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## **Pre-Service Teachers' Use of Multicultural Literature**

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*This qualitative study examines how pre-service teachers in urban elementary classrooms develop student literacy with multicultural literature. By evaluating the action research reports of three pre-service teacher candidates, the authors determine how reading experiences with texts align to Bloom's Taxonomy and expectations for Common Core State Standards. Findings indicate that multicultural literature engages students with authentic connections to learning. Results also show that teachers relied on guided questioning to measure reading comprehension, though the types of questions varied. The implications of this study for teachers to consider are: how to incorporate multicultural texts into the curriculum to encourage critical thinking, and the types of questions that promote text analysis.*

### **Introduction**

After reading an excerpt from "Who build the Pyramids?" by K. E. Carr (Appendix A), students analyze the author's purpose, steered by the questions: Why did he use words such as 'pyramids not being hard to build,' 'cheap workers available,' 'just a big pile of dirt' and 'ordinary way'? What do his words suggest? Do you agree or disagree?" Althea, a pre-service teacher asks the students post-reading questions such as:

- Who is the author?
- What is his purpose?
- Is his opinion accurate?
- What are his feelings about Egyptians?
- How do you know?

This snapshot comes from one pre-service teacher's report about her practice. In her report, she describes working with a group of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students to support their understanding of informational texts. She reports that these guiding questions were used to scaffold students' analysis of text after reading.

The scene above reminds us of a three important elements of reading instruction. First, teacher questioning is a critical part of teaching reading. Questioning can be used to scaffold learning and assess comprehension of the text. Second, the text helps to foster students' engagement when it connects to students' prior knowledge and experiences. Third, interdisciplinary connections help to build students' vocabulary and content knowledge. Unfortunately, many teachers miss the opportunity to effectively use texts to address these aspects of reading instruction. If teachers are strategic in their use of multicultural texts, they can use students' interactions with culturally relevant texts to foster critical thinking skills.

For many CLD students, their geographic origin can influence how they learn vocabulary. Prior knowledge may also affect how well they comprehend the texts they encounter in classrooms. Results from standardized tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that in the United States, CLD students, namely African American and Latino students, are outperformed by peers (NAEP, 2013), with only 18 percent of African Americans at or above a proficient reading level and 21 percent of Latinos at or above proficiency in reading (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). These results highlight the need for more research on how teachers use multicultural texts to foster students' comprehension, vocabulary development, and content knowledge.

We know that culturally responsive pedagogy, particularly the use of multicultural literature, can help support student academic development (Delpit, 2012; Ford & Harris, 1996; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009, 2013; Richard, 2015). Our study builds on McCullough's (2013) investigation by exploring further how much teachers use students' interest and prior knowledge of a subject to assist comprehension when students read culturally responsive literature. We asked: which experiences with multicultural literature help comprehension and how do these practices align to expectations in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)? We define culturally responsive texts as multicultural literature, texts that reflect the diverse student population encountered in urban classrooms. These texts help students

see themselves in the curriculum, a practice characteristic of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2000).

The CCSS (2010) prioritize cultural diversity in the classroom by identifying several text options for “teachers who want their students to develop awareness of others’ life styles and heritages through multicultural texts” (Richards, 2015, p. 61). The CCSS suggest that using multicultural literature “serve[s] as windows into others’ lives, and as mirrors into students’ own cultures” (Richards, 2015, p. 61). In addition, the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) assessment, aligns to the CCSS, which includes questions where students must analyze text and vocabulary analysis, identify the central idea and show how the idea is supported throughout the passage (New York State Department of Education, 2014). The reading practices evaluated on these assessments suggest that students need opportunities to closely examine a wide range of texts across genres, synthesize information from multiple texts, and make connections across texts. These critical thinking practices fall on the upper levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy (Marzano & Kendall, 2007) and indicate that students need to demonstrate their ability to read, evaluate, and analyze texts across genres. Given this context, text selection becomes an important factor in giving students access to texts across genres, meeting the CCSS, and ultimately preparing students for high stakes tests. Therefore, we sought to examine the ways pre-service teachers encouraged students to interact with and understand different texts and whether their classroom practices helped students meet CCSS.

