Integrating Multicultural Literature Into Curriculum and the Importance of Teachers’ Knowledge and Support

Emily Ringquist

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Dr. Amy Masko

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Grand Valley State University

**Abstract**

Few people would argue that multicultural literature is not a benefit to the majority of students in the classroom. Integrating a wide range of multicultural literature into the classroom will allow students to see various cultures and to have the ability to make text-to-self connections. However, I suggest that teachers do not have enough time to read a wide range of multicultural literature to become confident enough in choosing which texts to teach. Furthermore, they are unlikely to have an extensive amount of background knowledge on events or issues presented in the texts. This lack of knowledge results in teachers who do not know how to meaningfully integrate multicultural texts into the curriculum. This paper argues that teachers need to be trained in reading multicultural literature as political texts, which will equip them to more fully integrate it into their classrooms.

**Introduction**

“People need to know more, because some people treat us like we are not regular people” (Walker, 1992, p. 416). This is a direct quote from an African American student about his feelings on reading multicultural literature. Many minority students in the classroom feel as though they want to connect on a deeper level with books they are reading to see personal connections with people from similar backgrounds. Not only is it vital for students to see their culture reflected in the classroom, but it is also necessary for students to see a multitude of cultures represented in literature, highlighting the inclusion of diversity. Multicultural literature is an important aspect to include in curriculum for students of all ages. Although some educators would attest to only integrating positive multicultural literature during specific times of the school year, it is important for this literature to be constant and evident in all aspects of the curriculum.

Curriculum in many schools lack multicultural literature and tend to focus on White, usually male, authors and some teachers may blindly follow this curriculum (Margerison, 1995). Throughout this paper, I will capitalize the terms White and Black. When I quote the author, however, I will keep it is original style the author has chosen. With the increase in diversity and various cultures evident in America, it is crucial to include multicultural literature to reach all students in the classroom. The curriculum goes straight to the teachers’ hands, so they are the people who are most responsible for showcasing the importance of integrating accurate multicultural literature. Adding multicultural literature to lessons requires a great deal of time: reading a wide range of literature, developing discussion areas, and researching accurate background information, to name a few. Not to mention, teachers must prepare to stand behind their reasoning for choosing certain pieces of literature to faculty and parents. These are also just some of the minimum requirements to consider when dealing with multicultural literature. These requirements fall on the teachers if they want to change curriculum. However, teachers do not have enough time during the day to work only on this new material nor are they getting paid extra for work they do outside of the classroom. Therefore, teachers must devote valuable time out of their day to integrate multicultural literature into the curriculum. Teachers need to understand the importance and value of this genre of literature in order for them to take time to work on it. I believe preservice teachers, known as students who are studying education with the intention of becoming a teacher, should be required to take a course in college on multicultural literature focused on children and young adults. When universities require courses similar to this, all preservice teachers will have exposure to multicultural literature and have a better understanding of theories, tactics, and how their background influences their teaching.

Multicultural literature continues to grow in the educational atmosphere, as there are more cultures present in the classroom. We need teachers to prioritize the importance of multicultural literature so they can take time out of their free time to study literature and incorporate it into the curriculum. It is fundamental for students to appreciate the cultures around them, including their own, in order to engage in social action outside of the classroom. For multicultural literature to reach its audience with impact, teachers must take time to create a curriculum with accurate information. If we can motivate students to view the world through a new lens, students can understand they have opportunities to impact the community. This is important for future educators, parents, students, community members and all individuals around the world. We can break down negative stereotypes and have students on the frontier challenging social problems.

