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## Primary Teachers' Decisions for Selecting Multicultural Classroom Read Alouds

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PRIMARY TEACHERS' DECISIONS FOR SELECTING MULTICULTURAL  
CLASSROOM READ ALOUDS

By

Jennifer Lemke

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Kay Keiser

Omaha, Nebraska

April, 2020

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## **ABSTRACT**

Primary Teachers' Decisions for Selecting Multicultural Classroom Read Alouds

Jennifer Lemke

University of Nebraska, 2020

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As the diversity amongst the student population in schools increase, it is important that teachers include literature that contain a variety of settings and themes that allow students to explore the diverse perspectives and cultures that surround them. Research has shown that including literature that reflects the diverse experiences of students not only increases individual student's self-esteem and confidence, but the respect and empathy for other cultures. Therefore, supporting the need for teachers to be critical and intentional in the titles they select to read aloud is important. This phenomenographic research study identifies factors that influence how primary teachers in one Midwest suburban district select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds.

For the purpose of this study, an open-ended questionnaire collected information from Kindergarten through second grade teachers in one Midwest, suburban school district to gain understanding into what multicultural titles were used in their classrooms and the factors and purpose that influenced their title selection process. Analysis of the responses indicated that illustrations, theme and culture were common factors that influenced teachers' title selection process while holidays, curriculum and social emotional learning were the most common purposes of the titles selected.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

How are teachers in today's classrooms valuing the diverse perspectives that exist amongst learners? Many schools and districts have mottos and mission statements that discuss the need to create safe and caring environments where all students are equipped and prepared to be responsible and respectful citizens and successfully meet the challenges of the future, but are schools and districts truly fulfilling this mission? As diversity grows in American schools, it is critical that educators examine their instructional practices and resources to determine effective ways to provide an education where all cultures and perspectives are present and valued in the curriculum. With the growing presence of diversity, educators need to be equipped with resources to develop classrooms that are both culturally authentic and responsive to the student they serve (Gay, 2000; Irwin, 1999; Ivey-Soto, 2013; National Association for Multicultural Education, 2016).

Due to globalization and immigration, Americans are becoming more diverse both racially and ethnically (Cohn & Caumont, 2016). Nearly 39 million immigrants have come to the United States since 1965, with the majority being from Asia and Latin America. In 2015, the US Census Report stated that 14% of the United States population was foreign-born and predicted that this same population will increase to 19% by 2060 (US Census, 2015). Both the Asian and Hispanic populations are expected to triple over the next 40 years causing the racial profile of the United States to change vastly. By 2055, there will not be an ethnic or racial majority (Deprez, 2018).

As the nation becomes more ethically and racially diverse, so do schools.

Between Fall 2000 and Fall 2015, the percentage of white students enrolled in public schools decreased from 61 to 49% and black students enrolled also decreased from 17 to 15%. In contrast, there was an increase in enrollment of Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander students during this time period, making up 31% of the student population (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics projects that in 2027 white students will continue to decline to 45% of the student population in US schools, while the population of students of color increase (2019).

As diversity grows in both our nation and schools, educators are faced with the challenge of equipping students to be contributing members of a multicultural society and providing an education that values and teaches diverse perspectives. (Suh & Samuel, 2011; Vittrup, 2016). To develop this belief and respect, educators have to cultivate multiculturalism and create equal opportunities for all students regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, culture, social class, religion or exceptionality to experience educational equality (Banks, 1993). Multicultural education “is grounded in ideals of social justice, education equity, and a dedication to facilitating educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings, locally, nationally, and globally” (Gorski, 2001, p.1). It assists students in developing morally and becoming citizens who respect, embrace and understand others regardless of differences in an effort to help students develop positive attitudes and empathy toward other cultures (Banks & Banks, 2005). One way educators can teach respect and cultural pluralism to students is through the use of multicultural literature.

Access to authentic literature is one of the most essential elements of any school curriculum or resource for educators to increase student achievement and motivation. (Ciercierski & Bintz, 2015; Trelease 2013; Van Kleeck, Stahl, & Bauer 2003). Literature, such as children's books, not only provides essential foundational knowledge and skills to students, but also provides a critical lens into the world they live. Bishop (1990a) calls literature a social agent, serving as a catalyst in students discovering various cultures and its values, which behaviors are acceptable and appropriate, and how one must function to be a contributing member of society. Schools and educators create an environment where all students acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions essential in being contributing citizens of a pluralistic society. To do this, our students need meaningful opportunities to explore various cultures and perspectives, examine and question their assumptions and beliefs, and develop acceptance and respect for all members of society (Harper & Brand, 2010; Hillard, 1995; National Association for Multicultural Education, 2016). One meaningful way to enhance students' awareness and acceptance of others is through the use of multicultural literature. Bishop (1990b) believed multicultural literature to be the most powerful component of multicultural curriculum as the books we select to read to students are paramount in creating an equitable society.

The definition of multicultural literature has evolved as cultural diversity and awareness have developed both globally and in our school systems. Cai and Bishop (1994) first explained that multicultural literature, "challenges the existing canon by expanding the curriculum to include literature from a variety of cultural groups" (p. 59). While this term's original intent was to define race and ethnicity, it now encompasses gender, class, ability, age and sexual orientation (Gopalakrishnan, 2011; Holland &

Mongillo, 2016). The purpose of expanding the definition was to embrace diversity, promote inclusion of all cultures and engage students in critical thinking that leads to a better understanding and awareness of the various perspectives and cultures represented both in schools and in society.

There are many reasons that teachers promote and use multicultural literature in the classroom. The use of multicultural literature increases students' self-esteem. When students see themselves in the literature used in the classroom they believe their perspective and culture to be both important and valued by other members of the learning community and society (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Lopez-Robertson & Haney, 2017). On the other hand, when children find their existences to be invisible in the books they read, we must ask ourselves how children will look at and relate to a world that has deemed them so unimportant they do not fill the pages of books written for children, families, and schools (Jones, 2008, p. 43).

The incorporation of multicultural literature also creates opportunities for students to explore other cultures and perspectives that are different from their own. This knowledge and appreciation for others can combat prejudice and bias while promoting acceptance and empathy (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Ramirez & Ramirez, 1994). By creating an environment for students to critically examine and explore various cultures and perspectives, their understanding and awareness of diversity increases and the ability to take action against social injustice heightened.

If students are provided with authentic, relevant opportunities to explore high quality multicultural literature, they are more likely to show understanding and empathy for the diverse cultures and perspectives that exist in society. If teachers have access and

are better informed on how to evaluate and integrate multicultural texts, teachers will be more capable of including and embracing the diverse cultures and communities that exist in American schools (National Association for Multicultural Education, 2016).

### **Framework**

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory describes the relationship between a reader and text. This approach explore two stances when reading text; efferent and aesthetic. While efferent refers to the reader's ability to pull information or facts from the text, the aesthetic response explores how readers interpret, evaluate, and respond to make sense of the text and construct meaning (Cai, 2008; Parenti, 2013). Rosenblatt discusses that the reader's relationship with the text is just as important as the text itself and is foundational in the reader having aesthetic experiences that result in powerful emotional and intellectual insights (Connell, 2000). When feelings, emotions and perceptions are provoked by the text, the reader expands their perspective and understanding of various cultures and has an opportunity to clarify their own values or misconceptions about the world around them (Cai, 2008). Studies have shown that reading and responding to multicultural literature has an impact on students' attitudes and perspectives toward other racial and ethnic groups and the reader has a deeper understanding of the story when they become personally involved (Alteri, 1996; Dressel 2003).

Like Rosenblatt, Ruth Sims Bishop (1990a) discussed the need for students to have opportunities to think critically about their personal thoughts and experiences through the use of text; specifically multicultural literature. Bishop supported the need for literature that embodied diverse perspectives and underrepresented groups allowing students to reflect on, "how we arrived at our present state, and to inspire them to actions

that will create and maintain social justice, (Bishop, 1997, p. 19). Bishop discussed that literature can be a transformational process in which the text might not only be a reflection of their own life, but one of the “larger human experience” (Bishop, 1990a, p. ix). Bishop categorizes these transactions into three different ways in which the reader interacts with multicultural literature. This framework discusses that literature can serve as a window, mirror or sliding glass door for individual readers to find themselves and their personal experiences reflected in literature or provide an opening into worlds that are diverse from their own perspectives and experiences.

Literature serving as a mirror reflects the life of the reader. The reader is able to see their culture, perspective, experiences or identity represented in the text. When the text serves as a mirror to the reader, the reader feels validated, their experiences or perspectives not as different from others, and their desire to connect more to the world through literature increased (Bishop, 1990b; Tschida, Ryan & Ticknor, 2014). Bishop (1990b) also argues that,

When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part. (p. 557)

Readers look to books to show them their value and their place or part in the world, so it is crucial that educators be intentional in incorporating marginalized or underrepresented populations authentically into instruction to value the diverse cultures and perspectives that exist amongst students.



Literature as a window refers to when readers are able to gain insight into others' culture or perspective that is different from their own. When readers consistently read literature that serves as mirrors or as a "reflection of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world—a dangerous ethnocentrism" (Bishop, 1990a, p. x). Books may serve as the only avenue for some readers to meet individuals whose viewpoints or cultures are different from their own. This exposure will result in a new understanding and awareness of the global and contrasting viewpoints in society (Lopez-Robertson & Haney, 2017; Tschida et al., 2014).

Literature as a sliding glass door, similar to a window, refers to when the reader gains insight into a culture or perspective that is different from his or her own, but is also changed or impacted by the experience with the text. The change or impact may not be visible to others, but it leaves a lasting impression on the reader and may change their perspective or encourage them to take action in their own world. These books probe emotions in the reader and cause the reader to ask questions that might encourage advocacy (Johnson, Koss & Martinez, 2018).

### **Purpose Statement**

While qualities of excellent multicultural literature and powerful read alouds are known, what factors or process teachers use to make multicultural title selections needs further exploration so that students are given authentic opportunities to critically examine and explore various cultures and perspectives, and develop an understanding and awareness of diversity that exists in the world around them (Cai, 2008; Ciercierski & Bintz, 2015; Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Iwai, 2015; Layne, 2015; Trelease, 2013; Van

Kleeck, Stahl, & Bauer 2003; Wilkens & Gamble, 1998). Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenographic study was to describe factors that influence how primary teachers in one Midwest suburban district select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds.

### **Central Research Question**

The main research question was as follows:

What factors influence how primary teachers in one Midwest suburban school district select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds?

### **Operational Definitions**

**Multicultural literature:** Texts that embodies diverse racial, ethnic and social perspectives that is characteristic of pluralistic society and of the world (Bishop, 1997).

**Read aloud:** An interactive exchange between the teacher, students and text that is supplemental to the district curriculum (Hoffman, 2011).

**Primary teacher:** A teacher working in a kindergarten, first or second grade classroom.

**Cultural accurate text:** Texts that show substantial evidence of fact and that the author and publisher have been truthful and diligent in researching and providing the reader with accurate information and interpretation of the culture (Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013).

### **Significance of Study**

The purpose of multicultural education is to provide students with opportunities to explore diverse perspectives and cultural groups (Banks & Banks, 2005). The result of these opportunities can be children who have a deepened respect and understanding of their own and others beliefs, traditions and perspectives (Harper & Brand, 2010).

Multicultural literature is one way to introduce children to concepts and practices inherent to various cultures and plays a large role in the development of their cross-cultural understanding (Harper & Brand, 2010; Hillard, 1995). As classrooms become more diverse, the titles that teachers select to read aloud to students should be ones that promote respect and empathy. It is also important that the literature selected by teachers contain a variety of settings and themes and allow students to consider diverse values and perspectives. Exploring diverse perspectives creates opportunities for the text to speak to all children versus a limited number (Harper & Brand, 2010). While there is extensive research supporting the use of multicultural literature in the classroom, little research has been conducted to identify the factors that influence primary teachers' evaluation and selection process of multicultural titles for read alouds. This study will explore primary teacher's evaluation and selection process of multicultural titles and what transactional experiences are created for students to explore diverse perspectives and cultures. Identifying how teachers selected multicultural titles for classroom use and their intended purpose may assist school districts in developing a criteria process that best aligns with research-based practices and creating classroom environments for students to authentically explore and examine the pluralistic society they are a part of.

