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Effects of Multicultural Literature on Children’s Perspectives of Race
And Educator Implementation of Multicultural Literature

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

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Abstract

This action research paper addresses the question, “What effects can multicultural literature have on children’s perception of race and how do educators implement multicultural literature into the classroom. The results of the study were mixed based on the students’ thoughts about race. Data was collected in the forms of interviews, field notes, questionnaires, and student work samples. The data collected showed three themes: students’ perceptions of races, the importance of using multicultural literature, and educator implementation of multicultural literature in the classroom. The results from the study show that students require exposure to multicultural literature in order to address social issues and educators require professional development about multicultural literature.
Effects of Multicultural Literature on Children’s Perspectives of Race

And Educator Implementation of Multicultural Literature

Within recent years, many schools and districts have felt the push for multicultural literature to be used within the classroom and curriculum. Educators are finding it harder for the diverse student populations to relate to the current literature. The reading material used and implemented into a classroom should reflect the diverse population within that classroom. Literature can be a powerful tool, and children are easily influenced by what they read. It is important that they are exposed to a variety of texts that enables them to develop a well round insight into the world. The lack of multicultural literature in the classroom is contributing to the pressing social issues in today’s society (racism and prejudice). It is important that students learn from multicultural literature and that educators implement the literature into the classroom appropriately.

Through multicultural literature, students are able to develop the necessary tools needed to be successful. Students also gain experiences and encounter cultures, races, and religions different than their own when using multicultural literature. Multicultural literature also has the unique ability to enable students to see themselves, and their culture reflected within the writings and illustrations of the books (Brinson, 2012; Evans, 2010). When students of a minority background do not see themselves or their families reflected in literature, they are more likely to struggle with the reading and less likely to be engaged during the lesson or activity. Students from minority backgrounds need to be able to see themselves in the literature that they read; these books are referred to as mirror books (Brinson, 2012). Many classroom libraries contain mirror books for white students and very few window books into other cultures. On the other hand, classroom libraries offer many windows for children of minority backgrounds but very few
mirror books of their lives and culture. Some educators may not realize that the literature used in the classroom counters the idea of cultural pluralism and focuses on underrepresented groups’ assimilation into mainstream culture (Yoon, et al., 2010). A lack of connection between the character and student and a lack of background knowledge can result in poor academic performance, specifically reading assessments (Ebe, 2010). Minority students may also begin to think that because they do not see themselves reflected within the literature it means other cultures, races, and gender are more important or valued more than their own. It is imperative for students to feel acceptance by all; classmates, educators, administration and the entire school community. Multicultural literature can provided those who have been marginalized in the past with a voice to speak up about the prejudice and racism they have faced. Students learn to address social issues, biases and assumptions through literature that reflects the diversity in today’s society (Wake & Modla, 2008). These texts encourage students to make meaning and analyze the literature through a critical lens.

Using multicultural literature can provide students with ambition to further their education and expand their knowledge. Students learn to be more aware and accepting of cultural changes in society and often embrace them. Mainstream students (non-minorities) require exposure to multicultural literature as well. Through the use of diverse texts, majority students are able to learn, see and understand other perspectives and outlooks on life (Brinson, 2012; Evans, 2010). Students begin to realize that there are many different ways to do things and that no one way is correct. Caucasian students are often unaware to the hardships and struggles of minority families; this can result in a lack of respect or even prejudice toward minorities. With the use of multicultural literature students of non-minority background are also able to grow and develop. By using critical literacy, students are able to see how texts are social
situated and that can help students understand social contexts (Wake & Modla, 2008). Critical literacy is a complex form of analysis that requires the reader to challenge the status quo, and take social action based on what is learned.

The use of multicultural literature can have a powerful impact on an educator’s and student’s experience within the classroom and transition into the real world. Educators and students differ culturally, racially, ethnically, and economically. Culture is a major influence on student learning and social adjustment; and providing culturally responsive teaching is a main concern of educators (Bloom, et al., 2015). Unfortunately, many educators are unaware of the benefits multicultural texts can have in their classrooms, and have had little to no experience with creating lesson plans and units focused on multicultural literature. The lack of knowledge and preparedness on the educators’ part can greatly affect the students’ learning. Another reason educators aren’t taking the step toward multicultural literature is because they don’t understand it. The apparent disconnect between educators and multicultural literature is because many educators are of a Caucasian background and have never had trouble seeing themselves and their culture with the school literature (Gibson, 2012). The texts that educators are exposed to do not challenge societal norms or the racial inequalities that many students still face; instead the books justify and encourage white privilege. The texts used by many students in teacher education programs “normalize whiteness and marginalize color” (Gangi, 2008, p.32), which can instill in new educators that being white is better and that the white students in their classroom are better than those of color. A major benefit for educators who use multicultural literature is that they are able to learn about their student and their backgrounds and cultures and embrace the differences everyone has. Educators can gain a new or different insight into their students’ lives and change perspectives. Pre-service teachers often suffer a cultural reality shock when faced with a
classroom full of minority students (Almarza, 2005). This culture shock is due to the fact that many educators lack the exposure to culturally different students and their specific needs as students. The classroom, should be where a sense of interconnectedness and community with the diverse populations of the school. Using multicultural literature can be an eye opening experience for educators.

Through the use of literature, awareness will be made to the problem of racial representation within classroom literature. One of the main reasons this topic should be addressed is the ever changing and growing diverse populations of the schools and classrooms. This topic will bring light to the problems surrounding literature within schools and provided the necessary remedies to provide everyone with equal exposure to knowledge.

The main question of the study is what effects can multicultural literature have on students’ perceptions of race and how do educators implement multicultural literature into the classroom. Multicultural literature is used as a tool to counter racism and negative stereotypes of minority groups that are prevalent in society, when used with critical race theory. Using multicultural literature opens students’ eyes to unique and different cultures that they may not otherwise experience. It is important that students gain insight into other cultures and race to prevent unnecessary prejudices from being formed. Multicultural literature can be used to help prevent the mindset of culture as disability within schools and classrooms. The research looks at the importance of students interacting with multicultural literature so that students are able to see themselves, and others reflected in the literature. To obtain my research I used a variety of methods. I conducted student interviews in which I also took field notes during. I also used student work samples, group discussions and teacher questionnaires. My findings show that students currently hold negative views about minority groups, and that exposure to multicultural
literature can alter those views to a positive or neutral outlook. My findings also show that educators lack the knowledge necessary to provide their students’ with a diverse selection of books, and to don’t possess the knowledge to create lesson plans surrounding multicultural literature. This research emphasizes the importance for professional development on multicultural literature and how to select and implement it into the classroom. Educators should be provided their students’ with literature that reflects the classroom demographics as well as the United States demographics. Educators also need to alter their viewpoints on multicultural literature and open their minds to cultural pluralism and multiculturalism so that all students are being reached in the classroom and not just the students who belong to the majority.

**Theoretical Framework**

Literacy is a multifaceted and complex set of social practices that is ever changing with society. Literature is a powerful tool that can evoke change with people and society. Literacy is at the core of many different fields of study, such as cultural studies, linguistics, education and more. Literacy can and has been defined in multiple ways by such theorists as Gee (1989) and Freebody and Luke (1990).

Gee (1989) states that literacy is made up of many different discourses, all of which are relevant to the understanding of literacy. A primary discourse, or identity kit, is the setting a person first encounters literacy; it provides them with a set of rules and regulations to use when in that setting. A secondary discourse is the setting in which a person adapts their literacy skills to fit in, such as school, work, and other locations away from the home. Each discourse has its own set of rules, viewpoints, traditions and values that dictate the way one speaks and acts in that discourse. Some people are able to transition from one discourse to another easily, while others struggle to use any discourse other than their primary discourse (Gee, 1989). One secondary
discourse that children must learn is that of school. Those who struggle to adapt in school often lack the necessary resources to transition from primary to secondary discourse. Minority students struggle with the school discourse because the academic language and literature used are not what they have been exposed to. The language in most literature is thought to be ‘proper’ and the correct way to speak; this is not how many minorities talk and they find it very difficult to understand and connect to. Multicultural literature allows the diverse population to understand what is being taught and also teach new and exciting things. English Language Learners (ELLs) typically have a hard time with traditional literature in the classroom, but through the use of multicultural literature, books can be read with part or the entire story in a language other than English. The unique characteristics of multicultural books enable every student to be successful at learning.

Freebody and Luke (1990) define literacy as “a multifaceted set of social practices with a material technology, entailing code breaking, participation with the knowledge of the text, social uses of text, and analysis/critique of the text” (p. 15). Freebody and Luke discuss four roles that an individual must adopt to be successful readers in society: those four roles are code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst. Breaking the code requires the individual to know and understand the relationship between written symbols and spoken sound or language; without understanding of the code or how the pieces fit together, the individual will not be able to comprehend anything that is said or written. The role of a text participant involves the students’ ability to develop resources to engage in the meaning systems of written and spoken language. The role of a text user requires the individual to be successful at participating in social activities. It is through these social activities that people learn about the ‘technology of script’, how to use it, how to break the code, and how to comprehend what is said or written. The role as a text
analyst is to partake in critical reading, discover the various viewpoints of authors and how that influenced their writing as well as using the reading to influence change in society (Freebody & Luke, 1990).

In relation to Freebody and Luke’s (1990) definition of literacy, many minority students struggle with the first two roles (code breaker and text participant) that they are unable to practice the other roles. These students struggle because they can’t decode the words on the page or the meaning of the sentences, or worse, they can’t connect to what the story is telling and lose all meaning. Minority students cannot connect to the literature and be a text participant because the literature does not relate to the students or their lives. By implementing multicultural text into the classroom, educators will have an increase in student reading abilities as well as personal connections to the stories.

Racism and prejudices toward others is still a very prominent problem within the structural workings of many institutions; education being one of the institutions. Race is noticed by everyone, whether people choose to acknowledge it is another question. We all bring a history of unstated or unaddressed assumptions or beliefs about people who are different than us to every situation, including the classroom (Compton-Lilly, 2009). Many educators make the statement ‘I don’t see color’; this statement ignores the fact that race does exist and it implies that only one race (the White race) is the only one of value and power (Compton-Lilly, 2009). ‘I don’t see race’ can be a very harmful statement to young students of minority backgrounds; it instills the belief that their race and culture are unimportant and that the educator does not value them. Educators must address how race will affect their perceptions, interactions, expectations and views of students as well as their curricular choices (Compton-Lilly, 2009). Educators can address these issues with multicultural literature that reflects the classroom and school
The curriculum of a classroom should reflect its students and community, meaning diversity and race should be a part of it.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) observes the real issues involving all races; Black, White, Latino/a, Asian, and Native Americans (Compton-Lilly, 2009). CRT “acknowledges intersectionality or multiple forms of oppression – class, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, language, and immigration rights—that exists and are experienced among people of Color” (Compton-Lilly, p.35). Scholars of CRT examine how institutions, such as the education system, use race to de-value and segregate those of color. CRT challenges white privilege and encourages those of Color to speak up for one another. Through the use of critical race theory and multicultural literature, educators are to acknowledge that minority voices are silenced through institutional systems. CRT in literacy involves the acknowledgement of race as well as valuing the cultures, knowledge, language and abilities that are expressed through students of Color (Compton-Lilly). CRT is aimed to use literature as a form of social protest against racism. CRT also prepares students to resist and challenge racism present in their own lives. CRT helps to expose the importance of literature to those of Color, as well as show distinctive differences from Western European literature (Compton-Lilly). Multicultural literature is used as a tool to counter racism and negative stereotypes of minority groups that are prevalent in society. It is necessary for all educators to be aware about their own prejudices toward race; as well as understand the relationship of race, power, and privilege in today’s society. Educators should then use this knowledge to counter racism and stereotypes within the classroom.

Culture as disability theory has deep roots in multicultural literature and its use in the classroom. McDermott and Varenne (1995) define culture “not so much a product of sharing as a product of people hammering each other into shape with the well-structured tools already
available (p. 326). Culture is viewed as a disability when it does not fit with the standard or ‘normal’ form of culture. As a society, we are lead to believe that there is only one way to be and when someone strays from that, they are different and no longer a part of the norm; they are considered ‘disabled’. Disabilities are a cultural fabrication, which we create when someone or something does not quite fit or make sense; what is viewed as a disability in one culture may not be out of the norm in another. This type of mindset can cause a larger problem in the classroom. When educators and administration start to think that only one culture can be present in the classroom, many diverse, ethnic cultures are ignored, judged and perceived as different and unaccepted. When this occurs in the classroom, all students are denied the opportunity to learn and discover different cultures, limiting their life experiences. Multicultural literature can prevent this type of thinking. Using multicultural literature opens students’ eyes to unique and different cultures that they may not otherwise experience. It is important that students gain insight into other cultures and race to prevent unnecessary prejudices from being formed. Multicultural literature is a tool that educators can use to help prevent the mindset of culture as disability within schools and classrooms.

