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# Engaging Pre-Service Teachers in Interactive Social Justice-Themed Read-Alouds

*Kayln Hoppe*

Reading aloud is a time-honored tradition that has worked its way from home environments to school settings. Shared reading experiences, like read-alouds, stimulate memories and experiences as well as inspire new connections and perspectives. Even if only for a short time, read-alouds expand readers' horizons while simultaneously making sense of their own worlds. One by one, each read aloud experience cultivates a classroom into a community of empathetic readers. In a society where social justice efforts are constantly questioned, challenged, and advocated for, it is no surprise that these conversations are making their way into schools across the country, including post-secondary institutions. Children's literature serves as a non-threatening tool to address and discuss social justice topics that reflect the current societal climate of the United States.

Even though read-alouds yield academic and social-emotional benefits across all grade levels, the majority of the research is done in traditional elementary school settings (Anderson et al., 1985; Layne, 2015; Routman, 1991; Trelease, 2019). A need exists to study the use of read-alouds with older students (Layne, 2015), including those in post-secondary institutions. Multicultural literature is a way to frame read-aloud events around significant social justice themes that should be addressed in the classroom. Using multicultural literature to discuss important and sometimes sensitive topics helps teachers and students alike develop an understanding and appreciation for a multitude of different cultures, including their own (Gay, 2018; Slay & Morton, 2020).

This case study used observations, interviews, and student writing to understand how university pre-service teachers characterized social justice-themed interactive read-aloud events. Taking on the role as "student," the pre-service teachers actively participated in two separate read-aloud events and focus group interviews to discuss their personal experiences related to read-alouds. By engaging pre-service teachers in discourse surrounding social justice-themed read-alouds, this study contributes to a better understanding of how college students react and connect to read-aloud practices and social justice-themed literature. Moreover, the study findings consider implications for the pre-service teachers' own teaching and learning as future educators.

## Review of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to establish background for this study. First, I begin by reviewing read-aloud practices and applications in K-12 and post-secondary education. Then, I discuss how reading multicultural literature can be used to promote social justice teaching.

**Read-Alouds.** Reading aloud is an effective instructional practice that should be used on a daily basis throughout all K-12 classrooms (Anderson et al., 1985; Fischer et al., 2004; Layne, 2015; Routman, 1991; Slay & Morris, 2020; Trelease, 2019). Anderson et al. (1985) reported that reading aloud is "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for

eventual success in reading" (p. 23). Essentially, reading aloud sets students up for lifelong reading success. Teachers who read aloud promote vocabulary and oral language development (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Layne, 2015; Routman, 2003; Trelease, 2019); activate and build background knowledge (Kaefer, 2020); improve reading and listening comprehension (Kraemer et al., 2012; Layne, 2015; Santoro et al., 2008); model reading fluency (Hurst et al., 2011; Trelease, 2019); nurture social-emotional growth (Fisher et al., 2004; Trelease, 2019); and encourage cultural understanding (Kelser et al., 2020; Routman, 2003; Sipe, 2008).

Interactive read-alouds are shared reading experiences that enable teachers to read a text aloud while students interact with the text and engage in meaningful dialogue with the teacher and their peers (Barrentine, 1996; Fisher et al., 2004; May et al., 2014; Slay & Morris, 2020). Teachers who facilitate interactive read-alouds model proficient and animated reading, support vocabulary and language development, and strengthen listening and speaking skills (Johnston, 2016; Lane & Wright, 2007; Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009; Trelease, 2019).

In addition to K-12 classrooms, read-alouds are an effective teaching tool that should be used in post-secondary classrooms as well (Freeman et al., 2011; Slay & Morton, 2020). While students in teacher preparation courses enjoy being read to (Freeman et al., 2011), they also learn valuable read-aloud strategies that they can perform in their future classrooms (Slay & Morton, 2020; Serafini & Giorgis, 2003). Such strategies might include proper text selection, reading with prosody, word pronunciation, and identifying cross-curricular connections (Slay & Morton, 2020). Pre-service teachers also need sufficient time to apply and refine their own reading aloud skills (Routman, 2003; Slay & Morton, 2020). Reading aloud promotes both personal and professional growth, as well as develops pre-service teachers' appreciation for children's literature (Freeman et al., 2011).

