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Through the observation of seven students in small groups leading their own discussion about two picture books representing the Japanese culture I looked to find whether or not students' previous assumptions of another culture would be altered or upheld. I found that with the use of a critical lens and multiple perspectives to study multicultural literature, teachers can create a more tolerant and accepting classroom environment. Multicultural literature is an essential point of instruction for our increasingly diverse classrooms and will help students grow with society as we move towards a global economy through the use of literacy and technology.

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The Effect of Multicultural Picture
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Abstract

Through the observation of seven students in small groups leading their own discussion about two picture books representing the Japanese culture I looked to find whether or not students' previous assumptions of another culture would be altered or upheld. I found that with the use of a critical lens and multiple perspectives to study multicultural literature, teachers can create a more tolerant and accepting classroom environment. Multicultural literature is an essential point of instruction for our increasingly diverse classrooms and will help students grow with society as we move towards a global economy through the use of literacy and technology.

The Effects of Multicultural Picture Books on Student Perceptions

The American classroom has changed many times over the last century. In the beginning only wealthy boys were educated. Slowly girls and those of lower economic standings began to enter into the classroom, but only in the last few decades have all children of every culture, race, socioeconomic status and ability been welcomed into our schools. The melting pot of American society is now coming together in classrooms where the same standards teach students the same subjects and drive them towards independent college course work. How is it that we can teach so many diverse children the same concepts and give each unique individual the best education to meet their needs? The answer lies in a framework that welcomes all cultures and uses this to drive instruction.

Multicultural literature is the building block for classrooms to include other cultures throughout the curriculum. It gives all students a better understanding of our global economy and builds tolerance and acceptance among our students. While many teachers are using multicultural literature in their classrooms, they are often unaware of the misconceptions construed in picture books. McDermott & Varenne (1995) discuss the ways that society marginalizes those who do not fit within the norm. Many books set out to do good by educating youngsters on other cultures however these books portray characters and cultures with the same stereotypes that our society labels people for. Picture books that represent a culture through the use of stereotypes are continuing to marginalize them. In essence they are only strengthening what assumptions readers have already made rather than putting them to rest.

Yosso (2005) discusses critical race theory and how it is still present in our schools today. She states that “deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because” (a) students enter school without the normative cultural

knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education" (p. 75). This way of thinking pushes the values of that individual student aside and assumes that the dominant culture is the correct one. The child attends a school where the way they were raised, the things that they believe in and have always known to be true are shunned for being different. They do not see their own face in the literature nor their cultural ideas or beliefs. White is everywhere. This child has to choose to accept this change to succeed or to challenge it and fail. By a teacher using this child, and every other child's uniqueness to bring awareness to the classroom, a safe and open minded environment allows children of all backgrounds to feel welcome and free to be unique. The incorporation of multicultural literature gives all students a connection that is not always felt at schools where our similarities are so treasured.

Multicultural literature holds great value to those who find themselves missing or without representation in the literature. It provides confidence that there are stories about them that make them important too. These stories are most effective when they "contradict or oppose the assumptions and beliefs held by many White people" (Willis and Parker, 2009, p. 35). This quote suggests that those students who are held up against stereotypes and judged everyday by mainstream society, can finally find freedom in the literature where the stereotypes are not defining who they are any longer.

Teachers should also recognize that the literature alone is not enough to build tolerance and acceptance or any significant understanding of another culture. The knowledge gained from the literature should be supplemented with class discussions as well as other sources of literature such as news articles, magazines, letters, or any other source that provides an alternative perspective. This approach according to Yosso (2005) will allow teachers and students to challenge racism or any other deficit that society labels people for. Showing students that one

story cannot tell us everything will begin to encourage them to look critically at texts and eventually build them up to an independent level. Looking at literature through a critical lens will allow them to become stronger readers and writers which is crucial to our literacy and technology driven society.

This action research study looked at the ways teachers are using multicultural literature and the literature they are using. It asked them what influences their selection and how they determined its effectiveness. This study also included observations of one third grade student, one fourth grade student, one fifth grade student, one seventh grade student and three twelfth grade students who all read the same picture books and were asked the same questions about their perceptions previous to reading the book and then again after reading it. A follow up session with another book followed the same procedure to see how their perceptions changed with the use of additional literature and discussion. This session also included observations of discussions that ensued after reading the text with prompts to guide discussion to the topic at hand. Lastly the study looked at ten popular children's picture books critically for their inclusion of stereotypes, insinuations, and perceptions. This study found that student generated discussion can have depth with previous training to view a text through a critical lens, however without previous practice, discussion will lack depth and assumptions held previous to reading the text will remain unaltered. It also found that depending on students previous knowledge of stereotypes, several of them can exist within a text without a student picking up on them. This study serves to raise teacher awareness to the importance of incorporating multicultural literature and the significant impact this type of literature can have on students.

Theoretical Framework

Literacy has become a difficult term to define. It evolves so fast that one single published definition could not even begin to cover it before something new has changed. Literacy is dynamic, multifaceted, vigorous, and key to becoming a successful contributing member of society. According to Freebody and Luke (1990), literacy is “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. 15). By “multifaceted” they mean the need to know new literacies in terms of technology (computers and hardware), and the new ethos (mindset) of today’s society, ultimately viewing it as a complex and versatile concept. They use the term “social practices” to describe the way we use literacy in the many different contexts that we find ourselves in on a daily basis such as at the grocery store, work, the library, church, the bar and so on. Code breaking in relation to the English language can be complicated with there being 26 letters in the alphabet, and approximately 44 sounds. Literacy is making the connection between the sounds and symbols as well as the content. This definition focuses on the connection between social and cultural events and how the written and oral word is interpreted, manipulated, and interwoven throughout society. The pictures in children’s books bear a heavy weight on what a child or even an adult takes away from the text. An author and/or illustrator guide and manipulate the readers’ understandings and perceptions of a text.

Oral language is imperative in the acquisition of literacy (Goodman, 2001; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Kucer, 2009; Otto, 2008). It develops the pragmatic knowledge that children will find useful in their first interactions with literacy. The conversations that they listen to along with the words spoken to them carry inflections and both facial expressions and body language that add to what a speaker is saying. The more a child is exposed to through the media, being

spoken to and around, as well as storytelling can highly impact their own development. As children get older, they watch and listen to those around them to determine what behavior is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Often times “listeners may reiterate what they believe was uttered or ask for clarification” (Kucer, 2009, p. 50) in an attempt to better understand what was spoken. Children repeat what they hear in an uneducated fashion and may come across as obnoxious or annoying but they are in fact trying to develop their own set of oral skills. Oral language development helps to develop written language as well. Exposing children to different social situations and the technology that surrounds them directly correlates with the written language they will be exposed to in school and in the real world. According to Otto (2008), “oral language provides the basis on which knowledge of written language is acquired” (p.18). Hearing the sounds in those first years before school allows them to more quickly make the connection between the letters of the alphabet and the sounds these letters make when combined. This connection shows that the development of either oral or written language will continue to increase knowledge in both areas.

Written language is also crucial in literacy acquisition (Kucer, 2009; Goodman, 2001). Written language promotes high cognitive skill. It requires the ability to articulate feelings and expressions to the reader with only words rather than body language and facial expression. According to Goodman (2001), children find stability and order in written language. Once they have mastered the idea that they can make sense through written language they “develop control or ownership of the strategies of comprehension and composition similar to those they have used in oral language” (p.317). This exposure to and practice with written language is key to developing spelling and comprehension. The development of these skills will continue to expand a child’s oral skills and as they progress over the years they will become proficient in both oral

and written language. Each facet of literacy encourages further development of other aspects of it. This exposure to both oral and written language forms the contents for each individual's primary and secondary discourses. Our culture as well as our presumptions of other cultures greatly influence those discourses and build the foundations for literacy and language acquisition in the classroom.

McDermott and Varenne's (1995) Culture "as" Disability theorizes that society develops a dominant culture that is commonly recognized as the norm and uses standards to determine one's position in society or if they will be marginalized based on their differences. When the standards of a culture are not met, it is viewed as a disability as if they are missing something and due to this they are outside of the norm and thus labeled. American society has developed a particular set of expectations for its students regardless of their differences. We expect students to participate in the classroom in ways that are culturally unacceptable in their primary discourse and their inability to act according to our expectation can be viewed as a disability. McDermott and Varenne (1995) state that a disability is within our culture and what the culture believes is the norm, marginalizing those who do not fit within the norm in either their own culture (the difference approach), or having no culture at all (deprivation approach). The variety of cultures and their interaction with each other can give teachers the opportunity to use culture to drive classroom instruction beginning with multicultural literature. This appreciation and celebration of our differences builds tolerance and acceptance hopefully decreasing the number of Americans who are marginalized. This study looked at how some mainstreamed students view literature that represents culture that does not fit the norm. It also looked at how teachers incorporated multicultural literature to remove the cultural disability from their classroom and create an accepting and tolerant environment.

Critical Race theory as described by Yosso (2005), and Willis and Parker (2009) theorize that the impact of race and racism on society creates cultural deficiencies towards those outside of the governing culture. On their discussion of Critical Race theory, Willis and Parker (2009) state that “it is unrealistic to believe that anyone living in a racist society is not affected in some way by assumptions about race, racism and power” (p. 34). Those assumptions are brought to the classroom with each student daily. Willis and Parker (2009) suggest that teachers “address [racial differences] in a forthright manner for it will affect their perceptions, interactions and expectations of students as well as their curricular choices and instructional strategies” (p. 34). Yosso (2005) states that we can identify, analyze and challenge “distorted notions of People of Color” (p. 75) through Critical Race theory. We can rename the “norm” with a wider more open minded view and rebuild a more accepting and tolerant society. We live in a society that continues to celebrate only one culture and where others are viewed as insignificant in respect to the dominant culture. The exclusion of all but the dominant culture is evident in our lack of recognition, respect for, and accuracy of knowledge of other cultures. The literatures our students are exposed to that represent other cultures often perpetuate the stereotypes and hold negative connotations that view cultural differences as discrepancies. Before taking this step to incorporate culture through literature, educators should closely examine the texts they will be using to represent other cultures. As stated above, assumptions, stereotypes, and perceptions of other cultures exist before the literature is introduced, and being aware of the truth in what picture books denote will encourage acceptance and tolerance as well as putting many assumptions, stereotypes and perceptions to rest. This action research examined ten picture books as well as the way two of these books in combination with student led discussion affected previous notions of the Japanese culture held by the students.

Using McDermott and Varenne's theory of Culture "as" Disability in combination with Critical Race theory and our understanding of what literacy is we found that many picture books portray cultures in an unrealistic and demeaning manner that only feeds former misconceptions. We also found that the portrayal of multicultural views in picture books does not necessarily change or uphold previous notions held by students. With student led discussions conversations reached a stopping point and only those with practice using a critical lens discussed the insinuations and stereotypes presented in the text. The literature showed how important the use of multicultural literature is in today's classrooms. It showed how using a critical lens along with multiple perspectives to teach multicultural literature can give students the awareness and ability to look beyond the surface of any text. The inclusion of multicultural literature helps to build tolerance and respect for diversity and allows teachers to create an environment that thrives on our differences.

