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**THE IMPACT OF MULTICULTURAL BOOKS IN A FIRST GRADE  
CLASSROOM**

by

Lindsay M. Fox

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  
March 18, 2020

Thesis Advisor: Susan Browne, Ph.D.



## **Dedications**

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my husband, Jeff and my two boys Jase and Elijah. Thank you to my husband for your continued support when the process got challenging. You continued to encourage me to give my all through the entire process. To my boys, thank you for understanding when mommy spent more time than she wanted on the computer doing work. Thank you for the extra hugs and snuggles when I needed a mental break. I hope my hard work and determination teaches you that you can achieve your dreams no matter what. I love you all so much.

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## **Abstract**

Lindsay Fox

THE IMPACT OF MULTICULTURAL BOOKS IN A FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM

2019-2020

Susan Browne, Ph.D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The goal of the study was to examine how first grade students build on their understanding of culture through the use of multicultural literature. Students were engaged in read alouds of quality multicultural texts that included texts that represented the Native American, transgender, African American, Mexican, Chinese and Indian cultures. Data collection consisted of questionnaires, reading responses during interactive read aloud, anecdotal records, and a teacher note-taking journal. An analysis of the data revealed that students were able to learn about cultures different from their own and see their own culture reflected in multicultural literature they were exposed to.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

As an educator to young children for thirteen years I have always wanted the students in my class to feel a sense of belonging and to be heard in our classroom community. I know how easy it is to get wrapped up in curriculum and deadlines, but I always felt that getting to know my students and giving them my personal attention was important. As students in my classroom grew more comfortable, I found that they were able to share things openly about themselves and their lives outside of our classroom walls. I would know the names of all of their family members, what they were doing over the weekend and even who attended various sports and other relevant events in their lives. As I grew to know my students personally there grew an interest in me to learn about my students culturally as well. Always working in a diverse school district, I would hear stories about recent holiday celebrations or how in some of my students' families; grandparents often lived with them full-time or for several months out of the year. I would hear how some students would be spending their entire summers in India, Japan and China. I was interested to learn more about their home languages and how most of my students did not speak English at home. I remember a time when I attended a student's Hindi dance recital. It was amazing to see the Indian culture come to life. I saw different performances and was able to see my student shine on the stage. It allowed me to connect to my student's culture outside of school as I watched her dance beautifully on stage. As I continued to learn not just about my students, but of their vast cultures, I became more aware that I was learning about these cultures through my students. At the

same time I realized I was not incorporating any teaching or literature about their culture in my classroom.

As I reflect back on my teaching career I think about all of the missed opportunities to include multicultural literature in my instruction. As I think about all of the diverse students that have step foot in my classroom, I could have given them the chance to read aloud stories that relate to their culture, along with providing them with a selection of books they could read where they could make connections and see themselves in books. Those opportunities have made my students feel more connected and engaged to the texts they were reading. With my passion for teaching with multicultural books today, I want to study the impact reading multicultural books in my first grade classroom to see if students become more culturally aware and analyze how reading multicultural books fosters an environment of inclusivity.

### **Purpose Statement**

As our country grows more ethnically diverse (Gay, 2003), it is crucial that students are exposed to different cultures at a young age. “Multiculturalism in U.S. schools and society is taking on new dimensions of complexity and practicality as demographics, social conditions, and political situations change. Domestic diversity and unprecedented immigration have created a vibrant mixtures of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and experiential plurality” (Gay, 2003, p.30). Although I work in a diverse school, I often find that students are not aware of cultures different from themselves. Young children tend to be egocentric developmentally, but there is an opportunity to broaden their awareness of others. The teacher can have a huge impact and role on students noticing others that are different from them culturally and begin to build open conversations and

opportunities to celebrate diversity and learning about various cultures. Multicultural picture books would provide students with the opportunity to learn about different cultures and participate in conversations about what makes each culture rich and diverse. This will have a positive impact on building their cultural awareness and foster an environment of inclusivity within the classroom.

When thinking about multicultural literature it's important to be able to define what 'multicultural' actually means. 'It can be narrowly defined to mean ethnicity and race (culture). The terms has also been more broadly defined to encompass issues of racism, sexism (gender), classism (socio-economic status), religious intolerance (values/morals), xenophobia (fear of strangers and different cultures), and linguisticism (language/culture) (Holland, Mongillo, 2016, p. 17).' With this broader lense of what 'multicultural' means, it is significant when choosing multicultural books in a classroom. It is not just about books from around the world where you learn about food, language or traditions. My hope for the study is to provide access to multicultural books that touch upon the diversity of families, including the LGBTQ community. By exposing young children to these books my hope is that it will allow students to learn and become open and accepting of what family and gender look like.

Studies have shown the importance of using multicultural books in a primary classroom (Holland & Mongillo, 2016, Robinson, 2013, & Knoblauch, 2016). These studies demonstrate the impact and importance of incorporating multicultural texts in a classroom. This study investigates the impact that multicultural literature has on making students more culturally aware, and the importance of allowing for student access to multicultural books in their daily reading lives.

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

The research question I plan to investigate is: What is the impact of using multicultural books in a first grade classroom? The use of multicultural literature is crucial in order to build cultural awareness within our classrooms. Students need to be exposed to literature that represents not only different cultures, but their own cultures as well. Students need to see themselves represented in stories whether it is in a read aloud, reading group or reading independently. They might connect to their culture or see a character with the same skin shade or hair style as them. When teachers have color blind like beliefs they take away powerful learning opportunities and students do not feel like they are a part of the classroom community (Milner, 2016).

## **Story of the Question**

As a primary school teacher becoming more culturally aware of my student population, I reflected on my beginning years of teaching where I was just trying to stay afloat and do what the teachers on my team were doing. I was not being culturally conscious of my students and did not think about incorporating multicultural books in my classroom instruction. There is a memory that sticks out in my mind where my class and I had transitioned into a new month on our calendar and I had various holiday cards to place on that month. This was something I did regularly. As we were discussing this new month I had a student say, “Well you forgot about the holiday Holi. I celebrate Holi this month.” Other children of Indian descent also started to chime in and say they also celebrated this holiday as well. It was at that moment that I realized that this calendar pack of holidays was only American holidays and I felt a pang of guilt that I had spent all these years acknowledging these American holidays, but not the celebrations and

traditions of my diverse classroom. My calendar cards did not contain holidays like Chinese New Year, Eid, Ramadan, Diwali, Holi, etc. It meant something to my students to see their culture reflected in something as simple as a monthly calendar.

As I continued to build in my awareness of the various cultures in my classroom and how important it was to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity in my classroom, I also grew in my awareness of students and how they see themselves represented in literature. On one occasion I was working with a guided reading group and had one student who was African American in my group. Usually when getting books for groups I just went into my school's book closet and picked a few book sets from the instructional levels my students were reading. I really did not think about the choice of books. On this occasion I had picked a book for the guided reading group which was a Little Bill beginning chapter book. After reading the text together we had a discussion about the book. I asked, "Did you like this book, why?" Students in the group were all chiming in and responding when my African American student answered he said, "I liked it because Little Bill looks like me." At that moment I realized how many books I had in my classroom and how many I had read in my guided reading groups and how most of the characters reflected were Caucasian or animals. I felt guilty that I had not provided experiences with literature that represented my students.

I also began to pick up on student observations and conversations that were related to culture and race which caused me to continue to reflect on my teaching. There were several occasions over the course of my teaching career that I would have first graders draw and color themselves in a peach color as opposed to a brown or tan color, some adding yellow hair when they had beautiful brown hair. I often asked them to

correct it as it didn't look like them, but found in an activity in the future they would go back to coloring themselves incorrectly again. I had also overheard a conversation with a student who was Asian who told another student that his skin color was better than an Indian student because white was better and brown was ugly. On another occasion I heard a student say that two students who were African American boys looked the same. As I shared some of these stories with others while female teachers they would often respond to some degree about how these comments were innocent and harmless based on their age. I knew that while it may have been innocent, it was harmful in the environment I was trying to create in my classroom. I questioned myself as a teacher. Had I not built up their character enough for them to know that they should be proud of their skin shade? What could I be doing better so they celebrate their culture and are proud of who they are? What did I need to do to make more of an impact on my students being more culturally aware and feeling a sense of inclusivity in my classroom? What else could I be doing to prevent implicit bias from being planted in my young students?

These experiences were ones that sparked a change in the way that I wanted to teach. Specifically, I knew that a successful window to immerse my students in various cultures was through literature. Picture books had always been a tool I used to teach and I knew that could be a way to teach my students more about different cultures, but for them to also see their culture represented as well. I knew that multicultural literature had to be incorporated in my classroom and my students needed to have access to multicultural books as well.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter two is a literature review with research related to multicultural literature, reader's response strategy, read alouds, independent book choice, along with research surrounding independent reading. Chapter three will outline the study with the details of how the use of multicultural books will be immersed in read aloud instruction, independent reading, reader response practice, and independent book choice. Chapter three will also provide information about the school and class that will be a part of the study. Chapter four will detail the findings of my research with an analysis of the data from the study. Chapter five will report the conclusion to the study with a summary of the study, the limitations along with the implications of the use of multicultural texts used in a first grade classroom.



## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Young children at the primary school age come to school eager to learn and absorb the world around them within the four walls of their classroom. Most young students come to school loving to look through books whether or not they have the skills to become a reader yet. Some of these students are just beginning to learn to read and others love to look through the pages to see pictures come to life. With the books that build a classroom library teachers have the power to have an impact on what books they will read and what books their students will have access to and be exposed to. “Having a diverse collection can support all students in finding titles that they can read and connect with on some level while affirming their own cultural identities and hopefully developing important positive insights about others” (McNair, 2016, p. 381).

