Supporting Preservice Teacher Development of Culturally Responsive Reading Instruction Through a Cross-Course Assignment

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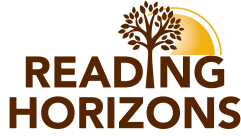Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons

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──────── **Abstract** ────────

This article describes design-based research undertaken by two teacher educators to support elementary preservice teachers (PSTs) in integrating culturally responsive teaching practices with reading methods. The study described was motivated by calls for teacher preparation programs to be more intentional about supporting PSTs in synthesizing their learning across courses, especially when it comes to culturally responsive reading pedagogies. This article focuses on an activity that tasked PSTs to select culturally authentic children's texts and design interactive read-alouds that engage elementary students in conversations around social justice topics while simultaneously meeting English language arts standards. Analysis of the lesson plans revealed that PSTs made explicit connections between reading methods instruction and strategies that facilitate dialogue about critical social issues and social justice advocacy, but the connections remained shallow. PSTs showed that they understood the overall goal of the assignment but lacked depth and detail in their justifications of texts and activities. The authors conclude with a reflection on the patterns that emerged in their findings and outline their plans for future iterations of the experiment. Overall, the authors' experiences highlight the importance of teacher preparation programs exploring more opportunities to cross-pollinate assignments or otherwise build bridges between courses to support PSTs' integration of concepts.

Keywords: *read-alouds, children's literature, reading instruction, social justice, culturally responsive teaching*

This article reports on the results of the first round of a design-based study in which we, two teacher educators, designed and assigned a cross-course interactive read-aloud lesson plan to our elementary preservice teachers (PSTs). Recent position statements put forward by major literacy organizations have called for teaching practices

that expand learning opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse students (e.g., National Council of Teachers of English, 2018, 2019). Simultaneously, scholars have continued to call for research that examines not just preservice teachers' sense-making but also the teaching choices that move students toward such understanding (Hoffman et al., 2014; Zygmunt-Fillwalk et al., 2019), particularly that which pertains to culturally responsive reading instruction (Fife-Demski et al., 2017; Papola-Ellis, 2020; Zygmunt et al., 2015). These calls prompted us to consider avenues by which we might better support PSTs in developing culturally responsive reading instruction.

PSTs always take our two courses in the same semester, in accordance with the teacher preparation program's course sequence. Prior to our collaboration, we were both using read-aloud assignments for different purposes in our respective courses. In Brittany's course, PSTs designed read-aloud lessons to meet English language arts objectives in the primary grades. In Annemarie's course, PSTs designed culturally responsive read-alouds to validate and affirm student identities and discuss social issues. And while the PSTs were successful at both assignments, they didn't naturally make the leap to using culturally relevant texts to discuss social issues while teaching reading skills. Thus, we sought to design an assignment that ran across both courses that would explicitly connect the seemingly disparate objectives. Therefore, this study was guided by the research question: How might a cross-course read-aloud assignment impact students' synthesis of culturally responsive teaching and reading instruction?

Review of Research on Culturally Responsive Reading Instruction

In this section we lay the foundation for the shared course assignment that inspired this design experiment study. In Annemarie's course, PSTs learn about culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and the impact that employing such pedagogy has on their students as well as their own instructional decisions. Brittany's course introduces students to early reading instruction. Since both instructors and courses require students to develop and implement a developmentally appropriate and standards-based read-aloud lesson plan, it seemed natural to cross-pollinate the assignment and instruction across both courses. The impact of cross-pollination and the power that read-alouds can have when utilized properly are outlined below.

Centering and Sustaining Culture Through Text

In 1995, Ladson-Billings proposed a pedagogy "that not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (p. 469). Since then, many others have built on Ladson-Billings's work to further decenter linguistic and cultural hegemony to envision and enact community-rooted forms of teaching (e.g., Paris & Alim, 2017). Often, one of the first steps on a teacher's journey toward more culturally responsive teaching practices is developing a diverse collection of children's literature. It is well established that children's literature can function as metaphorical mirrors by which readers can better understand their own experiences as part of a larger human experience as well as windows through which young readers can access views and experiences of the world that they would otherwise never know (Bishop, 1990). When classroom texts mirror young learners' lives, they are motivated to read more (Garth-McCullough, 2008); when they don't, learners are more

likely to disengage and read less (Murphy, 2007). Furthermore, children's literature can provide students with vivid snapshots of current and historical social issues (Botelho & Rudman, 2010) and thereby illuminate power systems and challenge stereotypes in complex and multifaceted ways that "invite students to resist the dominant discourse on social issues while gaining intercultural insights" (Mathis, 2020, p. 103).

Research on PST preparation for engaging in CRP is limited, especially as it intersects with reading instruction. One study, Bennett (2012), examined eight PST's changing comfort level with working with students in an urban setting and in understanding the importance of culturally responsive teaching tenets, such as clear expectations and modeling. Another, Seidle et al. (2005), examined how a yearlong cooperative inquiry project with a Black community supported in-service teachers' cultural competence. These sparse studies underscore the importance of long-term exposure, collaboration, and reflection for preparing teachers for culturally relevant practices.