## **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Readers understand and organize the world based on their experience and the background knowledge they bring to the text thus impacting their interaction with text and their comprehension (McCullough, 2013; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, drawing upon students’ background and culture validates what they bring to academic contexts (Gay, 2000). This type of instruction, which is often referred to as Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), asks that teachers adapt “instruction to fit the textual, social, cultural, and personal lives of their students [and] is largely about seeing pedagogy through the norms and practices of their students” (Hefflin, 2002, p. 247). The Culturally Responsive framework:

- acknowledges the importance of the students' voice and his/her experiences.
- requires that educators demonstrate high level of expectations from students and view them as valued participants in the learning community, where teachers elicit oral responses from students to check for understandings and also to address misunderstandings.
- fosters a community of learners among their students by providing opportunities for collaboration among their peers.
- enables a classroom community with high regard for the social aspect of learning and view "student talk" as a high level of engagement rather than non- engagement.
- fosters academic gains by providing formative feedback to students who in return use this knowledge to make revisions. They also use summative assessments to assess the student's ability to apply new knowledge. (Adkins, 2012)

This perspective asserts that the teacher should build on what the children bring to the classroom and use this instructional approach to bring the children's everyday lives and interest into the curriculum (Nolan, Raban, Janet & Young, 2013). The idea is that by incorporating resources that build on background and experiences, teachers can use students' prior knowledge to teach new concepts and increase knowledge. CRT integrates curriculum and instruction so that both are meaningful and incorporate the lived experiences of the community, thus allowing students to make self-to-text connections (Adkins, 2012). Teaching to students' strengths helps empower students and enables them to see themselves in the curriculum.

## **Method**

We explored how pre-service teachers working with CLD learners in urban classrooms used multicultural literature, seeking to gauge the extent to which the pre-service teachers' classroom practices with multicultural literature aligned with expectations for CCSS. Our data came from action research reports, or yearlong, capstone experiences completed by pre-service teachers enrolled in an urban teacher preparation program. While working in the field with real students, the pre-service teachers used action research methods (Mertler & Charles, 2008; Mills, 2003) to investigate a classroom-based problem over two semesters. In the fall semester, the candidates collected field notes each week including their observations about student literacy

practices, their own decision-making when implementing the curriculum and ways in which they assessed students, and their reflections about the complexities of teaching and learning in urban schools. They also included rich comments and reflections about interactions with the cooperating teacher, parents, colleagues, students, and administrators. After identifying a problem, candidates reviewed the literature and designed an intervention to address the problem. Then in the spring semester, the pre-service candidates implemented their intervention while documenting and reflecting on teaching and learning.

We selected the three projects highlighted in this study because all three focused on literacy and the use of multicultural literature during clinical practice. The pre-service teachers, Althea, Brenda, and Daphne (all names are pseudonyms), worked with diverse students in authentic contexts throughout the project.

Althea was beloved by her classmates and professors alike. Always poised, she exuded confidence and a welcoming smile. She immigrated to the United States from the Caribbean country of St. Lucia where she also worked as a teacher. For Althea, her race and ethnicity were salient to her identity. She proudly proclaimed that she was a Pan-Africanist and wanted to engage in practice that was African Centered, thus culturally responsive. She often went to conferences on her own to enhance her knowledge of Afro-centricity. This translated into frequent use of culturally responsive materials and practices in her classroom. She was eager to learn and try new strategies to help improve the learning outcomes of her students. Althea worked on math and social studies with 7 fifth-grade Guinean students from varying socio-economic background. The New York City Department of Education (NYDOE) website reports that there are approximately 560 students who are in classes from PreK to 5th grade and this school located within walking distance of the college. The school's population is made up primarily of students of color. During the time of Althea's research project, there were approximately 79% African American/Black, 17% Latino/a and 1% Asian, and approximately 20% of the students identified as English Language Learners (ELLs). Over 91% of the students receive free or reduced lunch, a designation, which connotes lower SES.

Brenda, like many of her classmates immigrated to the United States from the Caribbean. Throughout her year in Clinical Practice (student teaching) she displayed consistent drive and determination. While there were moments where she questioned her own abilities, she proved to end the year as a top scholar. Brenda worked with a small group of 5 African-American boys in a

fourth grade class and conducted her student teaching practicum in a long time partner NYCDOE elementary Prek-5 school. The school enrollment is approximately 900 students, most of whom are students of color, with approximately 5% Asians, 40% Black and 51% Latino and 3% White. The school is a long time partner site of the college as it consistently receives A ratings from the NYCDOE and with its curriculum, teacher effectiveness and student outcomes receiving scores of well developed year after year.

