

**USING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE  
IN AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM**

by

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CERTIFICATION OF THESIS/PROJECT CAPSTONE WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled USING MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE IN AN ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM by ERICA MORSE, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Literacy Birth to Grade 12, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.

  
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### **ABSTRACT**

The increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse children enrolling in elementary school means that white educators with limited cultural knowledge will be encountering classrooms with greater numbers of culturally diverse students. The problem arising from this increase is that with limited cultural knowledge comes limited knowledge about teaching “best practices” for use with culturally diverse students. Using multicultural literature in a classroom may be one way to increase teachers’ cultural knowledge, but it raises the research question of what are effective or “best practices” for using multicultural literature in a culturally diverse elementary classroom? An extensive literature review and synthesize has produced five findings. First is that multicultural literature can have four uses in an elementary classroom: as self-selected reading, as part of the curriculum, as a supplement to the curriculum, and as a teaching tool to generate classroom discussion. Best practices for these uses are to increase teachers’ knowledge about the existence and quality of multicultural books; to use multicultural literature in the curriculum in a way that is cognitively and developmentally appropriate for the students; to use multicultural literature as a means for students to connect to cultural awareness and diversity and in ways that are meaningful to them; and to use the literature as a teaching tool for starting class discussions. These findings are relevant to the professional development of elementary teachers and will therefore be available to them in the form of a pre-made DVD.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Statement of the Problem

The demographics of children in elementary school are rapidly shifting because of an increased enrollment of children who are culturally and linguistically diverse. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015), the percentage of minority schoolchildren is projected to raise to 50.3 percent in the U.S. by 2024 because of a dramatic growth in the Latino population and a decline in the white population. To a lesser degree, there has been a steady rise in the number of Asian Americans, as well as African-Americans. In addition, the NCES reports that, “in the 2011-2012 school year, 82 percent of 3.4 million public school teachers were non-Hispanic white, 7 percent were non-Hispanic black and 8 percent were Hispanic” (NCES, 2015, p.1). Therefore, the majority of educators around the nation are encountering classrooms comprised of an unprecedented number of students from various cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. While the majority of educators are white, they are still required to teach multicultural students from various cultures, even though those educators may have limited cultural knowledge. The problem related to this topic is that with limited cultural knowledge comes limited knowledge about teaching strategies or best practices for teachers to use with culturally diverse students. The premise for this research is using multicultural literature in the classroom is one way to increase teachers’ cultural knowledge. According to Glazier and Seo (2005), multicultural texts cannot and should not stand alone to “achieve desired ends” (p. 688). By that, Glazier and Seo (2005) mean that adding multicultural literature to the classroom library by itself will not create respect for cultural diversity or develop an understanding of cultural differences. Multicultural literature does offer a way for white educators to learn about other cultures, and help their students learn about other cultures, but the literature must be taught and read, not just sit on a library shelf. This approach leads to the research question, what are effective or “best practices” for using Multicultural Literature in a culturally diverse elementary classroom? The most appropriate way to answer this question is to conduct a literature review, synthesize the findings, and present the results to current educators through professional development.

## **Background**

My own experience from working with students has taught me much about how using multicultural literature might influence a student's understanding of a text. During my second placement for student teaching I worked with a culturally diverse student in third grade who was an English Language Learner (ELL). My cooperating teacher wanted me to assess this student in both Spanish and English on her English Language Arts skills and abilities. The assessments revealed the student read at a second grade reading level in her primary language (Spanish), and was at a kindergarten reading level for her secondary language (English). I noticed the student started to lose interest in the texts I selected and became withdrawn with the content of the text. It was difficult to select books at her reading level that were appropriate for her third grade age. However, one day I provided the student with the choice of selecting what she would read that day from the classroom library. By receiving the ability to choose for herself, this student selected a text that affirmed her cultural background. Next, I developed the same instruction I had provided the student on the books I had previously selected. However, for the text that the student had self-selected, I modified and accommodated the instruction to effectively meet the student's literature preferences. By receiving the ability to select the text for herself, this student was able to make connections to the text of choice. In addition, she was able to recall aspects of the text that she had not been able to recall in the other books. This literacy event made me start to think about how teachers incorporate these multicultural texts in their classroom libraries; sometimes these books are only for library use and may not be incorporated into classroom instruction. Consequently, I have selected this topic because I think it may be beneficial for both classroom teachers and students for teachers to understand how to use multicultural literature in the classroom, both in the library and for classroom instruction. This proposed research will determine best practices that teachers may employ for using multicultural literature in a culturally diverse elementary classroom.

