

Infusing Multicultural Literature into Teacher Education Programs

Three Instructional Approaches

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Introduction and Purpose

Today's classrooms in the United States reflect the growing diversity of our changing world. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2008), by the year 2050 the current ethnic and racial minority groups combined will constitute the majority of the U.S. population. Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy (2008) state that most mainstream teachers currently have at least one dual language learner (DLL) in their classrooms. However, only 29.5% of those teachers have had opportunities for professional preparation in working with the DLL population.

Research by Lewis (2006), with confirmation by the 2004 U.S. Department of Education demographics, reports that almost 87% of U.S. elementary and secondary teachers are White. Because all teachers are responsible for teaching in a diverse society, it is critical that educator preparation programs (EPPs) address the need for high-quality multicultural educators who are prepared to work with students of diverse cultural backgrounds. These changing student demographics have emphasized the need for all teachers to have the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to work effectively with racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse students (Banks, 2016).

In response to this growing diversity, teacher educators have an increased responsibility to prepare new educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide an EPP that effectively addresses

the diverse student population through multicultural education.

In order to prepare high-quality multicultural educators, three teacher educators at a large, mid-south, research-one university collaborated to share successful strategies to infuse multicultural literature into the three EPPs at their institution—one undergraduate elementary program and two graduate programs, M.Ed. TESOL and secondary education.

Literature Review

Defining multicultural education could well require a full article in itself, so for clarity of purpose and brevity, we point the reader to these sources: Banks' definition of multicultural education as a broad concept consisting of five specific dimensions (2006); Nieto and Bode's conceptualization of seven characteristics within a sociopolitical paradigm including the context of community and the process of education (2008); and the work by Sleeter and Grant (2006) on the redesign of education programs to focus on education that is multicultural and reconstructionist.

For the purpose of this article, we focus on Banks' curricular reform model (2016, 1998, 1997) to provide a rationale and framework for infusing multicultural literature into our courses. Banks offers four ways to integrate a multicultural understanding into the curriculum within his model. They are:

1. The *Contributions Approach* which focuses on a surface approach to culture such as heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements;
2. The *Additive Approach* which offers content, concepts, themes, and perspectives without changing the structure of the curriculum itself;
3. The *Transformative Approach* where the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspective

of diverse ethnic and cultural groups; and

4. The *Social Action Approach* in which the curriculum is modified so that students make decisions about important social issues and take actions to help solve them.

While these approaches can be holistic and cross-curricular as well as individual, they also provide a scaffold for instructors to consider as they commit to becoming multicultural educators.

The three authors of this article, recognizing that their students reflected the demographics of most EPPs, chose to supplement course materials with selections of multicultural literature to reflect the transformative approach in Banks' curricular reform model.

In choosing to add multicultural literature in the curriculum, the authors found support from Glasgow's (2001) indication that we must "create for students democratic and critical spaces that foster meaningful and transformative learning" (p. 54) and that "good books unsettle us, make us ask questions about what we thought was certain" (ibid.).

In the classic publication *Against Borders: Promoting Books for a Multicultural World*, Rochman (1993) states that "books can make a difference in dispelling prejudice and building community; not with role models and literal recipes, not with noble messages about the human family, but with enthralling stories that make us imagine the lives of others" (p. 19).

We hoped that by infusing instructional strategies using multicultural literature into our courses, our students would "imagine the lives of others" (Rochman, 1993, p. 19) and through this experience begin the process of envisioning the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups (Banks, 2016, 1998, 1997). This would prepare them for Banks' fourth approach—social action—to educate students for social criticism and social change and to provide them with decision-making skills to help

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them become reflective social change practitioners.

Methodology: Three Instructional Approaches

At our large, mid-South, land grant, research-one university all EPPs require a course in multicultural education as part of the curriculum. The courses align with the third component of the institution's Scholar-Practitioner Conceptual Framework—termed supportive—which emphasizes creating a caring learning environment for all students and being responsive to the diverse backgrounds of classroom students.

We chose to include multicultural literature in the respective programs: an undergraduate program for elementary licensure, a graduate program for the M.Ed. TESOL degree, and a graduate program for secondary licensure. Participants in our study included 21 students from the undergraduate program and 50 students from the Master's programs.

All three courses had the overarching goals of providing introductions to the major concepts and issues related to multicultural education and social justice in education and the ways in which race, ethnicity, class, gender, and exceptionality influence students' behavior. The courses also examined the intersection of teacher and student perceptions of identity, schooling, and learning and their effects on educational systems.