**Multicultural Literature.** Multicultural literature in the United States should represent the lived experiences of marginalized and underrepresented groups (Short et al., 2016). Children's and young adult multicultural literature offer a safe avenue to initiate tough conversations surrounding complex social justice issues (Griffith, 2009), like police brutality, wrongful incarceration, and White supremacy to name a few. While reading social justice-themed multicultural literature, teachers should facilitate intergroup dialogue (Zúñiga et al., 2002). Intergroup dialogue invites students from two or more social groups to engage in honest face-to-face conversations (Zúñiga et al., 2002). Discussing social justice topics, like racial inequality, personal identity, and poverty, enables students from different racial backgrounds and social groups to interact with one another while confronting and sometimes dismantling internal biases (Griffin et al., 2012; Zúñiga et al., 2002). Social justice-themed multicultural literature not only evokes students' feelings and emotions, but fosters critical thinking (Dressel, 2003; Griffith, 2009).

Teacher preparation programs have an obligation to prepare teachers for the multicultural experiences they will likely encounter in their future classrooms (Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejia, 2003; Pendergast et al., 2015). Interactive read-alouds can enrich college students' cultural, linguistic, and content understandings as well as help facilitate discussions about important topics (Freeman et al., 2011; Pendergast et al., 2015). Sharing multicultural literature with pre-service teachers also promotes culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2018) coined the term

*culturally responsive teaching* and described it as a pedagogy that channels classroom instruction through diverse students' cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives. Culturally responsive teaching empowers both teachers and students to practice cultural competence as well as supports higher academic achievement in diverse populations (Gay, 2018).

## Research Purpose and Questions

This study explored how pre-service teachers responded to social justice-themed interactive read-alouds in an undergraduate literacy course at Midwest University. The following questions informed this study: (1) "How does the instructor facilitate social justice read-alouds?" (2) "How do pre-service teachers characterize the read-aloud events?" and (2) "In what ways do pre-service teachers personally connect to the social justice issues portrayed in the read-aloud events?"

## Methodology and Methods

This study was guided by social constructivist theoretical underpinnings. Constructivists believe that humans actively construct their knowledge through their interactions with other humans and things in the world (Creswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2007). Knowledge is neither created nor discovered because we conceptualize by piecing together, or constructing, different encounters to form our own understandings (Bhattacharya, 2017; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2007). The participants' opinions expressed during this study were not simply formed on their own, but through past experiences and interactions with others.

This study used single instrumental case study design. Instrumental case studies seek to gain insight into the research questions by studying one specific case (Stake, 1995). The case selected for this study was a group of pre-service teachers within the parameters of an undergraduate literacy course. The findings of this study reflect the participants' individually constructed meanings of social justice-themed read-alouds.

**Participant Selection.** This study included a small population of participants of sixty students enrolled in an undergraduate literacy course. Students were selected based on academic rankings (freshman, sophomore, and junior) and level of participation in the class prior to the study. Of the sixty students enrolled in the course, twenty-one females and one male volunteered to participate in the focus group interviews. The recruitment pool was narrowed down to six participants.

**The Participants.** At the time of the study, all participants were seeking an undergraduate degree in elementary education. To provide anonymity for all participants, self-selected pseudonyms were used in place of their real names. Each participant's pronouns and pseudonym were approved prior to reporting the results. Table 1 displays the participants' self-identified demographics:

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name	Identified Gender	Age	Identified Race	Year in School
Chris	Male	54	White	Junior
Haley	Female	19	White	Freshman

Kendall	Female	20	White	Sophomore
Maya	Female	22	White	Junior
Samantha	Female	20	White	Sophomore
Sarah	Female	20	White	Junior

The primary instructor of the course, Dr. Larson, facilitated the read-aloud events. At the time of this study, the researcher was Dr. Larson's Graduate Teaching Assistant and helped co-teach this course. Dr. Larson gave consent to use her real name in the findings of this study.

**The Research Site.** Due to an unprecedented global pandemic, the classroom environment was restructured to follow campus-wide COVID-19 guidelines set by Midwest University. All participants in attendance wore face coverings and sat six feet apart from each other. While most participants attended class in-person, others joined class through Zoom. Dr. Larson did the best she could to accommodate her students while adhering to the university guidelines. With the help of newly-installed technology, Dr. Larson was able to accommodate both in-person and remote participants by displaying the picture book read-alouds on a document camera.

