

St. John Fisher College

Fisher Digital Publications

Education Masters

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

5-2013

Multicultural Literature: The Impact it has on Today's Students

Michelle Lawson
St. John Fisher College

Follow this and additional works at: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters



Part of the Education Commons

[How has open access to Fisher Digital Publications benefited you?](#)

Recommended Citation

Lawson, Michelle, "Multicultural Literature: The Impact it has on Today's Students" (2013). *Education Masters*. Paper 245.

Please note that the Recommended Citation provides general citation information and may not be appropriate for your discipline. To receive help in creating a citation based on your discipline, please visit <http://libguides.sjfc.edu/citations>.

This document is posted at https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_ETD_masters/245 and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at St. John Fisher College. For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjfc.edu.

Multicultural Literature: The Impact it has on Today's Students

Abstract

Multicultural literature is a tool that should be utilized within the classroom in order to help students see themselves and their own family structures reflected within the writings. This study examines the question: how the use of multicultural texts based on family structures influences children's perceptions of family. Questionnaires, informal observations, discussions, and students written responses were methods utilized to gain an understanding of the students' personal perceptions of family. The findings showed that the participants had preconceived ideas of family and after reading the texts student's personal perceptions were impacted. The implications demonstrated that educators must expose students to multicultural literature and a scaffold discussion following the reading is imperative to furthering students' knowledge and understanding of family structures.

Document Type

Thesis

Degree Name

MS in Literacy Education

Department

Education

Subject Categories

Education

Multicultural Literature:
The Impact it has on Today's Students

By

Michelle Lawson

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

Dr. Joellen Maples

School of Arts and Sciences

St. John Fisher College

May 2013

Abstract

Multicultural literature is a tool that should be utilized within the classroom in order to help students see themselves and their own family structures reflected within the writings. This study examines the question: how the use of multicultural texts based on family structures influences children's perceptions of family. Questionnaires, informal observations, discussions, and students written responses were methods utilized to gain an understanding of the students' personal perceptions of family. The findings showed that the participants had preconceived ideas of family and after reading the texts student's personal perceptions were impacted. The implications demonstrated that educators must expose students to multicultural literature and a scaffold discussion following the reading is imperative to furthering students' knowledge and understanding of family structures.

Multicultural Literature and its Impact on Students' Personal Perceptions of Family

In an ever changing multicultural society, children are exposed to and encounter different cultural backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and others ways of life different than their own. Through the use and implementation of multicultural literature students are able to see themselves and their culture reflected within the writings and illustrations. This type of instructional practice not only helps them as individuals but it also can help them succeed academically. Multicultural literature provides students with a sense of belonging or a sense of affirmation about who they are as individuals. When children do not see themselves reflected in literature, they are more likely to struggle with the reading and less likely to be engaged in the activity or lesson. They may also begin to think that because they do not see themselves reflected within the literature that they are less of a person and start to feel as if other cultures, races, gender, or other backgrounds are more important or valued than theirs. This type of thinking by a student can lead to struggling readers, ambivalent students, and in the worst case, increased dropout rates. The use of multicultural literature can truly impact an educator's and student's experience within the classroom and into the real world. Multicultural is made up of a wide range of texts but mainly focuses on groups that may be at a disadvantage or looked upon to be different.

According to Sanders (2009):

Multicultural literature is a body of literature that spans all literary genres but generally focuses on primary characters who are members of underrepresented groups whose racial, ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, or culture historically has been marginalized or misrepresented by the dominant culture. (p. 194)

Using this type of literature can provide students with a wealth of knowledge that stimulates an ongoing thirst for knowledge and learning. Through the use of multicultural literature, students

are able to start to become more aware and tolerant of the ever changing cultures within society (Evans, 2010). Multicultural literature effects both educators as wells as students in different ways. Students that are considered the minority or “outcasts” for being different find acceptance and solace when their culture is represented and acknowledged within a text. Students that are viewed as mainstream students can also be affected by multicultural literature. Through reading literature, they begin to learn that there are other perspectives and outlooks on life. They also begin to understand that while they don’t conduct their lives in a particular way or manner others ways of doing things that are just as valuable as their own. It also can awaken students’ intelligence, strengths, and interest which can result in affirmation, enlightenment, and inspiration in themselves. Multicultural literature can also play a vital role in in an educator’s life. As educators we have all the chance and ability to get to know our students. By learning about students’ backgrounds and cultures an educator can gain a different perspective on something they had deemed unusual or recognize that mannerism may be seen as misbehaving in their culture but is not misbehavior in another culture (Evans, 2010). Utilizing multicultural literature can be a beneficial and eye opening experience for both educators and students.

Today, children are faced with deafening obstacles that can impact who they are and who they can become. Students who are viewed as different due to their ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender preferences, or family structures can encounter ridicule and ignorance from others. According to the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics report (2012), 69% of children lived in a two parent home, 27% of children lived in a single parent home, and 4% of children lived with grandparents. Racial and ethnic diversity is on the rise and it is speculated that by 2023, less than half of all children will be Caucasian and that by 2050, 39% of all children will be Hispanic (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2012).

Issues such as ethnic differences and varying family make ups can be difficult to deal with for children. Even if a child is not directly dealing with an issue this severe they may know someone who is. Being a child and living in a world with so many obstacles can be challenging especially to a child who does not have the proper tools and resources to deal with them.

Understanding and dealing with the worlds challenges including the emotions they bring can be difficult for children. Within the safety of a classroom, children can have the opportunity to gain the tools they need to deal with any issues they may encounter through the use of multicultural literature. Utilizing multicultural literature is a developmental practice that through the use of certain texts educators can help their students grows emotionally while still helping them develop academically. It is a tool that educators can implement in order to connect to and support their student's individual needs both in and outside the classroom. Multicultural texts deal with a wide range of topics such as divorce, bullying, gender issues, family structures, complex emotions, and tolerance. By allowing children to read texts that focus on various real world issues that they can relate to, this practice gives them the opportunity to make connections to their own lives. Through multicultural literature, a reader is able to see how others deal with their emotions, frustrations, and fears, while providing them with insight on their personal problems. If multicultural literature is not implemented and utilized regularly within the classroom then children will not have the opportunity to develop the tools and resources needed to encounter, experience, and cope with commonly occurring problems of daily life.

Within a classroom environment, multicultural literature can be used to support students in adjusting to and coping with the struggles they encounter. A prevalent issue that children are facing is the diversity in today's family dynamics. Family structure is an ever changing entity that takes on many different forms. Family structures can be made up of various components:

mom and dad, mom, dad, grandparents, aunts, siblings, and other arrangements. Family is something that every student can relate to regardless of who makes up their family unit. Through the use of multicultural literature students are able to make personal connections, see other points of views and family dynamics, while building a foundation of acceptance and understanding.

Taking into consideration the various family structures of each student it is important to understand the importance and significance of implementing multicultural literature within the curriculum. Students are exposed to many different viewpoints within their home, community, and society which help form their own personal perceptions. Through the use of multicultural literature students have the opportunity to see other family structures displayed in a positive manner which can impact their own perceptions and viewpoints. Research was done at St. Michael College (pseudonym) located in Learning New York (pseudonym) with two students during their literacy clinic. Through informal interviews, questionnaires, and written responses a variety of data and information was collected. It was founded that a student's personal perception of family structure can be impacted through the use of multicultural literature.

Theoretical Framework

Over the last several decades, the understanding and knowledge of literacy and its impact on society has become increasingly more aware (Kucer, 2009). Literature has the ability to impact and change children's outlooks through personal connections. Literacy is not only viewed as a critical aspect in the education system but disciplines as different as linguistics, cultural studies, and psychology are developing a better understanding of what a vital role reading and writing plays in all areas of learning.

To fully understand literacy must be defined in its entirety. Various theorists such as Kucer (2009), Gee (1989), and Freebody and Luke (1990) have researched literacy and defined it

in several ways. Kucer (2009) defines it this way, “becoming or being literate means learning to effectively, efficiently, and simultaneously control the linguistic, cognitive, sociocultural, and developmental dimensions of written language in a transactive fashion” (p.5). In other words, literacy is a multidimensional and multifaceted concept with each dimension of literacy adding to the meaning of being literate in today’s society. Freebody and Luke (1990) define literacy as a “multifaceted set of social practices with a material technology, entailing code breaking, participation with the knowledge of the text, social uses of text and analysis/critique of the text” (p. 7). What this definition means for an individual is that in order to be successfully literate one must embrace each of the four roles described by Freebody and Luke. These roles include: code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst.

Gee (1989) defines literacy as “the control of secondary uses of language” (uses of secondary language in secondary discourses) (p.23). He associates a discourse as an “identity kit” one uses that comes complete with different roles and guidelines of how to act and talk when in different situations and settings. He also states that there are two types of discourses: primary and secondary. Gee states that an individual’s primary discourse is “attained through being a part of something” (p.77) In other words, an individual primary discourse is acquired at home and through interactions between family members. The interactions between family members involves the dimension of literacy known as the linguistic dimension (learning to break the code) or how language is used as a way to communicate with one another (Kucer, 2009). All other discourses acquired subsequently are deemed secondary discourses. **An individual’s secondary discourse is** learned through social institutions (ie. School, church, work, etc.). Gee specifically cites “schools” as an example of a secondary Discourse. This helps understand that home and school language, or practices, are not disconnected, but a matter a different Discourses.

There are several different literacy theories that are focused on throughout my research. These theories helped guide my research on multicultural literature. The two main theories are culture as a disability theory and critical literacy theory. The culture as disability theory also relates to the topics seen in multicultural texts. Culture as a disability theory strives to explain why stereotyping individuals is detrimental to society. McDermott & Varenne (1995) state that culture is our organization of society as we believe it should be or how we hope it will be. When society begins to believe and view one group a certain way or believe they should live in a specific manner or demeanor we are limiting them and their potential, and we are not allowing them to move beyond their pre-conceived way of being. It is perceived by many that a family consists of two parents: a mom and a dad. This notion relates back to the age old idea that families live in a nice house, with a white picket fence, a dog and a family that is made up of two parents and the children. That is not the case for all children in our society today. Today, families are made up of many different structures but still built upon the foundation of love. A child should not be deemed “abnormal” because they do not have the “appropriate” family structure which is reinforced by our societal norms.

