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# “THE WORLD IS CHANGING AND WE HAVE TO CHANGE WITH IT”: PRESERVICE TEACHERS AND MULTICULTURAL PICTURE BOOKS

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## **Introduction**

We are living in a society where the word ‘foreign’ has negative and even threatening connotations for some (Grant & Portera, 2010). Borders are closing, people of color are targeted by police (Balko, 2020), and information about immigrants is often misleading or incorrect (Hilburn & Fitchett, 2012). In the US 20% of households do not speak English in the home (Baines & Wickham, 2018), and while schools become increasingly diverse (Gay, 2018), the largely monocultural curriculum remains (Bennett, 2007).

As immigration topics are in the news almost daily and students bring their own immigration stories into the classroom, the need for discussions about identity (Cho et al., 2013) is becoming increasingly urgent. In particular, it is critical for these conversations to become an integral part of teacher preparation classes in order to promote empathy, as preservice teachers transition into their future teaching careers (Esau, 2014).

This paper offers insights into how preservice teachers (PSTs) select multicultural picture books and consider what constitutes a quality picture book for

Kindergarten-3rd grade students. Multicultural picture books “invite conversations about fairness and justice; [and] they encourage children to ask why some groups of people are positioned as “others” (Leland et al., 2013, p. 60). Picture books also describe often hard to understand situations such as immigration and family separation (Baghban, 2007), in an easily accessible way. The use of quality and culturally diverse picture books in classrooms is crucial because it determines how children perceive themselves and others (Boyd et al., 2015). In this study, candid conversations and reflections of three PSTs are examined through a critical lens focusing on how PSTs think about, engage with, and plan to incorporate critical literacy (Leland et al., 2013; Vasquez, 2001) into their future curriculum through interactive read alouds with picture books that deal with social justice issues.

This project grew from observations in an undergraduate PST literacy methods

class over one semester. Given a wide array of children’s picture books, PSTs tended to gravitate towards books with cute, colorful covers depicting cute animals (Geerdt, 2016), shying away from books displaying features of different cultural elements on their covers (e.g., skin color, characters with headscarves). As such, we wanted to examine students’ thoughts about using multicultural picture books for interactive read alouds.

Interactive read alouds invite student questions, provide a springboard for larger critical discussions (Leland et al., 2013; Sipe, 2008; Vasquez, 2003; Campano et al., 2013; Morrell & Morrell, 2012); and are tools for PSTs to explore and navigate critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2007; Vasquez, 2014; Comber, 2001). Critical literacy-focused interactive read alouds can amplify marginalized voices in the classroom (Lewison et al., 2002).

This study found that while our participants wished to use multicultural texts to promote empathy by introducing students

to characters who had experiences and customs that differed from their own, they needed more guidance on what is, and how to select, a multicultural text. This paper first reviews current literature on critical literacy and its link to multicultural picture books, before describing the methods employed to carry out the study. The thoughts of three focal PSTs are examined as they grapple with what constitutes as a multicultural picture book, how to use them for interactive read alouds, and finally what the implications and recommendations are for both teacher educators and PSTs.

## **Literature Review**

### **Critical Literacy**

Literacy can be used to critically examine our world (Lewison et al., 2007). As books work to “position readers in particular ways” (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 387), we use critical literacy as a theoretical and pedagogical lens through which to view and conduct our research. We build on the rich tradition of critical literacy-oriented

scholarship that uses picture books with elementary-aged children to instigate critical conversations on cultural and social justice topics of importance (Comber, 2014; Luke, 2000; Janks, 2010). We use Lewison, Leland and Harste’s (2007) definition of critical literacy, which:

encourage[s] students to use language to question the everyday world, to interrogate the relationship between language and power, to analyze popular culture and media, to understand how power relationships are socially constructed, and to consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice. (p. 7)

Critical literacy-focused training and practice is an essential part of teacher preparation. Esau (2014) found that the prior experiences of many PSTs had “not adequately prepared them for the immense challenges inherent in living in a multicultural and diverse society” (pp. 69/70). Critical literacy-focused pedagogy

offers strategies, questions, and orientations to the world intent on creating and sustaining connections to self and broader, multicultural society, with justice at its heart (Freire, 1970; Souto-Manning, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). Therefore, discussions about the diverse cultural backgrounds of K-3 students our PSTs will encounter should be integrated into the elementary teacher education curriculum (Milner, 2010).

