We’re the Same, But Also Different!

Fostering Cross-Cultural Understanding Among Students by Using Multicultural Children’s Literature

By

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Abstract

Today’s classrooms are microcosms of Canadian culturally pluralist society; they reflect the diversity that characterizes Canada’s population. In light of this, investigators assert that it is critical for students to develop cross-cultural understanding. This study investigates how multicultural children’s literature can be incorporated into the elementary school curriculum to foster cross-cultural understanding. Interviews focusing on this topic were conducted with three elementary school teachers; the interview transcriptions were then analyzed according to key themes. The interviews highlighted specific outcomes that were observed in their classrooms of these teachers in response to the use of multicultural children’s literature.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Research Study

The province of Ontario is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse regions on Earth, and visible minorities comprise 54% of its population (Statistics Canada, 2006). Student diversity is ubiquitous in Ontario’s classrooms; thus, is crucial that students have the opportunity to learn about each other’s cultures to contribute to their own building of identity and understanding of diversity (Pires, 2011).

There are various ways for students to learn about each other’s cultures in the classroom, with multicultural literature being one tool of many. I truly believe, however, in the saying that “The pen is mightier than the sword.” Literature has power; when utilized correctly, literature can cause the impetus for change. To this end, student’s preferences when learning about each other’s cultures should also be taken into account; and Koeller has suggested that children “…read more literature than textbooks and enjoy literature more than expository text” (1996, p. 99). Additionally, compelling research has suggested that using multicultural literature works. For example, Koeller (1996) has noted that using multicultural children’s literature fosters personal, and cultural, pride within students and promotes cultural awareness, mutual respect, tolerance, and understanding among those with diverse backgrounds (p. 101). Therefore, the focus of this study will be how to foster cross-cultural understanding among students through the use of multicultural children’s literature.

Previous research has had a predominantly American focus; this research paper will address the issue of cross-cultural understanding from a Canadian viewpoint. Additionally, previous literature has been more theoretical in nature and has given numerous reasons why
multicultural literature can and should be used in today’s classrooms. However, very little research exists on whether multicultural children’s literature actually does what it purports to do - that is, build a more inclusive, tolerant, and understanding classroom community. My research, therefore, addresses this gap in the literature by focusing on the actual, real-life outcomes of multicultural literature’s use in today’s Ontario classrooms. My research utilizes both critical literacy and multicultural studies as its framework or lens. It also investigates Bank’s hierarchical model to see if students can become empowered through the use of multicultural children’s literature to act in a more inclusive and understanding manner towards their fellow students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine how multicultural children’s literature can be incorporated in today’s classrooms to foster cross-cultural understanding. This topic is of particular importance to the educational community for several reasons. The first is that misunderstanding and intolerance of those students from other cultures/races can result in bullying in the playground. The second is that ELL’s in particular need specific assistance when adjusting not only linguistically but also culturally to a new country. The third is that all students can benefit from learning about other student’s cultures, for a variety of reasons.

First, the results of my research may help illuminate the problem of students excluding, discriminating against, or stereotyping their peers because they lack accurate information about their cultures. Bullying, as educators have become well aware in recent years, is detrimental to a student’s mental, physical, and emotional well being and therefore a systemic solution to race-or-culture centered bullying must be found. Recent research by Larochette et. al. (2010) has concluded that racial bullying – that is, bullying based on one’s race, ethnicity, and/or culture – is widespread
in Canadian school-aged children (p. 389). These researchers also found, however, that racial/cultural bullying appeared to decrease in schools with a supportive teaching environment (p. 389). This study offers hope that multicultural children’s literature can be used as one tool among many to promote understanding, tolerance, and inclusion among children of different cultures and races.

The implications of this research also have profound effects on ELL students. Clayton (2003) found that successful integration of ELL’s involves more than just their learning of the language. In his own words, Clayton remarks that “…[integration of ELL’s involves] more than just linguistics; it involves culture” (p. 24). Furthermore, other researchers such as Kasten, Kristo, and McClure, quoted in Clayton, have found that many teachers assume that it is an ELL student’s responsibility to “…make the cultural shift and to adjust to school” (p. 25), however studies show that many immigrant students drop out of school because of their inability to make that cultural shift to school on their own (p. 25). Therefore, Clayton argues that the essential ingredient for ELL student success is their teacher’s awareness of both the minority student’s culture, the majority student’s dominant culture, and promoting interaction and understanding between the two (p. 27).

On a more general note, it is generally accepted in academia today that all students will benefit from the inclusion of multicultural literature in the classroom; it can assist those from minority groups in their identity formation, all students can learn about a diversity of viewpoints in a culturally pluralist society, and it can prepare students to become critical thinkers and global citizens (please see my Literature Review for more information on these benefits).

**Research Questions**
Based on the cultural pluralism that exists in today’s classrooms, my research question is as follows: How can multicultural children’s literature be used to promote cross-cultural understanding among students in today’s classrooms?

The sub-questions included in this question are:

a) What strategies/methods of instruction are most effective in promoting cross-cultural understanding through the use of multicultural children’s literature?

b) When using multicultural children’s literature to promote cross-cultural understanding, exactly what do the outcomes of this understanding look, sound, and feel like to students from both majority and minority cultural backgrounds?

Implicit within this question is the assumption that multicultural literature can be used to promote cross-cultural understanding, as previous research overwhelmingly suggests. However, as mentioned previously, the actual effects and outcomes of the use of multicultural children’s literature in the classroom have yet to be studied extensively.

**Background of the Researcher**

I distinctly remember struggling to explain to my peers why, as a half-Hindu, half-Jewish child in elementary school, I celebrated both Hanukah and Diwali. I recall wishing that my teachers had tried to incorporate lessons about different cultures into their curriculum so I would not have to struggle to assert my unique multicultural background to my peers. It is with this in mind that I embarked on my major research project during my Master of Teaching program at the University of Toronto (OISE). As a biracial female of Indian and Jewish origins, I feel that learning about both cultures contributed vastly to my sense of identity and also encouraged me to
become an open-minded and critical thinker. I hope that students can glean these same benefits from the use of multicultural children’s literature in their classrooms.

Additionally, I have always been a voracious reader and read everything I could lay my hands on. I realized at an early age the ability of narrative to move me to tears, inspire me, make me laugh, and open my mind. I perceived the great potential in the narrative format; I knew that while textbooks and other traditional teaching formats could move a student’s mind, a well-told narrative has the power to open up students’ hearts and minds, and therefore empower them to propagate lasting change in their classrooms and communities.

Overview

Chapter 1 includes the introduction and purpose of the study, the research questions, as well as how I came to be involved in this topic and study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and procedure that were used in this study including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. References and a list of appendices follow at the end.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Definitions

To aid the reader’s understanding of the following review of literature, the definitions of several key terms are provided. Louie (2006, p. 446) describes culture as a social construct and reminds educators that there is substantial variation within any given culture. Elaborating on this cultural complexity, Gellner, quoted in Stewart, observes that “Human history is and continues to be well-endowed with cultural differentiations… cultural boundaries are sometimes sharp and sometimes fuzzy” (2008, p. 98). The process of showcasing or recreating a culture through literature, then, is difficult because of the range of diversity within cultures (Stewart, 2008, p. 103).

The term “multicultural literature” will be used frequently in this literature review. Two definitions of multicultural literature prevail in contemporary academia. The first of these is used by researchers who define multicultural literature as writings about people from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds and who have traditionally been marginalized and/or are considered outside of mainstream society (Louie, 2006, p. 438). The second definition is used by scholars who define multicultural literature as any work of literature that “…describes a variety of ethnic backgrounds and racial characteristics that discuss themes applicable across cultures… universal themes like survival, justice, conflict resolution, friendship or betrayal provide these connections across cultures” (León, 2002, p. 49). For the purposes of this investigation, multicultural literature will be defined as per the first definition. Similarly, the term “multicultural children’s literature” will be defined as multicultural children’s texts,
multicultural children’s works, and multicultural (children’s) books, as per the description developed by Ching (2005).

Likewise, the term “cross-cultural understanding” frequently appears in research in multicultural education. Cross-cultural understanding has been defined by Finney & Orr as the interpersonal understanding of the culture and experiences between people of different cultures (1995, p. 327). Cross-cultural understanding, in turn, can be separated into three major components: critical understanding, empathetic understanding, and conceptual understanding of another (Louie, 2006, p. 442). These three major categories of cross-cultural understanding are divided into several subcategories. Cross-cultural understanding, then, can be seen as a complex process involving several higher-order thinking skills. Table 2 (below) lists the three major components of cross-cultural understanding, describes their subcategories and provides illustrative examples for each subcategory.
Arguments in Favor of Using Multicultural Literature

Numerous sources suggest that when multicultural literature is included in the curriculum, the effects are beneficial for students (Green & Oldendorf, 2005; Clayton, 2008; Pires, 2011). Three types of benefits have identified: (1) Benefits for students from minority cultural groups, whose sense of identity is enhanced when multicultural literature is used; (2) Benefits for students who are not members of a minority cultural group, but who benefit by being exposed to diverse viewpoints reflecting cultural pluralism; and (3) All students, regardless of their
cultural group membership, who are seen as benefitting from their exposure to literature that augments their sense of global citizenship (Pires, 2011).

**Benefit #1: Multicultural Literature’s Role in Identity Formation**

It is widely accepted that the use of multicultural literature in classrooms can assist in the development of students’ identities (i.e., their sense of self) (Trites, 2003; Green & Oldendorf, 2005; Thirumurthy, 2011). The process of identity formation is seen as crucial because “An individual without identity is like a plant devoid of nourishment. It withers and dies. Possessing identity, we feel a sense of freedom from within” (Green & Oldendorf, 2005, p. 216). Similarly, Pires (2011) suggests that schools display a homogenizing tendency and that as a consequence of this, educators must raise questions and consult literature that “…go[es] beyond classroom boundaries and that is inherent to children’s experiences in multicultural societies” (p. 253). Pires further notes that literary representations may have a deep impact on the construction of identity formation for students from minority cultures (p. 253-254).

