

It's in Black and White: Preservice Teachers' Perceived Abilities to Facilitate Literary Conversations about African-American Picture Books

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine how preservice teachers perceive their abilities use African-American picture books to facilitate literary conversations. Two preservice teachers, one Black and one White, examined their growth and ability to use multicultural literature with a small, diverse group of children. This case study was based on a theoretical framework that supports social construction of knowledge by participants. Observation of conversations, the use of audio recordings, artifacts from the students, and interviews with the teachers were used to examine the data sets.

Each teacher was given one of two African-American picture books to read aloud to students. The preservice teachers chose one book to read at the beginning of the semester, and the other at the end of the semester. Preservice teachers, in accordance with class requirements, were asked to reflect on their ability to facilitate grand conversations about literature, particularly African-American literature. The preservice teachers engaged the students in discussions, reflections, and activities that created learning opportunities for students to co-construct knowledge. The information gained from the data was analyzed with the purpose of understanding the phenomena occurring during the read-aloud and the activity, or conversation that followed.

The results of this study suggested that both preservice teacher subjects exhibited and reported discomfort when discussing issues of race using picture books with elementary students.

The author offers practical suggestions for improving multicultural practices of preservice teachers and teacher educators.

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“Once you learn to read, you will forever be free.”

---Frederick Douglass

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I. Introduction

Very early in my teaching career, I had a sensitizing experience that would shape my teaching philosophy, and inadvertently, provide the inspiration for my dissertation research study. The second grade teachers, at the primary school where I spent the first six years of my teaching career, practiced collaborative planning. Therefore, we often gave our students identical assessments across the grade level. As with most basal programs, the tests for each chapter in our math book were provided, and they were the standard methods used for assessing our students' progress. The math chapter on time and money was always particularly difficult for our second graders, and we spent a lot of time doing hands-on, authentic activities in order to build on their conceptual bases of knowledge for the two. This method worked for most of the students; however, inevitably there were always a few students who were unable to fully grasp the concept during the weeks spent teaching and learning the skills prior to the test. There was one particular set of questions on the test in which students were asked to identify the amount of time it would take the person in each picture to complete a task. The picture of the Euro-American girl with shoulder length hair was the image seen by all of the students, regardless of their own culture. The multiple answer choices included five minutes, 30 minutes, and 3 hours. My Caucasian students selected five minutes; the African-American boys selected 30 minutes; while the African-American girls, overwhelmingly, selected 3 hours. The answer-key document listed *five minutes* as the correct choice, which was a bit troublesome for me as I reflected upon the various answers given by my students. As I asked each student why he/she chose that particular amount of time to get his/her hair done, it occurred to me that the Caucasian students

selected the designated *correct* answer for obvious reasons---it took them five minutes to brush their hair, and moreover, the girl in the picture resembled them. However, my students of color had very different reasons for their selections. African-American boys noted that it took “30 minutes for them to wait to get their hair cut in the barber shop.” African-American girls noted that it took their mothers “3 hours to wash, condition, and braid” or “do” their hair. And, it occurred to me that was the amount of time it took to get my hair done as well! This event illustrates the right reasoning behind the wrong answer choice for a culturally insensitive test question. It also provides the rationale behind my interest in how culture defines learning experiences and transactions with texts.

Nature of the Problem

Today’s classrooms are microcosms of the larger society of the United States: an ocean of individuals representing a plethora of cultures, races, religions, and ethnicities. However, the majority of the American teaching profession is composed of individuals from White middle-class backgrounds. In 2004, enrollment in U.S. public schools was slightly more than half White (57%), and a little under half students of color (16% African American, 20% Hispanic, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 2% "other") and 19% of students’ primary language spoken at home was some language other than English (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). By contrast, the teaching force was 84% White, 8% African American, 5.5% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). A 2007 study by Public Agenda and the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality found that 76% of new teachers said they were trained to teach an ethnically diverse student body but fewer than 4 in 10

said their training helped them deal with the challenges they faced (2007). These statistics make apparent the need for new teachers to develop cultural responsiveness that will enable them to teach the ethnically diverse student body they are likely to face in their own classrooms.

Classroom communities reflect society's diversity, and they should allow all members the opportunity to be respected for their own unique sets of differences, while encouraging them to develop a sense of respect and appreciation for cultural and ethnic backgrounds different from their own. In order to meet the needs of all students, teachers face the enormous task of bridging the two worlds of home culture and school culture.

A high-quality, balanced literature curriculum is vital to creating a classroom community that reflects and respects the diversity of society. The responsibility of elementary teachers is to select texts that speak to their students' cultural heritage and broaden their respect and appreciation of students' heritages. Nancy Larrick's (1965) essay "The All-White World of Children's Books" brought attention to the longstanding tradition of children's literature which was biased against Black children. The piece made educators more aware of the dearth of Black characters, and subsequently, characters from other ethnic groups in children's literature, or at least the shortage of characters that were not stereotyped or unrealistic. Today, there are a great many works by and about African Americans so that quality literature is available, but often ignored by teachers either through ignorance or through personal choice. Bishop (1992) maintained that students who do not see their culture represented in the literature they read are more likely to devalue their importance in society and in school. By choosing multicultural literature, teachers can help students deconstruct society's negative view of minority cultures and form a strong identity and awareness of differences that exist among people. Additionally, multicultural literature has the power to be a lifeline for students from diverse backgrounds

because it validates their existence. Research has shown, time and time again, that students of color benefit from a more culturally diverse curriculum rather than a one-dimensional curriculum (Spears-Bunton, 1990; Lee, 1993; Smith, 1995). For example, Spears-Bunton (1990) reported that the teacher in her study was not satisfied with the version of American literature in her anthology, so she decided to include African-American literature in her classroom. Her students, also unhappy with the void of African-American literature in the anthology, requested African-American texts. Spears-Bunton found that African-American students responded favorably and more often to texts depicting African-American life. Because she was the first to use African-American literature in her classroom, the teacher opened herself up to criticism from administrators and colleagues (p. 568). However, the teacher was able to foster an appreciation of and increased interest in reading among her African-American students. Similarly, Lee's (1993) study focused on the use of non-traditional texts, specifically African-American texts, which were not a part of the collection in the English department. Lee proposed that "novice African-American adolescent readers bring into classrooms a powerful intellectual tool [signifying] which goes unnoticed, devalued, and untapped" (p. 13). Where Spears-Bunton's (1990) study questioned whether culture has an influence on response, Lee's (1993) explored how culture affects the comprehension of texts. These scholars seem to suggest that while it is important to allow students to read texts which represent a variety of cultures, it is equally important for teachers to employ culturally sensitive lenses through which students may interpret and discuss these texts.

Significance of the Problem

As a teacher educator, I have the opportunity to shape what future teachers learn about teaching, and my students have the potential to impact the lives of thousands of children. Many of those children will look strikingly different from the teachers I am preparing to send out into the workforce. In the three years that I was an instructor for the College of Education, almost all my students in undergraduate classes were female and White. Moreover, as teacher candidates, these young women find that the majority of the children they teach in field experiences and internships are not White females, and they are likely to encounter even more diverse groups of students as they become more experienced teachers. To that end, preservice teachers should be provided with a cultural framework through which they are able to reevaluate the learning experiences of culturally diverse students. The teachers must be able to use the students' prior cultural knowledge as a foundation or support for learning, and this can only be achieved by leveraging home knowledge with that of curriculum goals (Lee, 1993). The issue of culturally sensitive lenses through which teachers may be able to view their pedagogical and ideological teaching practices is addressed throughout prior literature related to this topic (Lee, 1993; Spears-Bunton, 1990). What the literature has neglected to address, however, is how the cultural backgrounds of preservice teachers may impact their perceptions of and actual abilities to use African-American children's literature effectively and comfortably. Preservice and novice teachers of early elementary students impact the fundamental reading practices and skills that will follow students throughout their educational experiences. It is most important that teacher educators make an effort to increase the awareness and confidence of future teachers who will introduce students to the wealth of enjoyment and knowledge that lies within the pages of books.

Multicultural children's literature is a rich, valuable resource that can be used in the elementary classroom to meet a variety of curriculum standards. By fostering a love and appreciation for literature depicting the experiences of various groups of people, I aim to provide the preservice teachers that I prepare for the workforce with knowledge of the richness and diversity of texts that present characters and events with which their students can identify and from which they can learn about reading literature and living life. I have always believed in the importance of teaching multicultural literature as it will help us become, according to Banks (1993), "knowledgeable, caring and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world" (p. 23).

Purpose of the Study

My initial purpose for this study was to explore how African-American students make literary meaning of African-American picture books. I was guided by a qualitative case study in which Brooks (2006) examined a middle school class and how students read and responded to African-American young adult literature. Brooks identified African-American textual features contained in three children's books and used reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1976) as a framework for investigating how participants in the study read and responded to those textual features. The core findings from this study suggested that culturally focused textual features have the potential to become important tools for literacy instruction for readers from that culture. Notably, Brooks' participants were African-American middle school students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. The texts selected for the study genuinely depict African-American life, and they are regarded as exemplary literature. Participants in Brooks' study read three chapter books: *Scorpions* by Walter Dean Myers, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by

Mildred Taylor, and *The House of Dies Drear* by Virginia Hamilton. As I read and reflected on the results reported by Brooks, I asked the following question: How might the theoretical foundations apply and readers' responses show similarities or differences if the texts chosen were African-American picture books and the students were of elementary age? Raising that question gave me direction and an initial purpose for my own dissertation research and launched a small pilot study in a rural, low socioeconomic elementary school with a small group of second grade students.

During the course of this preliminary investigation, I conducted and audiotaped weekly read-alouds with students using African-American picture books. The first read-aloud group consisted of only African-American students; however, as the researcher, I was interested in exploring how Caucasian students made literary meaning of texts that were representative of the African-American culture. It was at this juncture that my purpose shifted. The data revealed that many of the students' literary responses reflected their geographical culture rather than their ethnic cultures, in that their lack of exposure to urban living, language, and culture was apparent in their conversations about the texts. Many struggled to generate meaning of new vocabulary; some had very little or no background knowledge upon which to base their responses; others were unable to make textual connections to themselves or to the world as seen through their eyes. Additionally, the literature I chose featured the nonstandard dialect, African American Vernacular English (AAVE). AAVE is characterized by extreme reduction of final consonants, and many of the approximately 8 million African-American students in U.S. schools are speakers of AAVE (Snow et al., 1998). With African-American primary characters and AAVE represented as a textual feature, I questioned how this affected the readers' responses to the texts. It was then that I turned from asking *how* African-American elementary students construct

literary meaning from texts about their culture to *why* elementary students, regardless of their ethnic background, respond to culturally conscious African-American literature the way they do.

As I began to explore student responses to multicultural literature, the initial questions guiding my purposes for research expanded and changed. One important factor in student readiness to have thoughtful conversations about texts is the effectiveness with which their teachers are prepared to do so. As an instructor for reading education courses taken by students in early childhood and elementary education undergraduate programs, I began to ask how these future educators might use African-American picture books in literary conversations with children and for reading instructional purposes. While reviewing prior research, I found results suggesting that broadening the expectations preservice teachers have of their students' abilities to respond to literature may produce a shift from limited, comprehension-based expectations to broader interpretive possibilities for literary responses (Wolf et al., 1996). Further, although there has been research on critical race and literacy at the secondary level (Lee, 2004), there is far less work that illuminates the construction of racial discourse about African-American literature with primary-grade children and their preservice teachers.

Teachers have traditionally been given basals filled with artificially constructed literature complete with teachers' guides that feature explicit questions and expected student answers. Under these conditions, literary discussion sounds more like a scripted lesson than an authentic discussion that allows for individual interpretations. Current theory and research reject the normative view of response to literature in which "good comprehension is a slavish fidelity of recounting the story line or the main ideas of a passage" (Hartman, 1991, p. 373) and emphasize

that a key component of reading is literary response that focuses on the relationship between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1991).

This study draws upon three theoretical frameworks—reader response theory, critical race theory, and the sociocultural foundations of reading aloud—which emphasize the importance of reader/text transactions and response to authentic literature. The reader response theory of reading is formed from Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading. Rosenblatt suggests that a reader can approach a piece of text with two different motivations. If readers focus their attention on information to remember facts from a text, they are in an efferent stance. If readers draw from past experiences and feel emotions when reading, they are in an aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1982). Having students approach text from both stances will invigorate critical thinking and increase the potential for thoughtful responses. Rosenblatt's reader response theory places emphasis on the reader's interaction with the text as an integral part of the reading process.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory is the foundation upon which research supporting classroom discourse about texts is based. This theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in constructing knowledge, and is founded upon the principle that cognitive development ultimately depends on social interaction with those who are more knowledgeable. Discussions provide an environment in which students can observe the cognitive processes that other learners use as they attempt to make meaning of various texts (Almasi, 1996). Discussions about books are also supported by transactional theory (Rosenblatt, 1978), which emphasizes that readers create meaning by interacting with a text. A new conceptualization of reading comprehension began in the 1970s when researchers and theorists first began to view reading as

a constructive process (Tierney, 1990). However, as far back as 1917, Thorndike (1917) theorized that readers create meaning rather than extract it directly from text. Two people can read the same text and come away with different meanings of it, and that understanding is influenced greatly by prior knowledge, perspective, and purpose for reading (Tierney, 1990). Each reader's interpretation of a text is personal, but can be enhanced through discussion about it. Jim Trelease, in his 1979 work, *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, put forth a very simple notion: parents should read aloud to their children. Additionally, Trelease suggested that children be read aloud to, even *after* they learn to read on their own. His theory was based on many years of scientifically-based reading research which concluded that children who read and are read to the most make the greatest gains academically (Allington, 1984). Moreover, it is essential that children be allowed to talk about texts they read, and texts that are read to them, as this social interaction has proven to be critical in meaning construction.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has its origins in legal studies of equality issues and now exists as a separate entity applicable to the field of education. CRT proposes that racism is a fixture in American society where laws and education systems continue to serve the interests of Whites (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The theoretical underpinnings and implications of CRT as it applies to education, and especially reading education, "colored" my research, for, among many other reasons, I am an African-American female instructor at a predominantly White institution where the vast majority of my undergraduate students have been White females. In our institution, the liberal notions of neutrality are scarce, and CRT aims to expose and challenge aspects of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment and other issues associated with American schooling.

Lortie (1975) found that preservice teachers may be working with literature and children from traditional frames of their own limited experiences rather than incorporating new ideas. To gain insight into diverse responses to literature, it is necessary for them to learn about children's responses. Learning about children's response to literature, however, must be done *with children*. Lectures, readings, and classroom discourse can support, but never replace, what children can tell us through literature discussion. By using classic books, current research, and authentic classroom experience, preservice teachers are better able to assess and build upon their abilities to conduct literary conversations using authentic literature.

While conducting the pilot study, I realized that there were many research questions to be answered and a number of different elements upon which I could focus when undertaking this study for my dissertation research. As a teacher and researcher, I deemed it most important to expose my undergraduate students to the wealth and usefulness of multicultural children's literature available to them. I also hoped that the effects of sharing multicultural literature would influence the elementary students, with whom they conducted weekly read-alouds, to read and learn about the many cultures represented in their communities. With massive amounts of data and many questions that could possibly emerge, I decided to focus my research questions on the preservice teachers and their implementation of the read-alouds. The preservice teachers in this study examined their own growth and reflected on their ability to use multicultural literature with small, diverse groups of children. This case study was based on reader response, sociocultural, and critical race theories which emphasize and support social construction of knowledge by participants whose prior knowledge and cultural backgrounds are believed to greatly influence text interpretation. Observation of conversations, audio recordings of read-alouds and

discussions, artifacts from the students, and interviews with the teachers were used as sources for data.

Research Questions

This study was undertaken to examine the growth and perceptions of preservice teachers' individual abilities to use African-American children's literature in reading instruction. A qualitative approach enhanced the study's potential to explore the lived experiences of preservice teachers working with early elementary students in a classroom setting. Two preservice teachers of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds were selected for this study. The goal in working with preservice teachers, and carefully selecting cultural literature for read-alouds with small groups of elementary students, was to answer the following questions:

- 1.) How do preservice teachers view their ability to use African-American literature for instructional purposes in the classroom?
- 2.) How might the cultural backgrounds of preservice teachers affect their perceived self-efficacy in teaching reading to diverse learners?
 - a. *In what areas did White preservice teachers seem comfortable using AA literature as a tool for teaching? In what areas did they seem uncomfortable?*
 - b. *In what areas did Black preservice teachers seem comfortable using AA literature as a tool for teaching? In what areas did they seem uncomfortable?*
- 3.) How are preservice teachers' cultural and racial beliefs represented in their facilitation of literary conversations with elementary students as they respond to African-American picture book read-alouds?

An outline of the remaining chapters follows: chapter two will provide a review of literature pertinent to multicultural children's literature and its usefulness in the elementary classroom; chapter three will discuss the methodology used for this study; chapter four describes the findings from this study; and chapter five provides conclusions, implications, and suggestions for further research.

II. Literature Review

Overview

This study was a qualitative analysis of preservice teachers' perceived efficacy, abilities, and comfort level using African-American literature for reading instruction with elementary students. I took an in-depth look at how two particular preservice teachers, of slightly different backgrounds, use African-American literature to facilitate literary conversation. In the content analysis, I studied the teachers' responses holistically, examining their inferences to culture and specific culture-related vocabulary. I analyzed the book talks, how they interacted with the texts and students, and what kinds of messages they transmitted. Further, I examined issues of ethnicity and socioeconomic class as they were depicted in the books that this group of teachers read aloud and how the preservice teachers guided students in literary talk about these issues. In addition, I analyzed the manner in which the preservice teachers said they conducted read-aloud events and how they perceived their abilities to facilitate such discussions.

To frame this study properly, it was imperative to have a theoretical understanding of several areas, including reader response theory and critical race theory, and how they connect to read-aloud events. In addition, it was important to examine the research that has been done in the area of children's literature, with special emphasis placed on African-American literature, as well as, research done on reading aloud to children. The racial identity aspect of this study was particularly important as I wished to describe, qualitatively, how preservice teachers perceive their own racial identity as it relates to using multicultural literature with groups of students from

various ethnic backgrounds.

Review of Related Literature

In 2007, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that at grades 4 and 8, White students scored higher, on average, than Black and Hispanic students on the reading assessments. Somewhere along the way, schools have failed to prepare students, particularly those who represent minority populations, to be competent, lifelong readers. It is my hope that the results of this study will add to the existing body of research and help educate those teachers who will directly or indirectly affect the teaching practices specifically aimed at literacy development for diverse groups of students in multicultural classrooms.

Peggy McIntosh, in her article *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, pointed out that “Whites are carefully taught not to recognize White privilege.” Much of this privilege, McIntosh contends, is like an “invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks” (1989, p. 10). As a veteran second grade teacher, I taught for six years in a primary school whose staff was overwhelmingly made up of White females. Within the first year, it became clear to me that the approximately 60% minority student population of the school was subjected to a majority culture during the most critical and early stages of their educational experience. This base of unacknowledged power, known as *White privilege*, was widely ignored by my colleagues, and was misunderstood due to lack of acknowledgement.

Disapproving of the social, class, ethnic, or racial systems which exist will not be enough to change them. In order to redesign social systems, we need to first acknowledge that they

exist. American teaching practices resemble those of bank transactions—the teacher deposits knowledge into the student, a deposit that can be withdrawn at a later time. This notion must be recognized and challenged, if our education system is to improve. Skillful teachers produce more successful students; therefore, the overhaul of our education system should begin with teacher education programs at the university level. Preservice teachers need opportunities to engage in conversations about race and culture during their undergraduate studies so that they might be aware of the possible educational, philosophical, and cultural deposits they are capable of making in young learners. My task, as both a doctoral student and teacher educator, is to bring to light the issue of enhancing teacher education and preparing my students, who are largely White female future teachers, for the diversity and multiculturalism they will confront upon entering the teaching profession. It is the responsibility of teacher educators to assist these eager, unassuming, yet inexperienced future professionals with understanding and unpacking the knapsacks of privilege they carry. When equipped with knowledge of the prevalent role that race and culture play within the context of literary experiences aimed at educating students, future teachers will be, ultimately, better able to carry out instruction in a diverse classroom.

Culture

Culture refers to the set of shared beliefs, attitudes, goals, practices, and symbols common to a particular group of people (Banks, 1988; Harris, 2003). Culture is much deeper than what can be easily observed. This definition influences my conceptual view of African-American children's literature as well. It is my stance that children's literature encompasses limited information and cultural identity about groups of people who have been traditionally marginalized in mainstream society, and whose culture is underrepresented in literary works.

Since 1985, the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has documented the number of children's books published in the United States written and/or illustrated by African Americans in its annual publication *CCBC Choices*. In that first year, the CCBC found that of the approximately 2,500 trade books published for children and teens, only 18 were created by African Americans. Even more startling were the statistics for the number of books created "by and about" American Indians, Asian/Pacifics, Asian/Pacific Americans, and Latinos, as there are far fewer for these groups than for African Americans. More recent statistics gathered by the CCBC in 2008 show that of the 3,000 children's books reviewed at the center, only 172 contained significant African or African-American representations, and only 83 of those were authored by African Americans (CCBC, 2008). The CCBC defines multicultural literature as book by and about people of color. The definition used by the CCBC is not meant to exclude those groups of people, such as immigrants, the disabled, the elderly, and religious minorities, who have, too, been absent from mainstream literature, but rather to focus more deeply on how children's cultural affiliation may impact their response to literature, and more specifically how African-American children's cultural representations in text affect their responses to literature (2005).

Prior research conducted by Rosenberg (1988) indicates that culture plays an important role in shaping the content and symbolic references in literary text. According to Rosenberg, one should expect different literary responses based on the culture of the readers. For example, Steffenson et al. (1979) found that when readers of a letter describing a wedding in their own culture were matched by sex, age, education, academic specialty, and marital status, they read the letters faster and with more recall. Conversely, when readers were given a letter describing a

wedding in a culture different from their own, they took longer to read, recalled less information, and created culturally inappropriate distortions of the text.

Research results described in the previous paragraph support the cultural modeling framework outlined by Lee (1991). Lee's framework called for instructional classroom environments that link everyday cultural knowledge with the learning of academic subject matter, with a particular focus on racial/ethnic minority groups, especially those of African descent. Lee asserted that by incorporating culturally specific practices and language into learning environments, we may even the academic playing field for children of minority populations. The findings from previous studies (Lee, 1991; Rosenburg, 1988; Steffenson et al., 1979) suggested that the cultural background of readers had profound influence on their reading comprehension, recall ability, and the information they gather from text. The cultural mismatch between mainstream literature and the students who populate today's American classrooms may, therefore, contribute to reading difficulties among these students (Lee, 1991; Steffenson et al., 1979). Readers, according to historical and contemporary reader response research, continuously attempt to link elements in a text with their own experience, and the sociocultural differences, including readers' prior knowledge, affect their abilities to read, comprehend, and respond to literature (Beach, 1983; Rosenblatt, 1976). As human beings have an innate desire to generate meaning, students use the contents of literature and fit them into the context of their cultural understandings to the extent that they can (Bettelheim, 1975; Greene, 1995).

Literature also has the ability to impact children's language development, reading ability, and cultural knowledge (Galda, 2001; Hickman, 1981; Lehr, 1991). Miller (1997) noted that individuals develop their identity through their culture. Literature, with its ability to expose readers to a wide range of thoughts and ideas, allows readers to live other lives vicariously and

learn about human nature (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Greene (1988) suggested that looking at literary texts chosen by informed teachers enable readers to “perceive their own illusions and stereotypes, even as they expose them to the multiple ways in which the world means to those inhabiting it” (p. 187). Nodelman (1996) agreed, adding that literature offers children a picture of the world and their place in it—if the “representation is persuasive, it will become the world that those child readers believe they live in” (p. 91). Teachers also assign value to books simply by choosing to read them aloud. Luke et al. (1986) suggest that because most teachers probably feel that all literature for children is “non-problematic” (p. 210), teachers usually rely purely on their own instincts when selecting material. However, because literature does contain value-laden depictions of culture and class, teachers are sending messages expressed to the listeners about their beliefs. And those beliefs are ultimately influenced by their cultural, economic, social, and political backgrounds. Reflective teachers are aware of the enormous impact those decisions have on the sociocultural academic experiences of their students. Therefore, it is important to explore teachers’ text choices from a cultural stance and examine their impact on meaning-making and comprehension for teachers and student readers.