Research on teachers' abilities to select culturally authentic text is similarly limited but demonstrates a need for additional education in this area. For example, Brinson (2012) found that less than 40% of teachers interviewed were able to identify two children's books that contained a character of color. Several factors contribute to this, including a scarcity of published books that represent diverse experiences, a lack of intentionality by professional outlets to promote culturally authentic literature, and a tendency by teachers to select texts that preserve their own social and cultural identities and values (Gangi, 2008; McNair, 2008; Williams, 2014). Regardless, this results in classroom libraries or instruction that lack inclusion (Gray, 2009; Sharma & Christ, 2017).

Annemarie's class uses Sharroky Hollie's (2018) *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning* to explore cultural and linguistic responsiveness and discuss strategies to use when working with students from these diverse backgrounds. In his text, Hollie relates cultural and linguistic responsiveness to and adapts his pedagogy from origins of culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). Hollie's pedagogical approach focuses on validating and affirming students' cultural and linguistic identity by including elements of culture, such as language, rhythm, sociocentrism, and communalism. He focuses on multiple identities and cultures that contribute to youth culture, emphasizing hybridity, fluidity, and complexity. Understanding, accepting, and affirming students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, along with examining their own, supports PSTs in a process of critical reflexivity. PSTs should be taught to reflect on their cultural practices to identify what is emancipatory and for whom as well as what is oppressive in those movements.

Reading Instruction

Brittany's class introduces PSTs to balanced and developmental-constructivist approaches to early reading instruction (Chambers et al., 2016). A balanced reading program seeks to achieve balance in areas such as teacher- and student-led instruction, comprehensive word study and authentic literacy experiences, leveled texts and high-quality literature, and a variety of assessment techniques (Kim, Hemphill, et al., 2017). Teachers

designing balanced classrooms rely on activities like interactive read-alouds, shared readings, guided readings, centers, mini-lessons, strategy groups, book clubs, individual conferences, independent reading, and word study (Kim, Burkhauser, et al., 2017).

How culturally responsive teaching practices apply to teaching reading cannot be reduced to a single routine or program. Rather, instruction is contextually bound, "shaped by the sociocultural characteristics of the setting in which it occurs, and the populations for whom it is designed" (Gay, 2013, p. 63). However, tenets of culturally responsive pedagogies can be extended to reading through instruction that is explicit and systematic. Explicit instruction intentionally connects to previous instruction, identifies learning objectives and states their importance, relies on graphic organizers and anchor charts to make learning more visible, includes detailed explanations of how to achieve learning objectives, and offers specific directions for activities (Carnine et al., 2006). Systematic instruction is carefully thought out, moves at a good pace, scaffolds from simple to complex, and gives students clear steps to follow (Adams, 2001). Explicit and systematic instruction is enacted in part by structuring lessons and activities that follow the gradual release of responsibility model, which intentionally shifts the cognitive load of learning from teacher modeling to teacher-guided practice, then to learners independently practicing (Fisher & Frey, 2013).

Teachers must also disrupt the idea that mainstream American English is the be-all and end-all for all speakers, regardless of their culture (Baker-Bell, 2020). This requires understanding how the linguistic practices of a student's community might come to bear on literacy learning, particularly when it comes to assessment. For example, English learners may be comfortable with some phonemes but not others, depending on their first language. Alternately, a student who speaks African American English may respond to rhyming prompts differently from students who speak mainstream American English because African American English phonology allows optional deletion of final consonants in some cases.

Culturally responsive reading instruction also includes centering texts in which students can see themselves and their lived experiences (Sedita, 2022). Books used for read-alouds or whole-class reading should celebrate students' lives and validate their worth at school and in society. The transactions (Rosenblatt, 2005) between a reader, a culturally relevant text, and the inviting context in which reading occurs (i.e., a culturally relevant pedagogy) supports the construction of deep meaning. Powerful transactions also support learner motivation, engagement, and outcomes (Heflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001; Morrison et al., 2008; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Research shows that read-alouds are versatile tools that can reinforce reading skills, reach across content areas, and frame critical conversations around equity and justice. Fountas and Pinnell (2016) defined the interactive read-aloud as "a whole-group instructional context in which you read aloud a selected text to the whole class, occasionally and selectively pausing for conversation" (p. 12). The pauses facilitate thinking about, talking about, and responding to the text so that students actively process the language and meaning of the text throughout the reading. Many teachers already use read-alouds in flexible ways to meet their curricular goals, particularly for reading instruction. Read-

alouds and text talk can have a meaningful impact on literacy skills such as listening, speaking, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Hollie, 2018). We believe discussion of social issues can easily be integrated into read-alouds designed to accomplish reading goals.

Additionally, research supports the idea that reading builds social understanding in readers, improving their ability to empathize and sympathize with others' thoughts, feelings, and actions (Kozak & Recchia, 2019; Taylor et al., 2017). Furthermore, literature that focuses on or highlights social issues can benefit students by creating space for critical dialogue and exchanging ideas, enabling them to unpack the roles of power and privilege in society and their own lives (Gopalakrishnan, 2010). Even when conflicting interpretations occur, such disagreements can be a springboard for digging deeper into issues and perspectives (Van Horn, 2015).

Conceptual Framework: Cross-pollination

In collaborating across our courses, we hope to highlight the importance of cross-pollination of concepts across teacher preparation courses. We employ the term *cross-pollination* in the way it has been employed elsewhere in educational research (e.g., Hattie, 2009; Thorne, 2008; Vangrieken et al., 2015; Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016) to dovetail the key objectives of both our courses into one assignment. In recognition of the shifting K–12 student population, most teacher preparation programs include at least one course on diverse learners or culturally responsive teaching in addition to methods courses. Often these courses remain independent of one another and rarely, if ever, overlap (Hattie, 2009). Unsurprisingly, we sought extant research on cross-pollinating elementary methods and diversity courses to support our planning but found none. Yet the literature tells us that in aligning assignments within such diversity and methods courses, PSTs may begin to see the relevance of equity and social justice contexts for traditional methods courses such as math, science, and language arts (Vangrieken et al., 2015).

