MULTICULTURAL BOOK CLUBS: EXPLORING CULTURAL IDENTITY
WITH YOUNG CHILDREN THROUGH LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

Although educators present many books of excellent literary merit to their students, the scarcity of current multicultural texts for young readers, as well as educators' unfamiliarity with them, lead to this area of literature being overlooked. As student populations change in the schools, classroom teachers are constantly presented with new challenges to address the diverse cultural needs of their students. Issues of cultural adjustment for new immigrants and cross-cultural identity for second generation children are pertinent. Therefore, this study aims to examine two crucial aspects of multicultural literature: How is quality multicultural literature chosen? How can it be taught to increase student awareness of diversity in the world? With a focus on East Asian literature, themes of cross-cultural awareness, identity, and acceptance are explored.

Research into existing approaches to teaching multicultural curriculum has identified literature circle studies as an effective means of disseminating values of tolerance and respect. Consequently, a 'literature circle study' book list of reviewed picture books and novels at a late primary or early intermediate level, are recommended later in this study. Furthermore, worksheets, in the form of adapted literature circle roles, are also offered to accompany these multicultural texts.
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"Thank you", it said. There was a drawing of Ruby and Emma in the pool. The water licked their chins. But they were smiling. And nothing about it [swimming] was scary. Inside the card Emma had written Thank you one hundred times in her best handwriting."

- Ruby Lu, Empress of Everything

In my best handwriting, thank you to Grace Li, Kelsey Blair, James Lee, Dr. Margot Filipenko, and Dr. Bonny Norton for your edits, your dialogue, and your cheerleading.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Growing up in the city of Vancouver, I took its ethnic diversity for granted until I moved away. As I studied, worked and traveled abroad to Europe, Asia, and South America, I grew accustomed to locals who found me a curiosity. My ethnicity was always a hot topic and I would be interrogated by complete strangers with a line of questions that typically began with, “Where are you from?” Often, this question would even be bypassed and instead, I would be playfully greeted in one of the major East Asian languages. Knowing full well what was expected, I would deflect the question by truthfully answering that I was from Canada. Seldom would my sheepish answer satisfy their curiosity, but that was my exact point. Why was it so important to identify my ethnic heritage? And if ethnicity was indicative of culture, how could something as complex as my identity, which is a conglomerate of cultures, be summarized by my appearance? As I began to question the nature of these interactions, I realized our shortcoming as human beings in needing to make assumptions about each other. I am no exception. Rather than tolerating ambiguity, it is much easier to stereotype one another into neat and tidy categories. However, these misplaced assumptions are precarious. They limit our ability to validate our shared commonalities and to experience each other as human beings. With this understanding in mind, I became more self-aware of the formation of my cultural identity and my views of other people and cultures. In the realm of teaching, I naturally became interested in what has been termed multicultural education.
Many teachers will agree that incorporating multicultural education plays an important role for the inclusion of ethnically diverse students found in current Greater Vancouver classrooms. As stated by Roberts and Cecil (1993), “Educators are in an ideal position to lead the way toward breaking down prejudiced and stereotyped thinking...offering multicultural concepts threaded throughout the entire curriculum may eventually lead to a truly democratic society whose citizens not only tolerate, but actively value diversity” (p. 1). Yet the teaching of it, as witness to it in my own school, happens via a “tourist approach” where only the celebrations, food, and a brief look at traditional customs are addressed. I am interested in increasing student awareness of diversity in the world through stories about people’s lived experiences.

In the late primary classroom, the major teaching emphasis is on literacy. The primary classroom is heavily literature-based and so I have been challenged to streamline the books that I teach, only selecting high quality literature for my students. Day to day reading of picture books are often used in the instruction of life lessons which spur on rich discussions. If this is the case, multicultural literature should be embedded in the selection. Students should feel safe to explore issues pertaining to their own identity or other issues such as racism in the classroom. The question then remains as to how educators go about selecting quality literature. Further, upon choosing it, how can educators implement it into the late primary or early intermediate classroom? How can the above objectives be met for students who are learning English as a second language? What sort of literature is available to them?

Consequently, I have chosen multicultural literature as the theme of this paper. Literature is a way for students to engage in worldviews that step outside their own. It is a
powerful tool that can change the way one thinks. It is my belief that addressing diversity first begins by looking internally at one’s own community. When students learn to respect each other’s cultures and customs, they also learn to become aware of values and beliefs that are different from their own.

A particular emphasis will be placed on multicultural literature that affirms the identity of minority students who are immigrants or second-generation born. Being a Canadian-born Chinese girl who began school in a predominantly Caucasian neighbourhood, I felt that my Chinese ethnicity was never validated in the school setting. I was always included and never felt discriminated against, but was treated and taught a curriculum suited for the White upper-middle class. As a result, amongst my peers, I made it known that I was not an immigrant (who somehow adopted a second class citizenship) in high school’s dismissive and socially divisive environment. I believe that my inability to feel pride about my own ethnic heritage hindered me from truly understanding people of other cultures earlier in my life. Although as students, we were encouraged to be more socially inclusive, we were not taught how to acknowledge the existing backgrounds in each classroom. Socialization was left for us to figure out ourselves.

Upon graduation, I visited Hong Kong for the first time; it was where my parents were raised. The trip sparked a curiosity in my ethnic heritage and affirmed my upbringing on adapted Chinese values. When I spent some time with a peer group that I knew from high school who still had family in Hong Kong, I was able to fit in easily, yet I had never before connected with them throughout our time in school. In university, my social circle of Asian friends further expanded. Negotiating my identity as a “CBC”
(Canadian-Born-Chinese) was a central concern and there were many social clubs on campus created by this group of individuals to address interests relevant to us. In my third year of university, I went on an exchange program to Hong Kong. This is where I took a keen interest in meeting people from around the world. As exchange students, we came together through shared experiences, and reveled in how strongly our nationalities shaped our perspectives and opinions. It was such a powerful experience that I have continued to seek out similar opportunities through traveling and French Language Learning abroad programs. If I could begin to help my students appreciate their own similarities and differences in primary grades, they might continue through school being more self-aware of how culture plays into their identity formation. My participation in multiple French Language Learning programs in francophone Canada and in France also tested my theoretical understanding of the Canadian "mosaic." As Canadian youth, gathered from the West Coast all the way to the East, we shared many similar views regarding tolerance and diversity, but each offered something unique about our own communities. The difficult struggle to construct my identity is why I hope that educators will provide more support for today’s children in constructing their own ethnic identities.

In my preliminary search for literature about the use of multicultural texts, I have found little situated in the Canadian context. Many of the available response studies have been researched in the United States and therefore, when minority population samples are included, students are typically from African-American or Hispanic origins. As Canada’s political and social views are diverse, and her history unique, researchers may find that teacher approaches to the instruction of diversity may differ and student responses may also differ. Yet in my survey and critique of the following articles, I expect to glean
teaching methods of multicultural literature that may be transferable to my student population in Canada and who are late primary or early intermediate aged. Not only is it important to affirm the identity of minority students, who are immigrants or second generation, but it is also important to encourage all students to understand our differences and similarities and to participate as global citizens in issues of social justice.

