Embracing the Rainbow:
Enhancing Cultural Identity with Multicultural Children’s Literature in Canadian Classrooms

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Abstract

This qualitative research focuses on the potential of multicultural children’s literature in enhancing students’ cultural identity and creating an inclusive learning environment. Two major implications arise from the analysis of two semi-structured interviews. On one hand, teachers need to view students as cultural beings and provide opportunities for them to validate their cultural identity. To do so, teachers should first examine their own identity and be aware of how their personal culture influences instructional decision makings. On the other hand, the successful use of multicultural literature to enhance cultural identity relies on both the quality of multicultural book selection as well as the effectiveness of instructional approaches. Teachers should constantly work on these two aspects to create a meaningful culturally responsive classroom.

Key Words: Cultural Identity, Multicultural Literature, Culturally responsive pedagogy, Student Diversity
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract  
Acknowledgements  
Chapter 1: Introduction  
  1.0 Research Context  
  1.1 Research Problem  
  1.2 Purpose of Study  
  1.3 Research Questions  
  1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement  
  1.5 Preview of Whole  
Chapter 2: Literature Review  
  2.0 Introduction  
  2.1 Cultural Identity in the Multicultural Classroom  
    2.1.1 The Concept of Cultural Identity  
    2.1.2 The Role of Cultural Identity  
    2.1.3 The Implication for Pedagogy  
  2.2 The Use of Multicultural Literature in Education  
    2.2.1 Definition and Classification  
    2.2.2 The Role of Multicultural Literature in Education  
    2.2.3 The Criteria for Selecting Multicultural Literature  
    2.2.4 Using Multicultural Literature at School  
  2.3 Conclusion and Significance of the Research Project
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction
3.1 Research Approach and Procedures
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection
3.3 Participants
   3.3.1 Sampling Criteria
   3.3.2 Participant Recruitments
   3.3.3 Participants Biographies
3.4 Data Analysis
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures
3.6 Methodological limitations and Strengths
3.7 Conclusion

Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction
4.1 The Importance of Embracing Cultural Identity in the Classroom
   4.1.1 The Importance and Challenge of Reflecting upon Cultural Identity
   4.1.2 Cultural Identity and Students’ Interpersonal Relationship
   4.1.3 The Correlation between Cultural Identity and Academic Success
4.2 Multicultural Literature as a Mirror to Students and a Window to the World
   4.2.1 Multicultural Literature Promoting Positive Self-identity and Empathy
   4.2.2 Multicultural Literature Communicating Hope and Inspiration
4.3 Multicultural Literature beyond Representation of Races and Colors
   4.3.1 Authenticity as Essential Selection Criterion
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Multicultural Literature Promoting Perspectives</td>
<td>41-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3 Some Books Lacking in Profound Messages</td>
<td>42-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Active Learning Strategies to Engage Multicultural Literature</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1 Integrating Multicultural Literature in All Subjects</td>
<td>43-44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2 Drama as Effective Approach to Explore Multicultural Literature</td>
<td>44-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 The Use of Multicultural Literature Affected by Teachers’ Experience</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.1 Distinct Views on the Availability of Resources</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.2 Challenges Ranging from Individual to System-wide Levels</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>46-47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 5: Implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.0 Introduction</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Implications</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1 Broad: Implication for Educational Stakeholders and Community</td>
<td>50-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2 Narrow: Implication for Personal Teaching Practices and Philosophy</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Recommendations</td>
<td>54-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Areas for Further Research</td>
<td>56-57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Concluding Comments</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References                                                               | 58-64  |

Appendix A: Letter of Consent                                            | 65-66  |

Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions                                 | 67-69  |
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

The beauty of a rainbow takes shape in its separate colors, all of which blend together to create a marvelous image. In the same way that a diversity of colors offers a rainbow its charm, a diversity of students gives the classroom a special touch. Each of the students is blessed with something that makes them special. In Canadian classrooms, especially, the geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity among students can be a great asset to be celebrated and drawn upon by teachers as resources for learning. New data from the National Household Survey reveal that Canada was home to about 6,775,800 foreign-born individuals in 2011, who represented 20.6% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2013). What this means for schools is that, since 2000, Ontario alone has witnessed a 29 percent increase of ESL students within elementary schools (People for Education, 2007). Since education imparts roots and gives wings to the development of a person, it is important that teachers in Canada should celebrate the diversity in their classrooms with culturally responsive pedagogy and help each individual shine.

1.1 Research Problem

Canada has long supported the importance of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. In 1971, Canada was the first country to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy, which ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging (Government of Canada, 2015). In order to truly carry out the principles of the policy, it requires tremendous effort from different aspects of the society such as educational settings.
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

According to Statistics Canada (2006), 6 percent (390,800) of the newcomers in Canada are immigrant and refugee children and youth 24 years of age or under. One of the significant challenges faced by these immigrant children and youth is identity formation (Suárez-Orozco, 2004). Very often, these children are trying to forge an identity in a “context that may be racially and culturally dissonant” (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997, p.114). The process of coping with two cultures places a burden on the individual and can result in stress, isolation, and identity confusion (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). In other words, if those children are not provided with opportunities to fully explore cultural identity, it may lead to a fragmented sense of self where they get lost and do not see a clear picture of who they are. According to the Newcomer Youth Settlement Guide provided by Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (2006), many of the youth who experience dual identity due to conflicting values at home and at school are often left confused and frustrated and, for some, this frustration can lead to poor performance at school.

As stated by Campbell (2004), multicultural education should help students “as they learn and explore their changing identities” (p. 60). Oakes and Lipton (2007) has further described that school is a major socio-cultural venue from which our experiences and identities are (re)invented, racialized, and remembered. Therefore, it is very important for teachers to make good use of the resources available to help students develop their cultural identity in multicultural classrooms. An engagement with multicultural children’s literature could be effective and meaningful. “Children’s literature, and more particularly, the visual images in children’s books can do the ideological work of extending hegemonic discourses within a society about collective identity, memory, and normative social practices” (Edwards & Saltman, 2010, p.12). Accordingly, having access to an appropriate selection of multicultural children’s literature gives students a wonderful
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

chance to explore their identity and see themselves reflected in school materials and resources. Late in the twentieth century, we began to see a transformation from Canadian literature with a dominant white Eurocentric perspective to the re-defining of Canada’s unified story by writers and illustrators of European descent, immigrants of colour, and Aboriginal peoples (Johnston & Bainbridge, 2013). This might be a sign showing that the literature helps to raise the value of multiculturalism; however, it is not necessarily synonymous with the trend of book selections by the teachers in Canada. Unfortunately, according to Johnston and Bainbridge (2013), “literary text selections and English language arts teaching continue to promote a traditional view of Canadian citizenship” (p.6). This is likely related to the reality that most of the practising and pre-service teachers in Canada are of white European descent (Carson & Johnston, 2001a). As suggested by Giroux (1992), “teachers need to find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived difference that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse” (p.201). Therefore, it is vital that teachers understand their own cultural identity and how this impacts their own teaching practice such as book selection.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This research aims to learn how a sample of teachers is meaningfully integrating multicultural children’s literature as responsive pedagogy for students to engage cultural identity and see a broad range reflected in material for learning. A secondary purpose is to learn how these teachers enact reflexive practice in their instructional decision-making when teaching with multicultural children’s literature. It is with hope that, by interviewing teachers on the subject, the study offers insights into why it is important that practicing school teachers reflect on their
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

cultural identity and how their cultural identity influences their selection of classroom materials, including children’s literature. Ndura (2004) argues that teachers need to explore and understand their own cultural identities so as to better understand and appreciate their students’ diverse cultural background. On the whole, through this research, I am committed to contributing to the growing literature on the multicultural education in Canada.

1.3 Research Questions

The principal question that will be addressed in this research is:

How are teachers using multicultural children’s literature as responsive pedagogy for students to engage cultural identity and see a broad range reflected in material for learning?

The following subsidiary questions will support the principal research question:

A. What does cultural identity mean to teachers and their students?
B. What role does multicultural children’s literature play in engaging cultural identity?
C. How do teachers make decisions regarding text selection? What criteria do they use?
D. What instructional strategies do teachers adopt as part of a culturally responsive approach to teaching?
E. What challenges do these teachers face when using multicultural literature in the classroom?

