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**IMPROVING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND ACCEPTANCE USING  
MULTICULTURAL TEXTS**

by

Bianca Rouse

A Thesis

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

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Reading Education

at

Rowan University

December 6, 2017

Thesis Chair: Susan Browne, Ed.D.



## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my mother, Bridgette Rouse who has motivated and encouraged me throughout my life.

## Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank my mother, Bridgette Rouse, who has been by my side throughout my journey in graduate school. Without your guidance, support, and listening ear, completing this thesis would have not been possible.

I would also like to thank my cousin Jalessa Fleming. Not only have you been supportive, you have motivated and given me strength to complete assignments that I thought were impossible. Your words of wisdom and encouragement played a significant role placing me on the right track.

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## Abstract

Bianca Rouse  
IMPROVING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND ACCEPTANCE USING  
MULTICULTURAL TEXTS  
2017-2018  
Dr. Susan Browne  
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this research is to investigate how students in a third-grade classroom engage in multicultural texts when reading about cultures other than their own. Furthermore, it will investigate how the use of multicultural texts will impact their understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures. Throughout the six-week study, students read and engaged in discussions after reading two multicultural texts. They participated in activities expressing their thoughts and beliefs related to the content read in class. The strategies used for this qualitative research study were questionnaires, observations, accountable talk discussions, artifact analysis, and interviews. Finally, after discussing and analyzing the texts, students were able to identify possible solutions to help people become more aware and accepting of diverse cultures.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Growing up in an urban area, I always knew that I wanted to give back to the community and serve as a role model for underprivileged students. When I began student teaching, initially, I was not fully aware of my position as an educator. As I adapted to my role and became more comfortable in my position as a student teacher, I began to closely observe the interaction amongst the students in the fourth-grade classroom I was placed in. The classroom consisted of predominantly Hispanic and African American students. While completing a group assignment, they interacted with one another respectfully and took pride in the task they were completing. It was a great feeling seeing students take such pride in their work but as I glanced at one girl in particular the look in her eyes immediately caught my attention. As Jayla stood by the library searching for a book, she looked at me and said, “Ms. Rouse, why can’t I find any books where they character’s look like me.” While standing there pondering her question, I bent down on my knees looking her directly in the eyes and asked, “Why did you ask me that Jayla?” She stated, “I see a lot of books with white girls and animals, but I wanted to use a different book for our project. I wanted to choose a book about a Hispanic girl but I can’t find any.” Sadness consumed her eyes and in that moment, I realized I didn’t have an answer for her. Thinking of a response that would help ease her mind, I explained that the classroom library was small and we would go to the school library during lunch to find a book with characters that looked just like her. She seemed to relax a little bit more and continued working on her assignment with her group.

The following year, I was hired as a fifth-grade teacher in the same district. I noticed early on that students were separated into cliques. This was much different than my experience from the year prior as a student teacher. Ultimately, the class was separated into three groups: Hispanic, African American, and Islamic. At the time, I assumed these students were more comfortable with one another because they share the same ethnicity therefore I never mentioned it. I would eventually place them into heterogeneous groups however they generally remained in their cliques during lunch.

Looking back at these pivotal moments in my teaching career, I missed a valuable teaching moment. Providing these students with the resources and tools needed to become more culturally aware and accepting of diversity would have been a life-long lesson that could have possibly resonated with them throughout their educational journey. It was a missed opportunity to have students learn, share, connect, and relate to one another on a deeper level. This is one reason why multicultural literature has significantly influenced my research and why I vow to include multicultural literature in my instruction.

Student teaching in the fourth-grade classroom as well as my first year working with fifth- grade students truly opened my eyes to the lack of multicultural literature present in classrooms. I never thought about the importance of multicultural literature while I attended elementary school but as an adult and educator, it plays a significant role in the learning and development of students. Living in a diverse society we expect students to become problem solvers and critical thinkers, but if we are not providing them with the resources needed to develop and expand their knowledge about diverse cultures, our expectations for students become unrealistic.

## **Purpose Statement**

Living in such a diverse divided country, it is extremely important to expose students at an early age to the range of cultures in our nation. Working in a predominantly Hispanic community has allowed me to see that students lack awareness about other cultures. As an educator, I must play a significant role in creating productive citizens in a global environment. Therefore, it is crucial that students begin to learn more about tolerance and acceptance of different cultures, religions, and race. A meaningful way to introduce this concept to students is by exposing them to multicultural texts. Multicultural texts would provide students with knowledge about different cultures and allow them to engage in productive discussions about diversity.

Reading multicultural literature students are unfamiliar with will provide them with the background knowledge required while promoting acceptance and tolerance of diverse cultures. Students will discuss controversial topics such as civil rights, women rights, and gender inequality. Having open discussions about these topics at an early age will expose students to the real-world problems that some people face today. Often times I have noticed that students struggle to comprehend or relate to literature read in class because of their lack of exposure to diverse cultures. I am hoping that this study will allow students to become more accepting and engaged when talking about people from different cultures, religions, or race.

“Multicultural education has not yet become a central part of the curriculum regularly offered to students; instead, educators have regulated it primarily to social studies, language arts, and the fine arts and have generally targeted instruction for

students of color” (Gay, 2004, p.31). With the diverse population across the country, the lack of multicultural literature in the classroom should spark concern amongst educators. Providing texts that represent all cultures is key to their development of becoming more culturally aware.

“Another obstacle to implementing multicultural education lies with teachers themselves. Many are unconvinced of its worth or its value in developing academic skills and building a unified community” (Gay, 2004, p.31). It is important for educators to understand the importance and value multicultural literature can contribute into instruction. Students will not be adequately exposed to diversity across the world if teachers continue to adapt this attitude towards multicultural literature.

As a result of the increase in the amount of diversity in classrooms, using multicultural literature has become more of a focus in recent years (Colby, 2004). Exposing students to multicultural literature would help them gain a broader understanding about the world. Although the use of multicultural literature can sometimes present challenges for teachers, it is important that teachers understand the crucial role that multicultural literature plays in the lives of students (Colby, 2004). Multicultural literature would not only allow students to learn about different cultures, it will provide them with the opportunity to express themselves as well. However, in order to do that, teachers must understand the importance of incorporating multicultural texts into their instruction if we want to see an increase in student engagement and acceptance.

When students are engaged in multicultural literature, it promotes appreciation of diversity and encourages dynamic understandings of the world (Martinez, 2012). By

allowing students to engage in multicultural texts, they will gain greater perspective of diversity. As the nation increasingly becomes more diverse, providing multicultural literature to students will give them the opportunity to be more understanding and accepting of people from diverse backgrounds (Martinez, 2012). When students are exposed to multicultural literature that represents their culture, their pride increases when they read about characters they can relate to. “Multicultural literature not only works towards enhancing other cultures but of one’s own. It creates a bridge in which similarities and differences are valued among the diversity in classrooms and beyond” (Martinez, 2012, p. 53).

Previous studies have shown the importance of incorporating diverse literature into classrooms. In addition, studies have shown the opposition that some teachers encounter in relation to implementing multicultural literature into their instruction. This study investigates the importance of discussing controversial and diverse topics and why these discussions should be implemented into elementary education. Not only did students discuss diverse cultures, they became more aware of the problems that people around the world encounter on a daily basis making them more appreciative of the things and opportunities they are provided with.

### **Statement of Research Problem and Question**

Students in elementary schools should be exposed to multicultural texts. With the lack of multicultural texts present in classroom and school libraries, students are not being properly exposed to an adequate amount of multicultural literature (Holland and Mogillo, 2016). After reviewing literature and previous studies, the following question

was posed: How do multicultural texts foster engagement and student acceptance of cultural difference in an elementary classroom?

### **Story of the Question**

In May 2016, I was told that I would no longer teach fifth-grade Literacy. The principal informed me that I would be teaching third-grade literacy during the 2016-2017 school year. My initial thought was “no why me, I don’t have the patience for third graders.” Needless to say, that changed shortly after beginning the school year the following September. Instantly, I fell in love with my new students and vowed that I would learn to be patient and nurturing while targeting their needs while providing rigorous instruction. However, what I wasn’t prepared for was their lack of background knowledge about culture and diversity.