Research Question

Given that literacy is tied to the culture of our primary discourse and the social influence of our secondary discourse, this action research project asks how does the portrayal of multicultural views in picture books change or uphold stereotypes, assumptions and perceptions of other cultures?

Literature Review

This literature review will look at some of the revolving themes found in the research regarding multicultural education. The first section will look at some of the challenges and limitations teachers face when implementing multicultural education in their classrooms. The second section will explore teacher preparedness in the teaching practices of multicultural

education. It will look at summer workshops teachers participate in as well as university programs that range from one project in one course incorporating multicultural curriculum to entire programs embedded with it from beginning to end. Thirdly, the effects of multicultural education on both students and teachers alike will be discussed to show the value it could potentially hold for all students. The research reveals that multicultural education becomes increasingly vital in today's diverse society. While universities are moving towards its inclusion within their education programs, their failure to incorporate it throughout the curriculum leads to teachers feeling underprepared and essentially lacking key steps in implementing a thorough and effective multicultural unit.

Challenges Teachers Face When Applying Multicultural Views to Teaching Practices

One of the most challenging factors in the face of multiculturalism is acquiring the support of the community. V.C. Plaut, L.E. Buffardi, F.G. Garnett, & J.S. Burks (2011) inquire if "diversity is truly about inclusion, then why might it be met with resistance among Whites?" (p. 338). They go on to suggest "that multiculturalism emphasizes the cultures, contributions, and involvement of minorities-or is coded as "only for minorities"-Whites will feel excluded from and less supportive of these efforts." (p. 338). In a three part study done on the supportiveness of British majority members in relation to multiculturalism, it was found that as long as minorities were willing to assimilate into the British culture then the concept would be viewed positively (L.K. Tip, H. Zagefka, R. Gonzalez, R. Brown, M. Cinnirella, & X. Na, 2012). After these three studies were completed, they found that the threat of losing their own British culture was enough to reconsider the entire subject of a more culturally plural society. Plaut et. al, (2011) agree that Whites view multiculturalism as a threat describing the 2010 Arizona law that banned schools from teaching classes that might celebrate one ethnicity over others. In particular, one that

reaches out to the Mexican culture whose country sits so closely to our own and might in turn build tensions unnecessarily. Plaut et. al, (2011) conducted a study of the misunderstood difference between color-blindness (that which celebrates sameness or assimilation) and multiculturalism (described as a mosaic which values individualism and uniqueness). They found that “for Whites (relative to minorities), the appeal of color-blind initiatives and aversion to multicultural initiatives lies, in part, in the perceived inclusivity of color blindness and exclusivity of multiculturalism” (p. 339). Therefore, in order to acquire the support of Whites in the construction of a multicultural governed society, Whites need to be educated on the formal definition of multiculturalism to gain understanding of its inclusivity.

In a study by Howry and Whelan-Kim (2009) of preservice teachers responses to a multicultural children’s literature project, the effectiveness of a university program was evaluated for how well it developed culturally responsive teaching practices. Universities are always looking to better educate themselves on best approaches to use in the classroom to give the most up to date knowledge to future teacher candidates. For a university to determine the best approaches to building teacher knowledge, observation of teachers’ daily practice and its effectiveness on students is essential. Howry and Whelan-Kim (2009) found that the program struggled to find room for a multicultural course. Embedding multiculturalism throughout the curriculum is suggested by researchers such as McNeal (2005) to produce teachers adequately prepared to teach it. Howry and Whelan-Kim (2009) also noted that limited contact with people of diverse cultures provided a challenge for teacher candidates in a small town with few opportunities to be exposed to diverse cultures. Being exposed to multicultural literature, themes, perspectives and ideologies forms the foundation for building that strong background in critical literacy. Critical literacy is the position of looking at something from an analytical perspective to

uncover underlying messages and build flexibility in ones understanding of a subject so as to be able to judge it objectively. Teacher candidates' limited access to persons of diverse backgrounds is only one obstacle in respect to becoming a culturally responsive teacher.

Many teachers lack administrative and/or resource support to meet only the basic needs of the students, not to mention any supplies required to support the institution of a multicultural education. Harman and McClure (2012) found in their study on the use of performance to embody and challenge problems at school that “teachers position themselves as antagonists to the institutional forces at play in River Town and as oppressed by a top down management discourse” (p. 387). Teachers' fear of reprisal served as a silencer for their problems and led to their feelings of isolation and demoralization. It was found however that through performance pedagogy teachers could collaborate new ways of dealing with confrontations to authority in a professional manner. The frustrations that these teachers often held were in regard to the limited resources and support staff available to meet the needs of their students. This struggle to meet student needs with limited resources, goes hand in hand with the struggles described in a study by D.E. Agosto, S. Hughes-Hassell, and C. Gilmore-Clough (2003) of multicultural books for middle grade students written between 1992 and 2001. The study showed that only one sixth of books written in that decade had at least one protagonist of color (not necessarily in a lead role). Teachers at the middle grade level will therefore find it more challenging to incorporate multicultural literature in classrooms unless the school has excellent access to the limited choices available for this age group.

Choosing culturally relevant texts that do not perpetuate stereotypes and assumptions is yet another barrier teachers must overcome when integrating multicultural literature. Many multicultural books represent another culture however forfeit the accuracy of life within that

culture. Golos and Moses (2011) studied 20 children's picture books that portrayed deaf characters and analyzed them "for messages linked to pathological and cultural categories" (p. 270). Specifically they chose books that appealed to children between the ages of four and eight and had a deaf character with no other disability. Their findings showed that only 14% of the 20 books portrayed deaf culture from a cultural perspective. One that depicted "positive examples of people who are Deaf...model Deaf culture and American Sign Language, and...share knowledge of the rich and successful lives they lead" (p. 271). They later make note of the scarcity of "diverse characters and the lack of accurate representation of marginalized populations" (p. 272). This limited choice in multicultural literature does not always mean that the book is not beneficial but rather when using it in the classroom it is important to raise awareness about the book's implications for that culture as well as the message it is sending about the people within that culture. Yoon, Simpson and Haag (2010) conducted a similar study to Golos and Moses (2011), however they focused on 12 picture books chosen by random from a selection of multicultural texts. They focused their attention during their analysis on whether or not the book shared a pluralistic or assimilationist ideology. Of the six books that clearly took a stance on one of these two beliefs (several took a neutral stance), four of them focused on a theme relative to assimilation. Yoon, Simpson, and Haag (2010) found that it is important to "consider whether the text will allow underrepresented students to see themselves in the literature and whether it will provide new cultural, social, and political perspectives to students who are from the dominant culture" (p.116). Both studies showed underlying meanings found within children's books that perpetuate stereotypes or imply to children who are different that assimilating into American culture will lead to a happy and successful life.

Some of the research on cultural relevance focused on students' responses to these texts (Evans, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2009). Evans (2010) studied the way multicultural texts read aloud to fourth graders altered student perspectives of others and increased tolerance. She found that even after 50 books were read and discussed students "did not comprehend the potential societal limitations placed on some groups and voiced a belief that all groups and cultures had the same rights and freedom as they did and that equal opportunities existed for all groups of people" (p. 98). Helping students to see these limitations is going to further develop their critical eye and allow them to begin critically examining texts independently. Her study did find however that these children showed an increase in empathy and began to understand the concepts of stereotypes and biases. Similarly Souto-Manning (2009) studied the ways multicultural literature served as an enabler of culturally responsive pedagogy. In Souto-Manning's first grade classroom, her students ranged widely between government housing and mansions, same sex parents, foster parents, grandparents as guardians, and an interracial family. This diversity among classmates was the foundation for her building acceptance and tolerance among differences. She found that students could see parallel actions among historical segregation and its more discreet existence today where children are pulled out for special needs or gifted programs. She notes that in her program books served "as a tool for critical dialogue and action" (p. 65), and that "dialogue about the book is as important as, if not more important than reading the book itself" (p.65). Therefore, a book's cultural relevance and ideologies are an important factor to consider when choosing a book; however the strategies employed before, during and after reading are crucial to building critical understandings of the text.

A study by Thijs and Verkuyten (2012) looked at the ethnic attitudes of native Dutch students toward multicultural beliefs. The study looked at children between the ages of nine and

13 and found that younger children have a stronger multicultural belief than older children. Surprisingly older children had higher peer acceptance for outside cultures. This surprisingly backwards conclusion shows that all teachers may face the challenge of a group of students who are resistant to accepting differences in culture however as shown by other research, building a sense of community among classmates with differences and then using multicultural literature to support tolerance will prove effective over time. Souto-Manning (2009) shows just how much time and effort must be put into building this sense of community in her two year study of a diverse group of first graders.

Cultural relevance takes on a new meaning when discussing the education of English Language Learners. Not only is it important that these students are able to relate to the text, but their motivation and comprehension skills are likely to increase when they read books that they see themselves in. This approach is especially helpful when assessing these students. In a study of nine third grade English Language Learners, Ebe (2010) found that students could better grasp the meaning of the culturally relevant text and performed better on assessments looking at reading proficiently using the same text.

The text cannot stand alone. When teachers find a text that is culturally relevant and portrays the characters in a respectful manner, they must also consider the approach they will take to give their students multiple perspectives, background knowledge and the strategies they will use to implore students to use a critical lens while reading multicultural literature. Rice (2005) found in her study that students reading multicultural texts failed to grasp a valuable meaning from the text when their only instruction was to write their response to a text down and then discuss it in peer led discussion groups. The groups were altered to see if gender played a role in conclusions drawn and assumptions made. Comments were shallow and the knowledge

gained from reading was limited. This study illustrates that without teachers laying down the foundation for a tolerant and respectful attitude that monitors for imbedded stereotypes and assumptions students will gain only a superficial understanding of a text.

The effects of race and socio-economic status also play a role in the challenging act of implementing multiculturalism in schools. According to Rice (2005), although “many educators view the inclusion of multicultural literature in literature programs as a means to help students develop understanding and tolerance for others whose sociocultural frame differs from their own” (p. 343), students may experience restrictions in their acceptance and understanding of the text due to “content or form that he/she deems unacceptable” (p. 344). In her study of eight white sixth grade students from middle class families, Rice (2005) found that students were unable to see beyond the superficial aspects of the text. In discussion groups that followed the reading of four short stories by Gary Soto about Hispanics from a lower class, students discussions revolved around the Hispanics as poor, fat and uneducated. Rice (2005) states that “the patterns that emerged across all of the discussions indicated the influence of the children’s class, race, and gender on their construction of meaning, reflecting the importance of a reader’s sociocultural frame in determining his/her construction of meaning” (p. 348). Students lack of knowledge about the Hispanic culture led to their inability to relate to the experiences of the protagonists (even though they represented a universal theme), and misinterpretations such as “the boys’ suggesting that the setting of the story was in Australia because the characters were drinking eggnog during the summer” (p. 356). On the other hand, it is sometimes the ways the school tracks students that socio-economic status comes into play. Harmen and McClure (2012) suggest that teachers often revert to an “institutional discourse” in which students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are labeled as “at risk” or “underperforming” rather than looking at

how the institution has affected the performance of the students. These students are often minorities who bear labels and placements that greatly influence their education.