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

My decision to undertake this research project is rooted in two reasons.
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

Firstly, on a personal level, as someone who has moved from one society to another, I have developed an interest in learning how cultural identity influences people’s overall wellbeing. I was born in a small village in China and the education system there allowed me to develop a strong sense of belonging as a Chinese person. However, when I moved to Hong Kong alone and attended the university at the age of 17, I was facing the identity crisis in Hong Kong. Since the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from Great Britain to China, there are a significant number of Hong Kong residents who prefer to be identified primarily as “Hong Kong people” instead of “Chinese”. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is that there are distinct differences on the cultural and political values in Hong Kong and mainland China. As a Hong Kong resident, and the permanent resident by now, I have been lucky that I am able to reconcile identity and culture by keeping an open mind and trying to understand cultural values and perspectives when speaking to locals. However, I could see some of students who had similar background of mine did not enjoy their study in Hong Kong. Some students believed that they had a different set of values with the local society so that they avoided interaction with the locals. At present, as an international student in Canada, I am embarking on the new journey of integration and acculturation based on a better understanding of the field of cultural identity.

Secondly, on a professional level, as a pre-service teacher in Canada facing classroom diversity in near future, I am curious to explore different ways to help students to develop cultural identity and celebrate multiculturalism in class. In the course of Curriculum and Teaching in Literacy, the professor started the first lesson by reading a children’s literature called “The Name Jar”, a story about a girl named Unhei who has just moved from Korea to United States and finally decides to stick to her own Korean name after receiving a glass jar with
American names suggested by her classmates. I related myself to the character as I kept my
Chinese name instead of giving myself an English one. As an international student in the
classroom, I appreciated the story and it celebrated the diversity in the classroom and helped me
to develop my cultural identity. This activity has inspired me to explore more on the potential of
multicultural literature in addressing the diversity issues in the classroom.

1.5 Preview of the whole

To respond to the research questions, I will be conducting a qualitative research study using
purposeful sampling to interview two teachers about their use of multicultural children’s
literature in enhancing students’ cultural identity. Chapter 2 focuses on an overview of the
literature in the areas of cultural identity and the pedagogical potential of multicultural children’s
literature. Chapter 3 provides the context and methodology of the research project. Chapter 4
presents the research findings with respect to specific questions addressed in the study. Lastly,
Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings and their significance in relation to the
literature and the implications for my own practice as a beginning teacher.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This literature review will be organized into two major parts. The first part of this literature review aims to provide a theoretical background to the study of what it means to be Canadian and how cultural identity influences teachers and students in the educational setting. The second part will take a close look at the role of multicultural children’s literature in schools and how helps students and teachers to connect, challenge or negotiate their Canadian identities.

2.1 Cultural Identity in the Multicultural Classroom

In this part, I will first define the term of cultural identity, and then I will explore the role of cultural identity in teaching and learning. Finally, I will discuss the relationship between cultural identity and teaching pedagogy.

2.1.1 The Concept of Cultural Identity

The term “cultural identity” is composed of two key words “cultural” and “identity”, both of which are polysemic and illusory as analytical categories (Bayart, 2005). In order to better clarify the concept of “cultural identity” as a whole, I will first define the word “culture” and “identity” respectively.

Culture
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

For over a century, scholars have made various attempts to define the word “culture” and each definition seems to draw attention to different characteristics of culture. Tyler (1870), a British anthropologist, described culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (as cited in Avruch, 1998, p.6). This definition reflects the complexity and multifaceted nature of culture. Hofstede (1994) defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p.5). He stressed on the shared beliefs, values and practices of a group of people. In this study, I will employ the definition made by Matsumoto (1996), that culture is “the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next” (p.16). I agree with Matsumoto that culture is not only a social construct but also an individual construct. People may adopt and engage in the culture of their social context to different degrees, which leads to individual differences in culture. Matsumoto further elaborated that “it is this interesting blend of culture in anthropology and sociology as a macroconcept and in psychology as an individual construct that makes understanding culture difficult but fascinating” (p.16).

Identity

As with the term “culture”, there is a remarkable range of definitions regarding “identity”. This range is partly due to different research traditions influenced by Eriksonian psychology, role theory and social identity theories, etc. Hogg, Michael and Abrams (1988) defined identity as “people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others” (p.2). This definition explores the central idea of what identity is. The definition given by Jenkins
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

(1996) further pointed out that identity could be used to classify both individuals and groups: “identity refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities” (p.4). Deng’s (1995) gave a more comprehensive definition that identity is used to “describe the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture” (p.1). Furthermore, Hall (1991) guided us to look at the term using discursive approach. He saw identification as a construction, a process never completed, not a settled semantic career. He also pointed out that identity is always relational: “identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative; it has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself” (Hall, 1991a, p.21). This notion is particularly significant for the present research. Since identity is constantly in the process of change and transformation, it helps us understand why students may encounter identity formation issues especially when they encounter conflict values in a new environment.

Cultural Identity

As suggested by Hall (1990), the term “cultural identity” can be examined in two different ways. The first position defines cultural identity “in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common”(p.223). This approach focuses on the collective self-awareness that a group embodies, which is stable and unchanging. There are scholars who are supportive of such an approach. Friedman (1994), for example, referred to cultural identity as “the attribution of a set of qualities to a given population” (p.29). The second perspective considers identity as “a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’”
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

(Hall, 1990, p.225). Hall (1990) further explained that we cannot talk about one identity without acknowledging the other. Cultural identities are also undergoing constant transformation and they are “subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Hall, 1990, p.225). In this research, I will adopt this second position because it allows us to recognize the constantly-changing and historical nature of cultural identity. Based on this premise, the term ‘cultural identity’, for the purposes of the study, is defined as “one’s understanding of the multilayered, interdependent, and nonsynchronous interaction of social status, language, race, ethnicity, values and behaviors that permeate and influence nearly all aspects of our lives” (Taylor, 1996b, p.232).

2.1.2 The Role of Cultural Identity

Why does cultural identity matter in the educational context, especially in a multicultural classroom? As this study concerns the issues of teaching and learning, I will discuss the role of cultural identity in two parts: the cultural identity of students and that of teachers.

The Cultural Identity of Students

First, students’ cultural identity may affect their interpersonal relationship in the classroom. Dilg (2003) pointed out that the cultural identity of students will influence “how they relate potentially to every other individual in the room” (p.77). She argued that aspects of cultural identity may vary from seating preference, making friends to a slur that intended to hurt. In particular, the cultural identity may affect students when they are communicating with teachers or peers. This view is supported by Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, Jackson &
Ribeau, 2003), which argued that identities are enacted in interactions with others and that “not all messages are about identity, but identity is part of all messages” (p.217).

Secondly, studies have revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between cultural identity and academic success. For instance, Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben and LaFromboise (2001) investigated a resiliency model of academic success to study the role of cultural identity among American Indian children. The study found that an increased identity with traditional culture was positively linked with academic performance. Vicaire (2010)’s research shared the consistent finding. She examined cultural identity in a proposed model of academic success among First Nation adolescents from northern Quebec. From the statistics, she concluded that cultural identity is a predictor of academic success. Dilg (2003) also argued that students’ relationships to their identities affect “the way in which they approach, explore, and respond to course materials and activities” (p.78).

The Cultural Identity of Teachers

Like students, teachers step into the classroom with their own culture and experience. While many choices that teachers make and the expectation they hold may be influenced by their own experience and cultural background, Giroux (1992) pointed out that “teachers need to find ways of creating a space for mutual engagement of lived difference that does not require the silencing of a multiplicity of voices by a single dominant discourse” (p.201).

To achieve this goal, teachers need to reflect on their own cultural identity and values before they create a multicultural learning environment. Dilg (2003) suggested that teachers should raise questions similar to those their students may be posing: “What is my cultural identity?
What is my relationship to that identity? What issues are unsolved for me in relation to that identity? How will aspects of that identity affect what I teach and how I teach it?” (p.80). The rationale behind this reflection is that, when teachers understand and value their own cultural identities, they tend to respect and develop a better connection with students of other cultures. As Gay (2000) argued, teachers who are more conscious of their emerging identities will display a greater comfort level in helping their students deal with their own identities. Dilg (2003) also commented that understanding both students’ and teachers’ own identity help teachers respond to complex aspects of attitudes and behaviours, resulting in a more meaningful classroom.

2.1.3 The Implication for Pedagogy

Specific pedagogical approaches have been developed that recognize and respect students’ uncertainty about identity in multicultural classrooms.

