



# Multicultural Children's Literature and Teacher Candidates' Awareness and Attitudes Toward Cultural Diversity

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Received: 9 September 2012 / Revised: 17 December 2012 / Accepted: 6 January 2013

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to look at elementary/middle school pre-service teachers' perceptions of multicultural and diversity issues through multicultural children's literature. Nineteen pre-service teachers in a foundation of literacy course explored multicultural children's literature and involved group/class discussions and a project over the semester. Data was collected using the pre- and post-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI), open-ended responses, quick writings, projects, and class interactions. The results showed that while they were not familiar with multicultural children's literature at the beginning of the semester, at the end of the semester they developed positive attitudes toward learning about them, identified them as crucial to foster children's awareness of diversity, and planned to use them in their future classrooms. They also increased their positive attitudes toward multicultural and diversity issues. In particular, they were most aware of two categories, cultural diversity and multicultural environment, in the CDAI.

**Keywords:** Teacher Candidates, Multicultural Children's Literature, Cultural Diversity, Teacher Education, Multicultural Education.

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## **Introduction**

The K-12 school demographic trends have been changing. Teachers serve more culturally and linguistically diverse students. According to Aud et al. (2011), the number of students whose first language is not English has increased at a rapid speed. For instance, the population of English language learners for ages 5 – 17 increased from 4.7 to 11.2 million from 1989 to 2009 (Aud et al., 2011). While the percentage of Caucasian students dropped from 68 to 56 between 1989 and 2009, the percentage of Hispanic and other students, including Asian, Hawaiian, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, American Indian, or two or more races, increased from 11 to 22 percent and from 4 to 8, respectively (Aud et al., 2011). U.S. Census Bureau estimates that over 50 percent of children will be children with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds by 2023 (cited in Dillon, 2006). These statistics demonstrate that teachers serve more diverse students.

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Teachers must prepare for teaching these diverse learners (Chicola, 2007; Ukpokodu, 2002). They will encounter more diverse learners in their classrooms in the near future. As teacher educators, we must make sure that we promote both teachers' and teacher candidates' cultural awareness and diversity and teach children the importance of multiculturalism.

However, despite the need for teaching diversity in schools and fostering students' awareness and respect for others with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, teachers do not normally see the importance of diversity while teaching. Colby and Lyon (2004) point out that pre-service teachers are more likely to be unaware of the significant role of multiculturalism in education and have little understanding of the impact of their personal beliefs on classroom interactions, discussion, and practices. Teachers also tend to pay less attention to the diversity of students and less likely to integrate diversity issues in their teaching. Such educators' attitudes toward multicultural education would generate a negative impact on students.

Research also shows the significant role of multicultural literature in schools (Cai, 2008). Multicultural literature is defined as books that describe people and events about countries and cultures other than the dominant ones. However, teacher candidates do not fully understand multicultural literature and how it can be integrated in their future classrooms because embedding multicultural and diversity pedagogy into teacher preparation programs have not actively implemented (Gay, 2000). Teacher candidates feel unprepared to teach children of diversity and lack foundations of multicultural education (Barksdale et al., 2002).

While scholars recognize the significant role of multicultural education and of teaching educators diversity issues, few researchers examine these areas in relation to multicultural children's books. Thus, this research aims to explore teacher candidates' awareness and attitudes toward cultural diversity by exploring multicultural children's literature. Three main questions guide this study: (a) What are teacher candidates' perceptions of multicultural literature?; (b) How does exploring multicultural children's literature impact teacher candidates' awareness and attitudes toward cultural diversity?; and (c) Which category of the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) (cultural awareness, cultural diversity family, cross-cultural communication, assessment, and multicultural environment) are teacher candidates aware of the most?

## **Review of Literature**

### *Multicultural education*

Gay (2003) states that people who come from other regions, such as Asia and the Middle East, to the U.S. are different from the immigrants from western and northern Europe in the earlier periods and that people may hold biases and feel anxieties about the people from these unfamiliar countries, cultures, and languages. She calls for embedding multicultural education in schools in order to augment diverse students' academic achievements and assist other students in becoming meaningful members of the global society.

Banks describes multicultural education as "an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process" and includes the assumption of providing all students with equal opportunities to learn in school (2010, p.3). According to Nieto (2000), multicultural education refers to "a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect" (p.305). She further explains seven important elements of multicultural education: multicultural education is (1)

antiracist education, (2) basic education, (3) essential for all students, (4) pervasive nature to schools and communities, (5) education for social justice, (6) a process, and (7) critical pedagogy (Nieto, 2000).