In the third-grade curriculum it is mandated that teachers incorporate *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* and *The Gold Cadillac* into their instruction. During one particular lesson, students reviewed the cover and title of the text and were asked to make a prediction. As they completed this task, I heard snickering. Leroy shouted out, “Ms. Rouse, Jake and Jairo are laughing at Sadako’s name.” After reminding Leroy to raise his hand next time, I took this moment to address the entire class explaining to the students about the importance of respecting different cultures. Furthermore, I explained that some students would be hurt if someone laughed at them because their name wasn’t considered as “normal.” I took this moment to provide students with a brief lesson about respecting different cultures and embracing diversity. In that moment, I realized students were not aware about the customs of the Japanese culture. I revised my lesson to provide



them with information that would help expand their knowledge about the Japanese culture.

Later that year, as I introduced the novel *The Gold Cadillac* to the students. Assuming they had some knowledge from previous classes about the Jim Crow era, I began to provide some background information about the text. The look of confusion on their faces showed me they had no idea about that time in history. This incident took place during the time that I was enrolled in the course *Using Multicultural Literature in the K-12 Classroom*. This course provided me with so much insight about multicultural literature and its importance in the classrooms. I enjoyed reading about multicultural literature, choosing multicultural texts, and creating lessons based on the multicultural texts that were chosen. After my past experiences and completing the course, I developed a passion for multicultural literature. I began researching different texts that I could use to expose my students to different cultures. Unfortunately, I was unable to continue providing students with lessons revolving around multicultural literature because it was not a requirement in my curriculum for the following unit. However, the exposure they were provided with showed me just how significant multicultural literature is in an elementary classroom.

My experiences as an educator have led me to this point. I strongly believe that students must be provided with opportunities to read and discuss multicultural literature in their classroom. Students should be taught at an early age to embrace diversity and cultural differences. If we want students to be well-rounded adults, it is important to begin opening their minds to accept all people regardless of their race, gender, age, religion, or sexuality. Providing literature that represents each student in a classroom is a

great way to show them that we are all equal and worthy to be recognized and celebrated.

### **Organization of the Paper**

Chapter two of this study provides information about the benefits of incorporating multicultural literature into instruction. Furthermore, it discusses the fear that some teachers encounter when teaching students about controversial and diverse topics.

Chapter three explains the data collected, the population of the students used in the study, as well as the qualitative research methods used to analyze the data presented in the study.

Chapter four analyzes the data and provides a detailed description of the findings.

Chapter five concludes the research study by discussing the limitations and implications of the study. In addition, suggestions will be provided for future researchers in relation to promoting student acceptance and engagement in elementary classrooms using multicultural literature.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

Student engagement with multicultural literature promotes appreciation of diversity and encourages dynamic understandings of the world. As the changing face of our nation grows increasingly diverse, both students and teachers are completely immersed in cultural diversity in the classroom (Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002). Incorporating multicultural literature into instruction provides students with an opportunity to relate to different cultures. Furthermore, it allows students to gain a better understanding and appreciation of diversity. “Multicultural literature helps children identify their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the dialogue on issues regarding diversity” (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p. 24).

It is crucial to ensure that students are being provided with rich and diverse literature that will help promote student growth. As 21<sup>st</sup> century learners, they are required to become problem solvers and critical thinkers. Multicultural literature allows students to critically think about a text, analyze different issues or problems in the world today, and create solutions while collaborating with peers. Furthermore, students have the opportunity to connect to peers on a more personal level. Identifying similarities and differences amongst themselves and their peers is a great way to promote positive dialogue in the classroom.

This chapter is a review of literature that examines culturally responsive pedagogy and how it contributes to student growth. It also describes the benefits of incorporating multicultural literature into the classroom as well as the lack of

multicultural literature in classrooms and how it negatively impacted students. Chapter two also focuses on cultural awareness, acceptance, and engagement. Furthermore, the research in chapter two will examine how multicultural literature transformed student thinking and how teachers view multicultural literature and the teaching of multicultural literature.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using multicultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and learned more thoroughly (Gay, 2002, p.106).

When culturally responsive instruction is implemented in the classroom, academic achievement and acceptance of ethnically diverse students are more likely to increase. Students are more likely to gain confidence knowing that their culture is relevant and significant in the classroom. Building a safe and trusting community among diverse learners is a crucial component of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). Engaging in conversations about past experiences significant to one's culture, speaking out about cultural differences, and stating opinions responding to literature about their customs or traditions could be intimidating for some students. If students are expecting to participate in critical discussions analyzing diverse cultures and issues, providing them with a comfortable learning environment that is welcoming and accepting is key.

According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions; academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. “Culturally relevant teaching requires that teachers attend to students’ academic needs, not merely make them feel good. The trick of culturally responsive teaching is to get students to choose academic success” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.160). By incorporating multicultural literature in the classroom, their chance of success is maximized.

Cultural competence requires students to maintain “integrity” as well as academic success (Ladson-Billing, 1995). In this domain of Ladson-Billings culturally relevant pedagogy, students are expected to incorporate their cultural background within the school setting. Their experiences and beliefs play a crucial role in their success. Meanwhile, teachers are expected to provide culturally relevant material utilizing students’ culture as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billing, 1995).

Critical consciousness focuses on students’ ability to develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, morals, values, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequalities (Ladson-Billing, 1995). This viewpoint of culturally responsive pedagogy directly relates to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. By incorporating culturally responsive instruction into classrooms, teachers are preparing students to become critical thinkers, innovators, and problem solvers in today’s society.

A study conducted by Mariana Souto-Manning in 2009 explains how culturally responsive instruction allowed students to analyze problems and create solutions. After

reading the texts *Going Somewhere Special* and *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, students were able to connect to the text because of their African American background and began analyzing how the issues in the text affected them. Students were able to relate and empathize with the stories that took place in the 1950's and 1960's due to their personal experiences. They began sharing their own stories and engaging in discussions outside of the classroom to make people more aware of racial tension (Souto-Manning, 2009). Souto-Manning states, "The issues the books raised made students think of their own location of oppression within the school and society. By becoming aware of the issue, these six and seven year olds brainstormed solutions" (p.69). The results of Souto-Manning's study significantly prove that incorporating multicultural literature into elementary instruction is crucial if students are expected to become 21<sup>st</sup> century learners.

One limitation teachers may encounter when incorporating culturally responsive literature into the classroom is the lack of quality multicultural literature available. In 2012, Martinez conducted a study that measured the quality of multicultural literature books that could be used for culturally responsive instruction at elementary school libraries in Treasure Valley. Martinez states (2012), "The results indicate that quality multicultural literature is very limited in the majority of school libraries in Treasure Valley" (p. 56). She suggested that further studies explore how the selection process is conducted for literature within school districts (Martinez, 2012). If educators hope to see progress and growth as shown in Souto-Manning's study, it is vital that teachers and students have access to multicultural literature in school classrooms and libraries.

Although culturally responsive instruction has proven to be successful in the classroom, some teachers fear the backlash they will receive when discussing

controversial topics. According to Tully (1998), “Teachers becoming familiar with literature written by minority authors often fear censorship or at least challenges to the texts and their professionalism” (p.60). It is common to hear stories of teachers avoiding controversial topics because they fear the reaction of administrators or parents. However, if students are required to become “problem solvers,” multicultural literature must be implemented during instruction. To avoid concerns about incorporating multicultural literature into the classroom, Tully (1998) suggests teachers send letters to parents explaining the importance and purpose of exposing students to diverse cultures and having discussions that focus on social issues.

### **Multicultural Literature in Classrooms**

Making visible the different purposes everyone brings to any multicultural educational reform is essential in order to honor the complexity of the project and get past naïve discourse of policies that disregard the social politics of the classrooms and communities they serve (Ketter & Lewis, 2001, p.182).