Daphne is very witty, with the potential to become a stand up comedian. Daphne is an African American candidate who is a NY native. She is humorous and truly loved by her students, peers and professors. Her oratory skills are about average and she is a hard worker and skilled writer. Daphne, worked with a group of 3 students, an eight-year old African American male, a seven-year old Mexican-American male, and a seven-year old African American female, she conducted her student teaching in the same field as Althea, which is described above.

We analyzed the data by performing an independent review of each action research report, noting emerging themes. We used the constant comparative method to recursively review the three reports to identify commonalities. Then our content analysis shifted to close examination and analysis of the reports (Bowen, 2009) to identify patterns and categories for further analysis. We also looked for examples that illustrated extreme departure from the practices that were similar across the reports.

As we examined the reports we also used Bloom's Taxonomy (Marzano & Kendall, 2007) to interpret and categorize reading comprehension practices. In this way, we could identify specific practices related to the use of multicultural literature in four contexts: teacher questioning, student engagement, interdisciplinary connections for content instruction, and assessment of student outcomes. When using Bloom's Taxonomy to analyze the content of classroom activities we noted each occurrence that involved multicultural literature and later aggregated and quantified them to examine frequency. Our goal was to identify and document how pre-service teachers employed multicultural literature across contexts. Although our sample size was small, we reduced the data with constant comparative analysis to compare among classroom approaches. Two specific practices with multicultural literature — using teacher questioning to assess student comprehension and making interdisciplinary connections— appeared to be linked to student engagement. The data also showed that when pre-service

teachers integrated these practices to make interdisciplinary connections, they displayed varying aspects of CRT and provided opportunities for CLD students to meet CCSS.

## **Findings**

### ***Althea***

While sitting in groups, the students examined different books and discussed their findings with peers. Their analysis of the text included a close reading of the language to determine the author's purpose, as well as evaluation of the themes and messages gleaned from the texts. As students worked, Althea would scaffold, probe, and challenge students to think more deeply about the texts.

When Althea worked with multicultural literature, students "read for critical analysis... to find the author's main idea." For her post-reading activities Althea had students identify the author's purpose, closely examine language usage, vocabulary and phrases, and engaged in accountable talk. She wrote:

*"After reading the passage, students will use critical analysis to identify the author's purpose. Why did he use words such as 'pyramids not being hard to build,' 'cheap workers available,' 'just a big pile of dirt' and 'ordinary way'? What does his words suggests[sic]? Do you agree or disagree?"*

She explained that students were asked post-reading questions such as

- Who is the author?
- What is his purpose?
- Is his opinion accurate?
- What are his feelings about Egyptians?
- How do you know?

Her goal with these questions was to "help our students identify biases and to recognize when people or groups are placed in a negative or stereotypical light or not given due credit for their accomplishments. It also helps them to think critically about "truths" that are offered to them and to dismiss inaccurate ones, while claiming their place in society."

As they read the books she'd chosen, Althea used questionnaires to gain insights about students' learning experiences. She interviewed students, asking them to think about what they were learning from the content, why they were learning it, and how it was helping them. She also asked students to reflect on the class textbooks and whether they believe the texts reflected them or whether people encountered in the texts "looked like" them. As shown in Figure 1, Althea found that students asked "more critical questions" when in class after she changed the curriculum, and they could explain how they arrived at their answers. In her action research paper she notes the shift in students when she designed a more culturally responsive curriculum and used supplementary materials as opposed to the traditional curriculum:

*"...the final interviews of the three students described learning as an occurrence that helps you to understand your culture and yourself. One student... described learning as "something you will be able to use to understand the reasons why you have lived in a certain way and to find new ways of making that way of living better, so that you can live the life you want to live without being embarrassed by what other people think [sic]."*