**Literature Review**

Multicultural Literature

Multicultural literature is a topic that has various definitions coming from different viewpoints of educators. Walker (1992) suggests, “Multiethnic literature can be used as an important tool in helping all students develop a healthy self-concept, one that depends upon a knowledge and sense of pride in family and educational background” (p. 416). Multicultural literature expands through a wide range of cultures. Hillard (1995) offers the perspectives of an interviewee that goes against what many educators think and defines multicultural literature as, “books by and about people of color” (p. 728). The author goes on to say that she believes many teachers think rather narrowly about multicultural literature similarly to this definition. Hillard continues to define multicultural literature instead as, “body of material that recognize, accept, and affirm human differences and similarities related to gender, race, handicap and class” (p. 728). However, the ever-changing field and controversy associated with multicultural literature narrows the definition to only focusing on race. Similarly to how Hillard describes multicultural literature, Norton (1990) states, “Multicultural literature helps students expand their understanding of geography and natural history, increases their understanding of historical and sociological change, broadens their appreciation for literacy techniques used by authors from different cultural backgrounds, and improves their reading, writing and thinking abilities” (p. 29). This supports teachers integrating literature into other areas in the classroom such as social studies. Literature is an important way to incorporate different cultures into the classroom in any grade. Bacharach and Miller (1996) explain that “literature is appropriate for building respect across cultures, sharpening sensitivity towards the common features of all individuals and improving the self-esteem of people who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups” (p. 36). Multicultural literature offers classrooms the opportunity to encounter experiences students may not experience elsewhere. Throughout this paper, I will focus on the definition for multicultural literature as it most closely deals with race and culture in texts.

Teacher Preparation

When considering adding multicultural literature with the intention to integrate different cultures into the curriculum, a majority of the time it falls in to the hands of teachers. Gray (2009), a teacher examining African American literature in the classroom, states, “teachers, as I can personally attest, have difficulty setting aside time to read recent children’s literature” (p. 479). She continues to state, “Teachers need time to read African American children’s literature because recent publications are more likely to include realistic fiction and characters with whom students can relate” (Gray, 2009, p. 479). Another teacher in the field, Hunt (2005), had similar feelings to Gray, “I was so enthusiastic, in fact, that while I took it upon myself to read the texts and study and adapt the materials shared with me, I felt little need to give much thought to how the texts throughout the course connected to one another. Even further, I gave little thought to why the texts were crucial pieces of the curriculum” (p. 77). The job rests on the teacher to pick multicultural books that are accurate and are beneficial to students. Hillard (1995) says, “Educators must evaluate the details in both the illustrations and the text to verify that they give a true picture of the values and beliefs of the culture” (p. 728). It is up to the teacher to continue to read outside of the classroom, “Yet teachers are rarely taught to read children’s and young adult’s literature as political texts, nor are they encouraged to read bibliographic resources with a critical eye” (Ketter & Lewis, 2001, p. 176). This is an important issue that highlights the lack of preservice teacher education at universities. These two researchers, Ketter and Lewis (2001), state, “As White teacher educators of primarily White preservice teachers, we strongly believe our students need to consider how their own Whiteness affects their interpretations of multicultural literature and their choices about what literature would be appropriate to teach” (p. 175). With the pressure to teach multicultural literature that pertains to the students, “…teachers can feel overwhelmed by the prospect of finding and evaluating the books. They do not want to offend anyone, nor do they want to harm any of the children they teach…” (Mendoza & Reese, 2001 p. 3).

Multicultural Historical Literature Throughout the Year

A problem with multicultural literature is the emphasis that it places on certain ethnic groups during only certain parts of the year. This is seen especially in African American literature where some schools primarily focus only on African American literature only during Black History month in February. Gray (2009) comments, “Being aware of more recent African American children’s literature is necessary to facilitate the availability of African American children’s literature year around, not just in February” (p. 479). When incorporating historical literature about various cultures, some teachers stay away texts that challenge difficult topics in the classroom. One of the teachers Ketter and Lewis (2001) interviewed thought about straying away from using multicultural literature that is political, “She believed that multicultural literature should remain neutral rather than be political” (p. 178). She continues to mention slavery in African American literature, “Well, if [students] read this about how awful it was, then they would start doubting what the Americans have done. So, I mean, they may have had people they knew or relatives or somebody…they start doubting the country that they live in…We read about slavery in our literature book, but we never talk about the fact that we did it” (Ketter & Lewis, 2001, p. 178) Hillard (1995) would contradict this idea, and emphasize the importance of using all types of multicultural literature to give students an idea of the reality of the experiences. “Reimer terms a ‘watering down’ of the curriculum, in which we include only literature that gives a positive portrayal of every aspect of the cultures with which it deals” (p. 729). This is a problem for teachers because as Ketter and Lewis (2001) state, “The habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture and, indeed, it is a gesture that most White teachers have learned well” (p. 178). When teachers only teach the positive aspects of a culture, they are watering down the information for the students, and in actuality, holding students back from learning valuable lessons. “Some educators and parents may argue that children are simply too young to be exposed to issue of bias, prejudice and discrimination,” but it is vital for students to learn some reality through multicultural books (Barta & Grinder, 1996, p. 269).