### **Using Multicultural Picture Books to Facilitate Critical Literacy**

We define multicultural picture books as depicting "human interest, ideology, and the experiences of the [culturally and ethnically diverse] people who created it (Banks, 2004, p. 3)." Bishop (1990) teaches us that multicultural picture books can be "windows" through which readers view the world, and "mirrors" that reflect a familiar experience back (p. ix). Multicultural picture books can convey cultural information and societal values, helping children understand the world around them, including cultures

and places they are not familiar with (Koss, 2015). Simply put, literature is a door by which students can develop empathy by passing through, seeing, reflecting on, and experiencing the lives of others (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Norris et al., 2012; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Bishop, 1990).

However, given that the books we provide to young readers influence their perceptions and views of the world (Boyd et al., 2015), multicultural picture books that promote stereotypes, biases, or lack authenticity cannot be mirrors or windows. Children who belong to the culture described in the book fail to see themselves reflected; likewise, readers on the outside of the culture only see a fragmented, or distorted depiction. Consequently, Boyd et al. suggest that selecting and deciding on the quality of a multicultural book is not "an exact science" (p.385); as readers' cultural values may complicate the definition of quality (Stevenson, 2006). Multicultural picture books also help readers recognize "multiple,

contested, even seemingly contradictory subject positions” (Letts, 2002, p. 122), which aligns with the tenets of critical literacy. Jones (2006) points out, “critical literacy is like a pair of eyeglasses that allows one to see beyond the familiar and comfortable” (p. 67). Likewise, the characteristics of such books, like plot, encourage students to question and engage in the discussion of what some may view, e.g. parents or administration, as controversial, complex topics.

Multicultural picture books, viewed through a critical lens, forefront power dynamics (Janks, 2010). Taking on various characters’ perspectives is crucial in highlighting marginalized characters’ experiences, and how they fit in the larger worldview (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2019). Picture books make discussions of power particularly accessible to children and can support critical conversations (Leland et al., 1999; Vasquez, 2014). This, in turn, facilitates discussions where students can

question prevalent power structures (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010). Despite this suitability, young children are often left out of conversations concerning racial differences as they are considered too young (Williams & Norton, 2008; Fontanella-Nothom, 2019), or too innocent (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). However, this assumption has the effect of silencing children whose life experiences are depicted in multicultural books (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Souto-Manning, 2016; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017). Vasquez (2001) found that children are able to partake in critical conversations and children’s books are an excellent resource to begin conversations centered on race and other critical topics (Vasquez, 2001; Lee, 2016). Having discussions about discrimination (Ching, 2005) encourages children to think about how texts position characters in terms of exclusion and privilege (Janks, in Turner & Griffin, 2019).

## **Methods**

### **Context and Participants**

This study took place during three workshops focusing on using multicultural literature for interactive read alouds. The workshops introduced and modeled multicultural picture books used to promote multicultural understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity in Kindergarten-3rd grade classrooms. The participants in this study were in an undergraduate elementary teacher licensure program at a large midwestern university and are enrolled in the same second-year literacy class where Mengying was their teaching assistant. Simultaneously, both Mengying and Helen took part in a graduate-level research group, and Helen taught a separate literacy course in the program's course sequence. Christy took part in the research group as faculty advisor.