Another additional literacy perspective that relates to topics in multicultural texts, such as family structure, is critical literacy. Kelly (1997) defines critical literacy as “a literacy of social transformation in which the ideological foundations of knowledge, culture, schooling, and identity-making are recognized as unavoidably political, marked by vested interests and hidden agendas” (p. 377). Critical literacy teaches students’ to use literacy to analyze our social world as a whole and form their own opinions and judgments. According to Kaplan and Smith (2007), “students involved in a critical literacy curriculum read the world and the word, by using dialogue to engage texts and discourses inside and outside the classroom” (p.377). In other

words, critical literacy gives students the ability to not only read the written word but understand the deeper implied messages. Critical literacy is the literacy of empowerment because it allows students to question, analyze, and critically think. Classrooms that embrace critical literacy promote issues of social justice while encouraging acceptance and tolerance of diversity. A critical literacy instructional approach “allows both students and teaches to read a text as a record told from one perspective that can be examined from other perspectives” (Kaplan & Smith, p.378). Educators must teach their students to question what they are reading. Students must ask critical questions in order to fully understand not only the explicit meanings but also the more understated and elusive messages, positions, and attitudes that the discourse presents or assumes (Kucer, 2009). Social issues such as gender, race, and sex can be topics that students need to approach with an open mind. Multicultural literature is the most valuable tool needed to get students to look beyond their own world and gain insight into another’s. Critical literacy used in direct correlation with multicultural literature can be a framework used to get students thinking about others in a critical way and deepening their empathetic response and acceptance of others way of life.

Another part of critical literacy instruction that relates to multicultural literature is that students are shown multiple perspectives within literature. Multicultural literature allows for students to read texts that do not just represent European ideals but portray and give voices to multiple perspectives of others all throughout history. The representation of characters within multicultural literature allows the reader to see a different side other than their own and how that character may deal with such an issue or obstacle. Through reading with a critical lens students have the opportunity to decide which perspective they agree with while still being able to see another’s perspective, also known as critical reflections (Larson and Marsh, 2005). With this

type of instruction the teacher is not imposing an agenda upon their students they are playing the role of “democratic problem poser” (p.15).

Research Question

Given that literacy is a social and cultural experience which takes places during social interaction while building upon personal experiences, this action research project asks, “how the use of multicultural texts based on family structures influences children’s perceptions of family?”

Literature Review

The topic for my literature review is that of multicultural literature and the use of it within the classroom. As stated by Stallworth, Gibbons, and Faubern (2006) “multicultural literature can provide mirrors through which students can read about situations that resemble their own worlds and discover the richness of cultures other than their own while learning to appreciate and respect differences” (p. 480). Multicultural literature is a tool that educators must embrace to allow their students the opportunity to enrich their knowledge, tolerance, and understanding of others cultures and differences.

Throughout this literature review, I will be discussing why multicultural literature should be implemented within the curriculum and daily lessons. I will be focusing on three themes that I found amongst the latest research done on multicultural literature. The following literature review synthesizes current research involving teacher based perceptions on multicultural education and literature, reading and responding to multicultural literature through a critical literacy lens, and the representation and effective instruction of multicultural texts within the classroom.

Teacher Based Perceptions on Multicultural Education and Literature

In an ever changing multicultural society, it is vital that educators have the proper knowledge and understanding of how to implement and utilize multicultural literature. Heath (1982) demonstrates how a child's culture can play a key role in their acquisition of literacy. Educators must not let their own personal perceptions that people use to form judgments and draw conclusions about the characteristics and motives of other people, impact our teaching. Educators must see past dialects, cultures, and "the mainstream norms" and expect all our students to perform at a high level. It is an educator's responsibility to be able to assess each child's individual need and give them the correct support (Kucer, 2009). In order to effectively instruct students, all educators need to be aware of the differences between various cultures and dialects and should use these differences as teaching tools rather than as a handicap. According to Almarza (2005): An educator must "be prepared to teach all children in the schools of today and tomorrow, teachers must have and understanding of the diversity of the present in heterogeneous classrooms" while the "recognition and celebration of the individual child be of paramount importance" (p.530). Everyone has their own opinions, views, and ideas about the world but an educator must put their personal perceptions aside. An educator should become the models of thinking they seek to encourage in their students. With a clear understanding of multicultural literature, educators have the ability to assist students as they develop philosophies and attitudes toward text. Preservice educators need to be exposed to a wealth of knowledge about various multicultural literatures throughout their schooling and while they continue their journey into the classroom. It is an educator's responsibility to refine their interpersonal skills, increase their knowledge and awareness of other cultures, and facilitate lessons and activities that include students from diverse backgrounds (Brinson, 2012). Educators must learn how to be

reflective and consciously aware of their own belief and morals and how these ideas can and may affect their pedagogy and instruction. Educators may try to “protect” or “shield” their students from real life situations and perspectives. These practices “maintain schools as unauthentic spaces that are a part of a Dick-and-Jane world, creating an environment that is disconnected from children’s everyday experiences and makes classrooms appear to be places where one cannot engage in anything real or important” (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2010, p. 88). In response to this way of “sheltered” teaching, it is apparent that the use of multicultural literature is an effective way to bring students cultural background into the classroom. It is also a way to get students to become more aware of their own cultural models while beginning to understand others in a multicultural society.

Students should be seen as individual and not viewed as groups or minorities by educators and if they are then seen as such it is evident the educator is lacking in their culturally responsive pedagogy. A culturally responsive educator is able to see that all students are capable of learning, so therefore they will be able to create lessons and activities based on multicultural literature that help connect students to larger social context. Walker (2011) discusses the deficit thinking theory in which students are labeled and looked down upon as a result of their poor socioeconomic status, cultural traditions, and family structures. Educators that follow the deficit thinking paradigm can use a student’s ethnicity as an excuse for their failure. Weiner (2006) states that educators that corresponded their teaching with the deficit thinking paradigm believed unless a student was able to change various factors such as family background, cultural practices, and family structures would have minimal to no success in an academic setting. In order for children to be successful both in a school setting and in society, they must develop a wide range of language competencies and be able to accurately implement them in a variety of settings. This

demonstrates that an educator must embrace their student's difference and help them succeed despite of the educator preconceived ideas about an individual in regards to race, culture, or family structure. Similarly, in a study done by Walker (2011) which focused on analyzing an educator's perceptions of their own African American students and if their perceptions affected how they instructed the students. The selected educators were evaluated through several different methods such as questionnaires, reflective journals, and informal interviews to establish trustworthiness. Throughout the study, several key themes emerged that demonstrated that the educators were not using culturally responsive pedagogy within their classroom. In the completion of this study, it showed that one of the main themes was the educators did not acknowledge ones ethnic or racial background as part of their culture but defined culture as one's family, beliefs, and religion. This study demonstrated a lack of cultural competence which indicated a need for continuing professional development pertaining to multicultural instruction. Other themes that were exposed throughout Walker's study indicated that while the educators could be deemed to be successful based upon standardized test scores and their abilities to develop students academically they still lacked the ability to incorporate their students culture as a basis of learning within the curriculum. Correspondingly in another study lead by Suh, Hinton, Marken and Lee (2011) the focus was on how an educators' own cultural identities might influence the instruction of multicultural literature. In the completion of this study, the results indicated that there were several factors that lead to educators struggling with utilizing multicultural texts such as cultural identity, discomfort related to cultural identity, and historical accuracy. When instructing with multicultural literature, the educators admitted to feeling uncomfortable due to their own emotional cultural responses to the text's content. Other educators indicated that when reading texts pertaining to their own cultures or other topics that

they strongly identified with negatively impacted their instructional approach instead of “advocating for a neutral approach by the educator which would challenge students to explore their own thinking and examine their own reactions” (Weiner, 2006, p.29). In other words, educators must put aside their own emotions or perceptions brought about by a text and model multiple perspectives thinking in the classroom. This type of thinking by an educator will encourage students to be more open to using multicultural literature as a way to challenge their own thinking and personal beliefs. In conclusion, these findings, in correlation with Walker (2011), suggest that educators need to enhance their awareness of multiple interpretations and views of multicultural texts while understanding their own personal biases and allowing them to not obstruct their level of instruction.

In addition, Fong and Sheets (2004) conducted a study examining how educators’ conceptualization of multicultural literature impacted how they implement it into their everyday activities. In the completion of this study, it was indicated that an educator must recognize their own perceptions while continually seeking ways to understand the cultures of their students. Walker (2011), Fong and Sheets (2004), and Suh, Hinton, Marken and Lee (2011) agree that an educator’s understanding, knowledge, and perception of multicultural education can have an impact on its implementation in the classroom. Educators may struggle with implementing the correct material or literature within their curriculum due to confusion, frustration, lack of resources, and/or limited instructional time. Instead of viewing multicultural literature as a way to connect to a student’s prior cultural knowledge, many educators struggle with finding an engaging and authentic way to incorporate multicultural literature. When educators begin to fully understand that becoming more aware of their own cultural positions, beliefs, and filters through

which they view culture, language, class, and ethnicity they have the ability to affirm students' lives, language, cultural context, and voice.

Almarza (2005) states that in teaching multiculturalism to preservice educators, there should be less emphasis on the traditional approach to teaching and more emphasis should be placed on realistic, meaningful, and authentic experiences in real world diverse classrooms. Experiencing multicultural education, for preservice educators, must consist of authentic learning opportunities and should involve self-reflections and groups discussion with fellow colleagues that allow for deeper understandings. Through a more realistic and authentic approach to multicultural education, preservice educators are able to build upon their own perceptions, beliefs, and emotions. In correspondence with Almarza (2005), Fong and Sheets (2004) also argue that throughout an educators educational journey they must read diverse literature, seek out culturally inclusive instructional resources, and attend any and every professional development workshop that can further help open their own minds about multicultural literature. This type of learning exposes preservice educators to field experiences that strengthen what they are academically learning in their own classroom while they gain experience in real classrooms that are full of a multitude of cultures, races, genders, and ethnicities. McKoy- Lowery and Sabis-Burns (2007) express that teachers cannot be expected to implement multicultural literature that they know little or nothing about. In other words, an educator must be familiar with the importance and significance of how, why, and what to teach within their classrooms and that can be only learned through a multicultural education. In addition, through authentic field experience an educator is developing their knowledge of "reflecting on practical situations in which a personal need for learning was created" (Almarza, 2005, p.530). Therefore, instead of a preservice educators focusing strictly on procedural concerns and following the "routine", they

should shift their focus to utilizing multicultural literature in their classrooms. They should follow this routine so they are able to adapt to the use of inquiry-orientated activities, interactions amongst their colleagues, and the development of reflective skills.