It is common for teachers to get to know not only the students in their room, but for them to be aware of diversity that lies within their classroom. It’s important that as a primary teacher plans the books they will read and builds their classroom library that they are understanding the positive impact of having multicultural books in their classroom. “The content should aim to promote inclusion of all cultures, social justice, and the celebration of diversity within the curriculum and beyond to include the entire school community” (Holland & Mongillo, 2016, p.17).

Chapter two provides a review of literature that looks at the benefits of multicultural literature used in classrooms. The review also describes various practices that allow teachers and students opportunities to read and interact with texts which will not only have a positive impact on the student as readers, but foster a community of

cultural awareness, diversity and inclusivity. Section two examines reader response and how and how students interact with the texts they are exposed to. Section three outlines the practice of the interactive read aloud and how the interactive read aloud practice engages students in a way where they can build on their construction of meaning of a text through the reading process with other students and the teacher. Section four describes the importance of student book choice in the classroom and how it creates a culture that fosters successful independent reading and allows for an increase in reading engagement, motivation, and volume. The final section discusses the independent reading practice and how it increases understanding of books students are reading with the proper structure and teacher support.

### **Multicultural Literature**

For multicultural literature to be an integral part of a teacher's practice a teacher must be aware of the impact of using multicultural literature in their classroom. In a study titled "Elementary Teachers' Perspectives on the Use of Multicultural Literature in Their Classrooms" Holland and Mongillo (2016) researched elementary teachers thoughts and beliefs on teaching with multicultural literature. They also wanted to investigate how and if teachers were incorporating multicultural issues in their classrooms and if they were in fact reading with multicultural texts what was their way to go about selecting multicultural texts. It was also important to be able to understand the meaning of the word multicultural and how it can be identified. "It can be narrowly defined to mean ethnicity and race (culture). The term also has been more broadly defined to encompass issues of racism, sexism (gender), classism (socio-economic status), ableism (physical abilities), ageism (age), heterosexism (sexual orientation), religious intolerance

(values/morals), xenophobia (fear of strangers and different cultures), and linguisticism (language and culture)” (Holland & Mongillo, 2016, p. 17). It is a broad term, but important to identify the meaning beyond some typical thoughts of multicultural just being identified to represent race, culture and nationality (Holland & Mongillo, 2016, p.16). Data was collected using an online survey given to elementary teachers across the country. The first piece was an online survey with multiple choice and written responses and the second piece was a book list selection of 41 multicultural books to see if teachers had ever used them in their classrooms before and how they were used. The multicultural books on the list had 11 different themes relating to multiculturalism. 26 teachers responded to the online survey. 11 of the teachers were in schools that mandated multicultural literature, while 15 did not have multicultural literature mandated in their schools. The overall findings of this study revealed several trends in the responses of the elementary teachers. The first trend was having a supportive and strong administrative team that supports the use of multicultural literature. “A strongly motivated principal can connect to peers, parents, school board, and politicians to promote multicultural education. The strong support of elementary school administrators for multicultural education encourages reading of multicultural literature in school” (Holland & Mongillo, 2016, p. 24). The second trend was data that found that mandating multicultural books and education did not actually increase the use of multicultural texts. The teachers in the study that did have it mandated reported they did not use multicultural literature all the time, while teachers in non-mandated schools used multicultural books more often and in a variety of ways in their classrooms. (Holland & Mongillo, 2016, p. 22). The last trend found from this study was the idea that by creating mandates that might actually create a

decrease in the use of multicultural texts due to the fact that they had to follow their curriculum program strictly and had limitations to the types of texts they used in their reading programs. The conclusion to this study found that administrators can have a positive impact on the changes that can be made to make multicultural literature required in schools. Creating mandates within a district does take additional effort, but changes can happen at the administrative level to push for multicultural education. Also, there might be a chance based on the study results that mandates can prevent teachers from having less control of the multicultural texts used in their classrooms based on the curriculum mandated. “That is, all students must see themselves in books that they read, and to that end each school should consider their population and seek out high quality, authentic texts to fill their classroom libraries. In addition, these libraries should contain a vast amount of diverse literature to broaden children's understanding and perspectives about diverse cultures other than their own” (Holland & Mongillo, 2016, p. 26).

Robinson’s (2013) five month ethnographic study in a third grade classroom investigated what understanding students learn about themselves while interacting with critical multicultural literature. The study further examined what experiences children have had that have an impact on how students respond critically and emotionally through reading multicultural texts (Robinson, 2013, p. 44). “Classrooms that do not perpetuate pedagogies of silence and disadvantage are places where critical discourse flourishes, exposing students to the perspectives of others, and to the skills and knowledge need to negotiate a pluralistic world” (Robinson, 2013, p. 45).

In Robinson’s study she has a classroom of twenty students, but highlights biographical information of five students. Some students highlighted come from blended

families, live in affluent neighborhoods, live in apartments, range in cultural backgrounds and have various individual traits and interests that make them each unique. As Robinson discusses her findings she provides detailed transcribed conversations between students as they react to various multicultural texts read in the classroom. As students are making meaning of the text they are engaging in conversation with one another and construct meaning from each other's interpretations of the texts. Not only are students able to make meaning, but Robinson finds that students become empathetic with the characters and situations in the stories. In the study Robinson highlights a student Abigail who tells Robinson she wants to do more multicultural readings because she can relate to the stories on a personal level. "So she is very aware of her racial differences at school, and her gender differences at home; both of these instances reveal her sense of alienation" (Robinson, 2013, p. 50). The conclusion to this research found the importance of students interacting with multicultural texts in a critical matter which leads them to learn about different social constructs and cultures different from their own. "Possibilities to interact, to learn about people whose experiences, cultures, social and economic situations, and heritages that differ from their own may only be possible through the literature that is available to them at school" (Robinson, 2013, p. 50).

As multicultural books encompass more than culture and diversity it's important to recognize the umbrella of multicultural texts that includes books with LGBTQ+ themes. The research in the article titled "Building the Foundation of Acceptance Book by Book: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender-Themed books for Grades K-5 Multicultural Library" by Dee Knoblauch (2016) examines the search and need for the elementary school communities to have access to LGBT books to foster acceptance,

understanding and student exposure to family diversity (Knoblauch, 2016, p. 210). In her research Knoblauch examined over 30 elementary level books that had LGBT themes. Most of these books were not found at a local library, but ones that were found through websites to purchase. Out of the over 30 books Knoblauch reviewed and recommended four picture books for early elementary and four chapter books for later elementary level. When looking at the picture books the purpose was to find texts “that subtly normalize and embrace all types of families, including those with same-sex parents” (Knoblauch, 2016, p. 211). When analyzing the chapter books Knoblauch was looking at “the subtlety of the inclusion of LGBT characters to normalize their presence” (Knoblauch, 2016, p. 211). After analyzing all of the books recommended for elementary age students Knoblauch found that it’s crucial to expose children to the LGBT theme books at a young age. Teachers cannot wait until middle school to have access to these multicultural texts. By exposing them to these texts early on, it builds a foundation for acceptance and allows students to celebrate the diversity of families (Knoblauch, 2013, p. 212). “For children with same-sex parents to actually see their family represented in the school-sanctioned curriculum: How powerfully validating would that be?” (Knoblauch, 2013, p. 213).

### **Reader Response**

The Reader response theory has been influenced by theorist Louise Rosenblatt. Based on the idea that every reader is unique in what initiates schema in any particular area, Rosenblatt argued that every reading experience is unique to each person (Rosenblatt, 1982). Part of Rosenblatt’s theory provides two different views on how a reader experiences a text. One view is the aesthetic experience. The aesthetic experience allows a reader to experience the text on a personal level where they are thinking and

feeling about their own schema while they are constructing the meaning of a text. The efferent experience while reading allows a reader to take away information that they have learned from the text (Rosenblatt, 1982, p.2). “The words in their particular pattern stir up elements of memory, activate areas of consciousness” (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 1).

Becker (1999) presents a qualitative study of four fifth grade students and how they respond to a text with three classroom activities. The activities included a discussion group, story map activity and written responses of the text. These activities were observed and collected based on student responses to the teacher’s read aloud of *Androcles and the Lion*. When looking at the data the purpose was to examine how the students constructed meaning and how they related to stance (Becker, 1999, p. 112).

During the discussion group it was observed that students were using the aesthetic stance as they shared their own experiences. “The students initial responses suggest they were engaging with characters’ feelings and actions. At the same time each student’s response at a personal accent (Becker, 1999, p. 114). Results of the story map indicated that their stance moved from aesthetic stance to efferent stance. Students worked together to determine the author, setting, characters, sequence of events, and lesson of the story. Most of the students in the group saw it as a class assignment that would be collected by the teacher, thus sharing out the information from the text to support the answers to the story map. One out of the four students did show some efferent characteristics when working on the story map. The written responses were unique in that they required both efferent and aesthetic responses to the text. The questions asked for evidence from the text, along with questions that reflected students' personal perspectives of the text. This study allowed for Becker to evaluate various reading practices and how they relate to the

reader response theory and stances taken when interacting with a text. Three of the four students in the study demonstrated evidence that they “adopted predominant stances” (Becker, 1999, p. 120), but also shifted between them as well. The fourth student showed evidence that they “did not bridge the stances and shifted back and forth” (Becker, 1999, p. 120). The conclusion of the study found the importance of teachers needing to be aware of the varying stances students can have relating to texts read and be able to scaffold reading skills and plan instruction carefully around this understanding (Becker, 1999, p. 123). “Educators need to recognize the individual variation in negotiating stance and be aware that shifts in stances across and within activities are not readily accessible for some children and my, in fact, be in conflict” (Becker, 1999, p. 124).