### **Organization of the Study and Future Steps**

The study begins with an introduction outlining the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, the conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, and limitations and delimitations of the research. The next piece contains the literature review. The literature review is divided into two sections. The first section focusing on multicultural literature will include the history and evolution of

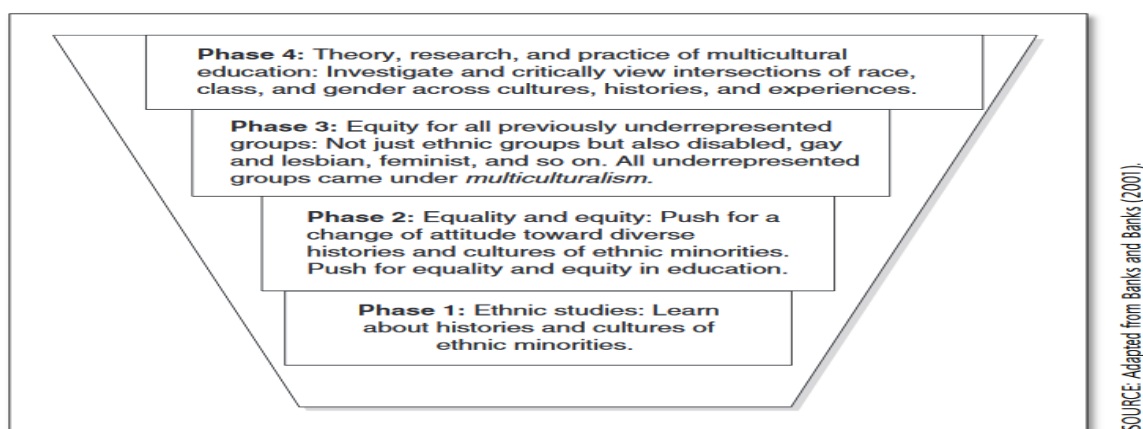
multicultural literature, the evaluation and selection process of multicultural literature, literature as a transactional and instructional tool, multicultural literature's impact on students and teacher's perceptions. The second section focusing on read alouds will include the definition of read alouds, the benefits of read alouds for primary students and the social and emotional benefits of read alouds. The methodology is included next to discuss the framework of the research design, data collection procedures and the analysis process. Next, information about the research participants are shared, as well as themes found throughout the questionnaire process. Lastly, a discussion of the research is shared, along with next steps.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORY OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

Multicultural literature derives from multiculturalism, a result from the Civil Rights Movement in which efforts focused to give “voice and equal rights to underrepresented people” (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 21). This reform gave way to accurately recognizing cultures and ethnicities to move toward inclusivity outside of the mainstream culture; otherwise known in school systems as multicultural education. A major goal was that students from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures experience educational equality. For multicultural education to be implemented effectively, researchers believed that institutional changes such as teaching materials, instructional styles, students and teachers’ perceptions and attitudes needed to be examined and shifted (Bank & Banks, 2005).

Banks and Banks (2001) outlined four phases of multiculturalism from its earliest stage to its evolvement. See Figure 1.



Children’s Literature: A Critical Issues Approach (p. 23), by A. Gopalakrishnan, 2011, Los Angeles: Sage. Reprinted with Permission

Figure 1: The Four Phases of Multiculturalism as It Developed Over Time

The first phases focused on learning about the history and cultures of underrepresented perspectives. Educators quickly realized that this approach did not change or alter perceptions toward underrepresented populations or understanding of the current state of these groups. This understanding led to the second phase, which pushed for educational equity and equality. This phase focused to change the perception of the mainstream culture towards underrepresented populations. The third phase developed when these underrepresented groups realized their disadvantage and demanded that their cultures' history and perspective be included in multicultural education. It was during this phases that the perspectives of women, individuals with disabilities and the experience of gay and lesbian individuals began to be included in multicultural education (Gopalakrishnan, 2011). The final phase of the development of multiculturalism is a focus on "theory, research, and practice that interrelate variables connected to race, class and gender" (Banks & Banks, 2001, p. 11).

The multiculturalism movement was a significant factor in the develop and expansion of not only children's literature, but multicultural literature. This movement brought awareness and consciousness of needing literature that depicted different ethnicities, cultures, experiences and perspectives in our classroom and curriculum that were different from the mainstream culture and during this time not consistently published. (Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013). While this term in the beginning developments of multiculturalism addressed equality and equity for individuals of colors, the definition of multicultural, as displayed in the phases, developed over time.

### **Developing Definition of Multicultural Literature**

Multicultural literature has been defined in terms of the degree or phase of multiculturalism. Its purpose was to help individuals explore diverse cultures and perspectives differing from the mainstream. When beginning to define multicultural literature, Cai and Bishop (1994), first explained that multicultural literature, “challenges the existing canon by expanding the curriculum to include literature from a variety of cultural groups” (p. 59). It was during the 1980s that the term multicultural literature was commonly used to refer to the books with characters of color (Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013). Bishop (1997) then extended the definition to embody the diverse racial, ethnic and social perspectives that existed in society. Multicultural books validate all sociocultural experiences and develop the readers’ social and cultural conscious (Gopalakrishnan, 2011). The purpose of defining this literature was to ensure that students were exposed to various perspectives and cultures that were authentic to both their lives and the lives of others. If children can see their lives and perspectives in the curriculum and literature used in the classroom, it heightens engagement and awareness in the learning environment. In order to heighten this awareness and cultural conscious, educators must critically evaluate and select literature to assist students in seeing the role literature can play in their development and understanding of the world around them.

### **Evaluation and Criteria Process**

One of the primary reasons for using multicultural literature in the classroom is to help students feel valued and their culture respected and represented in the learning environment (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Iwai, 2015; Wilkens & Gamble, 1998). Literature selected for classroom use will not only affect how students view themselves and their culture, but how others view it as well. “In developing an understanding of

different lifestyles, multicultural literature encourages a broad range of social relationships, openness, and interest in others” (Wilkins & Gamble, 1998, p. 28). Having minority characters is simply not enough and that like all high-quality literature, various plot elements and characterization must be well developed and coexist with cultural accuracies (Wilkins & Gamble, 1998). The criteria below are essential elements many researchers agree are characteristic of high-quality multicultural literature:

**Author.** High quality, multicultural literature is written by authors who are members of the cultural group they write about. This provides authentic, first hand perspectives to the experiences and emotions of the character. For example, if the story is about an African American living in the inner city it is critical that the author be an African American who once lived in the inner city. Educators should be cautious when writers are sharing experiences that they cannot first-hand relate to as it may not be realistically portrayed or an accurate voice to the experience or cultural group (Wilkins & Gamble, 1998).

**Cultural Accuracy.** It is also critical that the literature used in classrooms contain cultural accuracies. The text should show substantial evidence of fact and that the author and publisher have been truthful and diligent in researching and providing the reader with accurate information and interpretation of the culture. These accuracies are crucial in the reader constructing truthful perceptions of the culture and avoidance of perpetuating stereotypes or generalizations (Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013). For example, not all Mexicans wear sombreros so to avoid tokenism authors need to refrain from these generalizations. It is through reading about the culture that individuals gain a sense and understanding for



the perspective and “subtleties of diverse people’s culture and lifestyles” (Iwai, 2015, p. 84).

**Illustrations.** Illustrations play a crucial role in helping students connect to the culture and context of the story. Yuko Iwai (2015) discussed that, “accurate illustrations allow children to see how characters in a story dress, eat, and interact; how they observe and preserve their traditions; how they celebrate special occasions; where they live; and how they feel in different situations” (p. 81). Each character should be treated as an individual while conveying characteristics that are common to all people and cultures. Illustrations must not perpetuate stereotypes or portray individuals of one culture or ethnicity to look the same, but rather represent the diversity that exist within cultural groups.

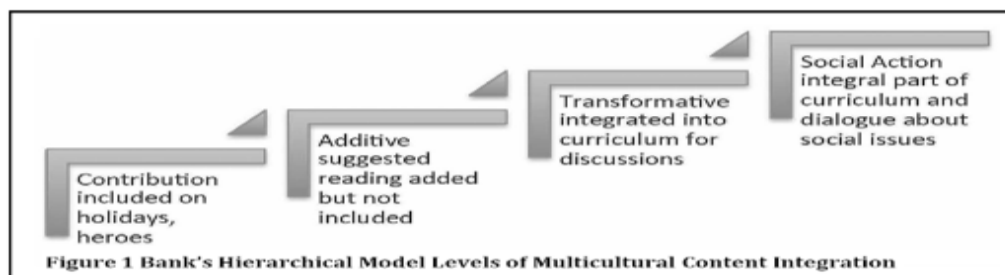
**Text.** Just as the illustrations, the text and dialogue of a book are evaluated to determine if it contains stereotypes or misrepresentations of a culture. It is important that characters of any cultural group be unique from one another and have their own personalities and emotions. Underrepresented characters should be strong and able to embrace the values and traditions of their cultures when faced with adversity, rather than adopt those of mainstream society (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Wilkins & Gamble, 1998). It is also important that the dialogue between characters be relevant to the story and not propagating stereotypes or misuse of language. For example, words written in a foreign language should be spelled correctly and used in the appropriate context. This authenticity makes characters believable and relatable members of a social or cultural group.

**Characters.** Another element essential for evaluation when determining high quality literature is that of the character and themes. To represent diversity, the characters must also be diverse in nature. To do this the literature must contain characters who are authentic to real life. This meaning that there are characters in the story who make good choices while others bad, characters that are strong with others who are weak, and characters who are positive role models and others who are not (Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013). These diverse portrayals will aid readers in not overgeneralizing populations or maintaining stereotypes in regards to various cultures or perspectives.

Exposing students to high quality multicultural literature can be the first step in fostering respect and appreciation for various perspectives and cultures, but simple exposure to these texts is not enough. Teachers must integrate these texts into their instructional practices and educate themselves and their students on the issues and discourse of diversity.

### **Instructional Integration of Multicultural Literature**

Educators today face the challenge of meeting students' academic needs, while using approaches and incorporating instructional procedures that are inclusive to all students' perspectives and cultures. In consistency with the four phases of multiculturalism, Banks outlined a four-tier approach to assist educators in the inclusion of multicultural content. While the approach was not specific to literature, this approach is applicable to the implementation of multicultural literature in the classroom (Banks, 1989; Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013). See figure 2.



Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform (p. 17), by J. Banks, 1989. *Trotter Review*. Reprinted with Permission.

Figure 2: Four-tier Approach to Integrating Multicultural Content

The *Contribution Approach* refers to educators using multicultural literature to discuss holidays, heroes, and customs of various cultures. With this approach, cultures and ethnicities are explored primarily related to specific holiday, events, or celebrations with little exploration of the culture that is unrelated to the event or occasion (Tucker, 2014). For example, teachers might celebrate Martin Luther King Day without mention of the history or relevance behind the day (Ramsey, Williams & Vold, 2003). While this might be the easiest approach for educators, it does not present a global view for students of the various cultural and ethnic perspectives that exist globally. This level of integration does not give students a robust view of the pluralistic nature of American society and instead promotes students seeing ethnic and cultural groups as outsiders who are given acknowledgement that may or may not be justified (Carter, Larke, Singleton-Taylor & Santos, 2007). This approach also tends to gloss over the true issues of oppression or victimization of the cultural or ethnic group (Banks, 1989).