The use of multicultural literature in elementary classrooms provides a space and opportunity for students to engage in authentic literary discussion. Active involvement in conversation and the expression of various points of view may also enhance the development of critical literacy by giving readers opportunities to evaluate their own and others’ interpretations of text. Without dismissing the importance of all cultural representations in children’s literature, my intent for this study is to focus on how African-American literature and theories that address reader response, read-alouds as a constructivist practice, and critical race theory can be used by

preservice teachers to enhance their reading instruction and multicultural pedagogy to more effectively engage young readers and improve reading performance for minority students.

Theoretical Underpinnings of This Study

Reader Response Theory and Criticism

When examining the responses of students to preservice teachers reading African-American picture books aloud, an understanding of reader response criticism and theory helped frame the study more clearly. Though I did not focus on reader response in the classroom setting, it was appropriate to know what kinds of behaviors elicited responses. As I analyzed the preservice teacher and student talk, I hoped to ascertain, in some measure, the degree to which the preservice teachers influenced their students' responses to the books they read and how their students' responses might have been affected by the ethnicity of the characters in the books and the ethnicity of the preservice teachers. In order for teachers to move beyond the phenomenon of reading failure in minority students, they must understand the cultural knowledge, attitudes, and strategies that minority, particularly African-American, students bring to text.

From the 1930s through the 1960s, an American literary critical movement called New Criticism influenced profoundly the study of literature, proposing that works of literature were autonomous and had set meanings or interpretations. Proponents of this movement asserted that literature exists for its own sake and the reader's job is to discover the text's primary meaning through close study. In contrast, reader-oriented approaches put more emphasis on the reader's power to interpret the text. Reader-response criticism is a term used to denote a number of different approaches concerned with understanding the ways that readers comprehend literary

works, a shift from the text to the reader's engagement with the work (Fish, 1980). Louise Rosenblatt (1938) first coined the term "transactional" in her theory, emphasizing that the reader plays a significant role in the transacting with and interpreting of a literary piece.

Rosenblatt stated that the reader, the text, and the context or reading event are all vital in understanding a literary piece (Rosenblatt, 1994). She argued that no literary work or reading experience will be exactly the same for everyone because the reader and the text are involved in an individualized reading transaction set in a particular and unique social context. The reader brings all his or her past experiences into the context of the reading event (which is where the actual literary work lies). The reader approaches the text from one or a combination of two stances lying along a continuum: aesthetic and efferent. Rosenblatt (1994) defined aesthetic reading as the reader being focused solely on the enjoyment and pleasure of a text. An efferent reading experience occurs when a reader is focused on the information that he or she will receive from the text. Depending upon the reader's stance, reading a novel may be a primarily aesthetic experience, while reading a map may be primarily efferent. However, the same text can be approached from either stance, and readers often blend both stances. According to Rosenblatt (1991) reading is a transaction that takes place between the reader and the text. In aesthetic reading, the readers' own unique personal life experiences influence their comprehension and interpretations, whereas efferent reading produces transactions that must be more securely grounded in text due to its informational content. Reader response theory is relevant to this study because of the emotional and physical characteristics of characters in the books chosen for the read-alouds.

The teacher reading aloud adds still another dimension to the transaction (Teale, 2003).

Listening to books read aloud and looking at the illustrations is usually considered to be an aesthetic experience for children, but it can also be an efferent experience, or a combination of both. Further, teachers' questioning practices and read-aloud behaviors can affect their students' responses and experiences both positively and negatively, and predispose them to take one stance over the other as they transact with the text read aloud (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1999).

Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) devised a transactional model of reading "that in essence has a fluid view of interpretation at its core. That is, each reader reads a text uniquely and, therefore, interpretation is an open system" (Lehr, 1991, p. 13). Readers' responses can be examined from five interwoven and contextualized perspectives: social, cultural, experiential, textual, and psychological (Beach, 1993). Transactional theory suggests that it is easier for students to be absorbed in stories when the cultures, race, gender, and class in the books they read match their own (Harris, 1999) and that authors and their backgrounds are an important element in the experience (Rosenblatt, 1994). Authentic literature often represents cultures more accurately and tends more often to be written by authors who are insiders to the cultures about which they write than by those outside the culture (Harris, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Authors who write about other cultures often produce tourist books that emphasize the exotic or surface culture and promote stereotypes (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987). As a result, children from different cultures or diverse backgrounds may have difficulty understanding or relating to books that are written about their cultures by outsiders (Knapp & Shields, 1990; Martinez & Nash, 1990).

Building upon transactional theory, Langer (1995) found that the past experiences of a reader can be important in the understanding of a piece of literature. She identified four nonlinear stances or "envisionments" which she defined as "text worlds in the mind" that occur

during the reading of texts: “being out and stepping into an envisionment; being in and moving through an envisionment; stepping out and rethinking what one knows; and stepping out and objectifying the experience” (pp. 15-19). Prior knowledge is required for the reader to be able to step into or move through an environment, and background information is necessary for the reader to analyze and reflect on the text effectively.

The reading process, oftentimes, demands that readers rely on background knowledge to develop an adequate understanding of text. Rosenblatt (1994) described the choices readers make when they are engaged in a reading event as acts of selective attention. These choices vary with the individual and are based, in part, on social and cultural contextual differences. Cultural experiences and background knowledge frame a reader’s understanding, making it possible for the reading aloud of a single text to be a rich experience for one student and a meaningless one for another. If prior knowledge is not sufficient or scaffolded properly, then students’ understandings are incomplete (Harris, 1999; Langer, 1995).

Reading research has taught us that words on a page are mere text; it is the reader who activates those marks and makes them meaningful (Karolides, 1997). Rosenblatt (1978) describes the transaction that takes place between the reader and text as an “ongoing process in which the elements or factors are, one might say, aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other” (p. 17). Therefore, in the same way that every child is different, so is every reader. “The reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality...A specific reader and a specific text at a specific time and place: change any of these, and there occurs a different circuit, a different event---a different poem” (p. 13-14). Having adequate background knowledge is a prerequisite for comprehension. When students have both world and literary knowledge, they are better able to bridge the gap of knowledge with new text (Pearson &

Johnson, 1978). In contrast, without adequate background knowledge, students are less likely to comprehend what they read.

Spears-Bunton (1990) conducted a study in which she addressed the relationship between reader response and culture. Her ethnographic study explored the cultural dimensions of the reader response theory in a high school classroom. Working with poor and working-class Black and White students, the White female teacher struggled to include African-American literature in her English curriculum. She was confronted by a two-pronged question: “What happens to Black kids who never get to read a book written by a Black author, and how do White students feel about the emphasis on Black literature?” (p. 569). These questions yielded important answers implying that the reading of culturally conscious literature may provide a bridge upon which students of various cultures expand their literary experiences (Sims, 1982; Spears-Bunton, 1990). Earlier research, such as that done by Reynolds et al. (1982), has found that Black and White students interpret text passages differently, depending upon their cultural backgrounds. Response to literature occurs within a triad—reader, text, and context (Hickman, 1981)—and facilitating this type of active response takes multiple and various literary experiences and many opportunities for students to discuss and transform their interpretations of text and knowledge of others’ perspectives and cultures.

Critical Race Theory

Minority students in today’s society often deny or make invisible significant portions of their humanity to achieve socially and academically in White middle class institutions. The editors of *Making Race Visible: Literacy Research for Cultural Understanding* based the text on Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical Race

Theory (CRT) has been used by researchers to study the impact of race in education. CRT is based on the idea that race, class, and gender privilege White citizens of European heritage. CRT argues that racism is so deeply woven into the fabric of our society, including our education system, that it cannot be extracted easily. In fact, research had suggested that non-White students may not do well academically in school because of imbalances and inconsistencies between their home and school cultures (Au, 1998).

Critical race theory is characterized by four tenets. First, it names and discusses the daily realities of racism and exposes how racism affords privilege to some and disadvantages to others. Second, it legitimizes and gives voices to people of color by using storytelling to integrate experiential knowledge drawn from a shared history into critiques of dominant social orders. Third, CRT insists on critiquing liberalism, especially the notion that social change can occur without a radical overhaul of existing social structures. Fourth, CRT questions the efficacy of much of the civil rights legislation enacted in the United States, arguing that rather than reducing the effects of racism on minorities, the primary beneficiaries of this legislation have been Whites (Ladson-Billings, 1999). CRT is identified by qualitative researchers as a potential lens through which educational practices and policies can be investigated (Ladson-Billings, 1999) and as a methodological tool that can reveal “greater ontological and epistemological understanding of how race and racism affect the education and lives of the racially disenfranchised” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, pp. 7-8). There is a pervasive relationship between literacy and race, especially as it applies to classroom practices and how it affects students of color, which must continue to be addressed. The qualitative approach to addressing this problem involves researchers making methodical observations in the classroom setting.

Critical race theory is about learning to listen to other people's counter stories and finding ways to incorporate these stories into curricula to improve the educational experiences of students of color. According to CRT, low academic expectations allow the existing social structure to remain the same. Low expectations promote the creation of a population of individuals who contribute minimally to their families and communities, because they are not encouraged to explore their highest potential (Finn, 1999). Good teaching captures student attention, encourages academic action, and promotes a vision for the future (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Critical race theory opens teachers up to new ways of thinking; it allows us to open our minds to possibilities once thought to be unimaginable. When multicultural literature is infused into the classroom curriculum, it stimulates possibilities, hope, and potential for change. Multicultural literature allows teachers to examine choices they make and goals they set for all students. Especially at issue, is the attitude toward White privilege, pervasive among educators as they are overwhelmingly White Americans. White privilege, the way that White people benefit from being the majority race, refers to the unearned advantages afforded to them based solely on skin color and sometimes unnoticed by White people. For example, if a parent never has to worry that his child will see representations of his culture in the books he reads in class, these parents are privileged by Whiteness (McIntyre, 1997). Making the subject of White privilege taboo perpetuates the need to protect the advantage of White Americans, marginalizes students of color, and maintains the system of dominance and power that still exists. CRT questions these issues of power. "If one group holds power over another, it is often because the culture has taught members of the less powerful group to accept a value system that bestows privilege on others" (Hinchey, 1998, p. 18). As a teacher educator, it has become my mission to

facilitate the unpacking of these invisible backpacks filled with power and privilege afforded to the majority in our society by allowing my students to have open, honest discourse about race and the role it plays in education.

Courtney Cazden, author of *Teacher and Student Attitudes on Racial Issues: The Complementarity of Practitioner Research and Outsider Research*, examined how race may function within an educational setting (2003). She argued that race and intelligence become “structural constraints impinging on educational reform.” In her discussion of research on attitudes toward language variation and African-American Vernacular English, she noted that “For reasons that have to do with controversies over race and racism rather than linguistic differences themselves, the most discussed United States dialect is African-American Vernacular English (AAVE)” (p. 44). Many of the approximately 8 million African-American students in U.S. schools are speakers of AAVE, especially youth and adults in inner cities where there is a high concentration of African Americans (Snow et al., 1998). In order to reduce the gap between what children speak and what they read, students should be provided opportunities to read text that is consistent with their oral or home language. Researcher Signithia Fordham (1999) urged teachers to understand the meaning of their students’ language practices to avoid conveying disdain for AAVE and implying that academic success requires “a flight from the Black self” (p. 280). Rather, linguistic principles of AAVE must be recognized as important in school settings in order to foster literacy in minority children. Instead of discrediting the importance of diverse cultures, teachers are able to use home language as a foundation for teaching mainstream language and literacy to minority children.

As a researcher, I find myself in the same predicament as Arlette Ingram Willis. In “Parallax: Addressing Race in Preservice Literacy Education,” Willis reflected on her own frustrations as she attempted to prepare teachers who were unaware of their White middle class privilege (McIntosh, 1990). She found that White present and future teachers do not see themselves as having a race, but rather believe that race is a problem for students of color. She found that White students in her university classroom were uncomfortable with race discussions and believed that the problems around race cannot be changed. Willis, who did not agree with her students’ stance, engaged them in a variety of assignments which included: autobiographies; journal reflections; race, class, and equity games; multicultural literature; and discussions of sensitive racial issues. Her efforts did not achieve the desired goal of having her students recognize their socioeconomic and racial privilege. However, Willis did come to the epiphany that because race is a part of our culture, students need time to consider their own positions within a social context. Like Willis, as a minority student at a large, predominantly White institution where most of my students are White, I have been faced with the difficult task of facilitating racial discourse among my students. These conversations are often uncomfortable but very necessary. I know that these future educators will play a very significant role in the lives of many children and it is important that they, at least, acknowledge race and how it impacts education for majority and minority children. I do not expect them to change the world; however, I know that they will play a significant role in changing the lives of their students. I own my responsibility as a teacher educator to adequately prepare them for considering their own positions in relation to race and their potential to change students’ positions in society through education.

Researchers like Florio-Ruane (1994, 2001) have captured the essence of why preservice teachers need to learn how to teach students who are culturally different from themselves. Florio-Ruane suggested that such teachers may have difficulty finding “instructional ways to assist youngsters making the transition from home to school” (1994, p. 53). This is especially true for preservice teachers whose family histories differ from those of their students. Teacher educators must be proactive by preparing future teachers to become culturally aware. Florio-Ruane noted that preservice teachers must be taught how to work with students from different cultures because they themselves were generally successful pupils who had entered school familiar with its language and literacy practices. Edwards (2004) echoed Florio-Ruane’s conclusions and stated that it is especially difficult for preservice teachers who have family histories that differ from those of their students to develop cultural awareness. In response to this lack of cultural knowledge on the part of preservice and novice teachers, Moll and Gonzalez (1993) suggested using families’ funds of knowledge as the base upon which to build school curriculum. In their study, teachers’ qualitative, ethnographic studies of their own students’ households became a viable method for bridging the gap between home and school. Moll and Gonzalez had teachers participate in study groups and make home visits. The teachers were then able to form curriculum units that tapped into the household funds of knowledge and opened new avenues for learning by bridging the gap between home and school.

Critical race researchers studying legal issues argue that language and visual images, including illustrations and photographs, can be manipulated to continue the practice of covert racism (Hibbitts, 1994). This type of close analysis is applicable to the area of children’s literature as well (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Theorists argue that children may not become readers and lovers of literature if they do not see their own cultures and identities portrayed in

literature (McGlenn, 2001; Sims, 1983). Current research suggests that children who have exposure to authentic multicultural literature are better able to understand complex themes and a variety of perspectives (Martinez-Roldan & Lopez-Robertson, 1999; Medina, 2001; Short & Fox, 2003). And although more accurate multicultural and multiethnic books are being published, most authors and illustrators are still White, and most children's books are about White, middle-class culture (Fondrie, 2001) further supporting critical race theorists' argument that those who are not from the majority culture have little control over the "production of the images of themselves" (Mendoza & Reese, 2001).

Book choices for read-alouds in the classroom reflect social class and position in society. Research suggests that social class stereotypes are prevalent in children's literature (Nodelman, 2000; Rodman, 1994). For example, in a content analysis of 100 picture books, Rodman (1994) found that the images of families were overwhelmingly traditional, intact White families residing in suburban or rural single-family detached houses. The average-school age child's schema for home is very different from what is portrayed in children's literature (Rodman, 1994). Research has proven, over and over again, that students must see accurate cultural portrayals in order to build strong literacy foundations (Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Researchers seem to agree about the need for children's literature to accurately reflect the reality of our diverse society. Rudine Sims coined the term "culturally conscious" as a way of evaluating African-American children's books for cultural authenticity in her book *Shadow and Substance* (1982). Culturally conscious literature is that in which the author is sensitive to aspects of African-American culture and seeks to accurately depict the culture throughout the text. The characters are African American, the story is told from their perspective, and the ethnicity of the characters is described in some way. Sims found faults, however, even in culturally conscious books written by members and non-

members of the African-American culture. Negative images and inaccurate stereotyping of people and cultures in children's literature is harmful to students whose ethnicities are portrayed. Students should be able to see accurate representations of themselves, and their lives, reflected in the books they read.

Critical race theory as a theoretical lens is meant not to suggest that racism is prevalent in the American classroom, but rather to examine it for its potential as a methodological tool that can reveal "greater ontological and epistemological understanding of how race and racism affect the education and lives of the racially disenfranchised" (Parker & Lynn, 2002, pp. 7-8). Researchers acknowledge the racist behaviors in schools, but present very few specific solutions. Teacher education programs need to make race visible and allow future teachers to take coursework in cultural relevance and diversity. Experiences unique to students of color need to become integral portions of the curriculum. Critical race theory promotes reading, writing, and talking about sensitive issues and making connections between school, home and community members for minority and majority students.

The Read-Aloud Experience

Why Read-aloud?

Reading aloud and response to literature have been studied in kindergarten and the primary grades (Feitelson et al. 1993; Sipe, 1998) and in preschool and childcare settings (McGill-Franzen & Langford, 1994). These studies have shown that the style and genre of books, as well as the number of times they are read-aloud, impact students' writing ability, comprehension, and enjoyment (Lehr, 1988; Sipe, 1998). Additionally, because teachers of early

elementary students are significant others in young children's lives, and their selections in literature and what they choose to highlight and emphasize are considered noteworthy by their students. Their choices in literature, whatever they may be, send value-laden messages, endorsements, or rejections to their students (Hinchey, 1998; Shannon, 2002). Further, teachers' text choices for read-alouds determine the amount and quality of students' exposure to many topics and ideas at a time when elementary children are very impressionable (Applebee, 1978; Lehr, 1988; Wells, 1986).

Public interest in and teachers' uses of reading aloud to children has produced a large body of research that supports the practice as a way to effectively increase children's emergent literacy (Galda & Cullinan, 1991; Wells, 1986). Reading aloud to children increases their familiarity with print conventions and their meta-linguistic awareness about print (Clay, 1979; Doakes, 1981; Galda & Cullinan, 1991; Taylor, 1983; Schickendanz, 1986). Research on reading aloud in the classroom suggests a connection between being read-aloud to and school achievement (Teale & Martinez, 1996). Still other research indicates that children's literature experiences in the classroom increase their interest in reading and achievement and have a positive correlation to their writing ability (Galda & Cullinan, 1991; Huck, 1992; Lancia, 1997). Classroom discussion during read-alouds is another technique that helps improve students' understandings of text (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

Research has documented the positive effect of read-aloud experiences on a number of literacy skills: familiarity with book language (Anderson et al., 1985), awareness of story structure (Morrow & Weinstein, 1982), verbal expression and vocabulary (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998), and story comprehension (Morrow & Weinstein, 1982; Wells, 1986). Read-

alouds are an effective way to introduce students to the joy of reading and the art of listening. Teachers model reading strategies and demonstrate the act of reading enjoyment. Children's literature has also been considered a vehicle for transmitting the accepted values and mores of our society (Apol, 1998; Harris, 1999; Sutherland, 1985). Martinez and Roser (1985) noted that reading aloud to children is a three-pronged event involving the child, the adult, and the book. According to Barrera and Bauer (2003), "the text is a key component of storybook reading" (p. 262). They, and other researchers, have noted the importance of studying which books are frequently read-aloud to young children (Teale, 2003; van Kleeck, 2003) because children's literature is filled with social and ethical ideologies that must be scrutinized to understand the impact of characters, events, and settings in these stories. Teachers have the opportunity to introduce their students to worlds they have never seen before through literature. Some children have been read aloud to and experienced many types of literature since birth, while others have had little or no exposure to or experience with books (Heath, 1983; Huck, 1992; Taylor, 1983). Children who have spent time in early-childcare facilities or preschools also come to kindergarten with a wide range of experience with books and reading. For others, however, kindergarten is often their first real experience with persons of a different race or ethnicity (Paley, 1981). Therefore, kindergarten teachers and primary grades teachers are faced with the task of building upon children's prior experiences while at the same time exposing them to literature and life outside of their own homes and communities (Au, 1998; Paley, 1981).

Reading Aloud in the Early Childhood Setting

Reading aloud is an accepted and effective practice in early childhood settings, often taking place several times a day. When *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson et al., 1985) was released over two decades ago, reading aloud gained a new level of emphasis. A primarily

White, middle-class American tradition, reading aloud has been recommended as a method of socializing children to school culture and rules (Anderson et al., 2003; Heath, 1983) and identified as the single-most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading (Anderson et al., 1985). The release of Jim Trelease's *Read-Aloud Handbook* (1979) also brought increased attention from parents and teachers to the importance of reading aloud. In addition, The National Parent Teacher Association and the National Education Association (2004) published a parent guide in which they promoted regular and frequent read-alouds in the homes of young children (2004).

Pre-school and elementary teachers are more aware than ever of the pedagogical reasons for reading to their students, so they plan carefully what they will read, and read-aloud throughout the day. Teachers often match their text selections to curriculum goals and objectives. Developing these cross-curricular connections makes learning more connected and meaningful. Teachers, through their selection of read-aloud books, have an impact on children's language and vocabulary development (Morrow, 1992). Moreover, reading quality literature aloud positively affects children's comprehension and higher order thinking skills as well as their verbal and written responses to books (Creighton, 1997; Lancia, 1997). Hunt pointed out that it is impossible for a read-aloud event with a children's book not to be "educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect an ideology...All books must teach something" (1995, 3). Shannon points out that when reading aloud, teachers have to consider two sets of values---"the ones embedded in the author's representation of reality and the ones they assign to the text while reading" (2002, 8). As authors tell a story, both intentionally and inadvertently, their beliefs and values show up in their writing.

Despite the common acceptance of the importance of reading aloud, very little research has been done on the method for providing effective read-alouds. Fisher et al. (2004) examined the read-aloud practices of 25 teachers identified as expert teachers. From these data, the authors identified seven factors most common to these expert teachers' read-alouds. These included:

- Books chosen were appropriate to students' interests and developmental level
- Books had been previewed and practiced by the teacher
- Purpose for reading aloud was established
- Teachers modeled fluent oral reading
- Teachers used expression and were animated when reading
- Teachers stopped throughout reading to ask thoughtful questions intended to focus students on specifics from the text
- Connections were made to independent reading and writing (pp. 10-11).

Additionally, researchers suggested that more studies be conducted to determine what specific behaviors during read-aloud sessions contribute to later literacy development. Meyer, Wardrop, Linn, and Hastings (1993) found that there are low to moderate negative correlations between time kindergarten teachers spent reading aloud and their students' reading achievement. In other words, in classrooms where teachers spent more time reading aloud to children, the reading achievement scores of students were lower than those in classrooms where less time was devoted to read-aloud activities. In classrooms where reading aloud was taking place, students spent less time reading independently and there were fewer interactions with other students. On the surface, these studies seem to negate the benefits of reading aloud to children.

Despite some negative findings, there is more evidence to support the benefits of reading aloud than ever before. Several research findings have demonstrated that reading aloud to children can increase their vocabulary (Beck et al., 2002; Brabham & Lynch-Brown, 2002) and their listening comprehension skills (Stanovich et al., 1998; Teale, 2003). We know that reading aloud to children promotes their syntactic development (Chomsky, 1972). It is also clear that reading aloud to children can increase their word recognition ability (Stahl, 2003). The conditions under which reading aloud to children has produced positive results typically occur with researcher-designed methods, as opposed to naturally occurring methods. This suggests that teachers and parents could be more productive in their read-aloud activities if they utilized some of the more systematic methods. With the pressures of accountability, teachers today must maximize the effectiveness of their read-aloud activities. The positive effects of reading aloud to students far outweigh those which are considered negative or unnecessary.