In summary, the intent of this graduating paper is to:

1) describe the selection process for choosing quality multicultural literature for literature circles with respect to a literature review on relevant research;

2) address the ways in which the classroom teachers can use multicultural literature to increase student awareness of diversity in the world.
SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining and Classifying Multicultural Literature

First, one must define multicultural literature. What is included or excluded from the definition? In Huck's (2004) textbook, *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*, all multicultural books fit into three kinds of literature:

- **[W]orld literature** (literature from nonwestern countries outside the socio-political mainstream of North America),
- **cross-cultural literature** (literature about relations between cultural groups or by authors writing about a cultural group other than their own),
- **minority literature or literature from parallel cultures** (literature written by members of a parallel culture that represents their unique experiences as members of that culture). (p. 22)

Multicultural literature is most commonly thought of as books about non-Western people — be it within or outside North America. However, some open the definition to include all groups of people outside the socio-political mainstream, such as religious and homosexual minorities.

Books, particularly picture books, can be further labeled into three types: specific, generic, and neutral (Bishop, 1992, p. 44). Culturally-specific books address the theme of living and growing up as a member within a certain group. In a well-written culturally-specific book, the details of culture — language, food, religious beliefs, familial relationships, music, behaviours, etc. — are all woven into a well-developed plot with believable and complex characters. In picture books, these details are woven into the illustrations. An example would be *Suki's Kimono* (2003) written by Cheiri Uegaki and illustrated by Stéphane Jorische. In this picture book, the central theme is the first day of
school and acceptance of difference. Suki, a Japanese-Canadian girl, wants to wear her kimono to school, but her older sisters tease her for it. The illustrations are embedded with references that combine both Canadian and Japanese culture.

Generically, American (or Canadian) books feature minority characters centered around universal themes — themes which are commonly shared by many groups of people. The characters happen to be of colour and the context is not necessarily embedded in culturally-specific cues, and if it is, it tends to be the dominant Western context. *Emma’s Rug* (1996), by Allen Say is about a child who discovers her source of artistic creativity. Emma is Asian, but her ethnicity can be easily be replaced by any other ethnicity, as there are no cultural cues which reference her ethnic or cultural identity.

Culturally neutral books are information texts about topics which are less culturally bound. For example, a science text about inventions may include photographs of many children using the inventions. These multi-racial children reflect the diverse populations in North America.

Other multicultural literature authorities, such as researcher Rudine Sims Bishop in her study and analysis of over 150 children books about African-Americans, have evaluated the quality of available literature. She uses the terms “social conscience” literature, “melting pot” literature” and “culturally conscious” literature. To her, social conscience literature is written for non-African audiences with aims to highlight the equal rights of all citizens; however, she asserts that these books are over simplified. Melting pot literature is a colour-blind approach that overemphasizes the universality of people. This perspective claims that people are the same everywhere, and fails to recognize White privilege. Finally, culturally conscious literature is literature actually written to and

**Guiding principles for multicultural literature selection**

With the numerous types of books available, what guiding principles can be offered for the selection of multicultural literature? It is important to remember to choose books which are authentic, use language that is fitting, show a range of representation of a cultural group, do not stereotype, and take realistic and positive perspectives (Huck et al., 2004, p. 23). Ultimately, a book should be first chosen for its literary merit and not because it aims to teach about cultural issues and an ethnic groups (Bainbridge and Pantaleo, 1999, p. 113).

**Authenticity**

Authenticity refers to the accurate representation of a group of people and their culture. This can begin with illustrations, which should accurately portray an ethnic group belonging to a particular time and location to issues of an author’s position and perspective. For example, children’s books are often written by Euro-American authors and illustrators, and thus, debate surrounding the question of ownership continues. There is also concern about publishers who act as gatekeepers and control the way minority cultures are represented. Does one who belongs to the group because he/she is an insider have the “right to write”? Or can any author write as long as his/her work is fully researched and accurate? Hansen-Krening, Mizokawa, and Aoki (2003) ask, “Is the author considered an authority not only on the ethnic group targeted in the story but also on the intricacies of diversity within that group? (p.xvii)” Authenticity validates local knowledge as a powerful source of information.
Dialect or jargon that is used within certain groups can further authenticate a book. Many books even incorporate another language where the context can support its meaning. *So Much* (1997) by Trishe Cooke and Helen Oxenbury plays with the spoken language and discourse within some African-American homes. *Andiamo, Weasel!* (2002) by Rose Marie Grant and Jon Goodell embeds repetitive Spanish phrases. These books can support second language use and help bilingual speakers feel proud of their mother tongue. In our schools, which tend to Westernize children, children mentally divide language into the language of the family and the language of school. When children feel that their mother tongue has no relevance in their lives, they will isolate it. These books can show that languages other than English are valued and can have a place in the classroom.

**Range of Race Representation**

Showing a range of representation of a particular race, in occupational and social status, is important to reflect the diversity within the group. Books should show that all people are complex human beings who can hold many roles and lifestyles. They can have different living conditions and backgrounds.

**Avoiding Stereotypes**

Avoiding stereotypes is an obvious consideration when choosing multicultural literature. Stereotypes can often be reinforced by illustrations which typecast a particular group, be they positive or negative stereotypes. One must also consider the perspective that is taken. Can children identify with the hero or heroine, and are his/her strengths valued without glamorizing or romanticizing the culture?

**Credible Reviewers**
Finally, have the books been reviewed by credible reviewers? To encourage authors of various ethnic groups outside the Newberry and Caldecott canon, multicultural awards such as the Coretta Scott King Award (African-American Literature), the John Steptoe Award for New Talent (African-American Literature), the Asian Pacific American Award for Literature, the Pura Belpre Award (Latino Literature), the Americas Award (Latino Literature), and the Oyate (Native American Literature) recognize books of literary merit. As the publishing industry in the United States is significantly larger than Canada's, these ALA (American Literary Association) awards are American. In Canada, other than the Governor General's award which is given to an English writer, a French writer, and an English illustrator, and a French illustrator, such distinctions are not made.

By incorporating multicultural literature of all genres, it is hoped that children will develop a stronger sense of themselves which includes an imagined community comprised of global citizenship.

**How to teach and use multicultural literature**

With the plethora of teaching advice and ideas about multicultural education, it can be a daunting task to determine the most effective way to teach respect of diverse cultures. The reality is that multicultural literature serves many functions. It can simply begin by bringing awareness of differing beliefs and values that exist within and outside the nation. It can serve as an instrument which gives ethnic groups who fall outside the political-social mainstream a voice to represent themselves and to affirm their identity. It can have an anti-racism agenda which asks those in the mainstream to acknowledge and challenge their unspoken power and privilege. To help teachers analyze their practices,
Harris (1993) in *Multicultural literacy and literature: the teacher's perspective*, summarizes multicultural teaching philosophies which range from assimilation to social reconstruction models.