Culturally responsive pedagogy and reading instruction were never mutually exclusive and, in fact, share many of the same goals. This effort to cross-pollinate our course assignments was intended as an additional scaffold to support PSTs in recognizing those shared goals. We hoped that doing so would allow each course to extend and enhance elements from the other. This curriculum is purposefully designed to address the needs of diverse learners from the outset, in contrast to traditional curriculum development that considers "typical" students first and then retrofits adaptations or differentiates for students of differing needs and goals. We believe in the strengths and abilities of all students and are committed to creating classrooms that belong to everyone equally.

Over the years, researchers have investigated the best approaches to preparing future teachers (e.g., Carlisle et al., 2011; Griffith et al., 2015; Piasta et al., 2009). Practicing planning instruction begins early during teacher preparation and remains a constant aspect of the profession (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). It stands to reason, then, that planning curriculum can be seen as a valid measure of PSTs' readiness to teach. Thus, when deciding which assignment/activity to create between courses, the read-aloud assignment felt like an ideal access point. Students are already familiar with text selection as an entry point for identity work, and English language arts classrooms use read-alouds at least

once a day. We hoped that PSTs would shift from focusing on reading skills solely as neutral things to using read-alouds in a purposeful way to do social justice work.

Methods

This study utilized a design-based research (DBR) approach to understand the results of a read-aloud assignment designed to support PSTs' synthesis of CRP and reading methods. The purpose of DBR is to examine the relationship between the theoretical underpinnings of a learning design and its efficacy to promote student learning (Reinking & Bradley, 2008). DBR is powerful for pragmatic education research because it necessitates revising a learning design until it meets the needs of students (Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006). This orientation to our research compels us to bring our theoretical knowledge and practice into conversation with one another to develop the best design to support our PSTs.

In the spirit of DBR, this study was conducted in a real-world setting (Barab & Squire, 2004) with confounding factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting modes of instructional delivery, and related student health crises. The read-aloud lesson plan assignment was designed in advance of the semester, but its implementation and our expectations stayed flexible to shifting circumstances. The recursive nature of DBR means it is not always easy to know when one's research is complete. We followed the advice of Reeves (2006) that the researcher continues until they are confident they can offer insights into the learning design. This study represents one semester of data on PST-generated lesson plans that draw on CRP and reading methods. We will continue to refine the assignment in future semesters, but we felt it important to offer our initial insights here, especially given the urgency teacher educators feel to address disconnects between core curriculum and the needs of diverse learners.

The Learning Design

Prior to our collaboration, PSTs enrolled in Brittany's course, Teaching Elementary School Reading and Language Arts, Pre-K Through 2nd Grade, were required to develop an interactive read-aloud lesson plan that taught a reading skill or strategy (e.g., predicting, making connections, identifying main ideas). PSTs enrolled in Annemarie's course, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners, were tasked with finding a culturally authentic text and creating a read-aloud lesson that aligned to current standards and/ or topics taught in their field placement classroom for the semester. The shared assignment we designed is a marriage of both. The lesson plan assignment was introduced by each instructor in their respective courses, but the same template (see the Appendix) was utilized to ensure cohesion throughout the lesson produced. Brittany supported students through the development of the lesson by focusing on reading instructional practices, while Annemarie emphasized and focused on the book selection and justification process as well as implementation of a social justice standard.

The assignment prompted PSTs to select a culturally authentic children's picture book that is appropriate for use with first- or second-grade students and to develop a read-aloud lesson that teaches one comprehension strategy and has a social justice outcome. PSTs had to identify state-specific English language arts standards related to their

comprehension strategy and at least one social justice standard provided by Teaching Tolerance. Teaching Tolerance anchor standards are divided into four domains—identity, diversity, justice, and action—and are intended to guide lesson plan development to engage teachers and students in discussions based around anti-bias behavior and social justice issues (Teaching Tolerance, 2018).

As the semester progressed, we both scaffolded PSTs through our respective components of the assignment. Annemarie helped them select culturally authentic texts and consider how they might be used for social justice and advocacy, while Brittany supported them in brainstorming approaches to reading instruction. From the time PSTs were introduced to the assignment in each course to final submission, they had about one month to individually work on enhancing their plans. Due to COVID-19 protocols, Annemarie had students complete an online module tied to course content on selecting culturally authentic texts (Hollie, 2018). Upon completion of this module, PSTs were instructed to search for and select a text for their read-aloud lesson plan. During class sessions in the following weeks, they had class time and support from both of us on developing their lesson plans. At completion of their plans, PSTs submitted the same lesson for each course, and we each graded the components respective to our course and expertise.

Participant Selection and Data Collection

All participants enrolled in both of our courses during the fall 2020 semester were invited to participate in the study after final grades posted; 20 consented. All 20 participants were between and ages of 19 and 23 and identified as women. All but one participant was White or White-passing; one participant identified as Afro-Latina. The data collected for this study were the final lesson plans of consenting PSTs, which we downloaded from our institution's learning management system.