**Research Question**

Given that literacy is an expanding social practice that encompasses multiple cultures, this action research project asks, what effects can multicultural literature have on children’s perspectives about race and how educators implement multicultural literature in the classroom?

**Literature Review**

In the following literature review three themes are examined concerning multicultural literature. The first theme is focused on students’ interaction with multicultural literature. For years, the demographic of students has been changing to a more diverse pool of students,
increasing the need for multicultural literature in the classrooms. Unfortunately, classroom libraries and assessment tools have not been following the diversity patterns that the classrooms and communities are experiencing. The view behind multicultural education is the promotion of cultural pluralism, not monoculturalism (Yoon, et al., 2010). Cultural pluralism focuses on education for all students, counteracting that of assimilation.

The second theme focuses on the relevance or occurrence of multicultural literature within classrooms, and the representation of race in recommended children’s book lists and common book award winners. Many classrooms have books that focus on white children or families and very few books that share the life styles of other cultures, and most books that do share other cultures can come across as being stereotypical or prejudice. The lack of diversity in school reading materials imprints the idea that being White is better (McNair, 2008). The lack of diversity also increases the chances that students from different backgrounds will not be able to connect with the literature and find reading and understanding the books very difficult. The lack of multicultural books on recommended book lists from notable sources and the winners of common book awards is also an issue that is discussed. People are more apt to find books with a non-human main character than a main character from minority background in a classroom, book list, or award winners (Hughes-Hassell, Barkley, & Koehler, 2009). The authors and illustrators of children’s literature have a responsibility to provided resources that enable children to see themselves and their families, in order to develop a self-concept and self-esteem.

The third theme in the literature review paper focuses on educator exposure and awareness of multicultural literature. Many pre-service teachers and classroom educators have had little exposure to multicultural literature during their educational background. Most educators are predominately white females who did not experience a lot of diversity in school.
This lack of exposure can cause biases and prejudices that may affect their teaching. Color blindness is the preferred choice of most educators over multiculturalism; they feel that it emphasizes the importance of equity; and they do not feel it is right to change practice for a specific group of people (Gangi, 2008). Educators also lack knowledge about the multicultural books available for the classroom that could be beneficial to the students. Educators are models for their students, in order to be positive models; educators must be properly trained through the use of multicultural literature.

**Student Interactions with Multicultural Literature**

Over the past decade, the United States and its classrooms have become more diverse with students from different parts of the world (Chaudhri, 2013; Sarraj, Bene, Jiaqi Li, & Burley, 2015). The change occurring within the classrooms also requires a change within the curriculum. According to the 2000 Census, 6.8 million people identified as being multiracial and in 2010 it increased to 9 million (Chaudhri, 2013). With this progressive change occurring in the classrooms, the literature provided to the students should be equally as diverse. Unfortunately, classroom libraries and assessment tools have not been following the diversity patterns that the classrooms and communities are experiencing. Students from different races and different cultures are finding it difficult to be successful in the classroom with the predominately ‘white’ literature used. Multicultural literature is a powerful educational tool used to develop understanding and respect for different cultures and people (Dressel, 2005; Evans, 2010; M., 2014; Okoye-Johnson, 2011; Pilonieta & Hancock (2014); Wake & Modla, 2008; Yoon, Simpson & Haag, 2010). Schools have slowly begun to implement multicultural literature into their libraries, classrooms and curriculum. Multicultural education is defined by Nieto (1992) as a
process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender) that students, their communities, and teachers represent. (p. 208)

Multicultural education is for all students, not just minorities, and it challenges prejudices, racism and biases to ensure all students receive an equal and fair education. Multicultural education and literature can help students respect minority groups, understand social change, and develop cultural literacy; but some social systems are not quite ready for such a strong education tool to be used. One system that is not ready for drastic change is the educational system, where teachers are predominately White and the academic activities and services reflect the traditional white, Eurocentric main-stream society (McCullough, 2013, Sarraj et al, 2015). Our society as a whole places all minority students at an academic disadvantage. Multicultural literature is one part of multicultural education that can help turn around the educational institution that marginalizes minority students.

The view behind multicultural education is the promotion of cultural pluralism, not monoculturalism. Cultural pluralism focuses on education for all students. This approach to education strives for equity and to ensure education for all students and aims to challenge dominant ideology (Yoon, et al., 2010). It is necessary for the education system to adapt with the change in cultural traditions here in the United States. Sarraj et al (2005) cites cultural pluralism as a coexistence of diverse cultures and focuses on equal opportunity and respect for human dignity. A critical focus of multicultural education is to analyze and discuss the minority groups’ identity and the dominant groups' power and its impact of society (Yoon, et al., 2005). Pluralism counteracts the assimilation approach. The assimilation approach focuses solely on
minority students and their ability to succeed and learning in the traditional classroom. The assimilation approach recognizes equity, but equity is achieved when minority students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in mainstream society (Gorski, 2008; Yoon, et al., 2005). Currently, the assimilation approach to multicultural education is active in too many school districts. The assimilation approach is not effective for all students, and hinders the learning of different cultures. Cultural pluralism provides an education that enables all students to learn and interact with various cultures, expanding their cultural knowledge and ultimately their acceptance of different cultures. Students are able to gain this knowledge through the use of multicultural literature.

The assimilation approach is not effective for all students, and hinders the learning of different cultures. One of the most important aspects of multicultural literature is that minority students are able to see themselves and their culture reflected in those books. The personal connection between students and books echoes the belief that literature can be a mirror or a window. Mirror books are books that allow the reader to see themselves, their loved ones, or their culture portrayed in the main characters or setting of the book; in contrast, window books are such that allow the reader to see into another person’s life, culture, or beliefs (Brinson, 2012; Evans, 2010). Students from minority backgrounds need to be able to see themselves in the literature that they read; these books are referred to as mirror books. Many classroom libraries contain mirror books for white students and very few window books into other cultures. On the other hand, classroom libraries offer many windows for children of minority backgrounds but very few mirror books of their lives and culture. Some educators may not realize that the literature used in the classroom counters the idea of pluralism and focuses on underrepresented groups’ assimilation into mainstream culture (Yoon, et al., 2010). Minority students are often
exposed to literature that marginalizes minorities and emphasizes white power. The use of multicultural literature that depicts cultural pluralism validates the culture and life experiences of minority students within the classroom (Ebe, 2010), as well as giving “voice to those who traditionally have been silenced or marginalized” (Evans, 2010, p. 96) and increases “awareness about the values, beliefs, and social practices of cultures” (Evans, 2010, p. 97) that may differ from those displayed in the classroom. Literature can also be used as a tool to educate students on diversity and social justice. Students learn to address social issues, biases and assumptions through literature that reflects the diversity in today’s society (Wake & Modla, 2008). These texts encourage students to make meaning and analyze the literature through a critical lens. By using critical literacy, students are able to see how texts are social situated and that can help students understand social contexts (Wake & Modla, 2008). Critical literacy is a complex form of analysis that requires the reader to challenge the status quo, and take social action based on what is learned.

A classroom library undersupplied with multicultural literature can greatly affect students’ achievement and success. Not only are minority students likely to have poor self-esteem and self-worth, they are likely to have poor reading skills (Dressel, 2005). Students perform better on reading tasks when they can apply background knowledge to the story and connect personally to the story. A lack of connection between the character and student and a lack of background knowledge can result in poor performance on reading assessments (Ebe, 2010). Multicultural literature is the only tool that allows minority children to see themselves and their culture reflected in books. Minority students live and grow up in drastically different ways compare to the majority (white children); their background knowledge will not be the same because their experiences, views and knowledge of the world are not the same (Dressel, 2005).
Knowledge of a different culture and background can greatly affect a reader's understanding of a book. According to Ebe (2010), “reading starts with the background the reader brings to the text. Readers come from diverse backgrounds with different ideas about the world so previous experiences and knowledge, also known as schema, affect how a reader comprehends text” (p. 195). Schemata are complex structures of ideas, thoughts and experiences that represent a person’s past encounters with the world; not one person will have the same schemata structure as another, although they can be similar (Ebe, 2010). To connect schema theory to reading and literature; comprehension will increase if the reader is able to connect their personal life and experiences to those of the characters in the book. McCullough (2013) describes schema as the reader's knowledge brought to a text that depends upon age, race, sex, religion, nationality and others; essentially the reader's culture. The implication of schema theory is relevant when a student appears to have poor comprehension skills, the problem may be a lack of or failure to activate prior knowledge relevant to the text. Dressel (2005) states “because students have limited knowledge of others, they often fail to see the intersection between the story world and their schema for understanding the culture” (p.751). Background knowledge are the pieces of the puzzle students use to create a complete picture of the story. Pilonieta & Hancock (2014) state that the background knowledge we bring encompasses every aspect of our learning; if a reader does not have background knowledge to attach new information to its very difficult to construct meaning. To make up for this disconnect, students attempt to incorporate their own knowledge and view of the world into their understanding of the literature.

Many authors and researchers have stated that in order to increase a student’s comprehension, one must find an interesting or motivating book for the student to read. According to Holmes, Powell, Holmes, and Witt (2007); “interest is the principal variable for
motivating all students to comprehend what they read” (p. 277). Many students find reading to be time consuming and tedious and will only participate if it is about a topic they are interested in or can relate to. McCullough (2013) uses student interest as a way to connect them to the literature that they read. If the student is not interested in the topic, then the student will not be motivated to read, and if the student is not motivated to read the student’s comprehension will suffer. Comprehension is a large issue for minority student when reading texts. Ebe (2010) found that when reading culturally relevant literature students were “more familiar the language of the text, the actions of the characters, the description of the setting, [and] the sequence of the events” (p. 196). When reading multicultural literature the students connected to the reading which made it easier for the students to read (fluency) and comprehend the piece of text. Culturally relevant text provide the reader with words, setting and imagery that are familiar to them and that coincide with the reader’s background knowledge; which ultimately makes reading easier and more enjoyable.

Multicultural literature has been used in various studies to see the affect it has on students reading skills, as well as personal views about diversity and race. The positive impact of multicultural literature within a classroom has been praised by many, for example, “use of cultural literature and practices fostered pride, participation, commitment and success” (Ebe, 2010, p. 196), and books have the potential of “influencing their [children’s] values and dreams and helping them move beyond violence, stereotypes, and prejudice” (Evans, 2010, p. 92). Multicultural books are the driving force behind culturally relevant teaching. Multicultural books can be a socializing agent as well as an instructional tool for teaching diversity (Evans, 2010). Many students of Color feel as though their voice is not heard or appreciated, using
multicultural literature is a way to show them that their point of view is important and valid and it allows the students to see into other cultures and beliefs.

Based on studies conducted by Ebe (2010), Evans (2010), Pilonieta and Hancock (2014), students’ responded positively to multicultural literature. The studies mentioned above resulted in an increase of comprehension, as well as a new found awareness and acceptance for those that are different. Evans specifically found that multicultural literature positively affected achievement, self-esteem, and attitudes toward race as well as changing the way the students think toward others and their tolerance for different cultures. Ebe (2010) and McCullough (2013) found that with a text the students found to be culturally relevant, very few miscues were made, and the students were motivated, interest levels increased and comprehension of the text was drastically higher than that of a non-culturally relevant text. By using multicultural literature, the students were able to read fluently, recognize more words in the text and ultimately connect with the story resulting in higher comprehension. Pilonieta and Hancock (2014) found that students used the ‘making connections’ strategy to increase their comprehension. This strategy capitalizes on schema theory (previous discussed); while making connections, students are utilizing their background knowledge (prior knowledge) and linking that knowledge to the text resulting in deeper understanding and comprehension. In congruence with Pilonieta and Hancock, McCullough (2013) found that students were able to comprehend the text easier if they possessed prior knowledge on the subject or cultural focus of the text.

In another study conducted by Holmes, et al. (2007), they sought to see if the main character’s race and the reader’s race played a part in selecting a book to read. Shockingly, and against other research, “students appeared to disregard the race of the character(s) on the cover of the books in their selection” (p. 279); the race of the student, and the race of the characters
played no significant role is selecting a book to read. These results do not support the idea on multicultural literature or culturally relevant teaching. The overarching results of the study indicate that “perhaps Black students and White students do not differentiate by race in their preference for books” (Holmes, et al., 2007, p. 279). The results of this study pose a very interesting idea; that maybe race isn’t a factor when it comes to literature, that students are unaffected by the race of the characters they read, and that they could perhaps connect to anything, regardless of the main characters racial background. Or perhaps children are not as closed minded as adults, and the concept of race does not affect the choice they make in everyday life; or that maybe black and white children have similar interests and the race of the book characters is not an issue. Evans (2010) had unique results as well with her study of read-alouds using multicultural texts with fourth graders. Read-alouds were used as an educational tool with multicultural literature. Although the students increased their awareness, acceptance and tolerance for diversity the students were unable to see or understand the larger implications of race and racism of those of color (Evans).