Educators must understand the importance of incorporating multicultural literature in their instruction in order to make students aware and more accepting of different cultures. Colby and Lyon (2004) asked teachers to explain the role multicultural literature has played in their education in hopes of encouraging them to incorporate multicultural literature in their classrooms. One participant responded by stating “I do not recall reading much multicultural literature geared toward African Americans. As a white-child I never really thought about it because I already had books that I could relate to” (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p. 2). Another participant stated, “It seems obvious that

readers want to identify with characters, but I never considered how all-white characters would affect African American students” (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p. 2). Responses varied greatly from those who were exposed to multicultural literature. “I feel this is important because the key to abolishing racism is to first abolish ignorance that one has of others” (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p. 3). Another participant stated, “Perceptions will not only change for the minority students, but also their majority classmates, and all of them will learn from the experience” (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p. 3). Exposing students to multicultural literature will allow them to gain knowledge about diverse cultures. Ultimately, the teachers in this study concluded that they would incorporate culturally diverse literature into their instruction that encourages students to become more aware and accepting of people from different cultures (Colby & Lyon, 2004).

Students of all cultures will benefit from multicultural literature in the classroom for numerous reasons: it provides an opportunity for all children to see themselves in literature, fosters development and positive self-esteem, prevents people from feeling isolated, and it cultivates respect, empathy, and acceptance of all people (Steiner, 2001). By providing students with literature they can relate to, they become engaged and more likely to comprehend the text. Cambria and Guthrie states (2010), “As students grow in awareness of how reading connects to them, their valuing of reading expands in breadth and depth” (p.26). Allowing students to interact with literature on a personal level shows that they are actively engaged in the text.

Dong (2005) explored cultural values through discussions in his classroom. Students were required to read diverse literature eventually responding to the text. They were then asked to compare and contrast their cultural values and beliefs with the cultural



values and beliefs held by people of other cultures. Based on his findings, Dong concluded:

Teachers must elucidate the cultural values and racial and cultural differences that underlie the behavior of characters in the work, challenge stereotypes, and engage students in cultural discussions. Teaching multicultural literature will help students discuss these differences and enhance cross-cultural understanding (Dong, 2005, p.59).

Providing students with the opportunity to engage in, respond to, and discuss multicultural literature allows them to gain knowledge about peers from diverse cultures. Furthermore, students can express their cultural beliefs and values allowing their peers to learn more about their cultural background as well.

“Elementary teachers have the greatest opportunity to foster the development of positive, healthy attitudes towards others in their students” (Holland & Mongillo, 2016, p17.) This belief expressed by Holland and Mongillo caused them to develop a study inquiring about the use of multicultural literature in elementary classrooms. Twenty-six elementary school teachers from the US completed a survey describing their usage and how students engaged in multicultural texts in their classroom. Holland and Mogillo (2016) found that teachers were more likely to implement multicultural literature in their instruction when it was not mandated rather than when it was. One participant stated, “Our curriculum is embedded with multicultural literature. There are many different cultures in our stories that we read in our anthology. I select literature based on holidays or special days that we have in our community” (Holland & Mongillo, 2016, p. 22.)

Multicultural literature should not be viewed as something that is taught during “special occasions.” This type of mindset towards multicultural literature will not effectively expose students to diverse cultures and promote students to become critical thinkers, innovators, or problem solvers.

Another significant finding worth noting is that teachers felt more comfortable implementing multicultural literature in their classrooms when they received support from administration. Holland and Mongillo (2016) suggests elementary school administrators promote multicultural literacy rather than imposing district mandates: by doing this school administrators might build trust, understanding, and respect between themselves and teachers. Although this study was limited to twenty-six (majority white) teachers from suburban school districts, Holland and Mongillo recommends that future studies focus on principals and how they can influence or promote more multicultural literature into elementary classrooms.

Teaching multicultural literature is more than recognizing heroes and holidays of cultural groups: transforming instruction that focuses on decision-making and social action skill building is a critical component as well (Logan, Watson, Hood, & Lasswell, 2016). The purpose of this study was to identify multicultural literature that would challenge gender and sexuality stereotypes that could be implemented in elementary classrooms. The authors in this study expressed the importance of teaching elementary students about controversial topics and how it could inspire them to become more accepting of others who are not viewed as the “norm.” The lack of LGBTQ texts present in elementary classrooms is a concern.

Our expressed desire is for elementary educators to take it upon themselves to provide inclusive multicultural reading instruction using LGBTQ-themed books. The benefits of such pedagogical and dispositional stance will empower their young learners with critical literacy attributes necessary to expand their perspectives through window, mirror, and door experiences (Logan, Watson, Hood, & Lasswell, 2016, p. 390).

Reading multicultural literature about different religions, traditions, and beliefs are critical in multicultural education but we must not forget the importance of exposing students to issues that are far more controversial. Fear is a significant component with the lack of exposure to these types of multicultural texts (Tully, 1998) however, if educators aspire to promote social growth and cultural acceptance, these topics must be addressed. After all, “there is nothing to fear but fear itself” (Tilly, 1998, p. 63).

Christensen’s book *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*, focused on teaching students about social justice and responding to issues or conflicts through writing. Working in a community that she labeled as “chaos,” she encountered students who feared the community they lived in daily. Her solution to this problem was to write about it. Christensen states (2000), “I couldn’t ignore the toll the outside world was exacting on my students. Rather than pretending that I could close my door in the face of their mounting fears, I needed to use information that would reach them” (p.5). Christensen introduced multicultural literature and poems to her students that they could relate to. Making connections to the characters and engaging in discussions allowed them to express their fears and relate to others in their community. “At first I worried that

inviting students to write about violence might glorify it. It didn't turn out that way. More often students shared their fears" (Christensen, 2000, p.6).

By engaging in multicultural literature, students were able to express their fears and create a news article expressing concerns with their community. By helping students excavate and reflect on their personal experiences and connecting them to the world of literature, they moved from ideas to action (Christensen, 2000). The goal is to provide students with multicultural literature that will allow students to express themselves, connect to others, engage in discussions, and form solutions. Christensen provided students with the resources they need to support them ultimately sparking change in their community.

## **Conclusion**

After reviewing the research pertaining to multicultural literature, it is evident that multicultural literature must be incorporated into elementary instruction as students are prepared to become 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. The lack of multicultural literature present in classrooms is a serious concern. "Diversity is a reality of our nation and of the world, and with that reality comes the responsibility and opportunity for growth in order to create a more accepting and just world" (Martinez, 2012, p.53). Multicultural literature plays a significant role providing elementary students with literature that will require them to critically think about diversity and issues in society. "As the challenge to better educate underachieving students intensifies and diversity among student population expands, the need for multicultural education grows exponentially" (Gay, 2004, p.35). Providing students with an opportunity to engage in multicultural literature is crucial.

This study will require students to actively listen and discuss cultures they are unfamiliar with. Topics such as discrimination and violence will be presented therefore students will be questioned throughout the read aloud to assess their ability to comprehend and respond to rigorous texts. In addition, they will explore and discuss possible solutions related to the problems in the story.

It is clear that multicultural literature plays a significant role in elementary education. This study will provide students the opportunity to explore, engage, and discuss multicultural literature. As a result, it is hoped that students will start to become more accepting of diverse cultures and set out ways to bring change and awareness to their community.

## Chapter III

### Research Design/Methodology

This qualitative study explores how multicultural literature can increase students' awareness and acceptance of diverse cultures. Qualitative research helps provide insight to problems or issues noted by researchers. "Practitioner research reflects a distinctive commitment to investigating issues of equity, engagement and agency in classrooms and schools across the country" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009, p. 12). Qualitative research allows researchers to dive deeper into the problem. Observations, interviews, videos, and dialogue between the researcher and participants provide qualitative data that can be used to help gain a better understanding of the problem set forth in the research study. "Increasingly sophisticated researchers permit the verification of scientifically based practices and policies that increase achievement, improve teaching and the schools, and solve problems involved in providing universal education to a large and diverse population" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009, p. 10).