Sleeter and Grant (1987) use a different definition, within which 'multicultural' includes persons with disabilities; Smith (2009) also uses a more extensive definition by including all exceptional individuals. Singleton (1996) suggests that multicultural education should address not only particular social groups, but differing perspectives generally including gender, culture, age, and class. As described, various views of multicultural education exist. They give educators insight about being sensitive to this growing diverse society. They call for the importance of teaching multicultural education in teacher education (Cai, 1998, 2010; Ford & Quinn, 2010; Ukpokodu, 2002).

#### *Teacher candidates' cultural and diversity awareness*

Scholars conducted research on multicultural education and cultural diversity among pre-service teachers. Frye, Button, Kelly, and Button (2010) compared perceptions of education students before and after a literacy methods course, in which they learned about and experienced culturally responsive teaching. They surveyed 55 elementary teacher candidates, comprising 32 undergraduate and 24 graduate students. The survey included four parts; two of them were analyzed in the study. They are adaptations of Siwatu's Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy (CRTSE) and Culturally Responsive Teaching Outcome Expectancy (CRTOE) measurements. On each question, students rated themselves on a scale from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest); each participant's total and average score was calculated.

Results indicated that teacher candidates' dispositions toward culturally responsive teaching significantly increased after taking the literacy methods course, more so for undergraduate than graduate students. The authors remarked that the survey enabled students to assess themselves and observe personal growth. Moreover, they were hopeful that multicultural education could increase the likelihood that teaching candidates will actually implement culturally responsive teaching. However, the authors also pointed out that teacher candidates' perceived increases in multicultural dispositions might not imply actual increases in practice.

Larke (1990) conducted a study with 51 female pre-service teachers in the elementary program. She examined their cultural awareness by asking them to complete the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) developed by Henry in 1986, which measures an educator's cultural awareness. Larke looked at how the participants responded to each item statement organized in five categories: (a) cultural awareness, (b) culturally diverse family, (c) cross-cultural communication, (d) assessment, and (e) multicultural environment. She summarized that more than 90 percent of the participants are aware that their future students may come from different cultural backgrounds and that it is important to identify students by ethnic groups; however, approximately two-thirds of them feel uncomfortable with people who have different values.

Regarding the culturally diverse family category, while the participants express positive attitudes toward working with diverse students' parents, Larke points out that the participants feel that the parents know little about assessing their children, which she documents as a critical element for the parents who make their child's academic decisions such as gifted students and students with special needs. About the cross-cultural communication category, the participants value the children's own language; but at the same time, they reveal that they are uncomfortable with people who speak non-standard English.

The results of the assessment category demonstrate that the participants viewed the use of languages as playing an important role in child's assessment. The last category of the multicultural environment showed the participants were positive about creating multicultural environments by providing the children with opportunities to share their cultures, making program adaptations to accommodate diversity need, and including more diverse materials in the classrooms.

Milner, Flowers, Moore, Moore, and Flowers (2003) duplicated the Larke's study. Ninety-nine pre-service teachers in the teacher education program participated in the study and completed the original CDAI. In the study of Milner et al., they found some consistencies with the results of Larke's study. For instance, most of the participants in the study of Milner et al. were aware of having diverse students in their classrooms. Approximately two-thirds of the participants in the study of Milner et al. agreed that the teachers need to build interactions with parents outside of school activities. The participants in both studies also were positive about their support of inclusion of ESL for English language learners in the regular curriculum. On the other hand, some results of the study by Milner et al. did not concur with those of the study by Larke. While 62 % of the participants in the study of Milner et al. indicated they disagreed with the statement about correcting children's spoken language by modeling without explanation, approximately half of the participants in Larke's study agreed with this statement.

Brown (2004a) examined the influence of instructional methodology on cultural diversity awareness of teacher education students in a cultural diversity course. This study took place at an urban university in the Midwest with 109 participants. The course was aimed to provide college students with an opportunity to examine and discuss diversity in K-12 classrooms. The class enrollment was divided into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group received treatments over different class sessions, including reducing resistance, increasing cognizance of self and others, exploring the interlocking relationship between and within cultural groups, identifying the effects of prejudice on those links, and developing a sense of community. The relationship between pretest and posttest scores of the students was measured by the revised CDAI, which Henry redeveloped in 1995 based on his extensive research. The results of Brown's study showed that there were positive changes in both groups, but cultural diversity awareness increased more for the experimental group than the control group.