Pilonieta and Hancock (2014) also conducted a study, analyzing the type of stance (efferent or aesthetic) students took when reading as well as their comprehension to diverse texts. The researchers found that they students varied in their stances when reading. Some students would take an efferent stance (acquiring and retaining information) and others would take an aesthetic stance (experience the feelings and thoughts conjured by the text) or some would flip back and forth between the two. This study shows the importance of background knowledge and personal connection when reading. Students who possessed background knowledge took an aesthetic stance when reading, and ultimately increased their comprehension of the text. Students who lacked background knowledge struggled to go beyond the text and the explicit
information presented. As a result of these three studies conducted by Holmes, et al. (2007), Evans (2010) and Pilonieta and Hancock (2014) it is safe to say that young students do not necessarily take their own or a characters race into consideration when selecting a book, that reading multicultural literature can increase awareness and understanding of other cultures and that reading comprehension is increased when the reader possesses background knowledge and can make personal connections. A large part of multicultural literature is to express the injustices and prejudice that other races and cultures face, and when it is used in a classroom, those injustices should be pointed out, made clear and discussed as a group to fully understand the implications of being a minority.

Multicultural literature has been proven to improve comprehension and reading skills in students of diverse backgrounds. Students are able to connect with the story line and provide ample background knowledge when reading multicultural literature. It is important that students from diverse backgrounds read books that reflect them and their culture. The use of mirror books instills a sense of importance and validity in the students and their culture. Multicultural literature can open many doors for students of diverse backgrounds and should be used to teach tolerance and understanding.

**Multicultural Literature within the Classroom, Book Lists, and Awards**

Within our society, “racism continues to be a lingering and extremely volatile issue” (McNair, 2008, p. 195). Many people are unaware or are oblivious to the fact that racism never went away, it just changed forms. Instead of segregated restaurants or drinking fountains, or signs that say ‘white only’, we (as a society) subconsciously or unintentionally exclude African Americans and other minorities through institutional laws set up to prevent such things from happening. One specific way society excludes minorities is through school book order forms,
recommended reading lists, and book awards granted to authors and illustrators. Gangi (2008) discusses the ‘unbearable whiteness’ that is institutionalized in literacy education. The tools that educators use for literacy instruction often advantage white children and marginalize minority children (Hughes-Hassell, Barkley, & Koehler, 2009). The lack of diversity in school reading materials imprints the idea that being white is better. The lack of diversity also increases the chances that students from different backgrounds will not be able to connect with the literature and find reading and understanding the books very difficult.

Books about minorities, such as African Americans, Asians and Hispanics, have the potential to counter the racism and negative stereotypes that are so prevalent in mainstream American society (Hughes-Hassell, et al.; Koss, 2015). It is important for students to be exposed this type of literature; because it gives voice to those whose voices have gone unheard and whose lives are at best underrepresented, and challenges the single story, often portrayed in U.S. literature; it presents the complexity of racial and ethnic identity formation, it challenges readers whose lives have been shaped by race and privilege to consider how the world looks to groups of people that have traditionally been marginalized. Counter storytelling is a method of storytelling that cast doubt on the validity of accepted norms and beliefs held by the majority (Hughes-Hassell, et al.). Members of the majority culture also benefit from hearing counter-stories that counter-stories can help them overcome their beliefs that the majority way is the only way. Koss (2015) defines counter-storytelling as a “way of telling stories that challenge myths or telling stories of populations that often are not told” (p. 33). Counter storytelling gives voice to those who are traditionally marginalized and validates their culture beliefs. The act of counter-storytelling sends the message that all cultures are important and matter.
Over the past decade, the minority population has increased in the United States, as well as the number of books published by and that focus on the lives of minorities; but the majority of books maintain a focus on white characters and authors and illustrators, failing to reflect the growing demographics of the U.S (Koss, 2015). An essential part of multicultural literature is its authenticity. Authentic literature allows students the opportunity to develop an understanding for others and affirm diverse cultures (Yoo-Lee, Fowler, Adkins, Kim, & Davis, 2014). Authenticity of multicultural literature has been a debate for years. No one has defined specific terms or guidelines to follow when determining if a book is authentic. Many have discussed it and there are several criteria that everyone can agree on. A multicultural book is considered authentic with the absence of stereotypes, derogatory language, and parodied speech, it also must include accurate illustrations, historical and cultural information, characters should take positive roles in the storyline; the text should comprise cultural values, not just facts and take place in authentic times, settings, and situations (Yoo-Lee, et al., 2014). Authenticity has always been an large issue with literature. Whether it is intentional or accidental, racism and stereotypes depicted in literature can influence students’ beliefs and views. Authentic multicultural literature can present positive messages to students (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Yoo-Lee et al., 2014).

Several researchers have analyzed books looking at how race is depicted within them. Koss (2015) analyzed books into categories of generic, specific and neutral. She considered a book to be generic when a specific cultural group(s) was identified but little to no authentic information was provided to support the notion of the group. A book was considered to be specific when details were provided about a specific group or culture; and lastly a neutral book was one that provided no specific details or descriptions to identify the minority group/ culture, the reader based its knowledge off of the illustrations that there was in fact a character belonging
to a minority group. The issue with Koss’s analysis is that it does not go in depth about how the
cultures are portrayed (positive or negative light). The analysis of the books may be considered
shallow. While she did look at how race was depicted she did not analyze how race is perceived
among the characters or how the reader may perceive race after reading the book. She examined
the characters race but not how it impacted their character role within the storyline, unlike
Chaudhri and Teale (2013). The results of the study clearly show that the white race is
dominating children’s literature and that minority races other than Black greatly lacked exposure.
It is evident through her study that there is not enough literature out there for young children of
minority cultures (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013) to connect to because the books that are available do
not specifically identify minority cultures, they only specifically identify the White culture
(Koss, 2015).

Yoon et al. (2010) similarly analyzed books for how race was depicted within them.
These researchers looked at how race and culture were depicted and presented within the text,
did the books take an approach of assimilation, pluralism or neutrality. An assimilation approach
encouraged the minority character to conform to traditional mainstream society. According to
Gorski (2008) the assimilation approach focuses heavily on equity, but that can only be
accomplished when minorities acquire or develop a second discourse (skills) to function within
mainstream society (Yoon, et al., 2010). Assimilation within literature implies the importance
and necessity for minority cultures to adjust to the dominant culture. The pluralistic approach
focused on educating all students to change the dominant ideology of race, culture, and
differences to ensure educational equity for all. Sarraj et al (2005) cites cultural pluralism as a
coexistence of diverse cultures and focuses on equal opportunity and respect for human dignity.
The concept of cultural pluralism is that all students are represented and celebrated within the
classroom, providing students with a means to learn and understand different cultures. According to Yoon, et al. (2010), in order to improve both groups understanding of their own societies, a discussion must take place that analyzes the majority group’s power and the minority groups’ identity. And a neutral approach could not clearly define it as assimilation or pluralism.

Chaudhri and Teale (2013) and Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) both analyzed specific types of books for representation of different races; Chaudhri and Teale (2013) solely analyzed books that contained mixed race characters and Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) solely analyzed children’s board books. Children’s literature has predominantly included more White characters than any other race, with the changes occurring in the US population, researchers hope to find a change in how race is represented within children’s literature. According to the 2000 Census, 6.8 million American marked the ‘one or more’ race box, and in 2010, that number increased to 9 million (Chaudri & Teale, 2013) and in the 2000 U.S. Census, 19 million children under the age of five were considered to be of color, five percent of that 19 million were of mixed race origins (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010). The increase in minority children will only increase as time moves forward, only emphasizing the need for literature that contains diverse populations. While our minority population is growing within the U.S. (Chaudhri, 2013; Sarraj, Bene, Jiaqi Li, & Burley, 2015); more specifically the Hispanic and Asian populations developing quicker than the African American population (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010), our mixed race population is developing as well. The amount of literature out that depicts mixed race characters is even less than that of literature depicted a character of minority decent. Between the years 2000 and 2010, approximately 5,000 children’s books were published, of those 5,000, 90 books featured mixed race characters (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). The amount of books that contain mixed race characters in no way represents the U. S. population. The lack of diversity within children’s
literature poses a problem; students who belong to two different cultures find it very difficult to identify who they are; the lack of literature to help them connect and identify with only increases their chances of having low self-esteem, low self-worth and poor reading skills (Dressel, 2005). The development of self-concept and self-esteem is very important to a child’s sense of self-worth. Self-concept and self-esteem develop from interactions and messages presented to children from adults and society (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010). Children need positive interactions and messages presented to them in order to develop a healthy self-concept and self-worth. If and when children are exposed to misinformation about themselves or people who are different from themselves, they internalize that information and it may go unchallenged for years (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010). If the misconceptions about themselves go unchallenged, it is unlikely that an adolescent will be able to change their self-perception and their perception of others.

The 90 books that Chaudhri and Teale (2013) identified were analyzed them into three categories, mixed race in/visibility, mixed race blending and mixed race awareness. This type of analysis only looks at the surface of the book and ignores the other message about race that may be present in the text. Mixed race in/visibility (MRI/V) was labeled as such because it “captures the concurrent state of being both highly visible—owing to a racially ambiguous appearance—and at the same time marginalized because of it [invisible]” (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). MRI/V books place blame on the character and their race, rather than on society and its issues about race. Culture is viewed as a disability when it does not fit with the standard or ‘normal’ form of culture, connecting MRI/V to McDermott and Varenne (1995) concept of culture as disability. Characters in MRI/V books are depicted as having internal or external conflicts about their mixed race identity in a mono-racial setting, often feeling like a misfit in society. With
characters of this description, their conflict comes from neither culture/ group accepting them in; forcing the characters to solve their issues of identity while the issues of society are never addressed. MRI/V books “reflect stereotypical master-narratives about dysfunction and trauma as inevitable in the lives of biracial people” (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013, p.367). Mixed race blending (MRB) books depict mixed race characters no different than the mono-racial characters, they blend in with society. While misrepresenting racial groups may not be intentional, these types of books encourage the idea of assimilation (Yoon et al, 2010 & Gorski, 2008). The books encourage assimilation by portraying the idea that race does not have to be an issue if one follows mainstream society. In MRB books, characters were identified for other attributes and not their race, a character’s mixed race was only revealed by accident or out of necessity for character development (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). Mixed race awareness (MRA) books portray a culturally conscious view toward the characters. Characters in MRA books are aware of mixed race identities and use their biracial identity to influence society, they often challenge stereotypical views and attitudes with an insider’s perspective, telling and sharing the story of the ‘other’ (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). The books analyzed were evenly distributed among the three categories. They did discover that the majority (87%) of the mixed races were half white, meaning that that characters were part white and part non-white; the remaining percentage was a mix on non-white races (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). The researchers also discovered that a great deal, approximately half, of the books took place in an urban setting, and a quarter of the books took place in a rural setting. Stereotypical situations were also evident in the book selection, such as the family structures of the mix race families, often time one or more of the parents were absent, dead, in jail, or uninvolved in their child’s life (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). Another injustice evident in the books is the fact that many of the main characters who were mixed race
were the only biracial people in the mono-racial environment, leaving the characters alone and disconnected from the people around them.

Like many before, Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) had very similar results. The researchers divided the books up into five categories, books in which all of the people were white, books that featured only people of color (African Americans, Biracial), bilingual/Spanish language, books that featured people from multiple racial and ethnic groups, and books in which the characters were international. It was discovered that white people were featured in all of the categories except for the “books that featured only people of color (African Americans, Biracial); all other mixed race categories contained white people, or part white people (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010, p. 140). The prevalence of White people in the literature further emphasizes the notion that it is better to be White, that it is the power race. Based on Hughes-Hassell & Cox’s research, the representation of color and race in board books has not improved. Most of the books that were identified as multiracial, or featured people of multiracial backgrounds were considered to be melting pot books (depicting people of color and white together with no distinction between them; this idea is similar to Yoon and colleagues (2010) and Gorski’s (2008) concept of assimilation. This idea of the melting pot and assimilation give readers the impression that race does not matter as long as you fit in with society. Ebe (2010) found that when reading culturally relevant literature students were “more familiar the language of the text, the actions of the characters, the description of the setting, [and] the sequence of the events” (p. 196). When students are able to connect to the story and understand the language, their reading improves and they are also able to build a positive self-concept. Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) believe that culturally conscious books are written for and by those of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. They offer a uniqueness that no White author or illustrator could provide to
readers of ethnic backgrounds. Hughes-Hassell and Cox found that there were very few culturally conscious books in their selection and there was a total lack of Hispanic/Spanish character representation. Overall, the study conducted by Hughes-Hassell and Cox just confirms what we already know; that the White race is depicted more frequently in children’s literature and that this overrepresentation only normalizes Whiteness and provides children with the message that it is important to be White and that being of color means you play a supporting role in society.

