Recreated with permission.)



The *Contribution Approach* refers to educators using multicultural literature to discuss

holidays, heroes, and customs of various cultures. With this approach, cultures and ethnicities are explored primarily related to specific holidays, events, or celebrations with little exploration of the culture that is unrelated to the event or occasion (Tucker, 2014). For example, teachers might celebrate Martin Luther King Day without mentioning the history or relevance behind the day. While this might be the easiest approach for educators, it does not present a global view for students of the various cultural and ethnic perspectives that exist globally. This level of integration does not give students a robust view of the pluralistic nature of American society and instead promotes students seeing ethnic and cultural groups as outsiders who are given acknowledgement (Carter et al., 2007). This approach also tends to gloss over the true issues of oppression or victimization of the cultural or ethnic group (Banks, 1989).

The *Additive Approach* refers to educator's addition of multicultural content into various concepts, themes, or units without integrating or adjusting the structure of the content. This is accomplished through the integration of multicultural literature without changing the focus or content of the unit substantially (Banks, 1989). For example, books written by authors of color might be added to the existing school reading list, without examining how this might impact the program (Ramsey et al., 2003). If teachers are not comfortable with the content or lack confidence in varied cultural context, they choose not to integrate or alter the unit's structure.

The *Transformative Approach* refers to how educators infuse curriculum and resources that explore the concept critically and from multiple points of views giving students a lens for examining the status quo and engaging in transformative dialogue (Gibson & Parks, 2014). This approach explores content and concepts through a variety of mediums and often divergent perspectives to develop a critical and well-rounded understanding and perspective. Teachers and school administrators examine the whole curriculum and expand or reshape the content to represent multiple points of view, with the issues of power and oppression that might influence what content is considered most valuable and of the greatest use to children living within a particular society (Ramsey et al., 2003). It is suggested that through this transactional learning that individuals construe, validate, or potentially reformulate their beliefs and values to guide future decision making and actions (Szecsi et al., 2010). This infusion creates frames of reference that will extend students' understandings of the landscape, development, and intricacies of society (Tucker, 2014).

The *Social Action* approach, like the Transformative approach, infuses multicultural literature that encourages students to think critically from multiple perspectives, but adds elements that require students to take action and/or make decisions in regard to the concept, problem, or issue (Tucker, 2014). A major goal of the Social Action approach is "to teach students thinking and decision-making skills, to empower them, and to help them acquire a sense of political efficacy" (Banks, 1989, p. 18). These goals are all encompassing and accomplished through students approaching the text and world around them with a critical lens. This goal can be accomplished through critical literacy. Critical literacy is defined by Gopalakrishnan (2011) as the process of becoming literate about a society or group through questioning, through seeing things from various viewpoints, through uncovering biases and reading "between the lines," and through critically analyzing the workings of a society historically and culturally, in order to thrive in it. (p. 9)

Instead of simply reading the text, students are engaged to question the beliefs and assumptions of others, and use the knowledge acquired through experiences to act or become change agents. When teachers select high quality multicultural literature to assist students in investigating society, our students learn to question, inquire, and be active participants in the learning process. Through exploring text and topics from multiple viewpoints and perspectives, students gain a viewpoint to understand and make sense of the world around them (Gopalakrishnan, 2011). These critical approaches lead to students embracing their own culture as well as developing empathy and acceptance for other cultures and perspectives. Therefore, the research question this study seeks to answer is: How do primary teachers use multicultural texts for classroom read alouds?

Methodology

The design of this qualitative research approach was phenomenography. This methodological approach allowed the researcher to uncover the differences that exist between human understanding (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Phenomenography is varied from other forms of qualitative research in that it is interested in related meanings vs. independent awareness over beliefs, and the approach is interpretative focused vs. explanatory (Tight, 2014). Therefore, this design illuminates teachers' purpose in selecting multicultural texts for classroom read alouds.

Data Collection

Data was collected using an open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire addressed multicultural texts used for classroom read alouds and the purpose of their use. An open-ended or free response questionnaire lets participants answer a set of questions with their own words, thoughts and feelings (Manning and Kunkel, 2013). This method allowed the participants time to reflect and consider their answers and an opportunity to revise and reflect if they chose to do so before sharing their thoughts and perspective with the researcher (Manning and Kunkel, 2013).

The web-based questionnaire was composed of two sections. The first section asked the participants for demographic information about their years of experience, level of education, ethnicity and grade level. The second section asked participants to identify five multicultural titles used for classroom read alouds and the factors that influenced their selection process and purpose. For each multicultural text identified, participants shared the purpose or how the text was implemented for classroom use.

