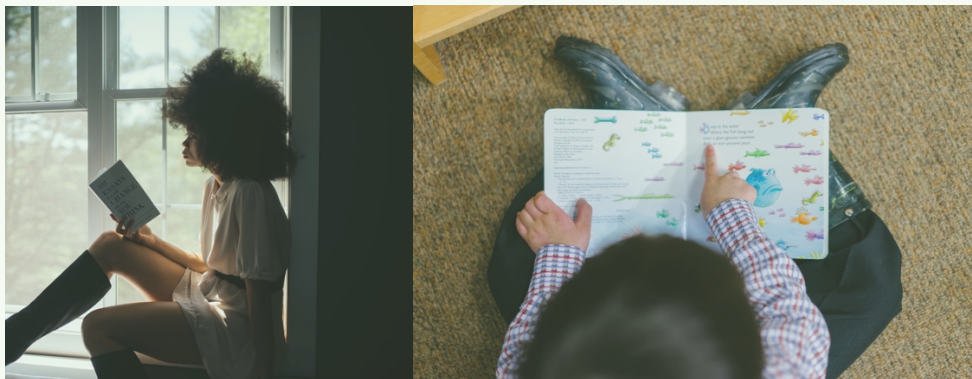


Indiana Literacy Journal

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Issue 1
Spring 2020

A Journal of the Indiana State Literacy Association



Promoting
Literacy

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Promoting Literacy

Journal of the Indiana
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Editors
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Letter from the ISLA Chair of the Board

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking time to read this message and journal. We have all found ourselves at a historical point in our lives, but I feel as educators and lovers of literacy that we are always ready for plot twists and stories of heroism, love, loss, and perseverance. Sometimes I feel lost and I am not sure what to do but most days I am enjoying the things that I loved and did not make time for because I was always too busy. I find myself reading more and focusing on the good in life.

ILA and ISLA are still committed to literacy and the safety of all. ILA recently announced the cancelation of the annual conference in Columbus that was scheduled for this October, but have been continuously adapting to best suit the needs and wants of the members. They are planning digital experiences to feel the void of the face to face conference. ISLA has followed suite for the safety of everyone and will now be switching to a virtual format.

ISLA has been continuously working to strengthen and rebuild our association. We have recently revised our mission and goals and updated some of our board positions and term limits. We voted to change the chair position from one year to two years; now my term will end on June 30, 2021. I am extremely honored to be able to serve in my role for another year. The board is seeking to add two Member-at-Large positions as well. We are looking for committed individuals that will help strengthen our association through participation, professionalism, willingness to lead tasks or work with a team, and enhance our board with unique and diverse opportunities or connections.

Do what you can, when you can, and know that you are doing your best!

Sincerely,

Rachel R. Armstrong
Chair of the Board



Letter from the Editors

Hello ISLA,

We want to present to you the Fall 2020 Indiana Literacy Journal! We extend a special thank you to all the authors who contributed to this edition. Though submitted prior to the recent unfortunate murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, the submissions were timely and offer promise to all literacy educators as we are facing trying times amidst racial tensions and oppression.

Christina L. Romero-Ivanova shares a heartfelt reflection of her experience implementing spoken word poetry and digital stories with literacy methods students to foster and create rich narratives, which they in turn implemented with their own K-12 students.

Vesna Dimitrieska and Leana McClain provide an amazing overview of the work of a team of experts from Indiana University and mentor teachers who are a part of the Global Literacy Invitations Project, which helps both in-service teachers and their students develop global competence through activities with global themed picture books.

Stephanie Barrientos and Susan R. Adams offer a constructivist action research study and findings, which had students critically engage with culturally diverse and anti-bias literature in book clubs in a predominantly White classroom.

Finally, we hear from Rachel Melnick about her practice of conducting reading conferences with her intermediate students. Rachel wrote a column describing her practices and to give you a more in-depth explanation, she recorded a podcast. We know you will find her words inspiring.

Like these professionals, we encourage you to submit a manuscript for consideration in the journal in the future. You can submit teaching ideas for literacy development based on sound theory and research. Other types of submissions including teaching tips, strategy suggestions, and technology tools are encouraged. Multimedia is welcomed since this journal is published as an e-text.

Your Editors,
Sharon Daley & Breanya Hogue

YOU can write for the *Indiana Literacy Journal*

The *Indiana Literacy Journal* needs **your** contributions to make the journal great! We are seeking submissions related to all areas of literacy and encourage teacher voices.

Guidelines for Submission

Full-length articles should run no more than 6,000 words (including main text and references) and should provide readers, who are mostly practitioners, with classroom ideas for literacy development, based on sound theory and research. Other types of submissions, including teaching tips, strategy suggestions, technology tools, are welcome. As this journal is published as an e-text, multimedia (images, video, audio, etc.) is encouraged. Submissions should be sent electronically to Sharon Daley at shdaley@indiana.edu. The author(s) must agree that the submitted manuscript is original work and not currently under consideration for publication elsewhere. Manuscripts should include a complete title on the first page, but no identification of the author or affiliation should appear in the title or elsewhere in the submitted manuscript. Use “author” to ensure submitted version is a blind copy. Be sure to adhere to [APA 7th edition](#) guidelines. Manuscripts are peer reviewed and editors reserve the right to edit all copy. Each article is sent to at least two members of the editorial advisory board for review and recommendations to the editors. Manuscripts are evaluated in terms of interest, quality of writing, appropriate documentation of ideas, uniqueness, and needs of the journal. Please contact the editors with any questions.

In order to be considered for publication in the Fall 2021 issue of the *Indiana Literacy Journal*, manuscripts must be received by August 17. Send all submissions electronically in Microsoft Word format via email to Sharon Daley at shdaley@indiana.edu.



NARRATIVE SPACES: PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS' SACRED LITERACIES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM

Christina L. Romero-Ivanova

A person needs to vent. Everyone needs that outlet but not everyone can afford a psychologist for Tuesday night therapy. Thus, incorporating this spoken word into the classroom will change the climate or the culture of a room. Students will know that there is a freedom and safety net in *this* classroom.
-Heather, Elementary Education student

Spoken Word

In the above quotation, Heather (a former elementary education student of mine) reflects on a unit of spoken word poetry we completed in our Reading Methods I course, which I teach every semester that includes sharing poems and specifically, spoken word poems we create. In her reflection, Heather notes that using slam/spoken word poetry in the classroom can be therapeutic, helps to change the classroom climate, and creates a safe space in which class members can share

their experiences with others. Heather notes, “But for some, especially those students who have gone through difficult times in life, Spoken Word is a lifeline.” Spoken Word has been defined as purposeful and meaningful poetry that is verbally transmitted in a cadenced rhythm (Fisher, 2005; Somers-Willett, 2016). I had first observed Spoken Word – a blending of smooth rhythmic phrases, narrated ellipses of trauma, social inequalities, and struggle that flow out from a speaker’s lips in an articulated, way – during one performance at a local Spirit Fest. It was during this performance (and afterward), that I began deeply considering Spoken Word and its use in my classroom space. Reflecting on that performance, I now believe I conceptualized Spoken Word as a performance of hope, or as Heather referred, “a lifeline”. I needed to create a space of

hope for my students so they could create spaces of hope for their future students. “Whether crying out for help, to release pent up frustration, or to finally announce to the world a secret to let it go, spoken word serves several purposes.” (Heather, Journal Reflection) From Heather’s perspective, there is that deeper sense of using classroom practices (and ones that matter to students) as therapeutic lifelines. Below (Figure 1) is Heather’s poem, which demonstrates the fear and anxiety she experienced during her life with her father who was an alcoholic.

Figure 1

Heather, 2016, E340 Spoken Word Poem

secret scars
He haunts me, though he is no more a part of
my family
The words he said, the songs he sang, the
smell, oh, the smell
Like the stench of smoke and Budweiser and
dirty factory clothes
I saw him and there I was instantly paralyzed
with fear and trepidation
Still the same old habits and cases full of
chasers
The realization that he spared me makes me
doubt my memory
Cussing contests, revoking driver’s license,
the legally forced psychiatry appointments
Domestic, they say, like no one ever sees it
But, they did, and just ignored it every single
solitary day
Eight years of cruelty and I tried to run away
from the Devil himself
But I could only hide under my bed terrified
of when he found me
If it wasn’t for her brothers she would have
never left

When she finally did, she took his guns and
gave them to his father
Her tears endless and liberated for in that tiny
trailer with a hole in the living room floor
was freedom
Only, the price tag of her divorce said that
she would live every day in apprehension
A nightmare over yet only begun.