Moreover, seeing one’s own culture reflected in literature is also viewed as assisting in the preservation of the cultural identities of students from cultural minorities by fostering a sense of personal and cultural pride (Green & Oldendorf, 2005, p. 210).

**Benefit #2: Cultural Pluralism/Diversity of Viewpoints**

The use of multicultural literature in the classroom is seen as benefitting not only students from minority cultures but also students who are members of non-minority cultural groups as well. Morrell & Morrell point out that “…the idea that multicultural literature is most appropriate or only useful for children of historically marginalized groups is now outdated” (2012, p. 11). Correspondingly, Gilton (2007) observes that the use of such literature is essential to students
from all backgrounds because it enables students from minority cultures to “…learn, know, celebrate, and promote their own cultures” (p. 20) while simultaneously allowing students from mainstream cultures to gain a better understanding of diverse peoples (p. 12). In similar fashion, León (2002) suggests that adopting multicultural education in today’s classrooms is congruent with a liberal and progressive philosophy of education that aims to show students the varied world in which they live (p. 16).

Other scholars have suggested that the use of multicultural literature in schools equips children for living in a world characterized by diversity. Yoon, Simpson & Haag (quoted in Morrell & Morrell) advocate incorporating multicultural literature throughout curricula and see this process as having the potential to foster cultural pluralism and challenge the uncritical acceptance of dominant beliefs and canons of knowledge (2010, p. 14). Green & Oldendorf (2005) observe that an awareness of and knowledge about diverse cultures should not be considered only as a characteristic of an educated person, but as necessary attributes for all people living in the diversity that characterizes the contemporary world (p. 210). Analogously, Pires (2011) observes that using multicultural literature can result in viewing “…diversity as a valuable force and not as a weakness which must be overcome” (p. 253).

**Benefit #3: Global Citizenry**

Some investigators have remarked on multicultural literature’s potential to offer lifelong advantages to students. These researchers assert that the use of multicultural literature in classrooms promotes critical thinking, an appreciation of complexity, and the development of attitudes that will enable students to function as global citizens – benefits that they can use across their lifespans. Akrofi et. al. (2008) points out that “…our young people need to acquire the
knowledge, attitudes, and skills to function in a diverse society” (p. 209). Consistent with this perspective, Stewart suggests that the use of multicultural literature in schools has the potential to expose children to broader and newer global visions, which are “…needed to prepare children and youth to be informed, engaged, and critical citizens in the new millennium” (p. 96). Stewart references Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hillard (2008) who note that students who are aware of cultural difference have an advantage in problem solving because the skills needed for analyzing and solving complex problems “…require individuals who are cognitively flexible, culturally sophisticated, and able to work collaboratively in groups made up of diverse individuals” (p. 103).

Some researchers have pursued a reciprocal line of inquiry. Rather than examining the potential advantages of the use multicultural literature in schools, they have chosen to focus their attention on the disadvantages that are seen as occurring when multicultural literature is not used in schools. Green & Oldendorf (2005) state that if teachers do not use multicultural literature in their classrooms they are doing a disservice to their students by creating the inaccurate impression that the cultural life of humankind is unimportant or insignificant (p. 210). In similar fashion, Pires (2011) contends that teachers have a moral obligation to use multicultural literature in their classrooms; the failure to do so promotes stereotypical thinking: “[There is a] …need to incorporate in the curricula minority cultures]… in books for children, where frequently it is striking the discrimination and racial prejudice present in them. Silencing this reflection is a form of perpetuating this situation or even promoting it” (p. 258).

Critiques Against the Use of Multicultural Literature
Although some investigators contend that the use of multicultural literature is beneficial for schoolchildren, others disagree and assert that using multicultural literature in schools may be detrimental for children if it is used incorrectly. Most of these researchers are not opposed to the use of multicultural literature in schools per se; instead, they urge educators to use caution in selecting the books they use and in the teaching contexts in which they use them.

**Critique #1: Lack of Truly International Texts, and Stereotypical Texts**

Thirumurthy (2011) notes that “… the body of multicultural literature is disappointing, and it is disconcerting to note that more books are written about non-whites than are written by non-whites” (p. 446). Although the selection of multicultural children’s works has proliferated in recent decades, the majority of Canadian books from other countries have been selected by Canadian and American editors, translated from their original languages (if they were not published in English), and republished in Canadian or American editions (Stewart, 2008, p. 97). Stewart quotes Stan in observing that “…as a result… the international fare offered to… [Canadian and American] children… is not reflective of the world’s literature for children. … Instead… the majority of international books published in… [Canada and the US]… come from just a few countries” (p. 98).

As Stan points out, the lack of truly international children’s literature results from economics and politics. Aside from North America, Australia, Germany, Great Britain, Switzerland, Japan and Austria, most countries simply do not have the financial resources to publish children’s literature. Editorial processes compound this situation in that editors can change words to suit what they believe young children will understand (p. 99). Therefore, when a book makes a border crossing, very often it is transformed into something other than what it
originally was (p. 99). Critiques of multicultural children’s literature suggest that not only do Canadian readers have limited access to multicultural children’s books and even less access to international fiction, but what is available has been edited. The product that results is homogenous and reflects dominant Western worldviews (Stewart, 2006, p. 95).

Other researchers have urged circumspection regarding the choice of multicultural texts, noting “… text selection is critical” (Locke & Harris, 2011, p. 17) and that the multicultural text an educator selects to use in their classroom can do more harm than good if it is chosen carelessly (Rasinski & Padak, 1990, p. 576). For example, some researchers have reported that the superficial treatment of different cultures can potentially lead to the reinforcement of misconceptions and stereotypes, including notions that ethnic cultures are not part of the mainstream, dominant culture (Rasinski & Padak, 1990, p. 577). Other incautiously-selected texts may reiterate insider/outsider or us/them binary thinking that encourages students to see cultures from which they do not originate as “the other,” (Stewart, 2008, p. 100). In light of this, educators are urged to be sensitive in choosing multicultural texts that accurately portray cultures other than their own; ideally selecting texts that highlight similarities between various cultures while simultaneously celebrating their differences (Koeller, 1996).

**Critique #2: Multicultural Children’s Literature, if Incorporated Into Curriculum Without Care, Can Be Damaging**

Some researchers have suggested that in today’s classrooms, “…[multicultural] literature’s use… stops at presentation. That is, teachers and students read stories of or from various cultures, but beyond brief post-reading discussions, little else comes of consideration of cultural values and beliefs” (Morrell & Morrell, 2012, p. 11). These scholars also suggest that when using
multicultural literature, text selection is important but the way in which the book is taught is crucial. From this perspective the most insightful text, if used incorrectly, can undermine a teacher’s efforts to create a culturally inclusive classroom. Morrell & Morrell suggest that if multicultural texts are taught in culturally alienating ways, educators will have actually disadvantaged their students albeit without intending to do so (p. 12). They further assert that although “… a text may lend itself to an analysis that centers upon race, gender, or difference, it will ultimately be the teaching of that text that truly enables students to read the text multiculturally” (p. 14). Common pitfalls include the “we’re so fortunate” syndrome (which is symptomatic of a solipsistic attitude and skews the focus from other cultures to the culture of the majority); ignoring diversity within a culture when reflecting on a multicultural text; and the “we’re just like them” misconception, which ignores the differences and the uniqueness of other cultures (Louie, 2006, p. 438). Finally, some research indicates that simply exposing children to multicultural literature without appropriate pre-, during, and post-reading activities can lead to a lack of understanding, indifference, and even resistance from students (Louie, 2006, p. 447).

The Authenticity/Cultural Appropriation Debate

There is currently a debate in academic circles focusing on whether or not a text can be considered “authentic” (and hence, appropriate for classroom use) if it was not written by an author who is of the same culture as the people s/he is writing about. For example, if a Canadian author is writing about a child’s life in Afghanistan (such as in the award-winning children’s book Parvana’s Journey, by Deborah Ellis) can the text be considered an authentic representation of Afghanistan? As previously noted, the lack of diversity in the publishing industry results in many multicultural children’s books being published in Canada by authors who do not share the cultural background of their characters. Scholars continue to debate what
qualifications are necessary in order to write about cultures that are not ones’ own. This discourse is an important one. Harris, quoted in Stewart, has noted “Inauthenticity destroys all cultural understanding that the literature tries to accomplish and distorts the humanity of the culture portrayed…Inauthenticity also spreads… dangerous lies” (2008, p. 98). Harris claims that writers of multicultural literature, therefore, have a moral responsibility to portray the cultures that they are writing about accurately. Their failure to do so puts them at risk being identified as racist or ignorant by consumers (p. 99).

On one side of the debate are scholars who suggest that writers attempting to describe a cultural impression outside of their own lived experience are committing an act of theft and have termed this process “cultural appropriation” or “voice appropriation” (Stewart, 2006, p. 99). However, other researchers disagree with this view and suggest that the conceptions of cultural appropriation or voice appropriation rest on simplistic insider/outsider dichotomies (Ching, 2005, p. 134). These scholars remind us that an author’s cultural origin is not a sufficient guarantee that s/he will depict their native culture accurately. León (2002, p. 51) summarizes this view, advising, “…questions can also arise about people describing their own cultures” Similarly, Gilton, (2012, p. 44) notes that “… very simply, authenticity comes from having lived the experience of that culture or having learned about it in depth”.