Data Analysis

We employed content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017) to analyze individual lesson plans. This approach was consistent with our goal of "seeking to generate a generalizable conclusion from an aggregate of cases" (Neuendorf, 2017, p. 23), that is, to assess the efficacy of the learning design for meeting the identified learning objectives. To begin analysis, we identified key lesson plan elements as a priori coding categories: culturally authentic text selection, text justification, anti-bias and social justice goals, culturally responsive teaching strategies, reading instruction practices, accommodations, and curricular alignment. These categories helped us frame our initial analysis by attending to the data (i.e., the lesson plans) through a framework of recognized lesson plan elements that corresponded to our learning objectives. Note that these categories were not used to grade the PSTs' lesson plans; they were developed after the conclusion of the course. Each of us read and annotated each lesson plan. Our responses to each lesson plan were shared in a collaborative document, and we both had access to the data throughout the first pass. We each documented our annotations while engaging in the recursive process of revising ideas in relation to the research question (Neuendorf, 2017).

We shared our developing understanding of the lessons during research meetings and through informal modes of communication, which were documented through group

meeting notes and researcher reflections. Such practices throughout the analysis process existed as a form of analytic memos (Saldaña, 2015). In accordance with DBR, we considered both the learning design that drove the generated artifacts as well as the artifacts themselves in our analysis (Reinking & Bradley, 2008).

We then examined the data for repeated patterns across all 20 lesson plans. To compare content across lesson plans, we created an Excel matrix where rows represented lesson plans and columns represented analysis questions. We identified common themes across lesson plans that extended beyond individual performance to demonstrate core concepts from both courses (Bazeley, 2013). This comparative approach served to prioritize findings and begin examining participant performance across the curriculum rather than exclusively within individual lesson plans.

Using interpretive synthesis (Bazeley, 2013), we condensed individual synopses into a generalized performance narrative. This synthesis turned our attention to the curriculum in general and emphasized commonalities across the lesson plans while also providing opportunity to note individual differences. Throughout the synthesis process, we wrote reflective memos and continuously returned to the data to solidify insights.

Subjectivity

Because qualitative research is inherently value laden (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017), and we functioned as the primary instrument of curriculum development, instruction, data collection, and data analysis, we must remain attuned to our subjective position within this scholarship, or what Peshkin (1988) called *subjectivities*. Rather than viewing subjectivities as a troubling indication of researcher bias, Peshkin argued that "subjectivities can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (p. 18). In this section we highlight our positionality and subjectivity relevant to this study.

As educators, we put more emphasis on the process of learning than on its product. We take a recursive approach to the curriculum that informed this study's research design because we believe the most effective curriculums are revised based on student performance. We also recognize that educators play a central role in the perpetuation of oppression and inequity (Mason, 2017). As a result, we conceptualize literacy as both cognitive and sociocultural, emphasizing the multiple and critical literacies students need to navigate real-world contexts (Muhammad, 2020). We know that research is never neutral (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017) and we believe we have an ethical obligation to challenge inequitable systems. As such, this research is not only in pursuit of knowledge—it is in pursuit of social change.

Findings

When exploring the PSTs' plans after final submission, we focused on the following themes and how they were addressed in the plans: cultural authenticity of texts, alignment of social justice standards, implementation of culturally responsive teaching strategies, appropriate accommodations for language learners, effective reading

instructional practices, and overall instructional alignment. It was notable that some PSTs excelled in certain areas while others appeared to just have surface-level understanding and application of some of the components. Findings are explained more thoroughly with data examples below.

Culturally Authentic Texts

Our PSTs were tasked with selecting their read-aloud books by using Hollie's (2018) three types of culturally responsive texts as a guide: culturally authentic, culturally generic, and culturally neutral. They were encouraged to pick culturally authentic texts. These texts, whether nonfiction or fiction, illuminate the genuine cultural experiences of a specific cultural group. Within a culturally authentic text, one cultural group cannot be swapped for another without jeopardizing the integrity of the story and the experiences within (Hollie, 2018). Fourteen of the 20 participating PSTs selected culturally authentic picture books. The most popular selections included *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi (2001) and *Alma and How She Got Her Name* by Juana Martinez-Neal (2018).

Culturally generic texts feature characters of various racial identities but contain superficial details about the characters (Hollie, 2018). These types of texts tend to focus on mainstream cultural values but just happen to contain nonmainstream characters. Multicultural celebration books often fall under this category. While these texts can be useful for making text-to-self connections, they often lack the depth to instigate conversations about the cultural experiences of a particular group. Five of the PSTs chose culturally generic texts, such as *My Language, Your Language* by Lisa Bullard (2015) and *We Are Family* by Patrica Hegarty (2017).

Culturally neutral texts might contain no characters of color or characters of various racial identities but still focus on traditional mainstream themes. These texts usually fail to address cultural experiences, or worse, they reinforce stereotypes. While culturally neutral texts are not inherently bad, they are unlikely to support meaningful discussions about social, political, or civic issues. One PST selected a culturally neutral text, *Hey, Little Ant* by Hannah Hoose and Phillip Hoose (1998).