The *Additive Approach* refers to educator's addition of multicultural content into various concepts, themes or units without integrating or adjusting the structure of the content. This is accomplished through the integration of multicultural literature without changing the focus or content of the unit substantially (Banks, 1989). For example, books written by authors of color might be added to the existing school reading list, without examining of how this might impact the program as a whole (Ramsey, Williams & Vold, 2003). Research suggests that educators chose not to integrate or alter the unit's structure do to their own comfort level with content or possess little understanding of multicultural literature (Tucker, 2014).

The *Transformative Approach* refers to how educators infuse curriculum and resources that to explore the concept critically and from multiple points of views giving students a lens for examining the status quo and engaging in transformative dialogue (Gibson & Parks, 2014). This approach explores content and concepts through a variety of mediums and often-divergent perspectives to develop a critical and well-rounded understanding and perspective. Teachers and school administrators examine the whole curriculum and expand or reshape the content to represent multiple points of view, with the issues of power and oppression that might influence what content is considered most valuable and of the greatest use to children living within a particular society (Ramsey, Williams & Vold, 2003, p. 148).

It is suggested that through this transactional learning that individuals construe, validate, or potentially reformulate their beliefs and values to guide future decision making and actions (Szecsi, Spillman, Vazquez-Montilla & Mayberry, 2010). This

infusion creates frames of reference that will extend students' understandings of the landscape, development, and intricacies of society (Tucker, 2014).

The *Social Action* approach, like the Transformative approach infuses multicultural literature that encourages students to think critically from multiple perspectives, but adds elements that require students to take action and/or make decisions in regards to the concept, problem or issue (Tucker, 2014). An example of this would be creating an opportunity for students to create classroom rules that ensure both boys and girls have equal access to the materials available in the classroom (Ramsey, Williams & Vold, 2003). A major goal of Social Action approach is “to teach students thinking and decision-making skills, to empower them, and to help them acquire a sense of political efficacy” (Banks, 1989, p. 18). These goals are all encompassing and accomplished through students approaching the text and world around them with a critical lens. This goal can be accomplished through critical literacy.

Critical literacy is defined by Gopalakrishnan (2011)

as the process of becoming literate about a society or group through questioning, through seeing things from various viewpoints, through uncovering biases and reading “between the lines,” and through critically analyzing the workings of a society historically and culturally, in order to thrive in it. (p. 9)

Instead of simply reading the text, students are engaged to question the beliefs and assumptions of others, and use the knowledge acquired through experiences to take action or become change agents. It is also through exploring text and topics from multiple viewpoints and perspectives, that students gain a viewpoint to understand and make sense of the world around them (Gopalakrishnan, 2011).

By providing students with high quality literature and meaningful experiences to investigate society, our students learn to question, inquire, and be active participants in the learning process. These critical approaches lead to students embracing their own culture as well as developing empathy and acceptance for others cultures and perspectives.

### **Multicultural Literature and its Impact on Students**

By using multicultural literature in the classroom, teachers are creating a more complex and authentic representation of the pluralistic society students are a part of. High quality literature can increase students' awareness that there are others in the world like them, which can encourage students to share their own story and perspective with others, in turn building connections with their own individuality and school community (Lopez-Robertson & Haney, 2017). When children feel a personal connection to the culture portrayed in the literature, a child's self-esteem increases (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Lopez-Robertson & Haney, 2017).

The use of multicultural literature can also result in more culturally and socially conscious individuals. For students to mature in understanding and acceptance of others, they need to explore concepts or topics from multiple perspectives to understand the various viewpoints that surround it. By immersing students in a variety of literature that reflects diverse cultures and perspectives present both in the classroom and society, students' understanding and acceptance of various cultural groups is enhanced (Morgan & York, 2009).

Analysis and exploration of a variety of cultures and perspectives can also create opportunities for students to examine their own understanding, beliefs and biases through

a different lens. This can harvest other perspectives and transform students' beliefs and actions. (Szeci, et al., 2010). Multicultural literature can extend or enlighten a students' understanding, which can combat prejudice or encourage a student to take action to obtain social justice or equity.

While the benefits and impact multicultural literature can have on students is evident, teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards multicultural literature play a critical role into its successful integration into school curriculum.

### **Teacher Perceptions towards Multicultural Literature**

To meet the needs of students in the classroom, educators should understand the framework and goals of multicultural education, be sensitive to the diverse perspectives in the classroom, and adjust instruction or content to engage students in the learning process. Teacher attitudes and perceptions toward the use of multicultural education has a profound impact on students (Holland & Mongillo, 2016). Teachers' beliefs and behaviors can shape students' interactions, awareness of diverse perspectives and cultures, and their acceptance and empathy of others (Irwin, 1999).

The National Association for Multicultural Education (2016) produced standards of multicultural education and educators demanding that,

School staff that is culturally competent, and to the greatest extent possible racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse. Staff must be multi-culturally literate and capable of including and embracing families and communities to create an environment that is supportive of multiple perspectives, experiences, and democracy. (para. 5)

Teachers are a critical factor in the implementation of multicultural education and the use of multicultural literature in the classroom. In order for teachers to be responsive to the diverse cultures and backgrounds present in the learning environment, teachers must equip themselves with the knowledge, skills and disposition to explore concepts from various viewpoints. They must also be aware of bias or prejudice that may impede their ability to connect and meet the needs of all the children in the learning environment (Irwin, 1999). When analyzing bodies of research that explore teachers' perceptions and attitudes, the results indicate that while teachers along with their administrators and colleagues value multicultural education and specifically multicultural literature, they do not effectively implement multicultural components to promote diversity and students' understanding of various cultures.

A research study was conducted with middle school teachers in a metropolitan school district to measure teachers' perceptions and attitudes in regards to the integration of multicultural literature in the curriculum. The results indicated that 83.3% of teachers felt that their administrators were supportive in their use of multicultural literature in the classroom and 100% of those surveyed indicated their colleagues supported the use of multicultural literature in the classroom as well (Tucker, 2014). This study also determined that while 100% of teachers indicated that literature should reflect the diverse populations present in the school environment, interviews with teachers at the beginning of the study revealed that teachers did not use multicultural literature in their classroom often due to the lack of diversity of the school or classroom population. Over half of these teachers did not think that the lack of multicultural literature in the classroom would keep ethnic populations marginalized. When these teachers did implement multicultural



literature, they shared that they were most often using African American literature to explore the Civil Rights Movement although the cultures most represented in the school were Native and Mexican American. These teachers also shared in the interviews that it was unlikely they would integrate multicultural literature into other curriculum or content and relied on students to choose these books to read independently, though it was observed that students did not. This discrepancy in belief and practice may be determined by the fact that of teachers surveyed, only 53% felt knowledgeable enough to teach about various cultures. (Tucker, 2014).

A similar study interviewed 26 teachers in which 100% of those teachers felt that the administrators supported their use of multicultural literature in the classroom. While this data showed that the support of building administrators increased the teachers' use of multicultural literature in the classroom, the study also discussed that some teachers reported that they were uncomfortable using books to explore cultures or perspectives unfamiliar to them. A population of elementary teachers in this study expressed their discomfort in using books or addressing issues they were uncomfortable with (i.e. sexual orientation), or exploring topics (i.e. cultures) they had little knowledge about (Holland & Mongillo, 2016).

Another study in which the purpose was to explore if rural and urban elementary school teachers differ in their attitude and perceptions of multicultural education found results similar to the other studies discussed above. This study revealed that while all teachers felt multicultural education was important in the school setting, teachers did not think it was part of their job to build cultural awareness and acceptance of others. The study also indicated that teachers did not feel that exposing students to various cultures

was critical in helping eliminate prejudice or discriminatory behaviors in the elementary school (Irwin, 1999).

These findings display that a teacher's attitude and perception toward multicultural education impacted teachers' actions in regards to their integration of multicultural literature and critical exploration of diversity in the classroom and society. The failure to create opportunities to explore diverse cultures and perspectives reinforces a "Euro-dominate culture" which keeps students from diverse cultures marginalized both in the classroom and in society (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Tucker, 2014).

Effectively implementing multicultural literature into the Pk-12 learning environment is a complex and analytical task. This implementation involves the educator understanding the developing definition of multicultural literature, knowing how to effectively selecting high quality literature for classroom use and integrating it meaningfully into the classroom which results in students having a new understanding of their own culture or a window into another. Educators need to continue to examine their own understanding of multiculturalism and the impact our own beliefs and values have on the opportunities educators create for students to develop as knowledgeable and accepting members of the pluralistic society they belong to.

### **Read Alouds**

Books and early experiences are essential in young students' literacy and social development. (Meller, Richardson & Hatch, 2009; Shedd & Duke, 2008). Meller, Richardson and Hatch (2009) discuss that "reading high-quality books increases children's overall language competence, and the process of reading, listening, questioning, and responding to a story provides a foundation for reflective and critical

thinking”. Read alouds are an instructional method that invites students into the world of books and help them learn and explore through text and conversations about the world around them (Dollins, 2014; Shedd & Duke, 2008). These critical opportunities can not only develop literacy skills essential in understanding the text, but lead students to question societal norms and critically examine their place in the social world (Meller, Richardson & Hatch, 2009).

### **Interactive Read Alouds**

Read alouds have many purposes in an early childhood classroom. These interactive exchanges between the teacher, student and text create intentional opportunities for teachers to enhance students’ oral vocabulary, phonological awareness, concepts of print and comprehension. (Beauchat, Blamey & Philippakos, 2012; Hoffman, Teale & Yokota 2015; Price and Bradley, 2016; Shedd & Duke, 2008). Through read alouds, teachers create critical thinking and discussion through modeling, open-ended questions and responses, and analytical reflection (Beauchat, Blamey & Philippakos, 2012). These questions create opportunities for student to connect to their own lives and experiences, and reflect on what they are reading to construct a deeper understanding of the central message of the text or concepts of print. These carefully selected texts serve as mirrors to reflect the familiar, windows into the lives of others or explore the countless ways others respond to life’s challenges (Pressley & Hilden, 2002). These books should be selected to add depth or perspective to what is being learned and a guided opportunity for students to interpret the text (Hoffman, Teales & Yokota, 2015).

### **Elements of a Read Aloud**

Teale (2003) discusses how to maximize instructional time during a read aloud by identifying components to consider when planning. These components include how much to read aloud, what to read and how to read to children. How much to read is a decision that should be made by the classroom teacher that depends on the students, curriculum and overall literacy program implemented by the school and district. What to read refers to the teacher selecting high quality literature that meets the goals of the curriculum and classroom while exposing students to a variety of genres and texts. Teale (2006) discusses that when considering how to read to children, teachers should discuss the book, read in a variety of ways and make sure that the style used connects to students' needs and development.

When depicting the structure of a read aloud, Bradbury (2006) focuses on effective components and best practices identified as to what happens before, during and after reading. Before reading, the teacher should preview the text to be aware of the content and how the text connects to the curriculum or what is being discussed in the classroom. Then, the teacher should build background knowledge to help bridge students' current knowledge with new information and concepts. During reading, the teacher should create opportunities to model and for students to make predictions and examine the text through questioning and collaborative discussion. After reading, the teacher should summarize the central ideas and ask students to reflect and draw conclusions from the text (Beauchat, Blamey & Philippakos, 2012). These components all lead to students engaging and developing a deeper understanding of the text.

One instructional approach used during a read aloud to help develop students' critical thinking and interpretation of text is text talk. This approach is implemented to

enhance young children's ability to create meaning through discussion and connections made with the text. Teachers pose open-ended questions to students that encourage them to think and connect to various ideas and concepts through the story to engage in high level thinking (Beck &McKeown, 2001). Conversation during a read aloud allows students to extend their thinking and creates dialogue that encourages them to seek clarification that leads to deeper understanding (Freese, 2018). These teacher led opportunities offer rich experiences for teachers to model critical and creative thinking through collaborative discussion and problem solving with students (Maine, 2013).

### **Evaluation and Selection Process**

In order for students to have opportunities to think critically and process complex texts, teachers should select texts that will allow for such analytical interpretations. When selecting texts for read alouds, teachers should evaluate and select text based on the following principles; theme, character, illustrations, language and plot.