After explaining the premise of the research to the 25 PSTs enrolled in the course, five chose to take part in the study. From the five, we focus intentionally on three here. Two are monolingual English-speaking Anglo-Americans from the midwestern US,

and one is a bilingual Korean/English speaking Korean-born immigrant to the United States who has lived in the US for seven years. We selected the focal participants based on their demonstrative evolving understanding, insightful discussions and overall growth throughout the workshops. They illuminated how a spectrum of students' existing knowledge about critical literacy-focused teaching practices and interactive read alouds might be better supported by our teacher education program.

The research questions we hoped to answer were: 1. How do preservice teachers choose multicultural picture books? 2. How do preservice teachers utilize multicultural books in interactive alouds, and how do their choices reinforce, or challenge, imbalanced power relations through inclusion or silencing? 3. Whose perspectives are centered in preservice teachers' response to texts and consideration of quality picture books?

### **The Researchers**

We authors, are female, cis-gendered teacher educators at the same midwestern University. Helen is a white, English-speaking, English-born immigrant to the United States who has lived here for 13 years; she has experience teaching elementary grades and PSTs. Mengying is a bilingual Mandarin-English speaking, Chinese-born international student currently studying in the midwestern United States. Her research interests center around using children's literature (i.e., picture books, wordless books) and imaginative narration to prompt and promote children's use of imagination as part of the activity of reading. Christy is a white, English-speaking, US-born American citizen and has experience teaching elementary grades and PSTs.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

We took a narrative approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) for this research, highlighting PSTs' stories, and exploring their thoughts on their experience using multicultural picture books as a tool for

interactive read alouds. We consider how they build and describe stories (Bell, 2002; Knight, 2009) and ultimately "make meaning of [their] experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 21), in the service of improving future students' experiences in our teacher education program.

### **Data Collection**

Data comes from video recordings and transcription of notes describing activity in three workshops- two 30 minutes, and one 45 minutes- during the middle-to-end of the semester. Afterward, Helen and Mengying conducted 30-minute individual interviews with each participant. All were voice recorded. During the first workshop, PSTs were asked to select picture books they felt children in their future K-3 classrooms would enjoy. They browsed 22 picture books displayed on a table: some were multicultural, covering topics such as race, immigration and culture; and some were not, including talking animals and fairytale creatures (see Appendix 1 for a full list of

books). Through this activity we hoped to discover what PSTs looked for in a text. After choosing a book, participants pondered their choice and wrote a 1-2-page reflection answering guiding questions, including: Which book did you choose? What paratext features influenced your choice (i.e. topic, color, characters, plot, front cover etc.) (Genette, 1997)?

For the second workshop Mengying provided definitions of multicultural education for participants to discuss, question, and ultimately create a foundation for their upcoming interactive read aloud. Mengying then modeled an interactive read aloud using the multicultural picture book, *My Two Blankets* (2015) by Irena Kobald, a book about moving to an unfamiliar place and finding friendship. Participants then repeated the book browsing activity. As workshop two was specifically designed to introduce students to using multicultural picture books, we explained that all non-

removed. Participants who had chosen a non-multicultural book initially were asked to choose a multicultural book. Having chosen a book, participants planned interactive read alouds integrating comprehension strategies (Gregory & Cahill, 2010), and using sticky notes to mark pages on which they would like to pause, question, and invite children's thoughts, during the read aloud. Participants wrote a closing reflection answering questions including: Did you change your book? Why/why not? If you changed, how do you feel about the new book you chose? Which comprehension strateg(ies) did you use? What do you think multicultural education is? How would you define it? What do you think constitutes a multicultural picture book?

The third workshop began with Helen demonstrating an interactive read aloud using the multicultural picture book, *A Mother for Choco* (1992) by Keiko Kasza, a book about interracial adoption - chosen as Helen had experience adopting interracially. The

participants were then asked to reread their chosen picture book while considering the information they wished to convey, and the conversations they hoped might unfold. After presenting their interactive read aloud to the group, participants shared their professional concerns in an unstructured discussion. Common concerns included how to teach from a multicultural perspective, and how to anticipate possible responses from students and other stakeholders.