Assimilation approaches aim to incorporate diversity by including multicultural texts or famous "minority" figures and their accomplishments, without making significant changes to the curriculum. Rarely will a discussion of the political or social context ensue. Some teachers may extend the former approach by emphasizing similarities shared across cultures as human beings, but fail to acknowledge diversity. The hope is that through shared interests, students will learn to respect one another.

Approaches that aim to transform, "involve changes in the structure of curriculum to enable students to view concepts, issues, and themes from the perspective of diverse ethnic and cultural groups" (p. 191). In this approach, the school may celebrate food, festivals, and costumes, but diversity is further reflected in practice and policy via the curriculum and the make-up of the school's student and staff population.

Of all the approaches, the most ideal and highly regarded are ones which prompt action for social change. Students become involved in issues of social justice and racism. The literature can bring awareness to the conditions and realities around the world, be they privileged or deprived. Harris' categories for multicultural teaching simplify a complex process, but give a platform for discussion. A teacher can move interchangeably from one model to the next, or may overlap many models of multicultural teaching. He/she can work at the highest model and incorporate elements from the models below it; they are not mutually exclusive.
The following excerpt from the Primary Program, an educational program guide put forth by the BC Ministry of Education, reaffirms the need for the development of social responsibility. It addresses all of the approaches proposed by Harris.

As children learn about themselves and their culture, they begin to understand how all people share similar needs, feelings, and aspirations, and how everyone has a contribution to make. Teachers engage children in activities to help them increase their awareness of others and to recognize the similarities between the diverse peoples of the world. At the same time, they foster an understanding of and respect for individual differences in temperament, appearance, personality, actions, abilities, and cultural background. In these ways, teachers lay a foundation for helping students develop respect for others and eliminate, or at least reduce, prejudices and stereotypes in their own outlook. They also help children begin to develop concepts of equality, fairness, tolerance, and justice in relation to the treatment of minority groups, individuals of both genders, and people with diverse family structures and ways of life. We live in a rapidly changing society that is part of an emerging global village. People are continually faced with decisions that may have a lasting impact on their own lives, the lives of others in immediate and distant communities, and the environments we share. Teachers help children appreciate, reflect on, and understand the complex ethical issues facing our society today. By so doing, children learn to act in thoughtful and responsible ways. (p. 27)
Norton (1992) in *Teaching Multiculturalism in the reading curriculum*, has developed a five step sequential study of multicultural literature with the intent to help students understand the values, beliefs, and traditions of a people. Using indigenous culture as her example, she starts with a broad based overview and then moves to specific knowledge. Beginning with myths and legends, she continues from autobiographies and biographies to historical fiction, before moving onto contemporary fiction. With each advancement through the study, students build up their background knowledge to judge for authenticity. True to traditional teaching of literature, students are then asked to make comparisons across all genres of text to make textual connections. This study make for a good introduction to a culture with which students may be otherwise unfamiliar.

However, despite the thoroughness of the study which increases cultural awareness, students could easily conclude it without shifting any of their personal views on the pertinent social issues faced by indigenous people. Harris would categorize this approach as an assimilation model and ask Norton to look at the chosen literature through a social or political lens.

**Allowing co-construction**

Dudley-Marling (1997), a Canadian teacher-researcher, uses her own class of Grade Three students in the Toronto metropolitan area, to reflect on her multicultural literature teaching practices. Unlike Norton, who hones in on one particular cultural group, Dudley-Marling introduces a wide range of folklore “to offer [her] students a diversity of literary experiences...that match[e]s their ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds (p. 313)”. Contrary to her well-intentioned expectation of being able to affirm her students’ cultural identities, they act with resistance. Their disinterest
leads to Dudley-Marling's conclusion that "intercultural understanding or communication" is unlikely to improve when texts are chosen to represent people. She realizes that it is not so much the chosen texts, but the lack of necessary space which should have been created for students to co-construct their cultural identities.

Glacier and Seo (2005), speak about that third space in their article, Multicultural literature and discussion as mirror and window?. This well-used metaphor has been used to describe how children can see their own lives as either reflected in literature, or as an observation into someone else's life (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). The priority goal is to give students a sense of belonging and to help them recognize that while individuals may have differing perspectives, we are all interdependent. It emphasizes differences and similarities. Issues of bias and prejudice must be introduced after students have a solid understanding of positive culturally sensitive images in picture books. However, it is important to note that:

[T]he addition of diverse texts will not, in and of itself, create respect for cultural differences. The text must instead be interrogated from multiple perspectives and act as a comparison point for students' own lives in order for it to be transformative, or life — and culture — affirming. (Glacier and Seo, 2005, p. 3)

Unlike the previously mentioned articles, the following discussion includes a formal research study conducted in an American high school by one of the authors of the article. Methodology included data collection through observations, interviews with teacher and students, artifacts of student work, and researcher field notes. Ethnologic and sociolinguistic methods of analysis were used to analyze the data. As descriptive qualitative research, the researcher aimed to describe the factors that influenced
discussions about texts which address cultural differences. The advantage of this study is the purely observational role of the researcher. Providing an outsider’s analysis of the teaching gives the reader a better sense of how objectives were implemented. The researcher was able to document the interactions of the class lessons without intervening, whereas Dudley-Marling’s article was a reflective piece. While she raised many issues which one could contemplate, the lack of documentation in her process of describing her teaching forces the reader to rely on her anecdotal recollection of how events and discussions transpired in her classroom. As with many teacher reflections, Dudley-Marling’s work can be criticized for the lack of internal validity. Going back to the high school classroom, at the end of the unit, the researchers measured successful implementation of the objectives by the quality of discussions held. They recorded the number of personal text-to-self and text-to-other connections which were made by each student as indicators. However, this measure of determining transformation or affirmation is debatable. Some researchers caution “overemphasis on personal connections to the text, as it may be seen to limit awareness of ethnic identity and cultural differences” (Prie in Knickerbocker and Rycik, 2006, p. 45). Ostrowski’s research (1994) also supports this warning. He notes that students tend to read for comprehension and make personal connections without cultural relevance (p.3). He suggests that students should embed personal responses within the context of the cultural background information.

A critical response framework

Knickerbocker and Rycik (2006) provide a teaching framework which speaks to the importance of understanding the privileges and assumptions of the dominant culture in their article, Reexamining literature study in the middle grades: a critical response
framework. A term they use, critical literacy, refers to thinking about the construction of text in the cultural, social, and political context. It further develops the preliminary role of personal response and individual interpretation, which solely relies on the reader’s immediate background knowledge. Critical literacy “engages students with literature in a way that encourages them to examine beliefs about society and about language itself” (p. 45). They are then asked to challenge the status quo and make decisions and stances on the social issues raised in the novel.