Brown (2004b) also examined the relationship between self-concept perceptions and cultural diversity awareness and sensitivity among pre-service teachers. Brown used two instruments (the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale: 2, and the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory [CDAI]) to measure the participants' self-concept perceptions and cultural awareness in the beginning and at the end of the course. Brown found a positive relationship between changes in self-concept perceptions and factors of cultural diversity awareness. As students' total diversity awareness increased, so did their total self-concept perceptions.

#### *Multicultural children's books*

Many multicultural children's books exist. Multicultural children's literature is "a literature about racial or ethnic minority groups that are culturally and socially different from the white Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States, whose largely middle-class values and customs are most represented in American literature" (Norton, 1995, p.560). Multicultural children's literature refers to books that reflect diverse cultures other than the major culture (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Bishop (1997) also defines multicultural literature as works "that reflect the

racial, ethnic and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world" (p.3).

Researchers also assert the significance of using multicultural literature in schools because it is a powerful device, which helps students develop multiple perspectives about their cultures and provides them with insights about understanding other cultures and people (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). Multicultural literature also cultivates one's awareness "to other cultural customs and values, promotes communication with people from other countries, and enhances experiences involving theirs and others' cultures" (Lowery & Sabiburns, 2007, p.50); it also helps them reflect on themselves and others, change their attitudes, and understand different cultures (Cai, 2008).

Multicultural literature is valued in education especially in this global society and with the increases in the population of diverse students. Scholars conducted studies to understand the effectiveness and role of multicultural literature in various settings. Montero and Robertson (2006) analyzed perceptions of multicultural literature among pre- and in-service teachers over the semester. Other researchers also examined teacher candidates' attitudes and awareness of diversity using multicultural literature (e.g., Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejía, 2003; Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009; Szecsi, Spillman, Vázquez-Montilla, & Mayberry, 2010). DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) looked at culturally diverse students' understandings about multicultural books in a fourth-grade bilingual language arts classroom. In the study of Evans (2010), elementary students increased their awareness of diversity after receiving critical, interactive read-alouds from multicultural children's books.

## **Method**

### *Research questions/Research designs*

Three research questions guided this study. Descriptions of the research designs follow.

The first research question was as follows: What are teacher candidates' perceptions of multicultural literature? The researcher collected qualitative data in her literacy class over a semester. The second research question was: How does exploring multicultural children's literature impact teacher candidates' awareness and attitudes toward cultural diversity? The researcher asked: Are there any differences between the pre-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) and post-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory results? She used one-sample *t*-test on the mean differences to examine whether the mean of the mean differences is equal to zero or not. She examined differences between the pre-CDAI and post-CDAI scores for each student for each item.

The third research question was: Which category of cultural diversity among cultural awareness, cultural diversity family, cross-cultural communication, assessment, and multicultural environment are teacher candidates aware of the most? Five categories exist in the CDAI: (a) cultural awareness, (b) cultural diversity family, (c) cross-cultural communication, (d) assessment, and (e) multicultural environment. The average score for each category in both pre-test and post-test was calculated to examine the trends of the teacher candidates' awareness of cultural diversity.

### *Participants*

Nineteen students, including 18 females and one male, enrolled in a literacy class participated in this study. They consist of one Asian and 18 Caucasian students. They majored in the elementary/middle school teacher education program (sophomore or junior standing) at a university in the Midwestern area in the United States. These teacher candidates pass through four stages in the teacher education program: the pre-field block, field experience one block,

field experience two block, and student teaching block. These participants were in the first stage of the teacher education program, the pre-field block.

#### *Instruments*

##### *Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI)*

The Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) was originally developed by Gertrude B. Henry in 1986. It measures educators' awareness of cultural diversity and multicultural education. It uses a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree) with some reverse responses intermittently. The CDAI has 28 items. Later, he revised the original CDAI in 1995 by refining wording for the statements along with the professional panel review. A panel of professional experts reviewed all items for content validity, and more than five hundred educators participated in his study. Based on the advice and feedback from them, Henry revised some items. The overall internal consistency reliability for the revised CDAI was .90 (Cronbach alpha), using a larger sample of educators. He also confirmed validity using feedback from the panel.