During the final reflection, participants focused on: 1. the process and experience of teaching their interactive read aloud; and 2. thoughts about multicultural education. Questions included: How did you feel during your interactive read aloud? Which comprehension strategies did you use, and why? Did your definition or thoughts about multicultural picture books, and multicultural education, change as a result of the three workshops?

After the workshops, we conducted individual interviews based on workshop

videos and information provided in participant reflections. Questions were divided into three categories: 1. thoughts on multicultural picture books; 2. multicultural picture books and future teaching; and 3. each preservice teachers' specific multicultural interests. Example questions included: Did you have any prior knowledge/experience with multicultural picture books? Why do you think it is important to teach these topics to elementary students?

### **Data Analysis**

We completed two rounds of coding (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). The first included all five participants, concentrating on: book choice, prior knowledge/experience with multicultural education, and thoughts about future teaching with multicultural picture books. The second round of coding identified the three focal participants - chosen as good examples of evolving understanding of multicultural education -and included more specific information such as: how PST used

comprehension strategies to ground their interactive read aloud, main issues discussed during interactive read alouds, and overall thoughts and feelings about the interactive read aloud.

### **Findings**

Below we highlight the stories of three focal PST: Alexandra, Samantha and Eve. We hold them up as examples of how PSTs approach interactive read alouds with multicultural picture books. All three PSTs are female and all names are pseudonyms: Alexandra and Samantha are Anglo-American, and Eve is South Korean. Table 1 shows the preservice teachers' initial book choice, second book choice, and focus for interactive read alouds.

#### **Alexandra: “The World Around Us is Changing and We Have to Change With it”**

Alexandra is a white PST from the Midwest. She entered the workshops enthusiastically and ready to learn. Her knowledge of multicultural education was

based on a mandatory college course for all education majors that she took the previous year. It focused on multicultural education generally, but not specifically on literacy. From this base she defined multicultural education as “the education of various cultures, races, backgrounds and traditions.”

Alexandra was eager to engage in the research as she believed she had an “obligation” as a teacher to teach multicultural books because “the world around us is changing and we have to change with it.” During workshop 1, Alexandra chose a non-multicultural book, *Mr. Wolf's Birthday Surprise*, a K-1 level book written in comic book format including interactive tabs to pull, speech bubbles and colorful illustrations.

She mused that she wanted to move away from more “conventional features” of books such as “12-point Times New Roman font.”

**Table 1***Preservice Teachers' Book Choices*

Participant	Initial Book Choice and Theme	Second Book Choice and Theme	Purpose of the multicultural picture book: Window or Mirror (Bishop, 1990)	Change in Perception	Change in Ideas about What Constitutes a Quality Picture Book
Alexandra	<i>Mr. Wolf's Birthday Surprise</i> by Colin Hawkins Theme: None	<i>Lost and Found Cat</i> by Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes. Multicultural Theme: Immigration	“Window” to foster empathy and “mirror” to reflect familiar relationships	Shift from “fun” picture books to making difficult topics accessible	Move from playfulness being vital for engagement, to books not only highlighting differences between cultures, but also celebrating common ground
Samantha	<i>Yuck!</i> By Mike Manning and Brita Granstrom. Multicultural Theme: None	<i>The Journey</i> by Francesca Sanna. Multicultural Theme: Immigration	“Window” to foster empathy	Deepened understanding of professional identity. Desire to introduce real life topics	Move from humorous books with predictable patterns, to books with serious themes that reflect real life
Eve	<i>Pingo The Plaid Panda</i> by Loreen Leedy. Multicultural Theme: Discrimination	<i>Mustafa</i> by Marie-Louise Gay. Multicultural Theme: Immigration	“Mirror” to raise identity awareness	Importance of students thinking about differences in order to address discrimination	Shift from content needing to convey a straightforward message, to content needing to relate to experiences of students from different cultural backgrounds

She believed that the appealing nature of the pictures was ideal: “the illustrations seemed to be silly and the sillier the better when trying to engage and entertain young students.”