This poem, which Heather shared with our class as a spoken word is provided to exemplify a practice that allowed Heather to think deeply upon her life and analyze and share her traumatic experiences through narrative performance. By creating and sharing her poem Heather critically reflected on her life by analyzing different remembrances from her experiences.

Through sensory narration Heather was able to present metaphorical images that translated the speaker’s fear and empowerment felt.

Heather and her classmates shared their narratives through spoken words, and the classroom blossomed into an authentic space of storying in which experiential knowledge was shared and privileged. This narrative space allowed class members to empathize with one another and to imagine ways in which they, as future teachers, could cultivate narrative spaces in their own future classrooms.

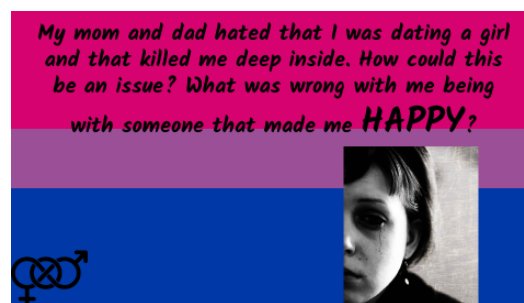
Digital Stories

Just as narrative expressions in the forms of spoken word poems can reveal students' lived experiences and allow students to critically analyze these, digital storytelling, which is the "art of combining narrative with digital media such as images, sound, and video to create a short story" (Robin, 2008) becomes an engaging practice in which students' voices and experiential knowledge can be shared and privileged in the classroom. My students complete a digital storytelling project each semester in my course Using Computers in Education. Through planning their stories and then digitalizing them, there is a critical reflectiveness that takes place. Students reflect upon their identities and analyze their lived experiences. Creating a digital story can translate to the understanding of creating a "critical narrative" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 94) that contains images, music, text or vocalization, and embedded meanings. Digital storytelling can also be understood as a way for students to use critical thinking, as it is a practice of "relational learning" (p. 105) through the transformation of the cognitive, to the written, to the digitalized narrative. One of my students, Emily, created a digital story about her experiences with

family tensions after having come out as a bisexual youth. Below (Figure 2) is a slide from Emily's digital story that helps to demonstrate the multifaceted, critical nature of the digital story.

Figure 2

Emily, 2019, W200 Digital Story Project



Emily's story, which she shared with our class involved a practice that allowed her to critically reflect on her life and provided a space in which to share her experiences with others. Her digital story blends symbolic images, colors, and text to reveal Emily's habitus or way of life and the dialogic nature of her narrative. Emily's narrative, which is partially revealed on the slide presents the questioning of a young bisexual woman who is struggling to understand the issue that others have with her sexuality. The LGBT symbol, along with the colors of pink, blue, and lavender (a blending of the pink and blue to represent bisexuality) represent the empowerment she felt juxtaposed with the image of the sad child.

Narratives – in the forms of spoken word poems or digital stories, such as the ones reflected upon from above– can be used as entry points to discuss the crucial necessity of creating safe spaces in higher education classrooms in which students can feel free to share their lives. Especially with our current climate of compulsory violence in schools and community spaces, we must provide spaces in our classrooms to not just allow but to also privilege students’ storied experiences. Storying in the classroom (verbal, written, or performed) then becomes a practice of care, of our humanity. As Freire (1996) argues, “human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world” (p. 106).

In this paper I have highlighted two artifacts, a spoken word poem and a digital story individually created by former education students to demonstrate important classroom practices which involved students’ sharing of experiential knowledge and reflective analyses. I now segue to the idea of sacred literacies as a lens through which narratives can be considered.

Literacies

Literacy is a dynamic process that moves across various communities, discourses, and cultures, and as Pahl and Rowsell (2010)

state, “It [literacy] involves many different scripts, and it can exist in many different languages and settings.” (p. 3) Literacy involves more than language (Romero-Ivanova, Kingsley, and Mason, 2019), as there is a “richness of practices” (Mendoza-Denton, 2014, p. 3) that are tied to language. With literacy’s multifaceted nature in mind, and for this paper, I address the plurality of literacy by referring to *literacies* rather than *literacy*.

Narratives as Sacred Literacies

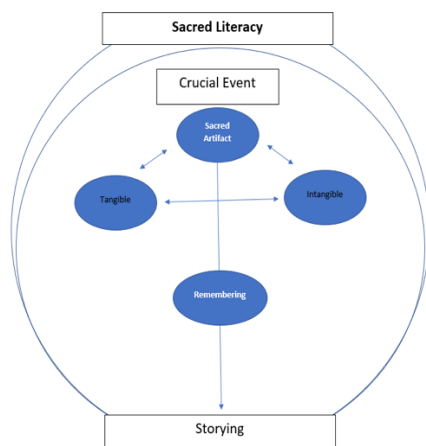
The idea of sacred has been developed in various fields of study. Anthropologists have studied various facets of indigenous sacred educational methods (Cajete, 1994); scholars in higher education have looked at individual educators’ spiritual and cultural identities and how these merge (Tisdell & Tolliver, 2003); scholars in teacher education have analyzed educators’ sacred narratives as alternatives to positivist notions of authority (Olson, 1995); and researchers in the field of spirituality and education have considered the intersection of spirituality and curriculum development (Miller, 2000). The word *sacred* is sometimes only associated with spirituality and religion but can also be understood as anything that is highly revered or honored (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Ivanova, 2014).

Sacred Literacies

The chords of meaning that we hold reverent and to which remembrances are connected, and especially the ways we use these to narrate our experiences, these are ways in which we sacredly read the world and make meaning in different spaces of our lives (Ivanova, 2014), including classroom spaces. Sacred literacy is “the use of various sacred practices (texts) to sacredly read the world through one’s experiences.” (Ivanova, 2014, p. 276). Sacred literacies involve the emergence and/or use of sacred artifacts, or objects that are embedded within individuals’ lives that are connected to crucial or highly impactful events. Below (Figure 3) is a visual conceptualization of the process of what a sacred literacy (Ivanova, 2014) would look like.

Figure 3

Storying as a Sacred Literacy



The question then would seem to be what lies at the heart of education? Palmer (2017) argues that education can be meaningful only when learners’ complexities, backgrounds, and interests are taken into consideration. I posit that an acknowledgement and space-making in the higher education classroom for students’ sacred literacies, their sacred ways of reading the world (Ivanova, 2014) and their experiences are ways in which to enrich the higher education experience and to engage students in conversations that are vital for students taking ownership of their education and can lead to higher-order thinking and critical conversations.

Sacred Artifacts

There are different ways in which human beings *read the world* – the ways in which we make meaning from experiences – the different ways in which we articulate literacy. One way in which we make meaning is *artificially*, through memories, objects and symbols. Artifacts or “everyday objects” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011, p. 130) can exist intangibly, within memories, to provide “a powerful and sometimes mysterious means of binding oneself to a sense of time, place, purpose, and community” (Thiel-Stern,

Hains, & Mazarella, 2011, p. 161).

Particular artifacts can exist as sacred objects – objects that hold significant value and that are connected to highly significant events in our lives (Ivanova, 2014). Objects have always existed in humans’ lives. However, *sacred artifacts*, I suggest, are ones that are imbedded in our lives and in our remembrances. I pose that particular artifacts (tangible or intangible) – *sacred artifacts* – exist and are used in sacred literacy practices (Ivanova, 2014), because of the ability of artifacts to *speak* and tell stories (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). Sacred artifacts act as extensions and entry points of the literacy practices, acknowledging the existence of sacred literacies, connecting individuals to sacred events and particular relationships and moments – the sacred threads of our lives.