Qualitative research allows the researcher and participants to critically engage in in-depth studies. Participants engaged in accountable talk discussions that required them to modify their thinking and responses about the text after analyzing their peers counter arguments. Furthermore, the interviews, observations, and artifacts provided me with qualitative data that was critically analyzed to measure their development throughout the study. For most of the participants in this study, they were exposed to literature that required them to "think outside the box." They are engaging in discussions about controversial topics they may or may not be familiar with. The qualitative research

approach applies best to this study because students have to engage, reflect, and analyze information in order to change their way of thinking or increase their knowledge about culture, diversity, and acceptance. Not only were they required to engage in critical and controversial discussions, they were required to support their beliefs using evidence from the literature during one-on-one and group discussions. In addition, their written responses to the literature allowed them to clearly articulate their thoughts and point of view about controversial topics.

### **Procedure of the Study**

Before I began collecting data, I showed students pictures of people from across the world. They consisted of people from the following cultures: Pakistani, Muslim, South African, Japanese, Chinese, Hispanic, and American. The students struggled to identify the students from the Pakistani, Muslim, and South African culture.

After observing the population of the class, I decided to focus on the South African and Pakistani culture because they seemed to be the most unfamiliar with these two cultures. The participants in this study were predominantly Hispanic therefore I wanted to expose them to cultures they were not familiar with. I explained to the participants that they would read about and participate in activities about different cultures to expand their knowledge about diversity.

During the first three thirty-minute sessions, students completed a pre-reading cultural activity. They were broken off into four groups. Each group received a large piece of bulletin paper tracing one of their group member's bodies. As a group, they listed information describing their culture and engaged in discussions identifying

similarities and differences amongst each other. As students discussed their cultures, I observed and collected anecdotal notes that would be used for data analysis. Next, the groups presented their findings to the class. We engaged in a whole group discussion in which they compared and contrasted their culture to their classmates' cultures from different groups. Finally, students were given a culture reference sheet listing the different cultural components. After reviewing the reference sheet, students engaged in a think-pair-share discussing the different aspects of their culture.

The next four to seven thirty minutes sessions, I read aloud the story The Day Gogo Went to Vote (Elinor Batezat Sisulu, 1999). Before reading the text, students viewed the cover and title and made a prediction about the text. As I read the text aloud, I stopped frequently to ask the students questions related to the text checking for comprehension. Students were instructed to jot down notes in their reading response notebooks stating new information they learned about the South African culture. After reading the text, students watched a two-minute clip about the South African culture. As students used their notes to discuss the new information they learned about the South African culture, I worked with a small group rotating every 10 minutes to assess their knowledge and understanding of the text. Students expressed their opinion stating if Gogo should have voted and provided textual evidence to support their response. After working with all four groups, we reconvened to the carpet and discussed their responses as a whole group.

The next eight to twelve thirty minute sessions, I read aloud the text For the Right to Learn Malala Yuosafzai's Story (Rebecca Langston-George, 2016). We discussed the Pakistani traditions and rules that affected the education system in their country.



Students were asked to describe how they would feel if they were not allowed to attend school. Furthermore, they discussed the actions of Malala in the text and explained if they would have the courage to take a stand as she did. As students worked to complete this activity, I worked with four students one on one to have them further explain their perspective of this text. Students were then required to write a letter to the Pakistani government explaining whether or not they should change the educational system in their country. I recorded students reading their letter aloud to use for further analysis.

During the last three sessions, I showed a video of students' describing their feelings about not being accepted because of their culture. Students were given a graphic organizer. They were asked to record how each student in the video felt because they were not accepted in society because of their culture. In addition, students responded to a question stating why it is important for students to become more accepting of diverse cultures. Serving as the facilitator, they engaged in a whole group accountable talk discussion. I recorded their responses for further analysis.

### **Data Sources**

The data for this qualitative study was collected in multiple ways. I began by using a survey to assess their background knowledge about culture, diversity, and multicultural literature. Using this information, I decided to incorporate multicultural literature that was not related to the students' cultural background. After choosing the texts, students were asked to list information about their culture and discuss this information within their groups and during whole group discussion. As I walked around observing their responses, I took notes and recorded information that I found to be

significant in my teacher journal. This journal allowed me to record significant moments, organize my thinking, and write down any clarifications or questions that I had in regard to the study. Throughout the study, I recorded a whole group accountable talk discussion and students presenting their work. Furthermore, I worked with students in small groups, interviewed students, and engaged in one-on-one discussions to assess their understanding about the information presented throughout the study. I collected the students' reader response journals, and any charted information to help analyze and identify common themes throughout the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected throughout this study was used to help draw conclusions about the importance of incorporating multicultural literature in elementary classrooms to help promote engagement and increase cultural acceptance. I used the surveys to guide the literature that would be provided to the students. By using the survey, I was able to see how much students knew about culture, diversity, and multicultural literature which allowed me to choose texts that would promote higher order thinking and engage students in critical discussions about cultural differences. The observations allowed me to hear how students connected to and interacted with the characters in the text. Charting information provided students with a visual that would allow them to see similarities and differences amongst them and people from diverse cultures. The interviews allowed me to probe students and push them to expand their thinking and question the text. By doing this, students became more consciously aware of the culture ultimately driving them to show empathy. The videos that were taken provided me with a tool that would help me

dig deeper into student responses by analyzing their thinking. This showed me if students were more culturally aware and engaged in the activities. I analyzed the reflections in my teacher-research journal and used this as a tool to guide my instruction. The notes provided me with insight to the students thinking and misconceptions they may have had about culture, diversity, and acceptance. The reader response notebooks were a key component as well. The student responses allowed me to analyze their “true” reflective thinking about issues and problems we encountered in the text. I was also able to gain a tremendous amount of data from the small group and one-on-one interactions with students. They felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions in a small group setting making their responses more meaningful and significant to the study.

## **Context**

**Community.** The study site is located in northern New Jersey and is the third largest school district in the state. According to City-Data, approximately 147,000 people reside in this city. Among these residents, 57% are Hispanic, 28% are African American, 9% are White, and 3% are Asian. Fifty two percent of the population are females while males consist of 48%. The median income is approximately \$32,000. According to City-Data 70% of residents received their high school diploma, 10% of residents received a bachelor’s degree, 2% of residents received a graduate degree, and 5% of the residents are currently unemployed (Onboard Informatics, 2017).

**School district.** The district’s mission statement is “to prepare each student for success in college/university of their choosing and in their chosen career.” The district’s vision statement is ‘to be the leader in educating New Jersey’s urban youth’ (Department of Communications,

2017). The urban school district currently enrolls, 25,00 students in grades K-12. Additionally, approximately 2,900 students are enrolled in Pre-K. There are 54 schools in the district and it is currently one of four that is state operated. More than 92% of the students attending schools in this district receive free or reduced priced lunch. Fifteen percent of students are receiving special education services while thirteen percent are classified as ELL (Department of Communications, 2017). The approach used by the school district regarding ELA instruction is balanced literacy. Teachers are required to implement guided reading, comprehension clubs, writer’s workshop, and phonics into their instruction. Teachers are given novels, IFL units, writer workshop kits, vocabulary and phonics books, and stationary items during the school year. A variety of programs are used to help students with literacy. Programs such as Waggle, Achieve 3000, Star Renaissance, Scholastic, and Reading A-Z are used to help students develop and advance in their reading and writing skills. One of the districts goals is to provide an opportunity for students to “learn about and appreciate other cultures and develop an appreciation for similarities and differences as they prepare for success in a multicultural world” (Department of Communications, 2017).

**School.** Approximately 800 students attend this urban school with majority of the students coming from low income households. Most of the people who reside in this area receive welfare assistance, have little to no education, with high school being the highest level achieved. The study site is located in an area with high crime and poverty. However, many services are offered to the students who attend this school. Students have the opportunity to participate in afterschool programs such as dance, art, intervention, Program Reads, and the PARCC Program. This school has an average attendance of 94% although administrators are hoping to improve that rate. The school demographic consists of 75% Hispanic students, 20% African American students, 3%

white students, and 2% Asian students. Out of the total population, 72 are classified as special education, and 248 are classified as ELL. Fifty-six students are bused and 10 are homeless.

**Students.** Twelve third grade students were selected from a general education elementary class to participate in this study. The students chosen do not have IEP's 504's, nor have they been referred to the child study team. The information in the chart below represents the student demographics.