In an article titled “Leaving Out to Pull In: Using Reader Response to Teach Multicultural Literature (Reissman, 1994) details a teacher’s use of reader response when teaching multicultural literature in his classroom. His classroom setting is predominantly Chinese and African American located in New York in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. Reissman’s strategy of “Leaving Out to Pull In” describes the practice of exposing his student to an unfamiliar text. Reissman asks that students read the text given three times and students have to “guess the ethnic or cultural background of the author and write down phrases, images, or words to suggest a particular ethnicity or cultural background to them” (Reissman, 1994, p. 20). He leaves out the names, references and places that might give any cultural information away.

After reading the passages it is clear that students were using their own experiences to guess the cultures represented in the passages. As students engage in conversations together in response to what they’re reading they are not able to correctly



guess the culture and ethnicity of the authors, but draw from their own experiences to make predictions. “One student thought the old women came from Cuba because her own grandmother was ‘just like that.’ When I asked Maria what she meant by ‘just like that,’ she said that although her grandmother only spoke broken English, she kept urging Maria to speak ‘American English’ at home” (Reissman, 1994, p. 21). Reissman continues this strategy with a passage about a young girl moving to a new neighborhood as a minority. After thinking she has made two new friends, the mothers of the two friends ask them to stop playing with her due to her ethnicity. Most students respond and connect to this passage on a personal level. Most of the students could personally relate to their family members not wanting them to be friends with others outside of their own ethnicity. After this conversation students were asked to write about their experiences “when they had been ‘warned against’ or ‘pulled away’ from peers of another ethnicity” (Reissman, 1994, p. 22).

This reader response activity allowed students to open their eyes to the connections they might have to other cultures, along with allowing students to become more aware of bias that they themselves and others might carry. “The technique can serve as a tool for engaging and motivating students not only to probe the particular cultural backgrounds of authors whose works are examined, but also to ‘pull in’ their own cultural experiences. Such interactive reading will not only enhance literacy but also promote empathy and intergroup respect” (Reissman, 1994, pg. 23).

### **Interactive Read Aloud**

Interactive read aloud is a common practice within the balanced literacy approach. In this approach students are able to think and apply comprehension skills in a critical

way. In the study by Fisher, Flood, Lapp and Frey (2004) they examined read aloud practices in expert teachers to see what components of interactive read aloud were most effective. The study consisted of 25 teachers that were “experts” in teaching read alouds. There were an additional 120 teachers selected for observations that were not necessarily “expert” teachers at the read aloud practice which allowed the data to be compared to the 25 “expert” teachers in the study. An additional part of the study was not only observing the read aloud practice, but interviewing the teachers to get a sense of how they planned for their interactive read alouds.

The data collected narrowed down seven components of an interactive read aloud that proved to create effective read aloud instruction. The first component was text selection. They found that expert teachers chose books students were interested in and were developmentally appropriate for the age and grade level. The second piece of evidence was that the teachers had previously looked and planned the read aloud before reading it to their classes. Their practice of reading the books allowed them to plan places where appropriate questioning would take place with post-it notes. The third piece was having a clear purpose for the read aloud. Teachers had a plan for what reading strategies students would practice and some teachers had anchor charts to support the strategies that were going to be practiced. The fourth component was observing the teacher model correct fluency when reading. By reading the books beforehand the teachers could practice the correct pronunciation of words and prosody as well. The fifth piece of evidence was teachers that used appropriate and engaging animation and expression in their voices. “They also used movement, hand gestures, facial expressions, and props to provide the animation and expression that seemed necessary to fully engage students”

(Fisher, Flood, Lapp & Frey, 2004, p.12). The sixth component found in effective read alouds was the conversation about the texts. Expert teachers planned discussions before, during and after reading. The questions planned ranged from personal connections to students being able to share their understanding of the text. The final piece of evidence found was the incorporation of independent reading and writing. The expert teachers found ways to tie in the interactive read aloud to reading and writing across the day. The read alouds chosen were not just random, but chosen to connect to other units of study in their literacy block.

The conclusion of this study found that the seven components of the read aloud made for the most effective and ways for students to critically think about what was being read to them. “We believe that attention should be placed on ensuring that students understand the purpose for read-aloud, both in text selection as well as when asked to apply comprehension strategies, because it is through the read-aloud experience that students can be exposed to the power writer's language patterns; introduced to new vocabulary, concepts, and text structures; and ‘turned on’ to the joy of reading” (Fisher, Flood, Lapp & Frey, 2004, p.15).

Another study of interactive read aloud by Hoffman (2011) looked at how a Kindergarten teacher changed the structure of read aloud to reflect “higher level literacy practices to meet 21st century literacy demands” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 184). The research looked at how the level of comprehension could be lifted to ask higher level questioning as opposed to solely focusing on literal questions that could be easily answered. Hoffman and the Kindergarten teacher planned a professional development sessions with other Kindergarten teachers. The goal was to change how students responded to read alouds.

“We established the following PD goals for the teacher’s instruction and for students’ responses to literature during read-alouds: (1) to change the form of teacher and student talk from mostly IRE to interactive discussion, and (2) to shift the focus of discussion from mostly literal-level foci on what is explicitly in the text to higher level interpretative meaning” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 185).

Hoffman and the Kindergarten teacher Ms. Maddox worked for six months training teachers to facilitate instructional practices within their read aloud time that would foster the interactive discussion that would lead to students being able to make meaning at the interpretative level. Each professional development session was designed to have teachers read professional literature about interactive read aloud and then to discuss these readings. Ms. Maddox then showed a video of her classroom during interactive read aloud time in which the teachers were able to reflect on her practice through a transcription of the video. “Ms. Maddox then taught the subsequent read-alouds and assessed student progress informally during the read-aloud as well as more formally through video analysis in the next PD” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 186).

After these professional development sessions and analyzing the practice and videos of Ms. Maddox, four key instructional practices were evident to support both interactive discussion and interpretive meaning. The first practice was “Encouraging Student Talk to Build Interaction” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 187). During her read alouds Ms. Maddox made a shift to allow students to talk freely in a quiet manner while she was reading aloud. When she planned questioning students could raise their hand to participate in the conversation in a louder voice. “These simple management moves communicated to students that the purpose of free participation was collaboration in

meaning making, so when too many speakers shared at once, she focused on the need to hear others' contributions, rather than on controlling students' ways of communicating with strict procedures for participation (e.g., raising hands)" (Hoffman, 2011, p. 188).

The second practice evident during interactive read aloud was "Strategic Use of Reconstruction of Meaning" (Hoffman, 2011, p. 188). As Ms. Maddox fostered free talk there were also times where she needed to scaffold conversation to continue to construct meaning. As students answered she would probe with follow up questions to get students to think deeper about the hows and why certain events were happening in the story. The third practice evident was "Strategic Use of Coconstruction of Meaning" (Hoffman, 2011, pg. 189). As the students were having a discussion meaning was coconstructed based on the conversation and questioning and probing done by Ms. Maddox. "In our analysis we identified two necessary components for coconstruction: capitalizing on student-initiated responses and the use of follow-up questioning to guide the meaning making process across multiple participants' contributions. Simply by allowing and encouraging students to freely respond during the read-aloud, Ms. Maddox achieved an increase in student-initiated responses (student talk other than responses to a teacher question, such as bringing up a new idea, or responding to another's comment without prompting)" (Hoffman, 2011, p. 190). The final practice observed was "Shifting Focus From Literal to Interpretive" (Hoffman, 2011, p. 190). To create more conversation and questioning to reflect interpretive meaning, Ms. Maddox read and studied each read aloud carefully, planning specific points in the book to stop and engage students in higher-order thinking.

The conclusion to this study found that with the thoughtful reflection and purpose to create more read alouds with interactive discussions and interpretive meaning making that Ms. Maddox’s interactive read alouds did grow in length, but students were able to construct much more meaning from what she was reading to them. “We found that instructional supports aimed at coconstructing meaning with students that supported their meaning making through questioning best supported interpretive meaning making. Co Constructed responses to literature resulted in much higher level interpretations of text during read alouds. Through this process, teachers and students can shift understandings of “meaning” from something preexisting in texts to something constructed through texts, themselves, and others” (Hoffman, 2011, pg. 193).

### **Student Book Choice**

As students are engaged in literacy instruction throughout their entire education, it is important to reflect on the importance of the books students read independently. In order for students to become engaged and motivated in their independent reading they must have some personal choice of books they are reading. In the article titled “Raising Reading Volume Through Access, Choice, Discussion, and Book Talks” Fisher and Frey argue the importance of choice and the impact it has on children reading with more volume and stamina. (Fisher and Frey, 2018). “Yet, to increase reading volume, teachers have to expand the amount of choice students have in what they read. Students who have opportunities to choose their own books develop strategies for selecting books and are more likely to become intrinsically motivated readers” (Fisher & Frey, 2018, p. 91). Fisher and Frey also discuss the importance of access to a variety of texts in the classroom and school. This includes the access to books in the classroom and school

library, which means classroom teachers should have a large variety of texts to choose from.

Merga (2018) researched the practices within silent reading, which included looking at book choice. The study consisted of qualitative data taken from interviews of 47 fourth through sixth grade students. The purpose of the interviews were to collect data on student's experiences with silent reading and book discussions and their feelings towards both. The results of the study found that book choice was one of the best parts of the silent reading experience for students. "This freedom to change a book that is a poor fit for one more engaging facilitated enjoyment" (Merga, 2018, p. 75).

The conclusion to the study found that both the silent reading and book discussion practices were beneficial to students as they supported various reading strategies and increased student engagement with reading. Book choice was a key component for students to remain engaged with the texts they were reading during silent reading time.

Research titled "In their own words: What elementary students have to say about the motivation to read" by the National Reading Research Center polled elementary students on what motivates them to read (Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994). The research interviewed 300 third and fifth grade students from two different districts. The study began by giving students a questionnaire about their motivation to read. 48 students were then interviewed individually to share some of the books they have read that have interested them and increased their motivation to read.