In many children’s books, characters are drawn in the same fashion, but the faces are painted a different color; Mongo (2002) states that “just painting the faces of different characters brown in a book is not sufficient” (p. 28); different racial and ethnic groups possess different facial and body features, that should and need to be illustrated in children’s literature. The authors and illustrators of children’s literature have a responsibility to provided resources that enable children to see themselves and their families, in order to develop a self-concept and self-esteem. Yoo-Lee and Colleagues (2014) also found that it was necessary for there to be diversity within specific minority groups. While Yoo-Lee and Colleague found that there was little diversity among children’s books, and those that did contain diversity were often accompanied with negative messages and stereotypes. The researchers also found that there was little diversity among minority groups such as Asian and Hispanic subgroups. If/when books were written about the Asian or Hispanic culture, it almost always focused on the main countries (China, Japan, Korean and Mexico); the small countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, or Puerto Rico. It is important that multicultural books cover all cultures, so that everyone is able to build positive connections. Yoo-Lee and Colleagues also found that more time than not, Asian characters were depicted as adopted children into the U.S. This type of representation can
give young children the impression that all Asians are adopted because they have never been told or exposed to anything else.

Portrayal of race is not just an issue within literature; it surrounds the business of publishing from every angle. A large issue within the industry is the representation of minority authors and illustrators for children’s literature. McNair (2008) discovered that in common book order forms that schools receive monthly, very few minority authors and illustrators were displayed in the order forms. Within ten months’ worth of order forms the names of authors and illustrators of color appeared very little compared to their white counterparts. Throughout all of the forms, African American authors and illustrators were displayed the most, followed by Asian authors and illustrators and then Latino/Latina authors and illustrators (McNair, 2008). Whether intentional or not, these forms are clearly bias. Kurz (2015) analyzed books for the presence of race in the main characters and in the author and illustrators. In his analysis, it was evident that White characters made up the majority, followed by African American characters, and then Asian, and then Native American, there were no Hispanic/Spanish characters in the books analyzed. As for the authors and illustrators present in Kurz’s analysis, the number of White authors and illustrators far outnumbered all other groups. The rest of the percentages broke down as most other studies, African American authors and illustrators came in second, followed by Asian authors and illustrators, then Hispanic/Spanish authors and illustrators and last, Native American authors and illustrators. It is interesting to see that there were in fact Hispanic authors and illustrators but no books that depicted Hispanic characters. In a similar study conducted by Hughes-Hassell et al. (2009), the researcher looked at Fountas and Pinnell Leveled Book List database and the prevalence of different races among that list. Within those titles, a majority of the main and secondary characters are white, only a quarter of the main and secondary characters
were of color (Hughes-Hassell, et al., 2009). Surprisingly, within the titles of the study, there were more main and secondary characters that were non-human (robots, monsters, animals), than there were characters of color. Kurz (2015) conducted a similar study with books that were nominated for the South Carolina Picture Book Award, in which he found that more non-human characters were present within the titles than all the titles with a main character of color. The lack of color within the three studies signifies the racism within the institution of education.

The two studies conducted by Hughes-Hassell, et al. (2009) and McNair (2008) showed that White authors and illustrators are dominant on book lists and order forms that are handed out in schools. The lack of color represented on order forms and book lists contributed to the institutional racism present in the school system. Gangi (2008) analyzed the common awards that children’s books receive, such as the Caldecott and Newberry Awards. The committees that decide the winners of these awards are predominately white. The lack of diversity among committee members enables them connect and relate more to books written and illustrated by white people, therefore white authors and illustrators are nominated and win more often than authors and illustrators of color (Gangi, 2008). There are awards that specifically look at authors and illustrators of color, such as the Coretta Scott King Award and the Pura Belpre, which look specifically at the writing style and artistic expression of African Americans and Latinos respectively (McNair, 2008), but that does not make up for the unintentional racism that takes place in book list, order forms, and awards.

Gangi (2008) possess an interesting question: “what is the impact on White children when they find themselves mirrored so frequently with few windows into cultures beyond their own (p. 32)?” White children are often given the impression that there skin tone is superior to others. The message that White children receive from common classroom books is that their
lives are important and valued and ultimately that it is better to be white (Hughes-Hassell, et al., 2009). But White children are not the only one receiving this message, with every book centered on white people and their customs, children from a minority background are receiving the message that their lives are not important and that again, it is better to be White. As a society that is constantly changing, and growing more diverse, race need to be made more visible; making sure that marginalized voices are heard and multiple viewpoint are seen. As a society, we need to instill these beliefs on the students so that these unintentional acts of racism do not occur again, and no race is marginalized.

**Educator Readiness in the Area of Multicultural Literature**

Educators go through a lot of training to get their certification, but unfortunately most training programs do not focus on diversity within the classroom or on literature that can be used in the classroom. Participants in teacher training programs are predominantly White females who lack exposure to diverse populations (Bloom, Peters, Margolin, & Fragnoli, 2015; Gibson, 2012; Wake & Modla, 2008). Educators and students differ culturally, racially, ethnically, and economically. Culture is a major influence on student learning and social adjustment; and providing culturally responsive teaching is a main concern of educators (Bloom, et al, 2015). The White female educators lack exposure to diversity, making it very difficult for them to connect to multicultural literature and diverse students. It has been cited that educators and pre-service teachers lack the ability to build culturally responsive classrooms. Educators’ lack of recognition and acceptance may be due to a life as mainstream student, unaware of their preexisting and socioculturally based beliefs about teaching and learning (Wake & Modla, 2008). A lack in recognition of teachers’ personal biases can greatly influence their teaching abilities toward minority students. In contrast to Wake and Modla suggesting that educators are unaware,
Gorski, Davis, and Reiter (2012) found that educators are cognizant of the significance of their perceptions on their teaching abilities and competency. The fact that educators are cognizant shows that they are aware of their teaching abilities and how they may impact different students. Cognizant educators suggest that educator self-efficacy (the way an educator perceives his or her abilities to achieve learning among students) is active (Hachfeld, Hahn, Schroeder, Anders, Kunter, 2015). Educators’ attitudes have direct implications on student learning and may influence the success or failure of multicultural education within a school system. According to Maasum, Maarof, and Ali (2013), educators’ attitudes about multicultural education are manifested in areas such as educator-student interactions, attention given to students, expectations of students, conflict resolution, teaching material and many more. When an educator has a negative view about multicultural education, the students are affected in a negative way. Wake and Modla (2008) found that many educator biases were rooted from their belief that student backgrounds do not significantly impact learning. This kind of bias toward diverse students can cause students to behave poorly, struggle with the curriculum and ultimately have poor self-esteem.

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using characteristics, experiences and perspectives of ethnically diverse students in order to better educate them (Maasum, Maarof, & Ali, 2013). It is important for educators to address diversity in the classroom as a way of promoting cultural understanding and enabling students to be sensitive toward others from different cultures. Educators that possess awareness for cultural diversity also have a responsibility to address multicultural issues in the curriculum and classroom. In order for the issue to be addressed in the classroom, educators must first examine their own personal beliefs and attitudes concerning multiculturalism. The multicultural model of education has positive
impacts on intergroup relations (Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). Within the multicultural model, curriculum should focus the differences that directly impact the students. The curriculum should concentration on culture and language of the students in the classroom, and then move to capitalizing on differences that exist within the classroom (Wake & Modla, 2008). Education reform is not the focus of multicultural education. Multicultural education is a way of changing attitudes and beliefs of those involved in the education process (Hachfeld, et al., 2015).

Multicultural education is the perfect tool for educators to use with diverse populations; however, many educators are reluctant. Plaut et al. (2011) found that many Whites show less support for multiculturalism than minorities, that they may even view it as a threat. White educators tend to favor the colorblind model over multiculturalism. Plaut et al. suggest that educators are drawn to colorblindness because of its inclusivity as opposed to the exclusivity of multiculturalism. It is human nature to want to belong and be included into a group of people. As humans, we are hardwired to particular cues that signal our potential for inclusion. Cues are located in body language and conversation, cues associated with color blindness and multiculturalism inform others if the identifies are ‘safe’ and accepted (Plaut, et al., 2011). Color blindness is a perspective that describes “ignoring or downplaying differences between ethnic and cultural groups” (Hachfeld, et al., 2015, p.45). Color blindness has become a large issue within the U.S. educational system. Color blindness is the preferred choice of most educators, to treat everyone fairly; they do not feel it is right to change practice for a specific group of people. Bloom and Colleagues (2015) describe color blindness as “a refusal or inability to confront White privilege that permeates our culture and perpetuates dominance by White individuals” (p. 560). Using the color blind model, educators are able to ignore their own biases
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and the larger critical issues of institutionalized racism. Educators with color blind beliefs may be hesitant to change their teaching style, curriculum and materials in order to teach a diverse population. Color blind educators lack the cultural knowledge to teach diverse populations, which not only influences their own perceptions, but also those of their students’ (Hachfeld, et al, 2015).

The texts used by many students in teacher education programs “normalize whiteness and marginalize color” (Gangi, 2008, p.32), which can instill in new educators that being white is better and that the white students in their classroom are better than those of color. The texts that educators are exposed to do not challenge societal norms or the racial inequalities that many students still face; instead the books justify and encourage white privilege. Gangi conducted a study of typical textbooks that teacher training programs use to analyze the racial disparities within them and found that in “Lucy Calkin’s A Field Guide to the Classroom Library (2002); of 36 ‘Benchmark Books for Each Text Level’, only one is by an author of color, and it is also the only multicultural book on the list” (p.32). Lucy Calkin’s A Field Guide to the Classroom Library (2002) is only one of many books that he analyzed, all with the unfortunate realization that racism is still very present within our society. Gorski et al. (2012) found that even teacher educators are reluctant to embrace multiculturalism within their classroom. Teacher educators must also be aware prejudices toward minorities within society and incorporate it into the classroom curriculum. Gorski (2008) found that many teacher education courses were not designed to educate about diversity or inequalities created in the classroom. ‘Othering’ language has also become a problem within education courses. Othering language defines a person or group as being an outsider; it attached a negative value to the identity in order to maintain hegemony (Gorski, 2008). If educators of pre-service teachers are unable to realize that the
books and language they are using are racist, then pre-service teachers will not realize when their own classroom libraries and curriculum are unfair and bias towards others.

Using multicultural literature in graduate and undergraduate classrooms offers opportunities for exposing pre-service teachers to the issues of diversity (Gibson, 2012). Multicultural literature is an educational tool that can be used by everyone at any age level. By using multicultural texts with teacher candidates, they are able to develop a more open-minded view, as well as an accepting attitude toward those that are different from them (Iwai, 2013, p191). With the use of multicultural literature, pre-service teachers are exposed to the realities that many people face. Pre-service teachers often suffer a cultural reality shock when faced with a classroom full of minority students (Almarza, 2005). This culture shock is due to the fact that many educators lack the exposure to culturally different students and their specific needs as students. According to Stallworth et al., (2006),

the classroom community should afford all of its members the opportunity to be respected for their own unique sets of differences as well as encourage them to develop a respect and appreciation for those whose cultural and ethnic backgrounds are different from their own. (p. 478)

The classroom should possess a sense of interconnectedness and community with the diverse populations of the school and community.

Educators have a responsibility to select appropriate and diverse pieces of literature that reflect the diversity of the nation’s population (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006). In order for educators to connect to their students they must use multicultural literature in their own learning and their students. Multicultural literature is a means for helping students build an understanding of the many elements of the human experience (Stallworth et al., 2006). With an
increased exposure to multicultural literature, prejudice against outgroups is less likely to occur. However, Stallworth et al., also found that many educators adhere to the notion that good literature is classic literature; and educators worry that multicultural literature will not fit into the same category. Defining good literature as books that only fit into western society is troublesome, this type of mind set increases institutionalized racism and White privilege. During a study conducted by Wake and Modla (2008), educators were able to overcome their insecurities about teaching diverse populations through the use of multicultural literature; and the students were able to make deeper connections. The influence of multicultural literature can reach both students and educators. Students who use multicultural literature are able to make meaningful interactions and discover the universality of what unites people of all background (Stallworth et al., 2006).

Almarza (2005) found the pre-service teachers develop understanding and personal connections with students of diverse backgrounds after having conversations with them. Interacting with diverse students allowed educators to possess a new view point for children of diverse backgrounds. Through interviews, pre-service teachers were able to deconstruct some preexisting cultural assumptions held my many; assumption such as a lack of parent involvement from minority families. In fact, Almarza found that pre-service teachers discovered that many parents of minority students don’t get involved with the school affairs because they trust the role of the educator and don’t want to interfere. Teacher knowledge of multicultural literature and how to incorporate it into the curriculum is vital. Many teacher candidates stated that they do not know about multicultural literature or how to incorporate it into their classrooms (Bloom, et al., 2015). Pre-service teachers state that there is disconnect between theory and practice, and they are unable to apply what they learned to the classroom. Pre-service teachers have thought for
years that field experiences are their opportunity to practice theories and techniques learned in the classroom; however, they often get caught up with procedures and routines unable to make the necessary connection with the students (Almarza, 2006). Educators of pre-service teachers must re-direct field experiences to real classroom teaching situations. Bloom et al. (2015) also found it important that educators and pre-service teachers critically self-reflect about their own background and its impact on their teaching. White educators may impress upon students their racially and culturally biased views about education and learning (Bloom, et al.) Educators should be aware of their own participation in the racial divide and counteract it through the use of multicultural literature in the classroom.