The revised CDAI was used in this study. The researcher used the following five categories, which Brown (2004a) and Larke (1990) modified based on the previous work of professional experts in multicultural education including Banks (1997): (a) cultural awareness, (b) culturally diverse family, (c) cross-cultural communication, (d) assessment, and (e) multicultural environment. For instance, a sample statement for the cultural awareness category is "I believe my culture to be different from some of the children I serve." Statements for the culturally diverse family include "I believe other than the required school activities, my interactions with parents should include unplanned activities (e.g., social events, meeting in shopping centers), or telephone conversations." Cross-cultural communication statements include "I believe English should be taught as a second language to non-English speaking children as a regular part of the school curriculum." In the assessment category, the CDAI includes statements such as "I believe that translating a standardized achievement from English to another language to be questionable since it alters reliability and validity." The last category of multicultural environment includes statements such as "I believe it is my responsibility to provide opportunities for children to share cultural differences in foods, dress, family life and/or beliefs." Among 28 items, two items were parallel items, indicating 3 (neutral) being the best answer. For a statistical purpose, these two neutral items were excluded from the study. The reported Cronbach's alpha calculated in this study was .69.

##### *Questionnaires*

Pre- and post-questionnaires were used. The questionnaire includes the following open-ended questions. (1) What is multicultural literature? (2) Do you know any multicultural children's books? If so, please write titles of the books. (3) Do you know any authors who write multicultural children's books? If so, please write their names. (4) Why do you think multicultural literature is important in education? (5) Assume you are a classroom teacher. What particular ethnic group(s) would you like to focus on in your teaching? Why? (6) How would you use multicultural literature in your teaching? Any particular teaching/reading approaches? In what subjects? The participants completed the questionnaires at the beginning and end of the semester.

##### *Quickwriting notes*

The participants provided quickwriting notes several times over the semester. In the literacy course, the instructor shared multicultural children's books with them. They explored and read multicultural children's books on their own and participated in guided class/group

discussions. They were asked to share their thoughts and comments about the topics covered in class. They were reminded that they did not need to be concerned about spelling or handwriting, but to focus on putting their thoughts on paper.

#### *Multicultural children's book project*

The participants worked on a multicultural children's book project in the literacy course. They learned about what multicultural children's books are, why it is important to include them in teaching, how to determine high quality multicultural children's books, and useful resources to select appropriate multicultural children's books for children. In particular, they learned how to examine multicultural literature based on the criteria by Yokota (1993) and Cullinan and Galda (1994).

#### *Data collection and analysis*

For the first research question, the researcher first organized and collected the data and then transcribed it. After preparation for the data analysis was complete, she conducted "a preliminary exploratory analysis" (Creswell, 2008, p.250). She explored the data to get the general sense of it. While exploring the data, she took notes in the margins of the transcripts about some key words, comments, and/or ideas that came to her mind. Next, she coded the data by segmenting and labeling. She read the transcripts and then highlighted the materials by finding some trends about the participants' cultural diversity awareness. After this process, she reviewed her notes and reduced a number of the codes by categorizing the similar codes into one code that embraced them. The researcher continued this process until she achieved saturation.

For the second research question, a one-sample t-test was used to examine any differences between the results of the pre- and post-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI). The .05 significance level was set. The researcher looked at a mean difference (post-CDAI minus pre-CDAI score) for each student for each question.

For the third research question, after the quantitative data was collected, the researcher organized it based on the five categories: (a) cultural awareness, (b) culturally diverse family, (c) cross-cultural communication, (d) assessment, and (e) multicultural environment for pre-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) and post-CDAI scores. The means for all five categories were calculated. She compared the means among the five categories between the pre-CDAI and post-CDAI scores to determine which category of the CDAI the teacher candidates were most aware of among the five categories.

## **Results**

### *Research question 1: What are teacher candidates' perceptions of multicultural literature?*

At the beginning of the semester, the teacher candidates were not familiar with multicultural children's books and did not possess in-depth knowledge about it, nor did they know authors and particular books of multicultural children's literature. Some examples of their perceptions of multicultural children's books were "multicultural children's books show the culture of one's cultural background" and "multicultural children's literature is literature that involves different cultures." Their definitions of multicultural children's books were general, and they only saw them as books about people ethnically different from themselves. As we explored books, they began to realize that multicultural children's books include not only books about ethnic groups, but also people with different beliefs and religions.