The study revealed important components that motivate children to read. These key components included prior experience with books, social interactions about books, book access and book choice (Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994, p. 177). When

looking specifically at book choice about 75% of students said that being able to choose their own books motivated them to read. “The children who participated in our study consistently revealed that they were more motivated when given opportunities to read books of their own choosing. When telling about the ‘most interesting’ narratives and informational texts which they had read, children had reported they had chosen the books” (Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994, p. 177). Another important factor in book choice was book access. Most of the students in the study had accessed a majority of books from their own classroom libraries. “This finding reinforces the notion that the ‘richness’ of the classroom library is a significant factor in motivating children to read, and further suggests that greater attention should be devoted to book access within the classroom setting” (Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994, p. 177). When students are able to choose from a large variety of books from their classroom libraries they have higher chances of choosing books that will motivate them to read.

### **Independent Reading**

Independent reading is an important practice that allows for reading growth in students. It is often seen as a component of the balanced literacy approach. Sanden conducted a year-long study with elementary teachers “aimed at better understanding the ways that highly effective teachers understand and use independent reading in their classrooms” (Sanden, 2012, p. 223). Sanden’s studies revealed the important elements of silent reading that go beyond a typical SSR structure (Sanden, 2012, p. 224). Sanden spent the time not only observing the teachers and students, but asking students about their thoughts about independent reading.



The conclusion of the study found two crucial features in successful independent reading practice which were student empowerment and teacher support. A key part of student empowerment was book choice where students were supported by their teacher to ensure books were read at their reading level along with providing them suggestions when they needed it. “Selecting just-right books occurred in different ways across these classrooms, including leveled classroom libraries and instruction on book selection” (Sanden, 2012, p. 225). Evidence from the study on teacher support was teachers being able to “demonstrate independent reading behaviors, including explicitly modeling what being an independent reader looks like” (Sanden, 2012, p. 226). This instruction allowed students to know expectations which allowed them to stay engaged in reading independently for longer periods of time. With these two features of practice evident within the independent reading process teachers were able to see student growth. “They believe that inserting intentional opportunities for reading instruction and holding students accountable for the learning that ensues allows independent reading to hold increased possibilities for influencing their students’ reading growth” (Sanden, 2012, p. 227).

In a study conducted by Chua (2010) they “used the time-series design to examine the effects of the SSR program on cultivating students’ habits and attitudes regarding reading books for leisure for both during the SSR period and after school” (Chua, 2010, p. 181). Chua worked with a secondary school to evaluate a questionnaire teachers had given three times throughout the year in regards to the SSR (Sustained Silent Reading) model and reading for leisure. The questionnaire asked the students, “1. To what extent did you read books for leisure actively during the SSR period? 2. What was the

proportion of your classmates that engaged in reading tasks during the SSR period? 3. How many hours did you spend on reading books for leisure after school? 4. What were your attitudes toward reading books for leisure?” (Chua, 2010, p. 181).

The results of the questionnaires showed student growth in reading for leisure when comparing the first questionnaire at the beginning of the year, the second mid-year, and the third questionnaire at the end of the year. The data provides evidence that students increased their attitude towards books read for leisure during their SSR time at school. The only question that did not show any increase was the third question asking students if they read for leisure at home. The amount of students that said they read at home for more than an hour decreased from the beginning to end of the year.

The conclusion to this study found the SSR program to have a positive impact on student’s engagement when reading for leisure. “First, it is possible to say that the SSR program had a significant effect on cultivating students’ reading habits in the SSR period. Second, the program had a significant effect on cultivating students’ pleasure in and enjoyment of reading. Finally, the effects of the program did not extend to students’ reading habits after school” (Chua, 2010, p. 183, 184). This study demonstrated the importance of allowing students the opportunities to read books that they are interested in and the importance of allowing them to choose books for independent reading time themselves.

In the study titled “Everyday We’re Shufflin’: Empowering Students During In-School Independent Reading Time by Hall, Hendrick & Williams (2014) they “examined how providing students with choice during independent reading time might increase their involvement in reading” (Hall, Hendrick & Williams, 2014, p. 92). The goal of the study

was for students to become more engaged with their independent reading through the opportunity of choice. The opportunities during this time included offering books students would be interested in choosing, students reading while listening to relaxing music, and students having discussions about their books after independent reading time. The participants in the study were a classroom of third grade students and it was conducted over a four week period. The classroom used a reading workshop model with independent reading time built in. In the beginning of the study the students completed interest surveys, along with the teacher providing the reading level of each student. With the data from both sources each student was given four books based on their reading level and interest. “Each student was offered an Ipod Shuffle with approximately 20 preprogrammed songs from the Classical Study Music album purchased on itunes” (Hall, Hendrick & Williams, 2014, p. 94). If students wanted to listen to music it was explained how it might help students concentrate as they were reading. After independent reading students had time to talk about their books with the teacher providing conversation prompts that might help them get started.

The conclusion and results of the study found success in allowing for choice during independent reading time. Students enjoyed the choice in reading books that they were interested in. When offered the option to listen to music students were able to figure out when it was distracting and when it helped them concentrate. When it was time to engage in conversation around the books students were engaged and eager to talk about their books. “They were outwardly enthusiastic about daily ISIR, often reminding the teacher that it was time to read. The teachers confirmed our observations, noting that

students looked forward to the ISIR and subsequent discussions, even after the study was completed” (Hall, Hendrick & Williams, 2014, p. 94).

## **Conclusion**

After reviewing various pieces of research relating to multicultural literature, reader response, interactive read aloud, book choice, and independent reading it is clear that all these components of literacy instruction support and scaffold the use of multicultural literature in a classroom. “Making explicit connections between multicultural education and subject- and skill- based curriculum and instruction is imperative” (Gay, 2003, p. 31). By incorporating multicultural literature in various areas of balanced literacy students will be able to access multicultural texts in a variety of ways. This study will allow students to learn about different cultures through read aloud and allow students to be able to respond to multicultural texts in a way where they are not only learning about different cultures, but making personal connections to their own lives and cultures as well. This study will also provide students the opportunity to choose multicultural books for their independent reading time which will allow for them to continue to build their cultural awareness as well as find books that reflect their own experience and culture. “Many ethnically diverse students do not find schooling exciting or inviting: they often feel unwelcome, insignificant, and alienated. Too much of what is taught has no immediate value to these students. It does not reflect who they are” (Gay, 2003, p. 33). The goal of this study is to provide evidence for how the exposure of multicultural texts allows students to build in their knowledge and understanding of cultures different from their own, but also allow them to have the opportunity to see themselves in multicultural texts as well.

## Chapter 3

### Context of the Study

#### Community

The study took place in a first grade classroom in the North Eastern part of the United States. The district has one K-2 elementary school, one 3-4 elementary school, one 4-6 lower middle school, one 6-8 upper middle school and one high school. According to censusreporter.org, the population of the district is 23,553. The race and ethnicity of the district is 58% White, 2% Black or African American, 33% Asian, 6% Hispanic, and 2% of two or more races. The median household income is \$189,046. This is more than double the average income in the state of New Jersey. There are 4% of the population living below the poverty line under 18 and 6% of the population living below the poverty line above the age of 65.

#### School

The study site for the school was in Central New Jersey that serves grades kindergarten through second grade. The total student population is 897, with 2.1% of the population being economically disabled, 15.4% with disabilities, 4.9% English Learners, student to teacher ratio being 13:1, average teaching experience is 10.4 years and the average absenteeism in the school is 6.5% (NJ State School Performance Report Card, 2017/2018). Due to the school being a K-2 grade school, students do not participate in NJ state standardized testing. The schools mission states, ‘The teachers and staff ensure positive learning environments that promote and value discovery, academic success and parental involvement. Literacy, numeracy, inquiry and character education are the foundations of all learning at our school. Our differentiated approach to instruction

includes large group, small group and individual conferring that promotes student growth in developmentally appropriate ways.’ The breakdown of the curriculum blocks include 125 minutes for Balanced Literacy, 60 minutes for Mathematics, 40 minutes for an alternation of Science and Social Studies, along with the requirement to build in a 20 minute Morning Meeting and 10 minute movement break a day. The Related Arts offered include Spanish, Physical Education, Art, Music, and Technology. Each kindergarten classroom has 5 iPads and first and second grade teachers each have 5 Chromebooks per classroom. Additionally there are several class sets of Chromebooks on carts available for classrooms when needed. Each classroom also has a Bright Links Interactive Projector and document camera in their rooms to support instruction.

### **Classroom**

The study was conducted in my first grade general education classroom. There were 18 students in my class. The study included 10 male students and 8 female students. The demographics include 10 Asian students, 4 White students, 3 Black students, and 1 mixed race student that was identified as Asian and White. The study focused specifically on interactive read aloud lessons daily that lasted for 20-25 minutes. It also included independent book choice during the week. Each student has a day of the week where they replace old independent books from the previous week and exchange them for new books. They choose 10 independent leveled books and 5 to 7 non leveled interest books in various genre bins. The leveled bins range from levels A-M. There are an additional 27 genre bins in the classroom library students can choose from for interest. The physical space in the classroom contains 18 desks for student seating. It includes an additional desk organized as a ‘zen zone’ which includes tools to support social and emotional

breaks when students need to self-regulate. There are also other places in the classroom that offer flexible seating. There is a table that has the legs taken off for students to sit, another table with 4 balance balls, an area with a carpet and two comfortable chairs, along with carpet squares that students can take on around the room when wanting to work on the floor. There is also a kidney size table with 7 stools for small group work. There is a main long whiteboard which is predominantly used for Bright Links display. There is also a section of the whiteboard used for calendar, visual daily schedule, and a display of mentor books to gain student interest. There is another large bulletin board that is a word wall. Additional wall space includes math workshop station visual board, class family picture board, job chart, show what you know board, reading and writing partners, along with a pocket chart on the wall for students who enter the Shoe Tying Club throughout the year. Window space is also used for instructional charts during various units. There is also a clothing pin display of work that is changed various times throughout the school year. For technology there is a Chromebook charging station where Chromebook are charged and stored when not in use.