PSTs were required to justify their text selection by explaining whether and how the text was culturally authentic, generic, or neutral. All but one referenced a survey developed by Hollie (2018) for assessing the responsiveness of a text. The strongest text justifications focused on the key features and qualities of culturally and linguistically responsive literature. For example, one PST wrote,

> *The Gift of the Poinsettia* is culturally authentic and earned 7/10 points on Hollie's survey. This is a story about a family in Mexico celebrating Christmas and the importance of poinsettia plants for their holiday celebrations. The story and illustrations show deep culture, the print contains home language, and the authors and illustrators are a reliable source of culture knowledge.

PSTs who selected culturally generic texts were also well argued. One such PST posited, "*Same, Same but Different* may be culturally generic but it has a strong message of friendship, despite the differences between the characters.… It shows how people's

bonds can be deeper than what meets the eye and difference makes us beautiful."

Only three PSTs did not evaluate their text appropriately or adequately. These justifications ranged from shallow to blatantly incorrect, likely because the PSTs were reaching to make less culturally responsive texts fit the criteria. For example, one PST argued, "*Hey, Little Ant* sends a message about perspective. It allows students to connect to how they may have different perspectives about things than others. It challenges readers' thoughts on perspective and how feelings of others are important." Another PST simply wrote, "*We All Belong* is culturally authentic because it satisfies 7 of the 10 criteria on the responsiveness survey." Altogether, 14 of 20 participants received full credit for selecting and appropriately justifying their read-aloud text.

Social Justice Standards

The lesson plans contained a range of anti-bias or social justice goals. PSTs selected Teaching Tolerance (2018) standards from three of the four domains: identity, diversity, and justice. Diversity standards were by far the most popular, with 12 lessons focusing on standards like "I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different" and "I can describe some ways that I am similar to and different from people who share my identities and those who have other identities." Objectives associated with these standards included "Students will be able to explain how they are similar to and or different from the main character in the story" and "Students will be able to describe how holidays are celebrated in two different cultures."

Issues of identity were also popular, with seven PSTs selecting standards such as "I see that the way my family and I do things is both the same as and different from how other people do things, and I am interested in both" and "I can feel good about myself without being mean or making other people feel bad." Objectives associated with these standards included "Students will be able to respectfully ask questions and express curiosity about another student's culture and/or family practices" and "Students will be able to describe or explain something unique about themselves to the class."

Two PSTs selected the justice standard "I know about people who helped stop unfairness and worked to make life better for many people." Interestingly, the PSTs who selected this standard were the only ones whose texts were nonfiction: *One Million Men and Me* by Kelly Starling Lyons (2007) and *Turning Pages: My Life Story* by Sonia Sotomayor (2018). The social justice objectives for these lesson plans were "Students will be able to describe important facts about Sonia Sotomayor's life" and "Students will be able to explain how the Million Man March helped make life better for many people."

No PST selected an action-oriented standard (e.g., "I can and will do something when I see unfairness—this includes telling an adult"), and only one of the assessment activities contained elements of action. The Million Man March lesson encouraged students to think about how they would advocate for disenfranchised people and had them create their own protest signs.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies

PSTs were expected to utilize culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies throughout their lesson. Throughout the semester, PSTs were introduced to strategies such as responsive attention signals and protocols for response and discussion that validate and affirm cultural behaviors or build a bridge between cultural and academic knowledge (Hollie, 2018). Analysis of the lesson plans revealed that every lesson contained at least one culturally responsive discussion protocol. For example, one PST described,

> After reading, students will engage in a One-Three-Six discussion.... Students will take a few minutes to think about the question, 'If you were Elliot, what is something you would ask Kailash?' Then students will share in a group of three for a few minutes, before finally sharing in a group of six.

And another PST wrote,

> Students will sit in two concentric circles to do a Give One, Get One with the inner circle facing out at the outer circle facing in. Students will take turns saying one good thing about the peer directly in front of them. The inner circle will move clockwise through all possible rotations.

Other popular protocols included two-person exchanges such as My Turn, Your Turn; Think-Pair-Share; and Turn and Talk. Doing a Whip Around, where each student makes a brief statement, was also frequently present in the data.

Overall, participants' conception of culturally responsive teaching practices seemed limited to facilitating student discussion. While centering student voices is certainly a culturally responsive practice, teachers must also consider classroom management strategies, the learning environment, curriculum, direct instructional practices, and academic literacies (e.g., norms, terms). Interestingly, only one lesson explicitly referenced a responsive attention signal: "Students will discuss for 2 minutes before I give them the quiet signal: I clap three times and they clap back once."

Accommodations

In consideration of how culture and language intersect with learning, the lesson plan required PSTs to list accommodations they would make for multilingual learners (MLs) during the lesson. Instructional and assessment accommodations are built into the instructional process with MLs in mind to facilitate their education, measure their performance adequately, and level the playing field (Christensen et al., 2012). All 20 participants interpreted this as considerations for English learners, rather than more broadly for any students with nonmainstream linguistic backgrounds.

The strongest accommodation plans identified practices for before, during, and after reading as well as during the activity or assessment. Some supports were ubiquitous, such as "Provide MLs with pictures of key vocabulary terms alongside print definitions," "Provide MLs with a bilingual version of the text, if possible," and "MLs can use their

home language during discussion and assessment." Other accommodations included having MLs sit close to the teacher, reading aloud at an appropriate pace, gesturing, pointing to illustrations, asking simplified versions of questions, providing simplified instructions, providing MLs with sentence stems for written responses, allowing MLs to draw their response, and providing a copy of the text for MLs to use while working on response activities. Some of these practices could be expanded to make room for dialectical differences and vernacular practices. However, questions remain as to whether PSTs would accommodate those linguistic practices when assessing students' speaking, reading, writing, and listening.