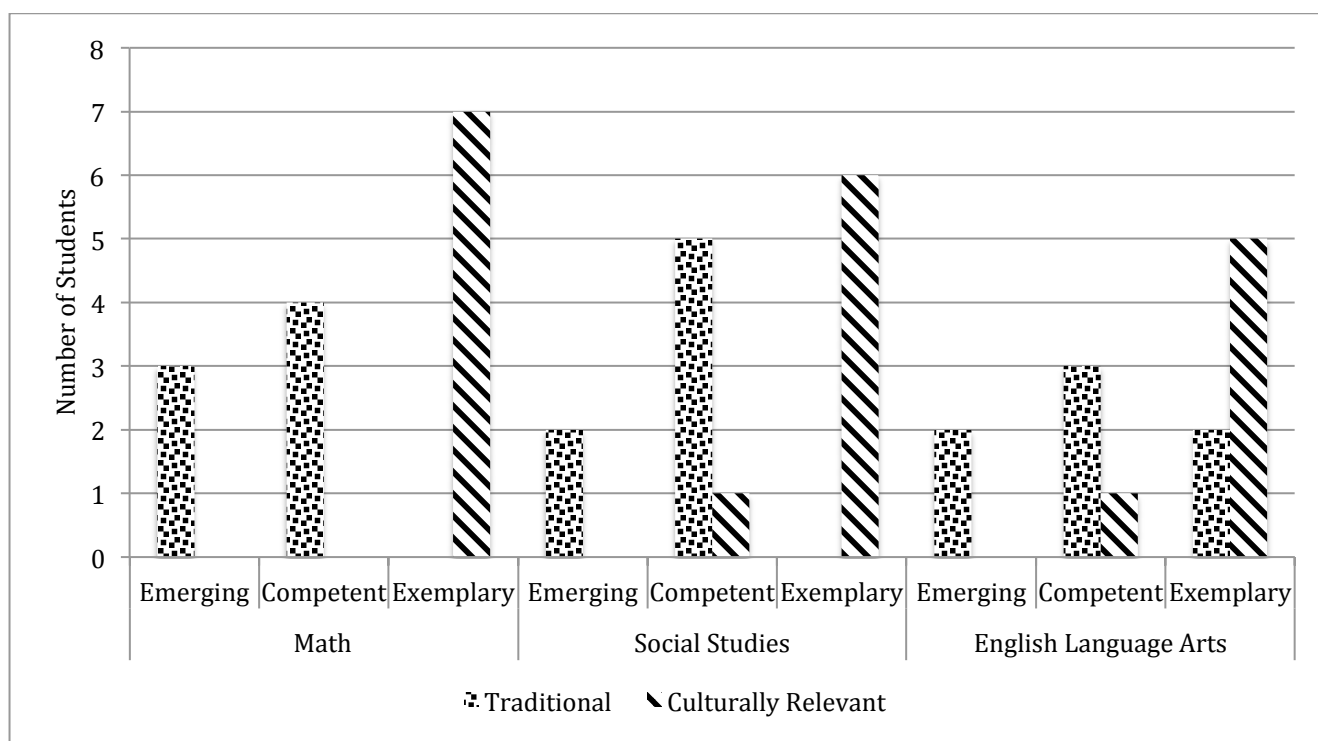


Figure 1: Comparison of Students' Performance with Traditional vs. Culturally Responsive Learning Experiences in Althea's Class



Althea also observed students as they reacted to tasks, looking for what she called “positive and negative changes in attitudes, cognition, achievement, interest and motivation...to see whether changes in their way of thinking and doing were evident.” She found that students increased their background knowledge of topics and that the texts gave students an alternate source of content. Althea wrote:

*“When the class studied the concept of converting inches to yards to feet, because I know that Afrikans [sic] constantly engage in dressmaking, I made references to that, enabling students to apply the measurement of a piece of cloth to make a dress. In math, students used shapes and figures found in African attire to examine symmetry.”*

Her questioning promoted inquiry. She asked open-ended questions to help students analyze the fabric.

- What makes it stand out?
- Why do you think these patterns are printed on the fabric?
- What can you tell us about the patterns on the fabric?
- What kinds of patterns are on [the fabric]?

Likewise, while working with students in Social Studies, Althea asked students to select an individual and write a biography of “an important figure from their culture (Guinean), living or dead and not necessarily famous, and find out some of the memorable things that figure had done.” To complete this assignment, students were encouraged to interview their relatives as well as consult multicultural books. Then students evaluated the contributions of the individual to determine if that person should be presented with an honorary recognition for their service.

### ***Brenda***

Students in Brenda’s class had in-class time to read their books independently. During independent reading time, she pulled a small group together for small group instruction or writing conferences. Brenda met with groups regularly for ongoing assessment, which she used for progress monitoring.

Brenda surveyed students to identify “high interest culturally responsive books” for students to read. Each student selected two books from a list she compiled, which included biographies, fiction novels, and humor. After students read each self-selected text, she conferred with each one using the same comprehension questions.