In a study conducted by Brinson (2012), she asked teacher candidates to name books that reflected or possessed a main character from different racial backgrounds; unfortunately less than half of the teacher candidates could identify books outside of the white race, and the majority of those books were about African Americans and no other minority group. So many teacher candidates are oblivious to the idea of multicultural literature and its usefulness in a classroom; but multicultural texts can also be used to help teacher candidates change their views, and evaluate the biases and prejudices that they may hold (Gibson, 2012). Educators are models for their students, in order to be positive models; educators must be properly trained through the use of multicultural literature. At the end of Almarza’s (2005) study, the pre-service teachers involved stated that they learned more about multiculturalism through experiences and interactions with minority children and their families than they ever learned in a classroom full of text books and tests. During a study conducted by Plaut et al. (2011) minority participants identifies more with terms focused on multiculturalism and color blindness than White participants. It is not uncommon for minorities to identify and relate with multicultural terms
than members of the majority. In a similar study by Hachfeld et al. (2015) educators more strongly endorsed color blind beliefs than multicultural beliefs because they were less willing to adapt their teaching to the specific needs of diverse students. Although multiculturalism was more closely associated with higher self-efficacy, educators still sought color blind beliefs (Hachfeld, et al., 2015). Multiculturalism can have a positive impact on educators and their philosophy about education, they first need to take the step toward it and evaluate their own beliefs and biases, so they can better educate the children of tomorrow.

Educators need to know about multicultural literature and the benefits it can bring to a classroom and the students. Before educators can teach about diversity, they must look at their own prejudices and biases first by using and reading multicultural books. Multicultural books have the power to open the mind of educators and instill and accepting attitude toward those that are different. Educators need to model tolerance and acceptance for their students as well as an understanding for different cultures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, multicultural literature provides many benefits to the classroom, and those in it. Multicultural literature has the power to motivate student to read, it can increase fluency and comprehension when reading as well. Students from diverse background perform better with multicultural literature because it allows them to see themselves and their culture reflected back. Using mirror books in a classroom is very important; when students read about people like them and situations they have gone through, they feel a sense of importance; that their culture and beliefs are important. Educators of diverse classrooms need to be aware of the possible literature they can use. Common book lists as well as book order forms and book awards often neglect to include multicultural literature, this neglect can be deceiving to educators and parents.
Educators need to research the multitude of multicultural literature available and use it within their classroom. Using multicultural literature foster a sense of community within the classroom; everyone will feel important and validated in the classroom, as well as accepting of everyone’s beliefs. Educators need to take a stance of multiculturalism, not color blind. Through color blind beliefs, students’ uniqueness is pushed aside and their true selves are never seen. With multicultural beliefs, students of diverse background flourish in the classroom, and are able to make positive, meaningful connections to literature and others. It is also important for educators of pre-service teachers to promote multiculturalism and self-reflection about preexisting biases. As a society, we need to make race more visible and give voice to those who are traditionally marginalized, one way to complete this task is to use multicultural literature in a classroom.

Method

Context

This study will take place at a local Day Care located in the Finger Lakes of New York State. The city in which the Day Care is located is located at the top of Seneca Lake, the largest of the five Finger Lakes. The students who attend the Day care belong to the local school district. School district prides itself on being “uniquely urban” (Swanson, 2014) with its diverse population and its beautiful location on the lake. The Day Care serves both employees of the Local Health System and the residents of the community. The programs offered range from infant care through school aged children (six weeks old- sixth grade). The children are in the care of a registered nurse as well as several teachers with college degrees in education.

The city school district in which the students attend school is home to 2188 students (NYS Report Card, 2012). The city has a very diverse population. The district demographics are broken up as such; zero percent American Indian, two percent Asian, 21% Hispanic, 17%
Black, 56% White, as well as a small percentage (four percent) of students who identify as a mixed race, as well as six percent identifying as Limited English Proficient (NYS Report Card). The district is also home to a number of low income families. Over half of the student population is eligible for the free lunch program (61%) and 10% of the student body receive the reduced price lunch. The demographics of this district are not like many of the surrounding towns and cities.

**Participants**

The participants for this study include 12 students, eight boys and four girls. All of the students are from the same school district located in the Finger Lakes region of New York State. The abilities of the students range from below grade level to well above; some of the students receive extra supports at school. The students range in age from four years old to eight years old. The majority (nine) of the students is Caucasian, there are two Puerto Rican students and one mixed race student (Caucasian and African American). The students also range from kindergarten to fourth grade. The teachers involved in the study consist of three female Caucasians. The educators are all middle aged with a wide range of teaching experience.

Erin is an eight year old Caucasian young girl in third grade. She lives with her mom, dad, brother and cat. She enjoys playing soccer and participating in 4H club and the leadership program at school. She also enjoys school itself. Her favorite part is mathematics, but she also likes to read. She loves reading the *Pere the Cat* series as well as books about ladybugs.

Jacob is a five year old Caucasian male in kindergarten. He lives with his two moms, sister and dog. He is a very intelligent young man who enjoys going to the museum and sea breeze for fun. He also loves reading, especially the *Magic Tree House* series.
Matthew is a seven year old Caucasian male in second grade. He lives with his mom, dad, and brother. He likes to play with cars, in fact he claims he has too many to count. He also enjoys school, especially art music and math. He also enjoys reading and being read to.

Alex is a seven year old Puerto Rican boy in second grade. He lives with his mom, brother and step-father. He is a wonderful basketball player, and plays as often as possible. He does not care for school much, but enjoys math, he finds it easy.

Jennifer is an eight year old Caucasian and one quarter Spanish girl. Jennifer is in third grade. She lives with her mom, dad, and brother; her two sisters are older and live elsewhere. Jennifer enjoys being outside and playing with her neighbors. She loves to read, especially chapter books like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series.

Juan is a seven year old Puerto Rican boy. He is in second grade, and currently part of a dual English and Spanish class. He lives at home with his mom, dad and little brother. He likes school, and enjoys interacting with classmates. Juan especially enjoys physical education class. He does not like reading, he finds it too be boring and exhausting, his mouth gets tired; but he does think of himself as a good reader because he practices with his teachers.

Daryl is an eight year old Caucasian boy. He is currently in third grade. His parents are separated and he shared his time between the two. His Dad lives alone, and his Mom and grandmother live together. He loves to play video games and his Wii U. Daryl does not particularly enjoy school, more specifically reading. He hates to read and does not think that he is good at reading because he doesn’t practice.

Joey is a four year old Caucasian boy in kindergarten. He lives with his mom, dad and dog. He likes to play with toy cars, his mom and grandmother. Joey thinks school is ‘okay’ but it is not his favorite. He does not particularly like reading; he finds it to be boring and not fun.
Erica is a four year old Caucasian girl. She is in kindergarten. Erica lives with her mom, dad and one year old brother. She loves to play with her little brother and make him laugh. She likes attending school, especially going to the cafeteria with the bigger students. Erica likes to read all kinds of books but particularly likes Amelia Bedelia books.

Steven is a six year old Caucasian boy. He is in first grade. He lives at home with his mom, dad and brother. Steven likes to open presents and gifts. He thinks school is “cool” and likes going. He enjoys reading, and especially likes battleship books.

James is a six year old Caucasian boy in first grade. He loves to swim and jump rope, and anything active. James likes school, especially physical education, recess and art. He also likes to read books of any topic.

Stacey is an eight year old Caucasian and African American (mixed) girl. She is currently in fourth grade. She lives at home with her mom, dad and pet frog. She enjoys dancing and playing soccer. Stacey ‘LOVES’ school, especially reading, math; she likes reading sci-fi books the most.

Monica is a new educator in a school located in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State. She is 30 years old, and a Caucasian female. She has been teaching for five years; currently she is teaching fifth grade. In the past, she worked for other school district as a head start instructor.

Jessica is an educator for a school located in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State. She is a 36 year old Caucasian female. Jessica has been teaching for twelve years as a sixth grade ELA and Social Studies teacher. Before she began teaching at this current school, she was a long term sub for a neighboring school district.
Rebecca is also an educator at a school located in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State. She is a 40 year old Caucasian female. Rebecca has been teaching for 18 years at this school. She is the remedial reading teacher for grades k-3, and is also the teacher for reading recovery. She has not taught in any other school.

**Researcher Stance**

I am a 24 year old Caucasian female. I graduated from SUNY Cortland with a Bachelor’s Degree in Inclusive Special Education and a minor in Psychology for Children with Exceptionalities. I am currently completing my coursework for a Master’s degree in Literacy Education, Birth – Grade Six. I am an active participant in this study. Mills (2014) describes an active participant as an educator who is engaged in teaching, and monitors the effects of that teaching. I qualify as an active participant because not only am I looking at students’ prejudices and biases, but I am also analyzing my own.

**Method**

I studied the effects of multicultural literature on students’ perspectives of race and how teachers implement multicultural literature into the classroom. For my qualitative data, I met with each child individually to interview and observe them for the pre-assessment portion of the research. During this interview they were asked a series of questions (Appendix A) that required them to choose a ‘skin tone’ as an answer. The students chose the ‘skin tone’ based off of a chart I created. The chart (Appendix B) contains 10 pictures, five girls and five boys, all with five different shades of skin, so that there is a boy and a girl with the same skin tone. I documented how each student answered the question and occasionally followed up with ‘why’ or ‘Can you explain to me why you chose that picture?’ to get a deeper understanding of the child’s thought process. I also documented the students’ body language and facial expressions for each
question. It is important to know if any of my questions made the students uncomfortable or if they are confused about what I was asking. These interviews were video recorded so that I was able to refer back to them for later analysis.

After all pre-assessments were completed, I conducted a whole group read aloud with two multicultural texts. The texts were *Something Beautiful* by Sharon Dennis Wyeth and *Nino Wrestles the World* by Yuyi Morales. *Something Beautiful* by Sharon Dennis Wyeth is about a young girl who longs to see the beautiful things in life. When her teacher writes the word ‘beautiful’ on the board, she makes it her mission to find something beautiful in her own neighborhood. As she searches, she discovers that sometimes the beautiful things in life aren’t quite what you thought. *Nino Wrestles the World* by Yuyi Morales is about a young boy who takes on any opponent that comes his way in his traditional Luchador wrestling costume (mask and underwear). But when his little sisters awaken from their nap, his skills are put to the test. After reading each book on separate days, the group had a discussion about the text. How did it make them feel? Were they able to connect to the story or character at all? Can the students see themselves being friends with the character? Then, the older students who were able to write complete, cohesive sentences completed a written prompt (Appendix C) about the story and those writing samples were collected for further analysis and discussion with the child if necessary. The read aloud discussions were also be voice recorded for reference and transcription.

Lastly, I sent out teacher questionnaires (Appendix D). The questionnaires consisted of questions regarding teachers’ thoughts and views on multicultural literature as well as how it is implemented into their classrooms. This questionnaire consisted of 14 questions as well as questions about the teachers’ backgrounds.
Quality and Credibility of Research

In order to have a successful action research project, one must ensure the credibility and quality of the study. Mills (2014) defines credibility 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.115). In order to make this study credible I took into account the fact that children can be unpredictable. To ensure the students provided me with accurate and honest answers, I took into consideration their body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and choice of words; all documented in videos and field notes. I also recognize that the pictures used contain both males and females for each ‘skin type’. The presence of multiple genders may have influenced student responses based on their previous experiences.

Transferability is another aspect of research that is relevant to my study. Transferability is the “researcher’s beliefs that everything they study is context bound and that the goal of their work is not to develop ‘truth’ statements that can be generalized to larger groups of people” (p. 116). I understand that the statements made during my research cannot be generalized. These statements represent the beliefs of my participants and no one else; and that these statements cannot be transferred onto any specific group within society.

Dependability is another important factor of action research. Dependability is referred to as the stability of the data collected (Mills, 2014). To ensure that my study is dependable, I used my interviews for dual purposes. The interviews posed as interviews as well as observational notes about body language and facial expressions. Every child will received the same questions but was interviewed individually to ensure no one felt pressured from others and answers are not copied/ repeated.
Finally is the confirmability of the study. According to Mills (2014), confirmability is “the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (p. 116). My role as the researcher was to ensure that I in no way revealed my personal assumptions to the students, influencing their responses. I kept a straight face when asking questions and did not alter the tone of my voice. I was also refrained from providing positive or negative responses to the students. By keeping my responses neutral (‘okay’, ‘next’), it ensured that the participants were not being influenced by me and their answers were what they believe to be true and honest.

**Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

This study requires informed consent and assent from its participants. The adult educators who will complete the questionnaire will be asked to fill out the consent form before completion on the questionnaire. The consent form will ensure that they understand the project they participated in and that they understood their rights within the study. The student participants were also required to complete assent forms. The guardians of the students completed the permission form indicating the purpose of the study and the students’ rights when participating. The students were also be required to complete an assent form indicating that they understood the purpose of the study and their rights; children below third grade provided verbal assent, and children above grade three provided written assent. The educator who completed a teacher questionnaire also filled out a consent form to provide me with permission to use their responses. All participants and guardians were reminded that everyone is assigned a pseudonym. The pseudonyms ensure everyone’s protection, confidentiality and anonymity.