Teale (2003) suggested that teachers consider the choice of text for read-aloud activities and the method of reading aloud in order to be effective. For example, teachers should encourage students to use their background knowledge to develop understanding of the text and ask questions to keep children engaged. Reading in a lively, engaging way, with expression, voices, and gestures can enhance understanding. Children should also have the opportunity to predict what will happen in a story, and they should be allowed to confirm or refute their predictions using the text. It is especially important for younger children to focus on important ideas and avoid discussions that are too tangential. Children should have multiple opportunities to engage in literary talk during read-alouds.

Building literacy through read-alouds has proven to be a socially and emotionally rewarding interaction that can serve to motivate children to engage in literacy activities on their own. Reading aloud to children can serve as a way to increase their vocabulary, listening comprehension, and word-recognition skills. The effectiveness of reading aloud can be maximized by educators and parents who employ research-based methods, thereby enhancing reading experiences and the reading achievement of students.

The Read-aloud Experience and the African-American Child

Early elementary students are at a particularly vulnerable and impressionable stage in their educational experiences. Much of the knowledge they are provided in the early years come from adults through the reading aloud of children's books (Klesius & Griffith, 1996). Researchers assert that many teachers fail to see or acknowledge minority students' cultures, a condition that is reflected in the texts they choose for read-alouds and the instructional practices they use to engage students in those texts (Perry & Fraser, 1993). McGlenn (2001) argued that due to their self-centered, egocentric perception of the world, young children, in particular, "want to see themselves and their everyday lives in the stories they read" (p. 50). Because people develop their perspectives of themselves and their lives based on their culture and socially constructed reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), teachers are sometimes not aware of their own biases or the biases of those around them (Greene, 1988).

While teachers may consider themselves colorblind, research has established that children notice race and have opinions and preferences regarding race, gender, and the elderly as early as age three (Cross, 1991; Valli, 1995). Racial identity theorists Lawrence and Tatum (1998) have suggested that racial awareness for individuals from the mainstream White culture

falls along a continuum, and their perspectives affect their understandings of themselves and others. White teachers' failure to acknowledge their own racial awareness becomes a barrier for successfully meeting the educational needs of students of color. Conversely, teachers who exhibit antiracist pedagogical traits tend to reside at a higher stage in the racial awareness continuum, and therefore, are better able to meet the needs of students of color. Teachers from mainstream culture may struggle to be aware of their own biases, as well as those of the authors, illustrators, and publishers of the books they select for students in their classrooms (Nodelman, 1996).

Despite the common acceptance of the importance of reading aloud, many children continue to start school with limited experiences with books. In a longitudinal study focused on developing prerequisite early literacy skills with preschool African-American children living at the poverty level, Perkins and Cooter (2005) looked at the Language Enrichment Activities Program (LEAP). The long range goal was for the graduates of the preschool to complete high school and gain employment. Early literacy components emphasized the areas of receptive and expressive language, phonological awareness, knowledge of letters of the alphabet, basic concepts, and prewriting fine motor skills. Pre- and post-assessments document the superior gains made by the children who participated in the program. The LEAP curriculum required a great deal of research and development to find the most effective curriculum for these African-American children living at the poverty level. Most notably, reading aloud to children was found to be essential in helping low-income African-American learners acquire preliteracy language skills. Reading aloud helped learners develop a sense of story structure and syntax used in written language and built children's listening and speaking vocabularies. Experiences with books were an integral part of the daily LEAP curriculum (Perkins & Cooter, 2005).

Au (1980) brought attention to the importance of the congruity between students' cultural norms for listening, speaking, and turn taking and school in the study of the Kamehameah Elementary Educational Program (KEEP). She hypothesized and found that by incorporating home practices in discussions about literature, students participated considerably more. Gallimore et al. (1986, cited in Garcia, 2002) studied the type of scaffolding that transpired in the KEEP project literature discussions. Before reading a book, the children talked about their home experiences and what they already knew about the world. Then the teacher gradually made transitions from those experiences to the book. The students then read the text silently, not aloud. This gave the children an opportunity to be oriented toward the text. In the end, the children's home experiences were again linked with the text reading (Garcia, 2002).

Aside from reading books that entertain and give joy, teachers select stories that pose problems, offer resolutions, teach about the world, and help children enhance comprehension skills. Around 1980, researchers began to examine the role of classroom discussion in reading comprehension instruction (Duffy, 2002). This line of research is supported by sociocultural theories emphasizing the importance of social interaction in constructing knowledge (Gavelek & Raphael, 1996). The results indicate that readers who become personally involved in stories also obtain a higher level of understanding than students who read efferently, or primarily to recall, paraphrase, or analyze (Cox & Many, 1992; Rosenblatt, 1976). African-American students, in particular, are sensitive to literature containing authentic depictions of their own ethnic group (Brooks, 2006). As today's schools become more culturally diverse, it is important that we deepen our current understanding of how readers of different ethnicities use culture to interpret literature. Brooks' qualitative study explored how middle school students read and responded to culturally conscious African-American children's books (2006). Carol D. Lee (2006) described

students' cultural data sets as the multiple texts that students learn to comprehend and interpret as part of their routine, everyday lives; the comprehension and reasoning skills applied to these texts are the same as those required for comprehending texts read in school. Lee called this design the Cultural Modeling Framework. The effective use of multicultural literature in the classroom has gained popularity as researchers have begun to more carefully examine children's responses to characters, themes, plots, and settings found in well-written multicultural books. Bell and Clark (1998) examined the effects of racial imagery (Black and White characters) and cultural themes (African-American and Euro-American) in reading content on comprehension and recall in African-American children. The study, consisting of 109 elementary school students attending a developmental research school in Tallahassee, Florida, called for students to listen to prerecorded stories while attending to an accompanying story manuscript. The findings suggest that stories reflecting themes consistent with the sociocultural experiences of African Americans have a greater facilitating effect on recall and comprehension in African-American children (Bell & Clark, 1998) than those that do not. So, there are research findings to support the facilitative effects of cultural factors on reading in African-American children. In "The Importance of Including Culturally Authentic Literature," Hall agreed with prior research that suggests authors and illustrators depict various cultures and backgrounds in their literary works as a way of building classroom communities (2008).

Comprehension

There is an abundance of research available relating to the importance of phonological awareness and phonics in the primary grades. However, more recently theorists have demonstrated that even the youngest readers need opportunities to be "code breakers, meaning

makers, text users, and text critics” (Muspratt et al., 1997). There is far less research available on how young children comprehend or use texts to acquire new knowledge and critique the world around them. Reading comprehension is a complex process in which the reader must think actively and interact with the text in order to construct meaning. It is a multifaceted process in which students engage with the text (Tierney, 1990). Judith Irwin offered a similar definition of comprehension - the reader’s process of using prior experiences and the author’s text to construct meaning that is useful to that reader for a specific purpose (1991). Irwin emphasized that comprehension depends on two important factors: the reader and the text that is being read. Reading, itself, is such a complex process, that skilled readers do not realize the number of skills that must operate simultaneously and that their ability to process text automatically makes them unaware that the processes are occurring. The National Reading Panel (2000) categorized the activities that readers, who are actively engaged with text, perform. For example, readers activate prior knowledge; examine the text to determine its length, structure, and important parts; make predictions; determine big ideas; make connections to their own experiences; create mental images, monitor their understanding; generate summaries; and evaluate text.

The early work of Applebee (1978), Hickman (1983), and Sims (1983), in addition to the thematic research of Lehr (1988, 1991) has proven that, like adults, children respond to literature according to their experiences and world perspectives. We also know that the kinds of literary experiences offered to children often are a function of the teacher’s familiarity and experience with multicultural titles. But, how do children begin to experience, understand, and interpret this diverse literary tapestry? According to Louise Rosenblatt (1982), one of the earliest reader response theorists, objective meaning cannot be found within a given text any more than it can

be found exclusively within the reader of that text. Instead, Rosenblatt argues that meaning is derived, or, in her terms, a poem is evoked from the transaction between the reader and the text during a particular act of reading, and therefore meaning is unique to an individual within a specific context and in each successive act of reading. Any change in either the reader, the text, or the situation, will, in Rosenblatt's terms, result in "a different event---a different poem" (14). No two readers will have the exact same response to any text, and no single reader will have the exact same response to a text read multiple times. Beach (1993) proposed that responding to literature is a learned social process, and therefore readers will respond to literature differently depending on their different social roles. He posited that socialization by cultural institutions will affect the subject positions readers assume, and their responses will reflect the positioning. Fish (1980) developed the concept of interpretive communities, groups of people who share particular assumptions and strategies for reading, to explain how the content and theme of literature do not bear universal interpretation.

Janet Hickman (1979) was one of the first researchers to examine how children respond to literature in a classroom setting. Her ethnographic study examined mixed-grade primary students' responses and found that children refer back to books read aloud long after the actual event, sometimes through artwork or discussions. Through her findings, she developed a number of student response categories, which have been summarized by Martinez and Roser (1991): (a) listening behaviors such as applause or joining in refrains; (b) contact with books such as browsing; (c) acting on impulse to share by reading together or sharing discoveries; (d) oral responses such as retelling or freely commenting on stories, actions, and drama; (e) making things like pictures or games, and; (f) writing about literature or using literary models in one's writing (p. 646).

In a study done by Belinda Louie (2005), a fourth-grade classroom teacher's unit using five variants of the Mulan tale was chosen for observation to determine what kinds of understanding the students might develop. Students watched the Disney video version of the tale prior to the unit. The fourth graders paid close attention to both the text and the illustrations. Students compared the book to the movie version, and were engaged in meaningful discussion throughout the unit. Louie found that the students, through classroom discussion and personal reflective writing, developed an empathetic understanding of cultures and values that were different from their own. Sipe's (2000) study, also seeking to describe the construction of literary understanding, used the oral responses of first- and second-grade students during read-alouds of picture books. His findings indicated five types of literary understanding: (a) textual, (b) intertextual connections, (c) personal connections, (d) becoming engaged in the story to such an extent that the world of the story and the children's world were transparent to each other, and (e) using the text as a platform or pretext for creative expression. The first- and second-grade students in Sipe's study also paid close attention to the text and the illustrations, suggesting that students' textual understanding is influenced by both the words and the pictures in the books they read.

Current evidence also suggests that children rely heavily on background knowledge in their interactions with text. While it is critical that teachers help young readers activate relevant background information, they must also be sensitive to dialogue that indicates that a child may be relying on inaccurate or irrelevant knowledge. In Beck and McKeown (2001 & 2003), the authors describe their work with interactive read-alouds in kindergarten and first grade. The researchers limited discussion of background knowledge to more tightly fit talk to the topic of the text. They found that extensive discussions of the students' prior knowledge often led the

youngsters far from the text and that what they recalled was based on shared recollections rather than the content in text. We want children to use prior knowledge effectively to make specific, relevant connections to text, and given the cultural and ethnic diversity in today's elementary classroom, one is safe to assume that children will draw upon a vast array of prior knowledge, some of which may be unfamiliar to the teacher.

Comprehension strategy instruction in the early grades is critically important as it has the potential to provide access to knowledge that is removed from personal experience. The unstated premise is that children who actively engage in particular cognitive strategies (activating prior knowledge, predicting, organizing, questioning, summarizing, and creating a mental image) are likely to understand and recall more of what they read. It is assumed that as children practice these strategies in a group setting, the children will make strategies habitual and will transfer them to other appropriate settings independently. Research has demonstrated that comprehension strategy instruction can enhance the reading comprehension of novice readers.

In order for children to comprehend text more clearly, they must be allowed to creatively understand the literature. Bakhtin (1984) asserted that creative understanding of text occurs when the reader is allowed to travel through a character or situation deeply, while making connections with personal experiences. Thus, the reader creates meaning as a new whole by dialoguing with self, peers, adults, and the authors. Social constructivists emphasize the importance of socially negotiated meaning through multiple interactions with the text and the world (Vygotsky, 1978).

Preservice Teachers and Literary Response

Researchers have, until recently, discounted the importance of preservice teachers' understandings of children's responses to literature. The capacity for preservice teachers to expand literary response of students is a critical concept in teacher education. In general, the reading field has seen literacy as the end purpose for learning to read; the children's literature field has been more concerned about the books themselves and less about instructional issues (Walmsley, 1992). Literature, especially for beginning teachers, has traditionally consisted of scripted basal textbooks with prescribed questions and expected answers. Very few instructional materials existed to aid teachers in the use of trade books of all varieties for reading instruction. However, current research rejects a normative view of literary response and, instead focuses on the relationship between the reader and the text (Beach & Hynds, 1991; Rosenblatt, 1991). With relatively little experience with children, preservice teachers may work from the traditional frames of their own learning experiences (Lortie, 1975). Recent researchers, however, have realized the importance of field experiences; learning about children's response to literature must be done *with* children. The invaluable experience of direct observation of what children have to say during literary talk cannot be simply replaced in a college classroom.

In their year-long study, Wolf, Carey and Mieras (1996) analyzed the effects of using case studies to prepare preservice teachers to be more knowledgeable and skilled in supporting children's literary response. As part of a class assignment for an undergraduate course in children's literature, preservice teachers read to and kept careful field notes on selected children. The findings revealed a shift in preservice teachers' perspectives on literary response. The preservice teachers began the study with relatively low expectations. However, over the course

of the study, the preservice teachers moved toward a vision of literary response that focused on interpretation rather than comprehension. Their expanded expectations emphasized the personal and social nature of literary discussions which allows for intertextual connections between the literature and the readers' lives. Authentic, literary interaction is imperative if the expectations of preservice teachers are to shift beyond limited, comprehension-based expectations to interpretive literary engagement.

In a study by Henderson (2006), in which preservice teachers used an instructional framework and explicit conversational scaffold during read-alouds, Henderson found that the level of preservice teachers' instructional conversation during interactive read-alouds with elementary students became more sophisticated. Teachers who were able to pinpoint a student's contribution to a literary conversation and provide an appropriate and timely response to that contribution produced higher levels of conversation. The study also revealed that preservice teachers whose conversations maintained coherence resulted in higher and more instructionally effective conversation (p. 121). Results from Henderson's study corroborated findings from earlier research conducted by Goldenberg (1991). He described instructional conversations as "discussion-based lessons geared toward creating opportunities for students' conceptual and linguistic development" (p. 8). Like Henderson, Goldenberg reported that the "teacher encourages expression of students' own ideas, builds upon students' experiences and ideas and guides them to increasingly sophisticated levels of understanding" (p. 8). Many researchers have emphasized the importance of literary conversation that allows students the opportunity to engage in analysis, reflection, and critical thinking. Multicultural literature is, yet another, means by which readers are able to comprehend text in more meaningful and effective ways.

Multicultural Literature in Education

Today's classroom community should afford all of its members the opportunity to be respected for their own unique differences, yet encourage them to develop a respect and appreciation for those whose culture and backgrounds are different from their own. The importance of creating this type of classroom environment is acknowledged in the *Standards for the English Language Arts* published by the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), in 1996. The standards state that students should read works that "reflect the diversity of the United States' population in terms of gender, age, social class, religion, and ethnicity" (p. 28), and teachers should carefully consider the interests of their students when selecting texts for curriculum inclusion. Multicultural literature and diversity in reading selections aid in students' abilities to understand the many dimensions of the human experience, and can serve as a mirror of students' own cultures and a lens through which they can view other cultures.

Research has shown that even infants can recognize differences among people (Katz, 1973; Wham, Barnhart & Cook, 1996), and these results suggest that having children exposed to a variety of cultures very early in their lives may encourage tolerance and acceptance of people of different cultures and backgrounds. On the other hand, many students come to school with limited exposure to other cultures and hold stereotypes about groups of people they presume are different from themselves (Banks, 1988). The need for literature featuring underrepresented groups is magnified in the Southern United States, which is known for its history of bigotry and discrimination. Bieger (1996) provided persuasive reasons for teachers to use multicultural literature in their classrooms:

What cannot be taught through facts may be taught through the heart. Literature can help affect multicultural understandings. Through reading, we briefly share in the lives and feelings of the characters rather than dealing with facts. Literature provides food for both the head and the heart. Books may be used as agents for change, vehicles for introducing concepts and catalysts for activities (p. 309).

According to proponents of the multicultural approach to education, the traditional approach to education is monocultural and reinforces ethnocentrism (Banks, 1993). Children from the dominant group are perceived to unknowingly stigmatize the members of the ethnic minority group. Additionally, there is a correlation between low self-esteem and social prejudice. And people who have high self-image tend to have a low degree of prejudice (Hilliard & Pine, 1990). Bishop (1992) maintained that students who do not see their culture reflected in the literature they read may believe they have little value in society and in school.

Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, and Duffy-Hester (1998) surveyed administrators and teachers about elementary reading and language arts instruction. Based on teachers' self-reports of their beliefs and practices, the researchers found that a majority (89%) of the teachers preferred a balanced eclectic approach to elementary reading instruction that involves reading skills instruction and immersion in a rich collection of various literary works, including multicultural literature.

We found that teachers design reading and language arts programs that provide a multifaceted, balanced instructional diet

that includes an artful blend of direct instruction in phonics and other reading and writing strategies along with a rich assortment of literature, oral language, and written language experiences and activities (Baumann et al., p. 646)

While a growing body of research supports the use of multicultural literature as an integral part of the curriculum, many teachers still subscribe to the notion that good literature is classic literature. In a 1995 study, Bigler and Collins found that teachers worried that multicultural literature would not be categorized as “good literature” and lacked “staying power” (p. 14). Most of these teachers offered personal definitions, narrowing what would be described as good literature to those books that fit into the Western culture. This type of framework disadvantages particular groups of students, especially those from historically disenfranchised groups. Miller states that teachers who read a wide variety of multicultural literature are able to create rich literacy communities and are better able to contextualize and teach multicultural literature well. The teachers who use multicultural literature have a heightened sense of cultural awareness and sensitivity to issues with which their minority students are faced, resulting in more effective literary instruction for minority students.

Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) investigated classroom teachers’ practices in an effort to discover the extent to which multicultural literature was integrated into the curriculum. They concluded that although teachers advocate the inclusion of diverse works, in practice they do not always implement these beliefs. Additionally, the study revealed a degree of confusion among teachers about the teaching of multicultural works. One teacher noted that she “wasn’t a

historian and felt underprepared and ill-equipped to discuss the non-Eurocentric cultures in her class” (p. 489), and others failed to see the relevance of teaching from multicultural perspectives.

While a multicultural approach to education has the potential to reduce ethnocentrism and racism, it is in no way a complete remedy for social inequality and cannot guarantee academic success. A major goal of multicultural education is to reform educational institutions and learning communities so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality (Banks, 1995). By strengthening both the individual’s own ethnic identity and the acceptance of other cultures, a multicultural approach to education has proven itself a positive model. In a review of research on children’s racial attitudes, Banks (1991) concluded that three methods have the most promise for change in young children’s race preferences, particularly those of White children: reinforcement of positive feelings about the color Black; perceptual training to learn how to differentiate faces of members of less familiar groups; and cooperative learning in mixed ethnic/racial groups. When multicultural education is viewed as a method to help young children “move from egocentrism to an understanding and appreciation of ethnic diversity rather than being bound by an ethnocentric perspective,” all children benefit (Kendall, 1983, p. 53). Teachers (of all colors) make assumptions about minority children’s actions, words, intellects, families, and communities based on stereotypes (Delpit, 1995). However, teachers have the responsibility to develop self-awareness about their own assumptions and biases in order to model non-biased behaviors for children. Teachers who are proponents of multicultural education can have a decisive influence on young people by teaching them the skills, knowledge, and critical awareness to become productive members of a diverse society (Nieto, 2004).

A multicultural, culturally relevant pedagogy is necessary for preservice teachers to be effective classroom teachers in our society. The cultural dynamics of the classroom are as diverse as they have ever been in the history of our nation. Ladson-Billings (1994) has identified several methods as being productive for engaging African-American students. She conducted an ethnographic study of eight teachers identified as most effective by parents and principals. The methods of instruction and materials used by five African-American and three Caucasian teachers' were examined through interviews and classroom observations. Ladson-Billings found that culturally relevant pedagogy was characterized by features such as cooperative learning, multicultural materials, and teachers who show concern and care for both students and their cultures. She concluded that culturally relevant teaching practices include:

“the kind of teaching that is designed not merely to fit the school culture to the students' culture but also to use students' culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge. Thus culturally relevant teaching requires the recognition of African-American culture as an important strength upon which to construct the schooling experience” (p. 314)

Ladson-Billings (1994) further described the type of classroom in which culturally relevant teaching exists as one where (1) the teacher-student relationship is fluid, humanely equitable, and extends to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community; (2) the teacher demonstrates a connectedness with all students; (3) the teacher encourages a community of learners; and (4) the teacher encourages students to learn collaboratively. The students are expected to reach each other and be responsible for each other.

Following up on the results produced by Ladson-Billings (1994), Perkins (2004) also examined what constitutes culturally relevant pedagogy. Like Ladson-Billings, Perkins found that effective literacy instruction for African-American fourth graders featured cooperative learning, multicultural literature, modeling, and connections to homes, parents, and cultures. Perkins found that by linking texts to students' prior cultural and home knowledge, and providing opportunities for cooperative learning with peers, African-American students became more deeply engaged with texts and developed deeper levels of understanding. Most of the literacy learning strategies thought to be most effective are consistent with conclusions described in the Report of the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). We can conclude that these strategies are not only important for African-American students, but for all students.

Diversity

There is strong evidence that African-American students benefit from thoughtful and purposeful instruction that begins with their own unique experiences. Without these connections, it is difficult for students of minority cultures to construct comprehensive vocabularies or multilayered understandings of the world. There is strong validation for the use of multicultural literature as a means to bridge understandings for these students. Delpit (2003) makes a convincing argument to this point:

Part of truly allowing the brilliance of our children to shine forth would be to consciously organize institutions and instruction that expose them to their intellectual legacy; clarify their position in a racialized society; ritually express expectations for hard work and academic, social, physical,

and moral excellence; and create alternative reason for success other than “getting a good job”—for our community, for your ancestors, for your descendents...Asa Hilliard has identified and documented schools serving low-income urban children that produce some of the highest standardized test scores in their respective school districts...Interestingly, despite their excellent test scores, the focus of each school is not to raise scores, but to develop a style of education that draws upon, whether consciously or not, traditional African educational thought about how children should be viewed and how they should be socialized intellectually, physically, and spiritually...[W]e must first stop attempting to determine their capacity. We must be convinced of their inherent intellectual capability, humanity, and spiritual character. We must fight the foolishness proliferated by those who believe that one number can measure the worth and drive the education of human beings, or that predetermined scripts can make for good teaching. Finally, we must learn who our children are—their lived culture, their interests, and their intellectual, political, and historical legacies (p. 19).

Readers can more easily construct meaning from a text that contains familiar elements because their background knowledge helps them make predictions and inferences about the story. However, Lee (1993) attests that one cannot adequately read the literature of a people without knowing something of the culture and the historical circumstances of that people. The challenges confronting teacher educators include helping preservice teachers broaden their belief systems, especially those related to social issues, cultural differences, and social justice

(Cochran-Smith, 1995; Gay, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Diversity-based courses in teacher education programs have great potential for acquainting teacher candidates with cultures and histories other than their own so they are not at a disadvantage for teaching students of diverse backgrounds.

Sleeter (2001) used a comprehensive literature review of 80 studies that dealt with preparing teachers for diversity in the classroom to argue that while there is much research that addresses the attitudes and lack of knowledge of preservice teachers, there is little that examines practices that actually prepare strong teachers. Further, literacy researchers acknowledge that the important issues of cultural and linguistic diversity are not necessarily influencing literacy practices in either schools or teacher education programs (Hoffman & Pearson, 2000). Rogers, Marshall, and Tyson (2006) addressed this issue in a study which focused on the dialogic narratives of selected preservice teachers in a teacher education program that emphasized literacy and diversity. The preservice teachers were immersed in community-based environments where they used dialogue to deepen their understandings of language and literacy, particularly in relation to issues of cultural diversity and social justice. The preservice teachers were able to clearly define their professional identities; however, they found it more difficult to explain their racial identities and awareness. The researchers concluded that because colleges and K-12 schools are riddled with inequities, there are limited opportunities for new teachers to confront their own prejudices and privilege and learn about issues of social justice and diversity as they relate to language and literacy education. The researchers maintained that by creating spaces for dialogue in which complex issues can be raised, the potential to help student teachers broaden their own, and their peers', social and cultural perspectives beyond their textbooks becomes greater.