**The Read-Aloud Texts.** To properly address social justice topics, teachers must approach texts with a critical eye (May et al., 2014) and select children's literature that reflects the diversity of the society in which their students live (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Even though different genres and text structure require different reading behaviors (Duke et al., 2012), teachers and students can use complex fiction and nonfiction texts to engage in meaningful and critical conversation (May & Bingham, 2015; May et al., 2014). Fiction texts, including poetry, promote empathy (Ciardiello, 2010) and humanize characters who experience social injustices (Rich, 1993; as cited in Ciardiello, 2010). Informational texts are excellent candidates for culturally-relevant read-alouds because they represent social and worldly knowledge and help students make sense of the world around them (May & Bingham, 2015). This section discusses one fiction picture book and one nonfiction picture book that were read aloud during this study.

***A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart.*** *A Place Inside of Me: A Poem to Heal the Heart*, written by Zetta Elliot (2020) and illustrated by Noa Denmon, is a 2021 Caldecott Medal Honor (American Library Association, 2021). The Randolph Caldecott Medal is awarded every year to the most distinguished American picture books for children (American Library Association, 2020). The "Honor" recipients are otherwise referred to as the "runners-up" and still receive annual recognition (American Library Association, 2020). Written in narrative verse, *A Place Inside of Me* explores a whirlwind of emotions that one Black child experiences at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement. The illustrations, coupled with the text, portray a stunning and thought-provoking message that explores deep and complex feelings.

***We Are Water Protectors.*** *We Are Water Protectors*, written by Carole Lindstrom (2020) and illustrated by Michaela Goade, is the 2021 Caldecott Medal Winner (American Library Association, 2021). Each year, one children's picture book receives the Caldecott Medal, which is the overall winner of the award (American Library Association, 2020). Inspired by actual Indigenous-led clean land and water movements, *We Are Water Protectors* advocates for a universal fight in protecting sacred land and water sources upon which many plants, animals, and humans respect and depend. The illustrations beautifully represent the Indigenous Nations as well as the environments they fight to protect.

## Data Collection

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured focus group interviews, and student work. Dr. Larson facilitated two separate read-aloud events over the span of two weeks. As the researcher, I assumed the role of peripheral membership, meaning I observed the read-aloud events from the sidelines with no interaction with the participants (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). Immediately following the read-alouds, the six focus group participants met with me in a separate room to discuss their experiences. Because the two read-aloud texts covered different social justice issues within two separate demographics, I used the same questions to guide both interviews. The goal was to compare the participants' experiences and perceptions related to each text. Participants who were in class but did not volunteer for the focus group interviews completed online reflections about the texts. These three data sources allowed for me to compare the pre-service teachers' experiences with teacher-led read-alouds as well as their perceptions about the read-aloud texts.

## Data Analysis

After data were collected, emerging themes were explored through inductive data analysis. *Inductive Analysis* (Bhattacharya, 2017) or *coding* (Saldana, 2016), is one way to analyze qualitative research data. This process involves working from the ground up, starting with the raw data then identifying patterns across the data (Bhattacharya, 2017; Saldana, 2016).

While transcribing and reviewing data, two rounds of coding were conducted. There were several overlapping themes between the two interviews as well as contrasting opinions and ideas about the two different texts. The major themes discussed in this article align with the research purpose and questions that informed this study. A visual representation of the data collection and analysis timeline is found below in Table 2:

Table 2: Visual Representation of Data Collection and Analysis Timeline

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis
<b>Research Question #1:</b> How does the instructor facilitate social justice-themed read-aloud events?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observations and field notes</li> <li>Audio/video recording of the read-aloud event</li> <li>Semi-structured interviews with participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review field notes, identify patterns</li> <li>Review and transcribe audio/video recording</li> <li>Cycle 1 Subcoding (identify primary and secondary codes) and InVivo Coding (direct quotes from participants), Cycle 2 Pattern Coding (identify patterns and themes)</li> </ul>
<b>Research Question #2:</b> How do pre-service teachers characterize the read-aloud events?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audio/video recording of interviews with participants</li> <li>Semi-structured interviews with participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and transcribe audio/video recording</li> <li>Cycle 1 Subcoding (identify primary and secondary codes) and InVivo Coding (direct quotes from participants), Cycle 2 Pattern Coding (identify patterns and themes)</li> </ul>
<b>Research Question #3:</b> In what ways do pre-service teachers personally connect to the social justice issues portrayed in the read-aloud events?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Semi-structured interviews with participants</li> <li>Student Document/Assignment Review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and transcribe audio/video recording</li> <li>Cycle 1 Subcoding (identify primary and secondary codes) and InVivo Coding (direct quotes from participants), Cycle 2 Pattern Coding (identify patterns and themes)</li> </ul>

## Findings

This section provides an analysis of the data obtained from observations, focus group interviews, and student work relating to each read-aloud event. The findings are organized by research question and reflect the researcher's interpretations using participants' direct quotes.