In agreement, Thein, Barbas, Carnevali, Fox, Mahoney, and Vensel (2012) state that, in order to effectively instruct students using multicultural literature, an educator must be active participants in their own learning and teaching of others. When educators approach multicultural texts with creativity, reflection, and with a purpose to engage their students in innovative activities then they are less likely to be influenced by their own personal perceptions. Thein et al. strongly state that educators should have continuous professional development that will increase their knowledge of new and current research on multicultural education while strengthening their abilities to teach effectively using multicultural texts. In other words, there is a critical and comprehensive need for both preservice and inservice educators to increase their own cultural knowledge through professional development. Walker (2011), Almarza (2005), Suh et al, and Lee (2011) argue that educators' own process of learning is never ending, and should continue on past the preparation stages of college. They agree that an educators' learning process is an ongoing journey that is cultivated through many experiences and further academic development. This process is one that entails professional development, collaboration with fellow colleagues, and exploration of current research. Students seek guidance from educators and educators nurture their needs through respect and acceptance of who they are and how they live their lives. As seen through the research of Heath (1982) and Meier (2003), children's cultures play a great role in their acquisition of literacy. Children, no matter their culture or dialect, should be expected to perform at a high level with the correct support. Literacy educators need to be aware of the differences between various cultures and dialects and should use these differences as

teaching tools. It is not enough for a teacher to be aware of the differences between their students' cultures and dialects but an effective literacy teacher will build upon students' prior knowledge and language base in order to help them formulate another language base to coincide with their existing one.

Reading and Responding to Multicultural Literature through a Critical Literacy Lens

Cultural diversity is seen throughout classrooms across the world and is becoming an important part of school curriculums and educators pedagogies. Educators have the responsibility of using multicultural texts within their classrooms in order to help children develop a deeper and more knowledgeable understanding and respect of other cultures. As defined previously, literacy enables a student to make meaning from a text. Through the use of multicultural literature, students are asked to push past the traditional boundaries of reading and writing and confront social, economic, or political issues head on. They are asked to be engaged in, critique, and look at situations from multiple perspectives. The overarching concept that guides the framework and use of multicultural literature in a classroom is viewing it through a critical lens. Kelly (1997) defines the critical literacy perspective as “a literacy of social transformation in which the ideological foundations of knowledge, culture, schooling, and identity-making are recognized as unavoidably political, marked by vested interests and hidden agendas”. Critical literacy is founded in the belief that an educator has the ability to use literature as a tool to expose students to experiences that foster empowering thoughts and transformative actions. Critical literacy enables student's to see how texts can be socially situated while allowing for a deeper understanding of social contexts (Glenn –Wake & Modla, 2008). Through critical literacy students are able to develop a lens in which they view literature in a more analytical, reflective, social, and critical manner. The critical literacy perspective also requires students to become

active participants during the reading process. Students are expected to read for real purposes, authentic experiences, and to evoke social action and change within one's self.

The implementation of multicultural literature within the classroom can expose students not only to others cultures and ways of life but it also allow them to look at literature using the critical literacy theory. Children of all ages have the ability to be able to look at literature through a critical lens thus making them into critical readers. Critical readers can only accurately develop if educators implement and instruct through the critical literacy approach. Crowley, Fountain, and Torres, (2012) discuss that the use of multicultural literature will begin to enhance a student's respect of other individuals, develop empathetic responses to not only multicultural literature but to various groups of people, and deepen their awareness of the impact many minorities groups have had within history. Through a critical lens, multicultural literature can expose children to other cultures, enhance students' self-concept and awareness of personal cultural heritage, and help children realize inequities in society while encouraging students to recognize prejudice and social injustices. During Ghiso, Campano, and Hall's (year) study literature was used that had illustrations and panoramic representation of groups of people with blurred faces that underscore the vast number of people involved in collective projects for change. This study is another example of how multicultural literature acknowledges contributions of minorities throughout our history while exposing children to this viewpoint. According to Evans (2010), the practice of critical literacy with multicultural literature provides students with the tools and resources needed to question, analyze, and address social injustices. Critical literacy not only encourages critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one's world but allows for students to be aware of the sociocultural aspects of the world and their surroundings. Critical literacy encourages readers to read between the lines and uncover implicit

messages within texts while scrutinizing all aspects of discourse. Evans states that the main objective of viewing multicultural literature through a critical lens is to go beyond the basic understandings of reading and writing and develop a way of reading that includes distinguishing connections between the students' lives and the social structures of the text, critiquing and analyzing of texts, while moving towards transformation of one's self and one's world.

However, for viewing multicultural literature through a critical lens to be used within the classroom properly, educators must have a basic understanding of literary theory while understanding that critical literacy is an overall philosophy and not just a set of techniques. According to Smith and Singer (2003), "utilizing literature that is multicultural helps to create a climate that welcomes diversity in the classroom, whatever the racial, gender, or cultural constituency of the class" (p. 17). By utilizing multicultural literature students are able to see themselves reflected in the literature within their classrooms. The instruction of reading through a critical lens is geared toward taking a student's response about a text from 'reader response' to 'critical response'. Some critical response questions can be: "Who made, constructed, or originated the perspective and ideas in this text? Who might need to learn this perspective and these ideas? Are any stereotypes represented or challenged?" (Kucer, 2009, p. 257) These types of critical response questions go beyond the normal comprehension questions such as the within, beyond, and about text. They urge readers to think about why a text was written and its audience. Critical response questions can also encourage critical discussions. According to Herman-Wilmarth (2010), by asking students to look at multicultural literature through a critical lens and partake in critical discussions is asking them to leave their comfort zones and explore real life issues which. Educators need to create a safe environment where the students are able to engage in similar activities that address the issues of society while promoting discussions that embrace

critical literacy practices. According to Thein, Guise, and Sloan (2011) educators should be active participants during student-led discussions thereby leading them with nonjudgmental language such as “I wondered” or “I noticed”. These types of questions can direct students without imposing on their own thoughts and opinions.

Educators should also listen carefully and only ask authentic questions that promote further elaboration and exploration of a topic. This type of questioning is known as scaffolding or modeling by the educator. These methods of questions are effective ways to approach instructing how to become a critical reader because it allows for consideration of other perspectives and views while encouraging students to challenge the status quo. Moller (2012) states that while creating atmospheres for discussions of literature that contain social justice themes thought they can be risky and hold uncertainties, they can also have limitless possibilities for the students mind. Through various texts that characterize and portray different cultures, educators are able to utilize them as a resource in the classroom to embrace student’s diverse surroundings (Moller). The use of different texts begins to address and breakdown certain cultural biases, stereotypes, and assumptions of a specific set of values or dominant “European traditions” seen through literature. Moller (2012), Glenn –Wake and Modla (2008) agree that critical literacy allows for students voices and ideas to be heard, respected, and seen as valuable knowledge. Students would no longer be seen as “passive receptacles of information” but as people who are capable of questioning the world around them and understanding, all the while analyzing the use of authentic dialogue. Implementing multicultural literature into everyday use, while using it as a tool to teach critical literacy students are able to explore different worlds, cultures, and discourses.

Another part of critical literacy instruction is that students should be shown multiple perspectives in their responses which give them opportunities to read different perspectives. Through this critical approach, students have the opportunity to decide which perspective they agree with while still being able to see another's perspective, also known as critical reflections (Larson and Marsh, 2005). With this type of instruction the teacher is not imposing an agenda upon their students; rather they are playing the role of "democratic problem poser"(cite). As discussed in Glenn –Wake and Modla (2008) study, it is important to have students understand the sociocultural values that may be embedded in the literature that they are reading. This type of instruction promotes multiple-perspective thinking in students. Larson and Marsh (2005) provided many examples of critical reflection and multiple perspectives based upon an educator that incorporated critical literacy and multicultural education into her curriculum. The study showed the educator held daily 'class meetings' where students presented on a range of topics that were up for discussion. These results in correlation with Glenn –Wake and Modla (2008) study indicated that an educator must not lead class discussions but allow students to take the lead fostering independent thinking regarding the literature. By allowing student lead discussions to happen students have the chance to listen to others perspectives while critically reflecting on the topics addressed.

Critical literacy gives the reader the chance to see how texts can contain socially constructed views and how the texts can be used as tools to better understand other social justices. Thein, Guise, and Sloan (2011) conducted a study in which students read multicultural texts such as *Bastards out of Carolina* and then conducted literature circles to see if engaging students in discussions of current, relevant, political, and multicultural texts would change their perspectives of diversity and other cultures. As a result, students started to make connections

with the characters in the selected texts while increasing their awareness about different morals, views, and social practices of cultures other than their own. It was seen through group discussion that students were able to make real meaning of characters and situations, while also posing authentic questions to their peers that emerged organically within the literature circles. Although students gained knowledge within their literature groups, the results show that more teacher involvement within the discussions may be needed (Thein, Guise, and Sloan). This study demonstrated that students cannot be given multicultural texts and be expected to analyze it critically without being given the needed support by an educator. Educators should lead discussions with students about texts using scaffolding questions like, “Who is always in the background of the story” or “What do you think the writer wants the reader to think or feel” that may challenge societal views (p. 23). This type of questioning gives the students the chance to interpret, and analyze, and critically think all on their own without being guided by specific questions. In a similar study, conducted by Evans (2010) students were read aloud multicultural books to see if the texts impacted their perspectives of diversity. At the onset of this study it was found that students began to appreciate differences among ethnic groups, develop new perspectives, and eliminate ethnocentrism. Through the read aloud, students were able to see how others go through experiences similar to their own while developing strategies to cope with issues in their own lives.

Also in another study done by Dressel (2005) it was found that a majority of the students were affected in a positive manner when reading and responding to multicultural literature. During this study, two thirds of the students were able to connect and reflect thoughtful understanding of a nondominant group. While many showed increased awareness of other cultures and groups, it was shown that educators of dominant-culture students need to read

multicultural texts on a consistent basis in order for their students to gain knowledge and experience with alternative views of the world. Educators can incorporate texts that offer different perspectives and views which help students discover underlying ideologies. In addition to Dressel (2005), Louie (2005) provided another study that demonstrates the development of student's empathetic responses to multicultural literature. In the completion of this study, it was found that as students began to understand how Chinese people lived they were able to express empathy in their discussions and written responses. Many students felt that learning about other cultures would help them be more aware to the happenings within their own community and society. Throughout various studies (Evans, 2010; Moller, 2012; Thein, Guise, and Sloan, 2011; Dressel, 2005; Louie, 2005) it was shown that while reading multicultural literature students have the opportunity to gain insight and develop a deeper understanding about gender, family, class, and race. Multicultural literature and the use of critical literacy have the ability to empower students to work toward change. Through critical literacy, students increase their knowledge, skills, and values needed to critically negotiate and transform the world in which they find themselves.