**Bank’s Hierarchy**

An important framework in any discussion about multicultural literature is Bank’s seminal curricular model for integrating ethnic/multicultural content into regular curricula. This hierarchical framework is especially prized for its ability to foster cross-cultural understanding
has been referenced extensively in subsequent publications by other researchers (Rasiniski & Padak, 1990; Koeller, 1996; Landt, 2006). Table 3 (below) shows the relationship between the four levels of Banks’ hierarchy and provides illustrative examples of each.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>BANKS’ LEVEL OF INTEGRATION OF ETHNIC/CULTURAL CONTENT IN THE CURRICULUM</th>
<th>USE OF LITERATURE</th>
<th>NATURE OF COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE</th>
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<td>Contributions</td>
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<td>Cultural concepts and content are “separate” from the curriculum and are</td>
<td>In February, reading literature about Chinese New Year.</td>
<td>Eurocentric perspective is used as the basis for selection of elements to be studied.</td>
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<td>introduced as a result of special ethnic/cultural holidays, heroes, customs,</td>
<td></td>
<td>May reinforce stereotypes and mistaken beliefs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>or contributions.</td>
<td></td>
<td>A focus on visible aspects of a culture may lead to superficial understanding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additive</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diverse views of events and issues are presented.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural concepts and content from a Eurocentric perspective are “added” to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>social studies curriculum.</td>
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<td>Transformative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural concepts and content “alter” the structure of the curriculum as</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>perspectives of various ethnic/cultural groups are included!</td>
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<td>Décision making and social action</td>
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<td>Cultural concepts and content “alter” the structure of curriculum by</td>
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<td>including diverse perspectives and related social issues.</td>
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Banks (1989) describes four curricular models – these models are hierarchically arranged in terms of their sophistication in integrating multicultural issues into the curriculum. Level One (the lowest level) is a contributions approach, which focuses on heroes, holidays, and customs of a particular holiday (i.e., what another minority culture has contributed to the dominant culture) (Rasinsiki & Pakak, 1990, p. 576). Level Two is an ethnic additive approach where multicultural themes are added, but are not truly integrated into the curriculum. Like the “contributions approach” at Level One, Level Two does not fundamentally change the structure of the
curriculum. However, content, themes, and concepts are added to the curriculum. At this level, more information (such as literature and/or other tools) are added to the curriculum but not woven through it (p. 578).

At the higher two levels of Bank’s hierarchy, Level Three and Level Four, multicultural perspectives are woven through the curriculum instead of just being added to it. At Level Three, the “transformation approach”, the curriculum is changed to make it “…possible for students to use literature to view problems and issues from the perspective of different ethnic groups” (Bishop, 2003, p. 27). For example, students might examine the fur trade in Canada through the eyes of Canadians, Americans, Indigenous peoples, the French, and the British. Activities such as these help students to see the interconnectedness of various ethnic groups within the dominant culture (Rasinski & Padak, 1990, p. 579). The highest level, Level Four, of Bank’s hierarchy is the “social action” approach. At this level, students will identify problems, make decisions, and take action to help resolve the issues that they have identified. Students are challenged to identify and then critically analyze, and work towards resolving, problems related to cultural/ethnic differences (p. 579).

**Academic Scholarship and my Research Investigation: A Comparison**

Substantial research has previously been conducted regarding the potential benefits of using multicultural literature in the classroom (Morrell & Morrell, 2006; Locke & Harris, 2011; Gilton, 2012). However, almost all of this research is theoretical in nature. Few investigations have been undertaken which focused on the effectiveness of multicultural literature in classroom settings. More specifically, this research sought to investigate if multicultural children’s
literature actually promoted inclusion, tolerance, and understanding in classroom settings, and if so, how it achieved those outcomes.

Additionally, my research dealt specifically with this highest level of the aforementioned Bank’s hierarchy. I sought to investigate if students could become empowered to treat students in their own classes differently and foster cross-cultural understanding when multicultural children’s literature is used with them. As Rasinski & Padak state, “Multicultural learning achieves its pinnacle when students are inspired to challenge and act upon their beliefs and values about people who are different from them or from the mainstream” (1990, p. 580). As Rasinski & Padak purport, it is not enough for the multicultural children’s literature to simply be read; some actions and behavior have to come out of it, which is what my research will investigate. Therefore, this study explored the question: How can multicultural children’s literature be used to promote cross-cultural understanding among students in today’s classrooms?
Chapter 3: Methodology

Procedure

The use of multicultural children’s literature has been examined primarily by qualitative research methods. As such, this study followed the same format, utilizing qualitative research methods to obtain key themes from the data collected; the aim was a complete, detailed answers to the research questions I was asking. In this case, the data was in the form of words; that is, the words of the educational professionals whom I had interviewed. I investigated how multicultural children’s literature could be used in classrooms to promote cross-cultural understanding among students from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, I was looking for the ways in which multicultural children’s literature was used, and what behavioral outcomes occurred between students from different cultures after the use of such literature.

First I partook in a literature review that cited the main issues in the area of the use of multicultural children’s literature in classroom settings; citing the advantages and disadvantages of using this type of literature, as well as information on the authenticity debate which is currently going on in academia, as well as Bank’s hierarchy. Second, I sought to obtain research participants that used multicultural children’s literature in their classrooms by contacting my former Associate Teachers (AT’s) from previous student teaching practicum placements to inquire as to whether they knew anyone that would be suitable for my research. Once I had acquired participants, I engaged in a series of semi-structured interviews face-to-face with these three teachers.

It is also of note that I provided these teachers with their interview questions beforehand after careful consideration of the outcome that I hoped to obtain from my research. The aim of this research was to get the most contemplated, detailed and accurate answers as possible.
Consequently, I did not want the teachers feeling put “on-the-spot” and therefore were unable to accurately or completely answer the questions they were being asked due to being caught off guard. Also, due to time constraints, I was aware that I would achieve a better outcome if the teachers already had time to think about the answers to their questions beforehand rather than during the interview. I also asked follow-up questions as appropriate. I recorded these responses by using a tape recorder and then transcribed these responses onto my computer. Finally, I critically analyzed these transcriptions for key themes that emerged from the teacher’s responses to my questions. It is by using these themes that I discovered from my interview data that I completed the “Findings” and “Discussion” sections of this paper, which lead to its completion.

**Instruments of Data Collection:**

The instruments of data collection, in this study, were informal face-to-face semi-structured interviews, one with each teacher. The participants were given questions on two general topics: multicultural children’s literature, cross-cultural understanding, and also the interplay between the two topics. Each of these participants was given a pseudonym in this paper. Additionally, as Turner (2010, p. 757) reminds us, “…creating effective research questions for the interview process is one of the most crucial elements to research design.” Therefore, careful thought and consideration was given both into the content of these questions as well as their ordering within the interview. Examples of some questions asked are:

1. What are some names of multicultural texts you use in your classroom, and why did you select them in particular? Why do you believe they fall into your definition of “multicultural children’s literature”?
2. What are the criteria that you use when you select a multicultural text?
3. How have you (or someone you know) used multicultural literature to promote cross-cultural understanding? Please describe a specific situation/strategy.

4. In your experience, what did you notice about your students’ cross-cultural understanding that resulted from using multicultural literature in your classroom?

For a complete list of the questions used, please refer to Appendix A of this paper.

Participants

Participants were selected that held a variety of experiences and teaching positions; I wanted the opportunity to gain insights from teachers that came from different backgrounds because each one had something unique to contribute. Additionally, participants that taught various grades were interviewed. This was to determine whether multicultural children’s literature had the same, or different, effects depending on the age group of the students in the classroom. Three participants were selected, as two to three was the recommended criteria for this study; however, this author wanted as much data as possible (within the constraints of the study) to base her analysis on.

Participants were selected on three criteria: first, their willingness to contribute; second, their knowledge and/or implementation of the subject matter (i.e., multicultural children’s literature) in their everyday teaching practices; and third, their ability to articulate their thoughts in a clear, concise, and thorough manner. The first criteria, the participant’s willingness to contribute, was clearly necessary for a project of this nature. The second criteria, i.e., the participant’s knowledge of the subject matter and/or their use of multicultural children’s literature in their classrooms, was also equally important. This provided the content for the teacher’s responses and informed their answers so I could gain a clearer picture to possible
answers to my research question. The third criteria, the participant’s ability to articulate their thoughts, also was very important; the participant’s responses were the only means of data collection used and hence had to be coherent and insightful in order to analyze them for underlying themes and patterns. Here is a concise introduction of each of the participants of this study:

**Participants**

**Becky**

Becky is currently a kindergarten teacher at a school in Toronto, Canada. She has had seven years of teaching experience and a diverse teaching background; she has taught every grade level and has worked as a teacher/librarian, an arts teacher, and an ESL/resource teacher. She was a career-changer who went into education as an adult learner because “…I had volunteered in schools with my children many years before that… I thought the job was easy, ha-ha… I later learned differently.” She enjoys her role as a Kindergarten teacher immensely.

**Suzanne**

Suzanne is a teacher/librarian at a school in Toronto, Canada. She has taught in Europe and in Canada in both private and public schools. In her previous teaching experience she has been a learning resource teacher for gifted students and a junior grade teacher. In her present role she teaches all grades but particularly enjoys instructing upper-year elementary grades, such as Grade 4 and 5.

**Vanessa**
Vanessa is in her 11th year of teaching as a teacher/librarian and technology expert at a school in Toronto, Canada. She also teaches two special education classes. She has taught every Grade from K-6 in her past positions in education. She enjoys teaching Grades 5 and 6 students because of their ability to have in-depth discussions about issues of social justice.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

I began my data collection and analysis process by transcribing each interview onto my laptop computer for the purposes of analysis. I then read over the interview data several times to gain a better understanding of what each participant was trying to say, and also more generally to compare and contrast each participant’s responses with each other. I used colored highlighters to identify key themes within each participant’s responses; I used a legend that had broad categories, such as *Rationale for using multicultural children’s literature, effective strategies to utilize multicultural literature, and outcomes of using multicultural children’s literature in the classroom (expected and observed)*. I also noted any themes that came up that I had not originally thought of. I then organized each participant’s responses under these themes with a note beside each response to mark which participant said what. This way, I could get all the responses for cross-cultural understanding in one place, all the responses for instructional strategies in one place, etc. and could then easily identify any patterns or themes that would emerge from this data. I made analysis and commentary on the side of the interview responses to provide further detail and insights that I then used later for the discussion portion of this paper.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

In order to ensure that ethical research procedures were followed during this study, I have meticulously followed the ethical review procedures for the Master of Teaching Program. These
procedures are in place to consider the safety, needs, and concerns of the people of whom we study. Additionally, these procedures serve to establish trust between the research participants and those who conduct the research and provide an appropriate framework for the conduct of research to take place. All the teachers in this study participated on a solely voluntary basis. They were fully informed about the study and asked to sign the “Letter of Consent for Interview” which is in Appendix B of this paper. In this consent form, they are told the logistical details of the interview. It also was stressed that their name was not going to be used for publication, all information gathered would remain confidential, and the participant had the right to withdraw from the study anytime if they chose without penalty. Additionally, a copy of the transcript would be provided to the participants to guard against any inaccuracies that may have arisen during the course of their interviews.