Conclusion

Narratives in the classroom provide a rich repository from which instructors can learn more about their students’ lives while encouraging and fostering critical thinking and reflection. When students are provided a space to voice their experiences with trauma, struggles, social inequalities, that space becomes an empowering place, as evidenced by Heather’s and Emily’s testifying. Heather felt comfortable sharing her narrative about

having experienced the impact of alcoholism on her family and growing up. Emily felt comfortable sharing her digital narrative about the complexities and tensions of coming out while navigating others’ perceptions of her emerging identities. Each woman’s sacred artifact, the Spoken Word poem, the digital story, dynamically emerged from the storying and became a vessel for transporting their stories to our classroom community.

When spaces are created and privileged for narrative practices, narrative practices are ones that will resonate with students as they journey through higher education, will linger with them as they graduate and transition to their future careers, and ones that can help to answer the question of “What pedagogical practices work through the conflict of sparking students’ intellectual interests and also training and credentializing them for the work force?”

Future Hopes

The hopes of this article are to spark thought and conversation about non-traditional spaces, like narrative spaces that can be created and nurtured within K-12 and higher education classrooms. There are also hopes for this discussion to illuminate the importance of individuals’ narratives, with

the understanding that some narratives can be considered sacred because of the nature of their embedded practices (reading, writing, verbalizing) and the narratives' crucial importance and embedded meanings from individuals' lived experiences.

Narrative practices, such as the storying of experiences into the formats of Spoken Word poetry and digital narratives can involve the use of embedded artifacts, or objects that already exist within individuals' lives (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). Objects (artifacts) are embedded within lives (Hecht, 2001; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010) and are chorded and woven into crucial experiences, ones that are highly impactful to the individual's life. When considering the classroom space and how sacred artifacts can be used, one suggestion is to have students bring objects from their familiar spaces of home, community, and other places of dwelling and to have them to each speak about their artifact. The verbal sharing of these can open a space for storying and crucial events or episodes from students' lives may emerge. From this story-sharing, a space for storytelling – a sequenced and discursive practice can be cultivated, nurtured, and grown. The stories that are spoken and verbally shared (Ivanova, 2014; Fisher, 2005), then can be written or digitalized in thoughtful and careful ways and become a

narrative practice. Dynamically, the stories become sacred artifacts themselves because they testify to events within individuals' lives that are highly impactful and significant.

Paying attention to what Palmer (2017) notes, that

on the flatlands of a desacralized world where we grow accustomed to seeing things approaching us long before they arrive, surprise is neither expected nor welcomed. When it suddenly arises, apparently out of nowhere, we are stricken with fear and may even respond with violence (p. 115)

there is the essentiality, I feel, to bring about discussion of spaces we can create in our classrooms that nurture sacredness and foster individuals' identities and backgrounds. Ultimately, the hope is that the practitioner, instructor, or higher education member might be able to consider the narrative space as one in which students can critically think about, story, and share their lives.

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TEACH GLOBALLY: GLOBAL LITERACY INVITATIONS

Vesna Dimitrieska & Leana McClain

There has been growing consensus among educators, business and government sector about the urgency to have globally competent teachers who can prepare globally ready students to thrive in today's diverse, complex and interconnected world. Although numerous global competence frameworks and matrices emerge, there is lack of transparency about what teaching globally looks like in classrooms and the types of learning experiences that help students develop their global competence. A team of experts from Indiana University and, more recently, mentor teachers, has engaged in systematic efforts to teach globally by providing professional development to K-6 teachers throughout Indiana on how to use globally-themed picture books to create global literacy invitations, i.e., teacher-created and student-led learning investigations. The aim of the Global Literacy Invitations project is to help in-service teachers develop their own and their students' global competence while engaging in meaningful inquiry-based global

exploration beyond the pages of globally-themed picture books.

Why Teach Globally?

Rapid technological, economic, social, and environmental changes are making today's world increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Consequently, the world in which students live and work is increasingly different from the world in which their parents and teachers grew up (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). Although many people do not realize how global everyone's lives have become, recent societal trends (e.g., career readiness, digital connectivity, demographic diversity, and cross-border challenges) have confirmed the urgency for global focus in education (Corapi & Short, 2016; Tichnor-Wagner & Manise, 2019). Educators have the role to tailor students' educational experiences so they engage in more powerful, relevant and transformational learning to meet these continually evolving demands and opportunities (Gardner, 2007).

Teaching globally and global education are often mentioned in the United States. However, as West (2012) observes, they are rarely systematically integrated into everyday classroom practices. The ever-evolving scope of teachers' skills has come to include skills that address the demands for twenty-first century student skills. In line with highlighting the need for critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, literacy "has gone from being about 'learning to read' to 'reading for learning' (West, 2012, p.1). In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education recognized the importance of global competence and added it as one of the components in the definition of twenty-first century education. By recognizing the need for a globally competent task force, the Department of Education's goal has been "to increase the global competencies of all U.S. students, including those from traditionally disadvantaged groups." (as cited in West, 2012, p.2). Many experts also agree that the majority of American students are not globally competent and thus do not possess those twenty-first century skills (West, 2012). Concurrently, in non-US contexts, educating students to be globally competent means to simply educate them. As a result, global education in the United States is often considered as an add-on and is oftentimes

reduced to one Cultural Night per semester or year, if at all.

Nowadays, culture in schools is integrated and celebrated in minimal ways. On the one hand, our classrooms have never been more diverse linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically (De La Garza & Lavigne, 2019; Jaumont & Stein-Smith, 2019). With the current trends in global migration, the student population of our classrooms will become even more diverse in the upcoming years (Tichnor-Wagner, Parkhouse, Glazier & Cain, 2019). Although teachers are expected to address the needs of our increasingly diverse students, many of them are not sufficiently prepared to do so (Fairbairn & Jones-Vo, 2010; Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Kouritzin, 2004). On the other hand, culture in today's schools is only celebrated through the Five Fs: food, fashion, famous people, festivals, and flags (Richards, 2015). The experiences, values, backgrounds and cultural practices of our students are rarely integrated in a structured way into those students' learning practices. Weaver's (1986) cultural iceberg distinguishes between two levels of culture: surface and deep culture. Surface culture includes a culture's visible aspects: language, food, flags, holidays, and music. Deep culture includes aspects such as religion, values, social norms, and attitudes

that are very often the aspects that underlie and drive our day-to-day behaviors and decisions (Richards, 2015; Weaver, 1986). The Five Fs of culture correspond to surface level in Weaver's cultural iceberg. By solely focusing on the Five Fs of culture we, as educators, fail to provide opportunities for our students to reach deeper understanding and appreciation of their own culture as well as other cultures.

There are numerous global competence definitions and frameworks emphasizing its multifaceted nature and including knowledge, dispositions, and skills as its three domains (Landorf, Doscher & Hardrick, 2018). Although there is more discussion about the importance of global competence among our teachers so that they can prepare students who are globally ready and involved citizens of the world, it is not transparent enough what global competence looks like in today's classrooms. Tichnor-Wagner and Manise (2019) have emphasized the need to work directly with teachers in order to expand their knowledge and skills related to developing empathy among their students, appreciation of diverse perspectives and cultures, familiarity with trends and conditions in their own communities and the world, and students' ability to communicate and solve problems with people of diverse backgrounds. Mansilla (2016) emphasizes

that "educating for global competence is no longer a luxury, but a necessity" (p.12). Furthermore, she highlights that in order to nurture global competence, we need to do more than simply add "more continents, rivers, and capitals to our already full K-12 curriculum" and calls for revisiting our instructional practices and education in general by examining the types of learning we are after and how best to nurture such learning (Mansilla, 2016, p.12).

As a response to Mansilla and Jackson's call for our students not only to have capacities in reading, mathematics, and science, but also be knowledgeable about world regions and global issues, sensitive to diverse perspectives, able to communicate cross-culturally and to act toward the common good, we find the use of quality globally-themed picture books and global literacy invitations around them as powerful practice for teachers and their students.

Why Global Picture Books?