In a school with high racial tensions in which the White students sit on one side of the class and the African American students on the other side, McNeal (2005) describes a situation in her study in which an African American female offered an apology for having to mention the ways in which Whites historically mistreated African Americans and a White male joking response warning her to be careful about what she was saying. The classroom teacher quickly put this conversation to rest and directed the male to stop making comments. These issues brew just below the surface in these classrooms waiting for a spark to ignite and give them reasons to act on resentments. For teachers attempting to manage this tension while simultaneously trying to implement a culturally diverse curriculum it is challenging to say the least. In contrast a compilation of 30 studies discussed the effects of multicultural education on racial attitudes for students ranging from pre-k to the twelfth grade. In one of these studies by Okoye-Johnson (2011), the results showed that “exposure to multicultural education brought about more positive changes in suburban students’ racial attitudes than did exposure to traditional instruction” (p. 1264). This same study done in an urban setting showed even greater impact as these students had “been exposed to a variety of cultures, [and] were more willing to accept the differences and recognize the similarities among the various ethnic groups” (p.1264). Okoye-Johnson goes on to suggest that the more diverse suburban areas become, the more accepting they will become. Multicultural literature can serve as an excellent support for building tolerance and acceptance.

Teacher Preparedness for Teaching Multicultural Education

As American society reaches new levels of diversity it is becoming progressively more important to realign school curriculums to meet the needs of the diverse student populations. In

an attempt to do just that, universities and even some school districts are finding ways to educate teachers in relation to multiculturalism. In one such study, Athanases (2006) explored a group of high school teachers collaborative skills when he addressed their reorganization of a multicultural unit spanning grades nine through twelve. Athanases found that the teachers lacked familiarity with multicultural works outside of the canon, and that the time required to read, discuss, and prepare units was limited. Teachers responded enthusiastically to the program and were motivated by their accomplishments to continue to rebuild the curriculum after this summer program. One group member stated:

whether we feel that because we have not experienced it we can not do it, or whether we feel intimidated by it, or bringing up topics that may be a little bit scary because we haven't worked them out ourselves yet-these become excuses for not doing the literature. (Athanases, 2006, pp. 20).

Incorporating these new pieces of literature forced teachers to touch on issues they had felt uncomfortable working with in the past. The connections they were making to the texts gave them a fresh perspective on how to approach critical literacy. For another group member, Vivian, a Chicana, "culturally connecting was automatic and powerful" (p. 20) providing her with an authentic experience that she could now bring to the classroom. All of the books chosen for this study except one were written by authors who were not White. He hoped this would strengthen the authenticity of the literature if they were written from a perspective unfamiliar to students and teachers alike. In a similar study that included two participants, Stevens and Brown (2011) found that "blogging has the potential to enhance knowledge of the ways technology can be harnessed to promote critical multicultural literacy instruction" (p. 31). Both participants were chosen for the study due to their numerous and authentic comments made on the class blog.

They observed that the success of blogging in the classroom “hinged entirely on a shared commitment by members of the group” (p. 41). Both could see potential ways to incorporate this method in their own classrooms and ways it would build communication between parents, students, and themselves. The graduate students in this study were to use blogging as a:

space to identify and share specific concrete ways to address the blending of critical literacy and multicultural education in their practice. Blog posts that reflected such thinking emphasized the potential for critical multicultural literacy instruction to be transformative and promote social justice. (Stevens and Brown, 2011, pp. 44).

The expectation of this study was for graduate students to transfer the combination of technology and multiculturalism into their own classrooms. Further study would be beneficial when looking at the effects that this program had on teacher practice.

The effects of multiculturalism in preservice education suggest that teacher practice should show evidence of this learning through the incorporation of multicultural literature, themes, and ideologies throughout the curriculum. Evans (2010) suggests that teachers should receive adequate training in “critical literacy practices and in multicultural literature” (p. 101) before incorporating it in their classrooms. Similarly, McNeal (2005) presents the practice of two teachers with thorough background in multiculturalism though their personal experiences in a diverse environment had provided them insight that the majority of preservice teachers lack. The practice of these teachers shows how well they know the curriculum and their approach to navigate it to weave multicultural practices in without going against state expectations. The long term goal of our schools is to produce socially responsible citizens that will uphold our values

and seek ways to improve our communities. Multiculturalism is a direction all classrooms should be heading to meet this goal.

Dooley (2008) suggests teachers working with a diverse group of students, such as Souto-Manning (2009) describes in her study of first graders should understand the “necessity that instructional strategies should build upon children’s backgrounds, especially when those children come from culturally and linguistically diverse communities that differ from the teacher’s experiences” (p. 63). Dooley’s (2008) study describes the micro-transformations teachers should be making in an effort to better serve the needs of their students. Participants in the study “illustrated how their expanded definitions of culture, language and literacy benefited their instructional planning” (p.65). Clearly there is a need to expand educators understanding of multiculturalism. The micro-transformations teachers were making were small and took time to establish. Teachers stated that the program affected their planning in positive ways and many were beginning to see the importance of the micro-transformations. This study shows how important an entire college program as well as school curriculums embedded with multicultural views is to learners.

Colby and Lyon (2004) believe that “the greater challenge may be creating an awareness among teachers of the important role multicultural literature plays in the lives of children” (p, 24). Countless teachers are entering the field on a yearly basis unprepared in the methods of teaching students multicultural beliefs. This lack of readiness is due to universities implementation of multiculturalism as a slow process. Most begin by placing it in their standards of one or two required classes. Unfortunately is not preparing teachers adequately to teach the growing diverse population. In a study by McNeal (2005) of two novice secondary English teachers that serve a diverse student population multicultural practices are crucial to

meet student needs. Both of these teachers received a multicultural education referred to as MTEP (multicultural teacher education program). This entire program while preparing them to receive an educational degree had multicultural themes infused throughout it. Both teachers were held by peers, administrators, and students in high regard. Although this study showed how effective a program infused with multiculturalism can be, this next study shows how behind many teachers are. A look at a qualitative study by Colby and Lyon (2004) with approximately 100 preservice teachers written responses to their understandings about using multicultural literature in the classroom showed that they knew very little in relation to multiculturalism. Several themes that emerged were “it opened my eyes” (p. 25) and “not just African American” (p. 26). One participant stated “I cannot fully understand what it must be like to have a dominant culture being portrayed everywhere I looked, however, I can only imagine the stifling effect it would impose on someone” (p. 25). These teachers were beginning to see from a new perspective the struggles of being a minority. Another student in describing how this class opened his mind stated “bringing culturally diverse literature in a classroom brings culturally diverse knowledge to all students. Since knowledge is power, we will be empowering our students with cultural diversity and tolerance” (p. 26). The second study described here has a lack of depth in respect to what students can bring with them to the classroom. While McNeal’s (2005) study showed how deeply multiculturalism was interwoven throughout both teachers’ curriculum, Colby and Lyon (2004) only managed to make the preservice teachers aware of multiculturalism. In contrast to Colby and Lyon (2004), a case study by Thomas and Vanderhaar (2008) studied the extent to which multicultural education was part of the teacher education program and candidates reactions to this part of the program. Throughout the course work in field experience required for this program, the preservice teachers did not consider

multiculturalism “an integral part of teaching. Nor did the program convince them of the need” (p. 186). The lack of teacher educators practicing what they preached lead candidates to view multiculturalism as a significant and were not sure that they would ever practice it in their classrooms. Candidates showed resistance to multiculturalism often sharing ideas about it that lacked depth and commitment. Teacher educators became aware of many flaws in the system and looked forward to finding ways to weave multiculturalism throughout the program. Thomas and Vanderhaar (2008) agree with McNeal (2005) that a program embedded with multicultural themes will best serve the needs of preservice teachers to teach a diverse group of students.

Effects of Multiculturalism on Students

As stated by Colby and Lyon (2004), “multicultural literature helps children identify with their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the dialogue on issues regarding diversity” (p. 24). Its (multicultural literature) significance does not lie solely in touching the lives of students from other cultures, but in creating an awareness and tolerance for all cultures that leads all students to look critically at literature as well as media and promote acts of social justice. In a first grade classroom, Souto-Manning (2009) conducted a study over the course of two years to show how her diverse group of students came together to put an end to the segregation that they noticed in their school, which paralleled the segregation that occurred throughout the twentieth century (and continues to exist in a more discreet manner). Her choice to read *The Three Little Pigs*, a story all the children had heard before from multiple perspectives, ignited conversations in six and seven year olds that held profound meaning. They asserted from the three stories she read that just because they were all different didn't mean any of them were wrong. One student's analogy proved that not only did she understand the concept but she could relate that concept to her own life. Sanquitta stated in group discussion, “Like, the

way we speak at home? [referring to African American English]” (p.62). Further on in the discussion Kary stated, “Now I get it. Just because someone does something in a different way, it doesn’t mean that it is wrong. We should still listen to it, and understand, or at least try, how a person understands something” (p. 63). Likewise Cai (2008) describes an analogy that a fourth grade student made between the “class-based differences” (p. 216) of the picture book *Voices in the Park* between “a character’s condescending attitude toward a young girl and her jobless father with his own mother’s attitude toward a shabbily clothed man they encountered in real life” (p. 216). These students’ comprehension of such important topics shows that with the right foundation and significant scaffolding a teacher can allow students to critically discuss books without a great deal of teacher intervention. Clarifying student insight and correcting misperceptions were the only reasons Souto-Manning (2009) stepped into the group discussions. In contrast, Rice (2005) sat back allowing students to guide their own discussions and gave students no background information to correspond to the literature they read concerning a culture none of the students had experienced before. All conversations that her study showed, lacked depth and students struggled to make connections. Her expectation had been that if the books held universal themes, that her students would see themselves mirrored in the text and acknowledge ways in which they were similar to the characters of the text. She notes that “the fact that the students were reading stories about characters whose socio-economic status and culture differed from theirs was a primary influence on their interpretations of these stories” (p.345). Dressel (2005) shared a similar finding on the importance of teacher’s scaffolding for students. Although her students did show growth in terms of a change in attitude from a negative to a positive in respect to minorities, they lacked insight in many ways. The simple fact that students viewed minorities as foreigners even after a multicultural unit showed that more work