During the interviews, the participants were treated with the upmost dignity and respect. I strove for a comfortable atmosphere for each participant and reminded him or her that there was no right or wrong answer to each of the interview questions. I also drew to their attention that if they so chose, they did not have to answer every interview question. Finally, when each interview was over, I transcribed the participant’s responses on my laptop computer at home that is password-protected. Therefore, only I, and my research supervisor, saw the participant’s responses before the submission of my final research report.

**Limitations**

This research paper represents only a small drop in an ocean of research that has been done on the benefits, and drawbacks, of the use of multicultural literature in classrooms. The potential limitations of this research arise from two major sources. The first of these is the small sample
size, as only three teachers were interviewed in this research study. Therefore, further research is necessary to see whether the themes that emerged from these responses are indicative of a general trend in education or, rather, whether these participant’s responses were corresponding outliers in relation to a more general trend.

Furthermore, because of the limited time that the researcher faced during this study, each interview was only approximately 30 minutes long and therefore provided minimal depth as to the subject of the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. However, the purpose of this study was not to provide a general overview of the uses of multicultural children’s literature, but rather, to seek three unique, individual perspectives on the more focused area of how multicultural children’s literature can be used in today’s classrooms to promote cross-cultural understanding.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter will illustrate the overall findings from the data gathered in three semi-structured interviews of the three participants in the study. For the purposes of this study, the three participants will be referred to by the pseudonyms Becky, Suzanne, and Vanessa. Responses to questions from the participants are categorized into three major themes: Rationale, Strategies Used, and Outcomes (Expected and Observed).

All three of these themes relate to the use of multicultural children’s literature in a school setting. For example, the theme “Rationale” means the participants’ reasons for their use of multicultural children’s literature in their respective classrooms/libraries. “Strategies Used” refers to the strategies these educators utilized when teaching a lesson involving multicultural children’s literature. “Outcomes (Expected and Observed)” refers to the participants’ outcomes when they have taught a lesson employing multicultural children’s literature (e.g., what does the classroom environment look, sound, and feel like after multicultural children’s literature has been used?).

The results for each theme will be described individually, although in some instances the themes overlapped. Each theme will be explored in detail in the “Discussion” section of this paper.

Rationale for using multicultural literature

To Promote Social Justice
Two of the participants I interviewed, Suzanne and Vanessa, explained that helping teach students about social justice issues as one of the main reasons that they used multicultural children’s literature in their classrooms. The third participant, Becky, focused on helping students to understand the world around them as her primary rationale for using multicultural children’s literature in her classroom.

The discrepancy between the rationales for using multicultural children’s literature for the three educators may have to do with their respective students’ ages. This will be discussed in detail in the following section (see Chapter 5: Findings for more detail).

For example, Vanessa used multicultural children’s literature to help students further understand issues of social justice: “I find books about issues of social justice fit very well with the social studies curriculum. It is a way for them to dive into issues and the realities of life of those we are studying.” When discussing how she used multicultural children’s literature, Vanessa explained that she found multicultural children’s literature particularly helpful when discussing children’s rights. She explained that in a previous Grade 5 class, she had read a story called *Iqbal*, a text that told about the life of Iqbal, a carpetmarker who was murdered at a young age for speaking out against the poor working conditions of the carpetmaking industry. In real life, Iqbal (and his murder) was the inspiration for the creation of the “Free the Children” organization. Through the teaching of this text, the students in Vanessa’s class investigated children’s rights worldwide and analyzed the discrepancy between the ideals of the Declaration of the Rights of a Child and the reality of children’s lives in many countries today. Vanessa used this story to facilitate an inquiry into real-life social justice issues using a children’s narrative to engage and inform students.
Suzanne also used multicultural children’s literature as a way of introducing inquiries about humans rights issues, particularly children’s rights. When asked why she selected certain multicultural books, Suzanne referenced a particular book:

[Called *Razia’s Ray of Hope*]… by the Citizen Kid’s Collection by Kids Can Press which [has] really good human rights/global issues books. It’s about education and again, kids can compare the fact that they can come to school. Sometimes kids don’t want to come to school and where these children are from, that’s all they want to do. It’s the importance, again, of children’s rights – how being educated is a right.

Suzanne, in this quote, also drew an explicit connection between a multicultural text she uses and the reason she uses it – that is, it explores the concept of children’s rights in an accessible way. The students in her class can identify with the main character in the story in that they - and Razia – are children. However, there is an overwhelming difference in that the girl in *Razia’s Ray of Hope* is not allowed to go to school and they are.

In her statement, Suzanne elaborated on the idea of allowing her students to compare/contrast themselves with the characters in the multicultural books they are reading. This learning strategy will be explored later in this study.

*To Create an Emotional Connection*

Both Suzanne and Vanessa discussed the importance of allowing students to make an emotional connection with different characters in the texts studied. Suzanne implicitly and Vanessa explicitly discussed the importance of having students connect emotionally with the multicultural protagonists who were being read about by their respective students. When asked for an effective way that the participants have used multicultural literature in their classrooms,
Suzanne stated, “[You want to read to]… get them laughing [or crying]…[about the main characters in the story].” She further elaborated that “[Students may] … come not knowing anything [about the culture you are reading about], they don’t know the language [or anything], so they have to make a connection and know what [people from other cultures may]… feel like.” Suzanne went on to explain that although students may lack information about other cultures, by vicariously experiencing another place as a multicultural protagonist, they can connect with him/her emotionally and hence come to care about the protagonist’s culture. Similarly, when asked for a few examples of texts that she uses in her classroom, Suzanne referenced One Green Apple, a narrative about a young Muslim girl who speaks no English going on a school field trip with her class to an apple orchard. Suzanne states that “[This is a great text because] you actually get to hear inside her head – how she’s feeling.” By hearing the girl’s innermost thoughts and feelings, her students are able to empathize with the main character, thereby creating an emotional connection. Suzanne’s students come to care about the girl in the story and want to know what happens next; the events in the story are influenced by the character’s own culture and experience. The students in her class, therefore, learned about another culture by forging an emotional connection with the story’s main character.

Likewise, Vanessa also stated, “[I use multicultural children’s literature to]… [allow] students [to be]… able to connect emotionally to the characters in the story and [the] real-life consequences [of their actions].” Suzanne and Vanessa both used multicultural children’s literature to “hook” students; they found that was an effective way to get students interested in multicultural content. If students came to care about the main character, they asserted, then by default they also came to care about his/her culture, which was an integral part of that protagonist’s story.
As a Vehicle to Talk About Other Messages in Addition to Multiculturalism

All of the teachers indicated that they did not choose multicultural children’s literature primarily because the stories contained children or adults from other cultures. Although they were aware that it was important for diverse groups of children to see themselves reflected in the literature they used in schools, the teachers explained that they had additional criteria for choosing multicultural texts. They selected texts because of the multicultural characters and themes they contained and also because these texts delivered messages that the teachers wanted to convey. That these texts contained multicultural characters/themes was necessary but not sufficient: the stories selected had to meet other criteria as well.

For example, Suzanne spoke about teaching students life lessons through the use of multicultural texts. Suzanne talked about the text *Kenta and the Big Wave*, a story she often used in Grade 5, when students were beginning a science unit on natural disasters. The story takes place in Japan and is about a boy living with the aftereffects of a tsunami. Suzanne stated that she chose this text not only because it has a protagonist who is from Japan (which is outside many of her students’ realms of experience), but also because one of the themes of the text is that, in Suzanne’s words, “Life can change very quickly.” In other words, Suzanne used this text because it simultaneously taught about another culture and illuminated the life lesson not to take what we have for granted because everything can be taken away from us in an instant.

Similarly, Becky suggested that she often uses multicultural children’s literature to connect her students with issues that relate to their lives and to teach them about other cultures. For example, when Becky was asked what types of multicultural texts she reads in her kindergarten classroom, she mentioned a book called *My Mother’s Hijab*. This book is “…about a little girl
who’s playing with her mom’s hijab and then she imagines she turns the hijab into a boat and sails about and a bunch of other [imaginary] things.” She then went on to explain how the book helps her students understand the different types of clothing worn in various cultures. However, this book also touches on themes of imagination and play – themes that all young students can relate to, no matter which country they come from. In other words, Becky chose the text because it taught her students about another culture’s traditional attire and also because it provided a point of connection with her students’ everyday lives (i.e., with imagination and play). Therefore, the texts Becky chose generally served multiple functions, rather than focusing solely on helping students to understand different cultures.

Similarly, Vanessa referenced three examples of texts that served multiple functions, one of which was assisting students in appreciating other cultures. The first text she commented on was The Streets Are Free. It is a story about “…children in Haiti who developed a children’s radio program to have a voice… The students [in my class] were interested in learning about children in other countries who were facing adversity and rose against it.” Vanessa chose this text because it depicted Haitian life and culture and also because it illustrated the theme of overcoming obstacles and working towards a better future. This was a universally applicable theme that Vanessa wanted to share with her students.