Implementing critical literacy in a response study, Louie (2005) examines how high school students who were predominantly Caucasian would be impacted by the reading of a story about life in Communist China. She documents the nature of the empathy developed by these students through the reading of a multicultural text. The teacher with whom she worked to develop the six-week unit aspired to help her students achieve emotional empathy. To check the students’ growth and understanding, they analyzed oral and written responses made during in-class discussions and in their journal entries. They were able to judge the depth of empathy by further classifying empathy to include categories of cognitive, historical, parallel emotional, reactive emotional, and cross-cultural empathy (2005, p. 6). Evidence of the students’ struggle to readjust their understanding was evident in the nature of their questions. In varying degrees, the majority of the class was able to situate themselves into the story to see the world from the protagonist’s perspective (p. 12). The strength of this study is the depth of analysis by Louie. She very clearly explains how each type of empathy factors into how the students understood themselves as global citizens. Furthermore, she provides a range of responses from the students to illustrate evidence of their thinking and its change over time.
Teaching discourse

Suzanne Miller (1993) speaks about perspective taking in her article, *Why a Dialogic Pedagogy? Making Space for Possible Worlds*. She emphasizes that learning takes place through dialogues which arise from the reading of books which challenge a particular worldview. Miller states, “I believe it is crucial that we learn how to teach ways of reading and talking about literature which create respect for multiple sociocultural perspectives and provide the means for learning to understand them” (p. 248). Simply reading multicultural texts or adding them to a teacher’s classroom library will not create respect for cultural difference. If the prevailing dominant culture is omitted in the study of “multicultural literature,” it relegates it to a mentality of “us,” as represented by White culture, versus “them,” as represented by everyone else. Literature in the canon need also be examined for its culture.

So, how can a teacher “transform ways of talking typical in classrooms to promote reflection through text discussion” (p.248)? Miller generalizes four strategies for creating the right context where students are engaged, interested and stimulated by discussion of multicultural texts. All of her strategies and example questions are based on observations in various successful classrooms.

1) *Making Space for Difference*

The first strategy is when the teacher takes a facilitator role, so that students are not reliant on his/her as the class text authority. The teacher can do this by physically creating spaces such as circles to promote shared responsibility for contribution to discussions. Teachers can also explicitly teach students how to talk about discourse. They can reinforce social interaction skills which let a speaker know that the listeners are
engaged. Students can learn to respond to each other’s comments and ideas, or ask further questions. While adults may take these communication practices for granted, students are still grappling, through trial and error, to competently negotiate the power to speak. It is particularly important, especially with young children who tend to interrupt one another, for teachers to help mediate discussions to give equal opportunity to all speakers.

2) Using Verbal promptings to provoke Collaborative Reflections

While teachers value the importance of group discussions, the actual discourse used to maintain a discussion is rarely talked about. Some specific phrases to provoke extension of ideas and thoughts are given.

*To clarify:* “So are you saying...”, “Why do you say that?”, “You look puzzled, why don’t you ask Jen a question about what she said?”

*To encourage different interpretative possibilities:* “Any other ideas?”

*To ask a student to take a stance:* “So you are saying that ___ can be ___ or ___?”, “Do you agree?”, “What do you think?”

To critically examine a particular text and its assumptions, teachers can pose questions that require students to examine the society and perhaps the limitations or advantages faced by characters because of specific historical, social, or political situations. Ask students to compare and contrast. Would the same results have ensued if the setting took place elsewhere? What is subordinated or ignored? Again, by hosting discussions where students of differing opinions are valued and where students feel safe enough to be uninhibited in speaking, students will gain a better understanding of each others’ perspectives.

3) Scaffolding
By scaffolding individual reactions, the teacher can guide the students in questioning which helps them to formulate their own meaning of the texts. By prompting students to problem solve and to record their initial responses to the text in a journal, they can capture their gut reactions. Later, they can return to their responses to analyze why they reacted the way they did and what is implicit in their values and assumptions. Students are, in other words, making text-to-self personal connections. A line of questioning that can help students move towards the text are: “Can you connect that to your experience?” (What does that remind you of in your own life?), “So what do you make of the character based on your experiences?” (From your point of view, what do you think about the character?). To move away from the text, ask “Do you think that is true from your experiences?”

A useful format to emphasize text-to-self connections is splitting the page into two columns. One column is for actual questions about an action in the text and the other column is for stating whether or not one agrees with the author’s perspective. Questions to prompt this line of thinking are: “Whose perspective is that interpretation from? (Who do you think believes that?)” “What group’s motives does he/she represent? (Are there reasons why s/he would do that?)” “What alternatives are ignored? (Is there any other way of working out or thinking about the problem?)” “What are the consequences for others? (What will happen to everyone else if _________?)”

4) Allowing Student-initiated and sustained Dialogic Inquiry

After repeated exposure in using the aforementioned discussion practices, students should be able to initiate their own conversations with less guidance from the teacher. Students will eventually internalize the many ways of eliciting responses from
each other and speaking their voices in a thoughtful manner. When students are able to think about how to analyze a text on their own, they will be able to negotiate and accept multiple viewpoints and perspectives on, hopefully, issues of class, race, gender, family, and ethnic communities.

Summary

This section has examined how multicultural literature is defined and classified, provided guiding principles for its selection, and suggested how to teach and use it. Huck classifies all multicultural literature into three types: world literature, cross-cultural literature, and minority literature. Regardless of classification, when choosing books of quality, one must question their authenticity, examine whether or not a range of races is represented and stereotypes are avoided, and ask if the reviewers are credible and reputable. Finally, while many methods of teaching multicultural literature exist, for students to make meaningful connections, they must be given opportunities to formulate their understanding of identity and diversity. Dialogue and discussion under the careful guidance of a facilitator can help students learn how to challenge their existing perspectives.
SECTION 3: CONNECTIONS TO PRACTICE

In my Grade 3 classroom of multi-lingual, multi-ethnic students, a mere mention of Brazil, Egypt, China, Korea, or Iceland causes ears to perk up and eyes to glint. My ESL students, who comprise a third of my class, are new immigrants and international students. They are keen to tell me about their countries and often ask me to share their cultural traditions with the other students. Fonn brings me an Icelandic folktale to read aloud. In celebration of Lunar New Year, Da Zhong wants to share a book about Chinese paper cuts. Not only is the class engaged and curious when I acknowledge Fonn and Da Zhong’s perspective, but I have also validated their personal lived experiences. They also keep me accountable. When I introduce a picture book of highly stylized, calligraphic and caricature-like Chinese people, Carrie combines an annoyed sigh of distress whilst crying, “Not Chinese!” and the class is quick to understand that the pictures are not representative of real people. They have subtly learned about pictorial stereotypes. For my ESL students, the mirror is seeing themselves reflected in some part of the classroom, and the window is their interaction with daily Canadian life that is real. For the rest of the class, their window is the opportunity to learn about the culture of their peers. As the dominant cultural group, it will be difficult for them to move beyond mere labeling and identification of cultural values, traditions, and customs to true perspective-taking. Their understanding will remain ethnocentric unless they are brought into a place that forces them outside their own worldview.