was needed before they could be ready to look at a text or media critically. An example of one student's knowledge before the unit was shown in a writing sample where he stated "that he didn't know the difference between Vietnamese Americans and Chinese Americans, but he knew they "know martial arts, and have beautiful art and live in cramped houses in Japan" (p.757). Upon completion of the unit, the same student stated, "that Vietnamese Americans "don't have advanced cities [because they are] farmers" (p.757). One of the teacher's main goals during this unit was for the students to enjoy reading. Hanging the unit on student enjoyment rather than increasing knowledge of other cultures might have contributed to the limited multicultural knowledge gained during this time. Dressel (2005), describes student as "making a clean break as they moved from the world of the literature to real life" (p.757) showing how the effectiveness of the unit ended at the classroom door. Souto-Manning's (2009) use of multiple perspectives such as media reports, books from different perspectives, articles, and through these perspectives making differences visible. Dressel's (2005) study showed a lack of challenging questions to encourage student thinking, and the opportunity to discuss what was read with a teacher guiding it in a critical manner. In contrast, Evans (2010) discusses how "students valued the experiences of different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups while at the same time embracing the oneness of our nations heritage" (p. 98). Her students shared a similar respect to Souto-Manning (2009) and Louie (2005). These three studies show how the effects of multicultural infused curriculum can benefit any age group as the studies span first graders through seniors in high school, not to mention the effects on university students even in other areas of study. In reference to multicultural literature, Cai (2008) warns us that, "to the dismay of many teachers, students' transactions with this type of text can also open a Pandora's Box of misunderstandings, stereotypical perceptions, biases, and prejudices. Instead of transforming racial attitudes, it may

reinforce biases and prejudices” (p. 212). Many students and even teachers are unaware of the preconceived perceptions and biases they carry with them at all times. Setting these aside as an educator is often a struggle especially for teachers who are blind to their own biases. Helping students to set their biases aside when they are in the dark is very difficult but not impossible. Cai (2008) also suggests that educators “engage students in transaction with literature about unfamiliar cultures and encourage them to reflect on their attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs on cultures different from their own” (p. 212). Cai (2008) is suggesting that students reflecting on their own presumptions will aid in making them aware of their own assumptions and is the first step to becoming more accepting and tolerant.

In a small town, Louie (2005) studied 25 seniors empathetic growth after first exploring the Chinese culture in depth and from multiple perspectives, including perspectives from multiple time periods. Louie (2005) states “students, usually limited in their background knowledge about the multicultural texts they read, tend to interpret these texts on the basis of their self-centered worldviews and experiences” (p. 567). Once in depth background knowledge had been established, the students read a multicultural text together that included lessons, projects, and discussions to encourage student growth and understanding in multiple ways. Louie (2005) suggests that the political context of the reader influences their interpretation and recommends teachers show students “how to question and critique texts and their affiliated social formations and cultural assumptions” (p. 567). This theory corresponds with what Dressel (2005) found in that background knowledge and teacher scaffolding is crucial to building an effective multicultural unit. Louie (2005) found that in a town with a large White population and very small Hispanic and African American population the inclusion of such texts was rare if not unheard of. Many of the students who participated in this unit found it beneficial to widen the

scope of their worldly knowledge. Louie (2005) asserts that “many students were highly aware of their small world. Because they lived in such a protective world, they found it extremely important to have a unit like this to broaden their education” (p. 576). Much of the text approached topics that the conservative students felt uncomfortable with though their background knowledge contributed to their ability to respect the culture even if they didn’t agree with it.

Much of the research encourages educators to take care when selecting multicultural books for their students (Evans, 2010). Evans (2010) suggests some things to look at in multicultural literature that “avoided stereotypes, portrayed the values and cultural group in an authentic way, showed people from different cultures working together, emphasized both similarities and differences, broadened children’s vision and invited reflections and showed multiple and contradictory perspectives” (p.96). Colby and Lyon (2004) and Rice (2005) also agree that choosing an appropriate text requires the educator to monitor for stereotypes and assumptions that perpetuate misinterpretations of other cultures. Golos and Moses (2011) and Yoon Simpson and Haag (2010) both conducted studies of literature that showed how common these ideas are in multicultural texts and although they warned educators of the consequences of using these texts they suggested that with minimal choices they would still provide a sneak peak into a culture. They believe it is the teacher’s responsibility however to educate their students in the critique of these stories and raise awareness of perpetuating stereotypes, assumptions and perceptions. The accuracy of how a culture is portrayed exposes students to positive role models and messages in print and nonprint materials from a young age. Golos and Moses (2011) describe how inaccuracies in the literature can harm the ways others respect and regard a culture. They state that much of the literature portray deafness as curable with either a hearing aid or

cochlear implant, or depict deaf people in isolation, and either angry or frustrated with their inability to hear.

In conclusion, school districts and universities should consider embedding multicultural practices throughout their curriculums. Educators should take note of student perceptions about other cultures and find ways to challenge assumptions and stereotypes that are preexisting. The literature they choose to use should accurately portray cultures and educators should be aware of inaccuracies and use critical literacy to raise awareness and promote social justice. Teachers in every setting should be prepared to include multicultural themes and ideologies in daily lessons regardless of their students ethnic backgrounds. Teachers should also continue to stay current with best strategies for meeting diverse student needs. The research shows that multiculturalism is growing significantly and that in years to come the population known today as minorities will one day surpass the White population. Creating an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance and celebrating both similarities and differences among cultures will be crucial in future classrooms. As Evans (2010) puts it, “if we teach students to be literate without helping them to develop a commitment to construct a just and humane world we will foster a nation and world in which there is a threat to justice everywhere” (p. 101).

Method

Context

Research for this study took place at three separate home residences. The names of the towns these homes reside in are pseudonyms chosen by the participants in order to better protect the identities and rights of the participants in the study. The first home was located in the rural town of Bond, New York. The two students sat at their dining room table. The population in this town is 1,730 and the median income is only slightly below the state average at \$53,470. Bond’s

racial demographics are as follows, 96.9% of residents are White, 1.5% of residents are Mixed with two or more races, .7% of residents are Black, .4% of residents are Hispanic, .2% of residents are American Indian, .2% of residents are Asian, and .06% of residents are listed as Other.

The second home is in the rural city of Lincoln, New York. The two students sat at a dining room table. The city's population is 15,465 and the median income in this city is significantly below the state average at \$37,998. The racial demographics of Lincoln are 87.9% White residents, 4.9% Black residents, 3% Hispanic residents, 2.8% Mixed race residents, .8% Asian residents, .4% American Indian residents, .1% residents listed as Other, and .01% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander residents.

The third home is in the suburban city of Potter, New York. The three students sat on a couch in a finished basement. In Potter, the population is 45,631 and the median income is \$57,196. The racial demographics of Potter are as follows: 82.6% White residents, 6.8% Black residents, 5.4% Asian residents, 3% Hispanic residents, 1.8% Mixed race residents, .3% American Indian residents, .1% residents listed as Other, and .03% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander residents.

Participants

There are seven student participants in this study between the ages of nine and eighteen. Three are male and four are female. Five of the student participants are White, one of the student participants was Chinese, and another was Indian. The names listed throughout this study are pseudonyms chosen by each student to aid in protecting the rights and identities of each participant. There are also three adult participants that were interviewed through email. The

adults are all White female teachers who work with students ranging from age four to age twelve. The adults have also been given pseudonyms to protect their identities and rights.

Master Chief is a 13 year old White male who is homeschooled. He enjoys imagining that he is a sniper or marine and dresses up in gear with a large selection of weapons. Some of his toy guns were hand made by his grandfather and he enjoys sharing the characteristics of each gun. He also creates movies using his mother's video camera and a program on the computer. He loves learning about history. His younger sister Cheezy (another participant) is an 11 year old white female who is also homeschooled. She loves to draw and play outside. She also enjoys using her imagination. They both attended public school up until about two years ago when their mother decided to home school them. She made this decision after seeing not only a lack of God within schools, but a disdain for Him. This in combination with the media violence in schools and children's loss of innocence at such an early age made the decision an easy one. Master Chief and his younger sister Cheezy do not live within walking distance of any other children and often spend time after school in parks or playing sports. Their mother spends her free time remodeling the house, and gardening. Their father sells windows and doors as well as several other products and often spends several days a week in Pennsylvania for his job. They have a very close family dynamic spending so much time together; however both Master Chief and Cheezy have found their independent interests and pursue them without holding back. Both Cheezy and Master Chief recognize that they are not exposed to a lot of diversity through direct contact, or through literature. Their understanding of other cultures is limited and based mostly on media related stereotypes.

La-a (pronounced Ladasha) is a 17 year old Indian female. She absolutely loves the Harry Potter series. She enjoys reading many kinds of books including autobiographies such as

Obama's, Bush's and Clinton's. She will be attending college in the fall and hopes to become a corporate lawyer someday. Education holds great value in her household and she has remained very involved in many extracurricular activities over the years building up an impressive resume. She loves to run and goof off but takes her studies serious. Most of the classes she took in high school were either Advanced Placement courses or college courses. La-a is surrounded by diversity and genuinely appreciates the differences of other cultures. Through her AP classes she has learned to use a critical lens when viewing media or literature.

Baby Spice, a Chinese female is 17. She plays on the track team for her school and is a part of the Interact Club and a leader in the National Honor Society at Rush Henrietta. She will also be attending college in the fall. Through her AP language and literature courses she learned to look critically at texts and to be aware of innuendos and stereotypes as well as where those ideas stem from. Baby Spice surrounds herself with a diverse group of friends and loves that she grew up in such a diverse environment.

Lynette is a White female, and is 18 years old. She spent most of her high school summers volunteering for the town as a teacher's aid to preschool students, as well as at the hospital doing any tasks they assigned her to. She loves to read almost any book simply because she loves to learn. She averages two to three books a week while attending school and working part time at Payless. She is well known for her sarcasm and will be attending college in the fall for Communications. She has also participated in extracurricular activities and taken several AP classes throughout high school. Her ability to look at books and media critically was developed through her classes. Her AP classes also exposed her to very diverse literature that built her appreciation for other cultures and a passion to learn about them.

General Nicholas is a 12 year old white male going into the seventh grade. He missed most of the first grade due to illness and fell behind in reading. His constant absence led to a struggle over the next few years in reading, writing and spelling, but with the combined efforts of his teachers and great parental support he has caught up and is right on track. Though he still views reading with a slightly negative view, he does enjoy books at his reading and maturity level and unintentionally challenges himself with his passion for history. When he finds something he is interested in (usually related to history) he will read any book, article, or magazine about that even if the reading level is years above him. His ability to recall that information is amazing and stretches back over years of study on dozens of topics. General Nicholas' father is a NYS Corrections Officer and his mother is a receptionist at a dentist office. He is the fifth child to his mother but the first for his father and has been raised as an only child. General Nicholas has been exposed to some racist views and comments and although he does share some of these views, his passion for history has taught him that many of those views are based on stereotypes.