Table 1

*Student Demographics*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Sex</b>
Allen	8	Hispanic	Male
Kayla	8	Hispanic	Female
April	9	Hispanic	Female
George	8	Hispanic	Male
Amy	9	Hispanic	Female
Jeffrey	9	Hispanic	Male
Debra	8	Hispanic	Female
Mike	8	Hispanic	Male
Antoine	8	Hispanic	Male
Steve	9	Hispanic	Male
Dana	9	Hispanic	Female
Deandre	8	Hispanic	Male

\*All names are pseudonyms to protect student privacy.

George, Debra, Steve, Jake and Dana are currently performing above grade level. They love to participate in class discussions and share their thoughts about topics that are discussed in class. They are leaders in the classroom and are often paired with struggling learners to assist them with their work while helping them to build confidence. They were eager to participate in the study and looked forward to the days when we engaged in critical whole group discussions.

Antoine, Amy, and Allen are easily distracted and lack focus. They are currently performing below grade level and struggle to comprehend the information read in class. These three students are often pulled for small group instruction that targets their area of weakness and promotes comprehension. On the other hand, they are social and have many friends. They mostly enjoy recess and art. When they are interested in a topic they will participate in class discussions however, if they are unable to connect to the topic, participation is minimal.

Kayla, Mike, and Deandre are extremely shy students however they are hard workers. When working in a small group setting they feel more comfortable but they tend to lack confidence during whole group instruction. These students are currently performing below grade level however, if given the proper interventions, they will excel.

April is the bossy girl in the group. She likes to be in charge and is easily upset if things are not her way. Although she is bossy, she is currently performing on grade-level and loves to help her teacher. April has an endless amount of potential however; at times her attitude hinders her performance.

Overall, there are 7 Hispanic boys and 5 Hispanic girls ages 8 and 9 participating in this study. The results from the survey indicate that the students have minimal knowledge of the importance of becoming more culturally aware and accepting of diverse cultures.

In Chapter Four of this thesis, I will analyze and discuss the results from the observations, videos, reader response notebooks, surveys, my teacher research journal,

and the charts. I will conclude by presenting my conclusions and implications of this study in Chapter Five.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter four will present the findings of my research study addressing the following question: How do multicultural texts foster engagement and student acceptance of cultural difference in an elementary classroom? After carefully reviewing and organizing the data, it indicates three reoccurring themes throughout the study: Identifying and defining culture, showing empathy towards diverse cultures, and recognizing the benefits of multicultural literature. Before reading the multicultural texts, students were given a survey to assess their knowledge of multicultural literature. They engaged in whole group discussions, interviews, and small group instruction. In addition, they analyzed and responded to the multicultural literature in their reader response notebooks. Throughout the study, I kept a teacher journal used to take notes and record my thoughts throughout the research process.

#### **Revisiting the Study**

As explained in Chapter three, I collected data for fifteen thirty minute sessions over the course of six weeks. Twelve third grade students'-ages eight and nine participated in this study. The study took place in my classroom from 8: 30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. First, students were given a survey to assess their background knowledge. After analyzing the results of this study, I charted their responses to particular questions to track their development throughout the study. Two multicultural literature texts were

read aloud followed by discussion questions and activities. The first text read aloud was The Day Gogo Went to Vote (Elinor Batezat Sisulu, 1999). This story was about an older South African woman who recently earned the right to vote. However, her family did not want her to vote because the journey would be long and tiring for a sick elderly woman. After explaining this significant moment in history to her family, they finally agreed to let her vote. The next text read aloud was For the Right to Learn Malala Yuosafzai's Story (Rebecca Langston-George, 2016). In this text, the author explains how Malala almost lost her life because she decided to take a stance against the Taliban. She would later become a Nobel Peace prize winner and an advocate as well as voice for girls who were not allowed to attend school. I recorded important information and notes in my teacher journal to use for data analysis. After reading and discussing the texts, students were given the survey to complete after concluding the study. The results were used to analyze if students were engaged and demonstrated acceptance of cultures different from their own.

### **Identifying and Defining Culture**

I began this study by providing students with a Multicultural Literature Survey to assess their background knowledge about culture, diversity, and acceptance. Students were required to answer the following question: What is culture? The students' responses were charted in the table below.

Table 2

*Multicultural Literature Survey-Question 1*

Allen	“A culture is a thing that helps you.”
Kayla	“I think culture is when you make something nice and unique.”
April	“A culture is a person how teach you stuff and takes care of you.”
George	“A culture is the shape of something.”
Amy	“I think a culture is a country.”
Jeffrey	“Culture is something nice and fun.”
Debra	“Culture is like someone’s know many more languages.”
Mike	“Culture is a country.”
Antoine	“I say that it happen a long time ago.”
Steve	“A culture is like a different kinds of experiment.”
Dana	“I think it’s like a celebration people enjoy.”
Deandre	“Culture is like a state or something.”

Based on the results of the survey it was evident students had varying ideas and needed additional support understanding the term culture. Two students defined the term culture as a “country”, while others viewed it as “something nice, fun, or unique.” As a result, I provided them with a culture reference sheet that was used frequently throughout the study. The reference sheet provided students with an explanation and visuals that would allow them to better comprehend the term culture. After reviewing and discussing the culture reference sheet, students were broken into four groups. They were

given a piece of bulletin paper and were told to outline one of their group member's bodies onto the sheet. Next, they identified different customs and traditions that took place in their cultures. As I circulated the room, I noticed students were engaged and eager to discuss their culture with the group. After working on this assignment for fifteen minutes, we reconvened to the carpet forming a circle to engage in an accountable talk discussion. I posed the following question: What are something's you would like to share about your culture with the class?

Debra: "In my culture we sing and dance to Bachata and eat empanadas on Saturdays with my family."

Allen: "We do something almost the same in my culture but we don't listen to Bachata. We have family over for dinner and eat a lot of Spanish food like rice and beans."

Steve: "I love rice and beans! We eat that at least once a week in my house."

Ms. Rouse: "I love hearing about the things you do in your culture. In my culture we make food, eat together, and play games every Sunday as a family. Can someone else tell me more about their culture?"

George: "In my culture we go to church on Sundays. After we come home and eat dinner like you do with your family Ms. Rouse."

Ms. Rouse: "George, you just identified a similarity between our cultures. Although we come from different cultures, we share some of the same beliefs. It is important to remember that people from different cultures may or may not have common beliefs or traditions."

After concluding the accountable talk discussion, I heard a few moans and groans because some students were unable to share their thoughts aloud. I explained to the students that they would have time throughout the study to share their ideas however because of time the discussion was concluded.

During the next few sessions of the study we focused on the text The Day Gogo Went to Vote (Elinor Batezat Sisulu, 1999). As I read the book aloud, I would stop to ask and answer questions to check for comprehension and clarify any misconceptions or misunderstandings the students encountered. In addition, students analyzed the pictures and language that was being used to identify things specifically related to the South African culture.

One particular day as I was reading the text aloud, I heard snickering and immediately heard a loud voice. Dana shouted, “Ms. Rouse, Jeffrey is laughing at Thembi and Gogo’s name!” I stated, “Thank you Dana however, next time please raise your hand. Jeffrey is this true. I heard snickering from your area before Dana’s statement.” Jeffrey stated, “Yes Ms. Rouse. I thought Thembi and Gogo’s name was funny.” I took this time to address the entire class about the importance of respecting diverse cultures. I explained that although we may not personally like or agree with certain things about other cultures, we must respect it and not pass judgment because we would be hurt, or upset if someone made fun our culture. Jeffrey apologized and stated that his feelings would be hurt if someone laughed at his name and he wouldn’t laugh at anyone else.