First Instructional Approach

Read-Aloud Strategy

In this first instructional approach, the teacher educator's classroom was composed of undergraduate elementary education majors in a course entitled, "Understanding Cultures in the Classroom." The students were seniors who had observed in elementary classrooms; however, few of these students had experience teaching. There were 21 students enrolled in the course, all females, who all identified as White.

The instructor chose high quality multicultural books that related to key topics and themes addressed in the assigned textbook, *Becoming a Multicultural Educator: Developing Awareness, Gaining Skills, and Taking Action* (Howe, 2017). Each week, the students were exposed to one or more multicultural books through a variety of instructional strategies such as read-alouds with accompanying videos, book talks, or book passes.

After the books were presented and students wrote reflections in their personal journals, the students were given time to discuss in small groups ways that they might use the books in their future classrooms to address social issues and to question the existing ideologies and practices within society.

Evidence-Based Read-Aloud Strategy.

For the read-aloud, the instructor purposefully selected multicultural books that highlighted major topics addressed in the textbook and introduced the books by telling the students how the book fit into the course goals. Clay (1991) writes that when teachers read aloud to students "meanings can be negotiated in discussion before, during, and after the story reading" (p.171). Read alouds should include think-aloud or interactive elements and focus intentionally on the meaning "within the text" and "beyond the text" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006, p. 33).

Within the text and beyond the text are the two areas where the students can begin to think deeply about the course topics. The instructor shared the excitement of finding a book specifically related to the course themes, but which addressed the perspectives of a marginalized or lesser known group, and recommended the book for elementary classrooms and libraries. Throughout the read aloud, the instructor would pause for comments to elicit class discussion around the themes of the course.

Read Aloud Strategy Steps:

Step 1: Before reading: Multicultural book selection questions:

- ◆ How does the book highlight the topic addressed in the course textbook?
- ◆ Is the big idea or theme addressing the multicultural topic in an exciting way?
- ◆ By reading the book aloud, can the students think more deeply about the topic?
- ◆ How does the author present cultural diversity?
- ◆ Are the illustrations appealing?

Step 2: Before reading (alone):

- ◆ Read the book silently. Stop at places and place a sticky note at important areas to question students.
- ◆ Practice reading the book and sticky note questions aloud.
- ◆ Practice reading the book to a colleague or a small group of students.

Step 3: Before reading (with students):

- ◆ Present the book cover to the class on an enlarged screen.
- ◆ Explain how the children's book fits into the chosen course topic.
- ◆ Allow the students to discuss the title, cover photo, and make predictions.
- ◆ Ask the students to discuss the course topic and predictions with classmates.

Step 4: Read the book aloud to the students:

- ◆ Stop at specific areas that address the multicultural topic.
- ◆ Ask the sticky note questions.
- ◆ Elicit class discussion around the topic using a variety of higher order thinking questions.

Step 5: After reading:

- ◆ Provide a writing prompt to students.
- ◆ Ask students to write a response in their personal journals.
- ◆ Encourage students to share their writing in small groups or with the full class.
- ◆ Return to the course topic and the book theme by asking students how they might use the book or a similar book in their future classrooms.

For teacher educators, it is important to keep in mind the varied instructional gains that can be made not only through modeling of a planned read aloud, but also by recommending a high quality multicultural book to preservice teachers.

The instructor chose Rylant's *When I Was Young in the Mountains* for a read aloud as a way to share how our personal childhood memories, experiences, and events help construct our personal identities. The book has expressive illustrations depicting memories in a rural setting. Many of the students in the class had grown up in rural areas and could relate to the protagonist, a young girl who grew up in the mountains. The repetitive pattern, "When I was young in the mountains," is lulling and mesmerizing. During the reading, many students said, "I remember that, too."

After the reading, the students wrote personal narratives in their journals based on one or more favorite childhood memories. The writing assignment provided an opportunity for the students to engage beyond the text.

The second book, Tonatiuh's *Separate Is Never Equal*, was chosen to demonstrate the omission from history books of

an important historical decision of 1947, *Mendez v. Westminster School District*, that preceded *Brown v. Board of Education*. Before the read aloud, a short YouTube video showed a picture of Sylvia Mendez as a young girl. When none of the students in the class said that they were familiar with the story or knew about the Mendez family's fight for justice and equality, the instructor restated the importance of the course topic about presenting multiple historical perspectives.

Specific parts of the book with direct quotations were read aloud to hear the voices and the words that the family experienced. For example, as the story unfolds, Mr. Mendez, Sylvia's father, met with Mr. Harris, the superintendent of the Westminster School, and explained that his family had just moved to a nearby farm.