Vanessa also used two other texts to convey messages that were distinct from the multicultural learning that she sought to impart to her students. One of these was Shelter in Our Car. This text focuses on a Jamaican child whose family moves to the United States. Because the child’s father cannot find a steady job, they are forced to live in their car until he can find stable employment. Vanessa strategically chose this text and observed “I was teaching at a downtown school and wanted to discuss different living arrangement and address homelessness.” The
cultural learning that took place as her students learned about Jamaican words and traditions was juxtaposed with their learning about homelessness.

Similarly, Vanessa mentioned another of her favourite multicultural children’s stories: *Those Shoes*. This story is about an African-American child who wants a pair of “cool” shoes but whose parents can only afford to buy him unfashionable boots. In Vanessa’s words: “I selected [this text] for a discussion about wants vs. needs and how people can look the same but have different issues going on [in their lives].” Vanessa therefore chose this text as a way of teaching students about one child’s experience as an African-American and also as a way to deliver the message that many people have problems in their lives which they may not necessarily tell or show to others.

**For An Authentic Portrayal of Experience**

All three participants seemed eager to teach their students about other cultures using an authentic portrayal of experience. In other words, participants looked for stories that were not stereotypical or misleading. Additionally, all three participants replied that an author’s ethnicity matching that of the main character’s was not the primary reason for choosing a specific multicultural text. For example, Becky noted:

>[The author’s ethnicity] is irrelevant. That’s like saying all of sociocultural anthropology is wrong. Like Margaret Mead is nobody. It’s irrelevant because the story still has something to offer.

Becky went on to explain that as long as the story was good and the proper research had been done before the story was written, she did not consider the author’s ethnicity when choosing multicultural texts. In the same way, Suzanne emphasized that in many of the texts she
used as examples in her interview, she did not look up the author’s ethnic or cultural background.

In discussing a work by Eve Bunting (the author of One Green Apple), Suzanne stated:

> Eve Bunting doesn’t have a Middle Eastern background. But when people travel, when people experience the world as authors, then they are able to write books from a different perspective. I mean, ideally you want someone to talk about their own experiences but it’s not always possible. You want them to give the authentic story, that’s the key.

In this statement Suzanne, like Becky, described an author’s ethnicity as no guarantee of a genuine story and also indicated that firsthand experience was not the only way to learn about a culture. Instead, Suzanne chose texts that portrayed an authentic experience; in addition, these texts had to be properly researched, as Becky also noted.

Likewise, Vanessa indicated that she also appreciated texts that were authentic and thoroughly researched by their authors. She maintained that: “[I] prefer authors who are the same ethnicity as their characters, but if that isn’t possible, I like to know if research has been done to authenticate the portrayal.” Consistent with this perspective, Vanessa did not use an author’s ethnicity as the single criterion for selecting a multicultural book to teach to her class. Instead, like Becky and Suzanne, Vanessa selected only texts that had been carefully researched by their authors. That attribute alone was sufficient for her to use as the criterion for selecting a multicultural text.

**Strategies Used**

It is important to note that in the classrooms of the three interviewees, when a multicultural text was read, it was not read simply as an isolated, discrete, stand-alone activity. Instead, each of the teachers I interviewed engaged in a variety of pre-, during-, and post-reading activities to
explore the issues portrayed in the multicultural stories they used in their classrooms. The most effective of these activities, according to the participants, are listed below.

**Providing Context**

All teachers provided context/information for the multicultural children’s stories they used in their classrooms. This almost always happened prior to the reading of the text, but it also occurred throughout the story whenever the teachers realized that they might have omitted something that was necessary for students’ comprehension. All the participants mentioned the necessity of providing contextual clues for students, especially for sensitive topics such as natural disasters or human rights abuses.

Becky’s interview provided a concrete example of this dynamic. Throughout the conversation Becky stressed the importance of providing context in the form of a tangible “hook” that students could see in front of them. For example, when she read the story *My Mother’s Hijab*, some students in her class were wearing hijabs while other students were not. The students who were not wearing hijabs were curious about the students who were. When asked why she chose that book, Becky explained, “The children were asking about the other students who wore hijabs and why they were wearing them. So that’s why [I chose the book *My Mother’s Hijab.*] I picked it because it was specific to the students that I had.” She then went on to explain how she picked her multicultural texts:

It would have to be something that the children could relate to realistically. I had a class full of Native Canadians who had never come across a Jamaican child, and so if we were doing something about Jamaica, I would have to relate it to food or something that the Native children could relate to. I couldn’t all of a sudden just start talking about Jamaica without an anchor, without any
scaffolding… It has to be something immediate, something they [kindergarten students] can see, touch, you know, not something abstract.

Becky later used another example from the text Nadia’s Hand (a story about how henna is used to decorate the hands of brides and female guests at wedding ceremonies in South Asia) to explain the henna on the hands of some of her Kindergarten students from Pakistan after they had been to a Pakistani wedding and returned to school. Becky stressed the importance of using concrete examples when providing context, especially when teaching students in the primary grades.

However, Becky was not alone in her assertion that providing context was a critical pre-reading activity when teaching multicultural children’s stories. Suzanne stated: “…I would not just throw these stories into the mix at random.” She stressed the importance of teachers thoroughly understanding the context before they started teaching students a lesson on multicultural literature: “You have to do frontloading for yourself too.” Likewise, Vanessa noted:

I believe it is important to give students context about the country or situation that people in the stories are in. I like to have them do some informal research about the topic, country etc., or have a discussion to see what they already know or feel to be true. It tunes them into the text and gives them a point of reference.

Vanessa further emphasized that it would be difficult for students to understand the significance of a story if they were not attuned to the cultural context in which the story took place. Moreover, according to all three participants, providing a context (and, for Becky, a
tangible hook for children in the primary grades) was paramount if students were to successfully navigating a multicultural text.

**Comparing and Contrasting to Student’s Own Lives**

All interviewees reported that when they used multicultural texts, they intentionally highlighted similarities and differences between the children in the stories and the students in their classrooms (e.g., they compared and contrasted the settings of the stories with settings from which the students in their classrooms currently or formerly lived, etc.). Furthermore, interviewees found that this practice increased the effectiveness of their use of multicultural texts.

For example, during a class discussion of *My Mother’s Hijab*, Becky asked the students what was the same about themselves and the story’s protagonist; nearly all students suggested that the protagonist played and imagined in the same way that they did. Becky mentioned that it was interesting that some students in the class suggested that they were the same as the girl in the story because they wore hijabs and others said that they were not the same. This text and the subsequent discussion served as a springboard for a classroom investigation of cultural similarities and differences at an age-appropriate level (i.e., Kindergarten).

Similarly, Suzanne frequently used T-charts as graphic organizers so that her students could investigate elements of sameness and difference between themselves and the characters in multicultural stories. For example, she discussed a text called *Same, Same, but Different*, which embodied the principle of highlighting similarities and differences. This picture book focused on two boys - one in America and another in India - who became pen pals and compared their ways of life in their respective cities. Suzanne explained:
We usually do a T-Chart. What did the kids [in the story] experience? So [for example, their] school, how did they get there, what’s in their school, what did they wear, what did they eat… and then you read the book, and then after the book or partway through you do the comparison to the character and then you talk about the differences and similarities between the kids and what’s happening in the books.

A recurring theme in Suzanne’s responses was the idea of comparing and contrasting students’ lives with the lives of the protagonists in multicultural stories. She found that this was an extremely helpful strategy when investigating other cultures through the medium of literature.

Vanessa also touched on the issue of comparing and contrasting the protagonists’ lived experiences in multicultural texts with the students’ lived experiences. When asked for the names of multicultural texts she has used, Vanessa mentioned Shelter in Our Car. She added that when she used this text, she strategically prompted her students to compare and contrast their lives with the protagonist’s to find similarities and differences. Vanessa stated that she wanted to make explicit the common thread of humanity that runs through all the characters in her multicultural stories and from them, to all humankind. In sum, Vanessa, Becky and Suzanne all agreed that having students compare and contrast their lives with the lives of the protagonists in their multicultural stories was an essential element of an effective multicultural literacy lesson.

**Cross-Curricular Use**

All of the participants mentioned using cross-curricular strategies to augment the effectiveness of multicultural children’s literature. That is, to reinforce students’ knowledge and comprehension of the multicultural texts, interviewees not only used a variety of strategies in
different subject areas; they also made sure they chose texts which contained themes and content that were present in multiple subject areas as well.

As a kindergarten teacher, Becky used multicultural children’s literature across all content areas of the curriculum. For example, when she structured an activity around a text that she was reading to the class, one strategy that she used was to read a multicultural children’s book that had been made into a movie. Each day, she read aloud for 5-10 minutes from a multicultural text that was above the students’ reading level. The next day, she recapped what the students had listened to the previous day. After she had completed reading the book to the students, the students then watched the movie for 5-10 minutes per day. Becky then asked her students to compare and contrast how the book and the movie were the same and different. “It’s a really amazing thing to do… we talk about characters, and settings… we do it all, the whole thing, and media studies. It’s possible for them [her kindergarten students] to follow a novel which you wouldn’t think could be done, it’s really neat.” Through her use of this strategy Becky incorporates multicultural literacy into her classroom instruction, but more importantly, she integrates media studies into her program as well. In this way Becky introduced the multicultural text in different formats – by reading a story and showing a movie – to reinforce what the children had already learned and to introduce them to concepts of critical literacy and media literacy that they would extend later in their academic careers.

Becky also used cross-curricular lessons when creating activities based on multicultural books that she had read to her class. For example, she described an occasion when some students of Pakistani ancestry in her class had attended a wedding ceremony over a weekend. These students returned to class with henna designs on their hands, and these designs elicited much curiosity from other students in the class who were not of members of the Pakistani community.
On this occasion Becky read *Nadia’s Hand* to her class. Next, she “… had to get special permission from the parents so that the kids could use washable markers on their hands [to duplicate the henna designs that some of their classmates had.]” She then “…brought math into it because of the little dots. If you put ten dots on each finger, how many dots do they have altogether?” Becky not only read the story about henna to her students (which had tangible applications for the students because they could see the henna on their classmates’ hands) but she also used a variety of activities to reinforce the application of this cultural tradition by enabling students to investigate henna through the lens of literacy, art, and math.