### **Research Question #1: How does the instructor facilitate social justice-themed read-aloud events?**

***Skillful Reading Prosody.*** Prosodic reading models proper expression, intonation, and pacing (Dollins, 2014; Johnston, 2015; Laminack, 2017). Dr. Larson read each book with genuine passion and modeled skilled reading prosody. At times, Dr. Larson paused her reading at crucial moments to allow participants to ponder what they just heard or to engage in reflective dialogue. Some of the participants noted Dr. Larson's demonstration of skillful reading prosody during this study. While listening to *A Place Inside of Me*, Samantha noticed that everyone was engaged and hanging on to every word of the story. Kendall described Dr. Larson's reading as "animated," while Maya recognized Dr. Larson's ability to "bring the words to life." Haley noted that often we equate "expressive reading" with excitement and happiness, but Dr. Larson was able to change her voice and "put into perspective what was going on" when the story portrayed emotions like sadness, anger, and frustration.

***Effective Questioning Strategies.*** One of the key ingredients of successful interactive read-alouds is posing open-ended "what, when, where, and why" prompts (Johnston, 2015; Laminack, 2019). Dr. Larson's strategic use of questioning highlighted small yet important details that might otherwise go unnoticed. For example, Samantha recalled that during the reading of *A Place Inside of Me*, Dr. Larson stopped on a page that illustrated a community barber shop and asked, "What did you notice on this page?" In the top left-hand corner of the page, there was a TV screen showing a news station with the headline "Girl Got Shot." If Dr. Larson had not stopped to discuss this detail, Samantha said that she would have missed that significant detail. While reading *We Are Water Protectors*, Dr. Larson asked, "What is the black snake?", which served a metaphor for an oil pipeline and a major focus of the book. She also asked, "Is this written from a one-sided perspective?", which helped the participants to consider the author's point of view and purpose for writing the story.

### **Research Question #2: How do the pre-service teachers characterize the read-aloud events?**

***Beneficial Auditory Experiences.*** Teacher read-alouds help alleviate reading performance anxiety and allow students to direct their focus on comprehension (Marchessault & Larwin, 2014) and listening skills (Fisher et al., 2004; Kraemer et al., 2012; Layne, 2015). Participants agreed that interactive read-alouds accommodate well for auditory learners. Chris discussed how the auditory component of read-alouds helped him to process the visuals and "focus on the whole experience versus having to mentally process the text and then look at the picture." Maya expressed that hearing a story read aloud "better puts in perspective the character's feelings or even what my mind was thinking." The participants addressed the fact that read-alouds help students focus more on "content versus decoding," which eliminates added stress readers can have when reading independently. Kendall said that being read to helps her "see the bigger picture." Even though the participants were entirely capable of reading the text themselves, they

found the read-aloud experiences to be enjoyable and a “nice change of pace” from reading on their own.

**Powerful Illustrations.** Picture book illustrations play an integral role in comprehension (Braid & Finch, 2015; Sipe, 2008). All the participants underscored the importance of the illustrations to both stories, and how they helped put the words into context. Haley admitted that when she reads to herself, she does not take the time to stop and analyze illustrations. “When I read to myself, I often get lost in words and sentences instead of focusing on the image, because I am just thinking about the words that I am reading.” When discussing *A Place Inside of Me*, Samantha pointed out that if the illustrations are removed from the book, the text could be about anything. Chris described the illustrations in *We Are Water Protectors* as “good graphic representations of what the story is about.” He also said that there is “no ambiguity with the illustrations,” and that most readers could understand that the “black snake” represented the oil pipeline. Samantha felt that readers could “infer and make good hypotheses” based on the illustrations.

It is important to think critically about both text and images when reading literature written by authors of color (Durand, 2020; Schieble, 2014). The participants felt that the illustrations in both texts represented the Black and Indigenous cultures well. Samantha noticed in *A Place Inside of Me* that the illustrator represented a variety of ethnic groups within the Black and African American communities by including various skin tones. Sarah felt that in *We Are Water Protectors*, “the illustrations do a good job incorporating the [Indigenous] culture in with it” and embody the beautiful land, animals, and humans. Chris compared both texts by saying, “the illustrations do a good job of tying in the feeling or feelings of what is going on with the characters.”