Instructional Alignment

PSTs and novice teachers often struggle to align their instructional decisions with their expressed instructional objectives (Gholami & Husu, 2010; Theriot & Tice, 2008; Windschitl, 2002; Zimmerman, 2017). We view instructional alignment as an important facet of pedagogical quality and a strong predictor of student achievement (Polikoff & Porter, 2014). When examining our data for instructional alignment, we looked for alignment between learning standards, learning objectives, and assessment. While almost all the lessons had well-aligned standards and objectives, the described assessments were significantly less so.

Eight of the 20 lessons described after-reading activities that could clearly assess their specified learning objectives. Often, these activities were the simplest. For example, to assess whether students can make connections between themselves and the main character in the story, students "complete a two-panel worksheet in which they illustrate one similarity they share with the main character and one difference." Similarly, to assess whether students can recall important facts about Sonia Sotomayor's life, students "complete a journal entry where they recall and describe two events or experiences from the book and state why they believe the facts are important."

The remaining 12 lessons' assessments were less well aligned or in fact misaligned. Because the lesson required PSTs to teach to both a reading standard and a social justice standard, the assessment needed to clearly assess both standards. This appeared to be a challenge for many of the PSTs, as their assessments tended to focus on either just the reading objective or just the social justice objective. One lesson described an assessment activity in which students "partner up and complete a Venn diagram of how they are similar and different from their partner." This activity is clearly aligned with their objective "Students will appreciate classmates for their similarities as well as their differences"; however, the lesson contained no process for assessing whether students can "recall key details from the story."

Conversely, a different lesson described how students will "complete a graphic organizer that requires them to recall details and information from the story" but mentioned nothing about whether students can "demonstrate how their lives and experiences are the same and different from others." A smaller group described fun activities loosely related to the read-aloud but not particularly valuable for assessment of any objective. For example, one student wrote, "After reading about the importance of the poinsettias in Mexican holiday traditions, students will construct something that represents holiday tradition in their family." This activity, while no doubt enjoyable, assesses neither

students' ability to make text-to-self connections nor their knowledge of different cultural celebrations.

Reading Instruction

To analyze the lessons for reading instruction that is both effective and culturally responsive, we looked for features like explicit language, the use of anchor charts and graphic organizers, teacher modeling through think-alouds, multiple opportunities for guided practice, and multiple ways for students to demonstrate their understanding (Chambers et al., 2016). When a reading teacher is first introducing a new skill or strategy, the introduction should include detailed information about what the skill or strategy is, why to use it, and when to use it. Such practices disrupt assumptions about background knowledge and invite buy-in from students (Callins, 2006). Very few lessons included such explicit introductory language. One strong example was provided in the form of teacher talk:

> When you make a connection, you take something from the story and connect it to something you already know. Good readers make connections because it helps them understand the text better when they can relate it to something else. You should be making connections all during reading. And you can even make connections before reading if you're looking at the cover page.

However, most of the skill or strategy introductions sounded like this:

> As we read, we will pay attention to how other parts of the world have different traditions and norms. We are going to make connections between the cultures shown in the story and the ones that we have in our classroom.

The lack of explicitness continued into the teacher modeling portion of the lessons. The purpose of teacher think-alouds is to externalize in-the-head processes that occur when reading. It simultaneously checks assumptions about how good readers transact with text. To demonstrate the importance of explicit language, we highlight two think-alouds that intended to model the skill of making connections. First, the best think-aloud included this teacher talk:

> I am ready to make a connection. When I went to school for the first time, I only spoke Spanish, just like Carmen. If I learned something new, I felt most comfortable sharing it with my family first because I knew they would understand me, just like Carmen and her family. Do you see how I made a connection from myself to the text? I connected to the story by thinking about what I would have done if I were in Carmen's shoes in this moment in the story.

Whereas a less explicit example went like this: "Lisa and Lida are wearing the same dress here. This reminds me of when me and my friend were in school together and we had to wear the same uniform. Do any of you like dressing like your friends?"

Another recurring issue we noticed with the weaker think-aloud submissions is that they often conflated explaining the skill and modeling. Frequently, PSTs did only one

or the other and perceived that they had done both. Alternatively, some PSTs included think-aloud scripts that demonstrated their monitoring of the story but failed to model a specific reading skill or strategy. For example, one PST's think-aloud script said, "Clover is playing with her friends and the girl at the fence asked to play, but her friends immediately said, 'No.' Do you think that was nice to do? I don't think it was." This offers no insight into what reading skill or strategy students are meant to be practicing.

Following the same pattern, PSTs' guiding practice questions also lacked the specificity necessary to provide space for students to verbalize their thinking pertaining to strategic actions while reading. A good guiding practice question might be as follows: "Arriving somewhere new can be scary. Does anyone have a connection they can make to how Unhei may be feeling in a new place? Have you ever felt like Unhei being somewhere new?" Another might ask, "Joey made Unhei feel good about herself when he took the time to learn her name. Can anyone make a connection to a time that a friend or classmate made you feel good about yourself?"

A less explicit guiding practice question we received stated, "I think it is so cool how Kailash lives with 23 of his family members! How many people do you live with? Is it a small number, like Elliot, or a lot, like Kailash?" This question could be made stronger by explicitly using the metalanguage of reading. Additionally, as with modeling, some PSTs included story monitoring questions unrelated to the specific reading skill or strategy, such as "On this page, Unhei practices saying different names into the mirror. Why do you think she wants a new name?" However, if such monitoring questions were offered in addition to strategy application questions, we considered them as further supporting students' processing.