Ladson-Billings (1997) introduced the term “culturally relevant pedagogy”, which is defined as “an approach to teaching and learning that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart/knowledge, skills and attitudes” (p.62). Culture is essential to learning. Participating in this approach means that teachers utilize the background, knowledge and cultural references of the students to guide their teaching. Another relevant approach is “culturally responsive teaching” introduced by Gay (2000). The term is defined as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p.29). It is based on the premise that students are more personally
meaningful, possess higher interest appeal, and learn more effectively and thoroughly if the
academic knowledge and skills are situated within the frames of reference of students (Gay,
2000).

As we can see, these two approaches share a large amount of similarities. In this research, I
will employ the term “culturally responsive teaching/pedagogy” only as a matter of consistency,
not because I feel one term is more comprehensive than the other.

Under the framework of culturally responsive teaching, as suggested by Banks (1990),
appropriate content is one of the major components. Literature, a large carrier of content, is a
powerful instructional tool for understanding the culture. Therefore, with an aim to create a
culturally responsive classroom as discussed above, this study attempts to investigate the
potential of multicultural literature in diverse classrooms.

2.2 The Use of Multicultural Literature in Education

In this second part of literature review, I will first examine the definition and the
classification of multicultural literature. Second, I will talk about the role of multicultural
literature in the classroom. Then, the criteria for selecting multicultural literature will be
reviewed. Lastly, a model for integration of multicultural content will be elaborated.

2.2.1 Definition and Classification

Definition of Multicultural Literature
Multicultural literature can be defined in terms of literary nature or pedagogical purpose (Cai & Sims Bishop, 1994). In this study, I will only focus on its pedagogical definition. Various scholars have made their attempts to define the term *multicultural literature*. Kruse and Horning (1990) described multicultural literature as “works that focus on ‘people of color’” (p.vii). In response to this definition’s exclusive focus on racial groups, Norton (1999) offered a more comprehensive interpretation, by defining the term as “literature about racial or ethnic minority groups that are culturally and socially different from the white Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States, whose largely middle-class values and customs are most represented in American literature” (p.580). Extensive as the second definition may seem, the study still requires an inclusive definition that is not restricted to the geographical scope. After reviewing more definitions that are available, I will define multicultural literature as “books other than those of the dominant culture” (Austin & Jenkins, 1973, p.50). This definition opens up more literature choices for discussion in the present study because it comprises all cultures other than the dominant one in the world (Cai, 2002).

**Classification of Multicultural Literature**

A wide variety of multicultural books for educational purposes could be found in the publishers’ list. In order to use multicultural literature effectively in the classroom, it is important for educators to understand how it could be sorted into different groups and the characteristics of each type.

As suggested by Cai (2002), there are different ways of classifying multicultural literature: by content and intended audience, by cultural specificity, and by geographical and cultural boundaries. For the purposes of the study, I will only focus on the last way of classification and
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

Examine different categories of multicultural books in this classification. The first category is *world literature*. According to Cai and Sims Bishop’s taxonomy (1994), books from and about countries outside the Western dominant culture fall into this category. The second category is *cross-cultural literature*, which “deals with interrelationships between cultures” (Cai, 2002, p. 25). The third category, *parallel cultural literature*, pertains to “literature written by authors from parallel cultural groups to represent the experience, consciousness, and self-image developed as a result of being acculturated and socialized within those groups” (Cai & Sims Bishop, 1994, p.66).

Given that each category of multicultural books has its own characteristics, the classification allows educators to evaluate the variety of books used in the classroom and gives some fundamental guidance for them in terms of text selection.

2.2.2 The Role of Multicultural Literature in Education

In general, multicultural children’s literature helps the world to reach mutual understanding and intercultural harmony. As Manning (2003) suggested, reading is “not just a tranquil act of deciphering, but an exposition of the irreducibility of the other as text, as world, as human being” (p.151). In this part, I will take a closer look at the role of multicultural literature from three different aspects, which I adapt from Cai (2002) with some modifications.

A Means of Crossing Cultural Borders

The first role of multicultural literature is that it helps students understand other cultures and experience crossing cultural borders. As suggested by Cai (2002), cultural borders are
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH
MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

“demarcation lines that separate one culture from another” (p.117). Specifically, cultural borders include three categories: geographical border (a physical border line), difference border (cultural differences in terms of beliefs, values, traditions, etc.) and inner border (negative feelings towards other cultures). If students could break out the limitation of their own culture with the support of multicultural literature, they become more open-minded and show understanding and compassion towards others. This view is supported by Corliss (1998) who argued that, if we are limited by cultural borders, “the scope of who we are and who we can be individually and collectively is severely restricted” (p.xi). In other words, crossing cultural borders help students to see who they are in a broader perspective, which may result in higher cultural identity levels.

A Means of Empowering

Multicultural literature, if used adequately, can empower students by allowing them to identity and analyze problems related to cultural differences. McGinley, Kamberelis, Mahoney, Madigan, Rybicki and Oliver (1997) argued that “stories can be a means of personal and social exploration and reflection- an imaginative vehicle for questioning, shaping, responding, and participating in the world” (p.43). Cai (2002) further elaborated that, for multicultural literature to empower students, it must be used as a means of personal and social exploration rather than simply as a source of information. He also pointed out that, to effectively achieve this goal, teachers “need activities that adopt an issue-driven approach and use thought-provoking books that challenge children to think about issues that they may face in reality” (p.135). For example, exploring cultural identity is one of the key issues in students’ life. The teacher can adopt an issue-driven approach by inviting student to analyze how the main character in the story book explores his/her own identity and to reflect on their own identity issues.
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

A Means of Fostering Positive Self-concept and Identity

Another key benefit of multicultural literature for children is that it increases knowledge of children’s own heritage and foster positive self-concepts and identity (Taylor, 1997). When students are reading books that reflect their own ethnic or cultural background, they are more likely to make connection with the stories. In contrast, if children do not find themselves reflected in the books used in the classroom, they might receive subtle message that the classroom or the school is not for people like them (Colby & Lyon, 2004). Therefore, multicultural literature helps to create a classroom where all students are valued and their cultures are celebrated.

2.2.3 The Criteria for Selecting Multicultural Literature

Given that multicultural literature helps to create a culturally responsive classroom, how to select the appropriate books for teaching is another important issue for educators. In this section, I will discuss some of the main criteria for choosing the appropriate literature.

Authenticity

A good multicultural literature should be consistent with the authentic culture that is being portrayed. The literature must be free of stereotypes in character traits, language and settings (Diamond & Moore, 1995). In particular, the characters should reflect the distinct cultural experiences of the specific groups and they should be presented in a balanced manner, revealing both good and bad characteristics (Canales, Lucido & Salas, 2002). Also, the language and dialect spoken by characters should also authentically portray the interaction typical of those
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

characters (Temple, Martinez, Yokota & Naylor, 1998). The language used needs to demonstrate sensitivity and avoid those terms that can be offensive to certain culture. Moreover, the setting and cultural details should be accurate. Temple, Martinez, Yokota & Naylor (1998) pointed out a problem that some authors may make some intentional errors because they try to meet the expectation of a mainstream readership with preconceived notions of cultures.

**Balanced Collection**

Apart from taking consideration of the quality and authenticity of multicultural literature, teachers should also aim to present students with a balanced collection of multicultural books. The term “collection” refers to “the books available in a school, classroom, or public library, and also to the books selected to serve as teaching units within a classroom” (Temple, Martinez, Yokota & Naylor, 1998, p. 103). The balance of collection is especially important in a multicultural school where students have different interests and cultural backgrounds. The variety of the collection can be demonstrated through different topics such as poverty, gender and equity, etc. Also, the collection should include different cultural groups such as Asian Canadian, South American, Jewish, etc.

**2.2.4 Using Multicultural Literature at School**

There are different ways of using multicultural literature at school. One of the most comprehensive summaries I find is the model for integration of multicultural content by Banks (1999). Although the model is not specific to multicultural literature, I will use it as the framework to discuss the approaches of using multicultural literature at school.
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

There are four levels of integration of multicultural content. Level 1 is the *Contributions Approach* which focuses on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements. It means that cultural content is limited to special days or events at school. During these celebrations, multicultural literature is introduced in the lessons or activities related to the cultural groups being commemorated; however, it is not specified as part of the curriculum (Banks, 1999).