Still An All White World

Although multicultural literature has made headway in the last couple of decades, thanks to an article written by Nancy Larrick titled, “The All-White World of Children’s Books” published in 1965, there is still room for improvement. Horning (2014) found, “As of July 11 [2013], we had received 1,509 trade books published in 2013. I found that 1,183 (78.3 percent) were about human beings. And just 124 of those (10.5 percent) featured a person of color” (p. 4). This showcases that some progress has been made, but there is still plenty of room for improvement. Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) saw similar problems with African American literature. They concluded, “All too often books used in primary classrooms contain too few African American characters…many of these stories say little about African American culture, or they present only the history of African Americans as slaves without including any ‘nonslavery’ or modern representations” (p. 8). These two authors also, “emphasized that in the primary grades, students rarely ‘see’ African American characters in their books” (Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd, 2001, p. 9). Although this specifically deals with African Americans, this is seen overall in some aspects of multicultural literature. Another set of research conducted by Gray (2009) shows, “In 2006, out of the estimated 5,000 new books published, 153 included significant African American content or characters” (p. 472). This shocking reality emphasizes the importance for teachers to get as many multicultural books in libraries and classrooms in our school systems. It is up to the teachers, Horning (2014) comments, to get books into the environment of children. “Otherwise,” she states, “we are all participants in the ‘cultural lobotomy.’ And it won’t be technology that threatens the very existence of books. It’ll be their complete and utter irrelevance in the real world that never was and never will be all white” (p. 5).

Literature As A Window and Mirror

Bishop (1990) introduces the concepts of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors to describe how students apply literature to their lives after reading. “Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author” (Bishop, 1990). Since multicultural literature involves cultural literacy or, “understanding of the fluency in one’s culture which provides the basic information need to thrive in the modern world,” students can use this literature as a window (Huang, 2014, p. 16). Mendoza and Reese (2001) reason, “Historically, children’s books have given European American middle- and upper-class children the mirror but not the window. They could see themselves in the stories they read and heard, but they were unlikely to see anyone much different from themselves” (p. 3). By introducing multicultural literature to all students in a classroom setting, students are open to view all literature as a window to see out into the world. Thein, Beach and Parks (2007) give another contrasting angle, “Conversely, when we encourage white students to relate to or empathize with unfamiliar characters and situations, we risk simplifying and universalizing complex experiences of discrimination and oppression. We as teachers may do a disservice to students by leaving them with the impression that they can authentically understand situations that they haven’t and may never fully experience” (p. 54). These two ideas are important to consider when looking at multicultural literature’s effect on different ethnicities. The goal is for students to view multicultural literature as a window to the world, while teaching in a manner that students can understand the relevance and effect of what they are reading. Glazier and Seo (2005) include the value of multicultural literature as a mirror to reflect on one’s own culture. They state, “Then use of multicultural literature, coupled with dialogic instruction within a safe classroom context, can provide student with both a window to other cultures and a mirror reflecting their own” (p. 686). Therefore, this type of literature, “acts as a mirror – allowing students to reflect on their own experiences and as a window, providing the opportunity to view the experiences of other” (Glazier & Seo, 2005, p. 688).