Although children’s literature includes books that are entertaining, fit the curriculum, and teach social justice and compassion, teachers do not necessarily select these for classroom use. Oftentimes, there is a disconnect between the literature chosen for read-alouds and the cultural backgrounds of the students who participate in them. Teachers assign value to books through the choices of literary pieces they share with students. There is an element of personal judgment that accompanies book selection by educators. Similarly, it is important to consider both the author’s representation of reality and those assigned to the text by the teacher while reading (Shannon, 2002). These judgments of selection and interpretation determine the messages expressed to the listeners—messages that are influenced by teachers’ beliefs. Their beliefs are in turn influenced by their “cultural, economic, social, and political diversity” (Shannon, 2002). Knowing this, reflective professionals are conscious of how their decisions in text selection are impacted by their personal beliefs.

It is important to foster positive self-identities and accurate perceptions of the world. Choosing to include culturally authentic books as part of read-alouds is one way to approach this task. Young children see themselves as the center of the world and desire to see themselves in the stories they read (McGlenn, 2001). It is critical for educators to be aware of the personal biases and to consider children’s cultures when selecting books to read-aloud. Making the task of selecting appropriate texts quite difficult is the fact that books about people of color make up less than 6% of the new children’s and young adult literature published in 2008, a percentage that has remained steady throughout the previous ten years (CBCC, 2008).

Children as readers and participants who engage in interactive read-alouds are constantly constructing meaning. Because all readers bring different experiences and cultures to a text,

assume different stances toward it, and understand it through their own unique cultural and psychological filters, readers formulate a wide variety of responses. The social element of reader response theory understands readers as both constrained and enabled by the rules of the interpretive communities to which they belong (Fish, 1980), thus making the culture, the setting, and reading purpose an essential piece in understanding how readers interpret texts. What counts as literary understanding changes when children's responses and teachers' facilitation of conversations are viewed through contemporary theoretical lenses. From the traditional view that literary understanding comprises a strong knowledge of narrative elements such as plot, characters, setting, and theme, certain responses might be considered off task or even incorrect. However, these same responses might be positively valued and celebrated from the perspective of a broader and more inclusive conceptualization of literary understanding afforded by these theories. While prior research supports the use of African-American literature to encourage literary talk and comprehension among African-American adolescents (Brooks, 2006), little research exists to explain how its use benefits elementary students of varying ethnicities. The growing diversity of the U.S. population dictates that we recognize that culture is an increasingly complex mixture of ethnicity, family structure, socioeconomic status, values, and beliefs. Teachers' messages promoted through the books they choose to read aloud to students should reflect their respect and acknowledgement of diverse cultures.

Equally important as acknowledging the diversity that exists among students, is the cultural identification of the teachers who interact with these students. A study of preservice teachers done by Velsor and O'Neill (1997) found that the preservice teachers were not initially able to identify themselves as being of a particular culture or ethnicity. Only after grounding themselves in a cultural background did they embrace the importance of heritage and culturally-

based responses. Banks (1988) defined ethnicity as a person's psychological identification with a certain group. More broadly defined, cultural heritage is considered to be a shared system of values and beliefs (Holmes, 1995; Slonim, 1991).

In order to determine how the ethnic group identification of preservice teachers affected the read-aloud practices of teachers and children's responses to African-American picture books, I conducted a series of observations, interviews, and questionnaires. As part of the questionnaires and interviews, I asked the preservice teachers to rate their level of comfort level using African American literature in the language arts curriculum and the likelihood that they would use it in their own classrooms one day.

We need to prepare and encourage preservice teachers to engage in dialogue about language, literacy, and social justice and prepare them for the rich and diverse contexts they will encounter in their teaching careers. My aim, through this study, is to contribute to the body of research that moves beyond the mismatched problem of the language of the home community and the language of instruction in classrooms to document and develop new ways of proactively leveraging everyday language as a resource for learning. America is diverse. Classrooms are diverse. The books teachers read-aloud to students should be too.

For the purposes of this study, I defined the following terms:

African-American literature: Literature written by and about African Americans (Brooks, 2006).

Read-aloud: the event of reading a book orally to a group of children. During these read-aloud sessions, students are sitting in close proximity to the teacher and the book, with the teacher holding the book outwards facing the audience of children, who listen and may

participate as a group. The children may raise their hands to respond or may engage in choral (group) response (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1999).

Read-aloud text: the book that the teacher reads orally to a group of students (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 1999).

Books/Literature: the various kinds of texts that are present in classrooms and school libraries and are read-aloud to students by their teachers.

Culture: the set of shared beliefs, attitudes, goals, practices, and symbols that a group possesses (Harris, 2003). In this study, I limit the definition of culture to the race, ethnicity, and gender to which the individual participants assigned themselves or preservice teachers assigned students.

Multiculturalism: the education that addresses the interests, concerns, and experiences of those considered to be outside of the sociopolitical and cultural mainstream of American society (Taxel, 2003).

III. Methodology

Overview

The qualitative approaches, both case study and grounded theory, were best suited for this study for several reasons. First, prior research provides little insight on how African-American (AA) literature may be woven into the standard curriculum. The demographics of U.S. schools have changed, and now include the greatest number of minority students in history; however, the characters, authors, and cultural underpinnings of the texts students read have not kept up with the trend. Secondly, while much has been written on reader response and critical race theories as they pertain to read-alouds, both of which emphasize and support social construction of knowledge by participants, and on which this study is based, there has been no recognized theory to specifically address the use of AA children's literature by preservice teachers and their abilities to use it effectively during a read-aloud event. In order to develop a theory of preservice teachers' comfort levels and abilities to use AA literature with students, I chose to describe qualitatively what teachers and students do, say, and think during read-aloud events with the goal of theory generation. As Wolcott (1992) put it, there is value in entering a research setting looking for questions and answers, but it would be naïve not to make that intention explicit. In other words, although the qualitative researcher's work can be described as a journey to find something, there is nothing wrong with having an idea of what one is looking for before the journey begins. With that in mind, I approached this research with questions I wanted to answer along the journey, but with the knowledge that this study would be exploratory in nature and would likely yield results that were applicable only to this particular setting.

This study used techniques of data gathering based in the qualitative tradition. Fraenkel and Wallen (1994) point out that qualitative traditions include the use of the natural setting as the source of data, the use of purposeful sampling, the identification of the researcher as the principal instrument of data collection, and the expression of the data in ways other than numbers. A large body of research and scholarly argument now exists to address the issue of how researchers can use rich data in examining and understanding what is happening, why it is happening, and what it means in a give situation, event, or setting. However, as Patton (1990) states, “The methods of qualitative inquiry now stand on their own as reasonable ways to find out what is happening in programs and educational settings” (p. 90).

Research Design and Goals

This study takes a qualitative approach to enhance the body of research focused on AA literature and preservice teachers’ abilities to use it meaningfully and appropriately during reading instruction. Additionally, this study seeks to bring to the forefront of reading research the increased importance of multicultural literature in the reading curriculum. The emphasis of this study is exploration, rather than prescription or prediction, therefore the researcher chose case studies to discover and address issues related to the research questions. In alignment with qualitative research strategies, this study attempted to understand what was going on in a real-world setting, with no attempt to manipulate, control, or alter it in any way (Patton, 2001). By seeking to understand as much as possible about a single subject or a small group of subjects, case studies offer a thick description of what is happening in a particular setting.

I opted to describe preservice teachers’ self-reported levels of comfort using AA literature and then analyze critical discourse about issues of race. Furthermore, the selection of preservice teachers of different ethnic backgrounds allowed for greater attention to how their

roles and cultures affected student discourse and interaction. Two preservice teacher subjects, one Black and one White, were chosen to allow for closer observations of their questions and interactions with elementary students (Patton, 2001). The research interviews of the preservice teachers provided deeper understandings that can be used to inform future reading education classes for undergraduate students.

In deciding between traditional quantitative research methods and less widely accepted qualitative methods, one must consider the key distinction between the two, which is the instruments used in data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because the researcher makes choices throughout all stages of a study regarding methods, interpretation, and communication of findings, it is useful to note that researchers using qualitative methods emphasize the researcher as the main data collection instrument. Therefore, a major and valid question in qualitative research still exists: Would someone else reading and interpreting the same data arrive at similar conclusions?

Qualitative research, by definition, is the kind of research that produces findings from real-world settings where the “phenomenon of interest unfold naturally” (Patton, 2001, p. 39). The naturalistic approach of qualitative research methods allows the researcher to interact with the data without manipulating the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2001). The data that is collected is descriptive, taking the form of words or pictures rather than numbers, and seeks to unlock a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the subject being studied.

Reliability and Validity

The rigor of qualitative research methodology has long been debated, particularly with regards to the validity and reliability of such methods. A large body of research, scholarly

argument, and epistemological tradition challenge the use of rich, narrative data in examining and understanding what is happening, why it is happening, and what it means in a given situation, event, or setting. Such debate is healthy and suggests that the researcher's philosophical tradition and stance take on an importance equal to that of the data itself. However, as Patton (1990) points out, the methods of qualitative research now stand on their own as viable ways to explore what is happening in particular settings and educational programs. The issue of whether qualitative inquiry should be undertaken with the same frequency as traditional quantitative research methods is beyond debate—qualitative research methods have proven themselves to be both feasible and useful.

The defining element of qualitative data collection is the researcher as the key instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although all research is determined by choices made by the researcher at all stages of a study regarding methods, interpretation, and communication, those researchers who use qualitative methods emphasize that the researcher is the main instrument of data collection. Therefore, the major and valid question with regards to qualitative methods is whether someone else interpreting the same data would arrive at similar conclusions. To this end, I have included a discussion on trustworthiness of the research methods used in this study, as well as a number of limitations, including background information about the participants and the researcher.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) coined the parallel concept of “trustworthiness” to address the issues of reliability and validity of qualitative research. Trustworthiness contains four aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Trustworthiness of data is tied directly to the researcher who collects and analyzes the data. Methods for ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were

considered throughout the design, implementation, and analysis of this study. Each will be briefly discussed in the following section.

One way the credibility of this study was established is by use of triangulation. Triangulation is defined as “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). The data-gathering techniques used in this study were questionnaires, interviews, audio-recordings of read-alouds, written reflections, and observations. This use of multiple data collection methods contributes to the credibility of the data.

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the results of the study. In other words, can the conclusions of this study be transferred to other contexts? One way to ensure transferability is by providing a “thick description” of the findings for the readers to assess the potential transferability appropriate to their own settings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The participants, setting, and researcher in this study are described in great detail to ensure generalizability.

The issue of whether a qualitative research study process is consistent and reasonably stable over time is referred to as dependability. One way of ensuring dependability is through triangulation. Another way of establishing dependability is through inter-rater reliability. By cross-checking my interpretations with a fellow scholar outside my area of study, I was able to establish a greater degree of dependability.

Confirmability is often described as the *objectivity of a study*. Do the conclusions depend on the “subjects and conditions of the inquiry, rather than the inquirer” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981)? The sequence of data collection and analysis are outlined specifically in the *data collection* and

data analysis sections of this chapter. Additionally, researcher bias is discussed in the *theoretical orientation* section of this chapter.

Theoretical Orientation

Theoretical orientation or sensitivity is associated with grounded theory and refers to a personal quality of the researcher. The degree to which this sensitivity is developed varies depending on the researcher's knowledge of the studied phenomenon, professional experience, and interactions with the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Also, the methodology relied on a sociocultural framework in which each person brings to the study his or her own set of social and cultural experiences, including the researcher. My primary goal was to explore the AA picture book read-aloud experiences of preservice teachers. Additionally, the distance between the subject (myself) and the objects (the study and all its components), or the subject-object relationship, is integral to understanding the conclusions of this study. It was nearly impossible to establish complete disengagement from the study participants within this study. However, in addition to citing the limitations of this study, my aim was for pure subjectivity—the state of being purely theoretical, contemplative, rational, and intellectual. And though I was unable to achieve the pure dichotomy of a subject-object relationship, I believe that my role as the primary researcher, observer, and instructor, coupled with my cultural, educational, and personal background, provided a firm, theoretical sensitivity needed for interpreting the results and for drawing conclusions from this study.

Researcher Orientation

As a qualitative researcher, it is important to describe my theoretical and professional point of reference. My theoretical orientation relies heavily on a trio of theories---sociocultural,

reader response, and critical race. I believe that individuals make meaning of literary text as part of a social and cultural community. Therefore, it is important to consider the cultures and interactions of the participants in this study. I believe that readers' comprehension and responses to text are transactional processes based on both the readers' past experiences and purposes for reading. Additionally, I believe that critical race theory is a lens by which we may carefully examine educational pedagogy and practices.

Professional Orientation

I have six years teaching experience at the elementary school level with students similar to those observed in this study. During those six years as a second-grade teacher, my classrooms were generally evenly split by gender and ethnicity, with at least one English language learner (ELL) student in each class. I believe that reading is embedded within the broader definition of literacy which includes writing, speaking, and listening. I feel strongly about the benefits of reading to young children, a practice which often leads to lifelong literacy practices. I made a conscious effort to make sure that a variety of cultures and ethnicities were represented in the literature we read, the guest speakers we invited to the classroom, and even the characters on the classroom wall decorations. I also allowed for at least 15 minutes of daily modeled reading during instructional hours. As a teacher who regularly sought out multicultural literature for instructional purposes, I could make comparisons between my attempts to hold literary conversations as a classroom teacher and a researcher during my pilot study and my preservice teachers' conversations with their students. These experiences provided me with the background knowledge with which to frame my understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon and helped me to understand what was going on more clearly than if I had not had these experiences to bring to the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Cultural Orientation

My status as a Black student attending a predominantly White institution led to my interest in multiculturalism and diversity in reading for elementary students. I have, to date, taught at least ten undergraduate reading education courses over nine semesters with over 200 total students. Of those students, all were females and only three were Black (approximately 1.5%). As public schools become more diverse, demands have and will continue to increase to find the most effective ways to instruct students from various backgrounds. Unfortunately, the student populations of my current institution, my graduate classes, and even the undergraduate classes I teach are not representative of today's elementary classrooms. In order for the American education system to become an equitable, culturally conscious institution, there must be an overhaul in, not only practices, but also the beliefs upon which the system was founded. Therefore, it has become my personal goal to instill in my students the cultural responsiveness that will enable them to teach the ethnically diverse student body they are likely to face in their own classrooms.

Participants and Setting

The study utilized convenience sampling of participants who were enrolled in an undergraduate reading methods course taught by the researcher at a state research university in the southeastern United States (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Of the twenty-seven students enrolled in the course, all were female. Two preservice teachers, one White and one Black, were selected for participation in data analysis. Class standing of the participants included juniors and

seniors; however, those chosen for this study were both of junior class standing. Both preservice teacher participants were elementary education majors.

At the beginning of the semester, all students enrolled in the course were invited to participate in this research study. Each preservice teacher was given an informed consent letter outlining the nature of the research and the investigator's purposes. A fellow graduate student assisted me with the distribution of the letters of consent. The letters of consent were not made available to me until the completion of the semester when all coursework was completed and the students' grades had been posted. Preservice teachers were informed, both formally and informally, that participation in this study was not required for successful completion of this course, and their decision to participate would be kept confidential from the primary investigator until the end of the course. Preservice teachers were identified using an alpha-numeric coding system to ensure anonymity. The participants received no direct benefits from participation in this study; however, the long-term benefits for future preservice teachers and teacher educators justify the need for this type of research. A copy of the informed consent letter can be found in Appendix C.

The course is the first in a series of two reading courses required of all teacher candidates pursuing early childhood or elementary education certification. The course is taken during the first semester subsequent to a student's admission to the Teacher Education Program. Content is comprehensive in nature and includes the five research-based components of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Typically, three sections of the course are offered during the fall semester, and two sections are offered during spring semester. Approximately 140 preservice teachers take the course during a given year with enrollment for each section ranging between 25-30 students.

Students are enrolled in either a Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday sequence. Each class meets for two hours twice a week during a 16-week period which includes a 10-week (20 hours) lab component. During those lab sessions, preservice teachers implement instructional procedures taught in the course with groups of three to six elementary school students. Each of the 10 labs is two hours in length and is conducted at a local elementary classroom within five miles of the university.

Preservice teachers spent one morning per week during the 10-week lab sequence in an elementary school. The elementary school serving as the setting for this study had an enrollment of approximately 420 students in first through fifth grades. The majority of the elementary students were from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds, with 18% of the school population classified as minority and 28% of the population receiving free lunches. The school employed 40 certified staff members, along with a principal and assistant principal. Preservice teachers worked with students from first, second, and third grade classrooms. Individual classrooms reflected students of various reading ability levels and were randomly selected to participate in the read-aloud groups, adding to the heterogeneity of the groups. Preservice teachers were randomly assigned to a classroom where they worked with heterogeneous groups of three to six students. During this time, classroom teachers were able to provide small group instruction to their most struggling readers. Preservice teachers worked with the same group of students throughout the semester. After the teaching labs, each group of preservice teachers was required to write a one-page reflection of their teaching experience during that week.

Demographics of the two preservice teachers selected to participate in this research study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Preservice Teacher Demographics

Personal Variables	PST PB1	PST CN8
Gender	Female	Female
Ethnicity*	Black	White
Age*	25	21
Classification	Junior	Junior
Major	Elementary Education	Elementary Education
Marital Status	Single	Single
Children*	1	0

Note. Items accompanied with asterisks (*) denote differences among participants.

Materials

I used a variety of materials for this study. Three different lesson plans were prepared for each individual read-aloud of the picture books (see Appendix E). Preservice teachers were only provided the picture book for their first read-alouds; however, they prepared lesson plans for subsequent and final read-alouds to guide and assist in their facilitation of literary conversations during the readings. Over the course of the semester, the preservice teachers were instructed on how to develop purposeful, curriculum-based reading lesson plans and were able to later use their lesson plans to provide prompts and deliver organized and meaningful instruction. The read-alouds and follow-up discussions were audiotaped for later transcription and analysis. These discussions, along with preservice teachers' reflections and interview responses, provided the most valuable data.

Texts

Three AA picture books were used for the read-alouds in this study: *Meet Danitra Brown* by Nikki Grimes, *Uptown* by Bryan Collier, and *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni. These texts were selected based on literary merit, illustrations, and potential for student interest and learning. The books also contained themes common to the AA culture. The books were written by

African Americans and featured main characters of AA descent. *Meet Danitra Brown* is a Coretta Scott King Honor award-winning text. Author Nikki Grimes uses a series of colorful poems to introduce the reader to the main character, Danitra, and her best friend, Zuri Jackson. Themes such as bullying, friendship, family, and respect are addressed with abundant respect and sensitivity to a young audience. The poignant text takes the reader through a series of events and challenges that Danitra faces as a young, AA girl. While written by and about an AA female, the story appeals universally to the human spirit.

The author-illustrator of *Uptown*, Bryan Collier, uses a rich mix of paint and photo collages to give readers a glance into the rich culture of Harlem, a New York City neighborhood, through the eyes of an AA boy. Collier's spare text, poetic and beautiful, evokes every aspect of Harlem: the aroma of chicken and waffles, the legendary Apollo Theater, the shoppers on 125th Street, beautiful, melodic sounds of jazz, and the chocolate candy-colored brownstones that line the streets. Bryan Collier has received awards such as the Ezra Jack Keats Award, the Coretta Scott King Honor, and the Caldecott Honor for his work.

Finally, *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni is the story of Rosa Parks's courageous act of defiance that led the way to the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama. Illustrated by Bryan Collier, the book's cut-paper images and unique perspective offers an exciting way for children to learn about a historical event through the words and images of a picture book. Giovanni and Collier together offer a moving interpretation of Rosa Parks's momentous refusal to give up her seat on a bus. Collier's strikingly beautiful illustrations and Giovanni's considerate awareness of her young audience seamlessly combine to create a beautiful text.

Lesson Plans

The preservice teachers were provided with a sample lesson plan for the text, *Rosa*, and were allowed to develop their own lesson plans for the remainder of the read-aloud sessions. Throughout the semester, I provided preservice teachers with feedback on their written lesson plans and added observational notes I took during their implementation of each lesson. I then reviewed my notes and added additional comments and suggestions before returning the plans to the preservice teachers the following class period. The preservice teachers, as part of the class requirements, wrote weekly reflections on their lesson planning, reading selections, and lesson implementations.

Read-Aloud Procedures

During a modeled read-aloud, the teacher does the reading so that the students can focus their cognitive resources on comprehension of the text. Additionally, teacher read-alouds have been shown to be a good starting point for teaching critical reading strategies for comprehension, as student can focus solely on the strategy being taught without having to exhaust any cognitive resources on the actual reading (Hickman, 1981). The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) noted that there is little research at the kindergarten to second grade level on reading comprehension and that an important topic at this level is the relationship between listening comprehension and reading comprehension (p. 4-126).

During this study, preservice teachers were provided with copies of the AA picture books and were instructed to simply read aloud and share textual illustrations with the randomly assigned small groups of elementary students at the lab site. The protocol for the read-alouds states one of the class assignments for the preservice teachers is to compare and contrast the ways they engage students in literary conversations about text at the beginning of the semester

and again at the end of the semester. The preservice teachers were informed that they would be reading to a small group of three to four elementary students at a local school. The objectives of the first lesson were deliberately vague, as preservice teachers were not initially instructed on *how* to engage the students in the text. They were instructed to tape record the reading and ensuing conversation and transcribe their tapes following a model provided by the teacher/researcher (see Appendix A). The preservice teachers were made aware that the purpose for audiotaping and transcribing their literary conversations was to enable them to compare and contrast their performance at the beginning of the semester to their performance at the end of the semester. The preservice teachers were also made aware that emphasis would be placed on how they view the conversation process about multicultural literature, particularly as it pertains to AA literature and on their developing skill to facilitate a conversation about text with children. Additionally, the instructional goal was to increase the abilities of preservice teachers to take students through the five steps of a modeled reading lesson: prereading, reading, responding, exploring, and applying.

Data Collection

An *audit trail* is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a study to the development and reporting of the findings. It provides an accurate record of research process and its products (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail serves as the researcher's filing cabinet and establishes proof of records during the investigation. Halpern suggests six audit trail categories: 1) *raw data*-field notes, audio recordings 2) *data reduction and analysis*-summaries, condensed notes, 3) *data reconstruction and synthesis*-emergent themes, connections, relationships, 4) *process notes*-methodological notes, procedures, 5) *personal intention notes/materials*-research proposal, personal notes, expectations, and 6) *instrument*

development information-pilot questions, schedules, interview questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

My audit trail contained elements in each of Halpern's six categories as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Audit Trail

Category Type	Contents
Raw data	Audio recordings, journals, observation notes, interview and read-aloud transcriptions, jottings
Data reduction and analysis	Interview notes and read-aloud notes
Data reconstruction and synthesis	Emerging themes, diagrams, charts
Process notes	Interviewing and observation procedures, consent form, post-it note reminders of appointments
Personal intention notes and materials	Research proposal, personal notes
Instrument development information	Pilot questions, theoretical framework used to construct open-ended interview questions

Data for this study included the preservice teachers' transcripts of their first and final read-aloud conversations, reflections, and interviews. Preservice teachers submitted all materials at the end of the semester. Audio recordings and resulting transcripts of preservice teachers engaging in literary conversations about AA picture books accompanied their final papers. All of these products were typical for this particular reading education course. The most valuable data, however, came from the interviews conducted by the teacher/researcher after the semester was over and, after all course requirements had been completed.