**Data Collection**

This study contained multiple forms of data. The first piece of data that was collect was the interviews as a pre-assessment tool. The data collection consists of the students answered
several planned questions about their perceptions of race as well as potential follow up questions. The data collection process used for the pre-assessment was also used as the post assessment to see if any changes were made in student perceptions about race. The interviews were video recorded for easy analysis, but because my research is not focused on technology, I do not consider the recordings a form of data.

The second piece of data that was collected is student work. The students participated in two read aloud sessions. After each read aloud, there was a group discussion (voice recorded) and then the older students submitted a written response about the text. The written responses was collected and analyzed.

The third and final pieces of data that was collected were teacher questionnaires. The teachers are asked to answer 14 questions regarding their practice and views on multicultural literature, their views on diverse classrooms, and the implementation of multicultural literature in their classroom. The questionnaires were collected and analyzed for specific details about teacher knowledge and readiness for use with multicultural literature.

**Data Analysis**

After collecting data, I began to analyze the information for commonalities. The first analysis conducted was with my quantitative data. This data consisted of the student interviews in which they picked a specific picture to answer the question. While analyzing this data I looked at the frequency of every response and the reason for choosing that response. The next pieces of data that I analyzed were the read aloud discussions, student work pieces and the teacher surveys.

While analyzing my qualitative data, I began to ‘code’ the commonalities found within the pieces. I focused primarily on the discussions I had with the students and their work
samples. While coding, I primarily looked at how the students interpreted the stories and also how their perceptions may have been influenced. These focus points were established and later analyzed through the research previously conducted on the focus of my research topic. Through this research I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how multicultural literature may impact student perceptions on race and how educators implement multicultural literature into the classroom.

In order to code my data properly, I had to first type up a transcript of every conversation I with the students. I printed the transcripts and used multiple colors to code the information. I chose to use multiple colors on one sheet so that I could easily see where concepts and commonalities overlapped with one another. I also used the same coding system for the teacher questionnaires to determine any commonalities among them. After determining the commonalities between within the data I connected it back to the research conducted previously.

**Findings and Discussion**

Throughout this research paper, I used various methods to collect data. My quantitative data consists of several tables that depict my pre and post assessment questions for the students. My qualitative data consists of group and individual discussions, as well as students work and teacher questionnaires. The common themes that presented themselves throughout the data were students’ perceptions of races, the importance of using multicultural literature, and educator implementation of multicultural literature in the classroom. These themes were apparent during all forms of data and will be discussed as they occurred through the data.

**Students’ Perceptions of Race**

The table below represents data collected during the pre-assessment and the post assessment. The pre and post assessment involved asking students multiple questions in which
they responded by picking a picture of a child that best answered the question in their opinion.

The pre and post assessments provided me with evidence that the children hold biases towards minority groups, particularly towards African Americans.

Table 1

*Percentage Scores of Picture Selections*

Chart of the pictures provided in Appendix B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Assessment</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: What child is mean/bad?</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Assessment</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 5: What child is mean/bad?</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the table above, each participant selected a character that they felt was a mean or bad child. Half of the focus group did not select a child, but rather told me that there were no mean ones and almost half of the population (41%) selected a child with a dark skin tone as being mean or bad. When asked why they chose that child as mean or bad, the common response was because their smile was not as big as the others. Juan chose number five (the darkest skin tone) because “he’s brown and he looks kind of mean” (Student interview, October 14, 2015). Juan based his answer strictly on the skin color of the child; this could be due to a real life experience with someone of a darker skin tone acting mean toward Juan. Juan’s
response could also be the result of learned behavior from his guardians. Children’s knowledge of themselves and others stems from what they learn from interaction with other children and adults (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010). The students’ bias answers could be due to a lack of multicultural literature in the classroom and curriculum, interactions with people of minority backgrounds, or a lack of exposure to media with minority figures. Multicultural literature is designed to help students learn and respect those of different backgrounds (Ebe, 2010). During the post assessment, the students’ answers did not change in a positive direction. As Table 1 shows, the percentage of students who chose a child with dark skin remained at 41%. The lack of change in response could be due to negative experiences in the students’ life or through interactions with literature and media with people of darker skin tones. Sometimes all it takes is one negative interaction to cause someone to form a negative stereotype in their schemata structures. Schemata are complex structures of ideas, thoughts and experiences that represent a person’s past encounters with the world (Ebe, 2010). It is quite possible that the students have had negative encounters with people from minority groups and the interactions have caused the students to stereotype, or categorize all minorities as bad or mean. This type of thinking is precisely what multicultural literature aims to fix. Many students altered their choices but did not make neutral choices. Erin and Jennifer are the only two students who changed their views and said that none of the children are mean after they had previously selected a different child. Erin and Jennifer both re-evaluated their opinions and decided that none of the children were mean. The change in response was big for Erin especially because during her first interview she disclosed having a recent encounter with someone of a darker skin tone bullying her, which influenced her choice greatly. During the post assessment, she selected no child as mean or bad, drastically changing her answer. This change in response is most likely correlated to the
literature I read to the students, depicting minorities in a positive light. In *Something Beautiful*, the main character was looking for something in her neighborhood to call beautiful, she discovered that the most unlikely thing was beautiful. The main character also made it her responsibility to clean up her neighborhood by washed graffiti off the door and one day providing shelter to a homeless woman. In *Nino Wrestles the World*, the little boy Nino was depicted as a fun loving boy who enjoys adventure and playing with his sisters, like many other kids. The literature offered the students a window into another culture (Brinson, 2012), and way of life, enabling them to see people from that culture in a new light. Other children, such as Steven, Joey, James and Stacey changed their original selection from a neutral stand point to one that suggested bias or prejudice towards those of darker skin tones. The change in selection may be due to experiencing negative encounters with minorities or their true biases were revealed. Using multicultural literature enables students to face their biases and also address social issues and assumptions through literature that reflects the diversity in today’s society (Wake & Modla, 2008). The lack of altered views and opinions by the students demonstrates their need for multicultural literature in the classroom and curriculum. The students need to be exposed to other cultures and way of life in order to gain appreciation and acceptance for differences. Multicultural literature enables students to see themselves, and more importantly, others within the text. Window books allow the readers to see into another person’s life, culture or beliefs (Brinson, 2012). Reading and interacting with window books, will allow the readers to experience cultural pluralism, which validates the lives of minority people. If the students had received a greater exposure to multicultural literature, it is likely that their views would have changed to a more neutral and accepting stance. The literature that I read to the students depicted minority children in a positive light. The young girl wanted to help improve her
neighborhood by cleaning it up, helping those less fortunate and overall looking for that ‘something beautiful’ in everyday life. The little boy, Nino, was an energetic, fun loving boy who likes to play around especially with his sisters. These books, and many more like them, enable students to see themselves and others as important, positive role models that they can look up to. Use of multicultural literature in the classroom can have a positive impact on students ability to foster pride, and move beyond violence and stereotypes (Ebe, 2010 & Evans, 2010).

The table below provides data that was collected during the pre-assessment and the post assessment. The information presented further supports the idea that students require an increased exposure to multicultural literature. The students hold a negative view about people of color, particularly African Americans.

Table 2

*Percentage Scores of Picture Selections*

Chart of the pictures provided in Appendix B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Assessment</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Post Assessment</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 7: What child is ugly? Why?</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>#5 (darkest skin color)</td>
<td>#4 (Second darkest skin color)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question 7: What child is ugly? Why?</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>#5 (darkest skin color)</td>
<td>#4 (Second darkest skin color)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 also shows the percentage scores for another question: what child is ugly? Based on the percentages, almost half of the students selected a child with a darker skin color (#4 or #5) for both pre-assessment and post-assessment questions. These selections may have been made because the students have had prior experience with others calling people with dark complexions ugly. The students may also be influenced by the media and societal views of beauty. There are very few minorities represented in the media, just like there is a lack of minority representation in books (Koss, 2015). Question number seven does not particularly relate to education or multicultural literature, but it does show the prejudice that many students hold towards those of minority backgrounds. A large percentage (41%) of the students selected a child with dark to medium skin color. In the post-assessment, the students’ selections for who they thought was ugly, was more widespread among the choices. The students were less concentrated on students of dark skin tone. The students may have been less concentrated on skin color because of the literature I read. In the story Something Beautiful, the little girl spends her time looking for something beautiful in her neighborhood, only to find out that she herself is something beautiful. This story enabled students to see things in a different light, and that not everything has typical beauty. The literature I provided to the students was authentic; it included accurate illustrations, historical and cultural information, and the characters had a positive role in the story line (Yoo-Lee et al., 2014). The authentic literature enabled the students to make judgment about others based on different characteristics other than race. Steven changed his original answer of #5 to #2, because he did not like the hair on #2. Another student, Alex, changed his response. Alex originally selected #5 as being ugly because he viewed them as being “really dark” (student interview, October 15, 2015), when he changed his answer he selected #1 girl as being ugly because “she’s white” (Student interview, October 27, 2015).
changes in the two boys’ answers are most likely due to the multicultural literature that was read to them. The literature was focused on two minority groups, African Americans and Mexicans, and in the stories, the two main characters were presented as positive, influential beings that can change their world and others. This positive depiction within the literature countered previous stereotypes that the students may have held (Koss, 2015). Because the answers transitioned from black kids are ugly to everyone is ugly, it is possible that students are taking other attributes into consideration when determining who is ugly. It is also possible that they took the words from Something Beautiful literally and now believe that black people or everyone is pretty, that skin color does not affect that opinion. The response made by the students raises awareness about our society’s beliefs and views on what constitutes beauty. While it is not the only factor of influence, multicultural literature can help improve students’ views on beauty. It is important that children are exposed to all types of culture and way of life; multicultural literature can provide children with knowledge necessary to be successful. It is evident through this study that the use of multicultural literature has ability to affect students’ perceptions about race.

The table below provides data that was collected during the pre and post assessments. This data is specific to the students’ perceptions of adult biases. The students were asked to select the child they feel adults do not like and why they think adults feel that way.

Table 3

*Percentage Scores of Student Selections*

Chart of the pictures provided in Appendix B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre Assessment</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 8:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What child do</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adults not like?</td>
<td>#5 (darkest skin color)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question number eight is a very important question that yields important answers. Forty-one percent said that adults do not like children with a skin color matching that of pictures 4 and 5 on the chart. This percentage clearly demonstrates that the students are exposed to racism and prejudice. Self-concept, self-esteem and perceptions of others develop from interactions and messages presented to children from adults and society (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010). When asked why they picked that child, some of the students responded openly with “he’s brown” (Student interview, October 16, 2015) or “they’re all black” (Student interview, October 14, 2015), others responded with phrases such as I don’t know, or just because; not realizing that the skin tone may be the reason they selected that child. The students may have selected the children with dark skin because they have had previous encounters with adults depicting racism or prejudice behaviors. Children need positive interactions and messages presented to them in order to develop a healthy self-concept and self-worth. If and when children are exposed to misinformation about themselves or people who are different from themselves, they internalize that information and it may go unchallenged for years (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010). During the post assessment, the student responses did not change much. A few of the students changed their answer to ‘I don’t know’ (the other column) but no one had a drastic change in their answer. The lack of change in response could be due to the fact that the books I read to the
students did not focus on adult views or perceptions so the students were not exposed to how adults can change their views. The experiences that the students have had with adults and children with dark skin have led these students to have negative views toward people with dark skin tones. Adults need to be more aware of how their beliefs and views are presented to children. A lack in recognition of one’s personal biases can greatly influence educators’ teaching abilities toward minority students (Wake & Modla, 2008). It is educators’ responsibility to provide everyone with a safe and secure learning environment, and that can only happen when the educator takes the time to look and analyze their own belief systems about race and prejudice.

The table below depicts data that was collected during the pre-assessment. The data is focused around one question, what child gets good grades? The data below portrays students’ tendency to choose a white child when asked about a positive trait or attribute.