**Discussion based on Literature**

The transformative approach towards teaching requires changing the internal structure of the curriculum that embodies the racial, ethnic and social experiences of various minority groups instead of just adding sporadic literature into the curriculum (Jenks, Lee & Kanpol, 2001, p. 97). This approach is one of the ways teachers can leave a lasting impact on a student’s knowledge and development. James Banks proposed the same kind of optimal learning approach known as Level Three of Multicultural Curriculum Integration, also known as the transformation approach (Milner, 2005, p. 397). In the classroom, students would ideally walk away being able to view situations through varying perspectives. Multicultural literature hopes to expand the perspectives of its readers. Through the transformative approach, the goal is, “students learn to be reflective, to adopt different perspectives, and to understand how what they are taught – the knowledge that schooling offers – has been shaped historically, ethnically, culturally and linguistically (Jenks, Lee & Kanpol, 2001, p. 97). It is necessary for teachers to learn the various approaches toward teaching multicultural education so they can identify which approach most closely resonates with their teaching views. When they foster the approaches they want to implement in their own classroom, the multicultural literature they will select will be a result of their chosen approaches. The varying approaches reach a widespread of views on multicultural education and it is important for future teachers to establish themselves and decide how they want their classroom to learn. The multicultural education approaches should be presented for preservice teachers in a college classroom setting by a professor or person in the field of multicultural education. By providing the various types of learning styles, teachers can see what is expected of them in order to have a classroom filled with reflective and challenging students who implement their learning.

Too often, teachers do not pay attention to different cultures consistently throughout the academic year. Many classrooms focus on a specific culture during a selected time frame decided by a communal group such as the government. Banks (1995) labels this Level of Multicultural Curriculum Integration as the additive approach. He summarizes this level as, “Content, concepts, themes and perspectives that are added to the curriculum without changing its structure. That which is safe, politically correct and less controversial is more likely to be taught and discussed” (p. 393). The most prevalent example of the additive approach is Black History Month in February. Likewise, growing up in Elementary school, I repeatedly watched the 1999 film, *Our Friend, Martin*. As inspiring as this film is especially for elementary aged students, I watched this film three times over the course of my youth. This film was consistently shown on January 19th for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. This becomes problematic when students can assume what will be taught based on one specific day. It is degrading to limit the amount of multicultural literature to 29 days or to spend one day focusing on one man. Multicultural literature should be integrated into the curriculum based on the relevance to the topic, rather than the specific day or time of the year. Banks (1995) expressed similar views, “The search for quick solutions to problems related to race and ethnicity partially explains some of the practices, often called multicultural education, that violate theory and research. These include marginalizing content about ethnic groups by limiting them to specific day sand holidays such as Black History month and Cinco de Mayo” (p. 393). Teachers must be encouraging students and their different ethnicities throughout the year so students understand the importance and prevalence each culture has in each and every day. Teachers do not want students to show respect to different races only on select days, so by integrating the literature of different cultures into everyday, students can become more accustomed to these perspectives.

By placing multicultural literature into the classroom, the goal is to transform students’ thinking by exposing them to various cultures. This means going beyond the pages of a book and implementing what students learn into the world. This embodies the transformative and social action approaches by having students look beyond themselves and out into the world. Dr. Wilson from Milner’s study says, “Multicultural education…if implemented in thoughtful, creative and effective ways, has the potential to transform schools and other educational institutions in ways that will enable them to prepare students to live and function effectively in the coming century” (Milner, 2005, p. 395). Our goal is for students to leave the classroom with accurate information about the world, and use that information to fuel a fire in their hearts to make a difference. To create a classroom setting that encompasses this goal, teachers must take extra time to develop curriculum and extensive lesson plans to meet these needs. Dr. Wilson believes that when students become more knowledgeable and aware of the injustices and social-ills in our world, then they will find their own solutions to the problems. I agree that it is important to view problems straightforward, and I think Dr. Wilson would agree in saying it is important not to dilute texts, but provide accurate information.