Reiterating an aforementioned quote in the Ministry of B.C.’s Primary Program educational guide, children need to learn about themselves and their culture and the commonalities between all people, while respecting diversity. As they work together, it
is hoped that prejudices and racial barriers are broken and instead replaced by tolerance and understanding. Teachers help children become thoughtful and responsible individuals who can appreciate, reflect on, and understand the complex ethical issues in their communities (p. 27). It is with the objective to “step out” that multicultural literature is being introduced to my class.

The reviewed research has shown that transformative beliefs and actions resulting from the reading of multicultural literature happen when students engage in dialogic inquiry. The dialogue must force students to take a stance, encourage different interpretive possibilities, promote reflection of the text in a collaborative way, and give students the chance to co-construct their identity— in essence, a third space. Indeed, the environment must also be respectful, open, and safe. When students have learned to work collaboratively, the teacher can move into a facilitating role. These core conditions to promoting cross-cultural understanding seem to all point to the use of literature circles as a logical medium of instruction.

Literature Circle Studies

A literature circle study is “an approach that emphasizes the reading and discussing of unabridged, unexcerpted children’s literature in small, self selected groups” (Samway & Whang, 1996, p.14). It is essentially a book club— a group of readers united by the same novel choice who engage in a student-led discussion.

Implementation of literature circles vary from class to class. Often times, students rotate the role of the discussion leader who guides the group in student-initiated topics. Each member is given a focus to prepare. For example, a reader may come to the discussion with prepared notes about their opinions about the actions of the protagonist.
Another reader may comment on their opinions of the illustrations. Student preparation is simply a vehicle to help initiate conversation. Once the students are engaged, conversations should be open-ended and natural.

An authentic literature circle in full implementation can be identified when students are engaged in meaningful discussion with little teacher prompting. A teacher should not be instructing; s/he is the facilitator (Daniels, 2001, p. 18). However, when literatures circles are first introduced to young children, a teacher can “act as both a knowledgeable reader and a mentor of learners” (p. 14).

The purpose of literature circles is to provide a learning environment where students can personally engage with the text. This type of learning recognizes that students bring a wealth of knowledge and background as readers. They will interpret a text based on their prior literary experiences and negotiate, clarify, and justify points of view to make new meaning. Reading, from a socio-psycholinguistic point of view, is a “meaning-making process” (p. 16).

Implementation

My class of twenty-two students is located in a middle to upper class neighbourhood. School demographics are mainly Canadian-born Caucasian and both immigrant and second generation East Asians. My class has an equal balance of Caucasian and Asian students, including international ESL students from every continent in the world. Nearly half the class speaks a second language. Families are educated. The school is comprised of approximately five hundred students, with a near equal balance in the primary and intermediate grades. The primary staff have recently committed to an “early literacy” project. A major focus on reading and writing has been implemented,
teachers are encouraged to develop best practices in this area, and every child’s reading level will be monitored and tracked from kindergarten onwards. Early primary teachers instruct through guided reading groups and early intervention will be made if a child is not meeting reading level expectations. What this means for me as a Grade 3 teacher is that literature circles are a natural and sequential step in the progression of literacy practices. I will be able to offer appropriate reading selections which will be at a pleasurable reading level. Yet the difficulty at the Grade 3 level is the transition from simple readers to early chapter books. There is also a slight paradox in the books offered, as the low level but high interest topics inhibits authors from writing a book of literature. There are very few contemporary multicultural selections of literary merit.

In creating literature circle groups, I take my twenty-two students and create four groups. One group is comprised of my six ESL students. They work through a new picture book each time we meet for literature circles. The remaining three groups of approximately 3-4 students each work through texts of their choice. I introduce each of my books and ask students to independently and secretly vote for the top two picks which interest them. This ensures that students, and not their friends, choose the book. During the week, students have three periods of approximately forty-five minutes each to work on literature circles. Half of this time is spent on reading and the other half on meeting to discuss the roles.

Literature circles are just one of the many facets of a balanced literacy program. They are meant to give a positive reading experience, for pleasure and content, to students. Students take ownership and control of discussions once they are taught how to converse with one another. And unlike reading groups, where instruction is explicit and
top-down, literature circle groups are not homogeneous leveled reading groups. Students come together out of their interest in a book.

Using multicultural books will give students new issues to debate and explore. Students will be able to share the experiences of the characters through the novel and, through discussion, they will be able to reaffirm their own experiences and each others’. The goal is for students to have rich discussions that they know how to initiate. I facilitate this process by teaching new roles that I’ve created. These roles have been adapted from Harvey Daniel’s original roles explained in his book, Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs & Reading Groups. They were purposefully designed to force students to pay attention to cultural elements in pre-selected multicultural books (See Appendix).

**Literature Circle Roles**

As students learn to gain literary independence, presenting literature circles into a balanced literacy program can be a very exciting progression for young children. Most students will have practiced learning how to read on their own and to each other. They will have spent much time in response journals learning how to make text-to-text and text-to-self connections. Literature circles incorporate and build on all of those necessary skills, and now ask students to develop a new one— orally communicating ideas and opinions to each other. Like all past milestone accomplishments in reading, teaching students how to efficiently engage in literature circles will take time, repetition, and scaffolding.

*Something New*
The *Something New* Role asks students who are unfamiliar with the presented culture to identify something new that they have learned. If there are students from that cultural background, they are expected to validate or explain the practices identified by their peers. If a reader claims that there is nothing new for him/her, he/she could adapt their role and act as if s/he were writing a glossary.

**Differences and Similarities**

The *Differences and Similarities* roles force students to compare their own experiences with those presented by the characters in the novel. In the discussion with their peers, they may discover something deeper about each others’ home lives. The discussion can bring topics in the fictional account to reality. It may also affirm students who are in the minority. Further, cultural differences and similarities do not simply lie with tangible items such as food, but in what one values, thinks, or believes. By asking “why” a particular individual or character says or acts the way he/she does, students will also inadvertently decide whether or not the practice is culture-specific or individually-specific.

**Setting**

The *Setting* role helps students identify places that their character frequents which may be unfamiliar to them. It gives them a chance to track the movements of their character within a day or week. This is particularly insightful if there are many differences because it forces students to concretely imagine a life different than theirs. This role is also useful if the story takes place in a foreign location.

**Problem and Solution Seeker**
The *Problem* and *Solution Seeker* roles force students to step into the shoes of their character. Students are asked to consider why the problem is a problem for the character and if they have ever experienced something similar. Hopefully, students will be able to make personal connections, some of which will help build their empathy for each other. In addition, by asking students how they would solve the problem forces them to deal with a scenario that they might have never considered. It is an avenue where all answers can be safe because the scenarios are hypothetical.

*Artful Artifact and Word Wizard*

The implementation of the *Artful Artifact* is essentially the same as the original *Artful Artist*, except for the instructions which now ask students to focus on drawing something that tells one about the culture. This is a necessary role for the exploration of picture books.