Global picture books are emerging as a powerful tool for developing global competence among teachers and their students. Fiction and nonfiction books that feature not only differences but similarities of people and places have the potential to provide contexts to examine ongoing and

historical events while at the same time viewing the world as a whole (Esteves, 2018). Additionally, carefully chosen globally-themed picture books that do not reinforce stereotypes but rather represent an array of people's lived experiences and places from various parts of the world may develop a sense of belonging among the students and build knowledge about benefits and challenges of living in a culturally diverse world (Esteves, 2018, Monoyiou & Symeonidou, 2016). Picture books help provide access to the world and people of different cultures to students and teachers that have historically lacked access to study or travel abroad programs. Although students and teachers may lack firsthand experiences with some parts of the world, picture books allow them to learn from and with people who look and sound different than themselves (Esteves, 2018). Increasingly, educators have been commenting on the scarcity of available stories and resources from the cultures that are represented in their classrooms (Mansilla, 2016). Although in English, globally-themed picture books help fill the gap and attempt to expose students to cultures that are represented in their classrooms and thus bring the world into those classrooms and communities.

Global literature provides rich learning experiences for our students as it expands our

worldview, adapts to curricular needs, serves as a stepping stone for learning to think critically and is a path to academic achievement (Corapi & Short, 2016). In addition to learning about near and remote parts of the world, global books, as Corapi and Short (2016) confirm, align well with states' academic standards and lend themselves to connections across the different content areas and the development of critical thinking skills.

What are *Global Literacy Invitations*?

Global Literacy Invitations (GLIs) are student-centered intellectually rich learning investigations based on globally-themed picture books. Invitations, by definition, advocate for a student-centered approach to knowledge acquisition as "knowledge is co-constructed by students while teachers play the role of a facilitator during the inquiry process" (Lee, 2015, p. 64; Lewison, Leland & Harste, 2008; Van Sluys, 2005). Moreover, invitations are both interrelated and grounded in critical literacy as they draw students in a personally-driven inquiry as well as invite them to examine power relations and social justice issues (Lee, 2015).

Global literacy invitations utilize globally-themed picture books to engage students in the inquiry process.

Figure 1

A selection of carefully selected, quality global picture books



Driven by the philosophy that all teachers are global educators, teacher participants experience how their global competence develops as they create authentic learning experiences for their students through the global literacy invitations in a naturalistic setting, i.e., their own classrooms. While integrating teacher and student learning, the GLIs aim to actively and intentionally engage students with global phenomena as well as promote an understanding of interconnectedness. The project aims are met by engaging in two types of inquiry-based global learning experiences: global learning experiences for teachers and global learning experiences for students.

Teachers utilize GLI strategies to incorporate global learning and thinking through:

- Reading their self-selected picture book.

- Researching and acquiring background knowledge about the country represented in the book. *Teachers can't teach what they don't know!*
- Creating 4-5 original, intellectually rich, cross-curricular GLIs, guiding students to make connections between their own culture and the target culture of the book (Appendix 1).

Figure 2

Global Literacy Invitations on Siberian Wise Sayings developed by Leana McClain following the read aloud of Little Lost Tiger



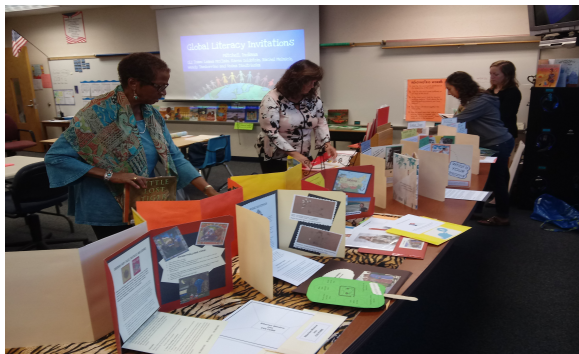
Students in the GLI collaborative learning environment:

- Are provided with the opportunity for further inquiry

- Are able to express themselves with open-ended responses
- Understand that there are no right or wrong answers, only thoughtfully formed responses based on newly acquired knowledge
- Work together to reach new insights
- Expand prior knowledge
- Make personal global connections.

Figure 3

Global Literacy Invitations developed by mentor teachers



Global picture books, short text with illustrations, makes them excellent for class read alouds. Read alouds provide a shared experience for the class and take the students on a journey outside of the classroom without leaving the classroom. Since invitations are a shared learning experience, it is critical that the students hear the story read aloud by the teacher as a whole class. Reading the book aloud will activate the students' prior knowledge, generate questions, provide an

opportunity for grand conversations, and provide an opportunity for students to begin their global journey together.

Critical literacy helps students read texts in a deeper and more meaningful way. Critical literacy and global literacy invitations link together in that they promote a deeper understanding of socially constructed concepts- intercultural understanding, recognizing common feelings shared by all people, valuing the unique differences that each culture brings to the world, reflection on one's own culture as they learn about other cultures. Global literacy invitations go beyond the Five Fs of culture and beyond adding more continents, rivers and cultures to our curriculum and instead promote and support the concept of building bridges across cultures through high quality children's literature.

Global literacy invitations are of open-ended nature by design. Their open-ended nature allows endless opportunities for differentiation of instruction. As Fairbairn and Jones-Vo (2010) state, differentiation of instruction is no longer optional nor supplemental, but rather imperative as teachers have the responsibility to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of their students. Some examples of differentiating the instruction through the global literacy invitations is the use of cultural artifacts,

graphic organizers, Google Earth, guest speakers, etc. In addition to explorations that are directly related to the selected picture book, students are invited to explore the topic and the target culture beyond the book. Using companion books, flexible groupings, and open-ended inquiry are some of the ways that support the beyond-the book exploration and invitation to engage and interact with the target culture and part of the world. The combination of having the same starting point (i.e., the read aloud of the same global picture book), differentiating the instruction to meet students' needs and inviting the students to explore beyond the book motivates the students to engage in learning experiences that are driven by their own backgrounds and interests while at the same time they are held responsible for their own learning. All these aspects of global literacy invitations align well with the tenets of culturally responsive teaching (i.e., assets based, simultaneously challenging and supporting students, students at the center of learning, and valuing students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds) (Staehr Fenner & Snyder, 2017).

Global Literacy Invitations as a Game Changer

The combination of its theoretical underpinnings and instructional practices

make the global literacy invitations a vehicle towards developing globally competent teachers and globally ready students. Teacher preparation programs are currently saturated with state-mandated standards and bound by accreditation requirements. Neither of those foreground global competence as one of the critical skills that our teachers of today and the future should possess. Since global competence is not systematically integrated in those programs, it is oftentimes considered as “a good idea”, “an add-on” or “an if-time endeavor”. Professional development focused on global literacy invitations fills the existing gap in teacher preparation programs to prepare globally competent teachers. Three cohorts of teachers who have completed professional development on the creation and use of global literacy invitations have praised the transformative nature of the global literacy invitations and the global picture books for students' deeper understanding and appreciation of other cultures and their own culture. Ms. Melnick, a teacher participant from the first cohort and a current mentor teacher shared the following experience: *I loved how accessible teaching global topics for kids can be through these global literacy invitations.* Ms. Tamborinno, another teacher participant and a current mentor teacher urged us to: *Create opportunities for teachers to get this [global literacy invitations] into*

more schools. Preparing globally ready students is an obligation of all the educators of today and tomorrow. Only globally competent teachers can nurture global readiness among their students.

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CULTIVATING CONSCIOUSNESS: STUDYING THE IMPACT OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE LITERATURE

Stephanie Barrientos & Susan R. Adams

Introduction

As Stephanie¹ turned the page of Jaqueline Woodson's 2012 picture book *Each Kindness*, Rachel's² voice interrupted her, "Wait... I'm confused... isn't that the new girl with shabby clothes who moved away?" Murmurs erupted around the group as several students mirrored Rachel's confusion while others explained their differing opinion.

In Woodson's book, the narrator, a girl named Chloe, shares the story of when a new girl, Maya, joined Chloe's class. Maya wears second-hand clothes that do not fit well and plays with old-fashioned, inexpensive toys. Maya tried to make friends with Chloe and her classmates, but everyone rejects her until Maya just plays by herself and eventually she

moves away one day. In the end, Chloe remembers a lesson her teacher taught her about kindness and regrets not showing kindness to Maya when she had the chance.