As more schools are becoming more diverse, another factor to consider is the influence of a White teacher for students of other ethnicities. Some students may feel a gap between the teacher and themselves, whether this might be based on race, class, socio-economic level or other. “Demographics reveal that 92 percent of the teacher education students are White, and over 80 percent are female” (Chisholm, 1994, p. 45). This shocking statistic showcases that a majority of preservice teachers are White and many of them will be teaching in diverse settings. One of the teachers from Milner’s (2005) study, Dr. Wilson, explained, “You teach what you know; you teach what you’ve experienced; you teach who you are. And when we have White teachers who don’t deal with race and culture and difference, it’s really a handicap to the students because they are not teaching reality” (p. 392). She is a Black teacher who feels she can better relate to her students of all races because of the experiences she has lived through. I think it is important to understand that teachers must be aware of the various experiences students will come into the classroom with, based on a multitude of factors. Multicultural literature is an asset that can also bridge the gap between teacher and student. This can include not only adding multicultural literature to the curriculum, but for teachers to have an expansive knowledge of experiences each students will already have. If teachers take the time to study literature that embodies various cultures, they might have a better appreciation for different cultures. By integrating it into the curriculum, students can also see the value of it in their education. This is one way for a teacher to indirectly let a student know that they are trying to connect and include the student. Chisholm (1994) states, “A teacher’s respect for both individual and cultural interpretations of reality and recognition of cultural and personal thinking and learning preferences shows acceptance of individual children’s and their cultural heritage” (p. 47). When teachers show they value a student’s culture, they are showing the student that they value them. I think all teachers would benefit from large background knowledge in multicultural literature so they can face their diversity-filled class prepared.

When implementing multicultural literature into the classroom, it is important to use literature ranging from various viewpoints of different cultures with accurate information. Sandra Stotsky (1994) suggested several ways to include multicultural literature for all students in a classroom. One fear she has is White students not feeling tied to a culture. She stated, “An overdose of ‘white guilt’ literature in the curriculum may cause students to associate ‘multicultural’ literature with white-guilt literature and to develop a negative reaction either to ‘white’ America or to the authors and the groups featured in them, depending on the social group in which they may see themselves as a member” (p. 30). I can see why Stotsky is worried about this situation, considering some multicultural books may reference feelings or actions that create White guilt as she explains. However, I do not agree with weeding out the ‘White guilt’ literature in an attempt to save negative reactions students may have. One of the many responsibilities teachers have in teaching is providing students with accurate information. In this case, teaching must handle the good, the bad and the ugly when it comes to issues in historical literature for instance. Unfortunately, a common problem that is present when teaching multicultural literature is the literature may become watered down in attempts to save negative reactions. Historical events may be altered in attempts to reach the child emotionally, but not to evoke too much emotion. Some multicultural literature then scraps the surface of issues, without diving into the actuality, as to not create negative feelings. I believe the ‘White guilt’ literature Stotsky is describing is literature that may speak true emotions and feelings from cultures other than American. The worry she has is too much of this actual multicultural literature could negatively impact White students and create uneasiness towards this kind of literature. However, it is up to the teacher to provide students with viewpoints from all perspectives, which is included in one of the definitions of multicultural literature. In Chevalier and Houser’s (1997) study, they gave preservice teacher’s a book about World War II from the perspective of a Japanese American. To many of the students, the perspectives they learned from this book and the experiences these Americans lived through surprised them. “Several students expressed the views that, in retrospect, they felt cheated by their history teachers who were either ill informed or had deliberately concealed World War II discrimination against Japanese Americans” (p.433). I believe it is up to the teacher to tactfully integrate literature that has accurate information and provide viewpoints from various historical events, while using supportive class activities and discussions where no ethnic group feels threatened. When the teacher is well versed in the literature, they can facilitate discussion of the varying viewpoints and explain why characters felt the way they did during that time period. This gives students historical background, while keeping information accurate.

When choosing multicultural literature, it is vital to incorporate as many cultures as possible. When multicultural literature is included in the classroom, typically African American literature is the major component. However, it is important to show students the value of all cultures, no matter the differences in populations of specific cultures. For instance, in Margerison’s (1995) preservice teacher classroom, she states, “We have discussed at length the message we give students when we fail to include a single piece of Chincano/Chincana literature although Mexican Americans number over fifteen million in our country” (p. 264). Even looking back at my own past, I have no recollection of studying multicultural literature outside of African American literature. Therefore, as a teacher, one must include various cultures, not only focusing on certain ones or certain cultures evident in the classroom. This is evident in an observation that Margerison (1995) did on a student teacher named Chad. Chad, an African American student teacher, implied that he used multicultural literature in his lesson plans. However, he limited the multicultural literature he used to only include African American literature (p. 2). It is important to include as many different types of cultures to showcase to the students the importance of all cultures.