As part of the course requirements, preservice teachers completed a series of eight read-aloud sessions over an eight-week period. Each session lasted from 30 to 45 minutes and took

place at a local elementary school. During the first read-aloud session, preservice teachers selected to read either *Meet Danitra Brown* or *Uptown*, and audiotaped the reading and discussion for later transcription. For the second read-aloud, all preservice teachers read *Rosa* and were given a modeled reading lesson plan for the text as a template for future lesson plans they would write independently. During the interim, preservice teachers conducted five modeled, shared, or interactive read-alouds with the elementary students. For the final read-aloud session, preservice teachers read whichever text they had not read during the first read-aloud. By this point, preservice teachers were expected to have expanded their knowledge of the five steps in the reading process and be able to conduct more effective literary conversations about multicultural picture books. The goal for the semester was for the preservice teachers to be able to compare and contrast their first and final read-alouds in response to the question “What evidence exists that I have increased my skill in facilitating literary conversations about multicultural literature, and specifically, AA picture books?”

The data used in this study came directly from the preservice teachers’ transcripts of read-alouds and interviews. All preservice teachers were assigned a three-symbol alpha-numeric identification code (e.g. HS4). This identification code was then applied to all three transcripts, the interview, and the final paper. The names of preservice teachers were then eliminated, and the resulting data sets were included in the analysis. For example, for preservice teacher CN8, data was reviewed and coded: CN8 (interview), CN8-1 (first read-aloud transcript), CN8-2 (final read-aloud transcript), and CN8fp (final paper).

The Pilot Study

It is important to note that this qualitative study emerged from an exploratory pilot study. This pilot study was conducted in order to test out assumptions, data collection methods, and

approaches to data analyses. Also, by conducting the study, first on a small scale, I was able to predict the feasibility of the study on a larger scale and with more participants. While the pilot study yielded useful information, more importantly, it provided me with a more accurate indication of the methods that would be most practical and the specific research questions that could be answered.

Purpose

The purpose of the pilot study was to evaluate the construction of literary meaning of AA literature by elementary students who were given the freedom to interpret texts based on their own cultural lenses. The conceptual framework was constructivist in nature, with some race and culture theory fundamentals. The ontological perspective of this study suggests that no ultimate truth exists and that individual truth is socially constructed by the students. The epistemological perspective suggests that reality exists through our personal and cultural backgrounds. All participants were given the freedom to interpret texts based on their own cultural lenses. The axiological perspective values the biases of the researcher's culturally-sensitized reality. It was important for me to acknowledge that as an African-American female, there were certain cultural biases with which I entered the research study. From a rhetorical perspective, it was important for me, as the researcher, to tell the story exactly as it occurred. The students' speech was transcribed verbatim and was expected to yield useful data. In addition, samples of student writing were used for analysis as well.

Data Collection

For the purpose of this initial study, I chose a second grade classroom in a rural southeast Alabama school in which to conduct the picture book read-alouds. The classroom teacher was a Black female with seven years teaching experience. The classroom consisted of thirteen students,

eight White and five Black, of varying reading levels. I chose three AA picture books for the read-aloud sessions—*Meet Danitra Brown* by Nikki Grimes, *Uptown* by Bryan Collier, and *Precious and the Boo Hag* by Patricia McKissack—based upon their literary merit, which was made evident by the number of prestigious awards each of the authors has received. In addition, because they were written by AA authors and featured AA characters, I believed that AA students would be able to make more personal connections with the stories.

Each lesson was conducted within a 30 to 45 minute time period and allowed students to engage in the five stages of reading—prereading, reading, responding, exploring, and applying. During the read-alouds of each storybook, I recorded student and teacher talk, allowing students to engage expressively with the text. I then transcribed the conversations that occurred during read-alouds of three African-American picture books with small groups of students.

Data Analysis

Using a constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I began categorizing qualitatively the questions and remarks generated by the students, and I inspected them for common themes. I then analyzed the transcripts to explore the qualitative characteristics of literary conversations as students constructed literary understandings based on their cultural backgrounds. My initial plan was to focus solely on the Black student discussion during the read-alouds. However, as I began to interpret the data, I quickly realized that the students' construction of meaning might have been impacted more by their rural, southern culture rather than ethnicity. Many of these students were born and reared in the southern United States, and have had very few experiences, if any, with urban culture, dialect, or big city living. Rather than focusing solely on AA students, I decided to examine *all* the students' talk during the read-alouds. Additionally, the data analysis process took a lot longer than I originally thought it

would and was difficult for me as I was using a trial version of Atlas.ti in order to gain practice using the software. I downloaded the free trial version of Atlas.ti from the internet for data analysis. I selected two complete transcripts for intensive scrutiny. A faculty member from my institution, who later served on my dissertation committee, assisted me with the initial coding, which began as an open coding process. I later decided that the conceptual categories that emerged closely resembled those described in Lawrence Sipe's (1998) analysis of first and second graders' talk during storybook read-alouds. In the next section, responses identified by Sipe are explained and illustrated by examples selected from the transcript data in my pilot study.

Methods of Literary Response

Analytical Response

Children responded to the AA picture books analytically by interpreting the text and illustrations in the manner of New Criticism (Ransom, 1941). Students were able to listen closely to a reading of the text, address the traditional elements of narrative texts (plot, setting, characters, and theme) and identify common narrative techniques such as foreshadowing. Children also discussed illustration media and sequence, conventional visual semiotic codes (such as the semiotic significance of color), and the relationship of text and pictures. Students engaged with the texts I read by making references to visual clues, both textual and pictorial:

Uptown is a row of brownstones.

I like the way they come together when you look at them down the block. They look like they're made of chocolate.

S1: I see a real life picture.

S3: I see two of them. And I see some real flowers.

S1: He's combining so much!

Intertextual Response

Intertextual responses connected the text being read-aloud to other stories, the work of other illustrators and artists, television shows, movies, and other cultural products. The children

interpreted and placed texts in the literary matrix they were constructing, showing an awareness that stories lean, or depend, on other stories (Yolen, 1981). The students who participated in my study made a number of text-to-text connections in both conversation and writing about the read-alouds. The following is an example of a student's writing sample:

One of the symbols on the front of the book remind of A letter to Amy, and when the boy was playing basketball it remind me of Jamacia Tag-Along.

Yet another example of textual connections can be found in the following excerpt from one read-aloud:

Teacher: What do you think the Ruckers is?

S1: A basketball team.

S4: It reminds me of the story *Jamaica Tag Along* when the girl went to play basketball and she tagged along.

S3: And this sign right here with the leaf on it reminds me of the flag of Canada.

Personal Response

Personal responses connected the text to themselves by finding points of similarity between their experiences and the experiences of characters in the story, making life-to-text and text-to-life connections (Cochran-Smith, 1984), and by commenting on what they would do if they were a certain character. Many examples of text-to-self connections emerged as students discussed and wrote about the read-aloud texts.

Teacher: What does it mean to be the lady of the house?

S1: Take care of it.

S4: Take care of your mother.

S3: Maybe you can take out the trash. Cause every Tuesday I be having to do that.

S4: Clean your yard.

S3: I don't have no rake at home.

The following is a second example of text-to-self connections:

S3: They have apartments. Me and Mrs. Moore live in Phenix City.

S4: I live in Seale.

S1: Barbershops.

S3: That's how I got waves in my head.

Teacher: Did this book remind you of your own family?

S1: Yeah. The place with the photographs. There's lots of Black and White pictures at my house, of my dad's parents.

S3: Well about the grandparent's wedding? There's a big photo album of my mom and my dad's wedding. June 19th, 1999!

S1: The year before I was born!

All: Me too!

S4: The picture when they was at church. Cause we go to church on Sunday.

Transparent Response

Transparent responses suggested that the children were so engaged in the lived-through aesthetic experience of the story (Rosenblatt, 1978) that, momentarily, their world and the secondary world (Benton, 1992) of the story had merged with and become transparent to each other. Children may display this type of engagement through silence, in which the responses are so limited that they may appear to be in a trance. Children's transparent responses may also be so inadvertent that children spontaneously talk back or become one with the story. Although these responses were fewer in number than others, there were a couple of instances in which the students participated in the story world.

Uptown is chicken and waffles served around the clock.

At first it seems like a weird combination, but it works.

S3: Hmmm! I love waffles.

S1: I'm thinking about pizza. It looks like pizza.

I observed some students rubbing their stomach areas, a gesture commonly used to indicate hunger. Others exclaimed, "Mmmm!" or "Yummy!" their vocal acknowledgements of their collective appreciation for those particular foods. It is possible that the students constructed various visual images that may have reminded them of particular smells, locations, etc.

Performative Response

Performative responses suggested that children may have manipulated the text (O'Neill, 1995). O'Neill found that in these response types, the text became a platform for children's

creativity and imaginations. Like little actors and actresses, the children regarded the text as their stage, an arena in which they were free to be expressive and creative. Sometimes, as I read, the students would become so engaged in the story that they were able to entertain the other students with their clever comments or comical gestures:

*Uptown is a row of brownstones.
I like the way they come together when you look at them down the block. They
look like they're made of chocolate.*

S2: They do.

S3: I wanna eat it.

S1: I'm gonna eat this page.

Taken together, these five categories describe what Sipe (1998) found constituted literary understanding for a group of children: what their interpretive community (Fish, 1980) valorized as appropriate ways of responding to picture storybooks. The children (a) engaged in textual and visual analysis, (b) formed links with other texts, (c) connected the text with their own lives, (d) momentarily entered the story world, and (e) playfully manipulated or subverted the story for their own creative purposes.

One pattern that emerged from the data analysis was the interactive building of meaning among the students, a phenomenon for which Sipe's research did not offer a category. The readers responded to either the text or student talk in the group context. Then, other students scaffolded—added to or explicated with words—the meaning of the text or talk. Ultimately, meaning evolved as a joint exploration of a concept in which the students negotiated until they were satisfied with meaning they had socially constructed. I found that the students engaged in this type of interaction without my prompts as teacher. For example, during the reading of the text *Precious and the Boo Hag*, one of the students used the word *maggot*. The following is the exchange which occurred as some students in the group struggled to make sense of this unfamiliar vocabulary.

Teacher: How many of you have heard of the Boogey Man?

All: Oooh!

S3: It's a scary mask.

S2: An ugly man.

S4: Sometimes it be on wrestling and it eat worms. It eat maggots.

S3: What's that?

S5: Worms that eat trash.

S4: They crawl all on the floor.

I saw potential in this small pilot study for bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge about language, culture, and literacy and actual practice in elementary classrooms. This study, when conducted on a larger scale, might provide insight into innovative ways teachers may use AA literature in the classroom to encourage literary meaning and conversation among students. As I gathered more feedback from my colleagues regarding the direction of this study on a larger scale, I gained useful information about the methodology that would be most appropriate to use in order to answer my research questions. While I, as an experienced teacher with cultural knowledge, familiarity with AA children's literature, and motivation to engage students in conversation about multicultural texts, was able to elicit deep and meaningful talk among children about their reading, based on my experience as a teacher of preservice teachers, I noticed that preservice teachers were not engaging students with multicultural texts in a meaningful way. I was hopeful that this research, when conducted on a larger scale for my dissertation, would introduce preservice teachers to the social and literary value of multicultural literature in the classroom.

Data Analysis

The data-gathering techniques used in this study, as stated previously, were read-aloud sessions, questionnaires, interviews, and observations. All interviews, questionnaires, and transcripts of read-aloud conversations were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcriptions

were then loaded as primary documents into Atlas-ti. Atlas-ti is a qualitative analysis tool designed to manage large sets of data. Each primary document was then coded in Atlas-ti according to an initial set of low-level codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As I analyzed the data, I continued to immerse myself in literature related to critical race theory in an attempt to deepen my interpretations. The coding process was used to fit the data into the theoretical model of the study. The coding process combined both a start list from previous research, advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994) and emergent coding, an approach suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The start list, or *a priori* codes, appear in Table 3. As I began to target specific places in the data that corresponded to my research questions, themes and commonalities emerged reflecting that preservice teachers' cultures impacted their comfort level in facilitating literary conversations with students about AA picture books and evidence of engaging around issues of race appeared.

Grounded Theory

The mode of qualitative analysis guiding this study was a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory refers to explanations from categories that emerge from collected data. Grounded theory approaches may be used to address problems that emerge out of a professional experience in the belief that a good research study might help to correct the situation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 35). In the current study, the issue of cultural awareness and sensitivity with regards to multicultural texts used by preservice teachers with elementary students, I felt, needed to be addressed in a methodological manner that might explain what factors determine the comfort level and effectiveness with which these preservice teachers might be able to use AA literature in their own classrooms.

What differentiates grounded theory from other research is that it does not test a hypothesis, but rather argues for the application of science beyond simply re-testing and re-visiting standard assumptions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The emergence of theory, as Glaser (1992) put it, is fundamental to understanding the methodology, and it is up to the researcher to discover the theory implicit in the data. Hypotheses developed through qualitative research are the building blocks between an idea the qualitative researcher has and the generation of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As such, they do not bear the burden of traditional hypotheses, i.e., the need to be proven. In other words, hypotheses generation in qualitative research requires no more than enough evidence to establish a suggestion, not evidence to establish proof.

Often referred to as “the constant comparative method of analysis” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-116) in the literature, grounded theory enables a researcher to ask questions of the data and to make comparisons that elicit new insights into the observed phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 31). Theories and hypotheses begin to be generated as the researcher works with the data, noting similar patterns and connections that emerge. These categories of data can be confirmed or disconfirmed by subsequent data. This process of theory building is dependent for its validity on the ability of the researcher to communicate to readers how the theoretical ties that are built function within the data set.

To this end, my central task in this study was two-fold: to find out if the theory which emerges fits the specific situation and conditions; and to ascertain that it works---that it helps the people in the situation to make sense of their experience. In this case, I wanted to consider all factors which might affect the read-aloud experiences of early elementary students and female preservice teachers, White or Black, from a small, Southern town while using AA literature as an instructional tool. By using two case studies, I was able to compare and contrast the read-aloud

experiences. Additionally, I believe that between-case comparison might have deepened my understanding and explanation.

Coding

“Codes” are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes are usually attached to chunks of information as large as several sentences or paragraphs, to those as small as a phrase or just a word. Codes are used to organize data and then later retrieve it. Codes pull sets of data together, thus permitting analysis. A data analysis ladder is shown in Figure 1 to give an overview of the progression of the coding process. Table 3 shows the initial coding guide used by the researcher. A complete coding guide can be found in Appendix B.

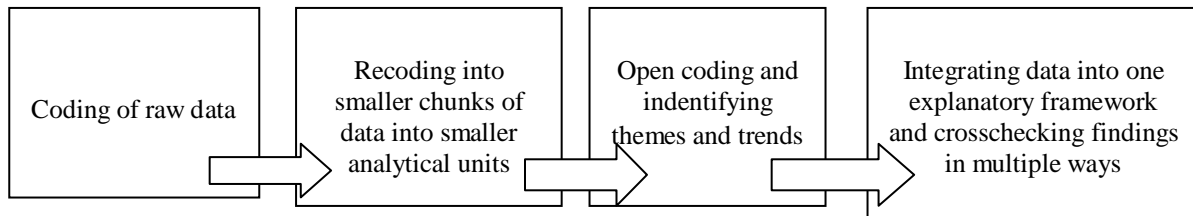


Figure 1. Data Analysis Ladder (adapted from Carney, 1990)

Phase 1

Data reduction and analysis began by coding each of the primary documents. One method of creating codes is to create start codes from the conceptual framework of the study and the research questions being addressed in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By doing an initial search of the data, I was able to locate patterns related to my research questions. I then used some themes and codes developed by a previous research study similar to mine (Wolf, S. et al., 1996) and some of my own codes to set up an initial set of codes using words and phrases to

represent these topics. These codes included: cultural awareness, intertextual connections, questions and answers, interpretation, cultural beliefs and/or biases, and comfort level.

Phase II

During this phase of coding, larger chunks of data were reduced to smaller analytical units (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Subcodes were developed at this phase in order to break down the major, initial codes. These codes were then assigned to data in a systematic fashion (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Glaser and Strauss (1967) say that categories can be borrowed from existing theory if the data and hypotheses generated are constantly examined to determine if existing theory is useful to understanding the data. To that end, I was able to use preexisting data codes from a previous research study (Wolf et al., 1996) while others emerged from careful data analysis.

Table 3.

Initial Coding Guide

Coding Categories	
Cultural Awareness	Features of language that mark preservice teachers' awareness of culture personally, within text, or among students
Textual connections	Preservice teachers' recognition of or students' ability to make intertextual connections
Questions and Answers	Kinds of questions asked by preservice teachers and students
Interpretation	Preservice teachers' perceptions of interpretation by students
Expectations	Features of language that mark preservice teachers' expectations for children and expectations for themselves as teachers

Cultural Beliefs and/or Biases	Features of language that mark preservice teachers' or students' cultural beliefs and/or biases
Comfort level	Features of language that mark preservice teachers' comfort level discussing issues of race

Phase III

The third phase in my analysis centered around a grounded theory, or constant comparative, approach. Grounded theory refers to theory developed inductively from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By reading and re-reading the data, I was able to discover categories and concepts that were interrelated. Three types of coding are utilized by grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding refers to the part of the data analysis in which labels and categories are assigned to the particular phenomena being studied. Data are then broken down by asking questions such as what, how, when, etc., and then data are compared and grouped according to similarities (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Open coding is a way of developing codes more inductively than by using predetermined codes. By not forcing data into pre-existing codes, the researcher is challenged to allow the codes to develop more progressively (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Axial coding occurs next. During this phase of coding, codes are related to each other through a process of deductive and inductive thinking by the researcher (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The codes that emerged from the data in this process are shown in Figure 2. Figure 2 provides a visual format of how the codes were connected to the initial themes. Note the hierarchical levels of the analysis. For example, *textual connections* is an a priori code used during the first phase of coding. *Text-to-text*, *text-to-self*, and *text-to-world* are sub-category codes that were created in reference to the literature and to break the data into smaller chunks.

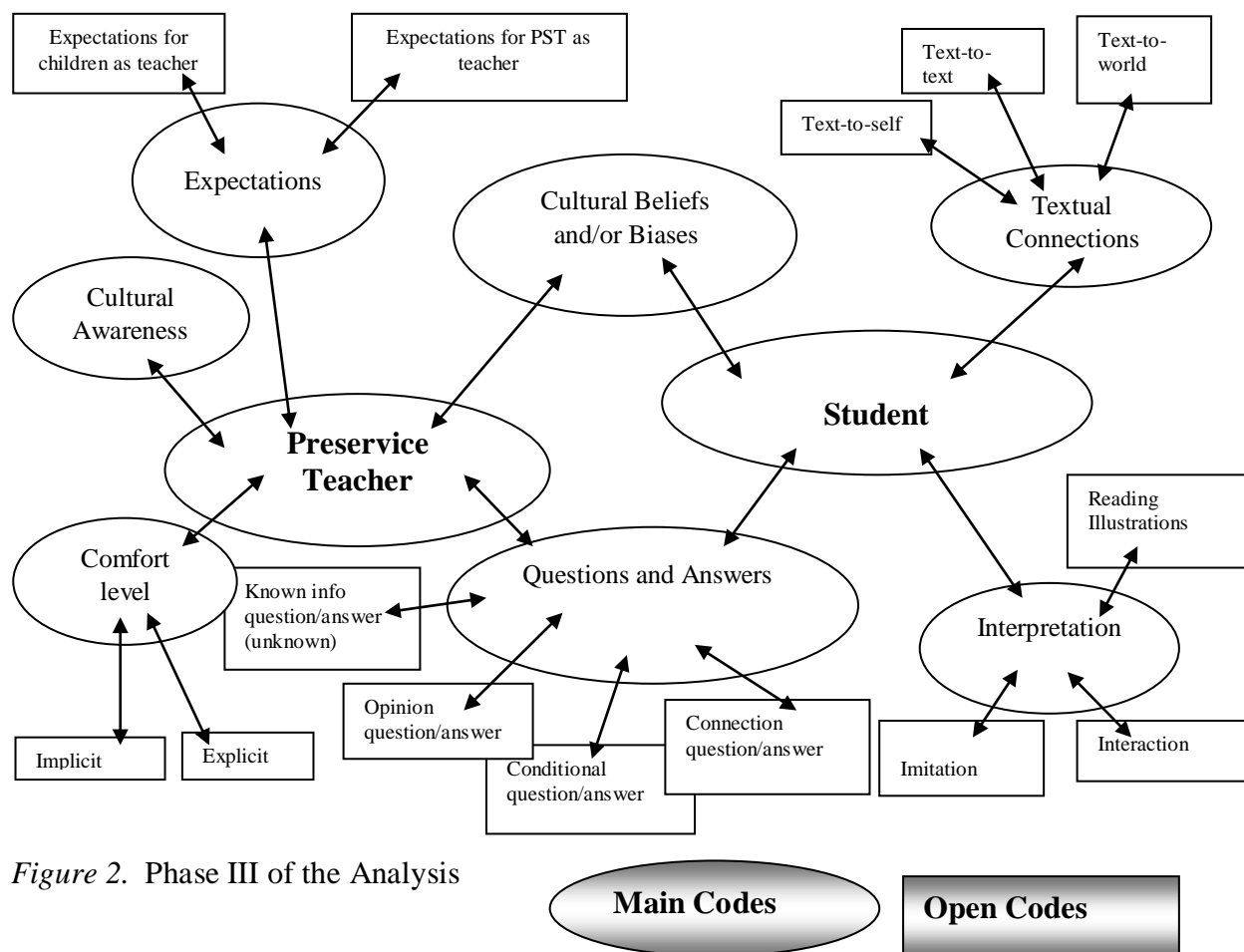


Figure 2. Phase III of the Analysis

Phase IV

Strauss (1987) suggests that coding and recoding are over when the analysis seems to have run its course. After open and axial coding was completed, a selected code was determined to produce all of the quotations associated with that code. At this step, themes and trends were identified by locating the prevalent codes in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process of choosing one category, then relating all categories to that category is called selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A code book was developed and utilized in order to complete this coding process. A total of approximately 400 separate quotations were identified and coded using the code book.

Conclusion

Multicultural literature, and particularly AA literature, may be used to address a number of state course of study standards and additionally, engage its consumers—the students—on a more personal level to deepen both their critical thinking and comprehension skills. The potential that such research holds for improving literacy levels of students from diverse cultural backgrounds and exposing future and veteran educators to the value of AA literature is immeasurable. Children of color often fail to see authentic cultural depictions of themselves in picture books, and are, therefore, further disenfranchised in the educational setting. For the aforementioned reasons and many others, the focus of this research study shifted from the careful scrutiny of AA elementary student talk to the examination of the culturally-sensitized literary conversation of preservice teachers who lack the experience and training needed to effectively teach children from multicultural backgrounds. How comfortable are novice teachers with using multicultural literature, particularly AA picture books, to meet grade level language arts standards and to engage students in meaningful literary talk about these texts?

IV. Findings

My intent, in undertaking this study, was to examine the growth and perceptions of two preservice teachers' individual abilities to use AA children's literature for reading instruction. The review of literature framed effective read-aloud practices for reading instruction in the multicultural classroom. Prior research has produced extensive findings with regards to reading instruction, reader response theory, read-alouds in the elementary classroom, AA children's literature, and preservice teacher effectiveness, but rarely have all these components been examined collectively. With an exploratory agenda, I utilized a case study design with two preservice teacher subjects, one African American and one Caucasian, to examine the following questions:

- 1.) How do preservice teachers view their ability to use AA children's literature for instructional purposes in the classroom?
- 2.) How might the cultural backgrounds of preservice teachers affect their perceived self-efficacy in teaching reading to diverse learners?
- 3.) How are preservice teachers' cultural and racial beliefs represented in their facilitation of literary conversations with elementary students as they respond to AA picture book read-alouds?