Abraham Lincoln, a nine year old White male, idolizes his cousin General Nicholas, and shares his passion for history and the drive to self educate. He also has had a few struggles with reading and received some extra help with a reading teacher this past year. This individualized attention has really helped him grow. Despite these struggles he truly enjoys reading. He is very smart and as an only child, enjoys spending time with adults and children often holding very sophisticated conversations considering his age. He loves using his imagination with General Nicholas to recreate some of the history they have studied. Abraham Lincoln lives with his mother, a traveling registered nurse, and her boyfriend who is a nurse at the VA. Abraham Lincoln is not exposed to a lot of diversity and seems unaware of stereotypes.

I interviewed a reading specialist in Virginia, named Melissa. She has her BA in Childhood and Special Education, and her MA in Literacy and Culture. Melissa is a Caucasian woman, age 27 and has been teaching for four and a half years. For the last year she has been the reading specialist for grades three through five in her school but before that taught second and third graders.

I also interviewed Janine, a Caucasian female, who is currently working on her MA in Literacy at St. John Fisher College. Janine has her BS in Childhood and Special Education with a minor in Instructional technology. She has two full years of teaching experience working with fifth and sixth graders in Gotham (pseudonym), New York. She currently teaches sixth grade in Gotham.

Izzy was my final interview. She has an AAS in Early Childhood Teacher Education, and a BS in Child Life Psychology & Child Development. She has two years of teaching experience working with preschoolers between the ages of three and four.

Researcher Stance

In this study, I played the role of an active participant observer. Mills (2011) defines this as being actively engaged in teaching and suggests we find a way to record ourselves to adjust or teaching methods to better meet the needs of our students. I was actively engaged in each session with my students through the reading of the literature, and guiding discussion. I also observed as much as possible during each session but used audio recordings, and a video recorder to allow myself the opportunity to observe everything.

I obtained my BS in Childhood and Special Education from SUNY Geneseo and am currently working on my Masters in Literacy Birth through 12 at St. John Fisher College. I currently work at Cracker Barrel in Henrietta, New York and reside in Scottsville.

Method

To begin this study, I first made sure to receive permission from the students and their parents. I began the session the same way for all three groups of students, by asking them answer a few questions. This questionnaire (see Appendix A for a blank form) was used to see if the students knew what stereotypes were and to find out what kind of prior knowledge they had about Japanese people and the Japanese culture. I also wanted to know if the students had any assumptions about or held any judgments against the Japanese and what those might be.

After each student finished their questionnaire, I collected them, and then read aloud the book Faithful Elephants by Yukio Tsuchiya. This is a historical fiction picture book that tells the story of three elephants that were alive during World War II and living in a zoo in Tokyo, Japan at that time. The story describes how the zoo keepers had to kill all of the dangerous animals in the zoo. They had to poison them because bombs were landing on Tokyo and if the animals escaped they posed a threat to the already fearful citizens. The elephants, being the most loved were the last to die and did so by starving to death. The zoo keepers had attempted other ways of killing them, all which failed and this slow death was heartbreaking for the zoo keepers. They hoped each day that the war would end and they could try to save the elephants.

After I finished reading the book I asked them to fill out a second questionnaire (see Appendix B for a blank form). This questionnaire was used to learn about their interpretation of the text and any feelings they now had about the Japanese. I wanted to maintain their unique opinions of the text before discussion to guarantee others did not influence their feelings and ideas.

After they each finished their questionnaire, I began recording their small group discussions where they began by verbally answering the questions from the questionnaire. All

three groups struggled to hold discussion so I often posed questions to prompt their discussion and asked them to elaborate on their answers by asking questions such as “Why do you say that?” or “What do you mean by that?” This discussion went in several directions depending on the group. Master Chief and Cheezy discussed their knowledge of the Japanese before reading the book and discussed how this book gave support to their assumptions and judgments. Lynette, La-a and Baby Spice discussed other books they had read, and looked at the text from a critical lens. General Nicholas and Abraham Lincoln discussed the history of Pearl Harbor, and the United States retaliation. They made a lot of judgments based on history and even tried to look at the situation from the perspective of the Japanese.

At the conclusion of this session I sat with each student for a few moments alone to fill out a cultural relevance chart (see Appendix C for blank chart) in which they judged how well they could relate to the text. Each student answered the questions I asked by rating their agreement or disagreement on a scale of one to four, with four being the highest form of agreement. I asked students to elaborate on their answers to a few questions when I wanted to know what they were thinking and to make sure I knew that they understood the question correctly.

I also sat down with each group a second time. This session began by having the student’s recall what we did in the first session and what the book had been about. I then provided them with a few historical facts about the book showing points where it had been historically inaccurate, and asked them what they thought about those details. I asked them questions such as why the author may have left out this information and how that would have changed their feelings about the book. Cheezy and Master Chief discussed several reasons why the author would change the facts and said that they probably would have felt the same for the

most part. Lynette, La-a, and Baby Spice again looked critically at the reasons for the inaccuracies and were very insightful through their discussion. General Nicholas and Abraham Lincoln didn't think that learning the facts changed their opinions, but tried to think of reasons they would have changed the facts if they were the authors.

I then read them another picture book about the Japanese entitled Tree of Cranes by Allen Say. This book is about a young Japanese boy whose mother grew up in America and who now lives and raises her family in Japan. She teaches the young boy about a holiday that she misses called Christmas and teaches him about the importance of a promise and the hope and peace that Christmas brings to the world.

After reading this book, I then asked them to tell me what they thought of the Japanese. They discussed how different this book was from the other book and how their perception changed after reading it. All three groups had a more respectful view of the Japanese after reading this book. The three seniors compared what they knew of the culture and how the media portrays the Japanese versus how this book portrays them. All of the younger kids commented on their memories being refreshed about certain aspects of the Japanese culture and thought it surprising that the little boy had never celebrated Christmas before. Abraham Lincoln remembered details about the Chinese New Year which he mistakenly associated with Japan until General Nicholas corrected him.

Quality and Credibility of Research

According to Mills (2011) ensuring the validity of a study requires the inclusion of four components. These components are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. While performing this study the quality of the information I collect rests in its credibility. Credibility is defined by Mills (2011) as "the 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). To ensure that my information was credible, I used triangulation in the collection of my data. Mills (2011) defines triangulation as a researcher’s use of comparative data using several sources or methods to gain a well rounded understanding of the subject. A second approach I will take to guarantee credibility was to use a critical colleague to view the course I planned to take when performing this study. Their insight allowed me to step back and take a second look through another educator’s eyes

Transferability was another important consideration for this study. Transferability is defined by Mills (2011) as the researchers belief that the knowledge gained from the study is context bound and does not make the goal of the study to find a larger truth or generalization about a group of people. In respect to transferability I collected data specific to my study that refers only to the participants directly involved. I provided very descriptive details about the location of the study and the procedures taken in its development.

Mills (2011) suggests that a researcher also guarantees dependability in their collection of data. Dependability is simply described as the stability of the data. The data should be true and unique to this specific study. To assure that the information I collect will be dependable I will continue to use my critical colleague for each step I take in my data collection. We will individually look at the data to make sure we both understand it the same and any personal assumptions or understandings will be dismissed to create a less biased understanding of the data.

Mills (2011) defines confirmability as “neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (p. 105). As mentioned above, my analysis of the data will go alongside that of my critical colleague to guarantee objectivity. My analysis alongside my use of triangulation allowed

me to compare each data source against each other. None of the data collected will stand alone. Each source will rely slightly on another to guarantee confirmability.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants

Before beginning my research, I collected informed assent and consent from my participants depending on their age and parental permission if necessary. The consent and assent form gave them information regarding the purpose of this study and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. This form gave me permission from all participants to use the information they provided me in my collection of data. Each participant willingly signed the forms and agreed to participate in the study. They each recognized that they would remain anonymous and their information would remain confidential as I would remove any identifying marks from the artifacts I collected. I did replace each participant's true name with a pseudonym.

Data Collection

For my data collection I asked each student to answer a few questions regarding their previous knowledge of the Japanese. I collected this questionnaire (see Appendix A for a blank form) and gave them another one to fill out after I read them the book. The second questionnaire (see Appendix B for a blank form) was collected after the group discussion about the book. I also used both video and audio recordings of discussion sessions. The questionnaires provided me with a little background knowledge and gave me insight as to what influenced the participant's understandings of the text. It also showed me if the book altered their perception of the Japanese at all or if discussion of the text changed their feelings and understandings of the Japanese culture. I also filled out a cultural relevance chart (see Appendix C for blank chart) with each student after the group discussion that had them rate the book on how well they could relate to it.

I conducted three interviews (see Appendix D for blank interview) through email to see how teachers in several different schools view multicultural education. The participants in these interviews expressed a willingness to do follow up interviews regarding any questions I had after the first interview. The interviews looked at the demographics of each teacher's school to see if that played a factor in how the school views multicultural education and the approaches those teachers use to include it with their students.

The last set of data I looked at was an analysis of multicultural picture books to see how they portrayed the culture that they depicted in their story. I chose 10 picture books at random. Many were selected by a librarian and were labeled as multicultural picture books. I studied these books using a chart. This chart asked questions to determine if the book looks at the culture of the characters or incorporates any cultural views or ideologies. This chart will also look at the perception of the culture as well as whether the illustrator or author incorporated any physical or cultural stereotypes and how clearly those may be displayed or if they are discreetly integrated into the text. The author's ethnicity or connection to the culture of the text is noted when possible.

Data Analysis

This action research project required me to collect several forms of data, including student led discussions that were audio recorded, before and after questionnaires, a cultural relevance rubric, teacher interviews, and a book analysis chart that was used for my personal analysis of ten children's picture books. To begin analyzing this data, I transcribed all of the student discussions, and made several copies of all of my data. I then read through all of it to refresh my memory on everything that had been done and collected. In order to narrow down which aspects of my data were the most important to my findings, I read through everything

once again highlighting the information from each data source that directly related to my research question. Once I had all of this information I began going through the highlighted data making notes of ideas or concepts that were being repeated across my sources. The cultural relevance chart that I had used only had one question that directly related to my research question, and the questionnaires only had two questions that gave me information about my specific question. Therefore, the only information that I analyzed from those two sources were those specific questions. I then looked at my book analysis and narrowed down the information gathered from them to the aspects that directly answered my question. I created three topic questions that stemmed from my research question, and applied them to each book using the notes I had taken previously. The transcribed discussions and teacher interviews were harder to narrow down until after I began coding the data. As I began reading through my data to code it, I noticed common threads appearing through all of my sources that had also been consistent with the literature. These codes let me to three themes that represent my findings. The three themes that emerged were the following: students' prior knowledge influences their interpretation of books, pairing critical thinking and multiple perspectives builds an ideal teaching environment for multicultural literature, and the importance for all students to read multicultural literature.