Both Evans (2010) and Dressel (2005) concur that incorporating critical literacy within a lesson can be tricky if an educator does not approach it in the correct way. First an educator must select a developmentally appropriate text for the students and preview the material prior to introducing it to the class. This way of instruction gives an educator a chance to preview vocabulary, key events, and other critical aspects to the text prior to a read aloud. As specified by Glenn –Wake and Modla (2008) “critical literacy is grounded in the beliefs that the teaching of is never neutral, is focused in equity and shared decision –making, is empowering, and leads to transformative action” (p.180). In other words, multicultural literature has the ability to open

minds, provoke action, and encourage change within all that read it using a critical lens. Through critical questions an educator can get students to question and challenge the status quo, examine underlying messages within the text, rethink text, self, and world, while exploring and understanding multiple perspectives of the read the world.

Representation and Effective Instruction of Multicultural Texts within the Classroom

Today's classrooms are made up of the larger society consisting of a sea of faces representing a plurality of races, cultures, genders, and ethnicities. In order to effectively instruct all the various groups of student, educators must create a sense of interconnectedness by utilizing and implementing multicultural texts within the curriculum. Ghiso, Campano, and Hall (2012) claim that:

Despite progress in the publishing field, children's literature does not fully reflect the world of many 21st century schools, which increasingly house students who communicate in numerous languages, claim multiple identities, and often have ties that extend beyond our nation's borders. (p.15)

As students read various storybooks that have been published within the last several decades they are led to believe that the majority of families consist of a mother, father and their children. Other story books only represent European dominated ideologies and values that leave children of different cultures and ethnicities feeling ostracized and unable to make personal connections with the characters. In today's classrooms, it is becoming glaringly obvious that the once "happily-ever after" stereotypical texts used are neither conducive nor reflective of the students within their classrooms. Educators use picture books and other texts within their activities as tools to motivate their students. This instructional practice makes it essential for the texts to be chosen accurately to represent the realities of the students own experiences. Glenn- Wake and

Modla (2008) claimed that multicultural literature fosters an educated awareness of other cultural customs, beliefs, and values while promoting their own experiences including theirs and others' cultures. Through multicultural literature, students are able to see portrayals of various cultures, families, genders, ethnicities, and values in a way that promotes acceptance and tolerance of others' cultures and differences. Educators have the ability to allow children to see cultures through different viewpoints through exposure to different texts. These texts can help support and encourage students in recognizing their prejudices and prejudgments while showing them they can critically question societal views of what is deemed to be "normal" and "acceptable." In other words, multicultural literature has the ability to allow students to be individuals who have their own personal beliefs and perspective on life. Brinson (2012) states that students must read literature that promotes individualized expression while increasing self-confidence. There are a variety of genres such as fairytales, legends, and realistic fiction that not only engages students' interest but gives them a "strong self-worth". As stated by Herman-Wilmarth (2010), utilizing multicultural literature is an essential tool used to enhance discussion of cultural issues ranging from sexual identity to culture biases. Students are able to approach social justice issues in a safe environment created by the educator. In addition, students are able to use the literature as a starting point for discussions that will "lead students to reflect on the limitation and relative nature of their own cultural model, and orientation essential for life in an increasingly multicultural society" (p.188). Moreover, it provides the students with an opportunity to not only learn about others' cultures and ways of life but facilitate discussions that may challenge their own thinking.

With this type of instruction in mind, a school must have the resources needed to incorporate multicultural literature in the classroom. Many schools do not have enough varieties

of text pertaining to various multicultural topics. By obtaining a variety of literature that characterizes a variety of cultures and traditions, students will better be able to identify how they view the world and what their perceptions are. Students will also get the opportunity to consider and critically address issues in their surrounding community and within society. Hardie (2011) addresses the lack of texts found within school libraries that accurately represent aspects such as same-sex marriages or diverse family structures. Due to the lack of picture books that are representative of children who have same-sex parents or with themes of diverse family structure students who shared these similarities had limited access to texts that characterize or reflect their own family makeups. In completion of the study, it was founded that out of 58 schools within the New Zealand school district showed a significant lack of picture books that addressed diverse family themes. In addition, Spence (2010) also researched the prevalence of gay-related themed books across a diverse population of libraries across five countries, with a direct focus on the United States. The study was based upon question pertaining to the amount of gay themed books were found in elementary libraries, what was the tone of the texts that were of gay-related in nature, what a libraries process in selection of texts is, and what titles are seen to be most widely held in elementary libraries. The findings suggest that there were fewer gay themed texts across the selected libraries and decreased with the population of the place. The research showed that the libraries residing in places with a larger diverse population may not only have more of a budget for such titles but may also have more of a demand for multicultural literature. While a percentage of selected texts that were available in libraries predominantly had gay characters in supporting roles while twenty-nine out of the one hundred and one titles promoted acceptance and tolerance. These results are similar to the study conducted by Howard (2002) including analyst on sexually orientated or diverse family themed pictures books within Canadian school

libraries. Various findings showed that certain libraries are significantly more likely to purchase other texts than texts that focus on gay or lesbian themes. In other words, these students have limited availability to texts that may show reflection of their own families or provoke critical thinking. Through such literature students are able to break down preconceived barriers and look at other cultures in a different way (Howard, 2002). It is essential that school libraries incorporate books that reflect student's racial, ethnic, and cultural background. This way student are able to make connections while seeing how others are like them and how literature can impact their perceptions of others. If students are not able to read literature that they can relate to, it may be harder for the students to enjoy a story and gain the desired knowledge from the text. Selecting the correct literature to use within the classroom can be just as difficult as finding it in the library. According to Sanders (2009), selecting quality multicultural literature is a process that begins with evaluating if the text embodies particular and unique qualities of a group's experiences and if that text allows for critical thinking. Students must be able to use literature as an avenue in developing a deeper understanding of other individuals or groups. Many students start to develop their own beliefs, values, and morals from childhood which can lead to preconceived judgments that could alienate another culture or group. Children begin to build their own understandings at home through interactions with family members, their community, and the type of texts that are accessible to them. The texts that they may encounter at home may only represent their own culture, race, beliefs, and values. Many students have been exposed to one way of life which can lead to a disadvantage for them. The lack of exposure children may get at home to multicultural literature can lead to ignorance or lack of acceptance of other cultures, how they may choose to live their lives, and what is most important in their cultures. When children enter an academic setting they are exposed to various types of

multicultural texts that show representations of others cultures and ways of life that are outside of what they are already familiar with and have learned thus far. Being exposed to multicultural literature will assist students in recognizing and being accepting of many cultures living within society. It can also allow them to see that while we are all different we are still community of people.

Similarly, Ghiso, Campano, and Hall (2012) concur that the use of multicultural literature can be a powerful tool to use to foster social justice inquiry and demonstrate to students that “we are indeed all in this together” (p.15). Throughout history, there are various representations of how events occurred and how they are portrayed in literature. Students have the opportunity to gain a more accurate and authentic understanding of the past through multicultural literature. Through research, Ghiso et al. (2012) analyze to what extent children’s literature accurately addresses shared histories, identities, and experiences and how it might impact the students’ personal perceptions. With that in mind, educators must introduce students to literature that can help them clarify their understandings and misunderstandings of cultures and other historical events. The use of various multicultural gives children the chance to see different representations of aspects such as social cooperation and the interconnectedness of society and humanity as a whole. In a comparable study conducted by Ebe (2010), the relationship between reading proficiency and cultural relevance of multicultural literature was presented to students through a wide range of texts. This type of data was collected to see if the literature impacted their social awareness and personal perceptions. In completion of the study, the findings showed that students are more willing to participate in readings and class discussions when the literature is relatable to them. Students want to see characters that reflect themselves, settings and plots that they can understand, and the ability to use their prior knowledge to make connections with.

Through the use of multicultural literature students are able to explore different worlds, cultures, and uses of language. They can take they have learned and apply that to changing or broadening their own ideas and understandings of the world. Through the literature the students are able to see the similarities and differences and can learn to appreciate both theirs and others' cultures. When students begin to understand and recognize, if just in the classroom setting, that our differences make us as people and a society that much stronger.

Another aspect of multicultural instruction is based on the sociocultural-historical theory which emphasizes both collaborative and social learning. Larson and Marsh (2005) present a case study that demonstrates how educators can create a curriculum that promotes authentic sociocultural practices and collaboration. As seen throughout the study, the educator "provides experiences which extend students'" everyday lives by moving beyond 'exposure' to genuine participation in experiences that give students access to literacy practices, cultural capital, and discourses of power commonly denied them in more traditional classrooms" (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p.35). The study demonstrates a community of learners who incorporate social learning into their many different activities that they participate in. The literacy practices seen throughout the study relates to practice of everyday life while highlighting many authentic literacy practices that built upon both school-based learning and multimodal literacies needed to participate in today's society (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Therefore, students are able to take their own literacy practices and apply them to school literacies such as understanding multicultural literature. In correlation with Larson and Marsh, Smith and Singer (2003), also agree that multicultural literature gives students the opportunity to be collaborative while experiencing social learning. Smith and Singer and conducted a study that showed that through dramatic play and interpretation students were able to develop a better understanding of what they were reading.