During workshop 2 Alexandra was asked to choose a multicultural picture book. She chose *Lost and Found Cat* by Doug Kuntz and Amy Shrodes. This is a true story about a refugee family who flee from Iraq, smuggling their beloved cat on the boat with them. During the journey, the cat’s carrier breaks and the cat runs away. The family continues to their new country without him. The cat is then found by aid workers who return him to his owners. Thinking about her second book choice Alexandra states “I largely focused on the personal connections to the feelings of the characters.” She wanted to “appeal to the emotional side of the students to try to connect something that seems unrelated to their daily lives.”

Alexandra thought a lot about the focus for her lesson and was very specific

about wanting to concentrate on empathy, making a deliberate effort to make the story “more relatable” to students. By asking questions about the text interspersed with questions about the students’ own lives, she purposefully connected the text to familiar concepts. Alexandra explained that she carefully planned where to stop and ask questions such as: “Why do you think they are leaving home? Have any of you lost a pet? How did you feel?” Alexandra reflected that she wanted her students to think about circumstances where “a family would have no choice but to flee their home country.” By doing so she hoped her students would put themselves in the shoes of the character to encourage empathy.

Alexandra explains that her desire to promote empathy comes partly from reflections on her own background wishing she had had “more diverse experiences” while she was growing up. She took part in the research as she hoped to gain book titles and ideas about how to teach with them, “the

books and materials are out there; teachers just need to find them.” By the end of the three workshops Alexandra had a clearer idea of multiculturalism, including incorporating intersectionality into her classroom,

There is more to it than just culture and race, tradition and background...it is just as important to focus on the similarities as the differences, and exposing students to that mindset starts in the classroom.

**Samantha: “There’s a Lot of Tension in Politics Lately Regarding Immigrants”**

Like Alexandra, Samantha is a white PST from the Midwest. She was eager to be part of our research as she, “loves children’s books” and wanted to become familiar with new titles and “see different types of books,” rather than “the traditional white, middle class, nuclear family so often written about.” Samantha was especially excited about teaching with “books that address different cultures and address issues not covered in other curriculum,” as these were books she

believed her midwestern students were not “used to seeing” or “talking about.” Coming into this project Samantha had a good idea of what multicultural discussions entail, “[it is] the discussion of more than one culture, and the validation of all of those cultures and elaborating on the distinguishing and unique aspects of each of those cultures.” She wanted her students to be familiar with multicultural issues such as immigration, be prepared for “the real world,” and understand that they “shouldn’t be scared or they shouldn’t worry about” discussing such topics.

During the first workshop Samantha chose *Yuck!* by Mike Manning and Brita Granstrom, a non-multicultural picture book. This is a story about young animals and which foods they prefer to eat. Each page depicts a different animal’s food and is accompanied by the word “Yuck!” as humans would not consider that food. When explaining why she chose this book Samantha described that as she gazed at it, an

image of a group of kindergarteners sitting on the floor and listening to her read aloud immediately materialized in her mind. In addition, she noticed the “repeating patterns” in the book and thought to use this as a teaching strategy when doing the read aloud. She imagines her students would love the repeating, “Yuck!” on each page, “when I get to that line, they [would] all scream “YUCK!!!” with me and a fit of laughter would ensue.”

During the second workshop Samantha, like Alexandra, was asked to choose a multicultural book. She chose *The Journey* by Francesca Sanna. This text as it was “about immigration”, and “there’s a lot of tension in politics lately regarding immigrants.” Moreover, “there may be immigrants in my classroom.” Samantha stated, “I think this book would be a great way to get themselves in the shoes of immigrants and try to understand what they might be feeling.” When discussing the

reasons behind her second book choice, she explained

I liked...how it didn’t come to a happy ending, it just kind of like, ended... [the characters] didn’t know what was going to happen...it shows the students that not everything will always end perfectly.