Findings and Discussion

In my analysis of the data collected for this study there were three recurring themes that appeared across all of my data sources. These themes were as follows: students' prior knowledge influences their interpretation of books, pairing critical thinking and multiple perspectives builds an ideal teaching environment for multicultural literature, and the importance for all students to read multicultural literature. Students' prior knowledge influences their interpretation of books

will discuss how each child's unique background influences their understanding of a text. I will also discuss how the individual backgrounds can contribute to building tolerance and acceptance. The second theme of pairing critical thinking and multiple perspectives to build an ideal teaching environment for multicultural literature reflects many of the struggles found through out my data as well as the literature on this subject. The third theme will show how important the inclusion of multicultural literature is for students of all ages and why it is essential in today's global economy.

Students' Prior Knowledge Influences their Interpretation of Books

As our classrooms increase in diversity, the variety of cultural knowledge among our students increases and consequently becomes more valuable. For those in less diverse environments, cultural knowledge and awareness is still a valuable tool in the classroom. Considering the world teachers are preparing students for, multicultural knowledge can greatly impact the respect for individual differences. In doing this research, I noticed that students bring so much to the table when we teach them, and this prior knowledge greatly influences how much they gain and what they interpret from what we give them.

In the table below, an excerpt of the discussion between two students are shown in relation to the first book I read to them titled, *Faithful Elephants*. This text is a historical fiction picture book that tells the story of three elephants that were alive during World War II and living in a zoo in Tokyo, Japan at that time. The story describes how the zoo keepers had to kill all of the dangerous animals in the zoo to prevent their escape if the area was bombed. The elephants, being the most loved were the last to die and did so by starving to death. The zoo keepers had attempted other ways of killing them, all which failed and this slow death was heartbreaking for the zoo keepers.

Table 1

Discussion on Faithful Elephants with Cheezy and Master Chief

Line	Speaker	Discussion
54	Prompt by Alaina	So what do you think of the Japanese?
55	Cheezy	I think that they're kind of cruel. But sometimes they can, you know feel bad about what they do.
56	Prompt by Alaina	Anything else? Any other feelings or thoughts?
57	Cheezy	Uhh...pause...I don't have anything
58	Master Chief	Well I didn't like the Japanese to begin with.
59	Prompt by Alaina	Why not?
60	Master Chief	Cause they basically—
61	Cheezy	I like Japanese people
62	Master Chief	They just bombed Pearl Harbor for no reason, started a war that didn't need to happen in the first place.
63	Prompt by Alaina	Yeah? You said you liked Japanese people?
64	Cheezy	A little bit. I mean they stopped by our house ahh... One of them stopped by our house with two girls and they took pictures of our house.

One of the homeschooled children, Cheezy interpreted the actions of the Japanese as “surprisingly cruel” (Table 1, line 55), and without her elaborating as to why she felt that way it appears that either her previous knowledge led her to that conclusion or that she misinterpreted the text. She also noticed that although they were cruel, they can “feel bad about what they do”

(Table 1, line 55). This observation that they might have felt guilty for their actions did not soften her outlook on them though. After looking at her questionnaire, the only previous knowledge she had of the Japanese and World War II was that they “were responsible for the bombing of Pearl Harbor” (Before Questionnaire, June 13, 2012). With her only prior knowledge being negative, her assumptions that these acts were out of cruelty rather than necessity were not surprising. This comment could have also been directed at those responsible for deciding to kill off the animals rather than for the zoo keepers. At the end of the discussion she noted that she did like the Japanese because, “one of them stopped by our house with two girls and they took pictures of our house” (Table 1, line 64). Master Chief on the other hand, stated his dislike for the Japanese based solely on their bombing of Pearl Harbor as stated in Table 1, line 62. The discussion with these two students required a lot of prompting on my part and most of the discussion was lacking any sort of depth. They answered my questions with little to no elaboration and displayed limited prior knowledge of the Japanese and World War II. In Master Chief’s questionnaire, the only additional knowledge he shared was that the Japanese “lied to their soldiers convincing them that using suicide as an offensive strategy was honorable” (Before Questionnaire, June 13, 2012). Rice (2005) would agree that using students prior knowledge alone in student led discussions can lead to shallow discussion and limited or incorrect knowledge gained.

Table two below is an excerpt from the discussion on *Faithful Elephants* with two different students. Below they discuss the reason the zookeepers killed the animals, and how they feel about the Japanese after reading this book. Abraham Lincoln and General Nicholas bounced a lot of details off of each other discussing the tactical progression of World War II requiring minimal prompting from me.

Table 2

Discussion on Faithful Elephants with Abraham Lincoln and General Nicholas

Line	Speaker	Discussion
5	Prompt by Alaina	Do you think that the zoo keepers wanted the animals to die?
6	Abraham Lincoln	No, in fact they the no one when the elephant trainer fed them no one and everyone pretended they didn't see it happen. Because because they didn't want the elephants to die they just hoped that they would last one more day and hope that the war would be over.
10	Prompt by Alaina	What do you think of the Japanese?
11	Abraham Lincoln	I think that they have like a unique culture in how they do things. Because in America we have chairs to sit on and Tokyo they have these small... in Japan they have these small tables with mats around them so that's where you sit and eat your breakfast and stuff.
12	General Nicolas	They're really smart cause that's where most of the worlds technology comes from, like Sony entertainment.
30	Prompt by Alaina	Why did the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor?
31	Abraham Lincoln	Because they wanted to take control of the navy and--
32	General Nicholas	Wanted the Pacific
33	Abraham Lincoln	Pacific and tried to tried to get more stronger navy.
34	General Nicholas	And because at the time the United States had control of the Pacific and the Japanese wanted that control.
35	Prompt by Alaina	Did the US do anything to the Japanese?

36	Abraham Lincoln	Umm...They...they were trying to...
37	General Nicholas	The United States did take control of the Philippines, but lost control of the Phillippines. That was their strike back, and then the Japanese struck back again
38	Abraham Lincoln	Mmhmm. And they were also... and they were also trying to take small islands off the coast...off of the...they were trying to take islands off of the coast of Japan
39	General Nicholas	More air support so that they could get closer to Japan
40	Abraham Lincoln	Yeah and so they don't have to stop at ships and refuel and then take back off
41	General Nicholas	So as they gradually gain more islands they have more important range so they don't run out of fuel. And finally they dropped the atomic bomb

Rice (2005) sat back allowing students to guide their own discussions and gave students no background information to correspond to the literature they read concerning a culture none of the students had experienced before. This background knowledge is so important as shown in Table 2. Looking at Table 2 it is easy to see that these two boys had a significant amount of prior knowledge that was displayed throughout their discussion. With so much prior knowledge that spanned multiple resources both could better interpret the literature. Towards they end of their discussion, they shared the reasons for the attack on Pearl Harbor from a tactical point of view. Both of these boys have a high interest in historical subjects and spend a lot of their personal time watching history specials and reading up on historical events from whatever resources are at their disposal. They often try to reenact historical events through their play and share their knowledge with each other this way. This information was gathered from my interviews with

them before beginning my study. Their ability to view the attack as a strategy to build up military control could suggest that they have been taught to look critically at a text before or have read multiple texts sharing different perspectives on the attack.

Each of these four students brought personal background knowledge to the discussion of this book that affected their interpretation of the text. Abraham Lincoln and General Nicholas looked at what they knew of Japanese culture as contributions as stated in line 12, and observed the culture without judgment as stated in line 11. The variety in the discussion and awareness that the Japanese have a story to tell as well, showed what a great influence prior knowledge can have in what students gain from one or two stories. Master Chief and Cheezy, with their limited prior knowledge held stronger personal views of the Japanese and judged this book accordingly.

As discussed in the methods section, La-a, Lynette, and Baby Spice all took advanced placement courses that trained them to look for ways in which the author might try to influence the reader. Their discussion which will be presented later was very thorough and looked critically at the texts. Their prior works, such as a paper discussing “how blacks are portrayed in today’s culture and where the stereotypes stem from” (Before Questionnaire, Baby Spice, June 15, 2012) gave them the experience and prior knowledge to allow them to have a thorough discussion after reading *Faithful Elephants*.

Students’ cultural knowledge affects their ability to connect to a text. After using the cultural relevance rubric to see how well students could relate to the texts I was reading them, I found that very little of this data directly related to what I was looking for. The related information is displayed in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Cultural Relevance Rubric

Have you ever had an experience like the one described in this story?

Student	Faithful Elephants	Tree of Cranes
Abraham Lincoln	Nope	Oh yeah! I love Christmas
General Nicholas	I went to the zoo before but never heard a story like that.	Well, I have never celebrated holidays' from another country.
Master Chief	Just when my cat died.	Celebrating Christmas with my family
Cheezy	I lost my cat when it was killed by a dog	Maybe when my mom first taught me what Christmas was when I was little.
Baby Spice	Nothing like this one, nope.	Learning lessons such as obedience, honesty, and keeping promises.
Lynette	Well I've been to the zoo, and watched my dog die of old age.	Not really the experience but in terms of learning lessons, yeah
La-a	Not watching someone I love Suffer.	Yes! I celebrate Christmas with my friends and learning lessons such as being disciplined and being honest were very important in my home.

Each of the students above answered the question to these books in a different way. Their prior knowledge of the culture was not always relevant in their ability to relate to the experiences in the books. Regardless of his wealth of prior knowledge, Abraham Lincoln found that he could not relate to the experiences in *Faithful Elephant* in any way, unlike General Nicholas who had made the connection of going to the zoo before. General Nicholas tends to take a more literal meaning out of the question, and states that he had “never heard a story like that before” in reference to *Faithful Elephants*, and “never celebrated holidays’ from another country before” in

reference to *Tree of Cranes*. Master Chief and Cheezy both acknowledge the loss of their cat after reading *Faithful Elephants*, and connect to the celebration of Christmas after reading *Tree of Cranes*. Even though I pulled them both aside for these questions, they both answered in a similar manner. This could be because both of them made comments during discussion about having a similar experience of losing an animal they loved, and about loving Christmas. Master Chief, Cheezy, and Abraham Lincoln all shared the connection of celebrating Christmas giving them something positive to connect to the book about. They could look beyond the cultural aspects and make connections to the individuals which can be a great stepping stone to respecting another culture due to shared experiences. Golos and Moses (2011) would agree that it is important to make connections to a culture and then to guide students towards the implications the book may infer about the culture. The three seniors, Lynette, La-a, and Baby Spice all noticed the importance of certain lessons that the *Tree of Cranes* was presenting to the reader. They connected to these lessons as something of importance in their lives. This connection of having certain morals that stretch from culture to culture could lead students to a shared respect. Of the three seniors only one made a connection to the experience of *Faithful Elephants*. Lynette stated that “I’ve been to the zoo and watched my dog die of old age.” Her connections being more so than the other two girls did not give her a leg up in her analysis of the text. They all had their moments of viewing the text critically and the cultural relevance of the text didn’t seem to impact that. Athanases (2006) might find this surprising in compared to the study he conducted in which multicultural books that teachers had never read before provided very powerful experiences when they found that they could connect to the characters for once.