### **Teacher**

While this study was taking place this was my 13th year of teaching. First grade had been the only grade I have ever taught during that time. I had been working at this school for my 9th school year. I had taught 3 years in a previous district and my first year of teaching consisted of two maternity leaves at various schools. My undergraduate program was Elementary Education and Fine Arts from Rider University. I graduated in 2007. I began my Masters in Reading program at Rowan University in 2014. I picked the program back up in 2017. My purpose for starting the program was to refine my craft as a

reading teacher and begin to think of other career opportunities that could arise from the program.

### **Participants**

There were six students chosen in this study from my class of eighteen. There was a detailed consent form sent home that detailed the study to all parents before the study began. Sixteen out of eighteen forms were returned signing off on consent for the study. The group of six that participated in the study included three boys and three girls. The six students were chosen to reflect a range of diversity for the study, along with an equal amount of girls and boys. After looking at the returned consents it was determined the range of culture and demographics that would reflect the results of the study. The demographics of this group consisted of one White boy, one Chinese boy, one African American girl, two Indian girls, and one mixed race student identifying as Asian and White. To keep the privacy of my students safe during this study I gave them pseudonyms. The names of the students in the study are Jason, Charlie, Xavier, Lucy, Anika, and Priya.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The type of teacher research done for this study is qualitative practitioner inquiry. “One feature that every form of practitioner inquiry has in common is that the practitioner himself or herself simultaneously takes on the role of the researcher” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 41). The purpose of this research study was to evaluate how first graders build cultural awareness through developmentally appropriate multicultural texts and how they learn about cultures different from their own. In this study students were exposed to multicultural texts through the interactive read aloud practice with



planned stopping points before, during and after reading to engage and make meaning of the texts. Students also completed reader's response passages before, during and after reading. Students then had access to multicultural texts when reading independently. These books choices were chosen on their own based on their interests in various cultures whether they had reflected their own cultures or texts that represented different cultures. Qualitative inquiry measures that were used to collect data included questionnaires, reading responses, anecdotal records, and a teacher note-taking journal.

### **Procedure of Study**

The purpose of this teacher research study was to evaluate how first graders build cultural awareness through developmentally appropriate multicultural texts and how they learn about cultures different from their own. In my classroom, it was a culturally diverse population of students, so it was not uncommon for students to discuss various things relating to different holidays they celebrated, the food they were eating during snack time and lunch and languages they spoke at home. I was curious as to how to continue to foster cultural awareness in students in a more critical way. I thought that access to multicultural books would be a beneficial way to do so, but had to create thoughtful planned read alouds and tools to get students thinking outside of just their own cultures, but cultures different from their own as well.

The study began in December of 2019 and was completed in January of 2020. The study took place over 6 weeks of classroom instructional time. Throughout the study various forms of qualitative data were collected. At the beginning of the study I interviewed each of the six students prior to the study with a culture questionnaire. This questionnaire helped provide information about each student and their understanding of

culture and how they see culture around them and in books. I used this same questionnaire at the conclusion of the study as well to see if the exposure to multicultural texts had an impact on their cultural awareness compared to the beginning of the study.

Each week I read 1 of the 6 read alouds where students completed the reading response page throughout. In addition, various questions were planned to allow students to think critically about the text. Students participated by raising their hands to respond or turning and talking to their reading partner. I also collected data on if students were choosing multicultural texts during their book choice time they had once a week. Two weeks prior to the study I collected data about their multicultural book choices before I had introduced the genres and books available. The books were always in my classroom library but I purposefully did not explain or put much attention to what types of books they were before the study. This data collection allowed me to see any changes as they had a better understanding of the multicultural books available and as they began to learn about various cultures through the read aloud.

The reader's response was the same template for each read aloud. Before reading, students would write the title of the text and think about what they already knew about that specific culture. At various times during the read aloud I would stop and allow them to record and additional new learnings about that culture. After reading students would continue working independently to add new information, but were also encouraged to write any text to self-connections along with drawing or writing a picture about any additional thoughts or feelings they had.

I also began anecdotal note-taking when any important comments or discussions were happening throughout the read aloud. I also took notes about what happened as I

exposed my students to the various multicultural text bins in the classroom they would have access to and it quickly became a tool I would go to often as I caught important conversations and observations throughout the study. My personal teacher research journal was one where I would write not only observations but reflections of how students had interacted with the texts that were read aloud. I wanted to see how their interactions had varied from each text and their level of engagement as I read. The teacher journal allowed me to write freely about any thoughts that I was having throughout the research study.

### **Data Sources**

A variety of data was collected to analyze how first graders build cultural awareness through developmentally appropriate multicultural texts and how they learn about cultures different from their own. The questionnaire before and after the study were data sources to measure any growth on a student's understanding of cultural awareness.

To analyze student book choice I took anecdotal notes to record if they were choosing multicultural texts during their book choice day and what culture those books reflected. I recorded if the texts were not only multicultural, but if they somehow reflected the student's own culture or a culture different from their own. I did this by recording the names of the books and how many they chose from week to week. Additional anecdotal notes were taken as students were responding during the read aloud. I recorded responses as students raised their hands to respond and when I was able to listen to specific partnerships turn and talk to one another.

Another important data source was the reader's response pages for each read aloud. Not all of the students were comfortable sharing out loud as I read aloud, so I

wanted to have a data piece that I could analyze that reflected more of their learning and understanding in writing. By also leaving a section to allow students to draw a response about what they were thinking or feeling allowed for less confident writers to be able to respond in a way they felt comfortable.

The last piece of data source was my teacher research journal. This journal allowed me to record specific thoughts, questions and reflections that I had throughout the research process with my first grader. Information was gathered at various points throughout the study as I interacted and observed my class throughout my teacher research.

Table 1

*Multicultural Read Aloud Texts*

Week	Culture Reflected	Multicultural Picture Books
1	Native American	<i>The Very First Americans</i> by Cara Ashrose  This story is about the very first Americans, Native Americans, and how they lived before Columbus came to America. It gives accurate facts about tribes around the United States and teaches about where they lived, what they ate, and how they played.
2	Transgender	<i>When Aiden Became a Brother</i> by Kyle Lukoff  This story is about a transgender boy and the challenges he faces with gender identity and roles when his parents tell him they are expecting a baby and he will become a big brother.
3	African American	<i>I Love My Hair!</i> by Natasha Tarpley  This story is about an African American girl Keyana and the time and effort it takes to get her hair combed, but loves all the hair styles her mom creates for her.
4	Mexican	<i>Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh  This story is about two cousins. One cousin lives in America and one lives in Mexico. As they write letters to one another they learn how their daily lives are alike yet different in the United States and rural Mexico.
5	Chinese	<i>Read is a Dragon</i> by Roseanne Thong  This story is about a young Chinese American girl who finds color in everyday things, many of them being from her Asian culture.
6	Indian	<i>Hot, Hot Roti for Dada-ji</i> by Farhana Zia  This story is about a young Indian American boy who goes on various adventures with his grandfather where he learns about cultural traditions and food from India.

## Data Analysis

Data was analyzed to determine themes that emerged to identify students' cultural awareness. As the data was analyzed about book choice it was identified by theme of the multicultural books chosen verses other books that were not considered multicultural. I also analyzed if any of the book choices reflected a child's culture or ones different from their own. Other means of analysis was looking at themes to how students responded to the text during the read aloud and reader response page. Specifically, looking to see what students knew before about a specific culture and their new learning of a culture after reading a text. By looking at both the discussions and reader's response I was able to look at connections between the two to see if there were any patterns of growth in a student's cultural awareness.

## Chapter 4

### Data Analysis and Findings

Chapter four provides the results of the research which investigated how first graders build cultural awareness through multicultural literature. This study was completed over the course of six weeks. During this six weeks data was collected through questionnaires, anecdotal notes, reader response pages and teacher research journal. The analysis of data provided three major themes that appeared to support students' understanding of culture. These themes are: (1) multicultural literature increases understanding of other cultures; (2) interest and motivation in reading multicultural books during interactive read aloud and independent book choices; (3) reader responses demonstrated deep and critical understanding of multicultural literature.

#### **Multicultural Literature Increases Understanding of Other Cultures**

After reading all six read alouds there was evidence to demonstrate that students grew in their understanding of other cultures. Before reading each story students had to write on their reading response template where they wrote what they thought they knew about the culture before reading. I told students what culture the story would represent. Before reading *The Very First Americans* (Ashrose, 1993) Priya wrote “They got there first and then Christopher Columbus took over their land and made them work to death every day and they did not give them time to eat.” As Priya wrote new information as the read aloud was being read she wrote,

The Native Americans carved doors to look like animal mouths. They Hopis prayed for rain. They used buffalo skin for clothes. Today almost two million

people built their houses there. Native American women wore so many necklaces at the same time. They eat buffalo, foxes, rabbits and chicken.

Her response and understanding grew from her original understanding of Native Americans. She had some understanding of the Native Americans and Columbus narrative, but demonstrated more understanding of Native Americans as a culture. Her Native American cultural knowledge was indicated through her references to tribal names, food, and traditions. Priya's response moved away from any information relating to Christopher Columbus and solely focused on her new understanding of the Native American's culture.

Another example when looking at the reader responses was Jason's writing. He seemed to have limited knowledge of the Mexican culture before reading *Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin* (Tonatiuh, 2010). Before reading Jason wrote 'They wear shoes from ancient Egypt.' Based on my observations I believe he was looking at the front cover of the text and saw Primo wearing sandals. This demonstrates his response is very limited in his understanding of the Mexican culture. As I read and Jason responded he grew in his understanding of the daily life in rural Mexico. As he was listening to the story he wrote,

I learned that they ride their bikes to school. They have horses called caballeros. When it's hot they jump into rivers not pools. They both play a marble game but in different ways. They grow corn and they play soccer.