As important as implementing multicultural literature into the curriculum is, unless teachers and educators are cross-culturally competent, they will not be able to teach the students in such a way. Jenks, Lee and Kanpol (2001) state that:

The development of such competency involves knowledge of cultural and racial differences and issues; the critical examination of one’s own beliefs and values regarding culture, race and social class; and an understanding of how knowledge, beliefs and values determine one’s behavior with respect to minority groups…cross-culturally competency can promote the development of students who are social reformers (p. 88).

It is vital to have teachers who embody the above statement to provide the ideal classroom experience for children of all cultures, and to provide educational activities and resources equally to all students. In order for multicultural literature with correct historical background information to be embedded into the curriculum, teachers must take time to intertwine it into every day activities and discussions in the classroom.

Little time is available for teachers to spend during the school day reading or studying multicultural literature. Through the course of the day, teachers are preparing for lessons, grading work, and planning ahead for activities to come. There is not allotted time in their day to focus on material that is not in the curriculum. This leaves limited time in the school day spent analyzing and reviewing multicultural literature. Spending extra time during the day thinking about multicultural literature when the school already has a curriculum assigned may feel like wasted time. Teachers might decide that the current curriculum is ‘good enough’ and not spend time searching for new pieces of literature or activities to benefit the students. As previously stated, Gray (2009), a current teacher, emphasizes that it was difficult to set aside time from her day to read and catch up on children’s literature. She states, “Teachers, as I can personally attest, have difficulty setting aside time to read recent children’s literature” (p. 479). She makes this statement even though she believes that teachers from her school should read African American literature and must include it in the classroom in order for students to relate. Teacher’s wanting to read children’s literature but not finding the time is a dilemma when discussing multicultural literature. However, if a teacher understands the importance and value of contextually embedding literature ranging from various cultures, ethnicities, races or minorities into the curriculum, they will create time in their day for this literature. When teachers see the influence multicultural literature has on students, they will take time from their schedule to build time for this literature.

I propose that preservice teachers should be required to take a class regarding multicultural literature in the classroom. Likewise, teachers who are already in the workforce should also be required to attend online classes or seminars emphasizing the importance of multicultural literature. Many universities offer courses in multicultural literature for English major students, but it is not a requirement. I believe it is crucial for students entering the teaching field to be well versed in the function of multicultural literature and its role the classroom. This is valuable for not only English majors, but for any future teacher. When teachers learn the value of creating an environment where this type of learning is occurring, they will put in the extra time to incorporate what needs to be done to achieve this. These college classes should contain information about how non-White students are slipping through the cracks because of the lack of connections they can make to texts. It should offer resources and help teachers identify multicultural literature that will broaden student’s knowledge and offer perspectives beyond their own. In implementing a class that forces students to analyze multicultural literature and debate with other future teachers, these teachers are building a foundation of knowledge on multicultural literature for themselves. If we want teachers to spend extra time from their day to focus on this literature, we must instill the importance multicultural literature has on students.

Not only is it important to support the preservice teachers who are in college with the information about multicultural literature, but also it is vital to keep in mind teachers who have been in the field for years. Education is an ever-changing career choice. New methods and approaches are constantly arising in the field of education, and some teachers may not get the chance to hear about these new shifts. By adding new courses that present the value of integrating multicultural literature into the curriculum, it is crucial to relay similar information to current teachers. This can be done by offering seminars for teachers to listen to professionals of multicultural literature explain similar topics held in the preservice teaching classes. The goal is to ignite a passion in teachers for incorporating an array of literature on cultures in the best interest of the student. These teachers can also engage in conversations about how multicultural literature can be added into the curriculum and hypothesize possible glitches or hurtles they will have to overcome by adding more multiculturalism. This can be a positive experience for teachers and inevitably help them become more aware of how the culture outside the school affects their students inside of the classroom. These opportunities must also be supported by the schools’ administrations and higher faculty to offer resources and to push teachers to expand their current curriculum or lessons. When offering these courses for teachers already in the classroom, it is assured that all teachers will be completely aware of the approaches or views on multiculturalism. Even if teachers choose not to change their teaching styles, more teachers will be aware of the repercussions that can be associated by not teaching multicultural literature.

