

---

# CULTIVATING CONSCIOUSNESS: STUDYING THE IMPACT OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE LITERATURE

---

Stephanie Barrientos & Susan R. Adams

---

## Introduction

As Stephanie<sup>1</sup> turned the page of Jaqueline Woodson's 2012 picture book *Each Kindness*, Rachel's<sup>2</sup> 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

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://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 School<sup>3</sup> (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

---

<sup>3</sup> 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?

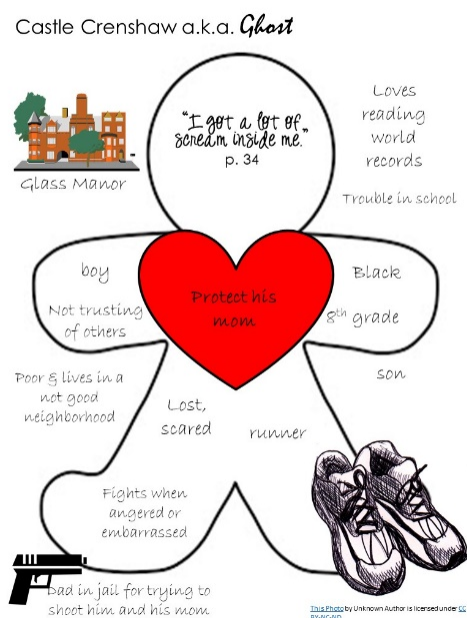
Group murmurs of “No”.

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).

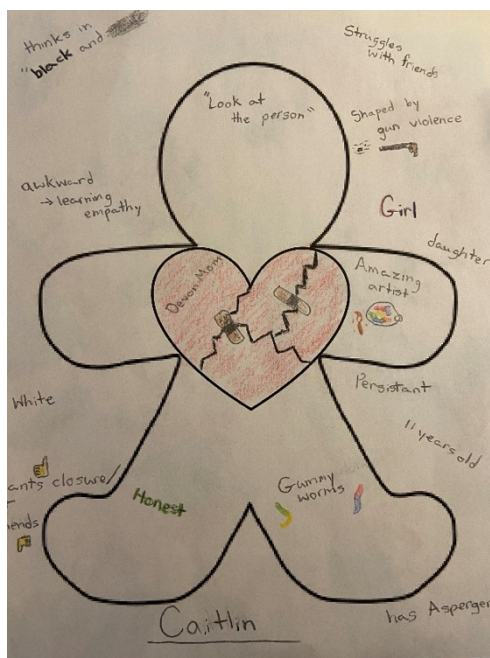
The next time students met with their book clubs, they were asked to discuss character identities with their group. They were encouraged to think about and discuss significant parts of their characters' identity that they had left off because it felt awkward. Students then created "Cultural X-Rays" (Short, 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*



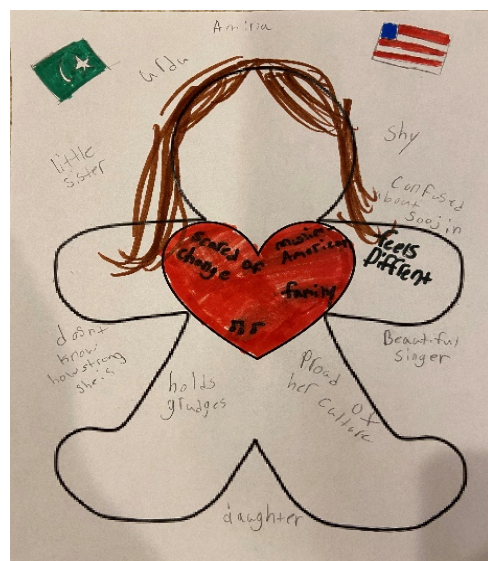
On and around the body figure, students added words and pictures that related to the characters' identity based on how the world saw them. Inside the heart were words describing the character's values, beliefs, and how he/she sees and feels about him/herself.