Level 2 is the *Additive Approach*. Without changing the basic structure of the curriculum, concepts and themes of other cultures are added. In other words, multicultural literature may be incorporated into the mainstream curriculum without changing the curriculum itself. Nevertheless, the limitation of this approach is that it may not transform thinking (Banks, 1999).

Level 3 is the *Transformational Approach* which changes the structure of the curriculum. For example, there might be a whole unit exploring the cultural identity so multicultural literature will be incorporated into the unit to allow students think critically.

The highest level is *Social Action Approach* which combines transformational approach with activities to strive for social change (Banks, 1999). In this approach, students are not only invited to understand and respond to the literature critically, but also take some actions related to the social issue such as writing letters to government.

2.3 Conclusion and Significance of the Research Project

In this literature review, I have firstly discussed the importance of cultural identity for teachers and students in a multicultural classroom, which leads to the need for a culturally responsive pedagogy. Multicultural literature, a powerful instructional tool for culturally
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

responsive teaching, is then examined in terms of its definition, role, criteria of selection as well as the teaching approaches.

Even though there seems to be an extensive research on the use of multicultural literature in addressing the issue of multiculturalism and cultural identity, the present study is significant for prospective teachers and experienced teachers in Canada. First, most of the research reviewed does not include data collected in Canada so the existing conclusion may not be applicable in the present context. Secondly, regarding the existing research on teachers’ cultural identity, the targets of the research were mainly pre-service teachers. As the in-service teachers’ voices are the important aspect of this study, I would argue that this study provides opportunities to examine what is really happening in the current school setting. Thirdly, although there are studies on the benefits of multicultural literature, few have examined students’ responses to the literature in the class. By interviewing teachers’ observations on students’ response to the literature, the study may provide new insights in the text selection and pedagogical approaches. Lastly, I would argue that the challenges that teachers are facing when using multicultural literature differ from one setting to the other. It would be thought-provoking when comparing and contrasting the views from different in-service teachers, which will provide guidance on how schools or school boards can help teachers to overcome barriers in order to effectively use the literature for addressing the diversity. On the whole, it is anticipated that this project would generate interest, not only among teachers and schools, but also among the school boards as a whole in Canada.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter of research methodology will be organized into seven parts. First, I will begin by reviewing the general research approach and procedures. Second, I will explain the instruments of data collection for the study. Third, participant sampling criteria and recruitment will be described in details. Next, I will elaborate on data analysis procedures and review the ethical consideration to my study, respectively. Furthermore, I point out a range of methodological limitations, but I also comment on the strengths of the methodologies. Lastly, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of my key methodological decisions and the rationale for these decisions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

The purpose of this research study is to discover and understand the experiences and perspectives of teachers on the topic of using multicultural children’s literature as responsive pedagogy to engage cultural identity. Therefore, the study will be conducted using a qualitative research approach, involving literature review and semi-structure interviews with practising school teachers.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011), in the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, describe qualitative research as “an interpretative, and naturalistic approach to the world” and they further explain that “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p.3). In this sense, a qualitative research approach is considered appropriate for this research study because,
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

by interviewing teachers, the study aims to ‘make sense of’ or ‘interpret’ the strategies, the barriers experienced, and the perspectives of teachers who incorporate multicultural literature in their classrooms. Moreover, Creswell (2013) points out that one of the main reasons we conduct qualitative research is that “we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p.48). By privileging the thoughts and experiences of each participant involved in the study, the research hopes to gain a complex understanding of the use of multicultural literature through the voices of practising school teachers.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary data collection method for this study is semi-structure interviews with two practising teachers. Each semi-structure interview will follow an identical protocol with a pre-determined set of open-ended questions (Appendix B), but allow for the opportunity for various themes and subtopics to develop (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001). Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow more space or leeway for following up on whatever aspects that are considered important by the interviewee. Compared to unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews provide the interviewer with a better control of the conversation focusing on the issues that are most relevant to the research project (Brinkmann, 2014).

The pre-determined interview questions for this study include four sections. The first set of questions tends to find out interviewees’ background experiences. In the next two sections, I ask questions that concern ‘the what’, ‘the how’, and ‘the why’ of using multicultural children’s literature in the classroom. The final section aims to study the difficulties or barriers of using multicultural children’s literature as responsive pedagogy, especially in terms of helping students
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

develop their cultural identity.

3.3 Participants

In this section, I will begin by reviewing the sampling criteria before I elaborate on a range of possible revenue for sampling recruitment. I will also introduce each of the participants respectively at the end of this section.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of using multicultural children’s literature in the classroom, I will select the participants based on the following criteria:

1. They have at least 5 years’ teaching experience in Toronto.

2. They have demonstrated experience, commitment and/expertise in the area of integrating multicultural children’s literature into their own teaching practice.

3. They have demonstrated commitment to enacting culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP).

First, it is assumed that a minimum of five years’ experience will ensure an array of experience to draw on students’ needs, relative to a recent Teacher’s College graduate. Novice teachers may have to spend more time on adjusting themselves to the complexity of the teaching career and some researchers label the first-year of teaching as a “sink or swim” scenario (Lundeen, 2004). Second, it is preferred that teachers have most of the teaching experience in Toronto as the present study mainly aims to shed lights on the use of multicultural literature in the classrooms of Toronto. Thirdly, these teachers must have demonstrated commitment, experience, and/or expertise in the area of integrating multicultural children’s literature (e.g.
professional development, graduate work, curriculum development, etc.), which allows them to respond to the various key issues such as the selection of books and the barriers of using multicultural literature. Lastly, teachers must have a good understanding of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy as the research is primarily based on this approach and guiding principle.

3.3.2 Participant Recruitment

To locate participants, I will primarily adopt a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a type of sampling in which “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 1997, p. 87). To recruit participants who meet the sampling criteria as described above, I will contact principals and offer them an overview of the study. Principals will be provided with participant criteria and be invited to distribute the information to the teachers that might fulfill the criteria. To ensure that teachers are voluntarily participating, I will provide my contact information to the school so that the teachers can contact me of their own accord.

Additionally, I will also attend professional development conferences hosted by teacher education programs or subject area specialization organizations so as to increase the possibilities of locating appropriate participants for the study. By accessing the catalogues of these conferences, I may be able to find contact information of those who have led or participated in these professional events.

Apart from purposive sampling, it should be noted that I will also rely on the convenience sampling, given the small scale nature of the study. Convenience sampling involves “drawing samples that are both easily accessible and willing to participate in a study” (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Since I am immersed to educator community with mentors and teachers, I will also
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

attempt to locate participants from the existing contacts.

3.3.3 Participant Biographies

My first participant, Amy, has six years’ experience teaching in the general education classrooms of both Grade 3 and Grade 4. She has taught every subject at primary schools except music and physical education. The classes she has taught have always been diverse in terms of demographics, cultural background and socioeconomic status.

My second participant, Brian, has 55 years’ experience in the field of education. He had worked as a classroom teacher, as an education consultant for school boards, and as a curriculum developer for schools. He is currently an educator of various teacher education programs.

3.4 Data Analysis

Before analyzing the data, I will first transcribe the interviews which will be audio-recorded. The transcript will be examined a couple of times to ensure its accuracy and I will also offer my interviewees an opportunity to review it. From there, I will follow the phenomenological data analysis approach outlined by Creswell (1998) to analyze specific statements and themes and search for all possible meanings. Specifically, I will use Nvivo data analysis software to code each transcript individually before I identify categories of data and look for themes under each category. I will learn to use this software by attending some professional workshops on qualitative data analysis offered by OISE. At the second level, I will read the categories and themes of each transcript beside each other to determine commonalities and contradictions among all the data. The final level will be the meaning-making process, whereby I discuss the
key issues and themes that arise from the transcripts, with reference to what existing research and literature has found. Meanwhile, I will also pay attention to what participants do not speak to (i.e. null data) on the subject matters. Both voice and silence can be valuable data for analysis.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

First, potential participants will be asked to sign a formal letter of consent (Appendix A) before the commencement of the study, giving their consent to the interview as well as being audio-recorded. The consent letter provides an overview of the study and addresses ethical implications and specific expectations of participants. Second, participants’ right to privacy will be addressed. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym and their identity will remain confidential. Any identifying markers to their schools or students will be excluded. All data will be stored in my password protective laptop and will be destroyed after five years. Only my research supervisor and my course instructor will have the access to the data. Third, I try to make sure that there is minimum risk associated to the participants. It is possible that some questions, such as issues related to their own cultural identity, might trigger emotional responses and making participants feel vulnerable.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The study presents certain limits that must be taken into account. First, the research is limited by the number of teachers I can interview. As there are only three interviews, the findings can hardly generalize the teachers’ experience. Second, the data collection method is restricted to interviews. Influenced by the interpersonal nature of the interview method, interviewees may respond to the questions in ways they consider socially desirable (Yin, 2009). In this sense,
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

interview data may sometimes present fragmentary or incomplete perspectives from participants (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Third, a potential limitation stems from the recruitment strategy. Only those teachers who are interested or even passionate about the research subject are chosen for the study. In this case, those voices of teachers who do not have much experience or interest of integrating multicultural children’s literature into the curriculum will not be included since those teachers might not be able to answer my research questions.