Validation process

Data collection ensured credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) through the validation process. Initially an expert panel was constructed consisting of university professors and certified teachers to develop the protocol used to answer the central research question. This process helped to ensure content validity. After the construction of the protocol, a pilot test was administered prior to the data collection process. Creswell (2013) discusses that field testing is beneficial in identifying and addressing any weaknesses or limitations within the instrument before final implementation (Kvale, 2007).

The pilot test was administered to three certified primary teachers in various suburban school districts. Each participant was asked to share basic demographic information and multicultural titles for classroom read aloud use. After the questionnaire was completed by the three participants, Author A conducted a thematic analysis to determine emerging themes in the data. After conducting this analysis, the researcher asked for feedback regarding clarity, relevancy and usability from the participants and university faculty. This process allowed the researcher to refine the tool and information collected in the open-ended questionnaire and ensure construct validity. To account for the variance in participant's background knowledge and to build common understanding, multicultural literature and read alouds were defined on the open-ended questionnaire given to study participants (Banks, 1997; Hoffman 2011).

Role of the Researchers

Both researchers are white, middle-class females who grew up in a Midwestern suburb. Growing up, most of their peers looked like them, celebrated similar traditions and holidays and had family structures like their own. When reflecting on how diversity was celebrated and discussed in their childhood classrooms, it lies primarily at the Contributions Approach level in that they only talked about or read books with people of color during Black history month. The researchers continue to be surprised by teachers' hesitancy to immerse multicultural literature into their curriculum and the lack of foundational knowledge teachers have in selecting multicultural literature that honors diversity versus perpetuates stereotypes and biases. While they believe that teachers know honoring diversity is important, they do believe that teacher preparation programs and school districts need to provide teachers with more training in selecting multicultural titles that will provide authentically diverse experiences and perspectives for students.

Participants

The site of this study was a Midwestern, suburban school district that at the time of the study included four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. This rapidly growing school district serves over 3,200 students and about eighty-seven percent of the student population is white. Of the remaining student population, approximately four percent of students are Hispanic, four percent are two or more races, two percent are African American and less than one percent of students identify as American Indian or Pacific Islander. Nearly ten percent of students receive free or reduced lunch (Nebraska Department of Education, 2018).

Participants were selected using the comprehensive sampling strategy. The sampling of participants was also homogenous in that the selected participants are the same or similar in nature (Patton, 1990). This strategy was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to "achieve representativeness of the context" and capture varied experiences of the participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pg. 314). All full time certified primary teachers in the selected suburban school district were invited to participate in the study and complete the questionnaire. The research focused on primary grades, specifically grades Kindergarten through second grade, where teacher-facilitated read alouds and interactive text interpretations are the most prevalent instructional methods (Vasquez, 2010, Crafton et al., 2007). This approach to participant

sampling allowed the researcher to gain a collective understanding of the phenomenon as it relates to the central research question (Patton, 1990).

Twenty-one certified kindergartens through second grade teachers participated in the open-ended questionnaire. Collectively, participants averaged twelve years of teaching experience, and all were white females. See Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Characteristics	Percent of Participants (n = 21)	Years of Experience
Kindergarten	43%	14 years
First grade	43%	11 years
Second grade	14%	13 years

Nine were kindergarten teachers who averaged a total of fourteen years teaching experience. Nine, first grade teachers participated with an average of eleven years teaching experience and three, second grade teachers participated with an average of thirteen years teaching experience. All but three participants had obtained a master's degree.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was utilized (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to interpret the data collected through the open-ended questionnaires. Author A, the only author active in the data collection and analysis process, first read through all responses to familiarize themselves with the data. Inductive coding was utilized to identify common semantic descriptors in the first round of analysis. Some responses contained multiple purposes and were coded with multiple themes within a single response. Data was examined a second time by Author A using deductive coding to determine patterns and identify codes that aligned with themes from Bank's Four Tiers of Integrating Multicultural Content (Banks, 1989).

Results

The following themes emerged from the responses to teachers' use of multicultural texts. See Table 2.