1. What was the story about?
2. What part of the book did you enjoy most?
3. What does the main character in the book want?
4. What predictions can you make about the main character?
5. What is the author’s purpose in writing this novel?
6. Why do you believe the chapter/book ended this way?
7. Is there one quote from the book/paragraph that stands out to you?
8. If you were writing this book, how would you write the ending?

Brenda also requested written responses so she could assess students’ comprehension. As part of the weekly assessment for a small group, she awarded her students one point for each correct response to the two questions. In her final action research paper she provides information about her method, stating:

*“As part of a pre-assessment, and to gain an understanding of the students’ level of comprehension, the researcher compiled data collected from the classroom weekly English Language Arts (ELA) assessment records. These records indicated student scores based on the weekly comprehension assessments that were conducted leading up to standardized testing. Data from students’ reading comprehension questionnaire were compared with their weekly ELA assessment scores. Data was also taken from the students’ miscue analysis determining their comprehension skills.”*

Brenda explains in her findings that, “African American boys are simply interested in books that they have some background knowledge of or can relate to.” This is crucial as scholars (Toldson, 2008) have called for educators to “break the barriers” and better engage African American boys who are often marginalized and excluded from school curricular programming.

## ***Daphne***

Daphne worked in a corner of her classroom with a small group. Her students chose fiction and nonfiction texts that reflected their cultural background. Every Wednesday when the small group met, they read one of the student selections. Her students self-selected fiction and nonfiction texts that reflected their cultural background, and everyone in the group read all of the books.

After reading, students were expected to answer questions, retell the story, and reflect on the reading through journal writing. Daphne used the following reading questions to evaluate her group's comprehension:

- Who are the main character(s)?
- Where does the story take place?
- What does the main character do?
- What happens then?
- Was there a problem?
- What was the problem?
- How was the problem resolved?
- How did the story end?
- How did the main character(s) feel?
- What is the main idea of the story?

Daphne then used these same questions to interview students about the reading, and she found no significant difference in the comprehension outcomes when she compared their responses across the texts they read. In other words, students performed the same when assessed on the books of their own cultural background as compared to a book of another student in the group. Daphne wrote,

*“The data revealed a noticeable trend which suggests that the students were able to recall more specific details from the texts that were most cultural relatable. However, there were no significant findings such that the participants’ overall comprehension skills were impacted. [Student 1] who demonstrated competent comprehension skills continued to do so, scoring a two on all four texts read. [Student 2] who scored a 1 on the initial assessment continued to score a 1 for all*

*retellings. Lastly, [Student 3] who demonstrated emergent comprehension skills continued to demonstrate partial understanding of the texts read. [Student 1] data shows that he was able to recall more details and demonstrate his understanding of the gist of the texts that represented his culture. [Student 2] data shows that she was able to recall more specific details from the texts that represented her culture, though she did not demonstrate understanding of the gist of the texts. [Student 3] data showed that he was able to recall specific details from both texts, the text that represented the African culture as well as the Mexican culture.”*

This report suggests that the primary goal was assessment. Daphne used questioning to evaluate students’ comprehension of the texts. Her assessment focused on students’ capacity to note or recall details from the text. She also noted that the use of multicultural texts fostered an increase in students’ comprehension of the text. She found, that students were able to recall more details about the text when reading a book they selected, one that reflected their culture.

## **Discussion**

### ***Using Multicultural Literature to Engage Readers and Foster Critical Reading***

Althea and Brenda asked text-dependent questions at the upper levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, while Daphne asked lower level questions that focused on recalling details from the text (see Table 1). Brenda combined levels of questioning to gradually scaffold students from Comprehension (lower level of Bloom’s Taxonomy) to Evaluation (upper level of Bloom’s Taxonomy), and she used writing prompts to assess students’ understanding of the text. Althea asked students questions at the upper levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, specifically questions that required students to Analyze, Synthesize, and Evaluate information presented in the texts.

Table 1: Types of Reading Comprehension Questions and Skills Assessed

Level of Bloom’s Taxonomy	Althea	Brenda	Daphne
Knowledge			
Comprehension		√	√
Application		√	
Analysis	√√	√	
Synthesis	√√		
Evaluation	√√	√	

The levels of comprehension and critical thinking Althea and Brenda assessed in their classes indicate that these pre-service teachers offered students more open-ended experiences that led to higher-level, critical thinking. The CLD students read texts that connected to authentic practices across cultures. By identifying connections across the texts and considering the main idea and themes, students drew upon their prior knowledge to respond to questions that help them meet CCSS. Conversely, Daphne asked questions primarily to locate and recall detail, which fall on the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. In Daphne's class, although students self-selected texts about their culture and then wrote in their journal about their reading, emphasis was placed on literal comprehension of the text. There is no evidence that Daphne used the multicultural texts to guide students toward discussions about diversity (Richards, 2015) or raise their global awareness, which are expectations in the CCSS. The students' journaling appeared to be open-ended or free writing about the reading.