Similarly, Suzanne, as a teacher/librarian, used multicultural children’s literature across several subject areas. As mentioned previously, all educators in this study used multicultural children’s literature to enable students to learn about different cultures. In addition, they sometimes also use multicultural literature as a vehicle for other messages and themes. Suzanne provided an example of this practice; she mentioned that she often selected texts that “[Are multicultural and also]… look at units of inquiry for the IB program. [I then] make connections between [multiculturalism], the literature, and the units of inquiry.” Because as a teacher/librarian Suzanne sees students from each grade only once per week, using multicultural literature that incorporates content that her students are already studying in another setting allowed them to activate prior knowledge, make connections with new material, and reinforce and augment their previous learning. This process also helped the students to see that individual subjects were not discrete, isolated entities. For instance, the multicultural text *Kento and the Big Wave* is not only a story about Japanese culture but also connects with the Grade 5 unit on natural disasters through the topic of tsunamis. Multiculturalism in literature, Suzanne reminds us, can and should be interwoven throughout other subject areas.
In the same way, when Vanessa used multicultural literature “…for all areas of the curriculum. [These books] fit in very well with the social studies curriculum… I also enjoy using [multicultural] mathematics books to frame problems and introduce concepts.” In other words, like Suzanne, Vanessa not only used multicultural children’s literature for its ability to help students learn about and understand cultures different from their own; she also utilized it for its potential to facilitate student learning in curricular areas other than English Language Arts (e.g., social studies and math). By seeing multicultural children reflected in the books that were read to them in their library class, and simultaneously furthering their knowledge across multiple subject areas, Vanessa’s students were able to see that multiculturalism was all around them and was not relegated to a single subject or curricular area.

Vanessa also stressed that, like Becky, she used diverse activities from a variety of subject areas to further explore multicultural children’s texts. For example, when Vanessa read to her class *Iqbal*, she had them “… create monologues and dialogues to finish conversations that were never told in the story between characters, as well as write scripts (drama); for reading and writing comprehension they developed questions and sought their own answers to craft a full, justified answer.” Consequently, Vanessa’s students did not just read a story; they first read it with their teacher/librarian (English Language Arts), talked about it, acted out monologues from the story (Drama), and researched the rights of children (Social Studies). Vanessa reported that she thought she had accomplished her goal of teaching students about other cultures by using a variety of subject areas to explore multiculturalism in ways that engaged the students.

*Putting Students in Another’s Shoes*
Another strategy that all three participants used in one form or another was having the students “put themselves in another’s shoes”. Each educator did this in a different way: Becky assigned her students to complete activities that children from a particular culture would experience during celebrations; Suzanne asked questions about how a child from another culture was likely to feel at different points in a story; and Vanessa asked students act out scenes from different characters’ lives.

Becky asked her kindergarten students to imagine that they were Pakistani children who just came back from a wedding with henna on her hands. Reflecting on the effectiveness of this strategy, Becky commented that the students were highly motivated because: “… they could see somebody in the class getting the henna and were interested in it… It also [used] multiple intelligences like kinesthetic intelligence and visual/spatial intelligence.”

Suzanne explained that when she used One Green Apple in her teaching, she prompted the students with questions to stretch their thinking and put themselves in the main character’s position, so that “[They can] actually hear inside her head and [imagine] how she is feeling.” In this way, both Becky and Suzanne structured activities around the reading of the text and allowed their students to connect with the protagonists in the multicultural stories in an authentic and meaningful way.

Vanessa also indicated that she used a variety of learning strategies – especially dramatic techniques - to enable students to put themselves in another character’s shoes. For example, when she read Iqbal to her students she assigned them to “…create monologues and dialogues to finish conversations that were never told in story between characters. And as well, they also wrote scripts.” Later, Vanessa also explained that: “I [like to] use drama techniques where the
students go into the role of people in different cultures to try to respond and feel their emotions/reactions to situations. I think it is effective in that it causes students to think carefully and apply their understandings.” Vanessa reported that she often used dramatic techniques with her students to accompany multicultural story investigations; like Becky and Suzanne’s techniques, this strategy prompted her students to think critically about what they were reading and to emphasize with the characters being portrayed.

**Outcomes (Expected and Observed)**

For the purposes of this study, the term “outcomes” refers to two different sets of consequences. The first of these are the expected outcomes; namely, what teachers anticipated their classrooms would look, sound, and feel like after they had taught a lesson based on a multicultural children’s story. The second set of consequences refers to observed outcomes; that is, the student outcomes that teachers actually observed on one or more occasions after they had instructed students through an instructional period using a multicultural children’s text.

At the conclusion of this section I will discuss the chronological age of the students in the classes of the interviewees and whether the interviewees thought that chronological age had an effect on student outcomes.

**Expected:**

*Fosters an awareness of diversity*

All three participants highlighted a greater awareness of diversity as one of the expected outcomes of teaching one or more lessons based on multicultural children’s literature. Suzanne defined multicultural children’s literature as “…writings about people from diverse cultural,
socioeconomic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds and who have [historically] been marginalized and/or considered outside mainstream society” amended this definition and then went on to say that teaching using multicultural children’s literature fostered an open-mindedness and an awareness of different perspectives from her students:

People may not [consider themselves] marginalized today. You want to celebrate people’s cultures and the way people live. It’s the way they do it in a different country but it’s not the way certain children [do things] that you are reading to. You are just opening their minds… [helping them be] open-minded… you are trying to get the kids… [to see] other points of view.

As a result, one of the outcomes that Susan expects (and actively works towards) when using multicultural children’s literature is that students will come to see different points of view:

If you don’t show kids that there are other ways that kids live and experience life, they think that the way they live [and think] is the only way. [Right now, we’re at] a global school, and [students should] see the whole picture, or different ways of living and people becoming more international… [but sometimes you have to help them] see this.

Suzanne observed that this awareness of the diversity of viewpoints is important in our society and is essential in a pluralistic democracy. Similarly, Becky and Vanessa underscored the importance of fostering an awareness of this diversity in their students.

Becky said that because her students were so young, it was difficult for her to tell if they were more interested in doing the actual activities associated with the multicultural story rather than learning about multiculturalism itself. However, she noted that she “…couldn’t help but think that more exposure broadens their outlook.” In other words, one of Becky’s expectations
was that the seeing and hearing about other cultures would encourage students to become more aware of diversity.

Likewise, Vanessa said that “[Students will become aware of] the realities of life of those we are studying” and that this is an important outcome when using multicultural children’s literature in the classroom. She further explained that simply by teaching the lesson, the students increase their understanding of a different experience, a contrasting perspective to their everyday lives. Like Becky, Vanessa explained that this outcome was valuable because it enabled students to understand that other people may have points of view that differ from theirs and the perspectives of their peers, friends and family.

**Develops empathy**

Vanessa selected *Those Shoes* because it “built empathy.” She indicated that her students felt empathy for the main character because he cannot get what he wants; at this point in the conversation her response was situated within the context of wants versus needs. Students can relate to wanting something and not being able to have it; it is part of the human experience to desire things that cannot be obtained. Consequently, her students connected with the protagonist of the story because they shared a common experience with him. Moreover, subsequently in the interview, when asked what she noticed about her students’ cross-cultural understanding that resulted from using multicultural children’s literature in her classroom, Vanessa replied that using this type of literature “… develops empathy and their ability to relate to diversity.” The interviewer carefully noted – but was not surprised by - this reference to the development of empathy.

**Observed: Student Curiosity and Interest**
Both Becky and Suzanne mentioned that one observable outcome of using multicultural texts was an increase in student curiosity and interest. Becky referenced the book *My Mother’s Hijab*, which she read to her class because some of the students were wearing hijabs to school. She then initiated a class discussion about why people dress differently in different cultures. It turned out, however, that her students were very curious about this question and were happy to take the lead in the discussion. They “…[continued]… the discussion… about why people are dressed in a way and where they come from.” Becky also mentioned that her students were excited to learn about something that they had been wondering about for a long time. The students in her class with hijabs felt flattered to be asked respectful questions about their garments and answered many of the questions that were directed to them. An increase in student curiosity and interest was a key outcome, in Becky’s eyes, that resulted from the reading a relevant multicultural children’s text.

Suzanne also mentioned student questioning and interest as an outcome that she observed after she taught a multicultural children’s story. Instead of citing a particular instance, like Becky, she instead spoke generally and apparently had a number of episodes in mind: “So you know you’re a good teacher and you’ve gotten through to them [after reading a multicultural children’s story] when they are reflecting and asking questions later on.” From Suzanne’s perspective, then, student questioning and interest after multicultural texts were used was seen as a marker of success in engaging students and helping them interact with the content they were being taught.

*Ignites a Passion for Social Justice*

One interviewee reported that the use of multicultural children’s texts increased children’s level of concern regarding social justice issues. In this instance, the reading of a multicultural
children’s text about an injustice that a child faced (along with some follow-up activities) mobilized students to ask what actions they could take to correct a social inequity. However, it appeared that this particular interviewee was explicitly teaching for that specific response from her students. The other two interviewees did not aim to spur their students to take action to attempt to correct perceived human rights abuses, but rather had other goals for using multicultural children’s literature, such as fostering empathy and exposing their students to a diversity of viewpoints.

Vanessa was the interviewee who reported this outcome. She seemed to place great value on social action as a result of her teachings of multicultural children’s literature. When she discussed what subject areas she uses multicultural children’s literature for, she identified social justice first, even before she mentioned traditional “academic” subjects. Social justice issues were clearly important to her. Later in the interview, Vanessa spoke about a lesson she taught on the story *Iqbal*. Vanessa engaged the students in numerous assignments that focused on this text, including activities that incorporated drama and literacy. She followed these activities with a guest speaker from an organization called “Me to We,” who added additional information to supplement what students had learned from the text. Vanessa reported that following these activities “…a passion for [social] justice and truth [was definitely]… ignited… amongst my students.” She provided evidence of this by stating that some other students asked what they could do to help Iqbal and others like him. This led Vanessa to believe that the content itself, and the way she taught it, had caused her students to want to be agents of social change and to assist children who did not have the same rights as the students in her class.