However, it is worth noting that there are two major strengths of this study. On one hand, interviews help to create a space where teachers can speak in depth about what matters most for them, using their own words. In this way, interviews are ways to validate teachers’ voice and are opportunities for them to make meanings from their own experiences. On the other hand, the study provides a platform for participating teachers to reflect on their own practices and think about the rationale behind their choices of teaching materials and strategies.

3.7 Conclusion

To summarize, the study will adopt a qualitative research approach and the primary data collection method will be semi-structure interviews with two practicing school teachers who fulfill the sampling criteria. The phenomenological data analysis approach will be used to analyze the interview transcripts. Ethical considerations are taken into account when the study is planned. Even though there are some methodological limitations, it is hoped that the study can present some insights on the topic of multicultural children’s literature through teachers’ own voice.

In the next chapter, I will report the research findings and discuss the major themes revealed through a thorough analysis of the transcribed interviews.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report the research findings from two face-to-face interviews with teacher participants, Amy and Brian. Upon analyzing the data, I identified the following five overarching themes, which I will report in turn: 1) the importance of embracing cultural identity in the classroom; 2) multicultural literature as a mirror to students and a window to the world; 3) multicultural literature beyond representation of races and colors; 4) active learning strategies to engage multicultural literature; 5) the use of multicultural literature affected by teachers’ experience.

4.1 The Importance of Embracing Cultural Identity in the Classroom

The first theme provides a direct response to the Research Question A: What does cultural identity mean to teachers and their students? Both participants reflected on their own cultural identity and saw the significance of embracing cultural identity in their classrooms. Within the theme, I identified three sub-themes, including: 1) the importance and challenge of reflecting upon one’s cultural identity; 2) The impact of cultural identity on students’ interpersonal relationship; 3) the correlation between cultural identity and academic success.

4.1.1 The Importance and Challenge of Reflecting upon Cultural Identity

When asked to describe participants’ own cultural identity, Amy considered herself as Canadian but she recognized the fact that her grandparents were not born in Canada. She
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

expressed the difficulty in defining what it meant to be Canadian by stating that “Canadian is no one thing.” She believed that cultural identity could include everything from food, holiday to ideologies. Brian, the other participant, sarcastically commented that he might fit the pattern of “Old-stock Canadians”, the term of which was used by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper to describe Canadians who are already here in the country compared to those immigrants who are coming. He further expressed his disapproval of the term by describing it as a “racist label” that divides people. Of what cultural identity meant to him, Brian stated:

None of us are individuals; we don’t go through life just as individuals. We are part of something. We are part of our families. And we are part of our national identities. We are part of generational cultures. We are part of social class, those who are poor and those who are rich. All these, to me, constitute to culture and where we derive our beliefs, our dreams.

Recognizing that cultural identity is part of who they were as teachers, both participants expressed their intention of reflecting on their identity to create an inclusive classroom. Amy noted that she had certain “privileges” stemming from her background. When invited to further elaborate what she meant by the term “privilege”, she expressed that her life was more privileged than other people because of being “white” and “not immigrated”. Since her students were culturally diverse, she remarked that she would like to reflect on her own identity and be inclusive about things other than just representing her and her culture. This view is in line with Gay (1999) and Dilg (2003) who underscored that teachers’ reflection on their own identities led to a more meaningful and inclusive classroom. However, Amy admitted that such intention was not always at the forefront of her mind: “I do have to encourage myself, remind myself to do that”. Brian similarly acknowledged that he had to keep cultural background in mind as it affected his instructional decision-making: “I try, I know I try, but I don’t always succeed.”
These findings reveal two major issues. On one hand, participants underscored the importance of critically reflecting upon their own cultural identity as part of supporting an inclusive classroom. On the other hand, both participants found it difficult and sometimes even fail to engage themselves in constant reflection and attention of their own identities.

4.1.2 Cultural Identity and Students’ Interpersonal Relationship

Consistent with the literature, both participants acknowledged that students’ cultural identities shaped their interpersonal relations (Dilg, 2003). Amy provided a general rationale to support this statement. She observed that students were more comfortable with their peers in the class when they were given the opportunities to develop more understanding of their own and others’ cultures. Brian, on the other hand, narrated a detailed experience about how his students developed respect and understanding towards an Orthodox Jewish child in the class. He described that the Jewish child was always quiet in the class, but when he did speak, he had a point of view on things that made the rest of the class laugh. On one weekend, a group of classmates including the child were going to the other end of the city for a tournament. The child could not take the bus like his peers because it was on Shabbat and the use of public transcript was not allowed in his culture. He managed to walk from one end of the city to the other for the tournament and walk back. The event made the whole class realize that “the Jewish child is flesh and blood like you and me but his belief system and his view to things is so different”. Brian further described his observation on the impact: “suddenly, the whole class began to respect him for his courage and his way of sticking to what he believes.”

36
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

These discussions indicate that some teachers consider cultural identity as an important element in enhancing the quality of classroom relations and such belief is also proven by their own teaching experience.

4.1.3 The Correlation between Cultural Identity and Academic Success

While Amy and Brian both made insightful observations on how cultural identity helped students preserve positive concept and appreciate the freedom of beliefs in general, they were unable to talk about the correlation between cultural identity and academic success, the association of which has been supported by various research done by scholars such as Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben and LaFromboise (2001) and Vicaire (2010). One possible explanation is that a student’s academic success is influenced by the interaction of multiple factors such as family background, personalities, motivations and their own abilities. Therefore, it is difficult for participants to notice if the enhanced cultural identity directly contributes to students’ academic performance. Furthermore, cultural identity itself is a profound matter that cannot be easily measured, which even enhances the difficulty in recognizing the correlation.

4.2 Multicultural Literature as a Mirror to Students and a Window to the World

The second theme intends to answer Research Question B: what role does multicultural children’s literature play in engaging cultural identity? Both participants affirmed that multicultural literature serves as a mirror to students and a window to the world, which leads to the enhanced cultural identity. I further categorized the theme into two sub-themes, including: 1)
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

multicultural literature promoting positive self-identity and empathy; 2) multicultural literature communicating hope and inspiration.

4.2.1 Multicultural Literature Promoting Positive Self-identity and Empathy

With experience of integrating multicultural literature in their classrooms, both participants considered the literature as an inclusive tool to help students understand themselves and others. Amy believed that multicultural literature provides students with opportunities to identify with their own cultures and also to serve as “a good jumping-off point for talking about the greater world outside of the classroom.” Brian held similar views. He conceived that multicultural literature not only “creates some knowledge on students’ own heritage” but also “builds respect to other cultures and facilitates empathy.” This is consistent with scholars who identify multicultural literature as fostering positive self-concept (Taylor, 1997) and crossing cultural borders (Cai, 2002).

These findings indicate that some teachers recognize one positive aspect of reading, which is, getting information. Once students have more knowledge and information about different cultural groups, they are more likely to be sensitive to cultural differences in others and show respect and empathy.

4.2.2 Multicultural Literature Communicating Hope and Inspiration
Rather than simply being as a source of information, both participants further addressed the role of multicultural literature as the source of hope and inspiration. The view is supported by Cai (2002) who regarded multicultural literature as a means of empowering students. Amy shared a book called *The Lotus Seed* written by Sherry Garland (1997). The story was about a young Vietnamese girl who was forced to leave her country and took a lotus seed with her as a reminder of her past. Amy believed that the tale of hope inspired her students to explore their own traditions and heritage passed down through generations. Brian also succeeded in offering an example to illustrate what he meant by the source of inspiration: *Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World’s Fastest Woman* written by Kathleen Krull (2000). It was a story of Wilma Rudolph who was a prematurely born black child suffering from polio but later became the first woman to win three Olympic gold medals. Brian added that the book helped his students to understand what multiculturalism really meant: “I like this idea of inspiration, of realizing everybody on the face of this planet has dreams, has a will to want to perform well”.