All of the pre-service teachers used multicultural literature to give students access to diverse texts. However, they used different approaches for incorporating those texts into the curriculum, which revealed their level of efficacy with CRT. At the emerging level, Daphne's practice does not demonstrate much alignment with CRT because she did not appear to have high expectations for students; she did not challenge them to think more critically about the texts. She used multicultural texts but focused on improving students' ability to recall details. Thus, while Daphne states that she uses CRT, her actual practice misses key components. This is a key issue for all educators to note, as simply saying one is culturally responsive is insignificant within itself. Without student evidence to substantiate this claim, there are limitations in her study and practice. On the other hand, Brenda selected multicultural texts and asked a range of questions for students to think about critically. Her questions challenged students to think about the content as well as the implications of the author's work. However, there is no evidence that she moved beyond text-dependent questions to start authentic discussions about culture and diversity. Althea demonstrated CRT competency by expanding the curriculum with CRT practices; she made it more meaningful and purposeful for students and relied on texts to make interdisciplinary connections. Althea used multicultural books aligned with the unit for read-aloud so she could build students' content knowledge. She encouraged discussions about diversity and she helped students make authentic connections to the community.

Althea and Brenda used different approaches for identifying and utilizing multicultural literature, yet both their practices aligned to most elements of CRT. They incorporated students' voices into the curriculum so students can see themselves as a member of the classroom community. While all three pre-service teachers facilitated small group learning and used questioning to evaluate the students, Althea and Brenda also used formative and summative assessments such as authentic projects. Although, Brenda used written responses to evaluate students' knowledge of the content, Althea emphasized students' metacognition and self-assessment, conferring with students to reflect on their practices and what they were learning.

We discovered some contradiction with outcomes in terms of the impact culturally responsive texts have on students' comprehension. When comparing students' performance with culturally responsive learning experiences against traditional activities in the curriculum, Althea found that students performed better with the culturally responsive experiences. However, Daphne's project suggests that the nature of the text itself did not impact students' comprehension because students' could self-select texts that reflected their culture. But when assessed, students did not show significant differences in comprehension when evaluated on reading material based on their background compared to texts about the culture of other students. One limitation of Daphne's study is length of time: her study lasted under 6 weeks. Given that she was not able to assess students over the course of the entire semester or year, the timing presented a challenge when she measured students' reading comprehension growth.

Brenda's open-ended questions evaluated comprehension at different levels on Bloom's Taxonomy: (a) at the lower levels, which prompted students to recall information; (b) at the midpoint where students had to analyze the character's motives and author's purpose; and (c) at the upper levels where students were asked to evaluate the text. Daphne used the questions primarily to assess students' comprehension. She evaluated students' responses to the text to determine their competency level in retelling; ascertaining whether students were able to recall details from the text. Although students self-selected texts based on their own cultural background and students in the small groups had the opportunity to read and discuss each other's books, none of her questioning focused on the cultures gleaned from the texts. Instead, her questioning focused on the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, specifically recalling details. Although some data from Daphne's report shows that students were able to recall more details when summarizing a text that reflected their culture there was no evidence that students analyzed

the content of the texts or made comparisons between texts to examine cultural differences. It can be argued that the type of questions Daphne used do not measure higher level thinking, and therefore her results are inconclusive or at least suggest that those questions can't be used to adequately determine levels of understanding.

Although, the data show that the use of culturally responsive texts did not improve students' comprehension in all cases, the type of questioning pre-service teachers used in these contexts impacted students' ability to think critically about the texts. Despite the limitations, all of the pre-service teachers used multicultural texts to help students meet the CCSS ELA K-5 Literature Standards but at varying levels. Although their practices fell at the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, Brenda and Daphne helped students focus on summarizing "key ideas and details." Althea and Brenda engaged students in critical discussions about complex ideas, namely challenging students to think more about "craft and structure" by examining the author's language and word choices as well as the ideas authors presented. Students also had to demonstrate "integration of knowledge and ideas" by making connections between the texts, evaluating the content and purpose of ideas presented in the texts, and reading multicultural texts across genres.