The teacher candidates self-reported limited knowledge about and reactions to the multicultural children's books. Before they took this literacy course, they acknowledged that

they did not know many books about diversity. They reported, "I didn't realize how many multicultural children's books are written in different languages...I am also shocked by how many multicultural books are out there." "I didn't realize how many multicultural books were out there." "I was amazed how many diversity books there were." "I was very surprised to see all the resources available on multicultural literature." Part of their limited knowledge about multicultural children's books was because they were not exposed to them when they were in K-12 school settings. They shared that "I wish I would have been exposed to books pertaining to diverse students." "Multicultural literature was something I was not really exposed to in elementary school that I wish I would have been."

While the teacher candidates were not familiar with multicultural children's books, they were positive and excited to learn and develop their knowledge about them. They shared "I am really glad we are learning and get insight into many different types of multicultural literature." "I think it is very interesting to learn about multicultural literature."

Another finding was that the teacher candidates saw a strong connection between multicultural children's books and education. They shared that it is important for children to learn about various types of diversity books. They wrote, "They are crucial in the classroom..." "It is very beneficial for the children of this generation," "This type of reading is very important to bring into the classroom to both educate and introduce different cultures/races to children..." They concluded that multicultural children's books "allow children to have appreciation for their differences," "help them learn about others' cultures and traditions that they may not have learned about otherwise," "help them become more accepting of other cultures and people," and "give them a sense of pride in their own culture."

Not only did the teacher candidates develop an understanding of the important role of multicultural children's books in education, they also plan to use them in their future teaching. They showed that they plan to incorporate these books in their classrooms and use them. They shared "I will definitely incorporate it [multicultural children's literature] in my classroom." Many pre-service teachers also see themselves using various books across subjects such as social studies, history, geography, reading, art, and English. For example, students shared their idea of teaching the distance between the United States and Laos where the story in a Hmong book took place in a geographical setting. In subject area teaching, they viewed that they would use a variety of reading approaches including K-L-W chart, shared reading, and group reading.

*Research question 2: How does exploring multicultural children's literature impact teacher candidates' awareness and attitudes toward cultural diversity?*

The following hypothesis was examined: Are there any differences between the pre-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) and post-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory results? Using the .05 level of significance, the researcher recorded a statistical positive difference between the pre-Cultural Diversity Awareness Survey and post-Cultural Diversity Awareness Survey results ( $p$ -value = .016).

*Research question 3: Which category of the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) (cultural awareness, cultural diversity family, cross-cultural communication, assessment, and multicultural environment) are teacher candidates aware of the most?*

The average scores of all five categories for the pre-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) were as follows: 4.00 for (a) cultural awareness, 3.71 for (b) culturally diverse family, 3.24 for (c) cross-cultural communication, 3.47 for (d) assessment, and 4.06 for (e) multicultural environment. These results show that the teacher candidates were most aware



of creating multicultural environments for diverse students. The next greater category was in the cultural awareness.

On the other hand, the average scores for the five categories for the post-CDAI were reported as follows: 4.18 for (a) cultural awareness, 3.91 for (b) culturally diverse family, 3.12 for (c) cross-cultural communication, 3.47 for (d) assessment, and 4.06 for (e) multicultural environment. These results show that while the mean of the category for multicultural environment remained high, the teacher candidates were aware of cultural diversity the most at the end of this study.

## **Discussion**

### *Research question 1: What are teacher candidates' perceptions of multicultural literature?*

This paper explored the teacher candidates' perceptions of multicultural literature. They first were not familiar with multicultural children's books or did not identify in-depth understandings of their definitions. They could not identify multicultural children's books; and they were surprised to learn the vast number of multicultural children's books published and available for parents, teachers, and children. They probably did not experience a lot of opportunities to read these books and/or learn about diverse students when they were in K-12 school settings.

However, as the teacher candidates explored multicultural children's literature through their own research and as they examined them using the criteria for high-quality multicultural children's books, they began to understand the importance of using them in their teaching. They had positive attitudes toward learning about diversity, cultures, traditions, foods, and people through children's books. Lowrey and Sabis-Burns (2007) also claim that pre-service teachers, who were uncomfortable reflecting on diversity issues at the beginning of the semester, developed positive attitudes toward diversity issues and learning about multicultural literature by the end of the semester. Similar results were found in another study, which explored elementary pre-service teachers' perceptions of multicultural literature and reported an increase of their positive perceptions (Colby & Lyon, 2004).