The cases presented in the following chapter will explore how the preservice teachers orchestrate and view their roles in reading instruction discourse, textual connections, and equity with regards to a multicultural pedagogy. Also, each case will examine how the race of the

preservice teacher affects the role of the student learning and the teacher’s level of comfort in discussing issues of race during read-alouds. Across analytic categories, several examples were evident in the data, consistent with previous research. However, there were a few exceptions and unexpected patterns that emerged. Excerpts from read-aloud sessions and interviews will be used to illustrate the findings.

Cases

Qualitative studies are designed to explore a concept or event and to build a theory about it (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data which are collected must be condensed, clustered, and sorted into a framework that ultimately describes the themes and relationships that emerge. I began this process by coding data. Based on previous research done by Wolf et. al. (1996), I was able to confirm themes found to be common in research regarding read-alouds with preservice teachers; I was also able to confirm emergent themes based on the case studies from which I gathered data.

As previously stated, I selected two cases for the purpose of data collection for this study. Two preservice teachers, one Black and one White, participated in this comparative study. As shown in Table 1, the participants were both single females of junior undergraduate class standing majoring in elementary education. The variables in which the participants differed were ethnicity, age, and number of children (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Preservice Teacher Demographics

Personal Variables	PST PB1	PST CN8
Gender	Female	Female
Ethnicity*	Black	White
Age*	25	21
Classification	Junior	Junior
Major	Elementary Education	Elementary Education

Marital Status	Single	Single
Children*	1	0

Note. Items accompanied with asterisks (*) denote differences among participants.

Setting

The study was conducted at an elementary school in a small, southeastern college community that housed approximately 420 students in grades one through five, the majority of which were from middle-class homes. The data segments used in this study were taken verbatim from the preservice teachers' transcriptions of read-alouds or interviews. Words in quotation marks indicate direct speech by preservice teachers or students. Words in brackets are my own, and are often there to serve as reference information or to add clarification. Each quotation is marked by the preservice teacher's code name and the gender and race of the case-study student (e.g., CN8/B/M). If quotations from the preservice teacher are included in the segment, then students will be identified by gender and race only (e.g., S3/W/F).

The code book, found in Appendix B, summarizes the analytic categories and provides definitions for each category and sub-category. In the following section, I will provide illustrative examples from the data as evidence that these themes did occur.

Coding Categories

Textual Connections

Before, during, and after reading a text, readers make connections to other texts, to their own life experiences, and to the world around them. Researchers have examined how students in elementary grades respond to literature in a variety of ways (Sipe, 2000). For this study, I examined student responses to AA literature in which the students made one of three previously

established textual connections: text-to-world, text-to-text, or text-to-self. The following offers examples of each type of textual connection from data gathered during the read-alouds.

1.1. *Text-to-world*: The child makes connections between the book being read and the world around them (life theme or event).

S1: “We have a boy in our class that says hurtful things to other kids in our class.”
(CN8/W/F)

S2: “We have chicken and waffles.” (PB1/W/M)

S1: “We have parades and stuff.” (PB1/W/M)

In some instances, preservice teachers used statements or questions to lead students to make text-to-world connections.

PB1: “Sometimes friends do tell secrets when they are not supposed to.”

PB1: “I don’t think we have brownstones, but we do have apartments that are similar to them. They are not like those in the book. How is where he lives similar to where we live?”

1.2. *Text-to-text*: The child makes connections between books previously read or books read to him or her.

S2: “I have read Bryan Collier before.” (PB1/W/M)

PB1: “So, what do you know about Bryan Collier?”

S2: “He didn’t do like real pictures, he like cut things out of magazines and stuff.”
(PB1/W/M)

It is important to note two important features of this dialogue. First, this student uses more sophisticated textual connection strategies to compare different works by the same author. There were no responses of this type by the students during the first read-aloud sessions conducted by preservice teachers, an indication that preservice teachers made significant gains in their abilities to facilitate meaningful dialogue about texts. Further, Sipe (2000) would describe this type of response as analytical, one in which students deal with text as a cultural product produced by authors, illustrators, and publishers. In such cases, students may question or

analyze the decisions and choices of authors, illustrators, or publishers. During further discussion, the student responds analytically by offering his opinion of the illustrator's choice of media.

PB1: "That is true, and he also is an African-American writer. He wrote the story and he also drew the pictures. He is the author and the illustrator of this book."

S2: "Who is that little boy on the front of the book? Is that him?" (W/M)

PB1: "I don't know if that is him or not. I think is just a little boy in the story, but you are absolutely right when you say he likes to cut and paste pictures for the story. When we read the story you can tell that some of the pictures are like cut and paste."

S2: "I don't like cut and paste." (W/M)

PB1: "I think that some people make great books with cut and paste."

1.3. *Text-to-self*: The child makes connections between the book and his or her personal life.

By far, text-to-self responses outnumbered any other textual connection response 2 to 1. Students of various races and genders were able to make connections between the characters in the text and themselves. Interestingly, preservice teachers tended to ask more leading questions to prompt students in making these types of connections. For example:

CN8: "Is there a certain color that you all wear a lot?"

S1: "No I wear all the colors." (W/F)

S3: "I wear all of the colors too, but I like to wear orange and blue." (W/M)

S2: "Why does she wear all purple?" (W/F)

CN8: "Because it's her favorite color. Do you all have a favorite color?"

S1: "I like pink!" (W/F)

S2: "I like pink and I like purple and sometimes I like green too! And even yellow! I actually like all the colors." (W/F)

S3: "I like green!" (W/M)

PB1: "So [S1], what parts of the book remind you of your own family and friends?"

S1: "I don't know." (W/M)

S2: "The part about the chicken and waffles. The church part, and sometimes me and my dad play basketball together." (W/M)

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness by the preservice teachers was most often marked by direct reference to race when reading text, responding to students, or answering interview questions. Preservice

teacher PB1 made more explicit references to race during the read-aloud sessions, explanations that may not have been evident to students in the picture book illustrations. The following is an example of such a reference.

PB1: “That is true, and he also is an African-American writer. He wrote the story and he also drew the pictures. He is the author and the illustrator of this book.”

No direct references to race were found in transcripts of read-alouds conducted by preservice teacher CN8. While the preservice teacher did exhibit growth in her ability to engage students actively with the text, she avoided topics related to race. This could be attributed to her unfamiliarity with AA culture or her comfort level with discussing issues of race, a topic that will be explored later in this chapter. Preservice teacher CN8 suggests that not only does her status as a non-member of AA race limit her knowledge, but also downplays her credibility with students in facilitating literary discussion about culturally conscious text.

CN8: “I think maybe if I was Black, they would maybe think that I had more knowledge about what I was talking about. I think I did act like I knew what I was talking about...I did kinda know what I was talking about. I just thought perhaps I would have known more if I was more a part of it.”

Questions and Answers

The types of questions asked by preservice teachers and students, as well as the types of answers given for these questions, offer insight to the thoughts and comprehension strategies utilized during storybook read-alouds.

2.1. *Known information question and Known information answer or Unknown information answer*: The preservice teachers asks, “What’s that?” and the child says, “I know.” and offers an elaboration of the response or says, “I don’t know.”

PST: “The author of this book is Nikki Grimes and the illustrator is Floyd Cooper. Who knows what the illustrator does? I know you all know what the illustrator does.”

S1: “Write, oh no draw.” (W/M)

S2: “No, draws the pictures.” (W/M)

2.2. *Opinion question and Opinion answer:* The preservice teachers asks, Why? or “What do you think about that?” and the child responds with “Because...” or “I think...”

PST: “Dorian, did it seem like she had nice friends?”

S2: “Yes.” (W/M)

S1: “Except when she blurts out the secret.” (W/M)

When posing opinion questions, the male students tended to offer opinion answers with less hesitation than girls. Neither the race of the preservice teacher nor the gender of the main characters in the texts seemed to have an effect on the boys’ eagerness to respond with their own opinions.

2.3. *Conditional question and Conditional answer:* The preservice teacher asks, “If you were in the story, what would you do?” and the child responds, “I would...”

Neither the students nor the preservice teachers offered any conditional questions and/or answers.

2.4. *Connection question and Connection answer:* The preservice teacher asks, “Have you ever...?” or “Does this remind you of some event, person, etc.?” and the child responds, “Yes. I have...” or “Yes. It reminds me of...”

Over the course of the semester, preservice teachers were able to develop higher level comprehension questioning skills which required students to think and respond more deeply to text. One of the more sophisticated lines of questioning in order to guide students to make textual connections is as follows:

PST: “How is the boy’s city different from where you live?”

S1: “They have subways and we don’t have Marta, and we don’t have that. We have brownstones.” (W/M)

PST: “I don’t think we have brownstones, but we do have apartments that are similar to them. They are not like those in the book. How is where he lives similar to where we live?”

S2: “The apartments kind of.” (W/M)

S1: “I don’t know.” (W/M)

Interpretation

Research on elementary school children's response to literature is abundant; however, much less of it concerns early elementary students younger than third grade (Sipe, 2000). These previous works rely heavily on the theoretical underpinnings of Rosenblatt's reader response theory. With many teachers having turned their focus from teacher-led to child-centered talk and personal response, a larger body of literature now exists that explores how students interpret and respond orally to texts. Further, a semiotic perspective also suggests that all the parts of a picture book not related to the narrative, such as the cover or the title page, have potential for meaning making (Higonnet, 2000). Additionally, students may respond audibly or physically to picture books read aloud to them. To that end, there were a number of examples of children's interpretations of the texts during read-aloud sessions of this study. The following are examples taken from transcripts.

6.1. *Imitation*: The child dramatizes the text imitating phrases, gestures, and/or facial expressions.

CN8: *"Purple socks and jeans and sneakers, purple ribbons for her hair. Purple shirts and slacks and sweaters, even purple underwear!"*

S2: "Eww!!!!" (W/F)

S3: "Eww!!!!" (W/M)

6.2. *Interaction*: The child interacts with the characters in the story by motioning or talking to them.

CN8: *"Then dumb old Freddy Watson called me "toothpick legs" and spit. I stared him down, and balled my fists and said, 'Okay! That's it!'"*

S1: "That's not nice!" (W/F)

More than any other interpretation, elementary students interpreted text by reading the illustrations. Both picture books, *Uptown* and *Meet Danitra Brown*, have been honored with prestigious author and illustrator awards. Students, regardless of culture or gender, used illustrations to make personal interpretations of texts during read-alouds.

6.3. *Reading illustrations*: The child uses the details, color, media, and/or mood of the illustrations to interpret the story.

PB1: “Why do you think this might be called purple?”

S2: “She has on a purple shirt.” (W/M)

Students also used illustrations to answer questions posed by the preservice teachers.

CN8: “Who knows what the brownstones are in the picture?”

S2: “Bricks.” (W/M)

S1: “The trees.” (W/M)

CN8: “No, actually they are the buildings; the apartments that look like candy bars.”

Expectations

The *expectations* category of coding, which explored features of language that mark preservice teachers’ expectations for children and expectations for themselves as teachers, was combined and subsequently deleted as several of the quotations were marked by indicators of cultural beliefs and/or biases. Rather than keep this category, I chose to explore how the expectations preservice teachers placed on themselves and their students correlated with their cultural beliefs and/or biases that may or may not exist. This is further explained in the section that follows.

Cultural Beliefs and/or Biases

According to many perspectives, racism is not a personal deviation, but rather a pervasive thought process woven into the very fabric of our society. Racism is perpetuated in subtle, symbolic ways through various media such as talk, television, and text. Likewise, talk between teachers and students in the classroom may provide an outlet for the subtleties of White privilege that are encoded in talk and texts. McIntyre (1997) referred to the absence of discourse around topics related to race as “White talk.” We are socialized not to talk about race or racism in the classroom. This curriculum of silence, as McIntyre (1997) called it, will provide messages about race and racism that will go unchallenged by teachers and students.

In a 1995 study, Barry and Lechner examined the attitudes about and awareness of aspects of multicultural teaching and learning by preservice teachers. Results indicated that most of the preservice teachers were aware of multicultural issues in teaching and anticipated having culturally diverse students in their classrooms. However, the preservice teachers indicated some reservations about the development of their abilities to teach children of different cultural backgrounds from their own during their teacher education programs. Current teacher education programs overwhelmingly integrate multicultural teaching practices in the curriculum. However, the knowledge and attitudes preservice teachers bring with them to colleges of education play a major role in their teaching practices. How might the biases and/or beliefs of preservice teachers impact their teaching of elementary students?

Data from read-aloud sessions and interviews revealed that both the students and the preservice teachers were very aware of cultural similarities and differences among the groups and among the characters in the texts. For example, PST PB1 noted that a White male student in her group indicated an awareness of racial issues discussed in the text and made a connection with the text based on his prior knowledge and experience.

PB1: “He was like, ‘Y’all always have to sit in the back; we sit in the front.’ He said, ‘All my friends are White, and we always ride in the front.’”

Both preservice teachers acknowledged there being very little cultural diversity in their small reading groups. For example, PB1 worked with two White males, while CN8’s group of students included only one Black female student. When asked about the impact the cultures of the elementary students and their own cultures might have had on conversation with students, the preservice teachers gave distinctly different responses.

CN8: “Umm, I think being White, I guess, I didn’t know that much about African American culture but we are like in the South and what not so, I think they understood

like, what happened and what like Montgomery and stuff like that when we were reading the books.”

PB1: “To me, they didn’t understand. I felt like they couldn’t relate to the stories, like rolling their eyes and brownstones, stuff like that.”

PST CN8 attributed her inability to engage the students on her own lack of knowledge, while PB1 attributed the students’ lack of understanding on their inability to relate due to their ethnicities. While both preservice teachers acknowledged that race had a significant impact on the effectiveness of their teaching, they differed in whom they placed specific emphasis, themselves or the students.

Comfort Level

Despite the fact that America is, today, is considered a “post-racial” society, race remains a taboo subject in most elementary classrooms. There is sometimes a dynamic of discomfort experienced by students when responding to books with explicit race-related themes. Preservice teachers, too, acknowledge that they will likely teach diverse populations of students, but are undecided about how well their undergraduate programs have prepared them to handle diversity in the classroom (Barry & Lechner, 1995). When determining the comfort levels of preservice teachers when discussing issues of race with students during picture book read-alouds, the following questions were used to guide inquiry:

- 1.) How do preservice teachers view their ability to use AA children’s literature for instructional purposes in the classroom?
- 2.) How might the cultural backgrounds of preservice teachers affect their perceived self-efficacy in teaching reading to diverse learners?
- 3.) How do these factors affect their perceived self-efficacy in teaching reading to diverse learners?
 - a. *In what areas did White preservice teachers seem comfortable using AA literature as a tool for teaching? In what areas did they seem uncomfortable?*

- b. *In what areas did Black preservice teachers seem comfortable using AA literature as a tool for teaching? In what areas did they seem uncomfortable?*

In exploring the nature of preservice teachers' comfort levels and describing the interpretive community which developed during these read-aloud events, it is important to note that I entered this study with some expectations. My research grew out of reader response and critical race theory. My assumptions that White preservice teachers would report difficulty using and discussing AA literature with students and Black preservice teachers would report little or no difficulty were grounded in these theories which suggest that culture plays a significant role in literacy. With that in mind, I approached this qualitative inquiry knowing that "comfort levels" and "responses" are, at best, very difficult to measure. However, I hoped to explore the interactions between the preservice teachers and the students, as well as interview responses, in order to uncover any themes or phenomena that might be present.

The preservice teachers were asked about the likelihood that they would use multicultural children's literature in their classrooms as professionals. Despite the few demographic differences between them, most notably the race of each, both preservice teachers gave similar responses to this question.

[Researcher]: "How likely are you to use multicultural literature in your classroom one day? How will the racial background of your students influence your decisions about appropriate literature for instructional purposes?"

PB1: "They need to know about all cultures. Multiculturalism is important whether they're Black, native American, or whatever. They might not think they need to know, but they do."

CN8: "I think I will consider the cultural differences in the classroom, but I would make sure we talked about all different cultures, not just African-American culture and just

make sure that, I mean, the students don't ever feel targeted or uncomfortable and just talk about...I mean it's just history, it's something they kinda have to learn about.”

While both preservice teachers recognized the value of multicultural literature in the classroom, they both emphasized the importance of celebrating diversity across numerous cultures. And although my original intent as the instructor and primary researcher was to expose preservice teachers to multicultural literature, particularly AA children's literature, in an effort to increase the likelihood of its use in the classrooms of my students, the subjects took an even greater lesson away from my study. They were able to recognize the value in and relevance of children's literature that celebrates not only the AA culture, but various cultures and their histories.

Findings also suggest that preservice teachers' comfort levels in discussing issues of race with elementary students during read-alouds of AA picture books is not dependent on the race or culture of the preservice teacher. The data for this study was coded into two separate categories, explicit and implicit. Explicit discomfort was marked by responses in which the preservice teachers stated outright that they were not comfortable using AA literature or discussing issues of race, and implicit discomfort was marked by subtle responses. For example, excessive fidgeting, laughing, or stumbling over words were all used to indicate discomfort by preservice teachers. Preservice teachers were asked the following questions during their interviews with the researcher: How comfortable did you feel using AA literature during read-alouds before your lab experience? After?

Their responses are as follows:

PB1: “I was uncomfortable because I thought, “They're White kids, so how can they relate?” I thought, at first, they couldn't connect. A lot of the preservice teachers felt uncomfortable because they don't want to teach underachieving kids

and unfortunately most of those students are minorities. They feel like they should be able to teach all White kids and not have to teach about Black culture.”

CN8: “At first when we had to do it, I was kind of a little hesitan...not hesitant, just I didn’t know how to go about it and I didn’t want to offend anyone. Umm, I knew a little bit about it, but even in the children’s stories I learned more along the way.”

Researcher: “What made you uncomfortable or hesitant at first?”

CN8: “I just didn’t want, I didn’t want the Black girl to feel like we were targeting her or talking about her or maybe she had some kind of bad experience that I didn’t know about. Umm, I guess race is a touchy subject.”

Researcher: “After?”

CN8: “I felt comfortable because, I mean, they all knew stuff before I even talked about it so it wasn’t like a brand new thing. They all seemed comfortable so...perhaps they were more comfortable than me. Well, I didn’t act weird around them or anything, but I think because they’re in second grade they didn’t look at it as a weird subject.”

The notable pattern in both responses was the explicit admission of discomfort in talking about race-related issues with the students. Additionally, PST CN8 displayed signs of discomfort in both her speech and excessive movement. Most notably, she frequently stumbled over words and phrases, a quality that was not present during read-aloud sessions, classroom discussions, or interactions with her peers. When comparing the cases, I found striking similarities between the two preservice teachers with regard to their self-efficacy in engaging the students with culturally conscious text in a meaningful way. The Black preservice teacher cited that her discomfort resulted from the fact that the students with whom she was conducting the read-aloud session were White. I noticed that she made reference to her classmates, all of whom were White females, and the fact that she felt they were uncomfortable using cultural literature because she thought they felt that “they should be able to teach all White kids and not have to teach about Black culture.” Her statement reflected the frustration that many minority women feel about the privilege that is afforded to White females and has been enculturated into our society. On many levels, even in a position of authority as the teacher of a small group of

students, PB1 was uncomfortable and less confident about her ability to lead a discussion about issues related to race or even her own culture.

Preservice teacher CN8, a White female, noted her level of comfort as low, both explicitly and implicitly. Her discomfort stemmed mostly from the presence of a Black student in her small group whom she did not want to make feel “targeted.” “I didn’t want the Black girl to feel like we were targeting her or talking about her or maybe she had some kind of bad experience that I didn’t know about. Umm, I guess race is a touchy subject. (CN8/W/F)”

Despite the fact that as a preservice teacher, CN8 received instruction and practice with literary discussions about AA picture books with children and how to facilitate comprehension and meaning-making strategies, her discomfort resulted from the presence of a minority student in her group. In analyzing this data and comparing the responses of CN8 to previous studies, I have concluded that her discomfort is a result of what I would like to term a “color-blindness value system.” In general, Whites in the U.S. have adopted a system of thought in which discussing, mentioning, calling attention to, or even noticing race is considered a negative thing. In the words of many of my students, who are overwhelmingly White females, they simply “don’t see race.” That is just not true. In fact, race is one of the first qualities we notice about others.

However, because White society and American society are intertwined, and oftentimes indistinguishable, many Whites enjoy the benefit of not having to confront racial issues except those which are presented in the media or those by which they are rarely confronted personally.

Surprisingly, not only did the White preservice teacher distance herself from talk about race when discussing the literature with children, but so did the Black teacher, to some extent. And, in the words of CN8, race is a “touchy subject” for some. It is possible that both preservice teachers’ difficulties stem from unfamiliarity, misunderstandings, or lack of personal experiences

from which to draw in discussing the literature. And then, some of the preservice teachers' discomfort may simply be a result of their limited classroom teaching experiences.

Discrimination is illegal and generally unacceptable, however, favoritism or advantage is not, and is prevalent in our "post-racial" society today. Whatever the case, silencing race in the classroom is a very dangerous and potentially harmful practice. The foundations for healthy attitudes about diversity and respect for differences start in the home, long before children enter school classrooms where those beliefs are challenged by the presence of students whose backgrounds vary greatly.

Summary

In summary, the findings of this study support previous research regarding children's literary response to picture book read-alouds (Sipe, 2000). There is a significant amount of information to be gained from careful analysis of literary discussions using critical race, sociocultural, and reader response theories as a framework for qualitative research. In contrast to my original beliefs, both preservice teachers reported some level of discomfort using multicultural literature and discussing issues of race with small groups of children. This finding suggests the need for more effective multicultural training at the undergraduate teacher education level. Despite our best efforts, in some ways we have shortchanged both teachers and the students they will encounter in their professional careers. So what's next? How might we prepare future educators at the undergraduate level to effectively instruct the diverse population of students they will likely encounter in their own classrooms?

V. Discussion

Summary

This grounded theory study sought to explore how elementary students and preservice teachers negotiate and construct meaning of AA picture books during read-alouds and how preservice teachers perceive their abilities and comfort levels using AA picture books with students. Based upon a theoretical framework that emphasizes social construction of knowledge, preservice teachers' actual read-aloud events and interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for data analysis. It was my intent that the investigation of talk from these read-alouds and interviews would provide insight and contribution to theory about preservice teachers' level of comfort discussing issues of race. The analyses of the data show that preservice teachers selected for this study reported some level of discomfort when discussing issues of race with elementary students, despite the use of children's picture books to facilitate the conversations. Teachers also became more aware of their literary talk facilitation skills, as well as issues of culture and race and their ability to engage students in meaningful talk about these issues.

Implications

Teachers are practitioners by design. As a former K-12 teacher, I recognize the immediate need for teachers to translate the findings of this study to tangible, effective classroom strategies. As important as research in the field of multicultural reading education may be, it matters most when it is disseminated and used by both practicing and preservice teachers. The need for training preservice teachers in multicultural pedagogy is overwhelming. The literature indicates that many teacher educators and preservice teachers acknowledge the importance of

multicultural education. Teacher education programs, however, have provided, at best, substandard multicultural pedagogy training. Not surprisingly, preservice teachers working in the field report feeling unprepared to tackle issues of race in the elementary classrooms (Barry & Lechner, 1995). It is important that researchers establish a set of curricular practices and training that would support broadening current teacher education practices to include multicultural pedagogy.

Considerations for Preservice Teachers and Teacher Educators

Prior research indicates that multicultural frameworks are central to most of the research regarding culturally sensitive practices in education (Helms, 1990). However, these principles are often not integrated into the pedagogical styles of teacher educators. Training and support for teacher educators is critical for the changes that should and will take place in K-12 classrooms throughout the U.S. Additionally, the integration of multicultural frameworks must occur in all areas of teacher education, and not be limited to specific times or courses. Typically, the broadening of educational principles and ideas occurs in courses designed specifically for diversity in education, and these courses typically cover a wide array of topics from special education to feminism. While there is significant value in these courses, true theoretical shifts will occur when multicultural competency discourse appears in courses outside of the typical realm of diversity training.