**Theme.** This principle refers to the central idea that is usually implicitly communicated throughout the narrative. Due to theme being an essential element of a narrative text, it is essential that teachers create opportunities for students to discuss and think deeply about a text's implicit message or idea. This allows young readers to build capacity and understanding instead of just simply recalling events from the text (Hoffman, Teales & Yokota, 2015).

**Characters.** The major and minor roles explored in read alouds need to be well-rounded characters. They need to be like real people in that they are diverse in natural and act, talk or think differently depending on the situation faced in the story (Hoffman, Teales & Yokota, 2015). These characters should reflect the diversity of your students as

well as have some similar experiences or interests to the students in the classroom (Shedd & Duke, 2008).

**Illustrations.** High quality picture books include artful and harmonious blend of illustrations and text that are interconnected to help students construct meaning (Hoffman, Teale & Yokota 2015). Bold photographs with detailed illustrated pages will capture students' attention and encourage them to revisit the text (Shedd & Duke, 2008).

**Language.** The language used in narrative texts should be rich, complex and assist the reader with meaning and imagery. The word choice should not only expand the reader's vocabulary, but also serves as an artistic tool in helping the reader connect to the message and create rich images for the reader (Hoffman, Teale & Yokota, 2015). The story and text should depict the characters and plot in a way that is both rich and appropriate for the age group (Shedd & Duke, 2008).

**Plot.** Narrative text with a complex series of events and relationships between the problem and resolution will interest and engage the reader (Hoffman, Teale & Yokota, 2015). Books with complex plots create opportunities for students to think critically about the text (Shedd & Duke, 2008). Though more advanced readers can engage with plots that lie outside of their lived experiences, younger children best engage with text that is more compatible with their experiences and perspective (Schickedanz & Collins, 2012).

If teachers select high quality literature to read aloud to students, they foster key skills and concepts and engage students with text that will enhance their understanding and perspective of the social world around them. All of which benefit children's future literacy development.

### **Benefits of Read Alouds**

Read Alouds in kindergarten through second grade classrooms promote and develop early literacy skills. Research has shown that read alouds increase students' language, print awareness, word recognition skills, vocabulary and comprehension (Hoffman, Teale & Yokota 2015; Price and Bradley, 2016; Shedd & Duke, 2008). All of which help students develop positive attitudes toward literacy.

Read alouds also contribute to students developing background knowledge that is critical in their ability to comprehend and engage in the reading and writing process as an independent reader. Studies have shown that reading and responding to multicultural literature impacts students' views on racial and ethnic groups different than their own and becoming personally involved with stories results in a higher level of understanding (Altieri, 1996; Dressel, 2003). As students gain various pieces of information from different texts and engage in meaningful conversations about various topics through read alouds, children are able to develop knowledge of vocabulary, concepts of print and comprehension which will naturally aid in their overall literacy development (Dollins, 2014).

Read alouds also create opportunities for students to process and comprehend complex texts which is required by the Common Core State Standards. When students are provided early exposure and meaningful instruction with complex texts, it can lay the foundation for students to develop the vocabulary and cognitive skills to think critically about text (Price and Bradley, 2016). Most children grades Kindergarten through second grade do not have the foundational knowledge or literacy skills to do this independently, so read alouds are a robust opportunity for this interaction to occur (International Reading

Association, 2012). Vygotsky sociocultural theory (1978). found that children are capable of engaging in higher level thinking when that same type of thinking is modeled or scaffolded in the learning environment or enhanced when students are engaging and interacting with their environment or peers.

Read alouds can help develop students' worldly view and perspective. Through critical exploration of text, discussion and asking questions, students gain opportunities to connect and reflect on issues of social justice, power and diversity. (Ballentine & Hill, 2000; Fox, 2001; Leland & Harste, 2002; Mitchell, Waterbury & Casement, 2003). Picture books allow teachers to provide an accessible way for students to engage orally and visually with social justice issues regardless of language or reading capabilities (Evans, 2010). They can also be used to build a foundation of cultural appreciation, social awareness and caring and empathy for others. (Owens & Nowell, 2001; Wolk, 2004). A study conducted in a fourth grade classrooms results demonstrated that the use of multicultural books for class read alouds increased students' awareness, acceptance, and respect for people different from themselves. The findings also showed that students developed an increased understanding and acceptance of cultural similarities and differences (Evans, 2010).

Read alouds coupled with discussion can also develop students' interpersonal skills and enhance students' social-emotional skills. Reading books and engaging in discussions that students can relate and connect to the character's struggles and emotions can result in students manage their own behaviors and emotions (Britt, Wilkins, Davis & Bowlin, 2016). According to Fountas and Pinell (2006) "Hearing written texts read aloud daily provides many opportunities for students to think inferentially, making connections



between their own lives and what they read in books” (p. 218). As young students respond to and engage in discussions about texts with their peers, students consider new reactions and social choices. These experiences can create students who are problem solvers and develop imperative life-long social competencies (Britt, Wilkins, Davis & Bowlin, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

Effectively implementing multicultural literature into the Pk-12 learning environment is a complex and analytical task. This implementation involves the educator understanding the developing definition of multicultural literature, knowing how to effectively select high quality literature for classroom use and integrating it meaningfully into the classroom which results in students having a new understanding of their own culture or a window into another. Using high quality literature to engage in read alouds can create opportunities for students to question, analyze and develop acceptance and understanding of their own beliefs, culture and understanding that will hopefully result students who embrace and respect the diversity that exist in our pluralistic society.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this phenomenographic study was to describe factors that influence how primary teachers in one Midwestern suburban district select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds. Multicultural titles were defined as literature that embodies diverse racial, ethnic and social perspectives that is characteristic of pluralistic society and of the world (Bishop, 1997). Using Bishop's transactional framework, this study aimed to identify multicultural titles used in primary classrooms for read alouds, what factors influence teachers' selection process and each teacher's selected purpose in using the multicultural title with primary students.

The literature demonstrates the need for primary teachers to select high quality multicultural literature that will engage students to think critically and analytically during classroom read alouds to develop empathy and understanding for various cultures and perspectives. With this said, the ability for students to develop an understanding for diverse cultures is connected to primary teachers' abilities to select multicultural titles for classroom use. If teachers are selecting texts that have well rounded characters, complex and diversified plots, and portray accurate cultural experiences students can identify or empathize with, it is more likely that students will not only embrace and understand the value of their own culture, but the culture and perspective of others (Hoffman, Teales & Yokota, 2015; Wilkens & Gamble, 1998;). While there is extensive research supporting the need for classroom teachers to use high quality multicultural literature, little research

has been conducted on what factors influence how teachers select multicultural literature for classroom read alouds.

### **Central Research Question**

What factors influence how primary teachers in one Midwest suburban school district select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds?

The sub-questions were as follows:

- What are specific purposes for using multicultural titles for classroom read alouds?
- What factors inhibit primary teachers from using multicultural literature for classroom read alouds?
- Using Bishop's transactional framework, what experiences are created by teachers for primary students when engaging in multicultural read alouds?

### **Qualitative Research Design**

This study utilized a qualitative approach when conducting research. Because “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem,” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4) this design approach was appropriate in helping the researcher gain understanding into what factors influence each primary teachers' selection process through the use of an open ended questionnaire. Creswell (2012) discussed that qualitative research is an approach in which the researcher's purpose statement and central research question are formatted in such a way that the researcher can learn from the participants. By asking participants to provide information regarding multicultural titles they use in their classroom and factors that influenced their selection of these titles, the researcher was able to uncover and gather

evidence and information that aided in answering the central research question.

Qualitative research was also appropriate for this study in that it entails, “complex reasoning, through inductive and deductive logic” (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). Through the collection and interpretation of each participant’s data and information, the researcher analyzed the data and built themes to piece together information to uncover meaning.

This process allowed the researcher to describe “how they understand and come to know the reality or realities of their participants” (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pg. 13).

### **Phenomenography**

The design of this qualitative research approach was phenomenography. This methodological approach allowed the researcher to uncover the differences that exist between human understanding (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Phenomenography is varied from other forms of qualitative research in that it is interested in related meanings vs. independent, awareness over beliefs, and the approach is interpretative focused vs. explanatory (Tight, 2014). Therefore, this approach is appropriate in that it will illuminate the common and contradictory approaches teachers take in selecting multicultural titles for classroom read alouds and the varied transactional experiences created for students through the use of the selected texts. Marton (1986) discussed that phenomenographic researchers try to “describe relations between the individual and various aspects of the world around them, regardless of whether those relationships are manifested in the forms of immediate experience, conceptual thought, or physical behavior” (p 41-42). While the researcher was interested in learning about each participant’s experience, the focus was on the similarities and variations in the understanding and experiences of the participants (Tight, 2014).

### **Comprehensive Sampling**

Participants were selected using the comprehensive sampling strategy. The sampling of participants was also homogenous in that the selected participants are the same or similar in nature (Patton, 1990). This strategy was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to “achieve representativeness of the context” and capture varied experiences of the participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, pg. 314). All full time certified primary teachers in the selected suburban school district were invited to participate in the study and complete the questionnaire. The research focused on primary grades, specifically grades Kindergarten through second grade, where teacher-facilitated read alouds and interactive text interpretations as instructional methods are most prevalent (Vasquez, 2010, Crafton, Brennan, & Silvers, 2007). This approach to participant sampling allowed the researcher to gain a collective understanding of the phenomenon as it relates to the central research question (Patton, 1990).

### **Participants**

The site of this study was a Midwestern, suburban school district that includes four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. This rapidly growing school district serves over 3,200 students and about eighty-seven percent of the student population is white. Of the remaining student population, approximately four percent of students are Hispanic, four percent are two or more races, two percent are African American and less than one percent of students identify as American Indian or Pacific Islander. Nearly ten percent of students receive free or reduced lunch (Nebraska Department of Education, 2018).

There are currently 227 teachers employed by the school district. Ninety-nine percent of certified teachers identify as white. Forty-four of those teachers serve kindergarten through second grade students, all of which are female.

After permission and access to emails was granted from the participating district, the researcher met with teachers to provide information about the study and were also recruited via email. The initial email described the purpose of the study, assurance of confidentiality and the time allotment for participation.

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

The researcher distributed an open ended questionnaire using Qualtrics to all participants. The questionnaire was sent directly to the district email account of each primary teacher in conjunction with a rationale of the study and a letter of consent. Participants received three weeks to complete the questionnaire and a reminder was sent halfway through the allotted time period and again two days before the questionnaire closed.

**Questionnaire.** Data was collected using Qualtrics through an open-ended questionnaire (See Appendix B). An open-ended or free response questionnaire asks participants to answer a set of questions with their own words, thoughts and feelings. “An open-ended response format encourages respondents to get involved with and feel interested in the research” (Manning and Kunkel, 2013, p. 98). This method allowed the researcher to collect data from the pre-determined group of participants to gain information and engage in an interpretive analysis of the factors influencing how primary teachers in the selected Midwestern suburban school district selected multicultural titles for classroom read alouds. Each participant included their top five text selections for

classroom read alouds, and a list of what factors influenced their selection process and purpose. Using questionnaires versus an interview allowed the participants' time to reflect and consider their answers and an opportunity to revise and reflect if they chose to do so before sharing their thoughts and perspective with the researcher (Manning and Kunkel, 2013).

The web-based questionnaire comprised of three sections. The first section asked the participants for demographic information about their years of experience, level of education, ethnicity and grade level. The second section asked participants to identify five multicultural titles used for classroom read alouds and the factors that influenced their selection process and purpose. The third section asked participants to identify overall factors that influenced their selections and/or inhibit their ability to use multicultural literature in their classroom.

**Validation process.** Many steps and measures were taken to develop the questionnaire used in this study. Initially an expert panel was constructed consisting of University professors and certified teachers to develop the protocol used to answer the central research question. This process helped to ensure content validity. After the construction of the protocol, a pilot test was administered prior to the data collection process. Creswell (2014) discusses that field testing is beneficial in improving the questions and format of an instrument before making final instrument. Therefore allowing the researcher to identify and address any weaknesses or limitations within the instrument (Kvale, 2007).