These discussions lead to some insightful reflections on what the learning goals are when using multicultural literature. There seems to be too great an emphasis upon difference or things that divide us when we use the term multiculturalism, but those multicultural books as suggested by the participants may be great ways to help us to assert collective experience such as the pursuit of love, hope and inspiration.

**4.3 Multicultural Literature beyond Representation of Races and Colors**

The third theme responds to Research Question C: How do teachers make decisions regarding text selection? What criteria do they use? The general benchmark used by both
participants was rather consistent. They believed that a good multicultural literature goes beyond a simplistic representation of race and colors. The criteria would be further elaborated in the following three sub-themes: 1) authenticity as essential selection criterion; 2) multicultural literature promoting perspectives; 3) some literature lacking in profound messages.

4.3.1 Authenticity as Essential Selection Criterion

Although both participants raised the importance of authenticity in choosing multicultural literature, Brian was able to elaborate the criteria in more depth. First, he addressed the problem of many First Nation stories. He shared that he had the opportunity to read some stories that a professor collected from aboriginal people. Upon reading, he realized that these stories did not sound anything like those in the readers that he was using as a kid, in his own words:

The stories in the readers are not written by Aboriginal people. They were written by white people, mainly British, not even Canadians. And these are highly romanticized based on European model of stories.

This is consistent with Temple, Martinez, Yokota & Naylor (1998) who pointed out that some authors made intentional errors to meet the expectation of a mainstream readership. Second, he pointed out that some books over-generalized the culture of a certain community. He described that he once talked to an elder of a tribe in Northern Quebec and asked him a question about aboriginal culture. The answer Brian got from the elder was that he only knew his own community but not the rest. The experience reminded him that “aboriginal people are as diverse as we are.” Third, Brian emphasized that the authenticity and accuracy of illustrations was also crucial. He shared that he had several encounters with illustrators who did not read nor truly understand the story. Moreover, Brian was cautious about how women were portrayed in stories.
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

He commented that some stories did not provide a context and women in the cities probably did not dress as how it was described in the story.

These findings reflect that teachers have different levels of sensitivity on the issue of authenticity. As both an educator and a writer, Brian probably had more experience in the field of publishing and he was more able to address the authenticity matter from different perspectives. However, it might be difficult for most teachers to evaluate the authenticity of a book even though they are aware that such criterion is important.

4.3.2 Multicultural Literature Promoting Perspectives

Both participants favored books that promoted perspectives. Amy showed a book called Le Magasin de Mon Père written by Satomi Ichikawa (2004). She commented that the book was “light-hearted” but it “demonstrated a different way of life and different perspectives”. Brian also used a book to present the idea of perspectives: The Eye of the Wolf written by Daniel Pennac (2002). He introduced that the novel tells of a boy and a wolf that were born worlds apart but tried to understand each other’s story and eventually forged some emotional connection. Brian was passionate about the book and he remarked:

How and what we need to succeed in a multicultural society is that we have to know each other’s story. That’s how it works. To me, this is a good multicultural book because it’s about perspectives, about sharing perspectives and understanding.

He further addressed that the illustration of the book cover (Image 1) strongly conveyed the message of perspectives as well. It was a perceptual illusion in which readers may see a boy or a wolf.
These findings may reveal that some teachers approach multicultural literature from a broad scope. Instead of simply looking for race and color representations, some teachers value the message of perspectives from the books.

4.3.3 Some Books Lacking in Profound Messages

Amy commented that some books represent diversity “through the images only, but not really through the content”. However, she was not able to provide a specific book example to demonstrate what she meant. On the other hand, Brian pointed to a book that he believed was a poor case of multicultural literature: *STOP! STOP! Don’t be a bully!* written by Peter Jailall (2015) (Image 2). He explained that, from the book, readers did see a diversity of countries and people. However, he did not believe the book worked: “all we get here is surface meaning and values. And the message is shouted at you”. He reemphasized that he preferred books such as *The Eye of the Wolf* that convey a deeper meaning.
These discussions indicate that some teachers value the profound messages from multicultural literature. When making decisions regarding text selection, some teachers may try to avoid those books with superficial representation of multiculturalism.

4.4 Active Learning Strategies to Engage Multicultural Literature

The fourth theme responds to Research Question D: what instructional strategies do teachers adopt as part of a culturally responsive approach to teaching? In general, participants believed that multicultural literature could be integrated into all subjects and they usually adopted active learning strategies such as drama in teaching. To add more details to the theme, I identified two sub-themes: 1) integrating multicultural literature in all subjects; 2) drama as effective approach to explore multicultural literature.

4.4.1 Integrating Multicultural Literature in All Subjects

When talking about where teachers could incorporate multicultural literature into the
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

curriculum, Amy shared that she used multicultural literature in nearly all subjects such as French, English, social studies, drama and even dance. For instance, in a dance lesson, she used a multicultural book to provide students with a context before the whole class engaged themselves into the dancing of Aboriginal people. Brian offered an even more definite response: “there is nothing you can’t integrate multicultural literature into.”

To me, the findings may show that some teachers are positive about using multicultural literature in all school subjects. According to the model for integration of multicultural content by Banks (1999), these participants’ integration methods may fall into the Level 2 category Additive Approach. In other words, multicultural literature may be incorporated into the mainstream curriculum without changing the curriculum itself.

4.4.2 Drama as Effective Approach to Explore Multicultural Literature

Both participants considered learning strategies like drama as an effective and active approach in teaching multicultural literature. Amy shared a specific lesson of social studies to support her argument. After introducing a French book on the arrival of Europeans, she involved students into a drama activity where a group of ‘Europeans’ and a group of ‘First Nations’ taught each other different skills such as catching a fish. She found that her students enjoyed the lesson very much and the activity also encouraged students to understand the topic from different perspectives. Brian put forward a broader approach, in his own words, “active learning strategies”. He believed that active learning strategies such as drama are essential because students could experience the places, the characters and even the problems mentioned in the book.

These discussions reveal that these teachers found success in using drama as an engaging
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

pedagogical strategy to explore multicultural literature. This finding may have implications for a wider audience of teachers.

4.5 The Use of Multicultural Literature Affected by Teachers’ Experience

The last theme attempts to respond to Research Question E: what challenges do these teachers face when using multicultural literature in the classroom? Unlike in the previous themes where participants shared similar thoughts, they expressed different views on the resources and challenges of using multicultural literature. Their perspectives would be elaborated in the two sub-themes: 1) distinct views on the availability of resources; 2) challenges ranging from individual to system-wide levels.

4.5.1 Distinct Views on the Availability of Resources

When asked about the availability of resources that support integrating multicultural literature, Amy provided a very straightforward answer: “very limiting.” She commented that the books in the library were narrow in scope. Worse still, she always found books disappear from the library and she felt frustrated because she had no control over that. To solve the problems, she had to ask for resource support from her family and the colleagues. On the contrary, Brian viewed resources from a broader picture: “We have policy, the government documents of all levels, the courses and resources at the universities. There is no lack of support in that way.”

To me, the discrepancy between two views may come from participants’ different qualification and experience. Compared to Amy who is a relatively new teacher, Brian has been in the education field for 55 years and his work experience includes teaching at the university level, which provides him with advantage of accessing additional resources and support.
4.5.2 Challenges Ranging from Individual to System-wide Levels

Amy considered the biggest challenge she faced in her class was finding books of appropriate levels for the students. She commented that the books she read to her students were always too advanced and the language was difficult for students to comprehend by themselves. When asked if she had sought support, she was a little hesitant: “Well, I don’t know. I haven’t. I don’t know where I would go for that. I know there are a lot of books out there. Again, I haven’t”. On the other hand, Brian believed that the challenge lies in the whole education system. He commented that a lot of child development theories were suppressed in the test-driven curriculum. He suggested that, to overcome the challenge, teachers should help students appreciate literature through active learning strategies. In his words:

We should help kids to realize that the story or a poem is a living organism. It is not a butterfly pinned to a frame. It is alive, it’s alive in our life, it’s alive among us. So we’ve got to see the literature as dynamic inspiration. This is how we get out of the issue of cultural diversity. It is about the sensual quality of literature. Let’s read them aloud, let’s act it, let’s listen to it, let’s sing it. Get in and immerse yourself. And then we can discuss it. I think those practices are so important.