The function of this portion of this chapter is to examine what effect the cultural backgrounds of preservice teachers might have on their abilities, both perceived and actual, to facilitate conversations about race using AA picture books. The conclusions from this study have widespread implications for multicultural discourse and pedagogy training. As a result, the findings of this study provided practical implications with the potential for ultimately altering the

multicultural practices of both teacher educators and preservice teachers. The following table offers considerations for both teacher educators and preservice teachers when implementing multicultural training in the classroom, especially those programs that prepare preservice teachers to include multicultural literature in their classroom curriculums.

Table 4.

Considerations for Preservice Teachers and Teacher Educators

Teacher Educators Should Consider:	Preservice Teachers Should Consider:
Integrating culturally sensitive pedagogical styles into training practices	Honest discourse with self and others about thoughts, prejudices, beliefs, etc.
Inviting students to change-Discontinue oppressive styles of requiring engagement	Integration of power/oppression into consciousness
Appreciate all levels of respectful commentary and openness	Awareness of personal biases and how such ideas may impact interactions with elementary students
Including discourse about race and diversity in teacher education courses, especially those not traditionally designed to integrate multiculturalism	Diverse mediums of learning that display and celebrate cultural diversity

Considerations for Teacher Educators

Integrating culturally sensitive pedagogical styles into training practices

Multicultural education is less a thing than a process, rooted in our traditional notions of schooling, all the while challenging our conventional notions of what education should be. By definition, multicultural education argues against the claims of universality and objectivity in

knowledge. Rather, it recognizes the particular standpoints of the knower and the known as grounded in historical, social, and cultural standpoints. With that in mind, it is imperative that teacher educators infuse into their training practices the impact that culture plays in education, especially literacy development.

Books about African Americans are often neither written nor illustrated by African Americans. In fact, prior to Nancy Larrick's ground breaking commentary "The All-White World of Children's Books," very little attention was given to representation of African Americans in books written for children (1965). As teacher educators, it is important that we model best practices with our undergraduate students in the hopes that they will replicate these practices in their elementary classrooms. The images of African Americans in the diaspora are broad, therefore, we must present preservice teachers with positive, factual, relevant images of people of color so that they will be equipped to provide those same experiences for elementary students. The portrayal of minorities in the media is not often positive. However, teachers have the unique privilege of presenting students with a range of values and lifestyles representative of people of color through the use of culturally conscious literature. In addition to access to these materials, preservice teachers require training and practice using them. This type of training occurs during practicum experiences in local elementary schools, after-school care programs, and through various community service organizations. It is the responsibility of teacher educators to make these experiences available to future teachers.

Inviting students to change-Discontinue oppressive styles of requiring engagement

Preservice teachers need opportunities to engage in conversations about race and culture during their undergraduate studies so that they might be aware of the possible educational, philosophical, and cultural deposits they are capable of making in young learners. Race is a part

of our culture, therefore, students need time to consider their own positions within a social context. The color-blind approach is less accurate than a multicultural approach that gives validity to disenfranchised or minority groups.

One of the ways in which I used my undergraduate elementary reading methods course as a platform for discourse was by selecting award-winning culturally conscious literature for preservice teachers to read. What I have found is that at the end of the course, many of the students, regardless of race, note that the inclusion of diverse literature and frank, honest discussions about race are powerful and helpful for them. Many of them note they have had no discussions of race, diversity, or multiculturalism during their undergraduate programs. I feel that by exposing preservice teachers to various cultures through literature, they become more aware of their attitudes and biases and how these may affect young learners. Responsiveness is driven by exposure and self-awareness; if I help these future educators become more aware of their racial selves, they may develop a pedagogy of cultural sensitivity and responsiveness that impacts the lives of children many years from now.

Appreciate all levels of respectful commentary and openness

Teacher educators must be receptive to open dialogue that stretches ideological and epistemological boundaries. In order for preservice teachers to develop a level of comfort in discussing issues of race, they must have several opportunities in their teacher education programs to express their views without fear. Every culture is marked by radically diverse intellectual levels, social structures, and cultural norms; conversation about contemporary African-American culture can be complex, to say the least. When preservice teachers ask pointed questions about hairstyles of African-American females—like many of the styles I wear myself—I happily answer them. I talk frankly about cultural differences in such areas as art,

music, dialect, and fashion. However, I am not afraid to engage preservice teachers in conversation about weightier issues such as politics, segregation, religion, and discrimination. By encouraging students to fearlessly break out of linear, absolutist views of their cultural selves, and inviting them to discuss openly what makes each of them unique within their own cultural subgroup, we empower future teachers to have that same effect on the generation of elementary students they will teach.

Including discourse about race and diversity in teacher education courses, especially those not traditionally designed to integrate multiculturalism

Preservice teachers acknowledge their awareness of cultural diversity in schools, despite the absence of adequate training in their undergraduate programs to effectively teach in multicultural classrooms (Barry & Lechner, 1995). Still today, preservice teachers are unsure about how well developed their skills are in dealing with children whose backgrounds differ from their own. Acknowledging the cultural diversity that exists in U.S. classrooms is very different from being confident in one's abilities to deliver effective instruction in these classrooms.

A single course during undergraduate education programs will simply not do. There must be a comprehensive, long-term commitment to training preservice teachers for the diverse classrooms in which they will teach. Perhaps the inclusion of frank discussions about race in all required undergraduate education courses, such as reading methods, will create a climate in which multicultural ideologies may flourish. Additionally, literature-based curricula and collaborative learning emphasize the importance of individual student backgrounds, languages, and cultures and their impact on student learning. Literacy is no longer viewed as an individual

process, but rather a family affair, in which the parents are active partners in the literary learning process.

As a teacher educator, I recognize the importance of comprehensive multicultural training in teacher education courses. Though my experience is limited to elementary and early childhood reading, literature, math, and science courses, I made a personal decision, many years ago, to infuse concepts related to multicultural education in all the courses I taught. My personal decision to design my course curricula in that way was, in the beginning, made based on what I perceived to be a simple case of needs. However, it became clear to me, as I gathered feedback from undergraduate students, that they lacked power and confidence in teaching about cultures other than their own. The first step in overcoming those fears occurs long before these future teachers enter elementary classrooms; it begins in their teacher education programs. It begins with teacher educators. It begins with me.

Considerations for Preservice Teachers

Honest discourse with self and others about thoughts, prejudices, beliefs, etc.

While it is important for teacher educators to provide a supportive environment for racial discourse in the classroom, it is equally important for preservice teachers to provide the same level of support in the elementary classroom. From a young age, children, like adults, notice differences. Rather than not acknowledging that these differences exist, preservice teachers should be encouraged to guide the understanding of young students through open discourse. Young students need an opportunity to explore their issues and beliefs without fear of judgment or prejudice. Preservice teachers should be made aware of their possible benefit to students as they provide positive diversity experiences. Ladson-Billings (2000) called for the incorporation of culturally relevant pedagogy—a method by which teachers blend home and community

experiences into their teaching practices. This method affirms AA children's cultural identities and allows them an opportunity to embrace themselves in a positive light. School-based knowledge is important, but by utilizing and incorporating home- and community-based culture into student learning, teachers develop the "whole child" and encourage high academic achievement.

Teachers who are successful in educating minority and low socioeconomic status students know the importance of linking their instructional practices with the realities children face in their lives outside schools. It is a very delicate, intricate process, and requires extreme care for both students and their families. Preservice teachers need opportunities during their teacher education programs to have honest discussions about their own socialization beliefs, educational values, cultural practices, and how those may differ from those of the students they will one day educate. The obligation for future teachers is not to become experts, but rather to become familiar, concerned consumers of the worlds and contexts from which their elementary students arrive at school.

Integration of power/oppression into consciousness

The theoretical foundations for a large part of the implications from this study are based on Critical Race Theory (CRT) which proposes that racism is normal and characteristic in American society. And because this racism is such an integral part of our society, it appears ordinary and natural to those individuals who are privileged to be members of the culturally normal group. CRT provides an alternate way to analyze and critique current practices in schooling and educational equity (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Reconsideration of these representations in light of consideration of race, power relations, and socioeconomic statuses is essential. Preservice teachers, specifically those of Caucasian

backgrounds, must gain the trust of minority students by creating a non-hierarchical learning structure. It is possible to reshape the power relationship of teacher/student and White/minority, but this process must be carried out carefully and strategically. White teachers, especially, must take stock in, and responsibility for, their legacy of oppression, either directly or through passive acceptance of racist practices. Helms (1995) describes White racial identity development as the process by which one becomes conscious of unearned privilege in society, does an honest self-examination of his or her role in maintaining the status quo, and ends with an identity perspective characterized by one's self-awareness and commitment to social justice for all. In summary, the development process requires that in the end, individuals accept their status as White persons in a racist society and define their identity in nonracist terms. This process involves movement on a continuum that may uncover deep-rooted beliefs, assumptions, or ideas. Ideologies are challenged; traditions are exposed. Ultimately, the goal is for teachers, especially those of Caucasian heritage, to come to terms with both their own racial identities and how they are viewed by their students of color. Racial identities relate to sense of self, comfort with one's own racial group, and comfort with persons of diverse racial groups. As our classrooms become more diverse, so, too, will the needs of our students. To that end, it is imperative that we prepare preservice teachers to be reflective, culturally conscious facilitators of learning.

Awareness of personal biases and how such ideas may impact interactions with elementary students

It has been said that "hindsight provides clarity." In the world of education, especially reading, there is little room for backpedalling. Reflection? Yes. Reexamination? Certainly. There is also a need for honest introspection with regard to personal biases by preservice teachers. In order avoid further marginalizing minority students, preservice teachers of all races

and cultures must be given the opportunity to acknowledge their own prejudices. White preservice teachers exercise conservative multiculturalism, often marked by the words “*I don’t see color,*” as a means by which to disavow racism and prejudice without fully acknowledging the power or privilege they enjoy as members of the dominant class. Moreover, multicultural education has taken on a more widespread appeal which includes students seeing representations of various groups in their texts, but how these groups are represented may be marginalizing or may perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes. Several programs and organizations cater to the needs of individual groups such as African Americans, Native Americans, gays, disabled, and other identified groups. However, these groups typically operate in practical isolation from each other while White middle-class norms are rarely called into question.

Research continues to show that avoiding taboo subjects, such as race, can lead to neglecting racial and social disparities or even perpetuating those disparities. However, for many White teachers, there is a high penalty for approaching the topic of race, especially in high-poverty, inner-city schools. In an age of layoffs and budget cuts, it is not hard to understand the hesitation of teachers, regardless of their own culture, to tackle issues of diversity in the classroom. Another barrier to racial dialogue is the perception of America as a “post-racial” society, especially in the wake of the 2008 presidential campaign, and ultimately the inauguration of America’s first Black president in U.S. history, President Barack Obama. The term has, in some ways, become a buzz word for the notion that American has completely moved beyond its past indiscretions towards minorities and immigrants. All teachers, regardless of race, should be equipped with training which allows them to, at the very least, validate, the experiences of their students of color. While these topics may be difficult to tackle, they are most important in moving us closer towards a truly “post-racial” American culture.

Diverse mediums of learning that display and celebrate cultural diversity

Sims (1982) categorized children's literature that merely colored in the faces of the characters while maintaining a story line that gave no indication of the characters' cultures, races, or experiences as "culturally neutral." Ezra Jack Keats's *The Snowy Day* and *Whistle for Willie* are perfect examples of such books. While the Keats's goal may have been an honest universal one in which racial identity is not important to the story line, oftentimes this blatant cultural neutrality serves to further disenfranchise students of color rendering them "cultureless." Nikki Grimes's *Meet Danitra Brown* and Bryan Collier's *Uptown* both clearly culturally conscious texts, representing the diversity of African-American culture in unique, positive story lines. Not only are these picture books culturally specific, but they are also universally appealing children's literature.

Frequently, even when historical figures of color are included in the curriculum, the significance of their roles are minimized or their characters are mythologized. It is important that teachers, in selecting literature featuring historical figures of color, be careful to select texts in which the significance or importance of these historical figures is not distorted or muted. Counternarratives are important, but rarely seen, in the curriculum. Rosa Parks' portrayal as a tired seamstress rather than a lifelong community activist is a distortion. Martin Luther King's historical portrayal as a folk hero loved by all "good" Americans, rather than the FBI's number one target who challenged economic injustice is also a distortion of history (Dyson, 2000).

Students' access to high-quality, culturally conscious literature is restricted, especially when those students do not belong to the social, cultural, or economic mainstream. The entitlement to rights of disposition by some students is seldom afforded to students of color or students whose socio-economic statuses are different from the norm. Low-income schools

typically lack the resources, funding, and highly-qualified teachers available to students whose parents are members of higher income brackets. High-quality teaching that is reflective and sensitive to the needs of these students beyond the watered-down, test-driven standard curriculum, is critical to these underserved schools and communities. My goal as a teacher educator is to present to my students a critical pedagogy—one that seeks to expand those practices deemed best and to implement those which involve student engagement, hands-on experiences, collaborative learning, technological access, and meaningful instruction. This pedagogy requires me, as a teacher educator, to negotiate and transform my own personal beliefs about classroom teaching, the acquisition of knowledge, and the social norms of schooling.

Limitations

My interpretation of theory and phenomenon is grounded in my observations, background knowledge, and, inevitably, my experiences. The problem of interpretation in qualitative research, what Peshkin (2000) called “metanarrative reflections,” is that qualitative researchers often fail to reveal how their identities in situations intertwine with their understanding of the object in the investigation. Peshkin further explains that “the researcher’s orientation and the definition of the situation cannot help but have ramifications for the way people are treated or thought of” (p. 5). Therefore, as the primary investigator and teacher, I must consider the degree to which my interactions, culture, and superior position influenced my interpretation of the preservice teachers’ and students’ responses. As a qualitative researcher, I am forced to consider and reconsider how my current state of knowledge and my experiences might influence my interpretations of the world around me. Peshkin urges qualitative researchers to develop a reflective awareness and be forthcoming and honest about how they work (2000). Perfection is an unattainable goal; we strive to simply be good enough.

In retrospect, there were a number of validation strategies that I might have considered employing in order to strengthen the validity of my study. Prolonged engagement in the field, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), might have provided a greater level of depth in this study. I did clarify the bias that may exist in my interpretation of the data as the primary researcher and course instructor. My proximity to the subjects, along with my position of authority as the instructor, may have impacted the truthfulness or full disclosure in their interviews. For example, as a Black female and the preservice teachers' former instructor, any reluctance of the participants to have responded negatively to questions regarding multiculturalism or diversity would not have been surprising.

Another validation strategy that I might have utilized is called member checking, a term used to describe the process of soliciting feedback from the respondents on my findings. Follow-up interviews, more prolonged engagement in the field, and longitudinal studies may provide more understanding of, not only preservice teachers' predictions about their professional practices, but also the strategies that they actually use in their classrooms. Revisiting the classrooms of these former preservice teachers may provide very useful data about their actual practices with regards to the use of literature in their classrooms.

The rigor of my research study may have also been enhanced by the inclusion of more extensive interrater reliability strategies. I only used one rater, outside my field, with which I compared my findings. The rater and I found a limited number of discrepancies in our coding decisions. However, the use of multiple raters, both inside and outside my field of research, may have been a more effective strategy.

I would certainly not assert the generalizability of the results of this study. On the contrary, I believe this study illustrates a "snapshot" in time; not an indication of what any

particular student might do in a similar situation. The objective of this study was to examine the preservice teachers' levels of comfort, but from a practical standpoint, it is not possible to take into consideration all factors that might have influenced their levels of comfort. The theoretical lens through which I chose, as the researcher, to view the phenomenon that occurred is one of countless others that might be used to examine storybook read-alouds of AA picture books.

Future Research

For future studies, additional significant findings could result from examining the preservice teacher responses and conducting follow-up interviews with them. This study lends itself to a longitudinal framework in which these former preservice teachers are revisited over the course of their professional careers in order to examine their attitudes, comfort levels, and actual use of multicultural literature in their classrooms. The geographical location of the study, southeastern United States, also impacted the results, and selecting subjects who represent a wider geographical scope of the U.S. might result in even more informative findings. For example, how might preservice teachers serving in less culturally diverse demographic locations view their abilities and comfort levels with using AA picture books? How might preservice teachers serving in low-income urban schools view their abilities and levels of comfort?

Future studies might also utilize mixed-methods approaches. For example, do elementary students engage in more verbal text responses during the first or final read-alouds? Also, using a previous study done by Hall (2008) as a framework, there is much information to be gained from examining teachers' actual read-aloud practices and quantifying those results. Still there exists the possibility of using some type of Likert scale questionnaire to gather information from teachers across grade levels, cultures, geographic locations, experience, etc.

The Multicultural Attitude Questionnaire, developed by Barry and Lechner (1995), can be used as a data gathering tool for which the results might be interpreted quantitatively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all of these suggestions and methods will likely not change the status or history of our country's institutional racism. Acknowledgement of its existence is the first step in moving beyond racial barriers and meeting the needs of diverse populations of students. We are not responsible for the institution of racism. However, as elementary educators, our role in the discontinuation of social and educational injustices is critical. The lives and education of a generation are at stake, and we, the educators, are instrumental in shaping those into rich, diverse contributors to society. Our charge is to carefully consider those taboo topics, provide a safe, inviting platform for their discussion, and then implement beneficial professional practices. By exposing preservice teachers to the wealth and benefits of multicultural literature, teacher educators are significantly impacting the literary practices of American elementary classrooms. Ultimately, I believe the goal of all educators, at every level, is simple—to create a nation of lifelong readers. Books, especially those written specifically for our most impressionable citizens, the youth, have the potential to enlighten, engage, inform, and foster a generation of culturally sensitive consumers of literature.

In summary, we, as teachers, are not teaching great books; we are cultivating lifelong readers. Literacy is the great equalizer among men, beyond all other measures. The author Maya Angelou once said, "Any book that helps a child to form a habit of reading, to make reading one of his deep and continuing needs, is good for him." And not to be outdone, by the quintessential children's book author, Dr. Seuss: "The more you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

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Appendix A

Directions for Transcripts and Final Reflections

CTRD 3700 Fundamentals of Language and Literacy Instruction

Read-aloud Sessions with Children in Auburn City Schools (ACS)

1. Before class, make sure you have a tape-recording device and a blank tape that you can record on one side for at least forty minutes if the device is not digital.
2. Arrive at the ACS where you are doing your field experience 15 minutes early for preparation time. You will be given a picture book and lesson plan (brought by the CTRD 3700 instructor) to preview and read yourself as well as time to prepare for reading the book aloud to a group of students selected by the teacher with whom you will be working this semester.
3. Meet your students and read the book out loud to them. Use a tape or digital recording device to record the instructional conversation that takes place before, during, and after the book is read.
4. When the read-aloud and all discussions are completed, return the students to their teacher and meet your CTRD 3700 instructor for any additional information about the field experience.
5. After class, use the tape or digitally recorded lesson to transcribe the read-aloud and record all verbal exchanges between the ACS students and you, the teacher and reader, in a Microsoft Word file. The following codes will be used to identify ethnicity of ACS students: White-W; African-American-B; Hispanic-H; Asian-A; Other or Unknown-O

Read-aloud on _____ Preservice Teacher's (PST) Code Number/Name:

PST Talk: Black

Student 1/Ethnicity/Gender: red

Student 2/Ethnicity/Gender: blue

Student 3/Ethnicity/Gender: green

Student 4/Ethnicity/Gender: magenta

6. Please save the transcripts of the full conversation for your read-alouds as Word documents in Rich Text Format (.rtf). Use the code number assigned to you and add 1sp08 to name the file. If, for example, Emily King (pseudonym) is a student in the Spring 2008 CTRD 3700 class, she may be assigned the code number *seven*. The name, then of Emily's file for her first transcript would be **seven1sp08.rtf** (with no spaces).
7. Send your file, as an attachment, to the course instructor at huntecl@auburn.edu. Be sure to make a paper copy because you will need it to complete the Final Reflection at the end of the semester. Transcript due dates are: _____, _____, and _____.

(Directions for Transcripts 2 and 3 are the same as directions for Transcript 1 except that the digit 2 or 3 will replace 1 in the file name.)

CTRD 3700-Guidelines for the Final Reflection

The final paper provides documentation of your professional growth as a teacher of reading and reading comprehension in three basic areas:

- (1) Explaining and modeling the comprehension of skillful readers**
- (2) Facilitating text-based instructional conversations that teach independent reading skills and strategies**
- (3) Thoughtfully adapting instruction based on student learning**

The assignment requires you to analyze data on your performance throughout the semester and to write evaluations of your ability to use instructional conversations to TEACH (not assess) comprehension, help students accomplish standards-based learning goals, and thoughtfully adapt instruction according to students' needs and the performance they demonstrate.

Use the following format and order for the required components of your paper:

- **Introduction with statements about what you knew and wanted to learn about using instructional conversations as tools for teaching reading at the beginning of the semester**
- **Three well-developed sections with one or more paragraphs that address all items in Parts 1, 2, and 3 below. Begin each section by clearly stating the topic for that Part and how it relates to what you said you knew and wanted to learn in the introduction. Then, identify three ways that you have grown on that dimension by using *examples* and *research* to provide evidence of your professional growth as an effective teacher of reading. End each section with conclusions related to what you learned about that dimension of teaching reading and reading comprehension using instructional conversations about texts. Your printed packet with notes on Skillful Readers and Comprehension and Vocabulary Instruction and articles (such as "In Pursuit of an Illusion..." on thoughtfully adapting instruction, for example) and the textbook, *Literacy for the 21st Century* (Tompkins, 2006), will be helpful resources for completing Parts 1, 2, and 3.
BE SURE to include in each of the three sections relevant information about *what the***

research says. Also, illustrate understanding and growth using clear and specific examples of your interactions with students (use authentic examples from your data to support and provide evidence of your claims).

- **Conclusion with insights and additional questions about teaching comprehension and the other components of reading (phoneme awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary) using instructional conversations about texts.**

Part 1 – Explaining and modeling the comprehension of skillful readers

Examine the data in the two transcriptions that record your conversations as you read text aloud to students at the beginning and end of the semester. Compare and contrast the instructional conversations for the two read-alouds as you respond to the following questions: What evidence shows that I have increased my skill in explaining and modeling the comprehension strategies performed by skillful readers? How did these explanations and models affect student learning and their use of comprehension strategies? Base your analysis both on your data and on what the research says about the comprehension of skillful readers and the text factors that affect comprehension.

Part 2 – Facilitating instructional conversations about text

Use data from the full transcripts of the two conversations during interactive read-alouds to compare and contrast the first and final conversations as you respond to the following question: What evidence indicates that I have increased my skill for prompting and focusing instructional conversations about text in ways that positively affect and/or accelerate students' learning from reading and performance of reading skills and comprehension strategies specified as learning goals in state Standards for English Language Arts? Base the analysis on your data and what research says about instructional conversations being more effective if they are in-depth discussions leading to thoughtful comprehension and understandings about big ideas rather than interrogations for facts and details.

Part 3 – Thoughtfully adapting instruction

Study the two full transcripts of interactive read-alouds and your evaluations and reflections for weekly lesson plans and transcribed segments of instructional conversations completed throughout the semester. Use this data to respond to the following questions: What evidence exists that I have increased my ability to thoughtfully adapt instruction based on students' performance (or inability to perform). How did the adaptations better meet students' instructional needs? What evidence shows that the adaptations increased student learning? Base your analysis on your data and what the research says about the thoughtfulness and adaptability of effective teachers.