Jenks, Lee and Kanpol (2001) highlight what they believe teachers should learn before teaching in a classroom, “how to use culturally sensitive strategies and content; to recognize the cultural underpinnings of their own logic and thought as well as those of others; and to understand how cultural and linguistic differences may explain what in the past have been labeled as learning disabilities” (p. 89). This is a hefty load to place on the shoulders of a teacher. These strategies and reflections are required of teachers to assist students as they are tackling the perspectives surrounding them. This quote relates with Ketter and Lewis’s idea that educators must reflect on their own Whiteness and how it affects their teaching. It is necessary for preservice teachers to reflect on their past experiences with ethnicity, race and culture, because they are play an essential role in how the teacher will teach. In a case study done by Robert Smith (2000), he found two students who had opposite experiences with race throughout their childhood. The various background experiences were reflected in how they choose to teach a class. May, who never experienced much diversity, did not want to dwell on diversity in her lessons. Brenda, on the other hand, had experienced being a minority as a White student in her upbringing. This reflected her teaching style because her lessons consisted of cultural awareness daily while examining topics in class from various perspectives (p. 168). By asking future teachers to examine their background, they can identify what kind of teacher they will be based on their experiences to that point. Teachers then can look at how their teaching style will be reflected by the varying cultures in their classroom. Chisholm (1994) states, “By exploring the impact of culture in their won lives, preservice teachers begin to understand how culture influences teacher and student behaviors, as well as how it affects teaching and learning” (p.51). Reflecting on their previous experiences, teachers can observe how culture affects the world around them. Teachers can then modify their teaching style to better reach children of diversity. In having college classes for preservice teachers, it is an asset to require them to reflect on their own experiences and how it will affect them teaching multicultural literature.

In the American school system, various topics are silenced and not talked about, which affects what kind of multicultural literature that is taught in the classroom. A huge part of teaching and learning encompasses talking and conversation around academic discourse in the classroom. However, often issues are left unsaid or silenced. This includes topics such as social class, culture, race, politics and religion (Glazier & Seo, 2005, p. 10). Topics such as these are getting left out of the classroom because they have the potential to spark controversial conversations. They also might be silenced because they contradict with what the curriculum is teaching. In the classroom, it may appear easier to slip past a topic that is difficult to explain or a topic that may evoke strong emotions from students in the room. Educators and parents look to teacher to facilitate discussions in an accurate, yet sensitive manner. However, when controversy arises, teachers are left responsible and they inevitably are left to face the repercussions. This is one of the reasons controversial topics are silenced in the classroom: Teachers are nervous to introduce the topic fearing where the discussion will lead. I believe teachers still must introduce these topics. Silencing important issues in our society inevitably silences individual students. Glazier and Seo (2005) continue to comment on silencing, “It is most often those students who are silenced for whom these topics and stories are most critical and central; silence renders ‘irrelevant the lived experiences, passions, concerns, communities, and biographies of low-income, minority students’” (p. 687). When we silence students in the classroom, they may end up silently walking through society. Integrating multicultural literature into the classroom helps spark the conversations dealing with these ‘touchy’ subjects and challenge the silence. The teacher is responsible for creating a learning environment where students can openly discuss these topics with accurate background information. When teachers are well versed in multicultural literature and the possible discussions and questions that may arise, teachers can face their class confidently. Preservice teachers should be exposed to various ways they can handle controversial topics, so these teachers do not shy away from this literature. Margerison (1995) explained that the third main reason that teachers leave out alternative works is because of worries about possible community reactions (p.262). Teachers need to realize that including multicultural literature can be risky, but when they stand firmly in their belief and take extensive time embedding relevant multicultural literature, they can become more confident. By valuing the importance of multicultural literature, teachers can end the silence in the classroom.