A few students were confused by the character they saw on the last few pages of the book. Maya, the new student, was a White girl with blonde hair. Chloe appeared to be bi-racial with slightly darker skin and tight, curly hair. Further engaging in conversation with Rachel and some of her classmates led Stephanie to understand that throughout the story, her students thought the blonde girl was the narrator and the bi-racial girl was the poor, new student who was shut out from acceptance. The illustrations in the book clearly show the small, blonde girl arriving to the class as a new student, being

¹ Stephanie is the person who conducted the original study in her K-12 classroom. Susan is her university thesis adviser and co-author on this manuscript.

² All students' names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect their identity.

picked on, and playing by herself while other kids turned away from her (Teacher Journal, September 18, 2018). This group of predominantly White middle school students could not see past their assumptions and limited world view. These types of assumptions re-surfaced in class discussions, student reflection responses, and hallway conversations throughout the fall semester.

These perspectives are not limited to this specific school district. In October of 2017, scholars from TeachingTolerance.Org, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, began tracking media reports of hate in schools and publishing their findings in monthly articles. The report from February 2019, showed 91 media reports of hate incidents in school in 28 short days, the highest number since they began tracking (Dillard, 2019, para. 4). These 91 incidents occurred in 34 different states. Sixty-three of the incidents were racist, 13 were anti-Semitic, four targeted LGBTQ students, and three involved multiple forms of hate in one incident (para 6).

This is not the world we want our own children or our students to live in. By engaging in Freire's (2018) notion of praxis "reflection and action directed at structures to be transformed" (p. 126), Stephanie began to examine how she could challenge existing societal and educational conditions. Both

conviction and guidance come from the words of Minor (2016):

To continue with business as usual, to do nothing, to be "neutral" is a passive declaration of [oppression] because the system that we are most intimately connected with—school—will continue to produce unjust outcomes. What is our influence, as educators? What can we do? We cannot reconstruct the world to reflect our views, but we are in a unique position to take action in our classrooms. We can start to disrupt the status quo by asking ourselves questions about our practice, community and curriculum. (para 14-15)

This idea harkens back to Counts' (1932) call to arms for educators to become a social force in social reconstruction and to Freire's position of education and literacy as a vehicle for this social change (Oakes & Lipton, 2003, p. 147). We began to consider how employing a progressive critical pedagogy in which Stephanie facilitates educational experiences that develop anti-bias perspectives, raise critical consciousness, and empower students to be agents of change. What steps could Stephanie take to start disrupting the status quo? What changes could she make that might most impact students?

These questions caused Stephanie to notice her belief that the most powerful forces in her classroom were the books they read and the discussions she facilitated. These wonderings ultimately led to our research question: *What happens when students engage with culturally diverse and inclusive literature that serves as a window into the lived experiences of others?*

Theoretical Framework

The working definition of “culturally diverse” and the theoretical perspectives that frame the study and guide Stephanie’s decisions in the classroom are founded on the research on anti-bias and multicultural education. Here we intend to trace our linkage of the move from a colorblind mentality toward critical consciousness to the research and theoretical perspectives which have shaped our current understandings and research commitments. It is not our intention here to provide an exhaustive review of critical whiteness, but instead to identify some of the concepts and theoretical lenses through which we understand and identify our foundational practices and philosophies.

Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity differentiates individuals based on the specific social identities which

shape their self-image and fundamental perspectives (Mazur, 2010). These primary social identities are gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, age and mental or physical abilities and characteristics (Rijamampianina & Carmichael, 2005). Banks (1999) employs the term “multicultural” as relating to race, ethnicity, culture and social class in society. Other scholars broaden “cultural diversity” to include religion, language variations, and physical and mental disabilities (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the term *culturally diverse* in relation to the research question and the selection of texts, refers to perceived and experienced differences with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, religion, and physical and mental disabilities (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005).

The Power of Literature and Learning

What students experience in the classroom by engaging with literature and from learning together can tremendously shape their ideas, understandings, and actions. Rosenblatt’s (1978) theory of the transactional reading experience proposes that a reader and a text engage in a cyclical relationships that impacts the shape of both the text and the reader. By interacting, engaging, and participating in the transactional process with a text, readers

develop their own beliefs and perspectives as well as learn to understand the perspective of others. This theory continues to ring true when considering neuroscientific research providing evidence that entering the world of fiction can develop empathy and perspective taking (Oatley, 2011). Social understanding, or the ability to understand and sympathize with others' emotions, cognitions, and motivations, can be developed by engaging with fiction texts (Kozack & Recchia, 2018). Beyond literature merely shaping the perspectives and experiences of readers, UNESCO (2011) confirmed that teaching about religions and cultures contributes to understanding and to reducing intolerance and discrimination.

Anti-Bias Multicultural Education

Creating effective citizens for a diverse society that leads to a more democratic and humane world is one goal of multicultural education (Banks, 1999). Nieto (2008) describes multicultural education as a means to “challenge and reject racism and others forms of discrimination in schools and society” (p. 44). One of the foundational goals of multicultural education was to meet the needs of students of color who were not being seen or supported. In a traditional curriculum, the knowledge, experiences, and

perspectives that dominate are White, Eurocentric, patriarchal ideas. Au (2014) emphasizes however that “Multicultural education is rooted in an anti-racist struggle over whose knowledge and experiences should be included in the curriculum” (p. 89). Literature, important people, and significant events centered on Whiteness may cause White students to be misinformed and students of color to feel ignored, invalidated, or even attacked (p. 85). Transforming the structure of the curriculum to “include concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups” (Banks, 1999, p. 31) is one goal of the anti-racists roots of multicultural education to which Au (2014) refers.

The notion that multicultural education is a curriculum movement designed for use with marginalized groups is a common misunderstanding (Banks, 1999, p. 5). Multicultural education is for everyone and quite likely offers long-term benefits for White students as much or more than racial minority students. In fact, Czopp and Monteith (2003) have demonstrated that bias and prejudice are most effectively decreased when the perpetrator is confronted by someone of the same identity group. For example, if a White person demonstrates bias or prejudiced behavior, he/she is more receptive to comments regarding his/her

negative actions from another White person, rather than a person from the demographics of his/her prejudice.

The work of Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2011) speaks directly to this situation. Their development of an anti-bias/multicultural (AB/MC) framework strives to support educators in dismantling the systemic oppressive systems of this country by developing new ways of understanding and living for White people. The AB/MC framework and supplementary materials can support teachers to better understand how children learn about racism, to develop anti-racists practices, and to foster caring and activism within students. The AB/MC is a framework that puts to work Sleeter and Grant's (1988) conceptualization of a K-12 curriculum that is multicultural and social reconstructionist, not just by transforming the curricular contents and by encouraging students to take action, but to develop anti-bias perspectives that will prepare students to confront these destructive forces in society.

Colorblindness and Critical Consciousness

Racial and cultural colorblindness was an idea that emerged after the Civil Rights era in the hopes of ending discrimination by ensuring that people would no longer see

color, race, or ethnicity (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). However, a claim of "not seeing color," ultimately perpetuates a White-centered frame for looking at the world that downplays and dismisses the impact of institutional and systemic racism and discrimination on persons of color throughout history and still today (Fergus, 2017).

In an interview with Education Week, Zaretta Hammond asserts, "As teachers of culturally diverse students, we need to educate ourselves about the realities of structural racialization in society and recognizing how colorblindness is just another a form of implicit bias." (Quoted in Ferlazzo, 2015, para 24). By clinging to a colorblind mentality as white educators and avoiding critical conversations with students that de-center white, heteronormative, Christian, affluence, we run the risk of allowing white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018) to preserve this bias which Hammond describes.

Moving to an idea of racial, cultural, and/or critical consciousness is the "process of continuously reflecting upon and examining how our own biases, assumptions and worldviews affect[s] the ways we perceive difference and power dynamics" (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005). Being aware of one's biased-based beliefs, acknowledging them, and working to dismantle them, is at

the center of a critical conscious decision-making process.

We have to be willing to have proactive conversations about race with honesty and understanding and courage, not because it's the right thing to do, but because it's the smart thing to do, because [everything is] better with greater diversity (Hobson, 2014, para. 10).

Working from a place of color consciousness rather than color blindness is not just an issue of morality, but essential for our daily existence. The world is a culturally diverse place and embracing that truth provides individuals “more opportunities to experience other cultures and thus become more fulfilled as human beings” (Banks, 1991, p. 1).