Finally, Daniels' role of *Word Wizard* has been kept because multicultural books often include phrases in another language. The *Word Wizard* gives students the opportunity to focus in on these words. Clearly an author has deemed the word important enough to include in the dialogue or narration, and so it deserves our attention. Students can enjoy figuring out the definition, which can be understood through contextual information, or is in the glossary.

**Recommended Books for Literature Circles**

The following books were chosen using the criteria set in section two, the Literature Review. They all focus on the theme of immigrant and second generation children in North America who learn to juggle multiple cultural identities. The picture books explore East Asian cultures of China, Japan, and Korea, while the early chapter
books deal specifically with China. They all address the values and traditions of the home, which are often in conflict with the Western ideologies of the dominant society found at school. Frequently, the protagonists encounter scenarios which test their understanding of friendship and acceptance. The selected books have been popular for their realistic portraits of issues concerning children, and have been well liked by the young readers in my class.

**Picture Books**

Picture books, a familiar medium to primary students, will be used for the purpose of introducing multicultural issues. As students at the grade three level are limited by their reading abilities, picture books offer an avenue to discuss more complex issues without the burden of reading comprehension. These books will be embedded into the regular literacy program as read-alouds with both class-wide and smaller group discussion, and accompanying writing activities. They can be used throughout the first and second term of the school year as preparation for more traditional literature circles in the final term. Specific books lend themselves particularly well to the introduction of the new roles I have created. Of the ones I have chosen and critiqued, a focus on East Asian culture—Japanese, Chinese, and Korean— is made. These following books can be a starting point or a supplement to other multicultural books already present in the classroom. I have made some suggestions as to how the roles can be used with these books and given some guiding questions to help students along in their literature circle groups.

This is a story about communication difficulties between a little girl and her grandfather who visits from China. She becomes angry with her mother for all the changes in their home due to his visit. However, she learns to bond with him through teaching each other their respective language.

Similarities, Differences, Problem and Solution Seeker: It will be easy for students to make personal comparisons with their grandparents. This story will likely generate some strong opinions about the protagonist’s actions.

Word Wizard: As the two central characters teach each other simple words in Chinese and English, students can also learn these. An appendix of Chinese words is included.


Themes: Halloween, Korean-American identity, family heritage

*Behind the Mask* is an intergenerational story where two cultures meet—the tradition of Korean folk dance juxtaposed with North American celebrations of Halloween. A young Korean-American boy worries about finding the right costume for Halloween. He discovers family treasures, his grandfather’s traditional Korean dance costume, and decides that it is the perfect fit. As he wears the costume, he makes a personal connection to his grandfather that was lost when he passed away.

Word Wizard: An author’s note about Talchum, the traditional Korean folk dance, can be found at the back of the book. (Tal, Talchum)

Problem Seeker and Problem Solver: Why had Kimin been afraid of his grandfather and how did he overcome that fear?

Themes: Korean culture, first day of school, immigration

The Name Jar is a story about a girl’s first day of school as a Korean immigrant. She experiences name calling, and as a result, wants to have an American name. The class gives her an empty jar and fills it with suggestions. This story is particularly well suited for affirming the feelings of new students who have been through a move and for helping the class be more sympathetic towards their transition. Students can also do a name study to explore the meaning and origins of their name.

Problem Seeker: Students can step into the shoes of Unhei, the girl. They can be guided by asking questions such as:

How do you think Unhei felt at the beginning versus at the end of the story?
Do you think Unhei’s name important to her for knowing who she is?
What is its meaning?

Similarities: Students can draw connections to their first day of school experiences.


Themes: Cross culture of Canadian and Chinese traditions

Where is Gah-ning? is a story about how a little girl disobediently makes her way from home to the nearby town of Kapuskasing. The book is an entertaining read aloud and students will have a great deal of fun analyzing the pictures.

Setting: Munsch’s story is filled with clues about the story’s setting. Scenes are filled with densely illustrated cartoon-like pictures that students will find humorous. At first glance, students will assume that the story is set in China, but upon closer inspection, they will discover symbols that make it clearly Canadian.

Theme: immigrant, Korean identity

In this beautifully-illustrated picture book of surreal scenes, a simple first person narration about young Yoon’s first days at school is told. Yoon defiantly refuses to write her name in English, as a way of expressing resistance to acculturation. She has difficulty transitioning to life in America and wishes to return home. When she finally accepts her situation, she symbolically begins to write her name in English.

Another book in this series includes the recent publication *Yoon and the Jade Necklace*. This story touches on friendships at school, bullying, and pride in family heirlooms.

This story is particularly well suited to helping students empathize and understand the feelings of new students, and is therefore most appropriate for the Problem Seeker role. Yoon has a strong personality and claims control over what little she can manage. The story portrays her in a position of power where she has little social authority.


Themes: immigration, Japanese and American cross-cultural identity

*Tea with Milk* is an autobiographical story about the author’s parents. The story shadows Say’s mother, May, whose “parents called her Ma-chan, which was short for Masako…[they]spoke to her in Japanese. Everyone else called her May and talked with her in English” (p. 4). This immigrant story is filled with cultural comparisons between Japanese and American traditions and values, but is presented with a twist. Although May is ethnically Japanese, home for her is in America until her parents immigrate to Japan. The move is difficult for May as she struggles to adapt to her new life. Say walks
us through May’s life, from university to her first job, and then to the meeting of her future husband, who reminds her that home is not determined by place, but by the people around you.

Every literature circle role is suitable for use with this story. The story takes us between Japan and America, possibly in a pre-war era. Gender equality issues are addressed in a tangible way. Complex problems are introduced and resolved over a longer span of time than that of most stories. There are many layers and it presents many sophisticated issues which can be examined by young or more mature groups of students.


Themes: Japanese culture, first day of school, cultural acceptance and tolerance

On the first day of school, determined and independent Suki refuses to wear anything but her favourite piece, her kimono. As warned by her sisters, she gets teased, but overcomes the taunts when she impresses her class with a Japanese dance that she learned over the summer. Before her peers, Suki proudly reminisces the celebration at a Japanese street festival she attended with her grandmother. The illustration of this scene shows how Suki’s Japanese background is celebrated in a Western environment. The setting, in an urban city confirmed by the townhouses and their doorways which spill onto the sidewalk, makes for a beautiful backdrop to the characters who are participating in the festival. *Suki’s Kimono* fully demonstrates all of the elements that make an outstanding multicultural picture book.

Similarities: Students can draw connections to their first day of school experiences.