*Reference to What was Learned After the Lesson Ends*
Both Becky and Sara alluded to an outcome they had observed after teaching a multicultural children’s text; namely, that their students referenced the book they were teaching and/or the concepts they taught after the lesson was over or in other subject areas. For example, one of Becky’s students asked several questions about hijabs long after she had read *My Mother’s Hijab* to the class. She attributed this to the high level of interest and student curiosity the students showed about this garment. Likewise, Suzanne (when asked about the outcomes she had observed in her students after she instructed them using a multicultural text) stated: “So… you know that’s when… you’ve had success… when they [the students] refer to the story or the unit or what they learned, either the following term or another term outside of when you taught the book.” Both teachers felt that questions that kept coming about content that was previously taught demonstrated that the multicultural content was internalized by students and remained relevant and engaging in other contexts, even when the lesson had formally ended.

**Chronological Age and Student Outcomes**

Two of the three interviewees discussed the chronological age of their students and the effects it might have had on student outcomes when they used multicultural children’s literature in their classrooms. Both Becky and Vanessa indicated that, as students got older, they become increasingly influenced by their social environments and it becomes more difficult to change their opinions. For example, Becky suggested:

I used to think younger children are color-blind and I still do – I think younger children don’t really see colors. But as they get a little bit older, they tend to be influenced by their family, by their peer group, so I think that they develop that [the ability to differentiate between different cultures and ethnicities] later and I think that once puberty hits they really take on what people close to them think.
Becky also observed that there might be a critical period (i.e., from approximately five to twelve years-old) during which exposing students to multicultural children’s literature would produce beneficial results. However, Becky speculated that sometime after children turn 12 they become so influenced by external factors (such as advertisements and the media) that it becomes increasingly difficult to change their perceptions.

Vanessa also commented about this. She stated that kindergarten children “…may not have much personal multicultural experiences [in their lives yet]” and are just at the stage of forming opinions about the world. [But] as students become older there may be more developed bias to contend with.”

Both educators suggested that with regard to the relationship between children’s chronological age and the effects of exposure to multicultural children’s texts, junior elementary students might be more malleable in regard to changing their worldviews and perceptions of others than are children in the senior elementary grades. Becky and Vanessa asserted that as the chronological age of elementary school children grows, they are increasingly influenced by external social factors and their mindsets become increasingly entrenched. In other words, from Becky and Vanessa’s perspective, the greater the age of the elementary school children, the more challenging it becomes for educators to effect changes in their outlook through the use of multicultural children’s literature.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

I am a researcher of mixed ethnic background and I grew up in a school system that was primarily homogenous and Anglo-centric. I believe - and researchers such as Pires (2011) have concluded - that contemporary schools continue to have a homogenizing effect and therefore, as educators, we should find ways to promote multiculturalism in our classrooms and in our curricula. As a teacher candidate, I am happy to say that all three of the educators I interviewed in connection with this research provided me with a both strategies and wisdom that I soon hope to incorporate in my own classroom.

For the reader, I would like to reiterate the purpose of this study. My research question was: How can multicultural children’s literature be used to promote cross-cultural understanding among students in today’s classrooms? As part of my main research question, I also asked two sub-questions: (a) What strategies/methods of instruction are most effective in promoting cross-cultural understanding through the use of multicultural children’s literature? and (b) When using multicultural children’s literature to promote cross-cultural understanding, exactly what are the outcomes, from a teacher’s perspective? Some of the transcribed data that addresses these questions supports the findings of previous research and also lends new insights to the academic conversation. This is especially the case in the area of observed student outcomes, an area for which little research has been undertaken to date. Similarly, although extensive research has been conducted on the benefits of using multicultural children’s literature, relatively little of this research has focused on whether multicultural children’s literature actually does what it purports to do. This chapter will therefore discuss the literature and the data,
analyze implications, make recommendations, identify areas for further investigation, and conclude the study as a whole.

**Using Multicultural Children’s Literature**

**Rationale**

The participants’ reasons for including multicultural works of literature in their curricula were consistent with those identified in previous research. Leon (2002) found that educators who used multicultural texts did so because they wanted to discuss issues of social justice and also used multicultural literature as a vehicle to carry other messages, such as universal themes such as truth, justice, and friendship. Pires (2011) observed that educators who used multicultural texts in their teaching did so (at least in part) because they wanted students to experience an authentic portrayal of cultures that were different from their own. Landt, (2006) and Morrell and Morell (2012) found that educators who used multicultural texts did so because they wanted to create an emotional connection between their students and protagonists from other cultures. The participants in the present investigation were motivated by these – and similar – considerations.

Surprisingly, none of the participants in the present investigation mentioned two important themes in the area of multicultural studies and critical literacy: multicultural literature’s role in identity formation (Stewart, 2008) and multicultural literature’s role in developing global citizens with interests and understandings beyond their own experience (Green and Oldendorf, 2005). I conjecture that these omissions may have been due to the interviewees’ focus on their current situations – the considerations that were immediately apparent to them within the confines of their respective classrooms and libraries. For example, it is relatively easy to see whether students are making an emotional connection with or showing a deep interest in a character in a
multicultural story. It is more difficult to determine if a particular story is contributing to their identity formation and their development as global citizens.

**Strategies/Methods of Instruction**

There are a variety of literacy strategies that teachers can use during pre-, during-, and post-reading activities to stimulate student interest and in comprehension of the material being read. This idea - that a text cannot be taught effectively in isolation – is reflected in previous research. For example, Morrell and Morrell (2012) found that if a multicultural text was taught in isolation, student indifference to the text, poor comprehension, and in some cases even resistance resulted.

My results have led me to conclude that in order to use multicultural children’s literature effectively:

1. Teachers should provide context for the content that the students are learning. For younger students, this context can be provided by tangible materials such as clothing or food; for older students contextual clues can be more abstract.

2. Teachers should design activities based on multicultural texts from diverse curricular areas in order to provide multiple entry points for understanding the text.

3. Teachers should intentionally prompt students to find facets of experience from the story that are similar to, and also different from, their lived experiences, and find opportunities for students to put themselves in another’s shoes when they plan literacy activities that focus on the use of multicultural children’s texts.

These four strategies will now be described in detail:
(1) All of the participants in the present investigation sought to provide a thorough context for their students before they began teaching with a multicultural children’s story. All three participants sought to avoid the “trap” that many teachers fall into: the view that literature begins and ends at the presentation of the text, with little or no context or discussion of relevance to the student’s lives (Randall, 2010). In contrast, all of the interviewees in the present investigation stressed the importance of providing context to their students. However, Becky, who taught the youngest students of the three interviewees, also emphasized the importance of providing a tangible context for young children. She gave examples of something the students could see in the class (i.e., students wearing hijabs or coming to class with henna on their hands) as possible springboards for discussions about and explorations of other cultures. The other two participants, Suzanne and Vanessa, thought that it was acceptable to give the students context that was more abstract. For example, children not being allowed to go to school in certain countries and instead being forced to work might be an abstract concept to some students in Toronto schools. However, Suzanne and Vanessa allowed that this was still a satisfactory “hook” for students if they were in the junior elementary grades because abstract concepts were easier for those students to grasp.

(2) Teachers deliberately making cross-curricular links when they used multicultural texts emerged as a common subtheme in the results of the investigation. All three of the participants in the present study intentionally used a variety of activities from diverse subject areas to engage students with multicultural texts. For example, Becky used “Nadia’s Hand” to devise activities based on literacy, art, and math. Likewise, Vanessa utilized “Iqbal” to construct undertakings that had elements of literacy, social studies, and drama. These cross-curricular links were not present in much of the literature specific to multicultural education and critical literacy. However, teaching across curricula (i.e., making links to content across multiple subject areas) is associated
with effective teaching in general (Robson, 2007). It therefore makes sense to incorporate a variety of subjects when discussing multicultural children’s literature in order to show the interrelatedness of its content.

(3) Another strategy that was common to all interviewees when they used multicultural children’s literature was building in opportunities for students to put themselves in another’s shoes so that they could see what another child’s lived experience was like. Thirumurthy (2011) suggests that situations should be interpreted through another character’s perspective so that students can better understand not only the multicultural character presented in the text but themselves as well. Through the process of putting themselves in another child’s shoes, students can analyze what they like, dislike, and what is the same and different about their experiences and another child’s. As Vanessa suggested, this can be accomplished through drama and role-play or, as Suzanne advised, by using prompting questions to ask students how a character might feel at certain points in the story. Becky also allowed her kindergarten students to experience a cultural tradition (such as putting henna on their hands) to get a sense of what another culture’s celebrations are like. All three participants developed in their students an understanding of cultures different from their own through this process.

The strategies that Becky, Vanessa and Suzanne used and espoused were supported by previous research; however, this research is both disparate and indirect. For instance, few investigations have examined effective ways of teaching with multicultural children’s literature. Instead, research in this area has tended to focus on general principles rather than concrete strategies. Likewise, there is even less research on student outcomes (expected or observed) when students learn through the use of multicultural children’s literature.
After providing context for a multicultural story and providing exploratory activities that address the major ideas of the text, Vanessa specifically addressed the issue of seeing increased empathy among her students (also supported by Ching, 2005). Becky, Suzanne, and Vanessa all referred to their expectations that using multicultural children’s literature in their classrooms would result in fostering an awareness of diversity. This outcome is also documented by Thirumurthy (2011), Trites (2003), and Randall (2010).