Table 4

Percentage Scores of Picture Selections

Chart of the pictures provided in Appendix B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Assessment</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 10:</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What child gets good grades?</td>
<td>#5 (darkest skin color)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16% 8% 8% 8% 16% 25% 16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Question 11:   | None                  |
| What child is dumb or gets bad grades? | #5 (darkest skin color) | #4 (second darkest skin color) | #2 (lighter skin color) | Other-multiple selections |
|                | Other-multiple selections |
Based on the data in Table 4, the data was fairly wide spread among various answers. However, 49% of the students clearly selected one of the three lightest skin tones as a child they thought would receive good grades. This mindset was most likely established from personal experiences, interactions with others and the media. It is perceived by many that white students are more intelligent that their minority counterparts but that is due to the white students’ ability to connect and understand the school work more because it is tailored to them (Dressel, 2005). When ask why the students selected the child many of them responded with answers that focused on appearance. One child who selected number two boy said he picked him because “he looks good” (student interview, October 2015). Others commented on their ‘big smiles’ which lead the students to believe they were smart and had good grades. Forty-nine percent selected a child with dark skin tone (child #4 and #5) as someone who is dumb or gets bad grades. The selection of minority children as dumb may be due to life experiences with minority students labeled as unintelligent. Minorities are often victims of tracking into special education classes (Sweller, N., Graham, L. J., & Bergen, 2012). The occurrence of tracking may be due to students poor reading skills which can be a result of little to no connection between the character and student and a lack of background knowledge can result in poor academic performance, specifically reading assessments (Ebe, 2010). When asked why they selected that specific child, the answers were shocking. Two students who selected number five responded with “they look brown” (student interview, October 16, 2015) and “they’re black” (student interview, October 14, 2015), and a student who selected number four said “they look gray and brown” (student interview, October 15, 2015). These results are alarming, but what is more alarming is the fact that a
minority student made a few of the comments above. When a student views others and themselves in this light, it is clear that they lack self-concept and self-esteem, things that can develop from positive interactions and messages presented to them by others and literature (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010). For these two questions, multiple students gave an initial response of ‘I don’t know’, some were able to select a child after some time but others weren’t, hence the Other column in the table. There was also a student who fixated on the gender of the students for most of the questions in which he would select all the girls or all the boys, his answer is also included in the Other column because this study is not focusing on gender roles.

It is possible that this student was too immature for the study and as a result his answers were skewed. It is also possible that this student just did not take race into consideration and finds gender to me a bigger factor in life. Multicultural education is education for all, and it focuses on more than just race and culture (Evans, 2012), perhaps if the literature focused more on gender and less on race, it would have had a larger impact on his views. The focus is on multicultural literature and the benefits it can have within a classroom. Our education system does not provide justice to all students; where teachers are predominately White and the academic activities and services reflect the traditional white, Eurocentric main-stream society (McCullough, 2013; Sarraj et al, 2015). Our society and education system place all minority students at an academic disadvantage. Multicultural literature is one part of multicultural education that can help turn around the educational institution that marginalizes minority students.

The Importance of Using Multicultural Literature

After examining the data that clearly showed students initially held biases against people with different skin colors, it was necessary to look at why it is important for students to be
exposed to multicultural literature in order to counter this type of thinking. The following data was collected during read aloud discussions, written responses to the read alouds, as well as the post assessment which consisted of the same questions as the pre-assessment and teacher questionnaires.

Reading multicultural literature is important on many levels. During my research and data analysis I found that it is essential to building positive connections to literature and exposing students to diversity in literature. Dressel (2005) found that students of minority background performed better on reading tasks when they could apply background knowledge to the story and connect personally to the story. Within my data, I found that the minority students were able to connect more to the stories I read because they had larger background knowledge; while the other students enjoyed the story, they were not able to make as deep a connection to it. During the discussion of Something Beautiful I asked a student what she thought of the book Stacey responded as such “I thought that it was like a really pretty story and about finding your true potential” (student interview, October 23, 2015). During and after the reading of Something Beautiful, Stacey was able to apply her background knowledge, and make personal connection to the character in the book and the situation she was going through and develop a well thought out conclusion or moral of the story. I believe that Stacey’s ethnic background enabled her to connect with the character in Something Beautiful more so than the other students because she was the only African American student in the study. I do not think that her ethnic background is the only reason she was able to connect, Stacey is a very intelligent young girl who made other connections with the character in the story. In another discussion about the text, Stacey shares that she is able to connect with the character because the character likes school and Stacey also loves school (student interview, October 23, 2015). Stacey was able to connect with the
character on more than just an appearance base; she was able to understand from the text and the illustrations that the character enjoyed school very much just as Stacey does. Had I read a story about a little white girl walking around her neighborhood, I do not believe that Stacey or any of the other students would have been able to connect to the story. Pilonieta and Handcock (2014) state that the background knowledge a reader bring to a text influences every aspect of our learning. While not all of the students had large background knowledge to support this story, some, such as Stacey, did, resulting in their understanding the text and making personal connections to it.

Comprehension is a large issue for minority student when reading texts. Ebe (2010) found that when reading culturally relevant literature students were “more familiar the language of the text, the actions of the characters, the description of the setting, [and] the sequence of the events” (p. 196). The second story that I read to the students was about a little Mexican boy pretending to be a lucha libre (Mexican wrestler). The adventures of Nino were described using Spanish and English words. I discovered that group of my students were able to comprehend the text because they either speak Spanish at home or they have been exposed to Spanish in school (dual language classes). During the reading of the story I would often stop and ask the student what certain Spanish words meant, to ensure that everyone understood them. One example is “Mis Hijos”; when I read the words I stopped and asked the students what it meant. It took some time, but a few students, some from a Hispanic background, Juan and Alex, and a few students who partake in dual language classes answered ‘children’ together. These students used their past experiences with Spanish (their background knowledge) to comprehend the text. It is important to use multicultural literature in the classroom because students who typically do not understand the literature used will have an opportunity to flourish. Minority students are often
exposed to literature that marginalizes minorities and emphasizes white power. The use of multicultural literature that depicts cultural pluralism validates the culture and life experiences of minority students within the classroom (Ebe, 2010). By using multicultural literature I was able to provide students with an opportunity to see them and their culture celebrated within a text. Another important aspect to using multicultural literature is that it provides majority students with an opportunity to learn about different cultures and customs. While not every student knew Spanish, they all knew English and some were able to realize that the Spanish words in *Nino Wrestles the World* matched up with the English words. Erin kindly pointed out “the words are right there in the middle of the page” (group discussion, October 21, 2015), referring to the translation of “Mis Hijos” “My Children” in the text. This realization made by Erin is important because it shows that she is aware of how the text is constructed and she is using that to help aide her in her comprehension of the text even though she does not know Spanish. Listening to *Nino Wrestles the World* offered Erin an opportunity to learn a little bit about Mexican culture, specifically the style of lucha libre. As Brinson (2012) describes, window books are texts that allow students to see into or learn about cultures different than their own. The students in my study were all able to learn about a different culture because none of them were Mexican and had very little knowledge about Mexican culture. Culturally relevant texts provide the reader with words, setting and imagery that are familiar to them and that coincide with the reader’s background knowledge; which ultimately makes reading easier and more enjoyable.

Educators go through a lot of training to get their certification, but most training programs do not focus on diversity within the classroom or on multicultural literature that can be used in the classroom. Educators are often white females that lack exposure to unique and diverse cultures and backgrounds (Bloom, Peters, Margolin, & Fragnoli, 2015; Gibson, 2012;...
Wake & Modla, 2008). Two out of the three educator’s interview stated that they would be uncomfortable teaching a culture that is different than their own, and one stated that she would especially be uncomfortable if there was a language barrier. The mindset of the three educators is typical for most. Many educators feel uncomfortable and unprepared to teach a classroom full of students who belong to a different culture than them or speak a different primary language.

Teacher preparation course do not offer pre-service teachers the necessary education to be successful in a diverse setting (Bloom, Peters, Margolin, & Fragnoli, 2015). It is important that education courses for educators include literature that is diverse as well as prepares the educators to face a diverse classroom. Multicultural literature used in a graduate or undergraduate course offers the pre-service teachers an opportunity to learn about the issues of diversity (Gibson). The fact that none of the educators could list multicultural book is a red flag. These professionals were never introduced to diverse pieces of literature during their education and have failed to receive professional development in the area of multicultural literature and education. The lack of teacher exposure to multicultural literature greatly effects student performance. If the educators to not know about or know how to use multicultural literature then the students who need interaction with multicultural literature will suffer academically and personally, developing a low self-esteem and low self-concept (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010). It is important for educators of pre-service teachers to use multicultural literature, and also educate the new teachers on how to use it in the classroom so that everyone is successful within the classroom.

Multicultural literature is important to use in the classroom because it enable students from minority backgrounds to see themselves and their culture reflected in the text increasing their comprehension and connection to book while offering majority students and opportunity to learn about other people and their cultures. Students from minority backgrounds possess the
necessary background knowledge in comprehend the text and are therefore able to make deep personal connection with the literature. Students from the majority population are provided the prospect of learning about another culture. When students are able to learn about another culture their views and beliefs about that culture and the people that belong to it change. When a classroom library strictly consist of mirror books for white students and no mirror books for minority students, if further emphasis the belief that whites are superior.

**Educator Implementation of Multicultural Literature into the Classroom**

Multicultural literature is only beneficial if educators and curriculum designers implement it into the curriculum and classroom. Research shows that many educators are unprepared and unwilling to use multicultural literature in the classroom. My research supports the idea that educators are not prepared to use multicultural literature and lack the education and training necessary for using it.

While analyzing the teacher questionnaires, it became apparent that the educators lacked the necessary knowledge and resources to provide students with an education that included multicultural literature. When asked to define multicultural education, they were able to provide a definition that coincided with the actual definition. Jessica said “Multicultural education means to teach students about other cultures so they have an understanding that the world is a broad place with much diversity, but also many commonalities” (teacher questionnaire, October 14, 2015). Jessica’s definition matches the actual definition in the sense that she (Jessica) feels that students should be educated about other cultures and ways of life. Evans (2010), states that multicultural education is used to educate students about different cultures in order to build respect and understanding for one another. Monica defined multicultural education as “Education that is all-inclusive of cultures and incorporating that into learning” (teacher
questionnaire, October 14, 2015). Monica’s definition of multicultural education fits closest with the idea of cultural pluralism. She stated that it is all-inclusive, and cultural pluralism focuses on education for all students, not just minorities (Yoon, et al., 2010). Rebecca defined it as “displaying many different cultures of race, religion, color, socioeconomic status” (teacher questionnaire, October 14, 2015). Rebecca’s definition is the only one that stands on the edge of the actual definition of multicultural literature. Rebecca states that it is the act of displaying various cultures, races, religions, etc., but multicultural education is much more than that. While it is important to have cultural differences displayed within the classroom, it is not enough to just look at them; as an educator it is important to discuss and explore the different cultures with students. In order for students to build an understanding and respect for one another they have to learn about one another. Also, students cannot challenge prejudices, racism or biases if they do not understand where they are coming from. Multicultural education provides students with the ability to challenge the wrong doings in the world (Nieto, 1992). Our society as a whole places all minority students at an academic disadvantage. Multicultural literature is one part of multicultural education that can help turn around the educational institution that marginalizes minority students. All three of these definitions encompass one aspect or another of multicultural education and should be implemented within the classroom and curriculum in order for all students to receive a fair and equal education. Multicultural education is for all students, not just minorities, it challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms pluralism (Nieto, 1992) to ensure all students receive an equal and fair education. Multicultural education and literature can help students respect minority groups, understand social change, and develop cultural literacy.
While the educators were able to define multicultural education, they lacked the necessary knowledge to implement it into the classroom. When asked to describe and list quality books, the educators answers disconcerting. Rebecca responded “ones with diverse characters, diverse problems” (teacher questionnaire, October 14, 2015); but did not list any specific books. Her response is very vague, and leaves a lot of room for interpretation. By saying, “diverse characters” she may mean that the characters possess a variety or personalities, beliefs, customs; and “diverse problems” could be interpreted as inter or external conflict between the character(s), and then that can be interpreted into various topics such as religion, society, race, gender, sexuality, etc. With such a vague response from Rebecca, it is hard to determine her exact knowledge of multicultural literature, but her response forces me to believe she has very little.

Monica defined quality literature as “books that inspire students to be great thinkers, books that grab the attention of students” (teacher questionnaire, October 14, 2015). While I agree with this definition, the books that she listed after her response do not fit with the definition of multicultural literature. Multicultural literature depicts cultural pluralism validates the culture and life experiences of minority students within the classroom (Ebe, 2010), as well as giving “voice to those who traditionally have been silenced or marginalized” (Evans, 2010, p. 96) and increases “awareness about the values, beliefs, and social practices of cultures” (Evans, 2010, p. 97) that may differ from those displayed in the classroom. Literature can also be used as a tool to educate students on diversity and social justice. Monica listed books such as Wonder by R.J. Palacio, Dark Water Rising by Marian Hale, Fish in a Tree by Lynda Mullaly Hunt, Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling, and the Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan (teacher questionnaire, October 14, 2015). All of these books, are great for young readers, and involve a lot of action, adventure, and even acceptance of others (mostly for physical issues); the issue with these books
is that they lack a diverse character pool, meaning a majority of the main characters are white and a majority or the supporting characters are white as well, the authors of these books are also white. Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) believe that culturally conscious books are written for and by those of different racial/ethnic backgrounds. Multicultural literature offer a uniqueness that no White author or illustrator could provide to readers of ethnic backgrounds, the white authors and illustrators are unable to provide an accurate depiction of realistic social and cultural settings. A majority of the books that Monica listed do not reflect those of multicultural education, but she did list Esperanza Rising by Pam Munoz Ryan. Esperanza Rising fits the definition of multicultural literature because it is written by a Mexican author (half Mexican) and is about the real life struggle that many had to face during that time period. However, listing one book out of a dozen clearly demonstrates a lack of knowledge about many multicultural texts available.