The challenges raised by two participants may fall into different levels, individual level and system-wide level. The findings may suggest that successful integration of multicultural literature requires teachers’ own endeavor as well as the support from the whole education system.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed five themes that emerged from my analysis of interviews with the two participants. I learned that both participants recognized the significance of engaging cultural identity in a multicultural classroom. They believed that integrating multicultural
children’s literature into the curriculum leads to enhanced cultural identity. They shared some book selection criteria such as authenticity and the promotion of perspectives. Active learning strategies, drama in particular, were adopted by participants to explore multicultural literature. Challenges of integrating multicultural literature ranged from individual concerns such as the difficulty of finding the right books to a broader concern such as the test-driven education system. The discrepancy among challenges may come from participants’ different qualification and experience.

In Chapter 5, I will first explain how the findings contribute to this existing body of educational research and identify areas for further research. Then, I will articulate recommendations for various stakeholders of the education system.
5.0 Introduction

This study was designed to learn from practicing teachers in Toronto who use multicultural children’s literature as responsive pedagogy for students to engage with their cultural identity. By conducting interviews with teachers and analyzing the findings, the research aims to answer the following questions: what does cultural identity mean to teachers and their students? what role does multicultural children’s literature play in engaging cultural identity? how do teachers make decisions regarding text selection? What criteria do they use? what instructional strategies do teachers adopt as part of a culturally responsive approach to teaching? what challenges do these teachers face when using multicultural literature in the classroom?

In this chapter, I will discuss the research findings in the context of existing literature, analyze the implications, make recommendations and identify areas for further research. First, I will provide an overview of the key findings and their significance as presented in Chapter four. Second, I will put my research findings into conversation with literature to draw out a set of implications for the education community and also for myself as a teacher candidate. Third, some recommendations will be put forward from this analysis to different educational stakeholders with an aim to enhance the effectiveness of integrating multicultural literature into educational settings. Next, I will articulate areas for further research based on the findings and implications. I will conclude the chapter by underscoring the significance of the research findings for the educational community.

5.1 Overview of key findings and their significance
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH
MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

After analyzing the data from two interviews with teacher participants, five broad themes have been identified in response to the five subsidiary research questions.

First, participants realized the importance of embracing cultural identity in the classroom. In terms of teachers’ cultural identity, they expressed their intention to constantly interrogate their own identities but such attempts were not always successful. Regarding students’ cultural identity, participants observed how cultural identity affects interpersonal relationship; however, they did not state a link between incorporating cultural identity and academic achievement among students. Second, participants viewed that multicultural literature serves as a mirror to students and a window to the world, which leads to the enhanced cultural identity. In particular, multicultural literature helps students develop positive self-identity and empathy for other cultural groups; meanwhile, it asserts collective experience such as hope and inspiration from the stories of the world. Third, participants believed that a good multicultural literature goes beyond representation of races and colors. Specifically, they viewed authenticity as an essential selection criterion and valued those books that promote perspectives. The fourth finding addresses the instructional approaches of using multicultural literature. Participants saw the possibilities of integrating multicultural literature in all subjects and they often adopted active learning strategies such as drama when using those books. The last theme discussed the resources and challenges of using multicultural literature, which may be categorized into two levels: individual and system-wide level. One participant expressed concern about the lack of resource support and the difficulty in finding age-appropriate books for students. Another participant believed that the test-driven education system hindered the use of multicultural literature in enhancing students’ cultural identity.
5.2 Implications

The research findings have implications on the use of multicultural literature for enhancing students’ cultural identity. This section is organized into broad and narrow implications. I will first address the implications of these findings for the educational stakeholders and community. I will then discuss the implications for my own pedagogy, philosophy of education, and practices as a teacher.

5.2.1 Broad: Implication for Educational Stakeholders and Community

The cultural identity of teachers and students

Both participants positioned themselves as teachers who attempted but often failed to sufficiently reflect on their own cultural identity. This suggests that teachers face the struggle and difficulty of keeping in mind their own cultural background to avoid marginalizing other cultures in the classroom. If teachers fail to identify their own cultural values, the dominant cultural perspective will very likely prevail and they may not be able to create the possibility for deeper connection with their students and families. There is a potential danger that there is no space in the classroom for students to discuss and explore a variety of cultures, beliefs and values. Cultural responsibility comes from “understanding self and others so that different values are understood and respected, rather than one set of values being imposed on all” (White, Zion and Kozleski, 2005). Teachers’ failure to constantly practice self-awareness might also suggest that teachers do not receive enough support from the school administration and there is not sufficient opportunity for professional development on the topic of critical reflectivity. There might also be
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

a possibility that the teacher education program has not provided guidance for pre-service teachers to explore their own cultural beliefs, values, biases and identities.

In terms of students’ cultural identity, both participants recognized how identity influences the interpersonal relationship among classmates, a view that is described by the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, Jackson & Ribeau, 2003). This may suggest that cultural identity is one of the important elements in enhancing the quality of classroom relationship. When facing a class with poor relationship among students, teachers may need to take cultural identity into consideration and examine whether there is a lack of understanding of each other’s cultures that leads to a broken bond. The finding might also suggest that the enhanced cultural identities of students contribute to the harmony and respect at schools. Surprisingly, none of the participants in the present study mentioned the correlation between cultural identity and academic success (Vicaire, 2010; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben and LaFromboise, 2001). These omissions may be due to the fact that student success is a result of a set of complex and interacting elements. It might be difficult for teachers to see a direct correlation between the two. However, this might lead to a potential danger that teachers do not recognize cultural identity as one of the trouble spots that lead to students’ low academic performance. Accordingly, those low academic achievers with a lack of cultural identity would not receive the proper support needed to manage the cultural conflict and make academic progress.

The role of multicultural literature

Participants of the study used multicultural literature in their classroom and recognized its potential to enhance cultural identity through developing positive self-identity and empathy of
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

other cultures as well as asserting collective experience. This may imply that multicultural literature has been commonly accepted as an inclusive literacy tool at schools in Toronto. This educational trend is supported by Pires (2011) who affirmed that literacy representations may have a profound impact on the construction of identity formation for students from minority cultures. In a cross-cultural teaching context, multicultural literature can help to narrow the gap between teachers and students which is exacerbated because of the differences in cultural and racial background. Participants’ imitative of embracing multicultural literature in the classroom, regardless of their teaching experience, may also suggest that teacher education program has placed emphasis on the culturally responsive teaching and drawn teacher candidates’ attention to those books as part of the pedagogy.

The selection criteria of multicultural literature

With regard to book selection, participants viewed authenticity as one of the most important selection criteria. They expressed the concern that books of other cultures are often written, translated or edited by whites. This may imply that teachers possess doubts about whether the books they select allow students develop an appreciation for accurate representations of other cultures. Their hesitation is supported by Thirumurthy (2011) who asserted 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 nonwhites.” Temple, Martinez, Yokota and Naylor (1998) also stated that some authors may make some intentional errors because they try to meet the expectation of a mainstream readership and culture. One participant specifically pointed out that she did not have enough professional judgment skills to assess the authenticity of the books. This concern may inform that the school administration and teacher education
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

program have not supported or prepared teachers to develop a critical lens in this regard. Meanwhile, participants shared the consensus that they preferred the books that promote perspectives to those with simple race and color representation. This may suggest that teachers value perspectives in multicultural education and they hope that those books can help them reach this goal.

Instructional strategies for integrating multicultural literature

Participants believed that active learning strategy such as drama could be an effective way of teaching multicultural literature across various subjects. Given the fact that both participants had education background in dramatic arts, this might imply that teachers can draw upon their backgrounds and strengths to help enact a multicultural curriculum. Morrell and Morrell (2012) emphasized that the text selection is important however the approach to teaching the literature is imperative. As insightfully pointed out, 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.”

Challenges of integrating multicultural literature

The participant with relatively less teaching experience expressed the difficulty in finding the age-appropriate multicultural books while the more experienced teacher participant indicated that there is no lack of resources. This finding may suggest that the confidence and ability of integrating multicultural literature partly relies upon a teacher’s experience and professional network. This may also imply that some school administrations have not provided sufficient support to aid teachers in accessing crucial multicultural resources. Consequently, the concerns
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

about the test-driven education system were raised as a challenge to integrate multicultural literature. This may imply that some teachers’ attempts to explore multicultural literature in class are hindered by the emphasis upon performance on standardized testing.