Table 2

Teacher’s Purpose in Selecting Multicultural Text

Purpose	Codes	Number of times referenced
Contribution Approach	Holidays Heroes	31
Additive	District curriculum Curriculum supplement Social emotional learning	21
Transformative	Divergent perspectives	0
Social Action	Divergent perspectives Social action Social change	0

Contributions Approach

Using multicultural texts to support various holidays and heroes was referenced thirty-one times in participants’ responses. Many texts, like *Martin’s Big Words*, were selected by participants to engage students in conversations about Martin Luther King (MLK) and the civil rights movement. One participant discussed the use of *Martin’s Big Words* to go, “more in depth into MLK’s life helping the kids understand how he wasn’t so different from them as kids” while another participant discussed that this title “teaches children about segregation, equality, fair and equal.”

To support conversations about the Chinese New Year, participants identified nine texts. One text selected by participants was *My First Chinese New Year*. When discussing the purpose of this text, one participant stated, “I chose this book because I have used it in my classroom each year to introduce the Chinese New Year. It gives my first graders background knowledge on the culture and how the holiday is celebrated.” Another text selected by participants was *Dragon Kite of the Autumn Moon*. The participant selecting this text discussed the purpose of using this book was to highlight common symbols of the holiday and culture. She stated, “I read this story during the Chinese New Year because it specifically talks about the dragon or the dragon kite.”

Participants also identified seven texts to discuss aspects of Thanksgiving such as Pilgrims and American Indians. *Duck for Turkey Day* was one text identified by a participant to support conversations around Thanksgiving. This participant selected this text to discuss the

diverse traditions of families. She stated, “This book represents how families celebrate Thanksgiving in different ways. I have many different cultures in my room and wanted to make sure they all felt represented.” Another participant wanted students to explore American Indian culture through the lens of the title *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*. She stated, “This picture book explains the importance of nature to Native American tribes.”

Additive Approach

Participants identified twenty-one texts that supported themes or content taught in the classroom. These texts were used to supplement or enhance the curriculum being taught. One participant shared that they used the book *I Love My Hair* because, “The class was doing writing lessons on things they love about themselves” and this text served as a mentor text through the writing curriculum. Another participant discussed choosing the text *Rosie Revere Engineer* because “... it is about a kid thinking outside the box. It goes great with STEAM lessons.”

Many participants referenced selecting texts that center around themes of acceptance, community and kindness. These responses referenced the moral or theme of the text and the development of students’ social awareness and relationship skills. One participant selected the text, *What If We Were All the Same?* to highlight the value of diversity within the school community. She stated, “I love that it teaches students we are all different and that is okay.” When referring to the theme of community another teacher referenced the text, *Is There Really A Human Race?* The participant discussed that, “this book shows the different meanings of the word race. The main idea is more about loving, helping, and caring for one another will make the world a better place.” Another participant selected the text *All Are Welcome* to build a classroom community. When discussing the text, she stated, “My purpose was to reiterate the fact that all are welcome in my classroom. No one student is better or worse than any other.”

Transformative Approach

Transformative approach refers to teachers selecting materials that offer a divergent perspective and viewpoint for students to consider. These titles are selected to expand or reshape the content to represent multiple points of view that are often missing or underrepresented in the district curriculum. There was no evidence in participants’ responses that texts were selected for this purpose.

Social Action Approach

Social Action approach aligns with the transformative approach in that teachers are choosing titles that expand or reshape the content to provide varying viewpoints or perspectives, but then students are encouraged to engage in social action or change to address the issue or problem being discussed. There was also no evidence in participants’ responses that texts selected were used to offer divergent perspectives that would engage students in social action or change.

Discussion

The findings from this study show that participants most often used multicultural literature to discuss various cultures and perspectives through the exploration of holidays which is reflective of the Contributions approach. While this approach can be most comfortable for teachers to implement, it sheds light on the potential dangers of a single story. During her 2009 TED Talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie discussed the danger of the single story and how when we consistently display people or events as one thing repeatedly, it trains us to view individuals or cultures in one way. This way of thinking becomes the only way in which we think about that culture or perspective. This narrowing and limiting window into a culture does not help students understand that “diversity is a way to honor both the distinctiveness of our identities and our participation in the human experience” (Enriquez, 2019, p. 30) and not something we acknowledge only on holidays. Teachers must recognize this need and be intentional in implementing a wide range of texts to generate a wide range of perspectives to disrupt and dismantle the single story.