Very few lessons opted to utilize graphic organizers or anchor charts to make thinking more visible. In fact, only one PST used an anchor chart in their lesson plan to display key information for easy reference for students practicing a new skill. Only two other PSTs used any type of graphic organizer to scaffold students' understanding of a new skill. One prompted students to use a Venn diagram to represent similarities and differences, while another used a t-chart to collaboratively create a pros and cons list with the class. A third PST included the use of graphic organizers as a potential accommodation for MLs, if necessary.

Lessons Learned and Future Plans

Overall, analyzing our PSTs' lesson plans gave us a window into how they understood, synthesized, and applied content from both courses, at least in theory. Cross-pollinating our assignment had an observable impact on how PSTs conceptualized and enacted the read-aloud lessons. Most participants demonstrated some understanding of culturally responsive reading instruction—especially when (anecdotally) compared to the very infrequent synthesis that had showed up in previous semesters. We noted explicit connections between reading methods instruction and strategies that facilitate dialogue about critical social issues and social justice advocacy, though the connections remained shallow. PSTs' artifacts indicate that they understood the overall goal of the assignment but lacked depth and detail in their justifications of texts and described activities. Still, many lesson plans demonstrated elements of culturally responsive pedagogy and effective reading instruction—though not reading instruction that obviously accounts for cul-

tural and linguistic diversity. Those that did not were a combination of weak and strong in one area or the other, but there was no observable pattern to those stronger and weaker performances.

Initially, it was tempting to view these less successful lesson plans as failings on the part of our own instruction or on the part of our students. However, over time and through ongoing analysis and reflection, we began to think of these findings as powerful windows into our students' sense-making (Goodman, 1967), reflections of our own practices, and reflections of the context in which learning occurred. We should note that the entire experiment took place during the COVID-19 pandemic in which direct face time with students was extremely limited and students were generally overwhelmed and confused. Restrictions also prevented students from visiting the campus library as a group and working with their course instructor and librarian to select their texts.

However, we also noticed similar areas of challenge as in past semesters, such as lesson plans in which standards, objectives, and assessment are inconsistently aligned; plans that lack explicit modeling by the teacher; some less than ideal text selections; and subsequently poor criticality in justifying those texts. It was important to remind ourselves that our PSTs are novice educators whose understanding of practice is constantly evolving. If they were all innately able to produce perfect lesson plans, our labors would be largely unnecessary.

While we did see some synthesis of ideas across both our courses, it seems that PSTs struggled to accomplish multiple objectives at once. Most often, the lesson plans emphasized either their expressed reading goals or their expressed social justice learning goals. This pattern was most obvious in their instructional procedures and assessment. If reading was emphasized, the instructional procedures contained more explicit discussion of reading practices but limited discussion of the picture book content and topic. If social justice was emphasized, the procedures included critical and socioculturally oriented discussion but little reference to reading skills. Planned assessments similarly assessed only one aspect or the other. The distinct lack of action and advocacy in the lesson plan corpus further underscores the challenges PSTs encountered in developing social justice–oriented reading curricula. These observations echo the contemporary understanding of the skills and areas in which preservice and novice teachers most frequently need additional support (Hikida et al., 2019).

These findings serve as a reminder of why we set out to cross-pollinate our assignments in the first place. The connections between our two courses, though obvious to us, are not necessarily as clear to our PSTs. Even with our support and scaffolding to make connections across the topics, PSTs still encountered several challenges in execution. However, one boon we discovered was that by sharing the assignment, we were able to divide up certain parts of it between us so that we could leverage our limited time with our PSTs for shared purposes.

Although most misunderstandings appeared to be unique to individual PSTs, our word choice and instructional approaches undoubtedly shaped some of their (mis) understandings. Reflecting on the patterns in PSTs' submitted work, we have identified new ways to offer them more support as they think about and plan for this assignment in future semesters. First, Annemarie will provide PSTs with a curated book list from

which they can select their read-aloud texts. Though text selection is an important skill, we believe narrowing their options ensures that they will at least start from a stronger position. Furthermore, it will still be their responsibility to examine the text and identify what makes it culturally authentic. It will also give PSTs more time to practice critically evaluating texts for cultural authenticity and curricular applicability and defending their evaluations of the texts. Meanwhile, in Brittany's course, PSTs will receive additional instruction in foundations of curriculum development and lesson planning for reading lessons to better support their construction of knowledge and their ability to make thoughtfully adaptive decisions (Duffy, 2002). Explicit language will be utilized and modeled for PSTs, and Brittany will embed additional practice with teacher think-alouds. We will also both build in peer coaching opportunities through which PSTs can practice collaborating and trusting their own voices (Grossman et al., 2009). Finally, both of us will introduce the assignment earlier in the semester to provide more workshop time in which we can focus on the above-mentioned strategies and supports.

One challenge on which we are still ruminating is the component of advocacy and action. Educators committed to social justice posit that the purpose of education is to help students develop a critical understanding of the world for the purpose of transformative action (Freire, 2005; hooks, 1994). Ideally, we would like to see more of our PSTs modeling and planning transformative practices and are still exploring ways to better incorporate it into iterative assignments.