The pilot test was administered to three certified primary teachers in various suburban school districts. Each participant was asked to share basic demographic

information and multicultural titles for classroom read aloud use. After the questionnaire was completed by the three participants, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis to determine emerging themes in the data. After conducting this analysis, the researcher asked for feedback regarding clarity, relevancy and usability from the participants and University faculty. This process allowed the researcher to refine the tool and information collected in the open-ended questionnaire and ensure construct validity. Approval of the instrument was granted by the participating school district in June 2019.

**Content analysis.** Content analysis is a flexible method allowing the researcher to discover and interpret the subtle messages of written texts. It focuses on the presence of noticeable words or concepts in texts, allowing the researcher to quantify and analyze this presence, and then make inferences about its message (Duke & Mallette, 2011). This is done through a progression in which the researcher initially must identify the key terms and variables for the analysis. To provide validity, the researcher then defines each variable and the process that will guide the analysis. The researcher then codes and reports the findings (Nuendorf, 2002). For this study, a content analysis will be conducted on each of the read aloud title selections made by participants.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative research is conducted through multiple forms of data collection (Creswell, 2013). Through this qualitative study the researcher accessed data through both the questionnaire and the content analysis.

**Questionnaire.** The open-ended questionnaire helped the researcher gain an understanding of basic demographic information of the participants, collect a list of each participant's multicultural titles used for classroom read alouds and the intended purpose



and rationale in selecting the titles. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze and report patterns and themes in the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Content analysis.** The researcher engaged in a content analysis of each multicultural title selected by participants. For the purpose of this study, directed content analysis was used in conjunction with discourse analysis. Direct content analysis uses existing research or theories to help identify key concepts or variables to develop the categories for coding (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). The initial categories for this study are research-based criteria for selecting high quality multicultural literature (Holland & Mongillo, 2016; Iwai, 2015; Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013; Wilkins & Gamble, 1998). These initial categories are author, cultural accuracy, illustrations, text and characters. Each selected title was read a first time to determine if it matches the criteria of the study. This analysis created a comprehensive look at the overall title selections made by participants and helped the researcher determine emerging themes related to the central research question (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

In contrast, discourse analysis uses a less structured approach examining the text beyond the words and sentences and exploring how the phenomena is represented (Krippendorff, 2002). Each title was read a second time to determine what emerging themes or patterns exist in content. Bishop's framework was used to determine what transactional experiences were created for students through the selected multicultural titles.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I am a white, middle class female who grew up in a Midwestern suburb. Growing up, most of my peers looked like me, celebrated similar traditions and holidays and had

family structures similar to my own. When reflecting back on how diversity was celebrated and discussed in my childhood classrooms, it lies primarily at the Contributions Approach level in that we only talked about or read books with people of color during Black history month. In college, I joined an educational program in which I worked at an inner city school working with primarily students of color. I knew very little about this school or community beyond the crime and violence discussed on the local news channel. On my first day working at the school I found myself running into the building to avoid the drive by shooting or theft I thought might happen as I approached the front door of the school. I remember going home after that first day and talking with my father, who also worked in that same school's community, about the fear and discomfort I faced that day. I came to the realization that the lack of exposure to diversity in my childhood and the perpetuation of violence by the media lead me to fear individuals and a community I had no prior knowledge or interactions with. This experience helped me recognize the unconscious bias created from the lack of exposure and knowledge I had to people and perspectives that were different from my own.

In my second year as a University literacy instructor, I was asked to teach a graduate multicultural literature course. While literacy is a passion and strength of mine, I did not feel prepared and knowledgeable enough to teach this class and educate others about this topic. As I began preparing for this class, I realized my shortcomings as a classroom teacher. When selecting books to read to my students, I was not always as intentional in selecting high quality multicultural literature as I should have been. I did not recognize the underlying bias that perpetuates stereotypes or conduct research to ensure each book read to students contained culturally relevant content or that the author

was part of the perspective they wrote about. I was not providing students with mirrors, windows or sliding glass doors to explore our pluralistic society and develop empathy and understanding of other cultures different than their own through literature. Each summer I teach this course, I continue to be surprised by teachers' hesitancy to immerse multicultural literature into their curriculum and the lack of foundational knowledge teachers have in selecting multicultural literature that honors diversity versus perpetuates stereotypes and biases. While I believe that teachers know honoring diversity is important, I do not believe that teacher preparation programs and school districts are providing teachers with the appropriate training to select multicultural titles that will provide authentically diverse experiences for students through literature.

This realization and consistent reminder is my motivation in conducting research that identifies the factors that influence how primary teachers select multicultural literature and how they go about creating transactional experiences for students to explore and value diversity. I believe that every child should feel valued in the classroom environment and that literature is one way for teachers to do that. I think that it is crucial that teachers be diligent in their selection process and critically evaluate titles to ensure they are using high quality multicultural literature to create opportunities for students to explore diverse perspectives and gain empathy and understanding for cultures that are different than their own. Lastly, I believe that teachers should be using literature that is rich and diverse in its content and characters to reflect the diversity represented in our nation's population.

### **Assumptions**

It is assumed that all participants were conducting read alouds in their classrooms and that all multicultural titles shared were implemented as read alouds in their identified educational setting.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study is limited to Kindergarten through Second grade teachers in one Midwestern, suburban school district. Each participant was limited to sharing five multicultural titles used for classroom read alouds. Participants in this study were all white females.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to identify what factors influence how primary teachers select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds. Therefore, the study explored the text selections of primary teachers in one Midwestern, suburban school district and the purpose and factors teachers identified as part of their selection process. The central research questions was:

What factors influence how primary teachers in one Midwest suburban school district select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds?

The sub-questions were:

What are specific purposes for using multicultural titles for classroom read alouds?

What factors inhibit primary teachers from using multicultural literature for classroom read alouds?

Using Bishop's framework, what experiences are created by teachers for primary students when engaging in multicultural read alouds?

#### **Participants**

Twenty-one white, female certified primary teachers participated in the open-ended questionnaire. Of those twenty-one teachers, nine were kindergarten teachers who averaged a total of fourteen years teaching experience. Nine, first grade teachers participated with an average of eleven years teaching experience and three, second grade teachers participated with an average of thirteen years teaching experience. Collectively, participants averaged twelve years of teaching experience. Of the twenty-one participants, all but three had obtained a Master's degree.

## **Data Analysis**

The researcher chose to use thematic analysis when analyzing participants' responses to the open-ended questionnaire. This approach supported not on the phenomenological approach to the study, but allowed for more involvement and interpretation by the researcher. The researcher coded and analyzed for common themes across the title selections and participants' responses. To address the question, "What factors influence how primary teachers in one Midwestern, suburban school district select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds?" The researcher asked participants to provide the purpose and factors that influenced the selection of each specific title identified. After thorough and repeated data analysis and reflection, the researcher was able to see common themes reflected in participant's responses.

## **Findings Related to Central Research Question**

Each participant provided information on what factors influenced the selection process for each multicultural title selected to aid in answering the main research question. The researcher organized and coded the responses into categories based on the common verbiage and terminology used in the responses. Some responses contained multiple thoughts and ideas creating opportunities for the researcher to code multiple themes within one title response. Data was labeled as a theme if five or more participants discussed a topic as a factor in their text selection process. Table 1 shows the emerging themes from participants' responses.

Table 1: Factors that Influence Teacher's Title Selection Process

Factor That Influence	Number of Times Referenced
Illustrations	32
Theme	20
Culture	18
Text/Plot	16
Holiday Focused	10
Characters	8
Relatability	7

**Illustrations.** Illustrations were the most commonly discussed factor that influenced teacher's selection process of multicultural titles. In reference to various titles' illustrations, participants consistently referenced the beauty, vibrance and information the illustrations captured for the reader. One participant said, "This story has such fun illustrations that introduce students to a culture that is different than ours." Another participant stated, "The illustrations are bold and colorful. They take up the whole page. Some were very whimsical and fun, and they all give students an idea of what life is like in other countries." Another discussed how,

The illustrations showcase the countries in a large picture as well as with stamps. In the end, there is a classroom of students looking at a globe, discussing where all the students' families come from. This helps the students understand that right in their own classroom, students come from different experiences.

**Theme.** Another factor commonly discussed by participants was theme. Participants discussed theme referring to books that provided a moral or message for the students. In reference to one title selection a participant stated, "It has a good message that everyone is unique and the world would be boring if we were all exactly alike." Another participate discussed, "This is a story the students can relate to and is important for them to understand our not so distant history and can lead to good discussions about kindness and acceptance."

**Culture.** Participants discussing the desire to expose students to diverse cultures or recognize cultural similarities and differences was coded eighteen times in participants' responses. One participant discussed that one title selection had, "Great



voice and reflection of how kids feel when they are different. [It] also is a great read for teachers to understand calling Thanksgiving turkey day can really make some kids feel wrong for how they celebrate at home.” Another participant discussed how books could engage students in exploring different perspectives. This participant stated, “This book shows similarities and differences. For example, eating but eating different food or playing but playing different activities. It shows a very different perspective on family meals or clothing for example.”

**Text/Plot.** Participants also discussed text and plot to be important factors when selecting multicultural titles. When discussing text and plot often participants referred to how the text structure or plot engaged the students in the reading process. For example, one participant stated, “There are many similes and metaphors in the book, describing the physical characteristics of different people” while others stated, “It is written with appropriate text for primary aged students” and is “easy to follow but gives the reader the opportunity to wonder.”

**Holiday Focused.** Another factor highlighted in participant’s responses was using multicultural titles to connect students to various holidays such as Martin Luther King Day and the Chinese New Year. For example many responses were similar to one participant who stated, “This book is a great book for our students to learn about Dr. Martin Luther King” and another that said, “This was such a fun way to teach students about the Chinese culture and certain aspects of the Chinese New Year.”

**Characters.** Eight participants highlighted strong, bold main characters as being factors that influenced their title selection process. One participant discussed “a strong female lead” being a factor that influenced her text selection process while another stated,

“The children always love the illustrations and Molly’s character. This book teaches children to be self-confident and proud of who they are.”

**Relatability.** Having a plot or characters that were relatable to students was another theme coded seven times by the researcher. Participants highlighted in their responses the importance of students being able to make connections with some aspect of the multicultural title. One participant discussed the emotions of the character by stating, “She is excited about the holidays she celebrates. Most kids are excited for any time there is a holiday, traditions and time for families to get together.” Another participant when talking about relatability discussed students being able to see themselves reflected in the text. The teacher stated, “Children of different backgrounds can see someone similar to them in the story.”

### **Sub-question 1**

What are specific purposes for using multicultural titles for classroom read alouds?

Each participant provided the specific purpose for using each multicultural title selected. The researcher used thematic analysis to identify emerging themes in participants’ responses. The researcher organized and coded the responses into categories based on common terminology used in the responses. Some responses contained multiple purposes creating opportunities for the researcher to code multiple themes within one title response. The three emerging themes in participants’ purpose in using the selected multicultural titles were holidays, curriculum related content and social emotional learning (See table 2).

Table 2: Teacher's purpose in selecting multicultural text

Purpose	Number of times referenced	Multicultural Titles Included
Holidays	35	<p><i>Light the Lights</i></p> <p><i>Maya Lin Artist-Architect of Light and Lines</i></p> <p><i>Miss Tizzy</i></p> <p><i>Henry's Freedom Box</i></p> <p><i>Can You Say Peace?</i></p>
Curriculum related content	30	<p><i>Last Stop on Market Street</i></p> <p><i>What Can You Do With a Paleta?</i></p> <p><i>Peter's Chair</i></p> <p><i>Chinatown</i></p> <p><i>Gracious the Thanksgiving Turkey</i></p>
Social Emotional Learning	25	<p><i>Stand Tall Molly Lou</i></p> <p><i>Melon</i></p> <p><i>The Day You Begin</i></p> <p><i>Be Kind</i></p>

		<p><i>What if we all were the same? That Rule Doesn't Apply to Me</i></p>
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**Holidays.** Using multicultural titles to support various holidays and heroes was referenced thirty five times in participants' responses. Many titles, like *Martin's Big Words*, was selected by participants to engage students in conversations about Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement. One participant discussed the use of *Martin's Big Words* to go, "more in depth into MLK's life helping the kids understand how he wasn't so different from them as kids" while another participant discussed that this title "teaches children about segregation, equality, fair and equal." A total of twelve titles like *My Brother Martin* and *The Story of Ruby Bridges* were used to discuss the contributions of Martin Luther King and others during the civil rights movement.