Subsequently, educators should have the goal of creating an anti-bias library within their classrooms that includes a wide variety of culturally relevant and multicultural literature. This type of environment begins the foundation students need to begin their journey into understanding others' cultures, backgrounds, and ways of life. Literature is a powerful resource in providing students with various exposures to positive images and stimulating material that enhances students' self-esteem, involvement and engagement, and academic performances. In order for an educator to be effective they must understand that the process of literacy learning is not easily identifiable. It is up to the educator to decide how they will instruct their students in multicultural literacy and which perspective or theory on literacy instruction they believe to be true. Not every educator will agree with, or use the same methods or ideas on how to teach students about multicultural literacy but recognizing multicultural literature as valuable tools to utilize while creating a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Conclusion

Given what the research tells us about literacy instruction for students through multicultural literature, several inferences are apparent for educators. First and foremost, educators must be properly educated in order to create a balanced and culturally representative literature curriculum. Educators must do a number of steps in creating a balanced and culturally representative curriculum. One of the first implications shown within the research is educators must be current and knowledgeable concerning new texts that are available. They also must feel comfortable in teaching their students about controversial and socially just subjects. According to Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber (2006), an educator intentionally exposes students to types of literature that evoke different ways of thinking, portrays various ways of life, and demonstrates

events that may be different from their own experiences. In addition to accurate education, educators must be aware of their own personal biases and perceptions toward cultures different from their own. By acknowledging and recognizing your own perceptions and biases can better equip an educator in instruction students on different subjects and literature that will address socially just issues. An individual students' success or failure can be in direct correlation with an educators beliefs, perceptions, and personalities rather than the curriculum, materials and class environment. Since educators are such vital resources in student's academic success, they should not only be reflecting on themselves, but should also assist the students in self-reflection and connecting with their own cultural backgrounds. While some students may be knowledgeable about their ethnic, racial, or cultural background others may be effected and brainwashed by the dominant ideologies that they struggle with knowing the importance are of their own culture and who they are.

With the increasing diverse population of students filling our classrooms it is critical that multicultural literature is present in the classroom for students to be able to see themselves represented within the literatures. Through the use of multicultural literature not only do students benefit but educators are able to create a classroom environment that fosters community, acknowledges diversity, promotes acceptance, and celebrates all cultures. Multicultural literature is a powerful tool that enables students to construct messages and meaning from text about their culture and roles within society. The selected literature should characterize various, if not all, groups of students within our schools. The literature should include story lines representing different races, genders, sexual orientations and preferences, ethics, language, and backgrounds. Utilizing multicultural literature that encompasses a diverse society not only encourages,

motivates, and engages students while they read, it also helps students develop a better understanding of topics such as acceptance, tolerance, inclusiveness, diversity, and respect for others. In addition, students have the opportunities to see how other individuals experience situations that are similar to their own, while developing strategies to deal with issues in their lives, and to identify with their culture.

Method

Context

Research for this study will take place at St. Michael College (pseudonym). St. Michael College is a private liberal arts college located in Learning, New York (pseudonym), an eastern suburb of Rochester. St. Michael's is ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* among the Doctoral Research Universities (DRU), which reflects the college's growth in the area of doctoral program offerings. St. Michael's is private college that is made up of 3,832 students which out of that number at least 2,878 are full-time. The student to faculty ratio is 14:1. The percentage of student body receiving any type of financial aid is 98%. The ethnic make-up of the school is 83.7% Caucasian; 5.5% African American; 3.4% Hispanic; 2.9% Asian; and 0.4% American Indian while the gender demographics is 61% female to 39% male. The research obtained for this study will be conducted during the graduate course Practicum. Practicum is a literacy clinic where graduate students work with K-12 students either one on one or in a small group setting to provide explicit, thorough, and individualized instruction in areas such as reading, word study, and writing. The mission statement of this literacy clinic states:

We are committed to providing high-quality, meaningful reading and writing instruction to a diverse group of children entering grades one through twelve. By providing our services on the campus of St. Michael College, we are affording urban, suburban, and rural children an educational experience in a new and exciting environment; one in which these struggling readers and writers have not experienced failure. At the same time, we are offering our graduate candidates an opportunity to investigate research-based literacy practices with high-need children in a focused, supportive setting. (SJFC Reading Clinic mission statement, p. 1)

The graduate students will spend two hours for four weeks with their students using formative assessments, writing samples, running reading records, and interview data to properly assess where their students' needs may be. After all the information is collected the graduate students then devise a plan for specified instruction for their students. During this course the use of differentiated instruction, and applying contextualized teaching and learning techniques that draw upon the students' experiences and prior knowledge are implemented. The study occurred within one of the classrooms in the education wing at St. Michael College.

The specific group that will participate in this research study will consist of two students and the researcher. One student is male and the other is female, they are both of Caucasian decent. Grade levels represented in the group include fourth and fifth. These two students both attend Learning Central School District (pseudonym). Learning is a public school district in New York State that serves approximately 5960 students in the towns of Learning, Academic, and Achieving (pseudonym) in Max County; and Victory in Success County(pseudonym).

Participants

The participants for this study will include two students both from the Learning Central School District. Both of the participants in the study come from middle to high socioeconomic backgrounds. The participating students are on grade level and perform at the appropriate instructional level.

Daniel (pseudonym) is a 10 year old boy, who is currently in fourth grade at Park Elementary School in Learning, New York. Daniel is an energetic, creative, and friendly young man. He enjoys playing basketball, doing magic tricks with his family and friends, and playing video games. He also loves food and snacks. Daniel's family consists of a younger brother who is seven, his mom, and dad. His interests in literature are non-fiction, graphic novels, and realistic fiction. Daniel enjoys school and his favorite subject is science. His teachers for this current year have reported that he is very interactive with his peers and does not struggle with making connections with others. They have stated that he has difficulty when asked to engage or respond to literature both orally or written. Daniel has a tough time when asked to complete a task without support or assistance. He is motivated through praise, encouragement, and engaging activities that he can make personal connections to. According to last year's completion of Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, Daniel was reading instructionally at a level S.

Julianna (pseudonym) is a 11 year old girl, who is currently in fifth grade at Park Elementary School in Learning, NY. Julianna is a very creative and social young lady. She enjoys writing poetry, swimming, playing volleyball, and spending time with her family. Julianna's interests in literature are non-fiction, mysteries, fantasy, and realistic fiction. Julianna enjoys reading and creating her own stories. Julianna's mother has indicated that she enjoys

school and is always eager to learn something new. She stated that Julianna struggles with comprehension and has problems retelling the events or key points of a story. Julianna has indicated to me that would like to work on responding to writing prompts and organizing what she has read. According to this year's completion of Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment, Julianna is reading instructionally at a level U.

Researcher Stance

I am currently a graduate student at St. Michael College in the Master's Literacy Program (Birth-6th grade). I also attended St. Michael College for my undergraduate studies where I obtained my Bachelor's degree in Childhood Education and Special Education certified to teach birth through 6th grade. During this study, as the researcher, I took on the role as a privileged active participant observer, meaning that I observed the students during a period of time when I did not explicitly instruct them on a strategy or lesson. Through the role of privileged active participant observer I was able to simultaneously take on role of the educator, aide, and observer (Mills, 2011). This role provided me the opportunity to interact with the students but still "withdraw, stand back, and watch what was happening during a particular teaching moment" (Mills, p. 75). As a result, I was engaged and focused on collecting data which demonstrated the students' perceptions on family structures.

Method

During this study, I collected qualitative data to examine the effects multicultural literature has on students' perceptions of family structures. Within my practicum experience, I was provided with opportunity to work with two students from varying backgrounds and family

demographics. This type of data allowed me the opportunity to gather a variety of feedback from the students.

The first point of research was to understand the students' perceptions on family prior to any exposure to multicultural literature. In order to gauge the student's personal perceptions, the first session was spent conducting a questionnaire (Appendix A) with each participating student. Students were asked various question based on family structure and what family means to them. I did not involve them in any conversation regarding families prior to the questionnaire. The students read the questions and independently filled out the questionnaire.

Throughout the next two sessions, the students took part in an activity where they had three various texts read aloud to them that focused on varying family structures. The texts that were used were *Two Homes* by Claire Masurel, *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and *We Belong Together: a book about adoption and families* by Todd Parr (Appendix B). The text *Two Homes* is about a young girl, Alex, who lives in two homes because her parents are divorced. The text focuses on what is gained rather than what is lost when parents' divorce while depicting through illustrations Alex's presence and love in both homes. The second text used *And Tango Makes Three* is based on a true story about a charming penguin family living in New York City's Central Park Zoo. The main characters are Roy and Silo, two male penguins, who are "a little bit different" than the other penguins. Instead of falling in love with another female penguin, Roy and Silo fell in love with each other. This text takes a reader on a journey showing that even though Roy and Silo may be "different" from other families they have the same values, characteristics, and most of all love, just like any another family. The third text I read aloud was *We Belong Together* which is about a child who is adopted. In a kid-friendly, accessible way,

this text explores the different ways that people can choose to come together to make a family unit. It shows that through sharing your home and sharing your heart is the way to make a family that belongs together.

Following the read aloud, I lead the students in a discussion regarding the various texts. The discussion was scaffolded by the instructor (me) using guiding questions (Appendix C) that gave students the opportunity to look at the literature through a critical lens and see how the families in each text may be similar or different to their own. The activities that followed the read alouds focused primarily on the students' perceptions of the family structures they heard about within the text. Following the discussion, I had the student's journal written responses to the literature. This gave me an opportunity to see if the students' perception of family was impacted through the readings since they filled out the questionnaires in the first part of the data collection. The responses in their journals were based on the various texts they read and how the portrayal of the different family structures impacted how they view family. I gave the students a writing prompt that will help them create a response to the texts (Appendix D).

Quality and Credibility of Research

When conducting any action research, it is critical for the researcher to assess and guarantee the quality and credibility of the study. It is the researcher's responsibility to guarantee that their research is based upon credible and reliable research. Mills (2011) has identified several important concepts which help a researcher guarantee their quality of work during qualitative research. These four components are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and are key aspects of a qualitative research study's trustworthiness. In order to

maintain trustworthiness throughout my research, I have examined and implemented these four components within my current research.

The first component that ensures trustworthiness of a qualitative research study is credibility. Mills (2011) defines credibility as a “researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 104). In order to guarantee that credibility happens throughout my research, I used various methods to collect data. The various data collection methods that were implemented throughout this study are questionnaires, observations of whole group discussion, and student written responses. By using varying methods of collection I used triangulation. Mills states that triangulation is when a researcher uses a “variety of data sources and different methods with one another in order to cross-check data” (p. 104).

The second component that assures trustworthiness of a qualitative research study is transferability. Mills (2011) refers to transferability as the “researchers beliefs that everything in the study is context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop ‘truth’ statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people” (p. 104). In other words, transferability does not perpetuate general statements, instead encourages researchers to make comparison and judgments based on if the research was to be conducted in an alternative setting. In other words, through the collection of detailed and descriptive data which could be looked at by another researcher so they are able to draw their own judgments and see how it may be used in other context.

In addition to credibility and transferability, I also guaranteed dependability within my research. Mills (2011) refers to dependability as the “stability of the data collected” (p. 104).