Conclusion

Future semesters will reveal what challenges were due to the effects of COVID-19 and what may be recurring issues. Regardless, we are satisfied with the synthesis we observed in several lessons, at least for this first round. In general, we believe that teacher preparation programs should be more intentional about supporting PSTs in synthesizing their learning across courses, especially when it comes to culturally responsive pedagogies. Deficit perspectives about diverse learners are exacerbated by teacher preparation programs where topics of equity are separated out from methods instruction (Delpit, 2006). We cannot assume that one or two courses on teaching diverse learners or exploring social issues in education is enough to create culturally responsive educators, especially when those tenets aren't woven into methods courses.

Additionally, our practice enabled our students to see the relevance of cross-curricular planning and read-alouds across content areas. This lesson highlights the value in teacher preparation programs exploring more opportunities to cross-pollinate assignments or otherwise build bridges between courses to support PSTs' integration of concepts. Of course, this effort must be carefully undertaken, because sequence and pairing of courses matter, and overall program alignment must be considered. However, with preparation programs exploring and considering more cross-pollination, we feel that PSTs can develop stronger culturally responsive curriculum planning skills across content areas.

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Appendix

Interactive Read-Aloud Lesson Plan Template

Teacher Name:	**Grade Level:**
Title of Text:	

Standard(s)	What standards will be addressed during this lesson? (Must include at least one ELA standard and one Learning for Justice social justice standard.) Example: • 1R9: Make connections between self and text (texts and other people/world) • Action 16: Students will express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias
Learning Objective(s)	For example: • Students will be able to make connections between themselves and events/characters in the story. • Students will demonstrate care or concern for those who are treated unfairly.
Grouping	Describe if, how, and why students will be divided into groups.

Teacher Materials	**Student Materials**
What materials will the teacher need to engage students in learning? Provide a complete APA citation for the picture book. Attach examples of any anchor charts, teacher models, etc. at the end of the lesson plan.	What materials will students need to learn? Include *all parts* of the lesson and be specific! Attach examples of any worksheets, handouts, templates, graphic organizers, activities, etc. at the end of the lesson plan.

Part 1: Before Reading

Introducing the text helps guide students in creating a purpose for listening to the story. The title, cover illustrations, illustrations in the text, headings, subheadings, and beginning text information can be used, as appropriate, to activate prior knowledge about the text content.

Text Justification

- Is this book culturally authentic, generic, or neutral? Support your response using Hollie's (2018) Book Evaluation and the Dots Survey Criteria (Appendix D).

Introduce the Text

- How will you set a purpose and help students understand why this lesson is important to them as learners?
- How will you pique their interest or curiosity regarding the text's topic? (hook)
- How will you activate and build on prior knowledge and experiences related to the topic?

Introduce Vocabulary

- What vocabulary words will students need to know to better interact with and understand the text? List both the target word and a child-friendly definition of the word.

Introduce the Learning Objective(s)

- How will you introduce the learning objective(s) to the students?

Part 2: During Reading

You will read the story in parts, pausing to ask questions that compel students to actively listen, process, and make connections to the text. In your planning, you need to decide the appropriate places to stop to ask questions. The only way to determine this is to know the story very well.

Remind Students of the Learning Objective(s)

- As you begin to read, what directions will you give students on how they should continue attending to the learning objective(s)?

Stopping Point 1: Teacher Think-Aloud

- Where in the text will you pause to use a think-aloud to demonstrate the learning objective(s)? What will you say? Include the page number.

Stopping Point 2: Guided Practice

- Where in the text will you pause to ask students targeted questions so they can practice the learning objective(s) while reading? What questions will you ask? Include the page number.

Stopping Point 3: Teacher Think-Aloud

- Where in the text will you pause to use a think-aloud to demonstrate the learning objective(s)? What will you say? Include the page number.

Stopping Point 4: Guided Practice

- Where in the text will you pause to ask students targeted questions so they can practice the learning objective(s) while reading? What questions will you ask? Include the page number.

Part 3: After Reading
- After reading, you will prompt students to reflect on the story and their understanding.

Reflecting

- How will you engage students in reviewing their accomplishment of the learning objective(s)? What will you ask to prompt students to think about their reaction to the story? (This is a reflective and introspective pause for students to think on their own.)

Sharing

- How will you engage students in sharing their response to the text? What will you ask? (This is an interactive and social pause for students to share with one another or the teacher.)
- Identify one discussion or response protocol to engage students in discussion. Explain here.

Alternative Questions

- What alternative or additional questions or prompts can you ask if students are hesitant to recall/retell the story and share their connections/responses?

Part 4: After Reading Activity/Assessment
Choose an activity/assessment to use that will provide you with knowledge of students' understanding of the story and accomplishment of the lesson objective(s).

Activity/Assessment Name:

- Describe the activity/assessment students will be completing.
- How does/can this connect to advocacy?
- How do students show they understood the story through this activity/assessment? What do the students do?
- How will you know if students have successfully understood the story? What are you looking for?
- What are your next steps for students who do not complete this activity/assessment successfully?

Accommodation Plan for Children	
List accommodations you will make for multilingual learners (MLs) during your lesson. This can be before, during, and after reading as well as with the activity/assessment.	
Beginner	What accommodations can you make for a beginning-level ML?
Intermediate	What accommodations can you make for an intermediate-level ML?
Advanced	What accommodations can you make for an advanced-level ML?