Samantha thought that teaching with a multicultural picture book and viewing it through a critical lens could be “a little intense.” She explains that the page where, “the war took the father and the whole page went black,” may not be appropriate with younger students, but that it would be okay with “older students who would be able to separate real life and a book better. Maybe.” On the other hand, Samantha felt that this text was a good choice to enable students “to draw on their previous experiences and emotions to allow them to imagine the emotions of the characters in the book.” Samantha explained how she would ask students to put themselves in the position of

others to see how “they would feel if they were in those situations.” She wanted her students to, “start to grow empathy and understanding for people who are different from them.”

### **Eve: “I’d Like to Make a Bridge” For Immigrant Students Between the Old Country and the New Country**

Eve is an undergraduate international student from South Korea and took part in this research because she is “interested in... problems of race and LGBTQ” concerns. Coming to the US from another country and having to learn, “a different language and different culture,” has made her want to support “students that face the same hardships and challenges as me.” For Eve, multicultural picture books are a good way to achieve this; she pondered “how can I use children’s books to address the real world?” For her, “multiculturalism is the biggest problem in today’s education because there are so many different backgrounds in one classroom.” She reflected how difficult it can

be for immigrant families to “not only engage with their own culture but also with the new culture too. [So] I want to make a bridge for them.”

Eve was interested in participating in this research as she had little experience with “children’s literacy,” yet she understood that books can have a powerful impact on children’s lives and be “a connection to the world.” Eve’s initial book choice for her interactive read aloud was *Pingo the Plaid Panda* by Loreen Leedy. This is a story about a panda who has plaid fur and therefore does not look like a panda. As a result, he is rejected by other pandas. Eve explained the panda represents immigrants who find it difficult to make friends as a result of differences in appearance. She believed this was a good choice for 2nd/3rd graders because at this age “they start to compare themselves to others, [asking] *why do I look different?*” Despite Eve’s strong connection with this book she decided not to use it for her interactive read aloud, choosing instead to

use *Mustafa* by Marie-Louise Gay. *Mustafa* is a story about a young immigrant boy who misses his country and sees everything in his new country as alien. With the help of his Mom and his new friend, he begins to notice things that are alike in both countries such as wildlife and the presence of the moon. He begins to settle in.

Eve explains that she changed books because she wanted to talk about immigration. She related it to her own experience of studying abroad. During Eve's interactive read aloud her own experiences of moving to a new country and trying to fit in, came through. As such she felt a lot of empathy for Mustafa and wanted to convey these feelings to her students, "Mustafa felt invisible and tried to run away from the unfamiliar things like a new language and words." Eve wanted to help immigrant students make friends and fit in, as opposed to Alexandra who looked at trying to make US students more empathetic. During an undergraduate course Eve was taking at the

time of the research, she discussed immigration with reference to picture books and she felt there were a lot of opportunities to explore picture books using mind movies as a teaching strategy, "children can draw their own story in their mind about how they can think about the main character." This would enable teachers to understand and "address why they are doing this and that with them." Eve believed that mind movies "help [the students] to understand the topic more." Eve was excited about this project as she wanted to incorporate picture books with multicultural themes into her first year of teaching; however, she believed picture books that dealt with multicultural topics are too "difficult" for kindergarteners to understand, so would only use them for 1st grade upward.

### **Discussion**

Although all participants have previously taken a multicultural course, our research suggests that they need further experiences with multicultural literacy as

they revealed their concerns about how to incorporate perceived “intense” topics into the classroom.