Jason's cultural knowledge of rural Mexican life was seen through his references to how Mexican children went to school and played. Comparing his knowledge to Mexican



culture before reading Jason demonstrated that he took away a lot of key information from the multicultural text. Jason's written responses connected to Robinson's research (2013) as he was able to draw from the text and share how life in Mexico was different than life in the United States. "Possibilities to interact, to learn about people whose experiences, cultures, social and economic situations, and heritages that differ from their own may only be possible through the literature that is available to them at school" (Robinson, 2013, p. 50).

Before reading aloud the story, *When Aiden Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff (2019), students did not know very much about being transgender before reading the story. The read aloud provided for meaningful conversations and questions throughout the story. The beginning of the story details how Aiden hated everything about being a girl. On one page it said, 'But Aiden didn't feel like any kind of girl. He was really another kind of boy' (Lukoff, 2019, p. 5). On this page I stopped and allowed the class to turn and talk. I asked them what they thought it meant when the author said that. When listening to conversation Xavier turned to his partner and said 'I think that it means he's really a boy. His hair is short in the picture and he has a big smile on his face and he didn't on the other pages.' His statement is simple, but it demonstrates that Xavier is beginning to understand the concept of transgender. Xavier's transgender cultural knowledge was indicated through him noticing that Aiden was happy when he cut his hair to look like a boy. The words were not in the text, but Xavier was able to notice that it was the first page that the main character Aiden had a smile on his face as he felt like he looked like a boy reflected in the mirror. The book also used the vocabulary word *transgender*, so on that particular page I stopped and clarified to students what the

meaning of transgender was and how Aiden was transgender. After clarifying the meaning of transgender and using clues from the text one student said, ‘When I was little I wanted to be a boy, but I don’t anymore.’ I used this opportunity to allow for open conversation. I said, ‘So does that mean transgender?’ Students began raising their hands to share. Lucy had answered, ‘Yea but you don’t want to be a boy now, so that doesn’t mean transgender. Aiden wants to stay a boy and be a boy.’ Other students chimed in ‘yea’ or made a connection sign hand gesture to show they agreed with what Lucy had said. This open conversation with students answering one another’s questions and comments was valuable and showed an understanding for the transgender culture and community. This scenario during the read aloud connected to Hoffman’s research on interactive read aloud (2011). “In our analysis we identified two necessary components for coconstruction: capitalizing on student-initiated responses and the use of follow-up questioning to guide the meaning making process across multiple participants’ contributions. Simply by allowing and encouraging students to freely respond during the read-aloud, Ms. Maddox achieved an increase in student-initiated responses (student talk other than responses to a teacher question, such as bringing up a new idea, or responding to another’s comment without prompting)” (Hoffman, 2011, p. 190). By allowing for open questions and responses from students they were able to make meaning of the word transgender and even provided personal connections to themselves as well.

The table 2 shows a data of the multicultural books that were chosen by the six students for independent reading time. Table 2 provides data of how many books students were choosing that were considered multicultural. Besides independent leveled texts students were able to choose up to 5 interest books that were not in leveled bins. The

multicultural texts were in separate labeled genre bins for students to choose from. Students provided data for these books when answering the questions on the post questionnaire which showed growth in their cultural awareness. When Xavier responded to the first question on the post questionnaire, 'Tell me about people around the world' Xavier's response was, 'People dress in different ways and talk in different languages. Some people don't have any money.' Since none of our read aloud stories touched on the theme of poverty I asked him to tell me more. He told me about a book that he read in his book bin. He said,

I read a book about a girl who lived in a city that was dirty with broken glass and spray paint with the word 'die' on her door. There was a person on the street too who lived there and didn't have a home. I think she was homeless.

I asked him if he could locate and show me the book and it was a multicultural book titled *Something Beautiful* by Sharon Dennis Wyeth (2002). This response is an example of Xavier learning about different cultures through his multicultural books in his book bin he chose on his own. Xavier's cultural knowledge of people living in poverty was seen through his reference to seeing the homeless person living on the street in the story. In the study by Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell (1994) their research shows parallels to Xavier's response to a multicultural book he had chosen himself. The results of their study found that 75% of students said that being able to choose their own books motivated them to read. "The children who participated in our study consistently revealed that they were more motivated when given opportunities to read books of their own choosing. When telling about the 'most interesting' narratives and informational texts which they had read, children had reported they had chosen the books" (Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell,

1994, p. 177). If Xavier did not have the opportunity to choose multicultural books in the classroom library he would not have had the motivation to read more about cultures and circumstances different from his own. His post questionnaire answer demonstrated his motivation to read multicultural literature and learn from them.

Table 2

*Multicultural Books Chosen Independently for Independent Reading Time*

Student Name	Before Research Week 1	Before Research Week 2	During Research Week 1	During Research Week 2	During Research Week 3	During Research Week 4	During Research Week 5
Anika	1	1	2	2	1	4	3
Charlie	0	1	2	1	0	1	2
Xavier	1	0	4	4	4	3	2
Jason	0	3	5	5	1	2	3
Lucy	0	0	4	2	3	2	2
Priya	3	1	2	4	4	5	4

When looking at the data source of the questionnaires pre and post it was evident that students had grown in their understanding of cultures different from their own. Anika and Jason demonstrated growth in understanding other cultures that related to the multicultural texts in the study that were read aloud and those they had chosen and had access to for independent reading time. The first part of the questionnaire asked, ‘Tell me what you know about different people around the world.’ Anika’s response before the study was ‘Some people are different because they speak different languages and have

different skin tones.’ Her response after the study was ‘People are all different and celebrate things in different ways and on different days. Things like Chinese New Year, Christmas and Diwali.’ The Chinese New Year traditions were seen in the read aloud book *Red is Dragon* by Rosanne Thong (2001). Anika also chose a book about Diwali as a book choice for independent reading time. When answering the statement, ‘Tell me about how people dress around the world,’ Anika answered in her pre questionnaire ‘they wear different things like jewelry. I think they wear hats all day and people wear short sleeves because it’s hot.’ Her post questionnaire response was ‘People wear different kinds of clothes during holidays than everyday clothes. When it’s a holiday people dress according to their tradition. People that celebrate Chinese New Year dress in robes.’

Jason also showed growth in his responses to dress. In the pre response Jason said, ‘Some people dress fancy and dress in clothes like gowns and wear jewelry on their clothes.’ In his post response he said, ‘they all have different clothes to show their culture. Native Americans dress up when they have celebrations and festivals and in India too.’ Anika and Jason’s cultural knowledge of how people dress around the world was seen through their references in their post questionnaires to how people wear clothing to reflect their culture whether it’s a holiday or some kind of tradition. Their responses before reading the multicultural texts are ones that don’t really reflect any knowledge of culture. “That is, all students must see themselves in books that they read, and to that end each school should consider their population and seek out high quality, authentic texts to fill their classroom libraries. In addition, these libraries should contain a vast amount of diverse literature to broaden children's understanding and perspectives about diverse cultures other than their own” (Holland & Mongillo, 2016, p. 26).

## **Interest and Motivation to Read Multicultural Books During Read Aloud and Book Choice**

During the study it was evident that students were interested in learning about different cultures. At the beginning of the study I exposed students to the multicultural books in the classroom library. The books were always accessible, but I did not discuss or talk about them before my research began. As Table 2 demonstrates there were students in the study that had taken some multicultural books out of the library for book choice before the study, but the most common numbers of books taken were between 0 and 1. Within the first two weeks of the study I pulled out a bin or two a day and introduced the genre bin and what types of books were inside. I explained how some books might teach information about a culture or there might be characters that represent a culture. I shared brief overviews of some of the books that may catch student's attention. Eight of my student's ethnic background in my class were Indian and when sharing the bin with books with characters and culture that reflect their Indian background, I heard a lot of excited remarks like 'I know the story of Diwali!' and 'My family eats Roti!' Other students eagerly chimed in when they saw their culture reflected in other genre bins. When I showed the class the genre bin of families and explained some of the stories about adoption, Lucy, an adopted child, said, 'I want to read that book (*My Family is Forever* by Nancy Carlson, 2004) because my brother and I were adopted from Ethiopia.' Once the multicultural genre bins were introduced many of the books were taken out for independent book choice.

Before reading *When Aiden Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff (2019) I had shared with the class that the story was about a girl transitioning to become a boy and

some families have children that feel that way. I also showed the class other LGBTQ themed books that had representation of different families and characters being true to who they were despite their gender. After introducing these themes of multicultural literature, these books were taken out of the classroom library immediately by a variety of students. The class seemed very interested in these books and wanted to learn more about different families and gender identity. In one instance I observed two students respectfully arguing over a few of these books as they were choosing their books for the week. One student had four of the LGBTQ themed books and another student commented that she had too many and it wasn't fair because others wanted to read them too. After sharing the multicultural genres and variety of books students were motivated to take more multicultural books out of the classroom library. Knoblauch's research (2016) reminds teachers of the importance of incorporating LGBTQ themed books in classrooms. "All families should be able to see their family represented in their school curriculum, and not be left to wonder what is 'wrong' with their family if they are excluded. Furthermore, children from 'traditional families' (with a mom and a dad) would realize all types of different families abound" (Knoblauch, 2016, p. 209). Most of my class consists of the 'traditional families' picture, with most families in my class having a mom and dad. The class showed interest in building their cultural knowledge of families and gender identity as they eagerly took these books from my classroom library to read independently. By reading these books students were also able to build empathy and understanding to those that might be different from them.