Setting: The Japanese street festival is an event similar to the Powell Street Festival held every summer in Vancouver.
Something New: Cultural elements mentioned can be researched in non-fiction books and perhaps even sampled. (kimono, taiko drummers, somen noodles, shaved ice with red bean sauce, paper lanterns)

Word Wizard: A translation of the Japanese words in the story can be found at the beginning of the book; however students should be able to decipher the meaning of the words by analyzing them in context. (obachan, obi, geta, kimono, somen, taiko)

Chapter Books

Before jumping into literature circles that require more refined self-monitoring skills and independence, I recommend first completing a novel study as a class. Unlike picture books, chapter books are literary pieces positioned to develop complex characters. For my purpose, it allows readers the chance to look at issues of identity in greater depth. The entire selection of literature circle novels is Chinese themed so that the class can focus on one ethnic group in detail. Some of the cultural elements transcend the particular time and place of the novel, which allows each group to compare the differences and similarities with the class. Each of the choices offers a circumstantially different position so that a wide range of race representation is provided. I encourage students to read at least two out of the four selections, so that they can make comparisons.

Students should spend approximately fifteen minutes reading, fifteen minutes preparing their role, and fifteen minutes in discussion. For the first traditional literature circle, students can each choose the same role to work through until all roles have been covered. They should be comfortable preparing for the discussion on their own. The group can perhaps discuss which role is best suited for the pages that they have read. The
teacher should decide the number of pages to be read in advance so that all group members can finish within fifteen minutes.


Ruby’s second adventure in Look’s sequel to *Ruby Lu, Brave and True*, is a comical and delightful read. Ruby finds her life turned upside down when her cousin emigrates from China to live with her family in Seattle. With childlike honesty, Ruby keenly observes her cousin’s behaviours and actions. She interprets Chinese culture like a foreign tourist would, but is forced to come to terms with these oddities that make her an outsider in her own home. The traditional stereotypes of Chinese people are coyly addressed. For example, Ruby describes how her relatives “loved to pose with many ordinary things that they thought were extraordinary…Ruby snapped a hundred pictures [but she] liked being a tour guide (2)”. Again, it is Ruby’s unbiased interpretation, which ignores what society has to say, that is entertaining. It is a clever position that Yee has taken. Her protagonist is upset by the changes in her life, when she isn’t the one who has uprooted and moved. Children reading this book will be amused by her antics and teachers will love the plotline twist on the conventional immigrant story.

The pace of the story and length of this book makes it a perfect literature circle choice. It is suitable for the average Grade 3 reading level, although weaker readers could participate if it were read as a read-aloud. It is a high-interest read with a dramatic tone. Boys and girls will be charmed by Ruby’s quirky character who now joins the ranks of Pippi and Ramona.

The Jade Dragon is a story about a girl’s struggle with identity, family, and friendship. Ginny is pulled between the need to fit in at school while keeping to the values of a traditional Chinese household. Marsden and Loh delicately balance the themes of acceptance and loyalty by juxtaposing Chinese traditions as represented by the protagonist, Ginny, with Western traditions as represented by Stephanie, an adopted Chinese girl raised in America. As the two girls develop their friendship, conflict often arises. People, including themselves, make assumptions about their common heritage, when in fact they hold many different values. Further, Ginny’s mother struggles to accept changes in her daughter’s priorities.

Bishop would classify The Jade Dragon as a culturally specific book, as it is embedded in a specific circumstance where Chinese culture is integral to the story. It is indeed didactic, teaching its readers to not judge people by the way they look.

In terms of authenticity, Carolyn Marsden is a notable author receiving critical acclaim for her previous novel, The Gold Threaded Dress, which won many awards and received Booklist’s Editor’s Choice and Top 10 First Novel for Youth. Writing of The Jade Dragon is co-authored with Virginia Shin-Mui Loh, who helps to validate its authenticity, as she writes from a personal perspective as a daughter of immigrant parents and a member within the group. There are also many culturally-specific references that are both abstract, such as values, and concrete, such as traditional foods. Cultural differences are highlighted, For example, Ginny’s mom reminds her to take off her shoes before entering Stephanie’s home, yet her family doesn’t practice this custom themselves.

This novel also includes a range of race representation. Ginny and Stephanie couldn’t be more different. Their life stories are worlds apart, despite their similar
physical appearance: “the new girl had straight black hair that shone in the sun, just like Ginny’s. She had bangs cut straight across, just like Ginny’s (1).

This book is 165 pages, a perfect length for early chapter book readers. It is suitable for strong readers at the Grade 3 level and is aimed at female audiences. Young girls can relate to many of the realistic scenarios of friendship development. A teacher’s guide with discussion questions is available on the Candlewick Press website (Retrieved May 19, 2009, from http://www.candlewick.com/book_files/0763631752.mis.1.pdf). Some of these questions could be used as prompts to help students get started with their literature circle roles.

Some of my criticism pertains to certain passages in the book. They are cause for concern as they are loaded statements which need to be unpacked for young children. For example, on page 54 Ginny’s mom says, “Your friend may have all those things, but you have your real Chinese parents”; on page 79, she says, “Our Ah Mei is Chinese through and through”; on page 96, she says, “American kids have no respect. When I was little I always listened to my parents”; and on page 110, she says, “I will have to send you to China to learn respect for your parents. Real Chinese girls would never lie”. At first glance, Ginny’s mom may seem harsh, ethno-centric and even prejudiced. So that she is not vilified, we must ask students to analyze her statements both in context and in relation to each other. Ginny’s mom is a dynamic character. Her attitude changes over time. What reasons does she have for her remarks and actions? Might she be fearful of losing her child to values which are foreign to her? Does her character evolve by the end of the novel? Ginny’s mom carries many sentiments typical of immigrant parents. Was she
uprooted from her home country without choice? Students, when asked to take on her perspective, may be more empathetic and sensitive to her situation.

The first comment referencing adoption may also be a sensitive topic. It might be an appropriate time to discuss family types and their differences. The students themselves, like Ginny’s mom, might have questions or pre-conceived notions about adoption, which can be addressed.

Overall, this book fits most of the criteria necessary for Grade Three literature circles. Its length and complexity is age appropriate, and more importantly, it is a book of literary merit offering a sophisticated, honest, and serious look at multicultural issues.


The Truth About Rats (and Dogs) is about Connor’s desire for acceptance by his parents. Events based around Connor’s home life illustrate his struggle to please and obey his parents while maintaining his personal interests. They expect him to learn the piano: “people seem to expect the Chinese half to make you good at piano or violin or math...” but he doesn’t enjoy it (p. 1). Instead, his heart is in biking and animals, both interests that his parents are not too keen about. By the end of the story, the points of conflict are resolved so that a better relationship and understanding is formed with his parents.

The story’s central plot has very little to do with Connor’s cultural identity. Although his half-Chinese background from his father’s side is woven into the story, it is secondary to the plot. Connor’s background, amongst other experiences, shapes his character, but it does not define him. He learns how to be more assertive and truthful, and these values help to form his identity. There is a chapter devoted to a Chinese New Year family dinner where issues about his mother’s acceptance by his grandmother are
paralleled to his own relationship. The complexity of his parents’ mixed marriage is casually mentioned. Bishop would identify this book as a generically American novel, with a few touches of cultural detail.

This novel is an easy read for average to strong readers. There are few stories in this genre written from a male first person narration with such raw honesty and thoughtfulness. This novel does so successfully, and as a result, will appeal to both boys and girls.