The pre-service teachers in our study demonstrated a range of CRT practices that fell along a continuum, but Althea incorporated most of the elements of CRT into her practice. By using an interdisciplinary unit Althea incorporated multicultural literature that reflects the students' culture and background knowledge, which enhanced their understanding about concepts across the curriculum by connecting literature, math, and social studies. She also expanded the curriculum beyond the classroom to allow students to connect back to their home life and the local community. This addition increased students' voices in the curriculum, allowing them to engage in authentic inquiry-based learning.

Most teachers asked students post-reading questions that fell across the range of Bloom's Taxonomy. Most questions appeared to occur post-reading and were used to assess students' comprehension of the reading. However, when a teacher used high-level Blooms Taxonomy questions, those questions challenged students to think more critically. We found that pre-service teachers afforded CLD students the opportunity to think critically about texts when they make connections across subject areas and foster opportunity for students to move up to higher

levels of Bloom's Taxonomy by thinking deeply about ideas presented on multicultural literature.

## **Implications**

Our work supports the notion that “culturally relevant literature has the potential for students to make connections between their lived world and the world of the text to develop their interpretations by using their lived experiences to mediate the comprehension process” (McCullough, 2013, p. 421). That is, when CLD students have the opportunity to read texts that reflect their culture they are interested and engaged.

When teachers work intentionally, passionately, and collaboratively to implement research-based practices and to engage students with authentic instruction (Preus, 2012), students are more likely to have successful learning outcomes. To enact Culturally Responsive Teaching, the teachers can incorporate multicultural literature into lesson plans to reflect students' background. These authentic situations where students interact with texts, explore themes, and connect ideas to authentic social issues help them meet CCSS, and prepare them for standardized tests such as NAEP and NYS ELA.

One area that teachers can transform is the type of questions they ask. Traditionally, teachers use questions to assess students after reading, but questioning can be a scaffolding technique to gradually move students to complex and abstract thinking (Clark & Graves, 2005; Costa & Kallick, 2015; Giouroukakis & Cohan, 2014; Liang, Watkins, Graves, & Hosp, 2010). Therefore pre-service teachers need preparation and in-service teachers need professional development to help them identify effective questioning strategies, especially across content areas – a purposeful design of questions using Bloom's Taxonomy to get at increasingly complex questions (Costa & Kallick, 2015).

There are several implications for future research. First, an experimental design where the teacher compares student performance on a text focused on their background against a reading passage that does not reflect the student's prior knowledge would expand the discourse on the role culturally responsive literature plays in comprehension. This kind of study can also examine how teachers use culturally responsive literature to prepare students for academic literacy expectations and standardized tests. Secondly, research can seek correlations between the variables identified in this paper to determine causal relationships; specifically whether content



and genre influence student reading outcomes. An experimental study that pairs different texts on the same topic will help to determine whether students perform better after reading certain types of texts. Finally, as a follow up to the annotated bibliographies of multicultural literature developed by teachers (Richards, 2015), future studies can examine how teachers select texts and how teachers evaluate students' comprehension of the selected material across subject areas.

Teachers' preparation, knowledge of, and use of multicultural literature has implications for student outcomes. For example, the type of texts can impact whether or not students understand the main ideas in a passage and how they analyze it, specifically their ability to judge characters' intentions and to grasp the underlying message of a text (Pelletier & Beatty, 2015). Therefore, teachers need to make informed decisions when they choose multicultural literature, from the type of texts to the types of questions that lead to student inquiry. Although evidence shows that using multicultural literature supports students' engagement with text, more research is needed to appropriately measure the academic gains students make.

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## **Appendix A**

Excerpt from “Who built the Pyramids?” by K. E. Carr

*People often wonder how the Egyptians could build such huge buildings so long ago. But really, a pyramid is not hard to build if you have plenty of cheap workers available. They're just a big pile of dirt with rocks over the top. First, they build a small mastaba-style tomb on the ground, in the ordinary way. Then, one theory is that they heaped up tons and tons of dirt over the tomb, leaving a tunnel to the outside. Then they began placing huge stones all over the outside of the pyramid. To raise the stones to the top of the pyramid, they built long ramps of dirt and then rolled the stones up them. They kept making the ramps higher and longer. When it was done they took the earth ramps away again.*

Source: <http://quatr.us/egypt/architecture/pyramids.htm>