During interactive read aloud Jason had shown interest in the Native American culture when reading the book *The Very First Americans* by Cara Ashrose (1993). When

interacting in conversation during the read aloud Jason was eager and motivated to raise his hand and contribute to the class conversations. In the beginning of the story I read, ‘There were hundreds of different tribes in America. Each one had its own language, its own way of life, and its own name. But when Columbus landed in America in 1492, he thought he was in the Indies so he called the people he met ‘Indians.’ The name stuck’ (Ashrose, 1993, p. 1). After reading the sentences I stopped and asked the class, ‘What do you think about that?’ As students turned and talked to one another Jason said, ‘I think that they shouldn’t be called Indians because Columbus named them and took over their land. They should be called by their own names.’ This comment reflects Josh’s understanding of the Native American culture and how the tribes were all unique despite Columbus giving them the name ‘Indians’. He is also learning that Columbus is not a glorified hero as is often depicted in literature about Native Americans and Columbus. After reading the book Jason showed continued interest and motivation to read books about Native Americans during his independent reading time. Based on data from Table 2, in weeks 1 and 2 he chose 5 multicultural books each week. Each of those weeks he chose 5 books from the Native American genre bin. He chose books about famous Native Americans and Native American tales. I also observed him taking these books home as students are allowed to take two books home each night from their book bins. In Sanden’s research (2012) on independent reading one of the two factors concluded from the study for effective independent reading instruction included book choice. “Students were encouraged to choose reading materials that reflected their own interests in topics, genres, series, and author” (Sanden, 2012, p. 227). After reading *The Very First Americans* by Cara Ashrose (1993) for interactive read aloud, it sparked Jason’s interest



and motivation for continuing to learn about the Native American's culture as he chose ten books for independent reading time following my interactive read aloud lesson.

When analyzing the post culture questionnaire, additional evidence provided that students were motivated and interested in multicultural books for book choice. When looking at Anika's post questionnaire she wanted to go and get books from her book bin to help support her answers to some of the questions. She brought over two books from her book bin to show me specific parts when answering questions. She brought the book *Prince of Fire: The Story of Diwali* by Fatinder Verma (2016) and *My Big Barefoot Book of Spanish and English Words* by Sophie Fatus, (2016). She referenced both books on several occasions and pointed out parts to support her answer. She was eager to show different parts from the texts. When asking her about characters that looked like her she was able to use both books to find characters that looked like her. She said, 'In Prince of Fire all of the characters, but not the gods, look like me because I'm Indian.' When asking her about characters she has come across that act like her she referenced *My Big Barefoot Book of Spanish and English Words* by Sophie Fatus (2016) when seeing different people from different cultures going shopping. Anika said, 'I like shopping and going places like the characters on this page.' As she turned the pages of both books with excitement I could tell that she was not only interested to read these self-selected multicultural texts, but that she was also familiar with them which indicates her motivation to read them during her independent reading time. Other students in the study including Priya, Lucy and Charlie also mentioned multicultural books they had read during independent reading time in their post questionnaires. The students did not have to choose any multicultural books for their book choice, as there were other genre books in

the classroom to choose from. While many chose from a mix of genre bins, all of the students chose some kind of multicultural book(s) each week and continued to do so after the study. In Palmer, Codling & Gambrell's research on what motivates children to read (1994) most of the students in the study had accessed a majority of books from their own classroom libraries. "This finding reinforces the notion that the 'richness' of the classroom library is a significant factor in motivating children to read, and further suggests that greater attention should be devoted to book access within the classroom setting" (Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994, p. 177).

### **Reader Responses Demonstrate Critical Understanding of Multicultural Literature**

Creating a written reading response template for each read aloud provided data and evidence that students were able to think critically about the multicultural literature they were exposed to during read aloud. The templates were designed for students to write responses before, during and after they listened and interacted with the various multicultural read alouds. The questions on the reading response allowed for both aesthetic and efferent responses (Rosenblatt, 1982). The statements students answered on the reader's response included the following:

1. *What do you know about this culture already?*
2. *What new information did I learn?*
3. *Can you make any connections to other cultures or your own personal connections?*
4. *What else are you thinking? You can write or draw a picture.*

When looking at the aesthetic responses to the read alouds all of the students made personal connections and responses to the multicultural read alouds. When Priya listened and responded to the story *Hot, Hot Roti for Dada-ji* by Farhana Zia (2001) she wrote, 'When my mom makes Roti she makes it with subji and dal. We also eat panere

and paratu and ramja and chola.’ Priya was making a meaningful connection as her family is Indian and could connect with the foods that were eaten and cooked in the story. Anika who is also Indian responded with, ‘I love gee it is my favorite and roti is my favorite food I eat.’ Anika also provided a picture of how Roti looks on a plate in the Indian culture. She drew a picture with labels for the roti bread, picell and another Indian food called yeo. In the story we had only seen the family eating roti bread by itself, so Anika provided a more detailed depiction of how it would be eaten with other Indian foods in her family. Jason responded to this text by writing, ‘I have cousins from different countries too.’ Xavier responded to the story by writing, ‘In India you can grow mangos. I like to eat mangoes too.’ Both Xavier and Jason’s responses provided a personal connection that might not be related to their culture, but their personal experiences.

When reading aloud the story *I Love My Hair!* by Natasha Tarpley (1998) Lucy, who is African American, connected to the young African American girl in the story when she wrote, ‘I usually need to get braids and I get beads too.’ Priya responded with a connection by writing, ‘When I take care of my hair I comb it every day. When I shower I do shampoo. I put oil in my hair when I wash my hair.’ Anika responded by writing, ‘We sometimes do braids and pigtails in my hair.’ Although the story was about a young African American girl, Jason was also able to make a connection to the story. He wrote, ‘Hair is important to African Americans. I spray this thing in my hair and then I comb it.’ In Becker’s study (1999) they analyzed students’ responses to a story using various response methods. Some responses found that students were using the aesthetic stance as they shared their own experiences and connections. “The students initial responses

suggest they were engaging with characters' feelings and actions. At the same time each student's response at a personal accent (Becker, 1999, p. 114). The personal examples written from the reader's response pages demonstrate that these students were able to make aesthetic responses as they were thinking critically about the multicultural books. These students demonstrated their understanding of multicultural texts through their detailed responses that connected to their own lives and experiences.

The students also demonstrated efferent stances when responding to the multicultural read alouds. One of the questions on the reading response template asked, 'What new information did I learn?' This prompt allowed students to share new factual information they learned from the various read alouds. When responding to *Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin* by Duncan Tonatiuh (2010) Charlie responded to this question by writing, 'They call soccer futbol. They sell corn at a farmer's market. They have two festivals. Caballero is a cowboy. They put fruit and candy into a pinata.' Xavier wrote, 'They have roaming dogs on the street. They ride bikes in the street. They have a celebration with fireworks.' Priya responded by writing, 'Mexican people grow corn. Mexican people eat quesadillas. Mexican kids ride bikes to school. Mexican people play football. They play marbles in Mexico. Mexican kids jump in the river in the afternoon. Cowboys in Mexico can do tricks.' Anika added factual information she learned when she wrote, 'They play paplotas which are kites. They ride bikes to school. They play football. They have dogs roaming around. They have fireworks. They have pinatas.' These students indicated their cultural knowledge when responding to the multicultural text through their written reader's response. They all responded in ways that shared detailed factual information they learned from the text.

When reading *When Aiden Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff (2019) students responded with a variety of answers about what they learned from the story and what the word transgender means. Jason wrote that he learned, ‘He transitioned to a girl to a boy. He didn’t feel welcome in his old room, but then he changed his old room to a new room.’ Charlie wrote that he learned, ‘When Aiden was little his parents thought that he was a girl. So he splashed in mud on purpose. So then he wanted to cut his hair because he wanted to be treated like a boy.’ Priya wrote, ‘I learned that some people can be a girl, but feel like a boy or some people can be a boy and feel like a girl.’ Two students showed mixed stances when writing about what they learned. Anika responded to what she learned by writing, ‘It is okay to become a boy when you are a sister and to change your name.’ Lucy wrote, ‘It feels confusing when you are a boy, but feel like a girl.’ Both of these responses show some level of understanding of the story, but also provide some of their personal thoughts on what transgender means and might feel like. Anika shares her thoughts of it being ‘okay’ to become transgender. Lucy said it feels ‘confusing.’ While these words were not in the story Lucy and Anika were both sharing their personal thoughts and inferences as they read the story. Becker’s research (1999) set out to evaluate various reading practices and how they relate to the reader response theory and stances taken when interacting with a text. The study demonstrated evidence that they “adopted predominant stances” (Becker, 1999, p. 120), but also shifted between them as well. Similar results were found as students responded in both stances when listening to the multicultural books for interactive read aloud. Despite the stance that students had in responding they absorbed critical information about different cultures as they listened to each story.

Discussions during the read alouds also provided information as to how students were understanding the multicultural read alouds. When reading the story *Red is a Dragon* by Roseanne Thong (2001) there were many opportunities to stop and talk about the text. Many pages had limited words and led to a lot of inferencing of what was happening in the pictures and the words. In the beginning the story described details of Chinese New Year when it said, 'Red is a dragon red is a drum red are the firecrackers- here they come!' (Thong, p.1). The illustrations detail a parade with a red dragon, gongs, drums, children in Chinese clothing, along with firecrackers. One student said, 'I think that's Chinese New Year!' I further probed the class by asking, 'How do you know?' As students turned and talked they had discussed the clothing, the dragon and the instruments. Charlie, who is Chinese, said 'I never saw a Chinese New Year parade, but in my house we have those instruments and firecrackers.' Another student added on to Charlie and said, 'I saw the Chinese New Year parade at school in Kindergarten last year and there were like 5 kids under the dragon.' A few more students chimed in saying, 'Oh yea, me too!' Another page had detailed pictures of dumplings and noodles with the words, 'White are noodles and chopsticks, two White are dumplings for me and you.' After reading I asked, 'Tell me about what we read about traditional Chinese food?' As students turned and talked they all shared what they saw in the pictures and read in the words. Some students eagerly shared that they've eaten dumplings and noodles before. Lucy said, 'I think they drink tea too because I see the mom and girl have it in the picture.' The students' discussion demonstrated how they were bringing their understanding together of the Chinese culture through answering with both efferent and aesthetic responses. "Teachers need to examine the cues for stance which various

learning environments elicit. They should model ways of approaching texts from different stances in order to scaffold students' reading skills” (Becker, 1999, p. 123). During the interactive read aloud students expressed their cultural knowledge of Chinese culture when responding to the text through their oral responses. They all responded in ways that shared detailed information and understanding of what they learned from the text and how it connected to their own lives and experiences.