There is also evidence of the Additive approach in which teachers infused multicultural literature into the curriculum to enhance but did not alter the concept or curriculum being taught (Banks, 1989). Many participants discussed using multicultural texts that were part of the district curriculum or using literature that supports concepts taught in the classroom. Though these approaches are foundational in developing respect and empathy in students, these approaches can often limit the opportunity for students to view society from diverse perspectives and cultures because the curriculum remains unchanged or altered to explore various points of view (Agirdag et al., 2016). Teachers must “assess the scope of multicultural learning in the classroom” (Enriquez, 2021, p. 105) so students understand underrepresented cultures are an integral part of society. Teachers must interrogate the curriculum to determine if it contains global perspectives and addresses world cultures, or if they need to consider supplementing or replacing core texts to provide a more current and global narrative for students.

Lastly, the results indicate that texts to provide divergent perspectives or engage students in social action or change were not intentionally selected for classroom use by any participants. With the desire for teachers to create environments that provide diverse perspectives and opportunities for students to engage in social action, we must consider what barriers are keeping teachers from integrating multicultural literature at both the transformative and social action approaches. Is it that teachers need more training and professional development to build individual cultural competence and comfortability leading cultural discussions in the classroom? Or do teachers need more support in selecting high quality multicultural materials and facilitating social justice conversations?

Implications

When preparing to teach content, teachers are often provided with a guide that includes step by step instructions to deliver content, and questions to facilitate discussions that lead students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the academic standards. Teachers don't fear not having a strong grasp of the content because the curriculum provides the language, tools and strategies needed to support implementation. The same playbook is not provided to strengthen cultural competence nor are teachers provided with strategies to navigate difficult

conversations in the classroom. The lack of resources and confidence in leading discussions grounded in culture and social inequities often results in teacher fear and disinterest in facilitating these opportunities in the classroom. To support teacher in integrating multicultural literature at the transformative and social action approaches, we must maximize spaces for them to enhance their own cultural competence and provides teachers with language to lead critical conversations in the classroom.

Maximizing Spaces

Schools need to create spaces for professional development to increase teacher's competence and comfort with using multicultural literature to engage in cultural conversations. With the goal being to have culturally competent teachers in schools, teachers must feel secure enough to ask questions to learn from the lived experiences of others. They also need to have opportunities to interrogate their own beliefs and perspectives. With our current social and political climate, this is a challenging task for teachers. The fear of saying the wrong thing or asking questions that may appear ignorant or offensive impairs the ability to build cultural competence. Creating teacher assistance teams (TATs) composed of teachers, administrators, and community members (i.e. students, parents, or community stakeholders) that provide knowledge and support in navigating what role culture plays in content and classroom environments will assist teachers in identifying strategies and structures that will foster inclusive practices. This collaboration works to break down biases, increase cultural authenticity in titles selected for classroom use, and foster conversations to build students' cultural consciousness.

Language

Designing experiences that create opportunities for students to be engaged speakers and listeners allows them to share their experiences, while considering the experiences of others. These rich discussions promote social awareness, perspective taking ability, and position students as meaning makers (San Antonio, 2018). Fear minimizes the experiences created for teachers and students to develop their cultural lens and institute social change in school settings. Using guiding questions, like the ones shared below, help facilitate discussions and foster critical thinking while highlighting the contrasting viewpoints and perspectives that exist in the classroom:

- Why do you think that?
- What does/does not make sense to you?
- Can someone share a different perspective?
- What are you questioning that you heard/read?
- Do you agree or disagree with what was shared?
- What connections can you make to the experiences heard/read about?

To prepare teachers to foster an environment that encourages students to question their own beliefs and be willing to learn from the experiences and perspectives of others, teachers must be provided with tools and language to facilitate a dialogic process that promotes respect and social action.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Although the results of this study provide insight into the use of multicultural texts in kindergarten through second grade classrooms, they must be interpreted within the limitations of the study. The first limitation is that all participants in this study are limited to kindergarten through second grade teachers in one Midwestern, suburban school district. Participants in this study were all white females. We recognize that these limitations in our sample do not represent the scope of teachers across the country but believe that the results provide worthwhile insights and align with previous findings in the literature (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Tucker, 2014; Vargas 2020). Future studies including participants across numerous states and classrooms would allow for more diverse experiences and perspectives to be represented.

Conclusion

When teachers effectively help students explore society through high quality multicultural literature, students inquire and engage in the learning process. This provides multiple perspectives for students to embrace their own culture, develop empathy, and identify how they fit within the world. The absence of these texts for this purpose in this study call on researchers to examine further why these texts and transformative approaches are underutilized or non-existent when integrating multicultural literature into classroom read alouds. Further examining the gaps identified in this study will assist teacher preparation programs and school districts in training teachers to engage students at both the transformative and social action tiers

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