Throughout my research, I was able to ensure dependability of my research by using various methods of collections. As stated above, I used different procedures such questionnaires, observations of whole group discussion, and student written responses. By implementing more than two different methods of data collection, I was able to make sure that the weakness of any of my methods would be counteracted by the strengths of the others (Mills).

To conclude my research, I also ensured confirmability throughout the remaining aspects of my study. Mills (2011) defines confirmability as the “neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (p. 105). Through the process of triangulation, I was able to ensure the component of confirmability. By using various methods of data collections one is able to compare and cross-check the collected data. I also used the practice of reflexivity to reveal any biases or preconceived notions I had prior to conducting my research or that could skew my data or findings. Through my reflections based upon the recordings, I was able to uncover underlying perceptions or biases that may cause me to “present findings in a particular way” (Mills, p.105).

Throughout this study, I met these four key components of guarantying the quality of work during qualitative research. I believe that the data collected was of trustworthiness, resulting in a better understanding of the impact of multicultural literature on a student’s perceptions of family structure. The data collected was reviewed and looked at following these four key components which will further ensure authentic, reliable, and valid research.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Right of the Participants

Before beginning my research, it was necessary to ask permission from the parents or guardians of all students who were going to participate in the study. I provided each parent with

a permission form that clarifies the purpose of the study and asks for their permission and signature to perform the research. In addition to getting the parents' permission, I received written assent from each student that will be participating in the study. I thoroughly explained to each student the purpose of the study as well as what the research would entail. Both parents and students were informed that the names of participants would be changed to pseudonyms and that any identifying marks would be removed from artifacts to protect the identities and ensure anonymity of the students.

Data Collection

As previously stated, I collected three different forms of data to accomplish the purposes of triangulation. One form of data collection that I used is that of a questionnaire I created. The questionnaire was based on family and the varying aspects of what makes a family a family. The students filled out the questionnaires independently during the practicum clinic. This questionnaire gave me a better understanding of their personal perceptions on family. It also helped guide a later part of my research.

Another form of data collection that I collected is that of voice recordings as a means to observe and collect accurate field notes on each session of the study. The voice recording was set up using my iPhone in order to record the students' verbal responses and whole group discussion based on the selected literature. The selected literature portrayed various types of families such as singles parents, adoption, same-sex parents, and other family dynamics. After each session, I reviewed the recordings, reflected on the collected data, and transcribed the conversation between the students. The recordings documented the students' discussions before and after the

readings of the text based on what their thoughts, understandings, and interpretations of the texts are.

In conclusion, I used journal responses after the discussion to assess if the students' perceptions of family had been impacted through the multicultural readings on families. The students were asked to write responses based on the varying family structures they saw and read about. They were then asked to connect their responses to their questionnaires. The written responses demonstrated how the literature may have impacted their changed perceptions of family and what a family looks like.

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, I began to analyze and look for commonalities across the sources. The first analysis done was with my qualitative data. This data consisted of the students' questionnaire that pertained to family, informal interviews, and student written responses.

While analyzing my informal interviews, questionnaire, and teacher interviews I began to "code" my data or look for common themes among the discussions. I focused primarily on the students' responses and the correlations that could be made as a result of them. While coding the data, I focused primarily on the impact the literature had on the students' own perceptions of family. These focal points were developed and further analyzed through the research I had done previously and the focus of my research question. Through my research, I wanted to develop a deeper understanding of how multicultural literature impacted a student's personal perceptions.

The student questionnaires and written responses were analyzed and coded according to categories and then put into themes. Students frequently attached an opinion or emotion in

regards to family whether negative or positive. Students also identified various characteristics and different types of family structures. The students described their own interpretations of family and what they believed family to be. Students portrayed their own personal viewpoints or personal perceptions within their written responses. These common categories developed into data based on their personal perceptions. While coding the data, I compared the findings to various researchers such as Stallworth, Gibbons, and Faubern (2006) who found multicultural literature a tool to use to help children broaden their own viewpoints. I also referred to Evans (2010) who thought multicultural literature may impact how aware, tolerant, and understanding a student can become.

Similarly, positive and negative experiences with various family structures were coded in the informal interviews and written response as well. Students frequently discussed the exposure they had to multicultural literature particularly dealing with family dynamics. Within the informal interviews, I also analyzed the data and found discussion of what students thought were on exposure to multicultural literature. This data showed students thoughts and beliefs while outlining whether or not they were being introduced to such literature within their classrooms.

Findings and Discussions

The initial research done with the students was having them fill out a questionnaire that consisted of 10 questions pertaining to family. The questionnaire was filled out individually and was then collected and analyzed. The answers to the questions gave some background knowledge of what each student thought about in regards to family and what a family looked like. Their answers could be in direct correlation with their own personal perceptions of family structures. The second aspect to my research was an informal interview conducted after reading

various multicultural literatures with the students. The interview was scaffolding with questions that further investigated the student's opinion and thoughts on family as a unit. Their answers were further analyzed and the findings showed that after reading such texts the students' perceptions of family began to change. In addition, the students' written work was looked over to look for further implications showing that the student's personal perceptions may have been impacted by the multicultural literature.

In addition, the data collected also started to show similar emotions experienced by a family unit regardless of its makeup. This data correlated with various researchers (Evans, 2010; Moller, 2012; Thein, Guise, and Sloan, 2011; Dressel, 2005; Louie, 2005) that support that multicultural literature can give students deeper insight and understanding of others emotions. Students' personal perceptions of family can be different based on the individual. After analyzing and coding the data three common themes emerged: students' exposure to multicultural literature, how multicultural literature impacts students' personal perceptions, and the emotions seen that are associated with family.

Implementation of Multicultural Literature within the Classroom

Exposing students to a wide variety of literature is a key aspect in their education. Multicultural literature gives students experience to aspects of life that they may not have the chance to encounter themselves. The data collected demonstrates how important multicultural literature can be to developing students' knowledge of other family structures. Through informal interviews and written responses, the data collected showed a clear understanding that multicultural literature helps students understand other people ways of life.

During the informal interview (March 12, 2013), both students were asked does reading different kinds of books help you understand other people's families if they are not similar to yours and Julianna replied:

I think reading books shows you about other people. Like how they live and stuff. Like if I didn't know anyone with two dads like *Tango* I could know how *Tango* feels. Reading different books helps with stuff like that. Now I can know things about other families. That way I can help my friends out if they ever need me and I don't understand.

(Informal interview, March 12, 2013)

Julianna statement could imply that that through reading multicultural literature she begins to understands other people's lives and the way their family works. Her response can also lead one to believe that through the use of multicultural literature students are exposed to different family structures which help to develop understanding and tolerance of others differences. Likewise, Daniel stated:

Sometimes it helps me see what other people's families look like. I guess it does help a little cuz it helps me know stuff. Like how my friend felt when his dad left his mom. He was sad just like the boy who got adopted. I think reading helps your imagination.

(Informal interview, March 12, 2013)

This data may demonstrate that students begin to develop empathy and a deeper understanding for others through multicultural literature. Students may be able to read literature and use what they read to help guide them in their everyday occurrence with their friends, family, or classmates. It can also mean that the students' develop an understanding that reading different

types of literature is important without knowing the real relevance of reading multicultural literature. Within a classroom and at home, students should be introduced to multicultural literature. According to Evan (2010) through the use of multicultural literature, students are able to start to become more aware and tolerant of the ever changing cultures within society. In other words, students that may be considered the minority or “outcasts” for being different find acceptance and solace when their culture is represented and acknowledged within a text. Some students do not have access to these types of literature therefore their exposure to other ways of life are limited. In addition, when asked if they have read other books that show different types of families, Julianna specified, “Yes, I have. Not a lot” and Daniel stated “Not really” (Informal Interview, 2013). These statements may support the fact that the students do not have multicultural literature utilized within their classroom or at home. The students’ responses also may imply that within their home environment they are not exposed to differences within family structures which could have a negative impact on their own personal perceptions of family. It may also concur that the students have limited experiences up to this point with multicultural literature. Hardie (2011) addresses the lack of texts found within school libraries that accurately represent aspects such as same-sex marriages or diverse family structures. There is a lack of picture books that are representative of children with same-sex parents or that have themes of diverse family structure. Students who share these similarities may have limited access to these types of texts that characterize or reflect their own family makeups. This lack of multicultural literature may have a negative impact on students’ personal perceptions.

When asked to further explain their understandings in written responses (March 12, 2013 and March 19, 2013) Julianna and Daniel both expressed the importance of reading multicultural

literature. When asked why reading different types of books helps them understand others families both students established explicit knowledge of why it multicultural literature is a valuable tool. Julianna indicated that reading does help her understand other people's families. She states "reading does help me understand better. You don't need a mom or a dad; you can have 2 dads or moms. It's still a family" (Written Responses, 2013). Julianna's response demonstrates that she has an understanding of the impact that multicultural literature can have. She shows this understanding by making connection to the texts and stating that despite a family's make-up it is still a family unit. Daniel responded in comparison by explaining "Yes, because the books we read showed about different types of families" (Written Responses, 2013). This statement may show that after reading the multicultural literature the Daniel able to see that differences exist in other families but does not make them any less of a family unit than other families. Research has shown that though the uses of multicultural literature students are able to make connections while seeing how others are like them and how literature can impact their perceptions of others (Howard, 2002). If students are not able to read literature that they can relate to, it may be harder for the students to enjoy a story and gain the desired knowledge from the text. Through the use of multicultural literature students are able to explore different worlds, cultures, and uses of language.

Multicultural Literature Impacts Students' Personal Perceptions

The data gathered through the questionnaires and the written responses pointed to a distinct difference in the students' perceptions of family structure. Students' personal perceptions of what a family looked like changed after reading the multicultural literature. Julianna and Daniel both had preconceived notions of what a family structure looked like and what people

defined a family unit. When describing what a family looks like, Julianna stated that “a family looks like a mom, a dad, an older sister, a brother, a younger sister, a dog, and two cats” (Questionnaire, February 26, 2013). She demonstrates that a family unit in her perception is in correlation with what a “traditional” family may look like. Her statement is also in direct correlation with her family environment. Julianna lives with her mom, dad, and siblings which may influence her personal outlook on who makes up a family unit. As stated by Stallworth, Gibbons, and Faubern (2006) “multicultural literature can provide mirrors through which students can read about situations that resemble their own worlds and discover the richness of cultures other than their own while learning to appreciate and respect differences” (p. 480). Multicultural literature is a tool that educators must embrace to allow their students the opportunity to enrich their knowledge, tolerance, and understanding of others cultures and differences.