In conclusion, the data analysis revealed that teaching and access to multicultural literature allowed students to increase their understanding of other cultures, promoted interest and motivation during read aloud and book choice, along with demonstrated critical understanding through the reader’s response practice.

After analyzing the students' interaction with read aloud and book choice it was evident that students were motivated to listen and engage with multicultural texts, as well as demonstrate intrinsic motivation to read the multicultural texts independently. Students were interested in finding books that reflected both their own culture and cultures different from them. Once multicultural read alouds were put back into the classroom library students were motivated to reread the familiar texts that we had read as a class. The data collected on interest and motivation suggest that students wanted to learn about different cultures and see their own culture represented in books.

After analyzing the reading response practice with the multicultural literature it was observable that the explicit reader response activities provided students the opportunity to think critically about the texts they were listening to and reading. As they were interpreting a variety of texts they were able to provide detailed information about various cultures that reflected factual knowledge and personal connections. The data

collected on the reading response practice suggests that students responded in ways that revealed their critical understanding of different cultures. Chapter five outlines a summary of the study, along with conclusions found from the study. Chapter five will also provide limitations and implications for future research.



## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

The goal of the study was to examine how first grade students build on their understanding of culture through the use of multicultural literature. Students were engaged in read alouds of quality multicultural texts that included texts that represented the Native American, transgender, African American, Mexican, Chinese and Indian cultures. Data collection consisted of questionnaires, reading responses during interactive read aloud, anecdotal records, and a teacher note-taking journal. An analysis of the data revealed that students were able to learn about cultures different from their own and see their own culture reflected in multicultural literature they were exposed to.

It was important to review literature that reflected studies on multicultural literature, interactive read alouds, reader response, independent reading, along with book choice. These practices reflected the study that was conducted with my students to support the goal of building cultural awareness through multicultural literature. When reviewing multicultural literature it was evident that there is a positive impact to exposing students to these diverse texts at a young age. “The impact of a thoughtful teacher can be profound. As teachers become more aware of their beliefs, attitudes and practices relating to diversity in the classroom, the children they teach will benefit. This may well be an important step towards reaching our goal of assisting children as they develop into productive citizens in a pluralistic society” (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p. 28). The more students are exposed to texts that reflect different cultures the more accepting they become of cultures different from their own. After reviewing literature on interactive read aloud, it was clear that it was a practice students were able to be engaged in when reading

multicultural literature. Read aloud gave students the opportunity to listen to rich diverse texts that spanned a variety of cultures. The process of listening to the text as the teacher read it aloud gave students the chance to not only enjoy the books, but to participate in reading strategies that allowed for them to understand the text in a deeper way. “Teachers need to be well practiced because their voices are vehicles that so fluidly convey the story and enable student listeners to develop their personal images and responses” (Fischer, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004, p. 15). When reviewing literature on reading response there was significant emphasis on Rosenblatt’s (1982) research. Reader response is not just being able to respond to a text, but use many modalities as an individual to do so. Rosenblatt refers to the responses to reading as ‘stances.’ The aesthetic stance allows a reader to experience the text on a personal level when they are thinking and feeling about their own schema and experiences while they are constructing meaning of a text. The efferent stance while reading allows a reader to take away information that they have learned from the text (Rosenblatt, 1982, p.2). “Questions can be sufficiently open to enable young readers to select concrete details of parts of the text that had struck them most forcibly. The point is to foster expressions of response that keep the experiential, qualitative elements in mind” (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 276). During the study students were able to answer reading response situations with both aesthetic and efferent responses as they constructed meaning from the multicultural texts. Literature reflected on student book choice emphasized the impact it had on student interest and motivation when reading. “Yet, to increase reading volume, teachers have to expand the amount of choice students have in what they read. Students who have opportunities to choose their own books develop strategies for selecting books and are more likely to become intrinsically

motivated readers” (Fisher & Frey, 2018, p. 91). Many of the same themes arose when looking at literature for independent reading. As teachers set students up to be successful readers it is important that they not only have the appropriate scaffolds and support, but that they are eager and excited about what they read to increase stamina when reading independently. “Teachers send a powerful message when they intentionally fill their classrooms with books that match their student’s interests, provide support to develop concentration skills, and schedule time to read and discuss books” (Hall, Hendrick & Williams, 2014, p. 96). The review of literature supports the purpose of the study as it examines how the literacy practices used with multicultural literature impact students being able to grow in their understanding of culture.

After thoroughly reading and accessing various pieces of relevant qualitative literature, I began to think of how to structure the study to best support my question, “how do first graders build cultural awareness through developmentally appropriate multicultural texts and how do they learn about cultures different from their own?” This study was a qualitative practitioner inquiry where students were exposed to multicultural texts through the interactive read aloud practice with planned stopping points before, during and after reading to engage and make meaning of the texts. Students also completed reader’s response passages before, during and after reading. Students also had access to multicultural texts when reading independently. These books choices were chosen on their own based on their interests of various cultures whether they had reflected their own culture or represented different cultures. Qualitative inquiry measures that were used to collect data included pre and post questionnaires, reading responses, anecdotal records, and a teacher note-taking journal.

## **Conclusion**

After the conclusion of the study analysis of the data provided, three major themes appeared to support students' understanding of culture. These themes were: (1) multicultural literature increases understanding of other cultures; (2) interest and motivation in reading multicultural books during interactive read aloud and independent book choices; (3) reader responses demonstrated deep and critical understanding of multicultural literature. Evidence of all three themes were uncovered in the areas of the data collection including the pre and post questionnaires, discussions and observations during interactive read alouds, collection of the readers response templates, along with book choice and independent reading observations.

An analysis of the data suggests that students' interaction with read aloud and book choice fostered motivation to read the multicultural texts independently. Students were interested in finding books that reflected both their own culture and cultures different from them. The data also suggests that the reading response practice with multicultural literature provided students the opportunity to think critically about the texts they were listening to and reading. As they were interpreting the multicultural texts they were able to provide detailed information about various cultures that reflected factual knowledge and personal connections and experiences. By the end of the study students were able to exhibit an increase in their understanding of the cultures represented in the books that were read and diverse books they read independently.

## **Limitations**

One limitation for the study was time constraints. This was done over a period of six weeks. If given more time, I would have liked to have been able to read other

multicultural books that represented more than just six cultures. The six multicultural books for the study represented everyday life in each specific culture. If given more time I could have exposed students to texts that represented other multicultural themes like influential people and historical events. It would be interesting to see how students continued to grow in their understanding of culture if they were exposed to a variety of multicultural themes.

Another limitation in the study was the amount of students who participated. There were six out of eighteen students that data was collected for. If time had allowed, it would have been interesting to see how other students in the class grew in their cultural awareness as they were exposed to a variety of multicultural texts.

An additional limitation was evident during the writing of the reading responses. Two out of the six students were emergent writers during the course of the six weeks. As I observed some of the struggling writers in the study they seemed to want to write simple statements and finish quickly. There were also times where I read back their responses and I couldn't read all of their writing and had to have them try to read it back to me. Sometimes they could read it back, but other times they couldn't. If these two students had another way to respond, possibly recorded orally, I may have seen a deeper understanding of the texts as the pressure and struggle to write would not be present.

### **Implications**

After completing the study and analyzing the data there are several implications evident for future teacher researchers. This study can provide information to teachers about the value of incorporating multicultural literature in their classrooms. The benefits of reading and having student access to multicultural literature in a classroom creates an

environment where students become conscious of cultures they might not have had prior knowledge about, creating an environment that understands and celebrates diversity.

After analyzing the data for this short 6 week study, I would recommend that more time be given to expose students to a variety of genres relating to multicultural literature. It would be interesting to see other diverse cultures represented. It would be interesting to see how students would continue to develop cultural awareness with a variety of multicultural texts over the course of an entire school year.

Future teacher researchers should also take the time to explain more about the cultures represented in books prior to reading. For young children it might be helpful to provide a map of where the culture originates from so they gain a deeper global connection. Students would also benefit from a more thorough understanding of the idea of “window” and “mirror” books. “Window” books refer to the idea that a reader can read a book and see into the lives of people that are different from them. “Mirror” books refer to texts that reflect a reader’s life and connections made in a story. By exposing this concept to students early on they can begin to reflect on whether a multicultural book reflects their own lives or if they are learning about the lives of others.

Within my school environment, another implication would be for primary school teachers to expose students to multicultural literature where the literature represents cultural diversity. Multicultural literature brings awareness to different issues and themes like race, gender, ethnicity, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and xenophobia. If teachers want to create an inclusive environment in their classrooms they should evaluate the books in their classrooms to see what themes of cultural diversity are represented in their classroom libraries. Teachers should be evaluating if the books they have in the

classrooms and school libraries represent a range of cultural diversity as well as characters that look and connect with the cultures represented by students in their classrooms.

In closing, the use of multicultural literature in classrooms allows for students to gain a deeper understanding of culture. It is important for teachers to expose students to multicultural texts in ways that will allow students to make meaning of culture in critical ways. Allowing students to discuss multicultural books they read creates an environment where students can share new learning or connections to their own life experiences. It opens up dialogue about the way different people live and how important it is to be accepting of cultures that may be different from them. By including multicultural literature into classroom instruction teachers create an environment that fosters diversity and inclusivity.

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