In this multicultural literature class for children and young adults that I propose, the class must enlighten future teachers to study the culture in which they are planning on providing literature about. When in a school classroom in front of students, the teacher must be well articulated in the material they are teaching about. This is even more important when teachers teach about cultures they are not as confident or knowledgeable in. When introducing a book or lesson, one common trend is for teachers to start out with a hook, and then give some background on the issue students will be learning about. This must also be applied to multicultural literature as well. Too often, when teachers include multicultural literature, it is not backed by or supported by lessons, nor is the culture of the book described. The book may be casually tossed into the school day without acknowledging the varying cultures and attitudes that arise. Since all cultures are different and value certain things differently, it is important to set the scene for students when reading a multicultural book. Therefore, the teacher must be aware of the aspects of a certain culture before reading to the class. This requires the teacher to build knowledge on the culture as well. In these university classes, preservice teachers must use rich texts with an emphasis in breaking down the stereotypes some future teachers may have. These preservice teachers must learn the importance of embedding cultural cues in the classroom and challenging stereotypes that the future teachers have lived with in their life. Chevalier and Houser (1997) studied preservice teacher classes and found a group of students resisting a multicultural book based on its references. One girl in particular thought the book was inappropriate for the age group because in a scene, a young boy sacrifices himself and feeds his family with stew made from his own flesh during a famine. In the Chinese culture, where the book takes place, it is common in some folklores to give loved ones part of yourself to help keep them alive. The book references a prevalent topic to the Chinese culture, whereas some of the future teachers took this as a cannibalistic act (p.431). Preservice teachers must be encouraged to dig into the culture, and provide students, and themselves, information of the context in which they are reading. By doing this, teachers can hope for the best response to multicultural literature from the students.

**Concluding Remarks**

One of the African American students in the classroom that Smith (1995) researched summarized Smith’s theories with the quote, “A person’s story is the anchor dat keeps ‘um from driftin” (p. 574). It describes the emphasis of having different races used in classroom literature and the importance the students see connecting with characters. It is vital to include multicultural literature into the classroom so students of any race can use the literature to view the world through a window. For teachers, making sure to include multicultural texts that are integrated well into the curriculum and understand the extensive background information regarding the literature is vital, despite the lack of time provided for them to do so. With the integration of the literature into curriculum, more multicultural literature can be found on the bookshelves in classrooms and libraries, available for students with knowledge of how to approach multicultural literature. Future teachers can enlighten hope and encourage social change through integrating multicultural literature that opens student’s eyes to the varying perspectives all around.

The goal of requiring preservice to take an extra class in college is for them to have a better understanding of their own stereotypes, and how to overcome these stereotypes while providing a cross-culturally inclusive classroom. Few teachers would disagree that students should only learn about one culture. In the perfect situation, many teachers desire students to be knowledgeable about the world and leave the classroom confidently in social action. To bring students closer to the desired outcome, I believe teachers must include multicultural literature. In this preservice classroom, future teachers should be examining multicultural literature and finding books with similar themes from different backgrounds. Not only this, but preservice teachers should be reflecting on their own background and how it shaped them as a person. Chevalier and Houser’s work in preservice classrooms highlighted similar examples I believe preservice teachers should experience before entering the workforce. The goal is for teachers to fundamentally transform their thinking and activity in the classroom to include the various cultures of students, even cultures that are not present every day. In this preservice class, we want students to struggle with previously held beliefs about classroom activities that do not include different cultures. We want future teachers who look at an activity, lesson, or curriculum and challenge to see if it connects with ethnic backgrounds, and how the teacher can incorporate this into everyday learning.

This class should warn future teachers going into teaching that it will not be a simple task to integrate this literature and they will face controversy and conflict. However, the goal is these future teachers will leave valuing the importance of multicultural literature enough to take the risk. Chevalier and Houser (1997) saw future teachers leave the class changed, stating that:

As a result of reading, discussing, and reflecting on the multicultural literature, many of the students expressed heightened awareness and increased contemplation concerning history and cultural stereotypes, the diminished life chances of members of economically disadvantaged groups, and the challenges faced by members of diverse communities attempting to maintain their cultural identities (p. 432).

I believe that by requiring future teachers and by offering opportunities for teachers already in the field, a class focusing in multicultural literature can offer a new view on the world for not only students, but teachers as well.

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