**Disengagement from the Text.** While the reactions to *A Place Inside of Me* were largely positive, the participants expressed a slight aversion to *We Are Water Protectors*. After observing the read-aloud event and picking up on the energy in the interview conference room afterward, I anticipated that the second interview would be a huge contrast to the first. I personally felt that this read-aloud was rushed, and the students did not get enough time to process the text while it was being read aloud. I asked the participants if they felt the same way, and they all agreed. Because I wanted their discourse to be meaningful, I spent the first five minutes re-reading the text. This also gave the participants another opportunity to examine the illustrations more closely.

Chris mentioned that he was less engaged with *We Are Water Protectors* because he felt it was “propaganda” material. He mentioned that the first read-aloud was more enjoyable because he “did not feel like somebody was trying to sell me something.” Chris was not the only participant disengaged from the second text. Sarah mentioned that personal reasons, unrelated to the text, had kept her from fully engaging in the read-aloud event. Because she was less focused, she realized that she missed several important details of the story: “I think one of the negative things about reading aloud is like, I wouldn’t get to go back and look at parts I missed.” Sarah and Haley both agreed that rereading the story helped their comprehension and ability to critically discuss the text during the focus group interview.



### **Research Question #3: In what ways do pre-service teachers personally connect to the social justice issues portrayed in the read-aloud events?**

**An Array of Emotions.** While comparing the two read-alouds, the participants agreed that both texts portrayed various human emotions. One topic that was discussed in the interviews was the fact that the main characters in each book experienced multiple emotions at the same time. For example, Chris mentioned that the main character in *A Place Inside of Me* was probably experiencing anger and sadness when learning that another member of the community was shot. He said, “I don’t think you can have sorrow without anger.” Maya agreed that one emotion might trigger another emotion. The phrase “deep down inside of me” was repeated throughout the story, and one participant recognized the phrase “emphasizes the true gravity of that emotion.” Kendall mentioned that Dr. Larson’s expressive reading helped her connect to the emotions on a deeper level. She also emphasized the importance of addressing “uncomfortable” emotions that we experience and felt that this book could help readers identify and name their own feelings. Some participants felt comfort in knowing that they were not the only ones who have experienced the emotions portrayed in the books, even if the characters were fictional.

In comparison, the participants discussed how the main character in *We Are Water Protectors* was likely experiencing grief and concern as she was losing sacred land, water, and animals to what she considered to be a destructive pipeline. It was mentioned that sometimes pipelines are installed on Indigenous lands without the community’s full consent, and Chris and Kendall acknowledged that the character must have felt “betrayed” and “disrespected.” The participants admitted that they had little background knowledge on the issues represented in this story, but Chris felt that “because of my age, I had a better understanding of what this was about.” This story reminded Sarah of one of her friends who experienced a similar situation in her hometown, in which an Indigenous community protested the installation of a pipeline.

Even when participants did not personally connect to the book characters and events, they practiced empathy and compassion for the circumstances presented in the stories. Even as she empathized with the characters in *A Place Inside of Me*, Samantha acknowledged her White privilege and realized that “you don’t truly understand it until you live it.” The participants were able to use multicultural literature to think more critically of current social justice issues. Kendall said that, for people like her who cannot specifically relate to the cultural experiences depicted in *A Place Inside of Me*, the read-aloud event helped her understand how the people in those communities might feel. Maya added that even though this specific text focused on Black and African American communities, this is a reality that other communities of color face as well. She then referenced the current rise in hate crimes affecting the Asian American communities in our country.

**A Call for Action.** As both read-alouds revealed injustices present in society today, the participants agreed that these read-aloud texts could incite positive change. Chris pointed out that both books could be “used as a catalyst for action” and Kendall believed they could “inspire a better reaction or change” in the United States. Chris also noted the difference between “productive action” and “destructive action”. For example, Chris hopes that people who read *We Are Water Protectors* are inspired to figure out the “safest, most effective, [and] cleanest way to accomplish what needs to happen” rather than cause more destruction and pollution. Sarah

admitted that her encounter with *We Are Water Protectors* had forced her to consider how she can take part in the clean water movement.

One of the participants expressed that *A Place Inside of Me* promotes “hope” and “perseverance,” and even though we have a long way to go, “holding on to hope and persevering for what is right, we will come to a society based on love and not hate.” Chris and Kendall acknowledged that our society should come together to fight for social justice for marginalized communities. In her personal life, Maya rarely noticed cultures mixing and integrating outside of work environments but admitted that it is “easier to sometimes relate to people who look like you.” She hopes that books like these will motivate readers like her to get to know people outside of their own communities and cultures.