Through my interviews, I found that all three teachers were greatly aware of their students’ background knowledge influencing their learning. Melissa stated that “I also

considered and included different points of view as each student's background knowledge is unique" (Interview, June 18, 2012). Her proactive approach to teaching students about the contributions of each culture promotes an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance among classmates and suggests that differences are to be celebrated. She noted that one of the struggles teachers face when teaching multicultural literature is taking into account "perspectives that students bring to the classroom" (Interview, June 18, 2012). This struggle could suggest that student's previous notions affect their interpretation of literature and teachers need to find a way to open their minds and respect everyone's differences. Janine also made note of the struggle that students' preconceived notions can cause. She stated that, "initially in the classroom I am in now I struggled to get students to connect with the material. Due to their limited experiences, they tended to judge the characters and have negative opinions" (Interview, July 8, 2012). Similar the Master Chief and Cheezy's limited knowledge and negative opinions about the Japanese, and World War II, Janine struggled with her students. Her solution to this problem however was to "incorporate technology, guest speakers, and open dialogue" to provide the students with multiple resources as well as more background knowledge. McNeal (2005) shared this struggle while attempting to incorporate a multicultural unit among students whose diverse nature was filled with biases, judgments and a very strong dislike for one another. This struggle which appears to stretch across the US is something that teachers should be aware of and use to their advantage.

Students prior knowledge, as shown above greatly influences the ways students interpret the literature. If they are confident in their prior notions, convincing them to look critically at a text and begin to build up some tolerance can be a challenge. With practice and the right

questioning techniques teachers can encourage students to use their prior knowledge to help build a more objective understanding of a text.

Pairing Critical Thinking and Multiple Perspectives to Build an Ideal Teaching

Environment

Throughout the small group discussions, I became aware that the students that had more background knowledge took a more objective point of view concerning the Japanese. In Table 2, Abraham Lincoln and General Nicholas lacked judgments for the Japanese as they considered the knowledge they had gained from several other resources. Souto-Manning (2009) used multiple perspectives such as media reports, books from different perspectives, articles, and through these perspectives made differences visible to her students. This variety in literature provided her an opportunity to teach her first graders to look at literature through a critical lens. Her success with her students took several months and continued over the two years she spent with the same students. In Table 4 below a discussion between Cheezy and Master Chief show that a second perspective of the Japanese can aid in building tolerance and respect for another culture, even if students held negative judgments previously.

Table 4

Discussion on Tree of Cranes with Master Chief and Cheezy

Line	Speaker	Discussion
29	Prompt by Alaina	What did you think of this book in comparison to <i>Faithful Elephants</i> ?
30	Cheezy	mmm. It was nice. The Japanese seem so nice and it was nice of the mom to teach him about Christmas...umm It's so different from that last book though cause they are so much more peaceful.
31	Prompt by Alaina	How about you? (in reference to Master

		Chief)
32	Master Chief	Well... I think that there is a lot we don't know about the Japanese yet (pause) and this makes their culture out to be nicer. This was very different from the other book. I did know that they sat on the floor and ate with chopsticks. I forgot about that stuff.
33	Prompt by Alaina	Do you still feel the same about Japanese people?
34	Cheezy	I think that they can be nice and they aren't all bad.
35	Master Chief	Well I still don't really like them for what they did, but some of them could be nice like in this book. Probably the government has changed a lot since Pearl Harbor was bombed.

After looking at Table 4, Cheezy and Master Chief showed a higher level of respect for the Japanese with the presentation of the second book that represented the Japanese in a disciplined and gentle manner. They could see that the Japanese were kind and both noted in their discussion that this book was exceptionally different than the first one. Cheezy noted in line 30 that the Japanese mother was nice for teaching her son about Christmas. She again commented on their being nice in line 34 when she stated, "I think that they can be nice and they aren't all bad." Her hesitation to let go of any negative feelings she held was evident, but waning. After seeing this second perspective it was hard for her to hold on to what she knew before as the sole way of life for the Japanese. Master Chief even began to give in stating "some of them could be nice, like in this book" (Line 35). He did qualify his statement with a limitation to this book but also seems to be slightly unsure of his previous notions. Before that, in line 32 he acknowledged that "there is a lot we don't know about the Japanese yet (pause) and this makes

their culture out to be nicer. This was very different from the other book.” This could mean that the negative connotations that *Faithful Elephants* presented gave support to his negative views, even though the books’ goal was to educate on how war affects all levels of society. This second perspective gave them a bit of insight that they had never experienced before. In a study by Colby and Lyon (2004), a student noted how a multicultural class opened his mind stating that “bringing culturally diverse literature in a classroom brings culturally diverse knowledge to all students. Since knowledge is power, we will be empowering our students with cultural diversity and tolerance” (p. 26). This quote suggests that the more perspectives shared with students, the more knowledge and tolerance they will gain. He did acknowledge that “probably the government has changed a lot since Pearl Harbor was bombed” (Table 4, Line 35). This comment would suggest that he is softening his negative viewpoint of the Japanese and making exceptions for some of them to not be disliked. Souto-Manning (2009) would agree that using multiple perspectives can give students perspective about a culture or topic.

Critical thinking is the ability to discuss the different meanings a text might have allowing other viewpoints to be considered. Critical thinking in conjunction with multiple perspectives can contribute to building not only a greater tolerance for other cultures, but allow students to challenge other people’s opinions to come to their own conclusions. In Table 5 below, Lynette, La-a, and Baby Spice offer their thoughts about the book *Faithful Elephants*, and their prior knowledge and opinions of the American decision to retaliate against the Japanese.

Table 5

Discussion on Faithful Elephants with Lynette, Baby Spice, and La-a

Line	Speaker	Discussion
6	Lynette	War influences all levels of society. It’s not just the government and the people in the

		war. It's also the people back home. They have to worry about taking care of society as a whole and worrying about their homes and places of recreation getting bombed.
7	Baby Spice	I think like we always the Americans always talk about how like blaming the Japanese for the war. But some of the Japanese wanted it to end just as badly as we did.
8	Lynette	Probably most of them.
9	Baby Spice	Yeah and like maybe that's the whole point.
10	La-a	And sometimes we forget about like the consequences our actions have on other countries.
34	Lynette	I know that during World War II they had internment camps in the US where they kept Japanese people and they were super racist and they bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki
35	La-a	Oh!
36	Baby Spice	How they like bombed a port city for like all of our war ships and everything but we bombed two umm like civilian cities. It makes a huge difference.

Souto-Manning (2009) states that “dialogue about the book is as important as, if not more important than reading the book itself” (p.65). The above conversation with these three girls looked at the message that the author might be trying to send the reader. In Table 5, Baby Spice

says “I think like we always the Americans always talk about how like blaming the Japanese for the war. But some of the Japanese wanted it to end just as badly as we did” (line 7). Her ability view the war objectively shows that she can look at both sides of the story to gain a better understanding of a text. She interpreted the actions of the Japanese and American governments as separate from that of the citizens of the two countries and found that the Americans are often arrogant and close-minded in their view of the war, when in fact both parties wanted it to end. Lynette agreed that those affected most by war are not necessarily those in power, “but all levels of society. It’s not just the government and the people in the war. It’s also the people back home. They have to worry about taking care of society as a whole and worrying about their homes and places of recreation getting bombed” (Table 5, line 6). Their awareness that many stories of war exist from all levels of society gave them the opportunity to use a critical lens in their discussion of this text. Baby Spice stated that “they like bombed a port city for like all of our war ships and everything but we bombed two umm like civilian cities. It makes a huge difference” (Table 5, line 36). They discussed in the US decision to bomb a location that would greatly affect the citizens of Japan while Japan’s attack was purely a military decision to strike back at a military threat. This dialogue, as Souto-Manning (2009) suggests was helpful in creating a deeper understanding of the text as each students’ comments built off of another comment. It led them towards gaining a critical understanding of the text.

The use of multiple perspectives is very important when using multicultural literature. Janine says in her interview that her students negatively viewed characters from the literature due to their limited experiences, however, “after the first experience and the incorporation of technology, guest speakers, and open dialogue they were much more receptive to it” (Interview July 8, 2012). The additional perspectives were crucial to giving students a positive learning

experience and building tolerance. Several of the teachers I interviewed made comments that students need to view “different cultures to help break stereotypes” (Interview with Janine, July 8, 2012) and teachers need to “develop lessons that counteract stereotypes and incorporate contributions” (Interview with Melissa, June 18, 2012). Breaking the stereotypes can be accomplished through the use multiple sources to see the ways that writers manipulate texts. Multicultural literature used in conjunction with critical thinking and multiple perspectives can not only create tolerance and respect for other cultures, but raise awareness for those who are naïve to the differences around them.

The Importance for all Students to Read Multicultural Literature

Reading multicultural literature is important on many different levels. As I looked across my data sources, I found that it is essential to building an excellent teaching environment as discussed above, and it allows students’ who have not experienced diversity in the literature to see themselves and encourages others to understand another culture. Yosso (2005) and Willis and Parker (2009) would agree that this literature holds great value to those who find themselves missing or without representation in the literature. As stated by Willis and Parker (2009), these stories are most effective when they “contradict or oppose the assumptions and beliefs held by many White people” (p. 35).

In Table 6, below I show how my analysis of children’s picture books showed a lack of cultural knowledge. I used three questions to narrow down the important fact that I had been looking for in my analysis. Those questions and the number of books that pertain to them are shown below.

Table 6

How Children’s Picture Books Represent Culture

Questions	Number of books that apply (out of 10)
Does the book teach about the culture it represents?	4
Does the book display stereotypes of the culture it represents?	3
Are aspects of the culture shown in the dialogue or pictures?	5

In my analysis of ten childrens' picture books, I found that only four of the 10 books actually taught the reader about the culture it was representing. Those books that did teach about it directly used cultural language, and terms to teach the reader specific aspects of the culture. For example, in *Jalapeño Bagels*, the book represented a boy whose mother was Mexican and whose father was Jewish. The book taught about different types of foods representative of both Jewish and Mexican cultures. It included Spanish words and talked about where the foods originated from. *Mei-Mei Loves the Morning* taught about daily routines for a Chinese family, and the love they have for nature when the little girl and her grandfather bike through town together to meet some friends and have their song birds sing together. *Tree of Cranes* by Allen Say also taught about culture. The Japanese culture was evident in the pictures through the traditional robes worn by the mother, the traditional food served to the little boy (rice, and hot tea) and the way that he ate on the floor using chopsticks. This book also taught about the holiday Christmas which may not be a Japanese cultural tradition but for the mother in the book who was raised in California this was a part of her American culture. *Chicken Sunday*, by Patricia Polacco taught about the Russian culture when a little girl in the book designs a Russian egg to help a Jewish shopkeeper understand that her and her friends are not troublemakers. Only three of the books displayed stereotypes that could have affected a readers' interpretation,

however I found that as I described under the first theme, prior knowledge dictates how one interprets a text. I might be unaware of a few stereotypes of cultures that may very well be shown in the books I analyzed. For this reason, it is essential that teachers scaffold student discussions of a text to guide them in viewing the text critically rather than allowing their own previous notions, or presumptuous texts to tell them what or how to think. Some of the stereotypes through out *Chicken Sunday* were the love of fried chicken, and hats. The African American grandmother was also very curvy and all of the African American characters had large flat noses and big lips. In *A Chair for Always* there were a few points in which the characters would say “get born” or “got born” in reference to a new baby that is due any day now. This could allow the reader to assume that they are uneducated due to their dialect. The third question I asked when looking over the books was if aspects of the culture were either shown through the dialogue or pictures. Five of the 10 books did this without necessarily educating the reader about the culture. Several of the books for example represented Japanese culture through the pictures, in the simplicity of the homes or clothes that were displayed. In *Faithful Elephants* and *Grandfather’s Journey* cherry blossoms, and gardens were in almost every picture however nothing in the text discussed the ways nature is appreciated by the Japanese. Without any prior knowledge about the Japanese I may not have picked up on these cultural acknowledgements in the pictures.