**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.

## References

- Ahmed, S. (2018). *Being the change: Lessons and strategies to teach social comprehension*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Anderson, G., Herr, K., & Nihlen, A. (2007). *Studying your own school: An educator's guide to practitioner action research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Au, W. (2014). Decolonizing the classroom: Lessons in multicultural education. In W. Au (Ed.), *Rethinking multicultural education: Teaching for racial and cultural justice* (2nd ed., pp. 83-89). Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools.
- Banks, J. A. (1999). *An introduction to multicultural education* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3).
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2003). *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bowling, D. (2017). *Insignificant events in the life of a cactus*. New York, NY: Sterling Books.
- Cochran-Smith, M., & Donnell, K. (2006). Practitioner inquiry: Blurring the boundaries of research and practice. In *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 503-518).
- Czopp, A., & Monteith, M. (2003). Confronting prejudice (literally): Reactions to confrontations of racial and gender bias. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29(4), 532-544.  
doi:10.1177/0146167202250923
- DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Derman-Sparks, L., & Ramsey, P. (2011). *What if all the kids are white? Anti-bias multicultural education with young children and families* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Fergus, E. (2017, February). Confronting colorblindness. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 98(5), 30-35.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0031721717690362>
- Ferlazzo, L. (2015, July 8). 'Culturally responsive teaching': An interview with Zaretta Hammond. Retrieved from Education Week Teacher Blog:  
[https://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom\\_qa\\_with\\_larry\\_ferlazzo/2015/07/culturally\\_responsive\\_teaching\\_an\\_interview\\_with\\_zaretta\\_hammond.html](https://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_qa_with_larry_ferlazzo/2015/07/culturally_responsive_teaching_an_interview_with_zaretta_hammond.html)
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed: 50th anniversary edition*. New York: Bloombury Academic.
- Hermann-Wilmarth, J. (2007). Full inclusion: Understanding the role of gay and lesbian texts and films in teacher education. *Language Arts*, 84(4), 347-356. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/41962203](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41962203)
- Hobson, M. (2014, March). Color blind or color brave? *TED2014*. Retrieved from [https://www.ted.com/talks/mellody\\_hobson\\_color\\_blind\\_or\\_color\\_brave/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/mellody_hobson_color_blind_or_color_brave/transcript?language=en)
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Kozack, S., & Recchia, H. (2018). Reading and the development of social understanding: Implications for the literacy classroom. *The Reading Teacher*, 72(5), 569-577.  
doi:10.1002/trtr.1760
- Mazur, B. (2010). Cultural diversity in organizational theory and practice. *Journal of Intercultural Management*, 2(2), 5-15.

- Millner, D. (2018, March 10). Black kids don't want to read about Harriet Tubman all the time. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/children-literature-books-blacks.html>
- Minor, C. (2016, August 11). *Why #blacklives matter in your classroom too*. Retrieved from Heineman Blog: <https://blog.heinemann.com/why-blacklivesmatter-in-your-classroom-too/>
- Nieto, S. (2008). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education*. Boston, MA: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.
- Oakes, J., & Lipton, M. (2003). *Teaching to change the world* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Oatley, K. (2011). In the minds of others. *Scientific American Mind*, 63-67. Retrieved from [www.jstor.org/stable/24943457](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24943457)
- Rijamampianina, R., & Carmichael, T. (2005). A pragmatic and holistic approach to managing diversity. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 3(1), 109-117. Retrieved from [https://businessperspectives.org/pdfproxy.php?item\\_id:662](https://businessperspectives.org/pdfproxy.php?item_id:662)
- Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, and the poem: The transactional theory of literary work*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Sakamoto, I., & Pitner, R. (2005). Use of critical consciousness in anti-oppressive social work practice: Disentangling power dynamics at personal and structural levels. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 35(4), 435-452. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bch190>
- Short, K. (2009). Critically reading the word and world: Building intercultural understanding through literature. *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, 45, 1-10. [doi:10.1353/bkb.0.0160](https://doi.org/10.1353/bkb.0.0160)
- Sleeter, C., & Grant, C. (1988). *Making choices for multicultural education: Five approaches to race, class, and gender*. Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing.
- Teaching for Change (2020). Social Justice Books: A Teaching for Change Project. Retrieved from <https://socialjusticebooks.org/>
- UNESCO. (2011). *Guidelines for educators on countering intolerance and discrimination against Muslims: Addressing Islamophobia through education*. Warsaw, Poland.
- Weeks, S. & Varadarajan, G. (2016) *Save Me a Seat*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- WeNeedDiverseBooks.org (2020) Retrieved from <https://diversebooks.org/resources/where-to-find-diverse-books/>

## Appendix A

<b>Texts Utilized</b>
<p><b><u>Novel Read Alouds:</u></b>  <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><b><u>Book Club Selection Options:</u></b>  <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><b><u>Picture Books:</u></b>  <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

Stephanie Barrientos is a teacher and instructional coach at Zionsville West Middle School in Whitestown, Indiana. She earned the Butler University College of Education Masters in Effective Teaching and Leading degree in 2019.  
Email: [sbarrientos@zcs.k12.in.us](mailto:sbarrientos@zcs.k12.in.us)

Dr. Susan R. Adams is Associate Professor of Education at Butler University in Indianapolis. A former high school teacher and coach, Susan's publications are included in *Theory into Practice*, *English Journal*, *The New Educator*, and her book, *Race and Pedagogy: Creating Collaborative Spaces for Teacher Transformations* (2016) co-authored with Jamie Buffington-Adams.  
Email: [sradams@butler.edu](mailto:sradams@butler.edu)