"The public school on 17th Street is the closest school to our house, and my children should attend it", said Mr. Mendez.

"Your children have to go to the Mexican school," said Mr. Harris.

"By why? Asked Mr. Mendez.

The superintendent said, "That is how it is done."

After the instructor read aloud the quoted section, the class discussed the importance of students' voices and other comments made during the conversations. The author's note at the back of the book was read aloud, which presented how Thurgood Marshall, the lawyer from *Brown v. Board of Education*, had sent friend-of-the-court briefs to the judge in the Mendez case arguing against school segregation. At the end of the short read aloud, the students saw a photo of Sylvia Mendez receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011.

The third book, written by Parnell and Richardson entitled *And Tango Makes Three*, was the most frequently challenged book of 2006 and 2010, according to The American Library Association. Tango is based on the true story of Roy and Silo, two penguins in New York's Central Park Zoo, who joined as a couple and where given an egg to raise.

The instructor chose this book because students in the course were questioning how they might be able to address homosexuality or same sex parents in an elementary classroom. Some of the pre-service teachers believed that parents would be upset if a teacher approached the topic of homosexuality. The read aloud strategy provided the preservice teachers with a

multicultural resource and a way to think deeply about discussing same-sex parent families with their students.

Throughout the course, the read aloud strategy was used with the preservice teachers in order to challenge them to think about how they might transform the traditional curriculum and make conscious efforts to carefully seek out texts and perspectives that might not be part of the traditional curriculum. Students had the opportunity to select from an assortment of high quality multicultural children's books and practice the read aloud strategy in small groups to begin acquiring the skills needed for success in their future classrooms.

Second Instructional Approach

Topic-Based Selections

The course, "Social Justice and Multicultural Issues in Education," was taught during a five-week summer session for the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program leading to secondary licensure in English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, and K-12 licensure in Drama/Speech and Foreign Language. Thirty-eight students were enrolled: 24 female and 14 male, two of whom were heritage speakers of Spanish. The remaining 36 identified as White.

These students had enrolled in the traditional fifth-year program with either a B.A. or a B.S. degree and had little experience in the schools or with any previous pedagogy courses. Prior to admission to the program, all students were required to take an on-line, three-credit course focused on inclusion and a one-hour credit introduction course with 60 hours of observation in public school settings.

Rather than rely on a textbook for the course, the instructor selected a series of primary articles that connected to Banks' *Introduction to Multicultural Education*, 5th edition (2013), which was referenced by the instructor. At the same time, the instructor introduced Danielson's model, *A Framework for Teaching*. The model is used for connecting MAT courses with student practicum, internship, and observation assessment.

All course materials were uploaded to a Blackboard course management site. Students purchased, borrowed, rented, or checked out the literature selections. For each class, the instructor assigned primary readings from the literature on multicultural education (See Appendix A for suggested readings). Supplementary materials included TedTalks, interviews

with authors of the readings, and instructor-created PowerPoint presentations on the topics found in the literature.

The instructor prefaced the course with the understanding that "knowing self" was the first step in really understanding others, so the first week focused on self-identity and the identity of the students they would encounter in their fall placements. During the second and third weeks, the focus shifted to instruction—specifically culturally relevant pedagogy and teaching for equity and social justice. Week four focused on poverty and class and week five on inclusion, language, and learning. Throughout the five weeks, the instructor assigned readings related to the weekly topics as well as multicultural literature that focused on the identities of their future students.

Discussion Protocol Strategy:

Step 1: The instructor placed students in family groups at the beginning of the semester for the literature discussions based on their respective content areas (English /Speech/Drama, Foreign Language, Math, Science, Social Studies) so that the students could begin to form a professional learning community in their areas.

Step 2: Each member of each group had an assigned number to facilitate sharing group information. Numbered Heads is a simple 4-step cooperative structure that includes teams, positive interdependence, and individual accountability, all which lead to cooperative interaction among students. The teacher asks a question, students consult their teammates, and then one student answers the question (Kagan, 1989-90).

Step 3: Each one-hour discussion contained two timed components:

Timed Component 1: For every text, the instructor provided a timed discussion-starter, either for individuals or for the group. An individual from each group (numbered head) reported to the class for whole class discussion.

Timed Component 2: For the second timed component, students were to draw connections between the assigned book and the readings and viewings for that week or to the Danielson's (1996) *Framework for Teaching* to share with their group. Again, a numbered head

summarized the group discussion for the class and whole group discussion ensued. During each whole-group discussion, the instructor facilitated by drawing connections to personal and professional experiences, the Danielson Framework, and assigned readings and viewings.