To support conversations about the Chinese New Year, participants identified nine titles. One title selected by participants was *My First Chinese New Year*. When discussing the purpose of this title, one participant stated, "I chose this book because I have used it in my classroom each year to introduce the Chinese New Year. It gives my first graders background knowledge on the culture and how the holiday is celebrated." Another title selected by participants was *Dragon Kite of the Autumn Moon*. The participant selecting this title discussed the purpose of using this book was to highlight common symbols of the holiday and culture. She stated, "I read this story at Chinese New Year because it specifically talks about the dragon or the dragon kite."

Participants identified seven titles to discuss aspects of Thanksgiving such as Pilgrims and Native Americans. *Duck for Turkey Day* was one title identified by a participant to support conversations around Thanksgiving. This participant selected this title to discuss the diverse traditions of families. She stated, "This book represents how families celebrate Thanksgiving in different ways. I have many different cultures in my

room and wanted to make sure they all felt represented.” Another participant wanted students to explore Native American culture through the lens of the title *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*. She stated, “This picture book explains the importance of nature to Native American tribes.”

Seven other titles were selected by participants to support various holidays such as Christmas or Hannukah, Veteran’s Day, President’s Day, Grandparent’s Day and Peace Day. Table 2 contains a list of some of the books discussed in relation to these holidays.

**Curriculum.** Participants identified thirty titles that supported or were part of the district curriculum. Titles such as *It’s Back to School We Go!* and *Thanksgiving is...* were discussed as supporting the district phonological awareness program. Participants identified *Round is a Mooncake: A Book of Shapes* and *I Love My Hair* as mentor texts for the district writing curriculum. Another participant discussed using titles because they support STEAM based concepts. When discussing the title *Rosie Revere Engineer* the participant stated, “I chose this book because it is about a kid thinking outside the box. It goes great with STEAM lessons.” When discussing a related text by the same author, *Iggy Peck Architect*, the same participant stated, “This book also goes great with STEAM lessons and since I read *Rosie Revere Engineer* I chose this because it is similar but about a young boy.” Table 2 highlights other titles identified by participants when the purpose was curriculum related.

**Social Emotion Learning.** In relation to social emotional learning, the researcher coded twenty-five titles identified by participants. These responses referenced the moral or theme of the story and the development of students’ social and cultural awareness.

Many responses were centered around the themes of acceptance, community and kindness. Participants discussed wanting their students to acknowledge and celebrate the similarities and differences that existed among individuals. For example, one participant selected the title *The Girl Who Thought in Pictures* to help students understand another child in the class who had autism. When discussing her purpose she stated, “I have a student with autism in my class this year. I thought it was important to have a text that helped students understand those differences and move toward accepting them.” Another participant selected the title, *What If We Were All the Same?* to highlight the diverse perspectives in the classroom. She stated, “I love that it teaches students we are all different and that is okay.” When referring to the theme of community one teacher referenced the title, *Is There Really A Human Race?* The participant discussed that, “this book shows the different meanings of the word race. The main idea is more about loving, helping, and caring for one another will make the world a better place.” Another participant selected the title *All Are Welcome* to build classroom community. When discussing the title, she stated, “My purpose was to reiterate the fact that all are welcome in my classroom. No one student is better or worse than any other.” When discussing kindness, one participant selected *Kindness is Cooler Mrs. Ruler* because of the examples presented in the text. This participant stated, “I chose this book to encourage kindness in my classroom. I love all of the examples of being kind in the book.” Other themes discussed by participants include perseverance and positive self-image. Table 2 shows some of the other titles selected by participants in regards to social emotional learning.

### **Sub-Question 2**

What factors inhibit primary teachers from using multicultural literature for classroom read alouds?

Participants were asked to identify what factors inhibit them from using multicultural literature in the classroom. Of the twenty-one total participants, nineteen provided responses. The researcher used thematic analysis to identify emerging themes in participants' responses. The researcher organized and coded the responses into categories based on the common terminology used in the responses. Some responses contained multiple factors creating opportunities for the researcher to code multiple themes within one response. The three emerging themes in participant's responses were time, maturity and resources (See Table 3).



Table 3: Factors That Inhibit Teacher's Use of Multicultural Literature

Factors That Inhibit	Number of Times Referenced
Time	6
Maturity	5
Resources	3

**Time.** Many participants discussed the lack of time to integrate multicultural literature due to the lack of opportunity to supplement from the titles selected or used through the district curriculum. One participant stated, “Due to our daily reading instruction and our writing curriculum, our reading and writing read alouds are already selected for us. This can make it difficult to find time to read other rich, multicultural text.” Reiterating that same response, another participated said, “I feel like a lot of the texts we read aloud are texts that are given to us via reading curriculum, unit studies, or writing mentor texts, which unfortunately doesn't always push me to find additional multicultural books.”

**Maturity.** When discussing maturity, participants discussed the need for the text to be written at a developmentally appropriate level for the age of students they work with. One participant stated, “Factors that may inhibit me from using specific multicultural texts would be the content and its appropriateness for kindergarten students.” Another participant responded similarly be stated that “if a book is too mature for 1st grade” it would inhibit her from using it in the classroom.

**Resources.** Access to materials and resources was another inhibiting factor discussed by participants. Due to participants using a majority of titles from the district curriculum one participant discussed “Finding good new texts” to be an inhibitor in her using multicultural literature in the classroom. Another teacher discussed, “Having access to a variety of multicultural texts that fit first grade” to be a challenge in integrating multicultural titles that are supplemental to the district curriculum. Another participant discussed the “lack of funds to purchase books from other retailers” to be an inhibitor in using multicultural literature in the classroom.

### **Sub-Question 3**

Using Bishop's framework, what experiences are created by teachers for primary students when engaging in multicultural read alouds?

Bishop categorized transactional experiences created through multicultural titles as windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors. Mirrors reflect the life of the reader in that the students are able to see their culture, perspective or experiences represented in the text (Bishop, 1990a; Tschida, Ryan & Ticknor, 2014). Literature serving as a window is one that allows the students to learn about a culture, perspective or experience that is different from their own. (Bishop, 1990a). Literature that serves as a sliding glass door refers to when the student not only gains insight into a culture or perspective that is different from his or her own, but is changed or impacted in a way the potentially leads to advocacy (Johnson, Koss & Martinez, 2017). To answer this research question, the researcher used discourse analysis to analyze the transactional experiences created for primary students through the selected multicultural titles. The researcher read each multicultural title selected by participants, and analyzed elements of the title such as plot, illustrations and characters to determine the theme or concept represented. The researcher also used participants' identified purpose of the multicultural title to interpret what type of transactional experience was intended for students. Table 4 provides an overview of the transactional experiences created for students through the identified multicultural titles and Appendix A provides a complete list of multicultural titles and its identified transactional experience.

Table 4: Transactional Experiences Created Through Selected Titles

<b>Transactional Experience</b>	<b>Number of Multicultural Titles Identified</b>
Mirror	25
Window	41
Sliding Glass Door	3

**Mirrors.** Twenty-five titles were identified by the researcher as mirrors for readers. Some titles emerging as mirrors for students were ones that centered around self-acceptance and appreciation. For example, both the titles *Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon* and *The Day you Begin* focused on celebrating individual characteristics and valuing what makes you unique or different. Other titles such as *Whistle for Willie* and *The Snowy Day* were identified as mirrors due to participant's using these titles to support personal narrative writing in the classroom. For example, when discussing *The Snowy Day* one participant said, "I choose this book for writing during the winter season [and] we look at all of the fun things that Peter does in the snow. We talk about what we do in the snow [and] we then write about our own snowy day fun."

**Windows.** Forty-one titles were identified by the researcher as a window for students to see cultures, perspective or experiences different from their own. Many titles identified by the researcher as windows focused on concepts of slavery or segregation. For example, both *Henry's Freedom Box* and *Almost to Freedom* gave readers insight into periods of slavery and the underground railroad. Other titles identified as windows focused on holidays that give students insight and perspective into cultures different from their own. For example, when discussing the title *Dragon Dance: A Chinese New Year* a participant selected this title to help her student compare and contrast holidays. She stated, "This book covers a lot of traditions on the Chinese New Year. We follow up with a Venn diagram comparing the American New Year and Chinese New Year." Another participant's purpose was similar in wanting to explore cultures different from that of her students. When discussing the purpose for using the title *The Runaway Wok*, she stated,

“We used this book as a fun way to incorporate the Chinese culture when teaching about Chinese New Year.”

**Sliding Glass Doors.** The researcher identified three titles as sliding glass doors due to the ability for the titles to result in student action or change. For example, *The Water Princess*, tells the story of the water crisis that exist in one African village. At the end of the text, the author provided more information into the water crisis that exists around the world and suggested individual or community actions. Two other titles, *Be Kind* and *Kindness is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler* highlight the need and importance of acting kindly to others. One participant stated “I then create a kindness bulletin board to display the ways our class is kind to others” after reading *Kindness is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler*. This reader’s response leads students to identify actions they could take to positively impact the culture of their classroom community.

### **Summary**

The data collected during the open-ended questionnaire created great insight into the factors that influence how primary teachers select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds. In summary, the themes emerging from the data collection process and analysis were as follows:

- Illustrations, theme and cultural awareness are significant contributing factors influencing the title selection process.
- Beyond supporting the district-selected curriculum, multicultural literature was often used to expose students to various holidays and enhance their social and cultural awareness.

- Factors that commonly inhibited teachers from using multicultural literature were time, content maturity and access to resources.
- Multicultural texts were often utilized to help students develop an awareness and understanding of cultures and perspectives that are different from their own.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify what factors influence how primary teachers in one suburban, Midwestern school district select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds. Therefore, this study explored the identified purpose of each multicultural title and the factors that influenced each participant's title selection process. This chapter includes a discussion of findings related to the themes that emerged from the open-ended questionnaire, connections to the literature as well as implications that might be valuable to district leaders. This chapter ends with future research opportunities and a brief summary.

This chapter contains discussion and information focused on the central research and sub-questions of the study.

The central research question was:

What factors influence how primary teachers in one Midwest suburban school district select multicultural titles for classroom read alouds?

The sub-questions were as follows:

What are specific purposes for using multicultural titles for classroom read alouds?

What factors inhibit primary teachers from using multicultural literature for classroom read alouds?

Using Bishop's framework, what experiences are created by teachers for primary students when engaging in multicultural read alouds?

#### **Factors that Influence Teachers' Selection Process**



The research findings indicated that though many factors influenced participants' title selection process, illustrations, theme and culture were most commonly discussed amongst participants. These findings are parallel with the literature suggesting that illustrations and theme are two essential elements to evaluate when selecting titles for read alouds (Hoffman, Teale & Yokota, 2015; Shedd & Duke, 2008). Participants commonly selected titles that contained illustrations that were vibrant and captured the attention of the reader.

They also selected titles that contained illustrations or photographs that provided more information to the reader to help them gain more understanding or insight about the topic. These findings support the literature that teachers should consider using titles for read alouds that used bold photographs and illustrations to capture the readers' attention and work simultaneously with the text to help the reader construct meaning (Hoffman, Teale & Yokota, 2015; Shedd & Duke, 2008). When discussing theme, participants discussed selecting titles that conveyed a moral or message that students could apply to their own lives. These titles included themes such as kindness and acceptance. These findings also connect to the literature reflecting the importance of selecting titles that's implicit message encourages the reader to interpret and thinking critically while reading (Hoffman, Teales & Yokota, 2015).