***Implications for Future Teaching.*** The participants were able to consider how these books could impact their dispositions and practices as pre-service teachers. Read-alouds support social emotional learning (Britt et al, 2016) and present different perspectives that allow students to confront their own conflicts and emotions (McTigue et al., 2015). *A Place Inside of Me* could serve as a conversation starter when confronting uncomfortable or stronger feelings. In addition, the text can be used to promote empathy. One participant mentioned that “this story could help our hearts have empathy and understanding” for others.

Background knowledge is a strong predictor of reading comprehension and student learning (Barnes et al., 2015; Kaefer, 2020), and the pre-service teachers recognized how background knowledge, or lack thereof, impacted their own comprehension of the texts. Most of the participants expressed a better understanding of *A Place Inside of Me* than *We Are Water Protectors* because they felt they were more informed of racism than environmental injustices. Chris pointed out that unless readers live in areas near major oil pipelines, they may not understand the black snake metaphor portrayed in *We Are Water Protectors*. Kendall added that younger students might require more background knowledge before reading this text, while older students could use the illustrations to infer what the black snake is.

Many of the participants acknowledged that perspective matters and read-alouds can be used to explore different points of view surrounding the same topic. Chris said, “If I’m getting just one perspective, and not the other, then the credibility is gone.” He will encourage his future students to “question everything.” Kendall agreed that “having both sides [of the story] will also help students form their own opinions.” Collectively, the participants agreed it is important to provide resources and tools that allow their future students to form their own educated opinions about social justice topics.

## **Conclusion**

The data from this study indicates that post-secondary students can enjoy and benefit from teacher-led interactive read-alouds just as much as young children. One of the many benefits of an interactive read-aloud is the dialogue that it generates (Johnston, 2015; Laminack, 2019; Lane & Wright, 2007; Zúñiga et al., 2012). Through their dialogue, I discovered that the participants’ experiences and perspectives were sometimes harmonious and other times conflicting. Even

though they were discussing the same read-aloud texts, everyone expressed different interpretations.

I intentionally chose two texts that highlight different communities of color as well as different social justice themes, and the findings reveal both similar and contradictory viewpoints among the participants. Since every focus group participant identified as White, I anticipated their experiences and opinions to be similar. While I would have preferred a more culturally diverse sample size, each participant's unique history and circumstances still contributed to meaningful discussions about the texts. I value the lessons I learned from every individual involved, and I hope that they walked away from this experience with similar gratitude.

The part of this study that surprised me the most was the participants' reactions to *We Are Water Protectors*. The overall consensus of the book was that the author's tone was accusatory. Before conducting this study, I read the book from beginning to end multiple times and never once viewed this book as "accusatory." Like most of the participants, I had little background knowledge of the Indigenous-led movements, and that could have impacted my initial perceptions of the book. I can understand now how the author's tone and perspective can be interpreted in different ways based on personal beliefs and experiences. Just as the participants realized, I too, recognized how important it is to use literature to discuss multiple perspectives about the same topic, rather than focus on a single story (Bishop, 1990).

The findings of this study align with existing research in demonstrating that read-alouds are an effective teaching tool, even after students become proficient, independent readers (Anderson et al., 1985; Routman, 1991; Trelease, 2019). College pre-service teachers can learn new content through interactive read-alouds, as well as explore how the texts can be utilized in their future classrooms. When teacher preparation programs expose students to multicultural children's literature, pre-service teachers can confront their own personal biases, strengthen their cultural competence (Slay & Morton, 2020), and obtain the necessary knowledge required to support and appreciate diverse classroom populations (May & Bingham, 2015).

While social justice issues have recently subjugated American culture, the findings of this study indicate that topics like racial injustice or environmental justice can be difficult and uncomfortable to talk about, even among adult learners. This study reaffirmed the notion that children's literature can be used to facilitate tough conversations (Griffith, 2009; May & Bingham, 2015; May et al., 2014). *A Place Inside of Me* and *We Are Water Protectors* amplified the voices from communities that have been oppressed and underrepresented in both children's literature and in teacher preparation literacy courses across the United States (The New Teacher Project, 2020). While this study only scratched the surface in read-aloud research conducted in higher education, more research needs to be conducted in teacher preparation literacy courses across the United States to understand the academic benefits of interactive read-alouds, as well as how pre-service teachers can effectively use multicultural literature.

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