### **Purpose: Windows and Mirrors**

All three PSTs entered the study with similar intentions: to become familiar with picture books that dealt with current “issues in the news” and the real world, to learn how to successfully integrate critical literacy and different perspectives (Banks, 2003; Milner, 2010) into their future classrooms (Vasquez, 2001). Despite their similar intentions, the participants’ approaches to the multicultural picture books we provided were very different. Alexandra and Samantha, both from the Midwest, were very interested in how they could evoke empathy and promote respect for students from other cultures by using picture books as “windows” to glimpse different worlds (Bishop, 1990), with their predominantly white, Mid-western students. Eve, on the other hand, concentrated on raising awareness of identity. She viewed this study through the eyes of an immigrant with

the view of making immigrant students feel welcome in her classroom. Eve related the study to herself throughout each stage of the three workshops and concentrated on helping future students who are in her position, an immigrant in an unknown country. She sought picture books primarily as “mirrors” that she could see herself/immigrants reflected in (Bishop, 1990). Considering the data based on personal identities is important in several ways as it shows a need for teacher educators to not only draw on the experiences of their PSTs, but also to introduce them to a wide array of new experiences through quality picture books (Boyd et al. 2015); and to our participants, this meant realistic and authentic picture books.

### **Changes in Perception**

With respect to awareness and understanding of multiculturalism, all three participants showed a transformation of perceptions. For Alexandra and Samantha, the development of multicultural awareness is significant. For example, at the beginning of

our study when participants were asked to provide a definition of multicultural education, Alexandra revealed a surface-level awareness giving a very brief, vague description, while Samantha and Eve began with a stronger understanding. During the first workshop, Samantha considered her professional identity as a future teacher as she imagined herself reading the book *Yuck!* with a room full of students. However, when choosing books with very little direction from Helen and Mengying, both Alexandra's and Samantha's focus initially centered on how "fun" these books could be to teach, rather than specific learning experiences that could broaden student perspectives, challenge power imbalances, and bring silenced voices into the classroom (Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Souto-Manning, 2016; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017).

During workshop 2, we used knowledge about book choice gained in workshop 1 to guide participants toward how multicultural texts could be integrated into

what they already knew, in order to develop children's fuller understanding of social justice and diverse experiences. With this development came an evolving understanding of multicultural education. In particular, the participants' unique perspectives on choosing multicultural picture books based on the desire to forefront specific topics that may otherwise be missing from the classroom, e.g. immigration and race. This shift in focus from choosing books based on their perspective as a teacher (e.g. fun to read), to choosing books with their students in mind, revealed a deeper understanding of the need for multicultural picture books that students can connect to. For example, Alexandra chose to use *Lost and Found Cat* for her interactive read aloud, liking the fact the authors used a familiar concept- a pet - to tell an unfamiliar story. Alexandra believed this type of book would make it easier for young readers to generate questions about the text by centering themselves within the story, and connecting it to their personal experiences.

Using an animal as the focus of the discussion about refugees having to seek a new life, helped to soften what Alexandra perceived as a difficult topic by shifting the emphasis away from the tensions of a Muslim family forced to flee from Iraq to the United States. While this softening enabled Alexandra to be comfortable using this book, not discussing *why* families are forced to flee their homes is a missed opportunity for learning.

Samantha took a different approach with *The Journey*, a story with a sad and open ending. In doing so, she centered the text, positioning it as “real life” (Lewison et al., 2002), showing that “not everything will always end perfectly.” However, while wanting to get away from traditional texts that center white characters and end happily by discussing the open-endedness and unpredictability of *The Journey*, the absence of discussing the tensions of escaping war as a woman and a single mother with two young children, is a missed opportunity to discuss

power imbalances (Friere, 1970; Medina, 2010; Braden, 2019).