## **Terminology**

For the purpose of this research study, terms are defined below to provide the reader with a better understanding of the topic. For this research study, the term “elementary classroom” refers not just to the students and teacher in a room, but also to the curriculum and other parts of the teaching environment including the classroom library. The next key term is “multicultural literature,” which refers to literature about the “sociocultural experiences of underrepresented groups” (McCune, 2010, p. 6). The term “using” refers to employing literature as a “tool that supports children to identify with their own culture, exposes children to other cultures, and opens the dialogue on issues regarding diversity” (Colby & Lyon, 2004, p. 24). Lastly, the term “best practices” refers to instructional approaches that are research-based, practical and useful (Shanahan, 2015) for classroom instruction, and in the field of literacy, they are practices that assist students to become “proficient readers and writers” (Shanahan, 2015, xxii).

## **Theoretical Stance**

The theory that connects the use of multicultural literature to the reading process is Gee’s (1991) theory of literacy as a social practice. According to Gee (1991), literacy as a social practice is where people of sometimes different “ages, races, ethnicities, countries, genders, and social and political orientation of all sorts group together to engage in joint action and communication” (p. 14). Thus, the theory of literacy being a social practice is thought to be a set of literacy skills (and a way of communicating) that is based in a context, and social group. Thus, the theory of literacy as a social practice means that there are specific literacies for each social grouping or culture. Therefore, this research study is tied to the theory of literacy as a social practice because multicultural literature is related to a culture, a social group with its own form of literacy. Barton and Hamilton (2000), agreeing with Gee (1991) that literacy is a social practice, say that literacy is “what people do with reading, writing, and a text in real world contexts” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). The two contexts for multicultural literature are the culture contained in the literature itself and the culture of the classroom where the literature is read.

The concept of using multicultural literature also relates to the theory of reading as an interactive process (Davenport, 2002). Davenport views reading as a “two-way process,

involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances” (p. 6). Thus, Davenport implies that the reader brings past experiences of language and experiences of the printed word to the reading task. What the reader brings then interacts with the content the text contains. The result is that a reader then tries to make sense of what content is read and connect that content and information to the reader’s own existing knowledge. This interaction enables the reader to make connections to the text: whether that reader it is a student from a dominant culture making connections to a culturally diverse character in a text, or a student from a minority culture making connections that identify with a character in a multicultural text.

### **Rationale**

Teachers and students in classrooms across America are coming in contact more and more with individuals from a myriad of cultural backgrounds. The way classroom teachers handle these encounters is based largely on their knowledge and attitudes about and towards non-majority cultures. This knowledge and attitude can be influenced by literature. According to Hillard (2012), multicultural literature can introduce students and adults to “unfamiliar practices and concepts inherent to different cultures” (p. 728). Further, Hillard believes that the inclusion of multicultural literature in a classroom is an excellent way to give students positive experiences that foster an acceptance and appreciation for cultural differences. Similarly, Kincade, and Pruitt (1996) explain that integrating into the curriculum the literature that reflects a variety of cultures can promote intercultural and multicultural understanding and appreciation. According to Willis and Johnson (2000), the use of multicultural literature enhances student self-esteem, involvement and engagement, and academic performance in literacy. According to Villegas and Lucas (2002), “exposure to the literature of different groups can give future teachers access to the rich texture of people’s lives—their hopes, aspirations, dreams, disappointments, pains, and joys” (p. 27). All these researchers affirm the benefits of using multicultural literature in a classroom; however these researchers do not explain “how” teachers can use the literature in a classroom. This research study will try to fill that gap by exploring teaching strategies for using multicultural literature in the classroom.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In order to address the research question of identifying effective or best practices for using multicultural literature in a culturally diverse classroom, a review of the literature is the first step. This literature review began with a search of the major educational databases for empirical research studies involving multicultural literature. The found studies that specifically examine the use of multicultural literature in a kindergarten to grade 12 classroom are grouped below and arranged as follows. The first group are those studies that examine how to select appropriate and authentic multicultural literature for use in a classroom as self-selected reading. The second group are those studies that explore and demonstrate principles for implementing multicultural literature into the classroom curriculum. The third group are those studies that explore using multicultural literature as a supplementary instructional tool for content area instruction and for a thematic approach to instruction. The fourth group of studies examine how to use multicultural literature to guide classroom discussion.