*****Limit each part of the paper to a MAXIMUM of one single-spaced, typed page (I would expect a final paper that is single spaced to be between 4-5 pages). Include copies of the collected data (copies of your read-alouds, full transcripts, and weekly transcripts) for Parts 1, 2, & 3 in an appendix. I am not requiring a reference page but you do need to discuss research and/or research-based recommendations and credit the researchers responsible within the body of the paper.*****

Evaluation Criteria

Required Components			
Introduction			5 points
Pertinent, Cohesive Content for Introduction, Parts (1, 2, 3), and Conclusion			5 points
Conclusion			5 points
Copies of Full Transcripts (first and final)			5 points
Copies of All Weekly Transcripts			5 points
Part 1: Explaining and Modeling the Comprehension of Skillful Readers			
Topic and Concluding Sentences	7 points		
Research Base			7 points
Specific Examples			7 points
Part 2: Facilitating Instructional Conversations about Text			
Topic and Concluding Sentences			7 points
Research Base			7 points
Specific Examples			7 points
Part 3: Thoughtfully Adapting Instruction			
Topic and Concluding Sentences	7 points		
Research Base			7 points
Specific Examples			7 points
Additional Criteria			
Overall Organization and Appropriate Length			6 points
Editing (correct all semantic, syntactic, punctuation, and spelling errors)			6 points

TOTAL POINTS

100

ORGANIZATION OF PAPER AND SUPPORTING MATERIALS

The top of the first page of the paper should have the following information.

Title: Final Paper for CTRD 3700, Instructor: Cheron N. Hunter

Your Name:

Due Date:

DO NOT PLACE YOUR PAPER IN A FOLDER OF ANY KIND! You will have four separate STAPLED sections. Make sure that each has your name on it, and clip them together in the following order: (1) Paper, (2) First Full Transcript, (3) Second Full Transcript, and (4) Final Full Transcript.

ALSO E-MAIL ME AN ELECTRONIC COPY OF THE PAPER (huntec1@auburn.edu) OR 10 POINTS WILL BE DEDUCTED FROM YOUR GRADE.

The late penalty for the paper is 5 points per day even if an excused absence occurs on the due date. A paper is considered late if it is not turned in by_____.

Appendix B
Code Book

CODE BOOK

Analysis categories for preservice teachers' growth in facilitating literary conversation about AA picture books

1. Textual connections

Preservice teachers' recognition of or students' ability to make intertextual connections

1.1. *Text-to-world*: The child makes connections between the book being read and the world around them (life theme or event).

1.2. *Text-to-text*: The child makes connections between books previously read or books read to him or her.

1.3. *Text-to-self*: The child makes connections between the book and his or her personal life.

2. Questions and answers

Kinds of questions asked by preservice teachers and students

2.1. *Known information question and Known information answer or Unknown information answer*: The preservice teachers asks, "What's that?" and the child says, "I know." and offers an elaboration of the response or says, "I don't know."*

2.2. *Opinion question and Opinion answer*: The preservice teachers asks, Why? or "What do you think about that" and the child responds with "Because..." or "I think..."

2.3. *Conditional question and Conditional answer*: The preservice teacher asks, "If you were in the story, what would you do?" and the child responds, "I would..."

2.4. *Connection question and Connection answer*: The preservice teacher asks, "Have you ever...?" or "Does this remind you of some event, person, etc.?" and the child responds, "Yes. I have..." or "Yes. It reminds me of..."

3. Comfort level*

Features of language that mark preservice teachers' comfort level discussing issues of race

3.1. *Explicit*: The preservice teacher states, "I am comfortable," or "I am uncomfortable"

3.2. *Implicit*: The preservice teacher expresses comfort or discomfort through actions, gestures, laughter, or any other verbal expression except explicit statement.

4. Cultural awareness*

Features of language that mark preservice teachers' awareness of culture personally, within text, or among students

4.1. *Explicit*: The preservice teacher makes direct reference to the race of the author of the book, characters in the book, or students in the group.

4.2. *Implicit*: The preservice teacher makes indirect reference to the race of the author or the book, characters in the book, or students in the group.

5. Cultural beliefs and/or biases*

Features of language that mark preservice teachers' or students' cultural beliefs and/or biases

5.1. *Teacher*: Features of language that mark preservice teacher's cultural beliefs and/or biases

5.2. *Student*: Features of language that mark student's cultural beliefs and/or biases

6. Interpretation

Preservice teachers' perceptions of interpretation by students

6.1. *Imitation*: The child dramatizes the text imitating phrases, gestures, and/or facial expressions.

6.2. *Interaction*: The child interacts with the characters in the story by motioning or talking to them.

6.3. *Reading illustrations*: The child uses the details, color, media, and/or mood of the illustrations to interpret the story.

7. Expectations

Features of language that mark preservice teachers' expectations for children and expectations for themselves as teachers

7.1. *Expectations for children as teacher*: The preservice teacher comments on what the children taught him or her through their response to literature.

7.2. *Expectations for PST as teacher*: The preservice teacher comments on his or her own role as a teacher of literature.

*"I don't know" is an answer that could be applied to any of the question types.

**Code book developed, in part, from Wolf, S. et al. (1996) "What is this literachurch stuff anyway?": Preservice teachers' growth in understanding children's literary response. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 31 (2), 130-157.

Appendix C
Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT

Understanding How Elementary Students Use Their Culture to Make Literary Meaning of African-American Literature

You are invited to participate in a research study that focuses on the effects of using African-American literature to foster literary meaning in the elementary classroom. I, Cheron N. Hunter, Ed.S., the instructor of CTRD 3700 Fundamentals of Language and Literacy Instruction I and a doctoral student in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Auburn University, will be the principal investigator. I hope to learn more about how to promote literary talk and comprehension among elementary students using African-American literature. This research will be used to complete my dissertation.

If you decide to participate, I am requesting that you grant me permission to make and analyze copies of the Transcripts and Final Reflection that you will produce in CTRD 3700. Your participation does not require any time beyond the required completion of these assignments. Your assignments will be graded using the guidelines and criteria in the course syllabus.

The only risks that you may encounter related to participation in this study are coercion and breach of confidentiality. I have attempted to minimize or eliminate the risk of coercion by assuring you verbally, and now in writing, that your grade in CTRD 3700 will not be affected by your decision to contribute copies of your Transcripts and Final Reflection to the data base for this study. I will not be aware of your decision to participate or not until after final grades for the semester have been assigned.

I have attempted to minimize or eliminate the risk of breaching confidentiality in several ways. Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with your name will remain confidential. To keep sets of your individual work in Transcripts and the Final Reflection intact for comparisons and analysis, a numerical coding system will be used to ensure anonymity. When each item of your work samples is numerically coded, your name will be removed. The anonymous data will be analyzed, and results may be published in a dissertation, a professional journal, and/or presented at a professional meeting; however, no identifiable information will be included.

Although you may not experience any direct benefits from this study, I hope that future preservice teachers and students will benefit from its findings by increasing their awareness and appreciation of the diversity that exists in the elementary classroom and the need for various types of literature and instruction to meet the needs of all students.

Participant Initials _____

Page 1 of 2

Appendix D

Sample Final Transcript

PST LB2

Directions: Color code each part of the conversation using the system below. Use your last name as the file name and, in Microsoft Word, click on Save As and select Rich Text Format as the type of file. Post an electronic copy of the transcript on the WebCT Discussion Board. On the discussion Board, click on Transcript #1, go to Compose Message, and send the file as an attachment because it will probably be too large to copy and paste into the Message box. Bring a printed copy to class.

Preservice Teacher's (PST) Name: LB2

Colors and Codes- Record names below. You may use only the Codes PST:, **S1:**, **S4:**, etc. to identify the speakers when you insert the conversations into the story text. Keep all the story text in italics and put the comments for you and students in with no italics. Hit Return and leave a line between each comment and between the text and comments.

PST: Your Name

S1: student's first name and initial for last name: Skye-WF

S2: student's first name and initial for last name: Camryn-WF

S3: student's first name and initial for last name: Alexis-BF

S4: student's first name and initial for last name: Camille

Meet Danitra Brown

By Nikki Grimes

You Oughta Meet Danitra Brown

*You oughta meet Danitra Brown,
the most splendiferous girl in town.
I oughta know, 'cause she's my friend.*

*She's not afraid to take a dare.
If something's hard, she doesn't care.
She'll try her best, no matter what.*

*She doesn't mind what people say.
She always does things her own way.
Her spirit's old, my mom once said.*

*I only know I like her best
'cause she sticks out from all the rest.
She's only she – Danitra Brown.*

S1: Which one is her?

PST: I don't know which one is her?

S3: Go back to the front cover.

S2: That one is her, with the glasses.

Jump Rope Rhyme

*Zuri Jackson. That's my name.
Count to three, it's still the same.
Turn the rope and watch me spin.
Quick, Danitra! Jump on in!*
PST: What are they talking about?

S3: Jumping Rope.

Coke-bottle Brown

*Dumb old Freddy Watson called my friend "Coke-bottle Brown."
(So what if her bifocals are big and thick and round?)
"Pay him no never mind, Zuri," is what Danitra said,
then hands on hips, she turned away and lifted up her head.*

*"Me, Danitra Brown, I've got no time for Freddy's mess.
Let him call me silly names, 'cause I could not care less.
Can't waste time on some boy who thinks it's funny bein' mean.
Got books to read and hills to climb that Freddy's never seen."*

*Then dumb old Freddy Watson called me "toothpick legs" and spit.
I stared him down, and balled my fists and said, "Okay! That's it!"
But suddenly I thought about the words Danitra said.
I rolled my eyes and grabbed my books and turned away instead.
PST: What happened?*

S1: Freddy made fun of her, but then she remembered what Danitra said and she didn't worry about what he thought.

Purple

*Once you've met my friend Danitra, you can spot her miles away.
She's the only girl around here who wears purple every day.
Whether summer's almost over or spring rains are pouring down,
if you see a girl in purple, it must be Danitra Brown.*

*Purple socks and jeans and sneakers, purple ribbons for her hair.
Purple shirts and slacks and sweaters, even purple underwear!
Purple dresses, shorts and sandals, purple coat and purple gloves.
There's just no mistake about it: Purple's what Danitra loves!*

*Purple is okay, I guess. I have worn it once or twice.
But there's nothing wrong with yellow. Red and blue are also nice.
So one day I asked Danitra if once in a while, for fun,
She would wear another color, just to surprise everyone.*

But her mom has told her stories about queens in Timbuktu.

*And it seems they all wore purple, never red or green or blue.
Now, she might just be a princess. After all, who's to say?
So just in case, she'll dress in purple each and every day!*

PST: Do ya'll like purple?

P4: I like purple.

P3: I don't like purple, I like green.

P2: I don't like purple, I like red.

P1: Camryn's wearing purple.

P2: I don't wear purple all the time.

Ladies of the House

*Danitra's mom had a cold the other day.
Danitra couldn't even come outside to play.
She had to cook and clean, is what Danitra said.
"Gotta take care of things while my mom is in bed."*

*So I kept Danitra company, 'cause that's what friends are for.
We washed up the dishes, and we swept the kitchen floor.
We took soup to her mom. (I was quiet as a mouse!)
It was serious work. We were the ladies of the house.*

PST: Do you help your mom?

P2: Yeah, I help cook.

P1: I have to wash the dishes.

P3: I help with the trash.

P4: I help my mom with everything.

Culture

*Mom says I need culture, whatever that means;
Then she irons some dumb dress, makes me take off my jeans,
drags me to the theater for some stupid show.
(It turns out to be fun, but I don't let her know.)
Next day I tell Danitra what the play was about,
then we go to her bedroom and act it all out.
We play all of the parts, and pretend that we're stars
like the ones that step out of those long shiny cars.
Then Danitra starts dancing while I sing the main song,
and she promises that next time she'll come along.
We decide we like culture, whatever that means,
but we both think that culture goes better with jeans!*

PST: What is culture?

P2: I don't know.

P3: I've never heard that word.

P1: Culture, isn't that kinda like what you do?

PST: yeah, culture is they way you grew up and the traditions and ways of your family and community.

Mom and Me Only

Some kids at school have a mom and a dad.

I've got Mom and me only.

On Parents' Night it makes me mad

that it's Mom and me only.

"You've got it good," Danitra says when I am sad.

"Your mama loves you twice as much. Is that so bad?"

Danitra knows just what to say to make me glad.

With her around, I'm never lonely.

PST: Are there all different kinds of families?

All: yeah...

P4: Yeah, at my house it is just me my mom and sister.

Sweet Blackberry

Danitra says my skin's like double chocolate fudge

'cause I'm so dark.

The kids at school say it another way.

"You so Black, girl," they say,

*"at night, people might think
you ain't nothin' but a piece o' sky."*

I never cry, but inside there's a hurting place.

I make sure no one sees it on my face.

Then mama tells me, "Next time, honey, you just say,

The Blacker the berry, the sweeter the juice."

Now that's just what I do.

I sure wish I had told them that before.

Those kids don't bother teasin' me no more.

The Secret

Danitra's scared of pigeons. I promised not to tell,

then I opened my big mouth and out the secret fell.

I tried to shove it right back in, though it was much too late.

I told her I was sorry, but Danitra didn't wait.

"What kind of friend are you?" she yelled before she stomped away.

She wouldn't hardly say a word to me the whole next day.

She finally forgave me, but not until I swore

to never, ever give away a secret anymore.

P3: Shes afraid of pigeons!!

P2: Why is she afraid of pigeons?

P4: I don't tell secrets.

P1: One time someone told me a secret, and I never ever tell.

P4: One time I told a secret, but I said I would never ever tell again.

Summertime Sharing

*Danitra sits hunched on the stoop and pouts.
I ask her what there is to pout about.
“Nothin’ much,” she says to me,
but then I see her eyes following the ice cream man.*

*I shove my hand into my pocket
and find the change there where I left it.
“Be right back,” I yell, running down the street.
Me and my fast feet are there and back in just two shakes.*

*Danitra breaks the Popsicle in two and gives me half.
The purple ice trickles down her chin. I start to laugh.
Her teeth flash in one humongous grin,
telling me she’s glad that I’m her friend without even saying a word.*

Bike Crazy

*Watch me and Danitra biking down the street,
wheee! round the corner. There go Danitra’s feet
right off the pedals, arms thrown up to the sky.
Me, I laugh and yell out, “Fly, Danitra! Fly!”*

P2: I can ride with no hands.

P3: I can ride with no hands and no feet.

Stories to Tell

*Danitra says she’s gonna win the Nobel Prize,
and I can tell by looking in her eyes
how much she means it.*

*I see her writing rhymes and stories in a book.
She slips a page to me and lets me look,
like it’s our secret.*

*She writes about our friends, our neighborhood, and me,
the places that we’ll go and what we’ll be
when we all grow up.*

*Some teachers say Danitra’s rhymes are wrong
because some of her lines are extra long.
I think they’re perfect.*

*If Danitra says she’s gonna win the Nobel Prize,
I double-dare anyone to roll his eyes.
I know she’ll do it!*

P3: I don’t like to write.

P1: I don't want to be a teacher.

P2: I want to be a author.

P4: I like to write, I don't know what I want to be.

P1: Yeah, I don't know what I want to be.

New Beginnings

*A new girl moved in down the street. I said hello,
and told her that she smiled like someone I know.*

*I told her that she oughta meet Danitra Brown,
the greatest, most splendiferous girl in town.*

Appendix E
Lesson Plans

Modeled Reading Lesson Plan

Meet Danitra Brown by Nikki Grimes

Preservice Teacher:

Classroom Teacher:

Grade Level:

I. Title and Author of the Text: *Meet Danitra Brown* by Nikki Grimes, Illustrated by Floyd Cooper

II. Materials Needed for Lesson: *Meet Danitra Brown* text, pencils, crayons, paper

III. Reasons for Text Selection

The readability level of this book is upper third grade, however, it would suit the interests and cultural backgrounds of the students to whom it will be read. This book is an example of high quality African-American children's literature and the author, Nikki Grimes, has won numerous awards for her work.

IV. Specific Standards-Based Learning Goals and Objectives

- Appreciate likenesses and differences
- Identify and make personal connections with characters
- Make an open-mind portrait
- Examine the qualities of a good friend

V. Detailed Plans for the 5 Steps of the Reading Process

A. Prereading

Show children the title and author of the book and allow them to make predictions about the theme. Explain to students that the author is African-American, has won numerous awards, and lives in California.

B. Reading

Read the book aloud as a performance of text. A performance read-aloud style was selected to present a dramatic, oral interpretation of the style the author chose, which is poetry. The author's writing style is highlighted using intonation, volume changes, and dialect. A performance style was chosen to promote comprehension of the whole story and allow students to notice similarities and differences between the language used in the text and that which they hear in their daily lives

C. Responding

- What part of the book did you like the most?
- What do you think the mom means when she says "Her (Danitra Brown) spirit's old"?
- What do you think the author means when she says: "Pay him no never mind, Zuri.?"

“Coke-bottle Brown”?

“Rolled my eyes.”?

- How did Danitra feel when Freddy Watson called her “Coke-bottle Brown”?
- What inappropriate actions could Danitra have taken? What would you do in her situation?

D. Exploring

Teacher and students will develop a list of words that may be used to describe Danitra.

E. Applying

1. Explain to students that they are going to make an open minded portrait of Danitra Brown.
2. Students draw and color a large portrait of the head and neck of the character.
3. Students design the “mind” page and write about the character from the character’s viewpoint.
4. Share the completed project.

Modeled Reading Lesson Plan

Uptown by Bryan Collier

Preservice Teacher:

Classroom Teacher:

Grade Level:

I. Title and Author of the Text: *Uptown* by Bryan Collier

II. Materials Needed for Lesson:

III. Reasons for Text Selection

This book is both a Coretta Scott King and Ezra Jack Keats award winner. It is a wonderful example of high quality African-American children's literature with authentic depictions of urban life. The main character is a young African-American male, which will appeal to and increase personal identification with African-American males as they read the text.

IV. Specific Standards-Based Learning Goals and Objectives

- Introduce new vocabulary words
- Identify and make personal connections with character

V. Detailed Plans for the 5 Steps of the Reading Process

A. Prereading

Show children the title and author of the book and allow them to make predictions about the theme. Explain to students that the author is African-American, is a male, and also illustrated the book. Focus particularly on the collage style art Collier uses.

B. Reading

Read the book aloud as a performance of text. A performance read-aloud style was selected to present a dramatic, oral interpretation of the style the author chose, which is poetry. The author's writing style is highlighted using intonation, volume changes, and dialect. A performance style was chosen to promote comprehension of the whole story and allow students to notice similarities and differences between the language used in the text and that which they hear in their daily lives

C. Responding

- What part of the book did you like the most?
- How is the city that the boy lives in different from your city? How is it similar?
- What parts of the book remind you of your own life, family, friends, activities, etc.?
- What does the author mean when he says "The vibe is always jumping...?"
- Has anyone ever seen "Showtime at the Apollo?"

D. Exploring

Teacher will explore vocabulary words that may be unfamiliar to the students.

brownstones: city apartments with stairways that lead from the sidewalk to the second floor entrance. (Reference: Cosby Show home)

jazz: musical art form that originated in the early 1900's in African-American communities

awnings: covering attached to the outside wall of a building. Usually found on windows or doors.

Modeled Reading Lesson Plan

Rosa by Nikki Giovanni
Illustrated by Bryan Collier

Preservice Teacher:
Classroom Teacher:
Grade Level:

I. Title and Author of the Text: *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni, Illustrated by Bryan Collier

II. Materials Needed for Lesson:

III. Reasons for Text Selection

The readability level of this book is upper fifth grade; however, it is suitable for students in grades 1st through 3rd for a number of reasons. The students with whom this book is being read have a cultural connection to this text, as it is set in Montgomery, Alabama, within the students' home state. Additionally, although it contains words that may be unfamiliar to primary elementary students, the vocabulary can be discussed before, during and after the reading in order to enhance the literary meaning of the text. Students may also connect with the text personally through stories they've heard in their homes, at school, through media, or in other texts. This book is an example of high quality African-American children's literature and the author, Nikki Giovanni, won the Coretta Scott King Award for this piece of literature.

IV. Specific Standards-Based Learning Goals and Objectives

V. Detailed Plans for the 5 Steps of the Reading Process

A. Prereading

- Show children the title and author of the book and allow them to make predictions about the theme.
- Without telling students about *Rosa*, talk about the woman and the man on the cover.
- What can the expressions and stances of the man and woman tell about their relationship?
- Ask students if they've heard of Rosa Parks. Discuss what they do know about her. **KNOW & WONDER** sections of K-W-L chart.
- Talk about the concepts of **segregation** and **civil rights**. Select vocabulary with which students may be unfamiliar.
- Have students make predictions about what the book will be about.

B. Reading:

Read the book aloud as a performance of text. A performance read-aloud style was selected to present a dramatic, oral interpretation with different voices for different characters and the narrator using intonation, volume changes, and dialect. A performance style was chosen to promote comprehension of the whole story and to keep students engaged with the text.

C. Responding:

- Discuss the types of jobs that Mr. and Mrs. Parks worked. Were they wealthy? Were they active in politics and community affairs?
- Discuss with students the reality of segregation in the south. Talk about the typical bus ride for an African-American in the south at that time.
- What was Rosa thinking about that enabled her to be so courageous and stay in her seat on the bus? Talk about injustices that you may have witnessed in your community today. What could you do about it? (**text-to-self or text-to-world**)
- Does this story about Rosa Parks remind you of any other book you've read? (**text-to-text**)
- Why was what Jo Ann Robinson did so important?
- Discuss the term *boycott*
- How do we know the boycott was successful?
- Discuss the quote on the last page of the book. "The integrity, the dignity, the quiet strength of Rosa Parks turned her no into a YES for change." What is meant by this statement? Do you agree with it? Why?

D. Exploring:

- Ask students to further explore story vocabulary in *Rosa* by asking each to identify one or two unfamiliar words in a set taken from the story. Words should be pre-written on the front of sticky notes/note cards/dry erase board with sentences or phrases showing them in context from the story on the back. The following words were selected because they may be difficult for students to decode or because they have multiple meanings or innovative, creative usage in this story:
- Have students practice composing sentences (interactive, shared or independent) about the big idea of the story. Encourage students to use vocabulary words.
- Talk about what students **LEARNED** from the text.

E. Applying

- Open-mind portrait
- Personal K-W-L chart
- Reading Log
- T-chart or Comparison chart comparing and contrasting life for people before and after the civil rights movement
- Group project-Get on the Bus! (first grade)
- Group project-In Order for Justice! (timeline of events)
WHO?, WHAT?, WHEN?, WHERE?, WHY?, HOW?-Develop chart/newspaper article/graphic organizer to answer questions.

Appendix F

Participant Demographic Information

Qualitative Research Study

Demographic Information

Participant: _____

Gender: M F

Ethnicity: White-W African American-B Hispanic-H Asian-A Other or Unknown-O

Age: _____

Classification: Fr So Jr Sr

Major: Elementary Education Early Childhood Education

Marital Status: Single Married Divorced Widowed

Children? Y N If yes, how many? _____

Hometown (City & State): _____

Rate your CTRD3700 Fundamentals of Learning & Literacy I lab experience.

5	4	3	2	1
Very helpful		Somewhat helpful		Not helpful

Rate your level of comfort teaching reading using African-American literature in an elementary classroom before and after taking this course.

Before:

5	4	3	2	1
Very comfortable		Somewhat comfortable		Not comfortable

After:

5	4	3	2	1
Very comfortable		Somewhat comfortable		Not comfortable

Appendix G
Interview Questions

Research Interview Questions

Researcher: Thank you for your willingness to participate and be interviewed here. I have been studying the literary conversations of preservice teachers and elementary students using African-American picture books and I'm interested in your lab experience. Can you give me your impression of the lab experience, as a whole?

PST:

Researcher: Can you tell me about the cultures represented in your group of students? How do you think this impacted your conversations about the literature?

PST:

Researcher: Are there any particular "moments" that stand out in your memory? For example, was there a comment made by a student or a defining teachable moment that stands out in your mind? Can you tell me more about it?

PST:

Researcher: How do you think your cultural background influenced your ability to facilitate conversations about AA literature?

PST:

Researcher: How comfortable did you feel using AA literature during read-alouds before your lab experience? After?

PST:

Researcher: How likely are you to use multicultural literature in your classroom one day? How will the racial background of your students influence your decisions about appropriate literature for instructional purposes?

PST:

Researcher: Thank you, again, for your participation and willingness to talk to me about your experience. I am certain your insight will add to the body of knowledge and research being done in this particular area of reading education. I am delighted that you agreed to be a part of this study!