The first book discussion focused on de la Peña's *Mexican WhiteBoy* as a way to connect students with the author's topic of identity. Students submitted a "ticket in" assignment to start the discussion in their groups. They were asked to choose one character with whom they identified and indicate why. After discussion, the instructor asked one of the "numbered heads" to report out for whole group discussion. For the second discussion, students drew connections between the text and the readings, and a second numbered head summarized and reported to the class for whole class discussion.

The second book discussion, Davis' *We Beat the Streets*, focused on a continued examination of identity and added teaching for social justice and equity. Each content group was assigned a discussion topic from a list. A "numbered head" recounted their topic for whole group discussion. Students wrapped up the discussion in this second component by drawing connections to their readings on *Culturally Responsive Teaching* and the *National School Board Association Report*, again reporting and discussing with the whole group (component two).

The third book discussion, Alexis' *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, furthered the discussion on identity and introduced the topic of schooling and equity of instruction. Students were given a K-W-L chart to start the conversation: what did they Know about "Indian" reservations before reading the text, what did they Want to know before reading the text, and what did they Learn from reading the text. Students followed the protocol for both components, but for Component Two, groups were also asked to connect the text to two of the domains in the Danielson Framework: instruction and professionalism.

The fourth book discussion, Belge's *Queer: The Ultimate LGBTQ Guide for Teens*, continued the topic of equity and social justice by introducing the Theory of Oppression in a PowerPoint presentation as outlined in the text edited by Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, 2nd edition. After viewing the presentation, students stood in a circle where several students received

cards with statements that they read aloud to the group. If the statement was true for students, those students stepped into the middle of the circle and looked around to see who joined them. Once they viewed their peers, they returned to the outer circle. An example of a statement included "I was laughed at for the way I dressed in middle school."

After the activity, students compared a list of the statements to the pointers found in Belge's book. Discussion procedures followed the protocol. For component two, students reflected on the circle activity by answering the following questions: Was this an easy or hard activity to do? What did you notice? What surprised you? Why did we do this activity? Discussion procedures again followed the protocol.

The fifth book discussion, concerning Siobhan's *The List*, expanded the discussion to poverty and class. Each numbered head in the group responded to the concept of *The List* from the perspective of a student not on the list, a parent whose student was not on the list, a teacher at the school, and an administrator at the school. Discussion again followed the protocol.

For the second component, students connected the tradition of the list to Danielson's "Domain 2: Classroom Environment" using four of the five criteria: Designing an Environment of Respect and Rapport, Establishing a Culture for Learning, Managing Classroom Procedures, and Managing Student Behavior. For each criterion, students were to draw an example from the book in which a teacher did or did not demonstrate the criterion and provide evidence for their decisions. Discussion again followed the protocol.

The sixth and final discussion, focusing on Hadden's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, involved the topic of inclusion. Each group had a large sheet of poster paper and different colored markers. They drew a T-Chart and labeled one side "Inclusion" and the other side "Exclusion." In their groups they listed examples of either term from the book using their particular colors. Once finished, each group posted their paper in designated places for a "gallery walk" around the room. Each group stopped at their peers' charts. Using their specified colors, students could add comments on each group's chart.

When the instructor's timer beeped, each group rotated until they returned to their original chart. At this point, group members read their peers' comments. Students were able to extend the "conversation" with the other groups based

on the color of the group's marker. At the end of the discussion, students returned to their original group with their charts. For Component Two, students reflected on how students who speak another language are excluded in a classroom. They used personal experience and their class readings for evidence. Discussion followed the protocol until time was called.

Student feedback was mostly positive. They appreciated the literature and enjoyed the discussion protocol activities. They found Belge's book to be the least helpful and de la Peña's book the most relevant based on the demographics of the area schools.

Third Instructional Approach

Modified Literature Circles Strategy

The third course, "Teaching People of Other Cultures," is a required course for students acquiring an additional teaching license or who are enrolled in the M.Ed. TESOL Program. The course is offered once a year and literature circles has been a part of the curriculum for four or five years.

Students in this course come from a wide variety of backgrounds and have a myriad of educational goals. Approximately one third to two-thirds of the class are international students from China, Indonesia, the Middle East, and a number of other countries. Along with traditional students, some of the American students are non-traditional—many of whom intend to teach overseas.