As an international student, Eve was more interested than the other two participants in the role of picture books as “mirrors” and had insights into the impact of language barriers and cultural differences on immigrant and minority children. Eve explained that she chose *Pingo the Plaid Panda* based on a wish to focus on differences in appearance, and believed the panda’s appearance is a symbol of an immigrant community, which may cause isolation and discrimination of minority children in schools. She emphasized the importance of inspiring children to think about physical differences between people, and how discrimination could be addressed this way (Ching, 2005). Eve argued that the message the text tries to convey is a guarantee of a quality picture book (Boyd et al., 2015). She explained her second choice, *Mustafa*, highlighted the importance of picture books not only as a vehicle for

children to learn about other cultures, but also as a mirror for minority children to see their plight and struggles with identity and belonging through the story; and this experience of reading will also change their experience, making the realization that their lives and experiences are matter as well as being part of the larger human experience (Bishop, 1990).

### **Significance**

During the course of this study it became evident that our participants felt ill-equipped to teach Kindergarten-3rd grade students from a critical literacy stance using multicultural picture books, and when given the choice would choose picture books that were familiar to them in some way. Further, from a pool of 25 PSTs, only five chose to take part in this study, and while this smaller sample size is ideal for digging deeper into each participant's story, it also suggests multiculturalism may not be viewed as an essential part of teacher education programs, but rather seen as "extra." With this in mind

we recommend teacher educators consider the following supports for PSTs:

1. Exposure: If preservice teachers choose books that are familiar to them, teacher educators need to expose students to a wider array of texts that include multicultural picture books that go beyond their own personal experiences (Esau, 2014). In addition, discussions about diverse cultural backgrounds preservice teachers will encounter should be integrated into the elementary teacher education curriculum (Milner, 2010).
2. Awareness: More direct teaching is needed to facilitate *awareness* of language and power relationships evident in multicultural picture books (Medina, 2010; Braden, 2019).
3. Selection: More work is needed at the college level to help preservice teachers select picture books that have multicultural themes, how to use those themes as teaching tools and discussion starters (Leland et al., 2013), as well as

how to provide focused instruction on paratext features (Genette, 1997).

4. Questioning: More in-class critical discussions are needed where preservice teachers are given space to question constructs and tensions within texts, and explore ways to approach these concepts with students (Freire, 1970).

Interactive read alouds are an ideal platform for introducing multicultural picture books into the classroom as they invite discussions and encourage questions. These discussions not only encourage students to reflect on the cultural and social environment they are familiar with, and to understand cultures and regions that they are not familiar with, but also promote the dialectical thinking about the relationship between language and power (Freire, 1970). This lays the foundation for changing students' mindset, and cultivating empathy and multicultural awareness in a “world [that] is changing.”

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## Appendix A

### Multicultural Picture Books Used In This Study

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Topic</b>
My Two Blankets	Irena Kobald	Immigration
My Name is Sangoel	Karen Williams	Immigration
The Name Jar	Yangsook Choi	Immigration
The Other Side	Jacqueline Woodson	Race
One Green Apple	Eve Bunting	Immigration
The Color of Home	Mary Hoffman	Immigration
Amelia's Road	Linda Jacobs Altman	Diversity, belonging
Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale	Duncan Tonatiuh	Immigration
The Keeping Quilt	Patricia Polacco	Diversity, culture, family
Carmela Full of Wishes in Underpants Save the World	Matt de la Pena	Diversity, culture
Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation	Edwidge Danticat	Immigration
The Day You Begin	Jacqueline Woodson	Diversity, culture, acceptance

## Appendix B

### Non-multicultural Books Used In This Study

Title	Author	Topic
Mog's Bad Day	Judith Kerr	Pets and family
Yuck!	Mike Manning	Food
The Tiger Who Came to Tea	Judith Kerr	Family
How to Catch a Falling Star	Heidi Howarth	Friendship
Mr. Wolf's Birthday Surprise	Colin Hawkins	Friendship
Aliens	Claire Freedman	Adventure
Gently Bentley	Ian Whybrow	Friendship
The Little Snowplow	Lora Koehler	Perseverance
Flip and Flop	Dawn Apperley	Friendship and family
Alphonse That is Not Ok To Do	Daisy Hirst	Family