As seen in recent literature over the last four decades or so, cultural changes have impacted children’s literature. According to Hannelore (2007), “nowhere is this change more evident than in the changing image of family, with its altered structures, role models and patterns of relationships” (p. 6). The portrayals of the “traditional” family roles of the bread-winning father figure, the doting stay-at-home mom, and the two children have faded away into the portrayal of the modern day family unit throughout many children books. The fact remains that there are many books that are utilized both in school and at home that keep the preconceived “traditional” family alive. This finding once again demonstrates the need for multicultural literature to be used as a tool for children to better understand the world they live in. Similarly Daniel described what a family looks like as “a mom, dad, and kids” (Questionnaire, February

26, 2013). Daniel, like Julianna have very traditional outlooks on what a family unit looks like. This response may imply that each student may not have a lot of exposure to multicultural literature at school or other aspects of family structures in their own personal experiences that show different portrayals of families or that they both do not have many real life experiences with other family structures. When asked if their own family looked similar to other people families, they both answered in similar ways. Julianna stated “No. Nobody’s families can be the same. They all have different ideas and unique traditions” while Daniel replied “No, because every family is different” (Written Response, March 12, 2013). Both Daniel’s and Julianna’s responses demonstrated that they both have a deeper understanding of what family is and means. While they both stated in their questionnaire that their view of family is more traditional, they showed more thorough understanding and knowledge of the varying aspects of family dynamics. In addition, both students listed several words describing the word family and they both listed the words “nice, kind, safe, and loving” (Questionnaire, February 26, 2013). The students’ clear understanding that families may be different but experience some of the same emotions such as love and caring may be connected to the fact they understand that those are emotions that can be tied to any type of family structure.

After reading several multicultural texts such as *And Tango Makes Three*, *Two Homes*, and *We Belong Together*, the data revealed that the students’ perceptions on family structure may have been impacted. When asked what types of families each student saw within the texts both students’ were able to describe the families’ in similar ways. When asked what some common themes seen throughout the different texts were Julianna stated, “I saw families in each book.

There were different kinds of families” (Informal Interview, March 12, 2013). When asked to further explain what she meant by “different kinds of families” Julianna explained:

Well in this book (pointed to *Two Homes*) Alex had divorced parents. I have a friend that has a divorced mom and dad and she gets to double the fun stuff. In the book about the penguins (*And Tango Makes Three*) Tango had two dads but they still did the same kind of things that the other families did. (Informal interview, March 12, 2013)

Julianna’s response may demonstrate that even though she referred to the families as “different” she is able to see they are a family just like her own. She may also be making personal connections to the texts which allow for her to begin seeing families as many different structures. Daniel was asked the same questions and also stated:

I saw a whole bunch of different families. One with two dads, a boy who lived with his mom and dad just in different houses, and a family that adopted a baby because they were sad. They were all different but still families. (Informal interview, March 12, 2013)

Daniel’s statement shows that he is being to see that there are many types of families and while they may be different in their make-up they share many commonalities with his own family. Throughout the reading Daniel was able to make connection to emotions and activities that the characters were doing that he applied to his own personal life. The students’ clear ability to understand that there are different types of family structures other than what they previously thought might have been impacted by reading the various multicultural texts. Through the use of multicultural literature, students are able to start to become more aware and tolerant of the ever changing cultures within society (Evans, 2010). Using multicultural literature can provide

students with a wealth of knowledge that stimulates an ongoing thirst for knowledge and learning. Furthermore, both students were able to make personal connections to the multicultural literature that they read. Julianna made connections with the texts *And Tango Makes Three* and *Two Homes*. She explained this connection in her written response to the texts by stating “In the book *And Tango Makes Three* they swam together and my family loves to swim together. My friends have divorced parents just like the book *Two Homes*” (Written Response, March 12, 2013). Her response shows she is making personal connections within her own life which can impact Julianna’s perception of family in a positive way. By making connections Julianna is able to look at family in a different and more abstract way that may allow for further understanding. Correspondingly, Daniel also made some personal connections to the texts stating “my family goes swimming and my friends have two dads too” (Written Response, March 12, 2013). Through the reading Daniel was able to see similarities within the families in the texts and his own. This type of experience may allow Daniel to get a clearer understanding that families can vary in structure while still being a family unit. The student’s responses may have been impacted by the various family structures that each text exposed them to. Fountain, and Torres (2012) discuss that the use of multicultural literature will begin to enhance a student’s respect of other individuals, develop empathetic responses to not only multicultural literature but to various groups of people, and deepen their awareness of others way of life. This data may suggest that through the use of multicultural literature students are able to develop a deeper understanding of others ways of life while impacting the students’ own personal perceptions.

These texts can help support and encourage students in recognizing their prejudices and prejudgments while showing them they can critically question societal views of what is deemed

to be “normal” and “acceptable.” Research conducted by Evans (2010), Smith and Singer (2003), and Thein, Guise, and Sloan (2011) reinforces that reading multicultural literature encourages students to learn that there are other perspectives and outlooks on life. They also begin to understand that while they don’t conduct their lives in a particular way or manner others ways of doing things that are just as valuable as their own. It also can awaken students’ intelligence, strengths, and interest which can result in affirmation, enlightenment, and inspiration in themselves (Spence, 2010). In other words, multicultural literature has the ability to allow students to be individuals who have their own personal beliefs and perspective on life.

Emotions Associated with Family Allows for Personal Connections

During conversations, questionnaires, and written responses, students experienced different connections with the different family structures. The students were exposed to various family units within the multicultural literature. Throughout the questionnaire (February 26, 2013), the students responded to multiple questions about family. One of the questions asked the students what the word “family” meant to them and they both responded with parallel responses. Daniel wrote the word “safe” similar to Julianna who stated the word “family” means “I feel safe with them” (Questionnaire, February 26, 2013). Both of the students’ responses could lead one to the conclusion that each student understands that a family is supposed to make you feel safe and protected. After reading the various multicultural texts, the data showed that the students were also able to make several connections and inferences about the families they read about. When asked if the families in the books were considered a family even though they may be different than their own family each student was able to identify and make some personal connections. Julianna responded “Yes, because your family will always be there for you to solve your

problems. It only takes love to be a family” (Written Response, March 12, 2013). This statement shows Julianna beginning to understand and interpret that every family shares similar emotions such as love and protection of one another regardless of their structure. Consistently with Julianna’s response, Daniel stated “What makes them a family in each book is they love each other and they care for each other” (Written Response, March 12, 2013). This choice of response could imply that each student understands a family unit may be different than their own but each family loves and cares for one another despite its difference. Throughout various studies (Evans, 2010; Moller, 2012; Thein, Guise, and Sloan, 2011; Dressel, 2005; Louie, 2005) it was shown that while reading multicultural literature students have the opportunity to gain insight and develop a deeper understanding about gender, family structure, class, and race. It is evident in the students’ responses that they may be beginning to cultivate a more thorough understanding of others people’s families.

The students read texts that exposed them to varying family units in which they saw similar emotions. When asked during an informal interview (March 12, 2013) what types of feelings did they discuss in *We Belong Together*? Julianna replied:

I’m not sure if it was a boy or girl but they wanted a baby so they adopted him. They loved him just like the mommy had carried him in her tummy. You could tell the parents really loved the baby because in the pictures they are smiling a lot and keep hugging the baby. (March 12, 2013)

Julianna’s statement may demonstrate that she is looking at the characters and understanding them while applying what she already knows about emotions to the families in the texts. This understanding may show a deeper knowledge that while the families she is reading about may be

different than her own they still show affection, love, and caring in similar ways. Consistently in his response, Daniel answered:

They family could not have a baby so they were sad. Then they adopted a baby who they really wanted as their own. They loved him very much. They took care of him and hugged him to show they loved him. (Informal Interview, March 19, 2013)

Daniel's reactions to the text may demonstrate that he is developing empathetic response to the literature he is reading while really looking at the characters and interpreting what their emotions and expression mean. This type of interpreting from students can be positive and impact their own personal perceptions. Through the use of numerous multicultural texts students have the chance to being exposed to different family structures that can positively impact them. Glenn-Wake and Modla (2008) claimed that multicultural literature fosters an educated awareness of other cultural customs, beliefs, and values while promoting their own experiences including theirs and others' cultures. Through multicultural literature, students are able to see portrayals of various cultures, families, genders, ethnicities, and values in a way that promotes acceptance and tolerance of others' cultures and differences. Both students identified key words and emotions that go along with any type of family. Julianna states "All you need to make a family is someone that will watch over you and love you" while Daniel supports her claim by stating "what makes each family a family in each book is that they love each other and care for each other" (Written Responses, 2013). These statements can demonstrate the student's deeper understanding that even if a family does not consist of a mom, dad, and siblings they are still as family that loves one another and that is all that matters. Julianna supports this data when she explains

You don't have to have a mom or dad, you can have 2 dads or moms. You don't need a sister or brother to make it a family; you can be the only child. You don't even have to live together; you can be a divorced family. (Written Responses, 2013)

This statement may imply that after reading various multicultural literatures Julianna was able to interpret, connect, and develop a deeper understanding of a family. Prior to reading these texts, she described family consisting of a mom, dad, and siblings and after reading she demonstrates a clearer understanding that families can be made up of various people and still can be considered a family. In addition, Daniel asserts that "all families can be different. All families have different types of feelings such as happy, sad, worried, loving but they are still a family" (Written Responses, 2013). Daniels responses, in addition to Julianna's, may possibly insinuate newly learned knowledge gained from the multicultural literature that all families experience similar if not all of the same emotions.

Implications and Conclusion

The ways in which family based multicultural literature is utilized as a resource by educators, implemented into the curriculum, and developed as a resource for students can have an impact on students' personal perceptions. Theories such as the culture as a disability theory and the critical literacy theory help to support this statement. The culture as a disability theory relates to the topics seen in family based multicultural texts because the theory strives to explain why stereotyping individuals is detrimental to society. McDermott & Varenne (1995) state that culture is our organization of society as we believe it should be or how we hope it will be. The critical literacy theory is also significant because it focuses on teaching students' to use literacy to analyze our social world as a whole and form their own opinions and judgments. Taking into

consideration these theories, it is evident that the use and implementation of family based multicultural literature can provide students with the opportunity to being exposed to different ways of life. If students are not exposed to various types of family structures through multicultural literature they may only be impacted by some of society's intolerance and judgmental views.