In addition, the teacher candidates saw advantages to using multicultural children's books for children in schools. They shared that incorporating them into teaching helps the students appreciate their own cultures, understand and respect other cultures and traditions, and broaden views of diverse people. Furthermore, many teacher candidates were very positive about utilizing multicultural children's books in their future classrooms. They planned to use them as much as possible for various subjects. Not only did they think about using these books in their teaching, but they also formulated specific ideas about how to incorporate them in different subjects using various literacy approaches.

### *Research question 2: How does exploring multicultural children's literature impact teacher candidates' awareness and attitudes toward cultural diversity?*

The following hypothesis was examined: Are there any differences between the pre-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) and post-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory results? The results of the one-sample t-test showed a positive statistical difference between the pre- and post-CDAI results. While the increase of the scores was not so significant, the results still show the importance and effects of exploring multicultural children's books to facilitate the teacher candidates' awareness of the value of cultural diversity. The result of this study was aligned with that of Brown (2004a), which indicated the increase of pre-service teachers' awareness toward cultural diversity on the post-CDAI at the end of the semester. In the study by Frye, Button, Kelly, and Frye (2010), pre-service teachers in literacy methods

courses increased their awareness toward culturally responsive teaching at the end of the semester after learning about it with various approaches, such as exploring multicultural literature and working with children. The findings of this study also concur with Montero and Robertson (2006), who reported pre-service teachers' increased awareness toward reading and using multicultural literature in their future teaching over the semester.

*Research question 3: Which category of cultural diversity among cultural awareness, cultural diversity family, cross-cultural communication, assessment, and multicultural environment are teacher candidates aware of the most?*

The results of this study showed the multicultural environment as the highest score of the categories in the pre-Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) the teacher candidates reported. On the other hand, in the post-CDAI, the cultural awareness category had the highest mean score among the five categories. The second highest mean scores for pre- and post-CDAIs were cultural awareness and multicultural environment, respectively. In other words, teacher candidates were most likely be aware of these two elements among the five categories over the semester. Some trends were found among this study and previous studies using CDAI. For example, the studies of Larke (1990) and Milner et al. (2003) demonstrated that many pre-service teachers indicated their strong cultural awareness, such as "being aware of differences between the teacher and student."

With regard to the category of multicultural environment, the studies by Larke (1990) and Milner et al. (2003) support the findings of this study. For example, Larke showed strong positive attitudes about four statements, such as "educators should provide opportunities for children to share cultural differences" and "students should be involved in a regular rotating schedule for job assignments" in the category of multicultural environment. Milner et al. (2003) reported a slightly different result from that of Larke on the statement on "educators place displays and materials showing at least three cultural groups." In other words, two-thirds of the participants agreed with the statement in Larke's study; approximately half of the participants in the Milner et al. study indicated neutral on this item. However, their studies had similar findings on the other three statements in this category.

Furthermore, the results of this study imply that pre-service teachers' higher awareness was observed in both cultural diversity and multicultural environment, which seemed to be influenced by their literacy course content, including interactions and explorations of multicultural literature and class/group discussions. It may also imply that because they have not experienced actually administering assessment, working and interacting with diverse students and their families in schools, they may not have developed their awareness of other three cultural diversity areas—assessment, cross-cultural communication, and culturally diverse family—as well as they did in cultural awareness diversity and multicultural environment.

### **Conclusions**

This study explored perceptions of teacher candidates' awareness of multicultural children's literature. It also examined their awareness and attitude toward cultural diversity using the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI). The results demonstrated that they were not exposed to multicultural children's books. However, they responded very positively toward learning about these books, considered them key tools for children to foster children's awareness of diversity and respect and tolerant toward differences, and planned to utilize them in their future classrooms across subjects by including various literacy approaches.

Despite the limited number of the participants, this study offers important insight about the teacher candidates' awareness and attitudes toward multicultural education and cultural diversity. In order to understand and scrutinize educators' attitudes toward multicultural education and cultural diversity, the following recommendations are offered for further studies: to examine how the educators' cultural and educational backgrounds, including ethnicity and past educational experiences, impact their views of cultural diversity; to investigate how their field practices with children through teaching and interacting with their mentor teachers impact their awareness of cultural diversity; and to compare the awareness and attitude toward cultural diversity between pre- and in-service teachers.

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