*Shu-Li and Tamara* is a simple story about two young girls and their friendship which crosses cultural and class boundaries. Woven between the plot line of their developing friendship are snapshots into Chinese culture as seen through Shu-Li’s home life. Much of the story, set around the family deli where rich descriptions of Chinese cuisine are given, provide a glimpse into a safe, but pertinent aspect of culture— food. This can be an easy starting point which brings awareness at the primary level to differences in diet. These anecdotes are complemented by black and white cartoon drawings. Description is further emphasized by Yee who frequently mentions the diverse neighbourhood in which the girls explore, highlighting the multicultural reality experienced by many of today’s urban Canadian children.

The story also lightly touches on prejudices when Tamara is accused of stealing money from the school’s bake sale. Yee plays on the destructive impact of rumors and stereotypes. The children suspect Tamara because her family is poor.
This early chapter book is just slightly more difficult than a simple reader and is appropriate for students reading at an early Grade 3 level. The simple sentence structure and emphasis on dialogue as a medium, makes it well suited as a read aloud.

Overall, this novel would fit well as a literature circle choice. There are many extensions that can be made, from richer discussions about the challenges immigrants face, to pairing it with a non-fiction book about Chinese cuisine. Paul Yee is also a recipient of Canada’s Governor General’s Award for Children’s Literature. He is a respected authority on literature about Chinese Canadians.

Summary

A review of multicultural picture books and short chapter books are provided in this section. Each of the recommendations has been examined in light of the criteria for quality multicultural literature as identified in section two. These rich examples of multicultural books specifically chosen for use in literature circles, a discussion based teaching method, will introduce students to issues of diversity in an engaging way.
SECTION 4: CONCLUSIONS

The ever increasingly-diverse classroom calls for new ways of addressing children whose worldviews differ from that of the traditional White middle-class that is often represented in curriculum. In the B.C. Ministry of Education’s framework on diversity in schools, educators are called to engage in instructional practices that encourage “conditions that foster an inclusive, healthy school culture, a nurturing social and emotional environment…” (p. 25). A series of guiding questions to foster these conditions are found in the ‘Implications for Boards of Education and Schools’ section. Some of these questions include:

To what extent do schools emphasize outcomes of the curriculum that address diversity in instruction? Have teachers been provided with the necessary resources to support this work? Are teachers encouraged to adjust teaching strategies to take into account differing ways of thinking and responding in educational settings? How are teachers supported in developing skills to do this? (p. 25)

Students of all backgrounds should see themselves, their concerns and lives, represented in literature.

By exploring the pedagogy of multicultural literature in the classroom, I have had to first learn how to be a better judge of quality of literature. I have had to understand what issues are pertinent to the children in my class without assuming and placing my expectations upon them. Children care for a rich story line where cultural traditions can be subtly woven into a rich and well written literary piece. It is often amusing for immigrant and second generation children to see their experiences validated in literature.
With different paces of self-reflection, some students may have never before needed to evaluate their ethnic or cultural identity. They may not realize just how different their home lives may be from each other. Reading books leads to new knowledge about other people.

As an educator, I have learned how important it is to give students a third space to engage in conversation that is student-centered and not teacher-led. With a teacher’s gentle guiding in literature circles, students can decide what concerns are important to them. They have an opportunity to read a story through their lens of understanding and make their own interpretations. A teacher can best support multicultural understanding by allowing students the opportunity to share their lives and build upon each other’s experiences.

Writing this paper has forced me to examine literature in great depth and methodically think through its implementation. I have encountered challenges in its practical application and have learned that there is no set formula to teaching children how to respect cultural diversity. Respect and tolerance is learned through action, and a teacher can best serve his or her students by demonstrating patience and genuine interest for opinions that are voiced and shared. I have offered a framework of what can be done as best practices in teaching a carefully chosen selection of literature. I have learned that educators must understand their groups of students to address the particular needs and interests that fall within the group. My appreciation for the range of multicultural literature has grown and I am challenged to keep my practices innovative and up-to-date.
References


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Appendix: Black line Masters: Multicultural Literature Circle Roles

SOMETHING NEW

Name ______________________________________________________________

Group ____________________________________________________________

Book _____________________________________________________________

Assignment p____ -p____

Something new: Your job is to find something new that you have learned about the culture presented in your book. This could be:

____ New foods
____ New phrases
____ New ways of doing things

Something new that I learned today is…
Differences

Name _____________________________________________

Group _____________________________________________

Book _____________________________________________

Assignment p _____ - p _____

Differences: Your job is to identify something that the character does or thinks which is different from how you and/or your family would do it. This could be…

___ How your character handles a situation
___ The weekly activities your character does
___ Special celebrations that your characters celebrates

Differences between the myself and the character include…
SIMILARITIES

Name______________________________________________________________

Group____________________________________________________________

Book______________________________________________________________

Assignment p_____ -p_____

Similarities: Your job is to identify something that the character does or thinks which is similar to you and/or your family. This could be...

___ How your character handles a situation
___ The weekly activities your character does
___ Special occasions or holidays that your characters celebrates

Similarities between myself and the character include…
You are the Word Wizard. Your job is to look for special words in the story. Words that are:

- in a different language
- new
- different
- strange
- funny
- interesting
- important
- hard

When you find a word that you want to talk about, mark it with a Post-it note or write it down here.

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When your group meets, help your friends talk about the words you have chosen. Things you can discuss:

- What is the meaning of this word? How do you know?
- How does this word fit in the story?
- Shall we look it up in a dictionary?
- What does this word make you feel like?
- Can you draw the word?

*modified from Harvey Daniel’s Word Finder
SETTING

Name______________________________________________________________

Group______________________________________________________________

Book________________________________________________________________

Assignment p_____ -p_____

Setting: Your job is to describe the setting that the story takes place in. This could be:

____ Different places that the character visits regularly
____ Somewhere familiar

These clues which tell me where the story takes place...
PROBLEM SEEKER

Name_________________________________________________________

Group__________________________________________________________________

Book_________________________________________________________________

Assignment p____ -p____

Your are the Problem Seeker. Your job is to identify the problem that your character is facing.

___Have you ever faced similar problems?
___Why is the issue your character facing a problem for him/ her?
SOLUTION SEEKER

Name__________________________________________

Group____________________________________________

Book____________________________________________

Assignment p____ -p____

You are the Solution Seeker. Your job is to identify how the problem is solved for your character. Would you have solved it the same way?
Artful Artifacts: Your job is to draw anything about the story that tells you about the culture. If you are reading a picture book, try to imitate the illustrator’s style. What you draw can also be something that you like such as:

- a character
- words
- the setting
- the problem
- an exciting part
- a surprise
- a prediction of what will happen next
- anything else

Draw on the back of this page or on a bigger piece of paper if you need it. When your group meets, don’t tell what your drawing is. Let them guess and talk about it first. Then you can tell about it.