Colby and Lyon (2004) further discuss the importance of multicultural literature stating that its significance does not lie solely in touching the lives of students from other cultures, but in creating an awareness and tolerance for all cultures that leads all students to look critically at literature as well as media and promote acts of social justice. Discussing books and media

critically occurred in a discussion among Lynette, La-a, and Baby Spice after reading *Tree of Cranes*. Table 7 below represents this conversation.

Table 7

Discussion on Tree of Cranes with Lynette, Baby Spice, and La-a

Line	Speaker	Discussion
13	Lynette	I think this book portrays the Japanese as a culture that is quiet, reserved and gentle. The mom never yelled at her son. Her demeanor was disappointed and she left him to deal with the guilt of disobeying her.
14	Baby Spice	The Japanese the culture like how the media represents them is honorable. They show them as being very disciplined and calm like they all think before they do something
15	Lynette	When I think of the media's portrayal I think of Kung Fu and them being super smart.
16	La-a	Weren't they like leading the world in technology?
17	Lynette	Pretty sure they are the smartest in the world. They are super healthy and smart and they don't care for superficial things like we do. Everything is simplicity.

The three girls had spent their discussion on the lessons *Tree of Cranes* was trying to teach and then began to look at how the media portrays the Japanese. La-a acknowledges the media hype on the technology that the Japanese have invented and Lynette discusses the sports and intelligence that the media suggests about them. The awareness of the media's influence shows that they don't take everything literally, but analyze the information based on the source. Baby spice states, "the Japanese the culture like how the media represents them is honorable.

They show them as being very disciplined and calm like they all think before they do something” (Table 7, Line 14). She is able to compare how the media views the Japanese in comparison to Lynette’s comment on how the book portrays them. The ability of these girls to look at the text critically allowed them to gain more knowledge and to look objectively at the stories told. As Colby and Lyon (2004) suggested, creating an awareness and tolerance of other cultures is greatly affected by the multicultural literature students are exposed to.

These themes of students’ prior knowledge influences their interpretation of books, pairing critical thinking and multiple perspectives builds an ideal teaching environment for multicultural literature, and the importance for all students to read multicultural literature are intertwined among each other and are greatly supported by the literature. They all contribute to show how incorporating multicultural literature is essential to today’s global culture in which literacy and technology connect us worldwide.

Implications and Conclusions

This study found that multicultural literature should be woven throughout the curriculum to attend to the many diverse needs of the students in our schools. This knowledge is not well known enough among education programs provided by our universities to have made the necessary impact in our grade schools. Through the literature and the performed study, I have found that the inclusion of critical literacy and multiple perspectives with multicultural literature provides a well rounded tolerant environment where students respect uniqueness and challenge stereotypes, assumptions and perspectives. This knowledge is helpful to myself and future teachers as we continue to follow new literacy movements. The importance of multicultural literature is growing in awareness and those without proper training and a welcoming attitude will find themselves falling behind in current teaching practices.

The research conducted for this study has several significant implications for teachers. The first implication is the need for teachers to have sufficient knowledge of critical literacy and multicultural literature. The second implication is the need for students to have teacher guided discussions revolving around multiple sources of multicultural literature. The third and final implication is the need for teachers to create an environment that challenges ideas using critical literacy.

As our society moves towards building global relationships, literacy and technology guide our progress. Our classrooms are becoming more diverse, not only in terms of race but also with regard to class, and skill. Differentiating to meet each students needs is essential, and in order to differentiate, teachers need to guide students to look at situations through a critical lens. This lens allows student to build tolerance and acceptance for the differences of those that surround them and to respect those differences. Many teachers in their efforts to cover a lot of ground in such a short period of time touch only the surface of the subject of tolerance, however with the support of critical literacy teachers and students can begin to look deeper at the significance of perspective and the importance of tolerance, until children begin to do this independently. Multicultural literature is a necessary building block to teach children about the differences among us. By reading books about their own culture students can make connections and hopefully find motivation to read more independently. Multicultural literature should be valued by the school, the teachers, and the students, to help mainstream rather than marginalize the diverse voices of the world. Selecting books that are appropriately representing culture without perpetuating any stereotypes can be a struggle. This study has shown through both the data collected and the literature that whether a text holds stereotypes or not, the defining moment is how the reader approaches the text. Books that hold stereotypes can be used to show students

that assumptions made about others are not based in truth and can often be hurtful. Teachers can use multicultural books with and without stereotypes to teach about culture, but through the use of a critical lens they can show students that the book told from another perspective could show a whole new side of the story. Teaching them to look for the truth and new perspectives to challenge ideas can build respect for each unique perspective.

The second implication is the need for students to have teacher guided discussions revolving around multiple sources of multicultural literature. Introducing students to multiple sources of literature about a specific culture or topic allows them to see the different perspectives and to understand how a writer might sway a reader based on their own biases. Teachers should pose questions and support discussion that challenges ideas presented in the books. Although both critical thinking and the use of multiple perspectives can build tolerance and break the stereotypes without the use of the other, it is ideal to use both as they bring a well rounded understanding of texts through their juxtaposition. They complement each other's weaknesses and open more doors for students to build their knowledge. The use of multiple perspectives also raises students' awareness of literature sources beyond books. It teaches them to look outside of the box.

Teacher led discussions are a necessary part of building student knowledge. Evans (2010) study showed that the text alone is not enough for students to recognize the limitations society places on certain individuals, nor do certain implications in books extend themselves to reality. As shown in the literature as well as the data I collected, discussion among students about a text can be superficial and often perpetuate stereotypes. Rice (2005) supports this theory in her study in which students read a variety of multicultural short stories and held student led discussions that focused on judgmental and superficial thoughts. With teacher guidance stereotypes can be

challenged and discussion can look at more profound meanings within texts. With proper scaffolding students can begin to discuss texts with less guidance from the teacher, and even begin to read independently using a critical lens.

The third and final implication discusses the need for teachers to create an environment that challenges ideas using critical literacy. Firstly, this environment allows students to feel comfortable and confident in their personal opinions with no fear of being wrong. It gives them a feeling of credibility that their own ideas and perspective have value. Secondly, the skill of looking at things critically can be used across subjects teaching students to view everything with an awareness of the biases involved and ready to challenge those ideas to find the truth. A critical lens encourages students to challenge stereotypes, assumptions and perceptions and to build an accepting and tolerant view of the world with respect for diversity.

Conclusions

Using McDermott and Varenne's theory of Culture "as" Disability in combination with Critical Race theory and our understanding of what literacy is we found that many picture books portray cultures in an unrealistic manner that only feeds former misconceptions. I also found that the portrayal of multicultural views in picture books does not necessarily change or uphold previous notions held by students. With student led discussions conversations reached a stopping point and only those with practice using a critical lens discussed the insinuations and stereotypes presented in the text. The literature showed how important the use of multicultural literature is in today's classrooms. It showed how using a critical lens along with multiple perspectives to teach multicultural literature can give students the awareness and ability to look beyond the surface of any text. The inclusion of multicultural literature helps to build tolerance and respect for diversity and allows teachers to create an environment that thrives on our differences.

Looking back on this study, there are a few things I would do differently. Though I focused on how students' previous knowledge was either changed or upheld after reading two picture books, I would love to go back and take a larger part in guiding student discussions. This approach appeared throughout the literature and I would have liked to see how using a critical lens to discuss the text would influence the students' previous notions and give the discussion greater depth. I would have also liked to have spent more time with the students, however we were very tight on opportunities to meet.

After performing this study, I am left with the question of whether or not my guidance during the discussions would have impacted the knowledge the students gained and possibly changed their previous assumptions and stereotypes. I also wonder if I had chosen a culture more familiar to the younger students, if they would have had more depth to the discussion even without my guidance. The older girls had so much more history with diverse culture in terms of personal experience growing up in a more diverse community and having participated in classes that challenged the norm. I felt that I would have liked to give the younger students some of that knowledge. This study allowed me to see that the impact of teacher guidance and history of knowledge greatly affect student discussion however I wonder where my questions would have led our discussion.

The benefits of a curriculum infused with multicultural literature will outweigh any challenges teachers and administrators may face in their efforts to incorporate it. If teachers begin using multicultural literature from the beginning, they can reach out to those students who struggle to connect to literature that is aimed at only one race, therefore motivating them to connect and learn. Teaching students to respect diversity and to foster tolerance will lead

classrooms and schools toward a strong united belief that differences should be celebrated and honored rather than dismissed and discouraged.

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Have you ever lived in or visited places like those in the story?

Yes No
 4 3 2 1

Could this story take place this year?

Yes No
 4 3 2 1

How close do you think the main characters are to you in age?

Very close.....Not close at all
 4 3 2 1

Does the story have main characters who are boys (for boy readers)/girls (for girl readers)?

Yes No
 4 3 2 1

Do the characters talk like you and your family?

Yes No
 4 3 2 1

How often do you read stories like this one?

OftenNever
 4 3 2 1

Have you ever had an experience like the one described in this story?

Yes No
 4 3 2 1

*Footnote: From “Culturally Relevant texts and Reading Assessment for English Language Learners,” by A.E. Ebe, *Reading Horizons*, 50, p. 198. 2010 by Reading Horizons.

Appendix D

Name:

Age:

Race/Ethnicity/:

Gender:

Education:

Years of teaching experience:

What have you taught?

1. How old are the students you work with?
2. What does the student population consist of in your classroom and your school in regards to race/ethnicity?
3. How does this play a role in the literature you read with your students? If it plays no role, what does influence the literature you choose, besides reading level?
4. Do you or does your school celebrate or represent various cultures throughout the school year? If so, how?

10. What is a struggle you find when teaching a multicultural text or unit?