However, the expected outcomes were extremely specific and were not referenced in any of the numerous articles that I have read to compose my literature review. Becky and Suzanne reported an increase in student interest and curiosity, as evidenced by the numerous questions that each heard from many of their students during and after their multicultural lessons. Vanessa witnessed student mobilization towards social action and change, which is referenced as the highest level in Bank’s Hierarchy of Incorporating Literature into Multicultural Education (1989). This point in Bank’s hierarchy is called the “Decision Making and Social Action” level and is often seen as the pinnacle of multicultural education because it encourages students to take action on issues that they see presented within literature. Vanessa said she witnessed this in her classroom when she read the story *Iqbal*, had the students create monologues, dialogues, and research questions about it, and then brought in a guest speaker for follow-up. I speculate that connecting the face of the guest speaker with the text inspired the students to want to create change of their own. Consequently, Vanessa’s students were mobilized to create social change based on the way that Vanessa had taught the story *Iqbal*, including bringing in a speaker related to the text.

**Limitations/Future Research**
When reading this study, the reader should also note the limitations of this study. These limitations, although discussed more extensively on p. 29 (Chapter 2), are succinctly repeated here for the reader’s convenience. These are: a small sample size (i.e., only three teachers participated in this study); that the data collected, because of the small sample size, may be only outliers in a more general trend; and that each interview was only approximately 30 minutes long and therefore provided minimal depth as to the subject of the use of multicultural children’s literature. However, this study’s purpose was not to provide a general overview of the uses of multicultural children’s stories, but instead, to seek three individual, unique perspectives in a focused area of the best ways in which multicultural children’s literature can be used in classrooms today to promote cross-cultural understanding.

This study could potentially be improved by seeking longer interviews with each participant. Because of the limited availability of each interviewee, each interview provided minimal depth. If I were to do this study over, I would ask each participant a few more questions about student outcomes that were observed. Although I did gain insight into this facet of my research, all participants mentioned only one or two observations. I would likely ask them to list five or more observations that they noted after they taught a multicultural children’s text.

Two of these interviews took place within the context of ethnically and culturally homogenous schools where most of the students were of Anglo-Saxon origin. In contrast, the third school that I collected data from was extremely culturally diverse. If I were to replicate this study, I would either chose to interview only teachers from schools with homogenous populations or only teachers from schools with heterogeneous populations so I could compare the results more easily.
Another change I would make for future, similar investigations would be to include interviews or surveys of the students who experienced a multicultural children’s literature lesson and their reactions to it. What better way to assess for student outcomes and/or changes in perspective/thinking than through student interviews/surveys? Unfortunately, as part of my Masters program, it was logistically not feasible to do this; I therefore worked with the information that I was able to get.

Additionally, future research might examine the effect of chronological age on student outcomes when multicultural children’s literature is used. The interviewees in this study contended that students were more susceptible to an educator introducing new perspectives (from different cultures, about different ways of living and being, etc.) when the students were chronologically younger and had less developed biases. This is a question that was outside the scope of this study, albeit an interesting one. If this speculation were confirmed, its implications would be profound. Some of the questions that present themselves include: Should educators spend more time teaching with multicultural children’s literature with younger students whose outlook is more malleable, rather than older students whose outlook is fixed? At what age should multicultural literature be introduced?

Another question that is outside the scope of this paper concerns the authenticity debate. There is little question about whether multicultural children’s literature should be used in a classroom; numerous benefits have been documented in previous research. However, when choosing a multicultural text, does the author’s ethnicity/culture have to match that of the main character of the story for an authentic portrayal of experience? Each of my interviewees said that the answer is no, provided that the author, no matter what his/her ethnicity, has done sufficient research to write his/her story. This is consistent with Harris’s view (1992) that authenticity
comes from either lived experience of that culture or by having learned about it in depth. However, this debate continues and the intersections between that debate and the selection of multicultural texts in a classroom require further consideration.

Implications/Recommendations for Practice

As a result of this investigation I have come to realize that there are several implications for myself as a future teacher and for present educators. As a future teacher, my research has made me much more aware of the critical role that multiculturalism studies play in the lives of my soon-to-be students. A student’s culture is a formative part of their identity and I now believe that it is not only an educator’s choice to spread awareness and celebrate unique cultural differences among students; it is also an educator’s obligation. I was previously aware of the positive effects that multicultural children’s literature had on elementary school students, but I was not aware of just how many benefits there were. Because of this shift in my thinking, I will strive to interweave multicultural children’s literature in every aspect of my curricula (including curricular areas that I had not previously considered, such as math and science).

With regard to the implications of my findings for the educational community, below is a list of recommendations I have made based on the results of this study and its literature review:

- Know what multiculturalism is, why it’s important, and the benefits of using literature to teach it to students (Ching, 2005; Morell & Morell, 2011; Locke & Harris, 2011; Landt, 2006).

- Try to provide context not only for your students, but for yourself as well. Do research and, if possible, ask students to do research on the culture being studied (Suzanne, Vanessa and Becky – interviewees)
• With younger children, try to provide a tangible “hook” (e.g., clothing, food, etc.) so students can have a concrete point of reference for the multicultural story (Becky – interviewee)

• With older children, it is acceptable to provide a more abstract point of reference or context (such as human rights issues for a child across the globe who is not allowed to attend school) (Vanessa – interviewee)

• Use T-Charts or Venn Diagrams to compare and contrast similarities between your students’ lives and the lives of the protagonist of the multicultural story (Suzanne, Vanessa – interviewees)

• Use a variety of activities from numerous different subjects to explore the text further (Robson, 2007)

• Allow students opportunities to put themselves in another’s shoes by utilizing activities from another culture’s celebrations (e.g., henna), through role play, and asking strategic questions (Vanessa, Suzanne, and Becky – interviewees)

• Allow students opportunities to take action on social issues if they feel so inclined. Bring in guest speakers who relate to the multicultural text being read and have them answer questions and put a face to a story (Vanessa, interviewee)

• Relate social issues in other subjects to the child’s own life, school, and community, and advise on ways to effect positive change in these areas (Banks, 1989)

Conclusion

This paper sought to address these questions by identifying the most effective strategies educators can use when teaching with multicultural children’s stories. These strategies have included providing context, allowing for student opportunities for comparing and contrasting
their own cultures with the protagonists in the story, using multiple avenues to explore the multicultural story through different subject areas, and creating ways to let students step into another child’s shoes to foster cross-cultural empathy and understanding. Some of the concrete outcomes of these actions have also been explored, namely: the development of empathy and other diverse viewpoints, increased student curiosity and interest, questioning even when the lesson has already been taught, and a commitment to social action based on issues discussed in a multicultural text. It is through investigations such as this one that we can work towards inclusive, respectful classroom communities where each person’s similarities are noted and their cultural uniqueness is celebrated and shared.
References:


Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Hello, my name is Gitanjali Stevens. Thank you very much for participating in this study. As you know, my topic is the how multicultural children’s literature can be used in the classroom to promote cross-cultural understanding. Today I am going to ask you 15 questions, not including follow-up questions. All in all, this interview will take around 30 minutes (3 minutes per question). Remember, each question does not have a right or wrong answer, but rather is constructed to gather your insights and expertise about the topic at hand. Do you have any questions before we get started today?

Interview Questions

Questions on the Participant and the Use of Literature in His/Her Classroom

1. Tell me about yourself. What grades and subjects do you teach? Have you always taught those grades and subjects? Are there any subjects/grades that you have a particular affinity for?
2. What subject areas do you use literature for? Are there any types of literature that you find fit with curriculum objectives or that your students seem to enjoy and/or learn the most from? Can you give me a few examples?
3. What is an example of a really effective way that you have used literature in your classroom? Why do you believe this instance was effective?

Questions About Multicultural Children’s Literature
4. A researcher Belinda Louie defines multicultural children’s literature as writings about people from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds and who have been marginalized and/or are considered outside mainstream society (2006). Do you agree or disagree with this definition, and why? Are there any parts you would change, or is there anything missing?

   **Follow-Up:** What are some names of multicultural texts you use in your classroom, and why did you select them in particular? Why do you believe they fall into your definition of “multicultural children’s literature”?

5. What are the criteria that you use when you select a multicultural text?

   **Follow-Up:** Is the author’s ethnicity an important factor – for instance, do you believe the author’s ethnicity should be the same as the protagonist of the story for an authentic portrayal of experience? Why or why not?

6. The last time you used multicultural children’s literature effectively in the classroom, what strategies did you feel worked very well? For instance, describe any pre-, during-, or post-reading activities that your students would undergo.

   **Follow-Up:** Why do you believe these strategies were effective?

**Questions About Multicultural Children’s Literature and Cross-Cultural Understanding**

7. Cross-cultural understanding is defined by Finney & Orr as the interpersonal understanding of the culture and experiences between people of different cultures (1995). Do you agree or disagree with this definition, and why? Are there any parts you would change, or is there anything missing?
8. How have you (or someone you know) used multicultural literature to promote cross-cultural understanding? Please describe a specific situation/strategy.

**Follow Up:** Why do you think this strategy was effective? What other strategies have been/could be effective?

9. Please describe an instance (it could be the same as the one above, or different) where an issue arose through the use of multicultural children’s literature?

**Follow Up:** Why do you believe this issue arose, and what do you think could have been done to avoid this issue or improve it in the future?

10. In your experience, what did you notice about your students’ cross-cultural understanding that resulted from using multicultural literature in your classroom?

11. Finally, do you believe chronological age has an effect in this process (if any)? For example, you think (or have you witnessed) a chronological threshold for children below which using literature to promote cross-cultural understanding is ineffective?
Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying the intersections of multicultural children’s literature and cross-cultural understanding for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Susan Schwartz. My research supervisor is Shelley Stagg Peterson. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of an approximate 30 minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have; please refer to my contact information below. You may also contact the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or by telephone at (416) 978-2798.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Gitanjali Stevens
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Phone number, email: (647) 466-8643, gitanjali.stevens@hotmail.com

Instructor’s Name: Susan Schwartz
Phone number: 416) 978-0076   Email: susan.schwartz@utoronto.ca

Research Supervisor’s Name: Shelley Stagg Peterson
Phone #: (416) 978-0329   Email: shelleystagg.peterson@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by _______________________(name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name (printed): ________________________________

Date: __________________