Context

A Changing Community

This study was conducted at Pleasant Valley Middle School³ (PVMS), one of two middle schools serving grades 5-8 in the Pleasant Valley School Corporation (PVCS). PVCS is comprised of students from two

adjacent towns that are suburbs of a large Midwestern city.

Over the past two decades, the towns of PVCS experienced significant population growth and changes in demographics with regards to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. This can be seen by looking at the changes in demographics of Pleasant Valley High School. During the 2005-2006 school year, PVHS had a student population that was 94.2% White. By the 2018-2019 school year, the percentage of students of color nearly tripled, with 16.2% of the student population identifying as Hispanic, Black, Asian, or Multi-Racial.

Stephanie's Classroom

Stephanie's student rosters closely reflect the demographics of the school district, with 36% of students self-reporting as female. She teaches two, 135-minute blocks of fifth grade Humanities. The Humanities course is structured as a three-period block of integrated Social Studies and English Language Arts. 53 students were enrolled in the two classes, with all students and parents consenting to participation in this study except for one. Since the study focused on the

³ School and town name have been changed

existing Humanities curriculum, all students participated in the learning experiences but the non-consenting student's data were not included in the study analysis.

Curriculum

For this study, students continued a series of book club discussions groups initiated earlier in the year. The student-led book clubs allowed each group to select a novel from a provided list of diverse and inclusive titles (See Appendix A for text selections). Each group of 4-6 students determined their reading schedule in order to have the novel completed independently by the final meeting. Book clubs met twice a week for four weeks, with students discussing their responses and reactions to the reading as a group with minimal influence from the teacher.

In addition to book clubs, students engaged with other texts during daily picture book readings and novel read-alouds (See Appendix A for text selections). Videos, infographics, and images were also used during mini-lessons and activities. Students participated in whole and small group discussions, online responses journals, independent response activities, and video responses. These elements and opportunities are all a part of the normal learning

experiences in the classroom but were tailored specifically to support the reading of culturally diverse texts and media for the purpose of this study. The diverse and inclusive texts were chosen to represent a variety of characters and settings that aligned with the definition of “culturally diverse” outlined earlier in this article. Texts were curated from sources such as [We Need Diverse Books](#) (2020) book lists and the [Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books from Teaching for Change's Social Justice Books](#) (2020) project.

Research Method

Constructivist Action Research

This study draws on *action research* methods as defined by Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007) in which the teacher researcher takes action based on situations observed within the classroom, school, and community. This stance allows the teacher researcher to question current curricular practices and to act for social change by “engaging in a continuous process of problem posing, data gathering, analysis, and collection” (Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006, p. 504).

Pre-Engagement Survey

An initial pre-unit questionnaire developed to explore student perceptions on

diversity and their community (Appendix B) showed that 47 of 52 students felt that the Pleasant Valley community is a diverse place. When asked why they believed the community is, or is not, diverse, 42 out of those 47 students stated Pleasant Valley had many different cultures and types of people. One-third of students (17) also included written responses that described Pleasant Valley as a place where there was no racism or discrimination. Additionally, questionnaire responses showed that students did not think people were treated differently in the community based on their race and ethnicity or religious beliefs, with less than 8% (4) of students agreeing these were concerns. Only 25% (13) of students felt that people were treated differently for not conforming to gender expectations. The area where the most students felt that people were treated differently was related to money. When asked about people being treated differently based on how much money they had, 41% (21) of the students felt this was an issue (student questionnaire, January 2019).

Figure 1

Student Created Chart on the Elements of Identity



While looking at a political cartoon image that described a Black teenager as potentially being from a “bad” neighborhood, several students believed this indicated the time period when the cartoon was created:

Jake: I’m noticing that this was probably drawn a long time ago.

Teacher: What makes you say that?

Jake: Well, it says he might be from a bad neighborhood, so, like, that’s from the old days.

Teacher: Can you tell me more about that?

Jake: Umm... well.... Like, I mean-

Amanda: I think he means because that was, like, back during the Civil Rights stuff, so it was probably from then.

Michael: Yeah, back then they had like good neighborhoods and bad neighborhoods and Black people couldn’t go certain places.

Jake: Yes! When it says “from a wrong neighborhood,” I think the setting is a long time ago because it’s not like that anymore for people, there’s not, like, racism and segregation and stuff (Transcription, January 16, 2019).

Later that month, students were participating in a school wide social-emotional growth curriculum. For that particular session, students were asked to discuss the similarities and differences between two students who were meeting each other for the first time. One student was a Black male and the other was Latino. After eight minutes of discussion, not one student had mentioned that the boys were different races or ethnicities (Teacher Journal, January 23, 2019).

After reading the first section of their book club novels, students created a working identity map (Ahmed, 2018) for the characters in the novel that would be developed as they read and discussed with their groups (See Figure 1 for an example of what was included on an identity map.). During identity work earlier in the year, students worked to construct an understanding about what makes up someone’s identity and created identity maps of themselves. In the first round of creating their character identity maps, students focused on character traits, hobbies, family,

and living environment. In the groups who had novels with characters where a specific country of heritage or origin was stated, 60% (10) of the students put the name of the country as a proper noun, not as an adjective or descriptive property (e.g. Korea not Korean; Pakistan not Pakistani-American). The remaining students did not recognize any country or cultural heritage at all. Only one of the 12 students who had books where the character’s race was specifically mentioned or described, listed race on the identity maps. All the students reading a novel in which the main character has Asperger’s added this term to their identity maps.

These responses from the students, along with observations from earlier in the year, such as the one described in the opening section of this study, were reminiscent of an instilled color blind mentality along with lack of awareness of the reality beyond their own bubble. As Hobson (2014) reiterates, “color blindness is very dangerous because it means we’re ignoring the problem (para. 9). Stephanie wondered if students did not truly see these differences or if they were afraid to mention them.

In light of this early observation and analysis, Stephanie decided to take seriously Derman-Sparks and Ramsey’s (2011) contention that, “To reduce prejudice, teachers cannot simply provide materials but

also need to discuss and model alternative attitudes,” (p. 16). To model this approach, Stephanie started reading aloud *Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus* (Bowling, 2017) in which the main character, Aven, has a genetic condition and was born without arms. Stephanie and her students worked together to co-construct an identity web for Aven:

Teacher: Who can start adding something to our web for Aven? Please tell us what you’re adding as you write it on the chart.

Kyle: Musical because she likes playing the guitar.

Ella: She’s in middle school. That’s part of her identity, right?

Teacher: Yep, what else do we have?

Jonah: Well, she lived in Kansas her whole life and then she suddenly moved to Arizona so both of those places.

Rachel: Ooooooh! She was adopted and she’s a storyteller, she loves telling crazy stories.

Carmen: She’s funny... but like, sarcastic funny. The blogs she writes are sarcastic and she’s like that with her parents, but not in a way where she really gets in trouble.

Teacher: All of those are great ideas, really insightful... Ok, so... um I’m thinking about what Carmen just said, and looking at

this web we have so far... we have a lot of things that contribute to Aven’s identity but it seems like we’re missing a pretty significant part of who she is... I’m thinking I would like to add something...

Writes “born with rare genetic condition” and “doesn’t have arms” on chart.

Teacher: How about these two things? What do you think?

Extended silence.

Ryan: Hashtag awkward (*laughter*) just kidding! (*More laughter*).

Teacher: Alright, well, it kind of does feel a little awkward to write that down. Is Aven’s *whole* identity or who she is about not having arms, or being born with this condition?

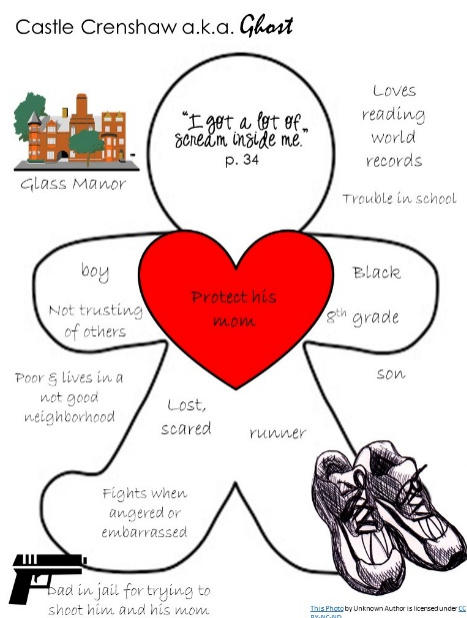
Group murmurs of “No”.