The third factor most commonly discussed by participants was culture. Participants discussed selecting titles that allowed students to explore other cultures and identify similarities and differences that exist. These findings are also reflective of the literature in that teachers commonly use multicultural literature to engage students with titles about unfamiliar cultures and encourage and challenge them through these

transactions to consider their beliefs, attitude and assumptions about their culture and the culture of others (Cai, 2008).

These findings indicate that while participants' are intentional in selecting titles that create opportunities for students to interpret and construct meaning and understanding from the text, the findings show minimal consideration of title elements such as author and cultural accuracy, which are essential in the selection of high quality multicultural literature (Iwai, 2015, Naidoo & Dahlen, 2013, Wilkens & Gamble, 1998). Responses from participants did not discuss selecting titles due to the authors being part of the cultural group explored or that the titles provided the reader with accurate information and interpretations of the culture or perspective, which are imperative elements to evaluate when engaging with multicultural titles.

### **Teachers' Purpose in Using Multicultural Literature**

When discussing the purpose of each title selection, holidays, curriculum and social emotional learning were the most commonly discussed themes in participant's responses. Titles were often selected to support participants' discussion of various holidays such as the Chinese New Year or Martin Luther King Day. Many participants used multicultural titles to explore culture through the context of holidays such as these. Participants also discussed selecting titles that were connected to or part of the district-selected curriculum. Many titles identified by participants were resources supplied by the district for either their phonics or reading programs. Titles selected to support students' social and cultural awareness was another common purpose discussed by participants. Participants' used the identified titles to create opportunities for students to learn about other cultures and enhance their empathy and acceptance of others.

Banks' multicultural approach discusses four levels of integration ranging from the contributions approach to the social action approach. These levels of integration vary from teachers using multicultural literature to teach about cultures through the context of various holidays and celebrations to the incorporation of multicultural literature that causes students to engage in social action or change (Ramsey, Williams & Vold, 2003; Tucker, 2014).

The findings from this study are primarily reflective of the first two approaches of Banks' model. Participants consistently discussed various cultures and perspectives through the exploration of various holidays such as MLK Day, Chinese New Year and Thanksgiving, which is reflective of the Contributions approach. The literature suggests that this level of integration does not create a robust pluralistic view of society or help students develop their understanding of the various cultures or perspectives that exist globally (Carter, Larke, Singleton-Taylor & Santos, 2007).

There is also evidence of the Additive approach in which teachers infused multicultural literature into the curriculum to enhance, but not alter the concept or curriculum being taught (Banks, 1989). Many participants discussed using multicultural titles that were part of the district curriculum or using literature that supports concepts taught in the classroom. Though these approaches are both at the lower levels of Banks' model, they are important steps in developing respect and empathy in students. Teachers exposing students to multicultural literature creates opportunities for them to learn about other cultures and stray away from texts that are familiar and comfortable (Rudman, 1976; Rasinski & Padak, 1990). While these types of interactions are easier to design, these approaches can often limit the opportunity for students to view society from diverse

perspectives and cultures largely due to the curriculum remaining unchanged or altered to explore various points of view (Agirdag, Merry, & Van Houtte, 2016; Rasinski & Padak, 1990). To avoid students not viewing underrepresented cultures as an integral part of society, teachers must be intentional in confronting misconceptions and stereotypes, and highlight the interconnectedness that exist between cultures (Rasinski & Padak, 1990).

### **Inhibiting Factors for Teachers Implementing Multicultural Literature**

Participants identified time, resources and maturity to be inhibiting factors in using multicultural titles for classroom read alouds. Participants felt that the parameters of the school district curriculum did not create time or space within the school day to implement multicultural titles that were supplemental to the district curriculum. They also discussed that the time restrictions and limited accessibility made it difficult for them to research and locate examples of high-quality multicultural literature to use with students. Though each year more and more books are published by and about people of color, only twenty-eight percent of children's or young adult books published in 2018 contained characters of color (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2019). The findings from this study confirm that teachers accessing high quality multicultural literature can be a significant barrier in their ability to implement these titles in their classrooms.

These findings are also comparable to another research study's findings that teachers in schools with regulated curriculum implemented multicultural literature less often and had a narrower interpretation of multicultural curriculum than teachers in schools with non-regulated curriculum (Holland & Mongillo, 2016). This might suggest that if participants had more autonomy in selecting titles to read aloud to students, more diversity amongst their selections might exist. Students' academic success can be linked

to the degree in which students' cultures and perspectives are represented in curriculum (Ladson-Billing, 1995). Reading materials that reflect the experiences of students socially, emotionally and academically have a positive impact on students making it critical that teachers and district leaders be intentional in implementing titles that reflect the diverse racial, social and ethnic perspectives of the students they serve.

Participants also felt that finding titles written at the maturity level of their students to be another challenging component of implementing multicultural literature. Banks (2007) discusses that before teachers can integrate multicultural literature and engage in critical conversations centered around the text, teachers must first analyze their own comfort level with diversity and controversial topics. When teachers have little experience with diversity, it is likely they will have anxiety or trepidation facilitating conversations around sensitive topics in the classroom (Deprez, 2010). These findings might be more representative of the participants discomfort with exploring topics of diversity than the actual maturity of the titles in comparison to students' age. To engage in culturally responsive practices teachers must create a classroom that fosters conversations and discussions around all students' cultures, beliefs and values to develop an understanding and empathy for the pluralistic society they are a part of. Though critical literacy may not be part of the early childhood curriculum, teachers can create space for students to question and examine the world around them and to gain perspective and understanding for beliefs, values and cultures that might be different from their own (Bennett, Gunn, Gayle-Evans, Barrera & Leung, 2018).

### **Transactional Experiences Created Through Multicultural Titles**

Literature supports that teachers should be using multicultural literature as a socializing agent for which students can explore and celebrate the diverse perspectives and cultures that exist around them (Bishop, 1990a; National Association for Multicultural Education, 2016). The findings from this research study demonstrate that participants most often used literature as windows to create opportunities for students to explore and learn about cultures and perspectives different from their own. These opportunities can help students develop respect and understanding toward other cultures and perspectives that are representative of the community in which students are a part of (Rasinski & Padak, 1990). Though these opportunities to explore other cultures is important, Evans (2010) discussed that a focus of multicultural literature is to provide space and critical literacy opportunities for students to “explore, understand and work toward ending social justice” (pg. 101). The findings from this study show limited transactional opportunities were created through selected titles for students to engage in social action or attitudinal changes. Literature discusses that often teachers avoid topics of social class, race and gender to avoid difficult dialogue and conversations that surround such topics (Glazier & Seo, 2005). When students are given the opportunity to explore multicultural literature and engage in both critical discussion and written responses, these opportunities can lead to students exhibiting behavioral and attitudinal changes (Evans, 2010). This reinforces the need for teachers to select titles that focus on social and global issues and work collaboratively with students to discuss ways in which they can solve them. These opportunities will cultivate students to become more reflective and active citizens.

### **Implications**

With diversity increasing amongst the student population in school, teachers in every classroom need to begin cultivating an environment that accepts and celebrates diversity. Multicultural titles can validate students who see themselves and their culture celebrated in text, create opportunities for students to construct understanding and empathy for cultures different than their own and be an opportunity to challenge societal norms. This understanding provides a foundation to ensure that all student's cultures and perspectives are celebrated in the school environment and that teachers are trained and confident in their ability to assist students in developing respect and understanding for the pluralistic world of which they are a part.

There are a number of practical implications of this research. With a focus of multicultural education being to ensure that teachers are capable of “embracing families and communities to create an environment that is supportive of multiple perspectives, experiences and democracy,” educators must have a definition of multicultural education and diversity that encompasses all cultures and perspectives (National Association of Multicultural Education, 2016, para. 5). To avoid narrowly defining diversity as race and ethnicity, teachers must be intentional in expanding their definition of multicultural education to provide opportunities for students to explore social perspectives such as gender, ableism, religion and sexual orientation through the context of multicultural literature. It is through these inclusive opportunities that all students will feel valued in the curriculum and school community, and that students will develop a positive attitude and high level of respect for others who perspectives and cultures different from their own. Teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards diversity and the use of multicultural

literature have a profound impact on students, making the role and beliefs of the teacher to be a critical one in fostering respect and acceptance in our students.

This study also sheds light on the need to avoid the single story. Findings from the content analysis show the majority of books connected to the Chinese culture to be centered around the Chinese New Year while all books connected to the Native American perspective portray stereotypical vs. contemporary images of the culture. During her 2009 TED Talk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichí discussed the danger of the single story and how when we consistently display people or events as one thing over and over again, it trains us to view individuals or cultures in one way. This way of thinking becomes the only way in which we think about that culture or perspective. Teachers must be aware of the single stories that exist and be intentional in implementing a wide range of books to generate a wide range of perspectives to disrupt and dismantle the single story.

In order for teachers to have an inclusive definition of diversity and incorporate high quality multicultural literature that enhances students' perspective and awareness, districts must provide extensive training and support in selecting and evaluating multicultural literature. While the same elements apply for evaluating good literature as it does for multicultural literature, teachers must evaluate with a more distinct lens to ensure cultural accuracy (Wilkens & Gamble, 1998). Many classroom teachers have limited experiences with cultures and perspectives that vary from their own, therefore, making choosing titles that accurately and respectfully represent these cultures and perspectives is complex. In order for teachers to work effectively with students from diverse cultures, they must gain knowledge and insight into the adversities students are facing and given the skills and resources to generate conversations and dialogue using



culturally relevant literature to approach these complex issues (Davis, Brown, Liedel-Rice & Soeder, 2005). These professional development opportunities will empower teachers to select high quality titles that engage students in transformative thinking and action.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was conducted with primary teachers in one Midwest suburban school district; however, the content and relevancy is appropriate across all grade levels. Expanding the study into intermediate classrooms or secondary language arts classrooms might yield different results. This study was also conducted in a school district with predominantly white teachers working with predominantly white students. Conducting this research in an urban district with more diverse representation among teachers and students might also yield different results.

### **Summary**

School demographics are changing and to make all students feel valued and celebrated in the classroom, teachers must use literature that reflects the diverse cultures and perspectives of the students they serve. Literature used in the classroom must not only allow students to see themselves, but create authentic, culturally relevant experiences for students to gain respect and empathy for the diverse perspectives and cultures that exist around them. In order to do that, teachers must carefully and analytically select titles that serve as a catalyst for students to engage in discussion and critical thinking to help them discover the world around them. As Beiger (1996) eloquently stated,

“Each time we read a good piece of literature, we are changed by the experience; we see the world in a new way. For these reasons, literature can be a powerful vehicle for understanding cultures and experiences different from our own” (pg. 311).