Another commonality that was present in the educator questionnaires was the lack of implementation of multicultural literature into the classroom. Jessica shared that she has conducted lessons on myths, folktales, and legends (Educator questionnaire, October 14, 2015). She used the lessons and a means to teach about differences and acceptance of those that are different. The issue with using this type of literature is that it is all make believe and does not depict real or actual events that have happened or can happen; also, these stories contain illustrations of white characters and lack diversity. Monica said that in past years she has celebrated holidays from other countries (educator questionnaire, October 14, 2015). While Monica did put forth effort to share and educate her students on other cultures, just celebrating the holidays (Cinco de Mayo, and Christmas traditions around the world) is not enough. A culture and its people are more than just holidays, and they deserve the respect of having their
entire culture shared and not just the ‘fun’ aspects of it. Rebecca clearly stated that she does not use a particular program in her classroom to promote multicultural education (educator questionnaire, October 14, 2015). Multicultural literature is a tool that can be used to share the realistic lives of different people and their cultures. Because there is a lack of multicultural literature in the classroom, which means that there is an abundance of literature that reflects white ideals and marginalizes minorities. Like Yoon et al. (2010) said; some educators may not realize that the literature used in the classroom counters the idea of pluralism and focuses on underrepresented groups’ assimilation into mainstream culture. Educators need to make the effort to find books that reflect a diverse population and represent multiple cultures in an authentic way.

Through the study I conducted, it is clear that students lack exposure to multicultural literature. This lack of exposure is influencing their perception of race. Students are not reading or listening to authentic stories about minority groups, causing the students to form unjust biases toward those of minority groups. When students are exposed to multicultural literature, they are able to comprehend the literature the same as they do with other stories. The students are also able to make connections between themselves and the text. Minority students were able to see themselves and their culture reflected in the book, while the majority was able to have an inside look into another world. This study also shed light on the necessary teacher reform that needs to take place. Teachers clearly lack the necessary knowledge about multicultural literature and its benefits in the classroom. Educators would benefit from professional development in order to learn about different texts and how to use the text in the classroom to have the greatest outcome.

Implications and Conclusions
As evident in the research provided above, mine and that of others, multicultural literature is not a part of school curriculum, educators lack knowledge about it, and students’ biases are influenced by the lack of multicultural literature in the school; which suggests several implications for educators. The goal behind multicultural literature is to educate everyone about those that are different. Many students find reading to be time consuming and tedious and will only participate if it is about a topic they are interested in or can relate to. McCullough (2013) uses student interest as a way to connect them to the literature that they read. Multicultural literature is an easy way to get minority students engaged and active in the reading process while also exposing the majority students to other cultures.

One implication that was brought to light during my research and the research conducted by others is the need for classroom libraries and curriculum to reflect the diverse population of the United States. Over the past decade, the United Stated and its classrooms have become more diverse with students from different parts of the world (Chaudhri, 2013; Sarraj, Bene, Jiaqi Li, & Burley, 2015). It is the educators’ responsibility to foster a positive and meaningful learning environment for all students. The classroom curriculum should reflect the diversity of the class, school, community and the United States population in terms of race, gender, age, social class, religion, and ethnicity (Evans, 2010). Students have the right to diversity in their reading selections that enables all students to be successful in school and life.

During my research, I found that many students’ held negative views about minorities, such as they are dumb, ugly, and that most adults do not like them. When schools do not address these views, they are only re-enforcing them, marginalizing minorities and affirming white privilege. School systems need develop a curriculum that encompasses all cultures, and way of life, so that students are exposed to both mirror and window books (Brinson, 2012). By using
multicultural literature, students will have the opportunity to experience the lives of others, and students from minority backgrounds, will be able to see themselves reflected in the text, providing them with validation that their lives matter. Schools may also look into having guest speakers from different ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds in order to expose students. The concept of guest speakers may work better if it is people from their own community or family members of the students in the class; so that they are able to make a deeper connection and understanding. Allowing students to interact with people different than themselves enables students to form their own opinions about the people; they learn to address social issues, biases and assumptions through multicultural literature and other resources (Wake & Modla, 2008). Multicultural literature and diverse guest speakers can help children appreciate the differences among ethnic groups and develop new perspectives.

Another important implication brought to light by this research is the need for profession development in the area of multicultural literature. Through my research, it was evident that the teachers lacked knowledge and understanding of what and how to implement multicultural literature into the classroom. Educators need to be adequately trained in critical literacy practices and in multicultural literature. Professional development needs to be continuous so that the educators are learning about the most recent research that may positively impact their classroom. Knowing how to select literature for a diverse classroom is an important skill for all teachers. Educators must be skilled in selecting the literature, but also in developing teaching strategies and literature related activities to accompany the literature.

According to Maasum, Maarof, and Ali (2013), educators’ attitudes about multicultural education are manifested in areas such as educator-student interactions, attention given to students, expectations of students, conflict resolution, teaching material and many more. When
an educator has a negative view about multicultural education, the students are affected in a negative way. Implementing multicultural literature into the classroom and curriculum is culturally responsive teaching. In order to be culturally responsive in the classroom, the educators must first look at their own prejudices and biases and address them. As an educator you cannot teach others to be accepting of differences if you yourself are not.

Another implication associated with professional development is the concept of colorblindness verse multiculturalism. Schools as a whole, or even a district, need to take a step back and analyze the educator views on colorblindness and multiculturalism. Many teachers consider themselves ‘colorblind’ with the assumption that they are making the best choice for all students when in reality color blindness is “a refusal or inability to confront White privilege that permeates our culture and perpetuates dominance by White individuals” (Bloom and Colleagues 2015, p. 560). Educators with color blind beliefs may be hesitant to change their teaching style, curriculum and materials in order to teach a diverse population. Color blind educators lack the cultural knowledge to teach diverse populations, which not only influences their own perceptions, but also those of their students’ (Hachfeld, et al, 2015). With a belief in multiculturalism, educators acknowledge racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic and ability differences; and use them to teach about differences to their students, teaching to the masses and not a select group.

The main question of the study is what effects can multicultural literature have on students’ perceptions of race and how do educators implement multicultural literature into the classroom. Multicultural literature is used as a tool to counter racism and negative stereotypes of minority groups that are prevalent in society, when used with critical race theory. Using multicultural literature opens students’ eyes to unique and different cultures that they may not
otherwise experience. It is important that students gain insight into other cultures and race to prevent unnecessary prejudices from being formed. Multicultural literature can be used to help prevent the mindset of culture as disability within schools and classrooms. The research looks at the importance of students interacting with multicultural literature so that students are able to see themselves, and others reflected in the literature. To obtain my research I used a variety of methods. I conducted student interviews in which I also took field notes during, I voice recorded every conversation I had with the students. I also used student work samples, group discussions and teacher questionnaires. My findings show that students currently hold negative views about minority groups, and that exposure to multicultural literature can alter those views to a positive or neutral outlook. My findings also show that educators lack the knowledge necessary to provide their students’ with a diverse selection of books, and to don’t possess the knowledge to create lesson plans surrounding multicultural literature. This research emphasizes the importance for professional development on multicultural literature and how to select and implement it into the classroom. Educators should be provided their students’ with literature that reflects the classroom demographics as well as the United States demographics. Educators also need to alter their view points on multicultural literature and open their minds to cultural pluralism and multiculturalism so that all students are being reached in the classroom and not just the students who belong to the majority.

One limitation that I experienced throughout the study was a lack of time. I used a day care facility as my location of research, which posed some problems. The students did not always attend every day at day care, and every student left the day care program at a different time each day, making it hard to reach every student in a timely manner. I also wish I had more time to read the students more books about different people and topics. I think having a greater
exposure to the books would have yielded different results. I also would have liked a more
diverse group of students, since the majority of my students were white. One question I would
like to have asked the students is what they think of the books they read at school, do they like
them, and do they wish they read different books? I think it would have provided some more
insight into how often they are exposed to multicultural literature and how the teachers
implement it. I also would have like to talk to the parents of the students as well. I think the
parents/guardians could have provided information about the students’ home life, and the home
library that the students have access to. In the future, if I were to this study again, I would
incorporate a questionnaire for the parents in order to understand what the students are exposed
to at home as well as school. Another possible alteration to the study would be to look at the
modules and analyze how they incorporate multicultural literature, because so many school
districts are using the modules, they use that as an excuse for not implementing multicultural
literature into the curriculum.

Throughout my research, I focused on the concept of multicultural literature influencing
student perceptions on race. My participants clearly showed prejudice against those of a
different race. With a use of multicultural literature and group discussions, I believe negative
stereotypes, prejudice and racism can be countered. This type of change will not happen
overnight, but it is important that the school system and its educators make an attempt. I also
focused on the importance to educator knowledge of and about multicultural literature. It
became evident to me that educators lack knowledge about multicultural literature and the
influences in can have on student learning. It is important that schools provide the necessary
education to its teachers in the area of multicultural literature. Their knowledge and
implementation of multicultural literature into the classroom is the deciding factor for many
students success in the education system. Overall, it was determined that multicultural literature can provide many benefits to all involved, teachers and students alike.
References


_Michigan Reading Journal_, 3, 28-34.


Appendix A: Student Interview

Name/# ______________________________________________________

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<th>Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What child is Black?</td>
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<td>2. What child is White?</td>
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<td>3. What child looks like you? Why?</td>
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<td>4. What child is nice? Why?</td>
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<td>5. What child is mean/bad? Why?</td>
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<td>6. Which child is the pretty? Why?</td>
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<td>7. Which child is ugly? Why?</td>
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<td>8. What child do most adults dislike? Why?</td>
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<td>9. What child do most adults like? Why?</td>
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<td>10. What child gets good grades? Why?</td>
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<td>11. What child is dumb? Why?</td>
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<td>12. What skin color would you like? Why?</td>
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<td>13. What child would you like to play with? Why?</td>
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Notes:
Appendix B- The Chart
Appendix C- Written Prompt

Students are to answer one of the following questions in written form.

1. How are you able to see yourself in the story?

2. What does the story make you feel?

3. How can you relate to the story?
Appendix D - Teacher Questionnaire

Dear Participant,

Thank you for willingly taking part in this action research project. Although your name will be on this questionnaire, all answers and data used are anonymous. I request that all answers and responses provided are honest, especially with the anonymity of the study. I appreciate your participation in my study.

Name: Age: Sex: Racial identity:

Current teaching position/grade level: Years teaching:

1. Have you ever taught within a different school district? If so, what district and position/grade?

2. How would you describe the student population in your current district and why?

3. What do you consider to be quality children’s literature? (Any particular authors or books?)

4. How would you define the term multicultural education? (or what is your understanding of it?)

5. What is your understanding of the term cultural pluralism?

6. Do you feel comfortable teaching a culture that is different than your own? Please explain reasons why or why not.

7. Have you ever implemented multicultural education within the classroom? If so, how?

8. How do you identify a book as being multicultural literature? Are there specific qualifications?

9. What do you believe is the best method to introduce diverse cultures into the classroom?

10. Do you believe multicultural literature use is important in a classroom that does not represent diverse cultures?

11. What multicultural literature do you implement within your classroom? Can you provide specific titles?

12. What benefits can result from the use of multicultural literature?

13. Can you reference a specific situation where you found multicultural literature beneficial to your instruction and classroom?

14. What steps do you take to create a curriculum that is instructionally appropriate and challenging for all students?
Appendix E- Parental Permission Form

St. John Fisher College
PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Title of study: Effects of Multicultural Literature on Children’s Perspectives of Race And Educator Implementation of Multicultural Literature

Name(s) of researcher(s): Elyssa Youngs

Faculty Supervisor: Joellen Maples, PhD Assistant Professor St. John Fisher College/Marty Murray, Instructor

Phone for further information: (315) 759-3965

Purpose of study: The purpose of this study is to improve education for all students by providing educators and students with the knowledge of multicultural literature and its effects on learning. Through the use of multicultural literature, students are able to see themselves reflected in the text as well as gain insight into other cultures, building respect and understanding for others

This study has been approved by the John Fisher College Institutional Review Board.

Place of study: Jim Dooley Center for Early Learning Length of participation: 3 weeks

Risks and benefits: This study presents no risks to your child. The benefits are the opportunity for improved teaching.

Your child’s name and the location of the research will be changed in order to protect your child’s anonymity. All data will be kept in a locked location and accessible only to the researcher. The findings from this study will be shared with other professionals at the St. John Fisher College Capstone Presentation conference.

Your rights: As the parent/guardian of ________________________________, a minor _________ years of age, consent to his/her participation in the above-named study. I have received a copy of this form.

_________________________ ___________________________ __________
Print name (Participant) Signature Date

_________________________ ___________________________ __________
Print name (Investigator) Signature Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Wellness Center at 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.