After reading and discussing the text The Day Gogo Went to Vote (Elinor Batezat Sisulu, 1999), I posed the following question on chart paper: What are some things you learned about the South African culture after reading the text? Students responded to this question in their reader response journals. (See Figure 1)

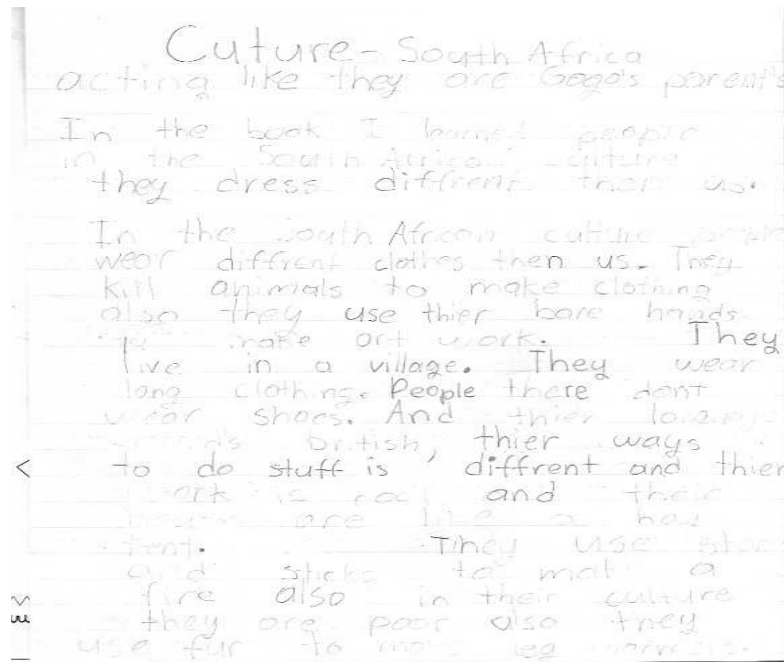


Figure 1. Notes

Many students identified the head scarves, language, animals, and explained the difference between the South African voting system and the American voting system as things they learned about the South African culture. Terms such as “Gogo” meaning grandmother and “Tata” meaning father in the South African culture were discussed as well.

On the last day of the study, students were given a duplicate copy of the multicultural literature survey. I explained to students after learning about different cultures and reading multicultural texts they would complete the survey again. The results from this survey indicate after reading and engaging in the study, students were able to define or partially define the term culture. Amy identified culture as “the thing that can help you learn about others.” Although she did not define culture, she associates the term with learning about others. Jeffrey’s defines culture as “the different celebrations and traditions people have across the world.” After analyzing the results of the survey, it is evident that students gained a better understanding of the term culture after completing the study.

### **Showing Empathy Towards Diverse Cultures**

As we read the text The Day Gogo Went to Vote (Elinor Batezat Sisulu, 1999), issues such as discrimination and inequality became the focus of discussion. Initially, students had a difficult time understanding why GoGo was so adamant about voting. I explained to students that during this time in history black people in South Africa were not allowed to vote. They recently won the right to vote. I continued by saying although Gogo was old and sick, she wanted to have a chance in her lifetime to vote because this was a significant moment in history. I noticed hands immediately began to rise after my statement. I pointed to Kayla and she asked, “Ms. Rouse why couldn’t the black South Africans vote?” Allen stated, “I think it’s because white people were in control of South Africa and they wanted to be in charge.” Steve shouted, “Yeah, just think about Dr. Martin Luther King. He fought for African Americans, he was on their side to protect them from the white people.” As the discussion took place Kayla began to think about the

responses from her peers. She said, “So basically the white people in South Africa wanted to be in control and rule the black South Africans but people fought for their rights like Dr. Martin Luther King and won.” I looked at Kayla, smiled, and said exactly. This interaction amongst the students showed that they were beginning to critically think and analyze the text on a deeper level. They are starting to understand why Gogo was so adamant about voting and why her vote was so important to the black South Africans. Students recognized black South Africans recently earned the right to vote therefore Gogo’s participation in the election was historic and necessary if black South Africans wanted change for their country.

After reading and discussing the text, I asked students the following question. Do you think Gogo’s family should have allowed her to vote knowing that she was sick and could possibly be injured? Provide details from the text to support your answer. As I circulated the room I noticed that April was extremely engaged in the story. I kneeled next to April and asked her to come with me to the back table so that she can share her response.

April wrote the following in her journal:

My opinion is that Gogo’s family should let her vote because Gogo had a great chance to vote. She wanted to vote for a great president that doesn’t care about people’s skin color. Also, if they let her vote- the rights in South Africa will be equal by white and black people. This is why Gogo’s family should let her vote.



I asked April to clarify what she meant when she stated “the rights in South Africa will be equal by white and black people. She said, “Black South Africans earned the right to vote like white South Africans. Gogo is getting older and she deserves to vote because now she has equal rights. Her family should allow her to vote because she may not be alive to vote in the next election.” I looked at April and commended her on her response and providing evidence from the text to support her answer. April’s response indicates that she is becoming more engaged in the literature and culturally aware. She showed her ability to comprehend, analyze, connect, and provide textual evidence from the literature to support her opinion.

Towards the middle of the study, I introduced the text For the Right to Learn Malala Yuosafzai’s Story (Rebecca Langston-George, 2016) to students. Students began to make predictions about the text before they were required to which showed me how interested they were in learning more about Malala’s culture. After providing students with some background knowledge I began to read the text aloud. As I scanned the room to look at their expressions I became speechless.

*Wednesday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017*

*Today we read about Malala’s story and I was surprised by the students’ reaction. I guess I never took the time to realize how much of an impact her story could have on them. The look of sadness they expressed showed me that students could relate to Malala. Some students felt that Malala was brave to stand up to the Taliban but others felt that she shouldn’t have risked her life. I noticed that Antoine was particularly quiet and I asked him to share his thoughts. He began to explain that he felt bad for Malala*

*and would be upset if someone told him he couldn't go to school. Others began to agree with Antoine as I watched a critical discussion unfold. They began to discuss the importance of standing up for your rights however, they identified the consequences that may occur when taking a stance. Today I learned that I should never underestimate students and their ability to analyze the text. I went into today's lesson thinking that it would be too rigorous however, my students proved me wrong.*

After reading about the suffering Malala endured because she wanted an education, students began to show compassion towards her situation. They started to realize that they shouldn't take their education for granted and would be really upset if someone took it away from them. They believe that you should take a stance and fight for something you believe in however, if it is not done with caution there could be serious consequences to follow. Initially, I thought the lesson would be challenging because of their lack of maturity. However, the students made connections, were empathetic, and engaged in a productive class discussion.

During the next lesson, I explained to students that they would begin drafting a letter to the Pakistani government stating if they believed girls should be allowed to attend school. They were required to state their opinion as well as provide details to support their opinion. The students agreed that girls should be able to attend school and expressed their beliefs as to why. (See Figure 2)

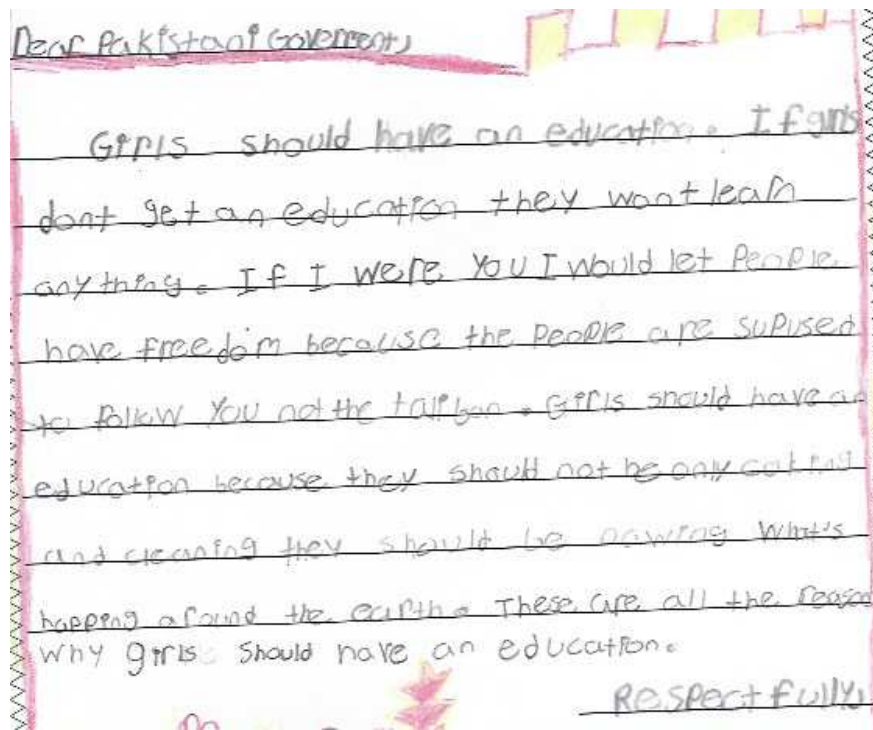


Figure 2. Letter

Reading Malala's story allowed students to show empathy and begin to develop solutions that would help girls in her culture. After concluding the letter, students began to ask if I could send the letter to Pakistan. They wanted the government to read their letters hoping that it would help encourage them to stand up against the Taliban and allow girls to attend school.