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## APPENDIX A

### Transactional Experiences Created Through Multicultural Titles

Mirror
Window
Sliding Glass Door
None of Factors

Title	Publication Date	Author	Summary
The Water Princess	2016	Susan Verde	Taking place in an African Village, this story talks about the water crisis that exists around the world. The author provides additional information at end of book to provide real life connections.
I Love My Hair	1998	Natasha Anastasia Tarpley	A story that helps a girl celebrate her African American heritage and the beauty of her hair.
Erandi's Briads	1998	Antonio Hernandez Madrigal	Set in the Tarascan village, this story tells about the tradition of the village women selling their hair during the 1940-1950's. The author provides researcher notes at the back of the book to explain the history of the tradition.
Is There Really A Human Race?	2006	Jaime Lee Curtis	In a story meant to promote kindness and acceptance, one boy questions what the human race is as he spends the day at the city park.
Of Thee I sing: A Letter to My Daughters	2010	Barack Obama	This book contains letters from a father to his daughters telling them about the characteristics that define them. Each characteristic (ex: brave) is

			coupled with an explanation of a historical figure (ex: Jackie Robinson) that demonstrated that same characteristic.
I Got the Rhythm	2014	Connie Schofield-Morrison	Tells the story of a little girl strolling through her urban community noticing the beautiful rhythms around her.
Round is a Mooncake: A Book of Shapes	2000	Roseanne Thong	As a girl strolls through her community, she notices specific shaped items in her community that are connected to the Chinese culture. The author included a glossary in the back of the book explaining some of the Chinese symbols included throughout the text.
All are welcome	2018	Alexandra Penfold	Inspired by the illustrator's daughter's school, this story focuses on a school that welcomes and celebrates diversity in the school setting.
Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon	2001	Patty Lovell	This books celebrates the strength and resilience of a little girl. When attending a new school, a little boy makes fun of her. Instead of feeling sad, she uses those parts that are viewed different as strengths to make new friends.
My Brother Martin: A sister remembers growing up with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.	2003	Christine King Farris	This story is written from the author's childhood experience with her brother MLK and what led him to being a historical figure.
Last Stop on Market Street	2015	Matt De La Pena	As a young boy and his grandma ride the city bus to a soup kitchen, he is encouraged to embrace the beauties of the urban city.

Big Mama's	1991	Donald Crews	Tells the story of a family going to visit their grandma (Big mama) on the farm. The book highlights all of the family's time on the farm.
My Grandfather's coat	2014	Jim Aylesworth	Based on the Yiddish folktale, It tells the story of a man who emigrates to America and how time after time he recycles his coat.
Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins	1994	Eric Kimmel	This Hanukkah tale tells the story of one man brave enough to scare away the goblins to restore traditions and save Hanukkah.
Samuel Eaton's Day	1993	Kate Waters	This biography tells about the day in the life of a young pilgrim.
The Buffalo Are Back	2010	Jean Craighead George	Tell the story of the evolving bison from the Plains, to the Dust Bowl, and from the edge of extinction to the herds that exist today.
Freight Train	1978	Donald Crews	With a strong emphasis on colors, this book tells the story of a freight train.
The Runaway Wok-A Chinese New Year Tale	2011	Ying Chang Compestine	Tells the story of how a magic wok robbed from one family to give good wealth and fortune to another.
The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The story of Dr. Temple Grandin	2017	Julia Finley Mosca	This Biography gives insight into the life of Temple Grandin, an autistic woman.
Peter's Chair	1967	Ezra Jack Keats	Tells the story of a jealous little boy whose parents are painting and giving his old things to his new baby sister.
Mrs. Katz and Tush	1992	Patricia Polacco	This story focuses on the growing friendship between a white, Jewish woman and an African American boy.

The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush	1988	Tomie DePaola	This folktale tells the legend of the Indian paintbrush, which is also the Wyoming state flower.
That Rule Doesn't Apply to Me!	2016	Julia Cook	The story is about a boy who doesn't like all the rules in his life, but once his mom explains while rules are important he realizes what life and school would be like without them.
Thanksgiving is...	2004	Gail Gibbons	Book focuses on the history of the first Thanksgiving to how it might be celebrated today.
Kindness is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler	2007	Margery Cuyler	As students are acting out in a classroom, the classroom teacher challenges her students to engage in acts of kindness.
The snowy day	1962	Ezra Jack Keats	The book depicts all of the enjoyable parts of a snowy day for one little boy.
ChinaTown	1997	William Low	The story takes readers through various places in China town ending with the Chinese New Year parade.
The Day You Begin	2018	Jacqueline Woodson	As one child feels like an outcast, the story reminds us that "one day" we will all have a space and place in the world.
Tacky the Penguin	1988	Helen Lester	Focusing on embracing differences, this is the story of a penguin unlike the others. When trappers come to get the "perfect" penguins, he protects the others by showing his imperfections.
Be Kind	2018	Pat Zietlow Miller	Book highlights all the ways we can be kind to others from doing chores to helping someone being bullied.
My First Chinese New Year	2004	Karen Katz	Book highlights one little girls experience with the Chinese New Year. Highlights aspect of culture (red, dragon, red envelope)
Maya Lin: Artist-Architect	2017	Jeanne Walker Harvey	Celebrating the contributions of a Chinese American, this biography tells the story of

of Light and Lines			Maya Lin ,who at age 21 design was chosen for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
What can you do with a Paleta?	2009	Carmen Tafolla	This bilingual text tells the story of anticipation of a Mexican girl waiting for the paleta wagon to arrive in her neighborhood.
The Legend of the Poinsettia	1994	Tomie dePaola	This folktale tells the legend of the poinsettia and how it became a traditional symbol of Christmas.
Ganesha's Sweet tooth	2012	Sanjay Patel	With insight into the Hindu culture, this retold story focuses on the legend of how Ganesha broke his tusk and wrote the MAHABHARATA poem.
Dear Primo: A Letter to my Cousin	2010	Duncan Tonatiuh	This bilingual story highlights the connection and similarities of two cousin living in different countries.
Rosie Revere Engineer	2013	Andrea Beaty	Tells the story of a shy little girl who wants to be an engineer. All of her family laughs at her inventions until her Aunt comes to visit and lights the path for her to follow her dreams.
Iggy Peck Architect	2007	Andrea Beaty	Tells the story of a boy who wants to build even though his teacher tells him there is no place for that. Eventually, it is his skills and imagination, that save Iggy and his classmates
Almost to Freedom	2003	Vaunda Micheaux Nelson	This book tells one story of the underground railroad through the eyes of a doll that travels with a black child.

Martin's Big Words	2001	Doreen Rappaport	This biography provides a timeline and celebrates the contributions of MLK Jr.
Henry's Freedom Box	2007	Ellen Levine	Tells the story of Henry Box Brown and how he made his way to freedom by mailing himself to Philadelphia.
The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses	1978	Paul Goble	This Navajo folktale tells the story of a girl who found love and peace among the horses.
The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales	1985	Virginia Hamilton	This collection contains a variety of African American Folktales ranging from fairytales to enslaved narratives.
The Story of Ruby Bridges	1995	Robert Cole	A biography focuses on the life and experiences of Ruby Bridges.
One World, One Day	2009	Barbara Kerley	The book presents children around the world and how their day can be similar and different from each other.
Gracias, The Thanksgiving Turkey	1996	Joy Cowley	After a boy develops a friendship with the live turkey he is supposed to eat for Thanksgiving, he decides to send it to the local zoo and have chicken for Thanksgiving instead.
Dancing in the Wings	2000	Debbie Allen	Tells the story of a girl wanting to be a ballet dancer that doesn't quite fit in.
Can you Say Peace?	2006	Karen Katz	With a focus on peace, each page highlights a different child from a different country and how they say peace in their language. A pronunciation guide is included on each page.
Whoever You Are	1997	Mem Fox	This story highlight that though we might look, talk and do things differently, we have many similarities.

Light the Lights: A Story about Hanukkah and Christmas	1994	Margaret Moorman-	Highlighting common traditions of both Christmas and Hanukkah, this is the story of a young girl who celebrates both holidays with her family.
The Color of Us	1999	Karen Katz	This book takes a walk with a girl through her neighborhood as she notices the varying skin tones of her friends and community members.
If A Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks	1999	Faith Ringgold	This biography Tells the story of Rosa Parks and her role in the civil rights movements. The book tells about her childhood and all of the different contributions she made.
Shortcuts	1994	Donald Crews	Tells the story of seven children and their adventures as they take the shortcut home from school.
Duck for Turkey Day	2009	Jacqueline Jules	A young Vietnamese girl feels nervous as Thanksgiving approaches due to her families' transition vs. others.
Dragon Dance: A Chinese New Year		Joan Holub	This book celebrates the common traditions associated with the Chinese New Year.
Red is a Dragon: A book of colors	2001	Roseanne Thong	As a girl looks around her she notices and admires all the colors around her that connected with her Chinese culture.
Dragon Kite of the Autumn Moon	1991	Valerie Reddix	Based on the Vietnamese tradition, a young boy is faced to fly his favorite kite alone when his grandfather is ill.
Martin Luther King Jr.	1998	Peter and Connie Roop	This biography tells about the life and contributions of Martin Luther King Jr.
The Sandwich Swap	2010	Queen Rania Al AbDullah and Kelly DiPucchio	Tells the story of two girls who bring very different lunches and when they chose to try each others sandwiches they realize

			that different doesn't always mean bad
Goin' Somewhere Special	2001	Patricia C. McKissack	This story focuses on a little girl's experience with segregation as she makes her way to someplace special- the public library where all are welcome.
Miss Tizzy	1993	Libba Moore Gray	This story highlights the special relationship between an old woman and the neighborhood kids.
David's Drawings	2001	Cathryn Falwell	Tells the story of a group of classmates who help a shy student add to his drawing.
The World Turns Round and Round	2000	Nicki Weiss	This book shows children from one class receiving items from their family members all over the world.
It's Back to School We Go! First Day Stories from around the world	2003	Ellen Jackson	This book highlights children experience with school from all over the world. Each section highlights facts about schools in that country.
Sam and the Lucky Money	1995	Karen Chinn	In an act of selflessness, a young boy makes the decision to give his lucky money to a homeless man who does not have any shoes.
Whistle for Willie	1964	Ezra Jack Keats	Tells the story of a boy wanting and learning to whistle after a day of practicing.
D is for Dragon Dance	2017	Ying Chang Compestine	An alphabet book that centers around the symbols and traditions of the of Chinese New Year.
Goldy Luck and the Three Pandas	2018	Natasha Yim	In a spin on the classic tale, this heroine takes responsibility for her wrong actions and makes new friends.



Thank you, Mr. Falkner	1988	Patricia Polacco	Based on the author's personal experience with a reading disability and the teacher who helped her overcome it.
A Chair for Mother	2007	Vera B. Williams	Due to a fire, a young girl and her family save money so they can get a chair for their new house.

## APPENDIX B

**Multicultural literature:** Texts that embodies diverse racial, ethnic and social perspectives that is characteristic of pluralistic society and of the world (Bishop, 1997).

**Read aloud:** An interactive exchange between the teacher, students and text that is supplemental to the district curriculum (Hoffman, 2011).

**Teacher Information:**

Grade Level Currently Teaching: \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Experience: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Level of Education: \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

*Below please provide the following information regarding multicultural titles used in your classroom for read alouds.*

**Multicultural title #1** \_\_\_\_\_

Author \_\_\_\_\_ Publication Date \_\_\_\_\_

What was your specific purpose for choosing this book?

Beyond your specific purpose, what are other reasons and factors for selecting this text?  
 (ex: moral, illustrations, authenticity)

**Multicultural title #2** \_\_\_\_\_

Author \_\_\_\_\_ Publication Date \_\_\_\_\_

What was your specific purpose for choosing this book?

Beyond your specific purpose, what are other reasons and factors for selecting this text?  
 (ex: moral, illustrations, authenticity)

**Multicultural title #3** \_\_\_\_\_

Author \_\_\_\_\_ Publication Date \_\_\_\_\_

What was your specific purpose for choosing this book?

Beyond your specific purpose, what are other reasons and factors for selecting this text?  
 (ex: moral, illustrations, authenticity)

**Multicultural title #4** \_\_\_\_\_

Author \_\_\_\_\_ Publication Date \_\_\_\_\_

What was your specific purpose for choosing this book?

Beyond your specific purpose, what are other reasons and factors for selecting this text?  
 (ex: moral, illustrations, authenticity)

**Multicultural title #5** \_\_\_\_\_

Author \_\_\_\_\_ Publication Date \_\_\_\_\_

What was your specific purpose for choosing this book?

Beyond your specific purpose, what are other reasons and factors for selecting this text?  
 (ex: moral, illustrations, authenticity)

***Below please provide answers to the following questions:***

What general factors influence you when you select multicultural texts for classroom read alouds?

What general factors inhibit you from using specific multicultural texts in your classroom?