The teacher educator utilized a variation on literature circles. The books used over the past several years include Abu-Jabar's *Crescent*, Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Nafisi's *Reading Lolita In Teheran*, and Yang's *American Born Chinese* and as a companion to the latter, McCloud's *Understanding Comics: the Invisible Art*, and Alexis' *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*.

For their literature circles, students were given a bibliography of acceptable books and choose one from the young adult list and six from the elementary options. They read in groups each week at the beginning or end of class. When finished reading each book, the group wrote a review of the book and a reflection on its importance for use in the classroom.

Karen Smith, an elementary school teacher, created The Literature Circle model in 1982 (Bedee, 2010). Peralt-Nash and Dutch (2000) hold that literature circles provide a low-risk learning environment for children who are learning English as a

second language. Students assume “roles” that guide their reading (Daniels, 1994). Roles may include a summarizer, discussion leader, connector, word wizard, and/or illustrator.

The students met on a weekly basis to discuss agreed-upon sections, rotating roles among group members. Schifter and Simon (1992) suggest that negotiation of shared meaning within social interaction often provides a source of cognitive dissonance that allows individual student to restructure their concepts. Including the activity in adult TESOL classes gives pre- and in-service teachers a chance to experience the learning events they will use in class. It provides opportunities to build supportive ZPD-type relationships in university classrooms that translate then into their “real” classrooms (Vygotsky, 1978).

Modified Literature Circle Strategy:

Step 1: From the book list provided by the instructor, students choose one book from the young adult list and six books from the children’s literature.

Step 2: Students read in groups each week at the beginning or end of class. They discuss the readings, looking for connections to their own lives and current events. They have thirty minutes for discussion, usually at the end of class so they can stay and talk as long as they like. They enjoy the activity and sometimes meet outside of class for coffee and further discussion.

Step 3: At the end of the book, each group writes a review of the book together, reflecting on the literature circle experience. They also offer suggestions about how to use the book in the classroom setting.

Crescent, *Reading Lolita*, and *The girl in the Tangerine Scarf* all deal with current aspects of growing up Moslem in the United States. They were included in the choices because there is a community of internationals from Middle Eastern countries in the university’s region. Students who anticipate remaining in the area can expect to have children from these cultures (and religions) in their classrooms. Pre- and in-service teachers are strongly motivated to understand this population and often read more than one of the offerings.

Yang’s *American Born Chinese* is an especially appropriate book because it tells the tale of three immigrants, in this case from China. In addition, as a graphic novel,

it is concerned with young adult and mature themes but with reduced text that makes it advantageous for English learners. The instructor included *Understanding Comics* as an introduction for students (and faculty) new to the graphic novel genre since the book explains the complexities of comic art and the logistics of reading a different form of text and, thus, prepares them to read *American Born Chinese*.

All the literature circles read Alexi’s *Absolutely True Diary* for a couple of reasons. First, many of the graduate students in the course are international students who are curious about, but know very little about American Indians. The book is semi-autobiographical and deals with growing up in poverty on an Indian reservation. The protagonist is determined to get an education and leaves the reservation school for a town education. He also suffers from health issues and from bullying and the daily difficulties of adolescence. Second, it is a lot of fun—students confess to laughing aloud when they read it and it is great for self-confessed non-readers and international students faced with the daily reading of dense academic writing.

The students professed to love the literature circles. They generally evaluated this as the most useful activity in an already popular course.

Conclusion

To actively engage students “the teacher’s role should be to challenge the learner’s thinking—not to dictate or attempt to proceduralize that thinking” (Savery & Duffy, 2001, p. 5). As teacher educators we believe that by modeling and exposing our students to the purposeful selection of high quality and engaging multicultural literature that is meaningful and relevant, those students will begin to reflect and ask themselves deep questions which will encourage critical thinking.

To embrace fully Banks’ transformative approach, teachers must be willing to become seekers of knowledge and include the voices and ideas of those not traditionally represented. In all of the cases discussed here, and with all of these strategies and activities, faculty encouraged pre- and in-service teachers to consider and re-consider their positions on culture and differences in the classroom.

All three faculty sought to link current conflicts and issues in the classroom to current social justice concerns. Through discussion and reflection, their students refocused their approaches to multicultural education

with more unsophisticated attention to social issues in and around classrooms, encompassing what Banks labels a social action approach that considers the whole child and the whole society in the creation and reform of the educational curriculum.

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Appendix

Reading List

Instructional Approach One: Read-Aloud Strategy

Topic: Identity

Rylant, C. et al. *When I was young in the mountains*. New York, NY: E. P. Dutton.

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