5.2.2 Narrow: Implication for Personal Teaching Practices and Philosophy

The process and the finding of this study have led to several implications for my own teaching practices and philosophy of education. First, a particular area of attention that has emerged for me as a result of this research is the critical role of cultural identity. It urges me to constantly reflect on my own cultural identity while I strive to help my students develop their own identities and truly celebrate the diversity in the classroom. Second, I am more convinced of the importance of multicultural literature as an inclusive tool to enhance identity and promote cross-cultural understanding. However, the study also makes me more concerned with the selection of the texts for my future lessons and the instructional approaches. Finally, I will carry with me the teaching philosophy which is grounded in self-reflection and embracing diversity. I will strive to reflect on the values and cultural codes being promoted and reinforced in the classroom, and create an inclusive learning community where students’ cultures, contributions and perspectives are respected.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and implications of the current study, the following are recommendations for different educational stakeholders.
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

Teachers

Teachers should critically reflect on their own identities and experiences and how these may influence their instructional decision-making in a multicultural classroom. They should also take the initiative to learn about students’ cultures and backgrounds and use them as the base for helping students to develop their own identities and deal with cross cultural conflict. Recognizing culture as a complex construction, teachers should help eliminate cultural stereotypes and provide students with exposure to multiple narratives and perspectives. In terms of the use of multicultural literature, teachers are encouraged to participate in professional development opportunities that support them in effectively integrating multicultural literature in the classroom. When critically examining the book selection, teachers should always keep in mind that the power of books may nurture or, conversely, undermine students’ sense of self and the world. Teachers are invited to develop a list of criteria which may guide them to assess the quality of those multicultural books. Teachers also need to examine students’ responses, reflect on instructional approaches and adapt instruction based on students’ needs.

School administrators

School administrators are encouraged to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own cultural identities and learn about culturally responsive pedagogy. They should also organize community meetings, conferences and forums with parents to better understand the cultures and the needs of their students and their families. The school needs to strive to provide updated resource guidance for teachers in the realm of multicultural literature. They may also create a teacher collaboration platform with a supportive professional culture where teachers could share their resources and learn from each other.
Teacher education

Through course activities, teacher candidates should be invited to participate in an ongoing self-reflection journal of their own culture and background. The course materials should draw their attention to the correlations between cultural identity and students’ experience and academic achievement at schools. Specific instructional strategies for implementing culturally relevant pedagogies, or in specific, teaching multicultural literature, should be introduced. More resources toolkits should be provided to teacher candidates so as to help them locate relevant printed and online resources. The literacy program should also equip candidates with a critical lens to assess the quality of multicultural literature and teaching materials as a whole. The overall training program should model the culturally responsive pedagogy in all aspects including curriculum, instructional approaches, course materials and assessments.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Whereas this present study shed light on the connection between cultural identity and multicultural literature in a multicultural classroom, there is ample room for further study on this topic. First, although there exists the model of integration of multicultural content by Banks (1999) which examines the literature integration in a school-wide picture, there is little detailed guidance on how teachers could effectively use multicultural books in their lessons with appropriate pre-, during, and post-reading activities. Second, there needs to be a closer examination of students’ responses to the lessons of using multicultural literature, which may provide insights on the effectiveness of text selection and instructional approaches. Finally, while
there are some guiding principles of assessing the quality of multicultural books such as authenticity, a list of specific indicators should be developed to guide teachers’ decision-making in the realm of multicultural book selection.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This research sought to address the potential of multicultural children’s literature to enhance students’ cultural identity and creating an inclusive learning environment. There are two important ideas that are supported by this study. On one hand, teachers need to view students as cultural beings and provide opportunities for them to validate their cultural identity. To do so, teachers should first examine their own identity and be aware of how their personal culture influences instructional decision makings. On the other hand, the successful use of multicultural literature to enhance cultural identity relies on both the quality of multicultural book selection as well as the effectiveness of instructional approaches. Teachers should constantly work on these two aspects to create a meaningful culturally responsive classroom.

On the whole, as a teacher who strives for equity and inclusivity in education, I view this research experience as a stepping stone and continue to critically draw on professional knowledge and research to embrace the rainbow of diverse cultural identities and backgrounds in our classroom.
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

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EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

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EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS


EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS


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EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS


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EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

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EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS


Appendix A: 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 student. I am studying how teachers use multicultural children’s literature to engage the topic of cultural identity for the purposes of a graduate research paper. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this topic as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for this assignment this year is Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. 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 a 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you, outside of school time.

The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research 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 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 audio 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.

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.

Sincerely,

Wenting Yin
Researcher
M.T. Candidate, OISE/UT
wenting.yin@mail.utoronto.ca
Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic
Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream
Master of Teaching Program
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
OISE/University of Toronto
angela.macdonald@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 Wenting Yin and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________

Name (printed): ______________________________

Date: __________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study for the purposes of a graduate research paper. The research aims to learn about the use of multicultural children’s literature as responsive pedagogy for students to engage cultural identity. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes. I will ask you a series of questions, and these will include questions about your background, beliefs, practices and some supports or challenges you have. I want to remind you of your right to choose not to answer my questions. Before we begin, do you have any questions by now?

Background

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher/educator?
2. What grades and subjects do you currently teach, and which have you previously taught?
3. Can you describe the community in which your current school is situated (i.e. size, demographics, cultural diversity, socioeconomic status)?
4. As you know, you are here today because I am interested in learning how you use multicultural children’s literature to teach about cultural identity. Can you begin by telling me how you developed an interest and commitment to integrating multicultural children’s literature into your teaching practice? (listen, and the probe if necessary, re: personal, professional, and educational experiences they may have had that contributed to their interest and commitment)
5. A component of this study is focused on the notion of cultural identity. Can you please describe for me your own cultural identity?

Teacher Beliefs

6. What does cultural identity mean to you?
7. In your view, what role does and/or should cultural identity have in curriculum and in students’ experience of schooling? Why does cultural identity matter in the educational context, especially in a multicultural classroom?
8. Can you tell me what the term “multicultural” means to you?
9. What is your perspective on how the school system responds to multiculturalism?
10. How would you define “multicultural children’s literature”? What common characteristics do these books have, in your view? Can you give me some examples of books that you consider to be “multicultural children’s literature”?
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

11. Why do you integrate multicultural children’s literature into your teaching? What potential for learning do you believe these books offer for students?

Teacher Practices

12. Generally speaking, how do you create opportunities for students to learn about cultural identity? What instructional approaches and strategies do you use?

13. Where do you locate these opportunities for learning in the curriculum? (i.e. which subject areas, strands, etc.)

14. Can you give me an example of a specific lesson that you have conducted that created opportunity for students to learn about cultural identity?
   a) What were your learning goals?
   b) What opportunities for learning did you create?
   c) What resources did you use?
   d) How did your students respond? What, if anything, did you notice about which students responded this way? What outcomes did you observe from students?

15. Now, more specifically, where in your curriculum do you typically incorporate multicultural children’s literature?

   What kinds of factors do you consider when choosing multicultural books to use in your teaching? What are the criteria that you use to select multicultural children’s literature?

16. Can you give me an example of a specific lesson that you conducted using multicultural children’s literature?
   a) What grade were you teaching?
   b) What were you learning goals?
   c) What book did you use? Why did you use this book?
   d) How did you integrate the book into the lesson?
   e) What did you do with the book during the lesson? What did the students do?
   f) How did your students respond / what outcomes did you observe? From which students did you observe these outcomes?
   g) What do you think your students learned about culture and cultural identity from this lesson?
   h) How do you measure the effectiveness of these books?

17. Have you ever shared your cultural identity with your students? If so, why and in what context? And how did they respond?

18. Do you think your cultural background affects your instructional decision-making when teaching with multicultural children’s literature? If yes, how so? If not, why not?
EMBRACING THE RAINBOW: ENHANCING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITH MULTICULTURAL CHILDREN’S LITERATURE IN CANADIAN CLASSROOMS

Supports, Barriers/Next Steps

19. What range of factors and resources support you in this work?

20. What challenges/obstacles have you encountered when teaching about cultural identity (generally) and in terms of using multicultural children’s literature (specifically)?
   - How have you overcome, or how are you working to overcome these challenges? What would further support you in meeting these challenges?

21. Do you have any advice for beginning teachers who are committed to integrating multicultural children’s literature into their curriculum?

Thank you very much for your time and considered responses.