### **Recognizing the Benefits of Multicultural Literature**

We began to engage in conversations about gender inequality after reading the text, For the Right to Learn Malala Yuosafzai's Story (Rebecca Langston-George, 2016). It was important for students to understand this concept in order to comprehend and

analyze the text. As we were discussing gender inequality, I noticed that April raised her hand. After calling on her she stated, “Ms. Rouse, if we didn’t read about Malala, would we have discussed this stuff.” I asked her to clarify what she meant when she stated, “this stuff.” “Well about girls not being equal to boys. I really like learning about this,” she said. The class began to agree with her and I immediately felt a sense of pride because they were expressing their interest for multicultural literature. I explained to April that gender inequality would have not been a topic we would have normally discussed in third grade but I would try to include more books like that into instruction. Controversial topics such as gender inequality and discrimination became enjoyable for third graders to learn about after being exposed to these issues through multicultural literature.

As students completed their letters to the Pakistani government, I began conferring with them one-on-one to gain a better understanding of their perception about multicultural texts. When asked about multicultural texts, Dana’s responses were as followed:

Ms. Rouse: “Did you find the multicultural texts interesting?”

Dana: “Very interesting. I didn’t know about their cultures although I knew about black history. The South African culture voting system was interesting. I never knew about Pakistan and their unfair laws. I like learning about that.”

Ms. Rouse: “Do you think we should read more multicultural texts in class?”

Dana: “Yes because I want to learn about more cultures.”

Ms. Rouse: “Do you think learning about these cultures will make you more accepting of other cultures?”

Dana: “Yes because now that I know about other cultures, I won’t make fun about what they eat or wear. I would be really really angry and would punch someone if they talked about me but now I understand I shouldn’t talk about others I should respect their culture even if I don’t agree.”

The discussion with Dana shows not only is she engaged, she is learning to be more accepting of diverse cultures. She understands the importance of multicultural literature and the role it plays in teaching students about diversity. Providing her with literature that focused on real-world problems such as gender inequality and discrimination exposed her to issues that she would not normally discuss. The multicultural texts read aloud in class has allowed Dana to express emotions and engage in thought provoking dialogue ultimately leading her to see the benefits of reading multicultural literature.

Many students expressed similar thoughts as Dana. They enjoyed reading about multicultural texts and wished that we could spend more time in class reading about diverse cultures. Their response to the multicultural literature read in class prompted the following question. What are the benefits of reading multicultural texts? If you think there are no benefits please state: There are not benefits. Their responses are listed in the table below.

Table 3

*Benefits of Reading Multicultural Texts*

Allen	“If you go there to real life you will know more about them.”
Kayla	“We should read more culture books because if we go to that culture we can know what they do like what they eat how they celebrate.”
April	“To learn about more cultures.”
George	“I think we should read about more books about other cultures because I want to learn about more countries like Malala’s story.”
Amy	“We can learn about more cultures.”
Jeffrey	“We get to learn about their food and learn more about them.”
Debra	“Benefits of multicultural texts is if you go to another culture the text will tell you about the culture you want to go to. Also, you can know what the laws are.”
Mike	“We can learn to do things if we visit their country.”
Antoine	“There are benefits of reading multicultural texts. Maybe if we go there we know how their culture is.”
Steve	“We can learn more about different cultures we don’t know.”
Dana	“The benefits are we learn about different cultures so we can know what they eat and how they live.”
Deandre	“This is good to help you learn not to be mean to people like Gogo went to vote.”

By the end of the study, students were able to recognize the benefits of incorporating multicultural literature into instruction. Most students provided a reason to support why they believe multicultural literature is beneficial.

## Summary of Data Analysis

After analyzing my findings, I noticed that students began to develop and redefine their original definition of culture after engaging in text based discussions. The activities provided throughout the study allowed them to engage in controversial conversations that required them to have an understanding of a particular culture in order to actively participate in class discussions. The participants began to show empathy towards the characters when they read about the discrimination and inequalities people in their culture endured. They were able to provide evidence supporting their opinions using information from the text. The participants began to apply what they read to their own lives allowing them to connect to the characters on a deeper level. They imagined themselves in their situation which provoked emotional responses causing students to have great compassion and empathy for the characters. By the end of the study, students were able to explain the benefits of reading multicultural literature. Furthermore, they expressed their interest and desire to continue reading texts that would expose them to diverse cultures yet challenge them to critically think and analyze the text.

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

## Chapter V

### Summary, Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications for the Field

#### Summary

In conclusion, I found that students were able to become more engaged and accepting of diverse cultures after reading multicultural literature in the classroom setting. This six week study allowed students to engage in productive dialogue with their peers while analyzing and responding to complex texts. In addition, it allowed them to discuss real-world issues and participate in activities that focus on providing solutions to issues and/or problems. Furthermore, students felt safe and comfortable asking questions about culture and diversity. They were eager to express their thoughts and make connections to the multicultural texts showing their enthusiasm as they learn about different cultures.

Initially, I found that students were unfamiliar with the term culture. After providing resources and texts exposing them to this term, their understanding of the term began to develop. Their concept of the term culture began to increase after reviewing the culture reference sheet. They began to identify similarities and differences amongst their cultures before engaging in the multicultural texts. While reading the text The Day Gogo Went to Vote (Elinor Batezat Sisulu, 1999), students recognized cultural aspects of the text that differed from their norm. Learning about the different voting laws and terms such as “Tata” and “Gogo” fascinated them. It was something they were unfamiliar with however it was the beginning of them becoming more culturally aware, engaged, and accepting of diverse cultures.



In addition, as the study progressed students became empathetic towards the characters. In the first read aloud, students connected to Gogo because of her passion and determination to vote. Not only did they believe her family should allow her to participate in the election, they identified significant reasons why she should be allowed to vote. Students recognized the importance of her vote and the impact it would have on the South African culture. They referred to the text citing evidence to support their claims which shows that students comprehended and analyzed the information presented in the story.

Reading about Malala allowed students to express their emotions and connect to the character. The events in the text sparked an emotion within the students that eventually led to them writing a letter demanding change. Students became more appreciative of their education and the opportunities they have to become successful productive members of society. This text exposed students to the harsh reality that some girls encounter daily. They were able to verbally explain their disbelief and discuss this controversial topic with their peers during whole group instruction. This discussion led to a positive exchange amongst third graders about the cultural differences between the Hispanic and Pakistani culture.

By the conclusion of the study, students identified the benefits of reading multicultural texts. Students expressed their desire to continue reading about diverse cultures and engaging in critical discussions. Providing students with an opportunity to engage and discuss topics such as discrimination and gender inequality in a third-grade classroom allowed students to interact with their peers in a positive manner.

## Conclusions

I found that my study was beneficial to students because they were exposed to diverse cultures and ultimately gained a better understanding of the South African and Pakistani culture, promoted positive discussions amongst their peers, and allowed students to critically think and analyze the text. As previously stated in chapter two Gay (2004) states, “As the challenge to better educate underachieving students intensifies and diversity among student population expands, the need to fit multicultural education grows exponentially” (p. 35). Gay continues by explaining the importance of implementing multicultural texts to students who are performing below grade level and the benefits it will have on their academic achievement. My research supported this idea because it allowed students to engage in multicultural literature and provided them with opportunities to respond to higher level questioning and participate in evidence based activities that required them to comprehend the material read aloud. Students began to ask questions about diverse cultures that eventually led to accountable talk discussions leaving me to take on the role as the facilitator.