Amanda: Like, she doesn’t want to just be the weird girl without arms, so it feels awkward to write down, but that’s totally a big part of who she is, right? Like, her mom didn’t want her to be helpless like she was when they adopted her, so she made her do all these things on her own which seemed super hard, I can’t even imagine doing all of those things with my feet like she does. But she had to work really hard to do those things without any arms and that makes her able to do all kinds of other stuff.

Gretchen: Yes! Not having arms is a part of her identity, like, a big one, but it's not the only thing on there. She's got all these other cool things on there, too. (Transcript, February 1, 2019).

The next time students met with their book clubs, they were asked to discuss character identities with their group. They were encouraged to think about and discuss significant parts of their characters' identity that they had left off because it felt awkward. Students then created "Cultural X-Rays" (Short, 2009) for themselves and their characters (See Figures 2-4) For these cultural x-rays, students were provided a blank outline of a body with a heart in the middle.

Figure 2
Cultural X-Ray #1



On and around the body figure, students added words and pictures that related to the characters' identity based on how the world saw them. Inside the heart were words describing the character's values, beliefs, and how he/she sees and feels about him/herself.

Figure 3
Cultural X-Ray #2

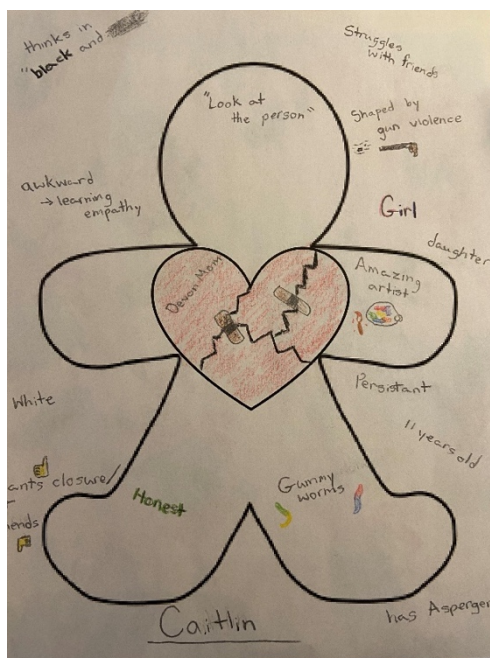
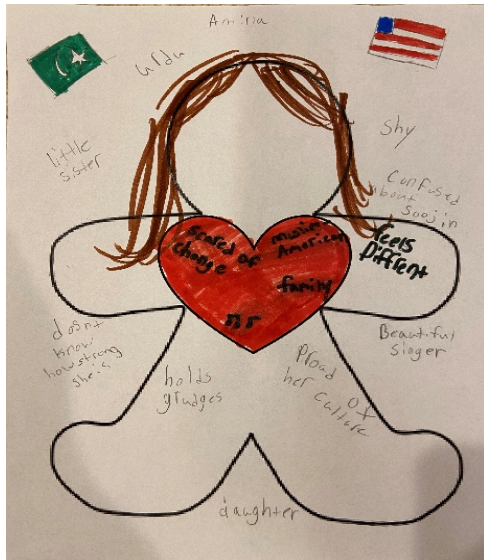


Figure 4

Cultural X-Ray #3



this exercise, 80% (42) of the students listed identity elements related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, diversity, or other social identities. Additionally, student responses and discussions while working on the exercise, began to indicate an awareness that the way a world sees people and the way they feel about themselves or on the inside, can be conflicting. For example, when discussing Ravi, one of two protagonists in *Save Me a Seat* (Weeks & Varadarajan, 2016), a small group of students had an intense discussion regarding Ravi's academic identity. The students were focused on the fact that Ravi was incredibly smart, but because of a thick accent and cultural issues, he was not perceived that way by teachers or classmates.

This led the students to consider other instances when assumptions, bias, or superficial issues cause us to miss or ignore someone's identity and value.

Windows and Mirrors

Bishop's (1990) notion of books as mirrors to see ourselves reflected in, or as windows to see into the lives of others, was a guiding philosophy for the book club novels thinking and discussion. In read-alouds, picture books, and book club reading, students discussed and shared ways that the books help readers see into the lives and experiences of people who are different. As a part of the student final book club reflections, they were asked how their book club novel was a window into the lives of experiences of someone else and how it changed them as a person. When open coding these final reflections in search of emerging themes, Stephanie highlighted key words in each response and identified these outcome categories: no impact (four responses); activism (ten responses); new perspectives in empathy and awareness (26 responses); and a distinctive category she dubbed "naïve narratives" (11 responses).

The naïve narrative responses were responses that seemed to make light of certain situations. For example, one novel

had a character who grew up in a small town in South Carolina during the 1960s.

There was a racial incident in town and the character, Ronnie, had to flee. He was a light-skinned, bi-racial teenager and his means of survival was to change his identity and pretend to be White for the rest of his life.

The book fast forwards 50 years and Ronnie is an incredibly rich and successful businessman but also still lives as a White man. Four of the six students in that group commented about Ronnie being an example of anyone being capable of achieving their dreams if they worked hard enough. None of those students acknowledged that Ronnie was forced to deny his racial identity to achieve that success, that his Black heritage was the reason he had to flee the town he was born and raised in, or the very real danger Ronnie faced by posing as a White man in the 1960's.

The students from the study who demonstrated feelings of new perspectives or desire for activism often provided thoughtful responses that showed discovering newfound empathy for others or feeling angry and wanting to do something.

This book is changing the way that I see people with Aspergers. It is changing this because some of the things that she does when she is having a TRM I didn't know about before this book. If someone was

having a TRM in public I wouldn't know that they were doing (student response journal, March 13, 2019).

I thought people with disabilities knew that that's not the way people act, but now I know that they think what they do is normal (student response journal, March 13, 2019).

My aunts are in the LGBT community and now I understand how hard it is to keep people from having dirty looks at them. Once I wondered why they were basically standing 7 feet apart from one another, it was very sad (student response journal, March 13, 2019).

One interesting pattern that repeated throughout the unit was the way the students responded to and connected with certain cultures differently. In book clubs, read-alouds, and picture books that involved gender non-conforming characters, LGBTQ issues, or physical and emotional challenges, students were quicker to speak up and advocate for the character, to demonstrate empathy and to make connections. When issues of race or ethnicity were involved, students voiced fewer connections and less empathy was expressed.

Post Questionnaire

At the conclusion of the unit, students were asked to complete the questionnaire again, nine weeks after initially completing it. There were noticeable changes in student

responses. The number of students who said the community is not diverse, increased from 9.6% to 18.3%. After the unit, 18% of students believed people in our community were treated differently based on their race or ethnicity, up from 5% of the pre-assessment. Belief that people were treated differently due to religion increased from 3% to 10%. Finally, the question asking if people were treated differently based on their behaviors relative to gender expectations, increased from 23% agreement to 42% (student questionnaire, March 18, 2019).

Implications

While impressed with the shifts and growth seen in this small group of students in a short period of time, the results and implications of this study extend far beyond a nine-week engagement with culturally diverse literature. A review of the Reader Inventories students complete at the beginning of every year reveals that nearly every chapter book which featured culturally diverse characters (there were four titles identified) was a historical fiction text that focused on the “degradation and endurance” (Millner, 2018) of marginalized people. As Millner insists, all children- Black, White, Brown, LGBTQ+, neurotypical, and neurodiverse- need and deserve to see

culturally diverse characters that “revel in the same human experiences that they do” (para. 10). If the culturally diverse texts we share with students focus only on issues like the Civil Rights Movement, slavery, and historical Native American communities, it is not surprising that any material presenting issues among diverse characters would automatically be mentally filed in the “historical” category.