The first implication seen in the above findings showed that educators must expose students to various types of multicultural literature. Multicultural literature that focuses on family structures help students begin to understand others way of life while helping them develop empathy and tolerance of others differences. This is supported by the data that showed the students thought of family structures as consisting of the traditional mom, dad, and children. When asked specifically who belongs in a family each student stated: "Mom, dad, and kids" (Informal Observation, March 12, 2013). Both of these students attend a school where resources on books are not limited, but it is clear they have had limited experiences with books that expose them to varying family structures. This lack of exposure to multicultural literature is concerning because in order for students to build a foundation of acceptance, tolerance, and understanding for others should be developed within the safety of the classroom. Students need to encounter multiple types of multicultural literature so they are able to begin to understand that even if families are different than their own they are no less equal. It was evident after reading the selected multicultural literature; the students were able to make personal connections with the different family unit's portrayed in the texts. This demonstrated to me that the students were able to see families for who they were and not for who made up a family unit. The students were not only able to make personal connections but were also able to see the importance in reading

multicultural literature. These findings demonstrate that in order for students to develop and further their personal perceptions of different family structures it is imperative that students are exposed to multicultural literature throughout their school experience.

My second implication showed that a scaffold discussion following the reading of multicultural literature is imperative to furthering students' knowledge and understanding of family structures. Crowley, Fountain, and Torres, (2012) discuss that the use of multicultural literature will begin to enhance a student's respect of other individuals while developing empathetic responses to not only multicultural literature but to various groups of people. Educators should also listen carefully and only ask authentic questions that promote further elaboration and exploration of a topic. This type of questioning is known as scaffolding or modeling by the educator which is an effective ways to approach instruction. Moller (2012) states that while creating atmospheres for discussions of literature that contain social justice themes thought they can be risky and hold uncertainties, they can also have limitless possibilities for the students mind. Through the use of multicultural literature, students are asked to push past the traditional boundaries of reading and writing and confront social, economic, or political issues head on. They are asked to be engaged in, critique, and look at situations from multiple perspectives. Through critical literacy, students are able to develop a lens in which they view literature in a more analytical, reflective, social, and critical manner.

There were a few limitations in the research completed and I was left with some unanswered questions. The first limitation was the lack of time I had to observe, interact, and conduct research with the students. The research was conducted during the student's literacy clinic and as their tutor as well as the researcher I had other duties I was responsible for. I was

left wondering if I had more time could I have gotten a more depth understanding of the student's prior knowledge of multicultural literature. I would also have liked to collect more data with additional students. Both of the students that were involved came from similar family backgrounds and it would have been interesting to see if students from varying background had different response and perceptions. In the future, I would like to see students from different family backgrounds and various age groups to see if and how that may have impacted my data. Another question I was left with was how the student's educator implemented family based literature into their curriculum. It was clear that the implementation of family based multicultural literature is important in developing students' knowledge and personal perceptions. The implementation of multicultural is a key aspect and I would have liked know to an educators view point. In the future, if I were to revise and do this study over, I would want to look into the educator's aspect of utilizing multicultural literature and how they perceived it to impact student's personal perceptions. What policies do schools have in regards to multicultural literature within the curriculum? Do educators partake in professional developments that enable them to teach multicultural literature from a neutral stance? Is multicultural literature really used as the significant tool and resource it is? These are among some of the questions that could be asked if I had the opportunity to delve deeper into the use and implementation of family based multicultural literature.

In conclusion, it does not matter what type of family a child comes from. What matters is how students are able to see that regardless if you have a mom and dad, 2 moms, or is adopted; it is still a family unit. Through the use of multicultural literature, students have the opportunity to explore other people's lives and begin to build a foundation of acceptance and understanding of

others. This type of foundation is the most valuable lesson educators can give to their students because it not only increases their knowledge in an academic setting but it prepares them to be a part of an ever changing society.

References

- Ayala, E. (n.d). "Poor little things" and "Brave little souls": The portrayal of individuals with disabilities in children's literature. *Reading Research And Instruction*, 39(1), 103-117.
- Almarza, D. J. (2005). Connecting Multicultural Education Theories with Practice: A Case Study of an Intervention Course Using the Realistic Approach in Teacher Education. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 29(3), 527-539.
- Brinson, S. A. (2012). Knowledge of Multicultural Literature among Early Childhood Educators. *Multicultural Education*, 19(2), 30-33.
- Delpit, L. (1995). The Politics of Teaching Literate Discourse. In *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (pp. 545-554). New York: New Press.
- Dressel, J. (2005). Personal Response and Social Responsibility: Responses of Middle School Students to Multicultural Literature. *The Reading Teacher*, (8), 750.
doi:10.2307/20204303
- Ebe, A. E. (2010, October). Culturally Relevant Texts and Reading Assessment for English Language Learners. *Reading Horizons*, 50(3), 193-210.
- Evans, S. (2010, March). The Role of Multicultural Literature Interactive Read-Alouds on Student Perspectives Toward Diversity. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching*, 3(1), 92-104.

- Fong, A., & Sheets, R. (2004). Multicultural Education: Teacher Conceptualization and Approach to Implementation. *Multicultural Education, 12*(1), 10-15.
- Freebody, P., & Luke, A. (1990). Literacies Programs: Debates and Demands in Cultural Context. *Prospect, 5*(3), 7-15.
- Gee, J. P. (1989). What is Literacy? *Journal of Education, 171*(1), 18-25.
- Glenn Wake, D., & Modla, V. B. (2008). Using Multicultural Literature to Teach Culturally Responsive Instructional Approaches. *College Reading Association Yearbook, 179-200*.
- Ghiso, M., Campano, G., & Hall, T. (2012). Braided Histories and Experiences in Literature for Children and Adolescents. *Journal Of Children's Literature, 38*(2), 14-22.
- Hardie, A. (2011). Inclusive primary school libraries: Stories of diverse families. *New Zealand Journal Of Educational Studies, 46*(2), 95-102.
- Heath, S. B. (1982). What No Bedtime Story Means: Narrative Skills at Home and School. *Language in Society, 11*, 73-95.
- Hermann-Wilmarth, J. M. (2010). More than Book Talks: Preservice Teacher Dialogue after Reading Gay and Lesbian Children's literature. *Language Arts, 87*(3), 188-198.

- Howard, V. (2005). Out of the Closet...But not on the Shelves? An analysis of Canadian public libraries' holdings of gay-themed picture books. *Progressive Librarian*, (25), 62-75.
- Kucer, S. B. (2009). *Dimensions of Literacy: A Conceptual Base for Teaching Reading and Writing in School Settings* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge. (Original work published 2001)
- Larson, J., & Marsh, J. (2005). *Making Literacy Real: theories and practices for learning and teaching*. London: Sage Publications.
- Louie, B. (2005). Development of Empathetic Responses with Multicultural Literature. *Journal Of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, (7), 566. doi:10.2307/40017543
- MÖLLER, K. J. (2012). Developing Understandings of Social Justice: Critical Thinking in Action in a Literature Discussion Group. *Journal Of Children's Literature*, 38(2), 23-36.
- McDermott, R., Varenne, H. (1995). Culture "as" disability. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 26(3), 324-348.
- Meier, T. (2003, November). "Why can't she remember that?" The Importance of storybook reading in multilingual, multicultural classrooms. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(3), 242-252.

Sanders, L. A. (2009). MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE IN PERFORMANCE. *Curriculum & Teaching Dialogue*, 11(1/2), 193-205.

Singer, Judith Y., and Sally A. Smith. 2003. "The Potential of Multicultural Literature: Changing Understanding of Self and Others." *Multicultural Perspectives* 5, no. 2: 17-23.

Spence, A. (2000). Controversial books in the public library: a comparative survey of holdings of gay-related children's picture books. *Library Quarterly*, 70(3), 335-379.

Stallworth, B., Gibbons, L., & Fauber, L. (2006). It's Not on the List: An Exploration of Teachers' Perspectives on Using Multicultural Literature. *Journal OF Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, (6), 478. doi:10.2307/40017605

Suh, Y., Hinton, K., Marken, J., & Lee, G. (2011). Are We Comfortable Teaching This? Using Banned Books as a Vehicle for Teaching about World War II-Era Japan & Korea. *Multicultural Education*, 19(1), 24-30.

Thein, A., Guise, M., & Sloan, D. (2011). Problematizing Literature Circles as Forums for Discussion of Multicultural and Political Texts. *Journal Of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(1), 15-24. doi:10.1598/JAAL.55.1.2

- Thein, A., Barbas, P., Carnevali, C., Fox, A., Mahoney, A., & Vensel, S. (2012). The Affordances of Design-Based Research for Studying Multicultural Literature Instruction: Reflections and Insights from a Teacher-Researcher Collaboration. *English Teaching: Practice And Critique*, 11(1), 121-135.
- Walker, K. L. (2011). Deficit Thinking and the Effective Teacher. *Education And Urban Society*, 43(5), 576-597.
- Yoon, B., Simpson, A., & Haag, C. (2010). Assimilation Ideology: Critically Examining Underlying Messages in Multicultural Literature. *Journal Of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, (2), 109. doi:10.2307/20775366

Appendix A

Questionnaire:

1. Who lives in your house?
2. What does the word “family” mean to you?
3. Who are you closest with in your family and why?
4. Does your family look similar to other people’s families? Why or why not?
5. If families include members other than your own does that mean they are not a family?
6. What are some things you and your family do together?
7. What are some things other families do together?
8. What do you think a family looks like?
9. List at least 7 words describing the word family.
10. Use one word to describe each member of your family.

Appendix B

Book list:

1. *Two Homes* by Claire Masurel
2. *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson
3. *We Belong Together: a book about adoption and families* by Todd Parr

Appendix C

Scaffolding Questions between student and researcher:

Researcher: What were some common themes you saw throughout the different texts I read aloud?

R: What do you mean by different kinds of families?

R: What types of activities did you see the families do that were similar to each other?

R: What feelings or activities did they discuss in *We Belong Together*?

R: Did you see any similarities or difference in the families we read about compared to your own?

R: Have you read other books that show you different types of families?

R: Does reading different kinds of books help you understand other people's families if they are not similar to yours? Gave example: Like how we read books about different families other than your own.

R: Do you think it helps you understand people better?

Appendix D**Writing Prompt 1:**

What types of families did you see in the books we read? Are they still considered a family even though they may be different than your family? Why or why not?

Writing Prompt 2:

Do you think reading different books helps you understand other peoples families? Why or why not?