Additionally, I found that the third-grade students enjoyed discussing controversial topics at a young age. Topics such as discrimination and gender inequality were foreign to some which made them extremely curious. As we discussed discrimination, students often raised their hands to share ideas about their interpretation of discrimination. Other students would clarify or make connections using Dr. Martin Luther King as an example. Gender inequality was a topic that students were unfamiliar with. As a I read Malala’s story aloud, I would look at the expression on the students

faces and could immediately tell they were affected by the text. Students were eager to share their thoughts and would often become upset if I did not call on them right away. This showed me that students were engaged and interested in the text.

Ultimately my findings support's the literature that promotes the use of multicultural texts in the classroom. As stated in chapter two, "Diversity is a reality of our nation and of the world, and with that reality comes the responsibility and opportunity for growth in order to create a more accepting and just world" (Martinez, 2012, p.53). The world is filled with diversity therefore it is important that students are exposed to multicultural literature at an early age. Students were able to connect to characters and analyze difficult concepts through the use of multicultural literature. Furthermore, they were engaged and positively interacted with their peers discussing real-world issues. These texts allowed students to develop their understanding of diversity and acceptance of cultures other than their own.

### **Limitations**

One major limitation to this teacher research study was the lack of time provided to collect the data. This study took place over a six-week period for fifteen thirty minute sessions. As a result, my original plan of introducing four texts had been reduced to two. If more time was allotted I would have introduce additional multicultural texts and gathered more data to gain a better understanding if students learned to become more accepting towards one another. Although students learned to empathize with the characters, I think providing them with multicultural literature related to their culture would help them become more accepting of their peers.

Another limitation was the lack of multicultural literature presented throughout the study due to the time constraint. Initially, I wanted to read four multicultural texts however I only read two. Exposing students to real-world topics allowed them to connect and relate to the characters which increased their engagement and ability to comprehend the texts. If students were exposed to more multicultural literature, I think they would have continued to engage and critically think about issues that people encounter across the world today. Additionally, they would continue to develop their knowledge about diversity ultimately increasing the likelihood that they will grow up to be accepting individuals.

Finally, the students' lack of knowledge about the term culture proved to be a limitation in the beginning of the research study as well. I assumed that students had a general idea of the term culture however the survey proved otherwise. The first two sessions were spent building their background knowledge so they could understand the purpose of the research study and why it is important to be more accepting of diverse cultures and culturally aware.

### **Implications for the Field**

After analyzing the data collecting throughout this brief study I would recommend more time be given when assessing students' ability to become more engaged and accepting of diverse cultures after reading multicultural literature. Diving into this topic in depth by reviewing more cultures and discussing controversial topics will allow future researchers to see if students are truly making strides to becoming more accepting and engaged over a longer period of time. It would be interesting to see how

much knowledge and awareness students would gain over the course of an academic school year after reading multicultural literature.

Another implication for future researchers is to expose students to multicultural literature representing their culture. The students participating in this study were Hispanic. It would be important to see if their level of interest would increase if they were reading multicultural literature related to their culture. In addition, providing multicultural literature they can relate to would allow students to become more familiar with their culture. They would be able to identify similarities and differences between themselves and the characters which would be a good way to promote engagement.

Finally, this study could be improved by introducing literature that focuses on subjects that would bring awareness to issues people encounter. Multicultural literature that discusses different religions and homosexuality would bring awareness to elementary students about topics that are not usually discussed in school. This would be a great way to truly assess if students are becoming more culturally aware and accepting of the diverse cultures in the world today.

In short, the use of multicultural literature in third-grade classrooms will promote engagement and acceptance amongst diverse cultures. It is important for teachers to expose students to multicultural texts and have discussions that will allow students to actively engage with their peers while discussing real world issues. As educators, the goal is to prepare students to become problem solvers and critical thinkers. Incorporating multicultural literature into instruction will expose elementary students at an early age to diversity in hopes of increasing their acceptance of all people across the world.

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## Appendix A

### Multicultural Literature Survey

What is culture?

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What is diversity?

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What is multicultural literature?

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How can multicultural literature help you learn more about other cultures?

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Do you think it is important to learn more about other cultures?

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How can multicultural literature help you become more accepting of cultures other than your own?

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How can you use past experiences to engage in critical discussions and increase your understanding of diverse cultures and multicultural texts?

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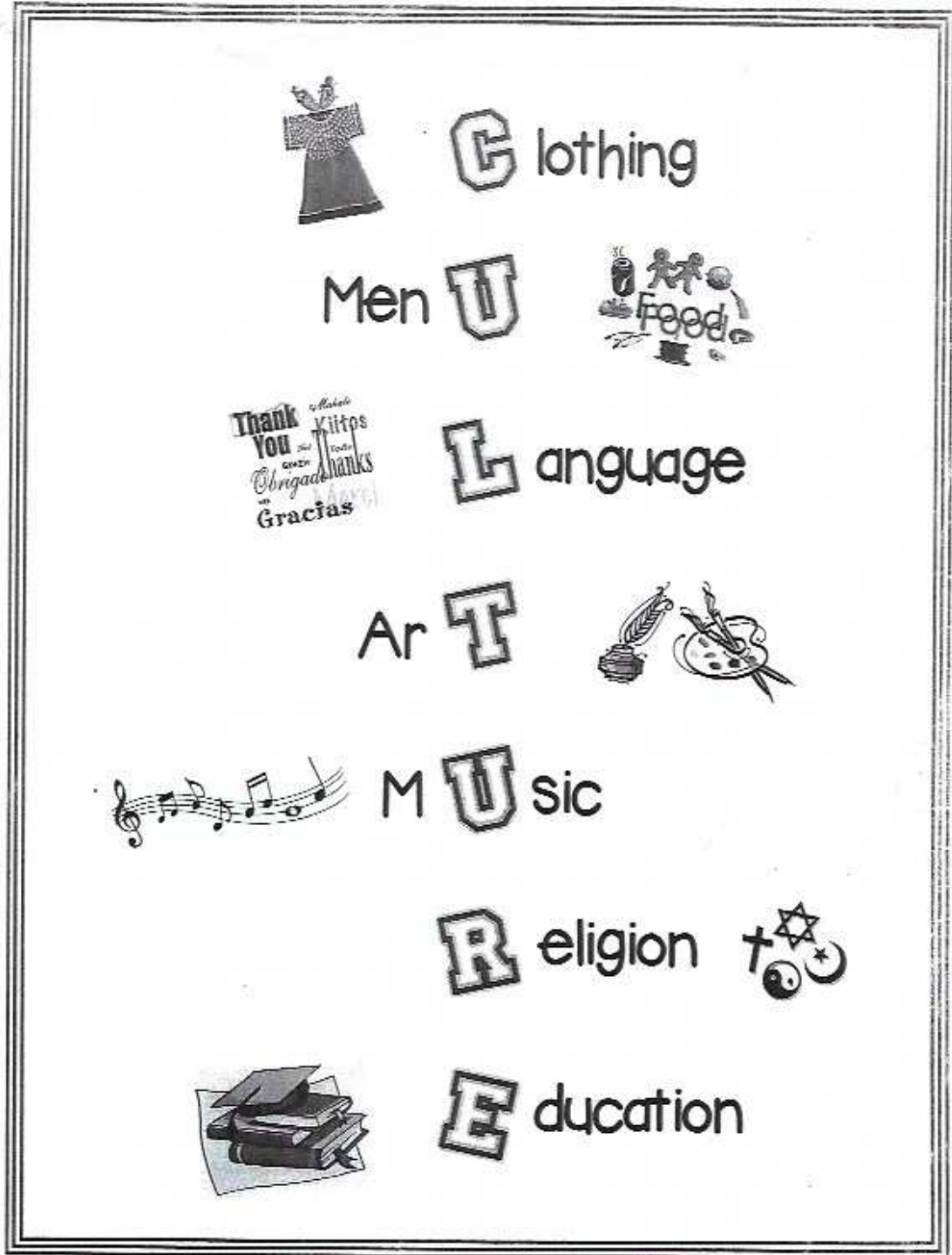
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Appendix B

Culture Reference Sheet



## Appendix C

### Multicultural Texts