It is important that educators diversify library and curricular reading materials, not just with historical texts that show triumph and struggle, but that we offer a rich variety of genres and mediums which portray the full complexity of life lived in under-represented social and identify groups. As hooks (1994) urges “Accepting the decentering of the West globally, embracing multiculturalism, compels educators to focus attention on the issue of voice. Who speaks? Who listens? And why?” (p. 40). Checking our bookshelves and binders for whose voices, stories, and faces are present and what they are saying, can be one step in the journey to make all students feel valued and seen, while working to recalibrate an over-exaggerated sense of importance in some groups.

Conclusion

This study attempted to dig deeper by investigating the impact of socially constructed understanding with transactional reading experiences (Rosenblatt, 1978) to support societal transformation. The power of literature is significant and has the possibility to build empathy and awareness, but it should not end with simply having students read more books with different characters. That leads to a “tourist” perspective (Short, 2009), where students just learn a little about different types of people and believe that solves the systemic issues in the world. This type of work is likely to perpetuate the colorblind mentality and lack of true awareness from students.

In addition to the types of work tackled in the classroom for this study, with reading, discussions, reflection, and modeling, the results of this project have challenged Stephanie to work towards Banks’ (1999) Transformational and Social Action approaches to developing classroom curriculum and learning experiences, where the structure of the curriculum is changed to support students viewing concepts, issues and themes from the perspective of diverse groups, along with encouraging students to make decisions and take actions to solve important social issues (p. 31).

The next step is to build on this work by including the framework and principles outlined by Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2011) to establish an Anti-Bias/Multi-Cultural practice in predominantly White population. Simply cultivating awareness is insufficient. It is not enough for White people to tolerate People of Color or to simply tweak the current unjust, inequitable system. Rather, White individuals need to undergo a profound shift from viewing the world through a lens of dominance, however unrecognized, to making a commitment to equitable sharing of power and resources. In this process, they will also recognize that the end of systemic and individual racism will humanize and liberate everyone. (p.2)

By working to make these changes to the curriculum in her own classroom and by sharing successes and struggles with others, Stephanie hopes to pave the way for other teachers in the community to join this journey. The experiences from this study are an entry point to discuss opportunities to shift the literature, curriculum, and instruction that shape students’ perspectives, words, and actions.

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Appendix A

Texts Utilized
<p><u>Novel Read Alouds:</u> <i>Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus</i> by Dusti Bowling <i>Save Me a Seat</i> by Sarah Weeks and Gita Varadarajan <i>Ghost Boys</i> by Jewel Parker Rhodes</p>
<p><u>Book Club Selection Options:</u> <i>Mockingbird</i> by Katherine Erskine <i>The Parker Inheritance</i> by Varian Johnson <i>Amina’s Voice</i> by Hena Kahn <i>The Best Man</i> by Richard Peck <i>The First Rule of Punk</i> by Celia C. Pérez <i>Ghost</i> by Jason Reynolds <i>The Harlem Charade</i> by Natasha Tarpley <i>Front Desk</i> by Kelly Yang</p>
<p><u>Picture Books:</u> <i>Julian is a Mermaid</i> by Jessica Love <i>The Last Stop on Market Street</i> by Matt de le Pena <i>Love</i> by Matt de le Pena <i>Festival of Colors</i> by Surishtha Sehgal and Kabir Sehgal <i>One Green Apple</i> by Eve Bunting <i>I Walk with Vanessa : A Story about a Simple Act of Kindness</i> by Kerascoët <i>All Are Welcome</i> by Alexandra Penfold <i>The Day You Begin</i> by Jaqueline Woodson <i>Lila and the Crow</i> by Gabrielle Grimard <i>Morris MickleWhite and the Tangerine Dress</i> by Christine Baldacchino <i>My Name is Bilal</i> by Asma Mobin-Uddin <i>In English, Of Course</i> by Josephine Nobisso <i>The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin</i> by Julia Finley Mosca</p>

Appendix B

Pre/Post Student Questionnaire

What race or ethnicity do you identify as?

(Select all that apply)

- Black
- White
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- Other: _____

Do you feel like our community is a diverse place?

Yes No

Why? What makes it diverse or not diverse?

People are treated differently in our community because of the color of their skin or their cultural background.

Strongly Disagree Disagree
 Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

People are treated differently in our community because of their religion.

Strongly Disagree Disagree
 Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

People are treated differently in our community because of how they act in relation to their gender.

Strongly Disagree Disagree
 Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

People are treated differently in our community because of how much money their parents have.

Strongly Disagree Disagree
Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

People are treated differently in our community if they have physical, mental or emotional challenges.

Strongly Disagree Disagree
Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

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READING CONFERENCES: A PODCAST

Rachel Melnick

The heart of a reading workshop is the quiet buzz of teachers and students collaborating and conversing about reading. Reading conferences are an essential part of a reading workshop, without a doubt. But what happens when you find yourself teaching in an intermediate classroom and the novels that students are reading are unfamiliar to you? And how do you find the time to confer with students in addition to all of the other pressures and demands in the field of education? Logistics can be daunting as well. Conferring with older students about their reading can be intimidating and feel unnatural at times. Even considering all of these legitimate concerns, it can be done!

Using my experiences of holding reading conferences in the intermediate classroom as references, I have created an audio recording which -- I hope -- offers support for busy educators in the field who are seeking ways to incorporate them into their classrooms. I often learn so much from teachers' stories because they are authentic, and they are lived experiences. While research certainly can

present credible findings, hearing or reading about other teachers' experiences helps me to envision the concepts better because I know that someone who is or has taught in a classroom is sharing the reflection. My wish is that I can help you on your reading conference journey through my trials and errors.

In the recording, I discuss my philosophy of how to make conferences work for teachers in today's classrooms by sharing the approaches I've taken to scheduling them into a part of my daily routine, the logistics of how to discuss books that I've never read with my students and how to collect and use conference data. I will refer to Nancy Atwell's (2014) "In the Middle: A Lifetime of Learning About Writing, Reading, and Adolescents", Jennifer Servallo's (2013) "Teaching Reading in Small Groups: Differentiated Instruction for Building Strategic, Independent Readers", and Donalyn Miller's (2009) "The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child." If you've not read those books,

I would highly recommend reading one or all if you have time.

Reading conferences can be successful for intermediate students with teacher commitment, practice, and patience. I wish you the best as you implement them in your classroom.

***Note from the editors: Click here to listen to Rachel's podcast about reading conferences.**

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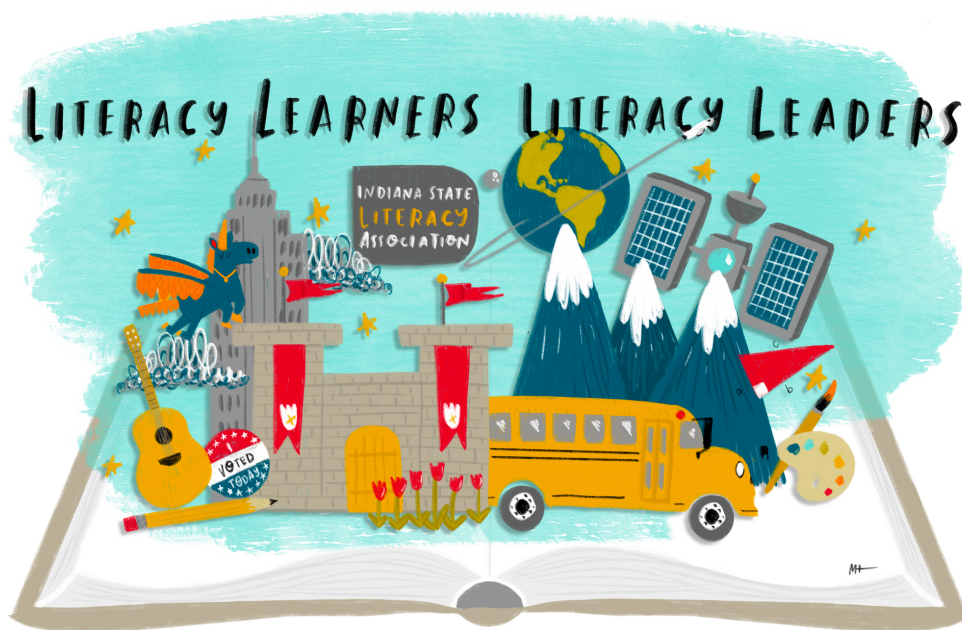


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