### Selecting Appropriate and Authentic Multicultural Literature

The search for empirical research studies involving multicultural literature has uncovered many studies; those that examined how to define and identify and select appropriate and authentic multicultural literature are in this section. To examine how to select multicultural literature for use in a classroom library and student self-selected reading, Brinson (2012) conducted a study that assessed the knowledge of early childhood educators about multicultural literature for children. Brinson explained that children “need to be exposed to positive images that represent their culture and themselves in the literature they are hearing and reading” (p. 30). Brinson thus referred to multicultural literature as “mirror” books and “window” books (p. 30). Mirror books reflected and reinforced the culture of the child reading the book. In contrast, window books offered a way for a child to learn about cultures that differed from the child’s own culture by providing a *window* into new experiences. Brinson created a “Survey of Multicultural Children’s Literature” (p. 30) and administered it to 33 preservice and 80 in-service early childhood teachers in Tennessee. The survey consisted of six open-ended questions, and required the participants to identify two children’s books featuring characters in the following cultural

categories: African-American, Anglo-American, Asian-American, Latino-American, Native-American, and multicultural. The qualitative data were the responses to the survey questions, as well as an analysis of the responses. The results revealed that 61 participants were only able to identify two books from the Anglo American group. In addition, the survey results indicated that 53 participants had minimal awareness of African American literature, and 68 participants could not identify any children's books featuring Asian-American characters. Most of the participants (67) could not identify any books featuring Latino-American characters; 73 participants could not identify any children's books featuring Native-American characters; and 74 participants could not identify any books featuring multicultural characters. According to Brinson, these results demonstrated a "critical need for professional development for both preservice and in-service early childhood teachers to increase their knowledge about culturally specific and multicultural literature" (p. 32). Also, Brinson concluded that classroom libraries should reflect the diverse population of the classroom, and do so by focusing on mirror books for students, as well as window books. Lastly, Brinson provided recommendations for selecting multicultural books that can "bridge the gap" (p. 32) of knowledge of early childhood teachers including notable literary awards that can be used when selecting high quality, multicultural books for children. This finding clearly addresses a way to select multicultural literature appropriate for use in a classroom.

Prior to Brinson (2012), Holmes, Powell, and Holmes (2007) explored the "relation of interest to time on reading by isolating one factor, the racial congruence, or lack thereof, of the characters in the books to the background of the reader" (p. 278): meaning that, the researchers sought to determine whether students would display interest and increased motivation to read books if the characters presented in literature matched the students' own background. The researchers indicated that 63% of the students participating in this study were eligible for free and reduced-price lunches. The researchers' goal of this study was to determine whether low socio-economic students would "linger" (p. 277) over books for longer amounts of time if the characters matched the students' race. The researchers intended to answer the following questions: "does the race of the book characters correlate significantly with the race of the student choosing the book" (p. 278) and "does the race of the book characters significantly affect the amount of time that the student lingers over a book?" (p. 278). The participants consisted of 32 third-grade students (14 were black, 18 were white, and 3 from another racial background)

from two classrooms in an elementary school in northern Mississippi. The researchers labeled each of the 42 different books corresponding to the title, and then placed the books randomly on two tables. The researchers used the following criteria to select books for the study: “comparable book covers, reading level, and comparable topics” (p.278). Six observers were selected at random and then paired to two to three students. The observers recorded data pertaining to the student’s reading events of the self-selected books during four 30 periods in the third grade classrooms. Research results indicated that both black and white students “do not differentiate by race in their preferences for selecting books” (p. 279). In addition, the results revealed that there was “no difference” (p. 279) between white and black students in the duration of time they spent on books that reflected their “cultural congruence” (p. 279). However, white boys were likely to linger longer over a book with a predominantly black character than with white characters. Therefore, the researchers concluded that both black and white students in this study read books with characters of a race different than themselves a “substantial fraction of the time” (p. 280) if they were given the opportunity to select their own reading material. Holmes, Powell, and Holmes concluded that if teachers added books with black characters to their classroom libraries, both black and white students would read them.

In another study Wee, Park, and Choi (2014) investigated how contemporary Korea and its culture are demonstrated in children’s picture books published in the United States. According to the researchers, a parallel between a character’s cultural background and the children’s own background can “positively affect a child’s self-esteem and may lessen the impact of society’s cultural bias and stereotypes” (p. 71). Thus, children would benefit from the accessibility of books that accurately reflect their own culture. The methodology was a sample of 33 children’s books published in the United States that portrayed Korean culture elements (i.e. Korean people, places, foods, and clothes). The researchers also included books that were originally published in Korea and then published in the United States. The researchers analyzed the text features of each children’s book (e.g., genre, main topic, characters) and illustrations. After an analysis of the children’s literature, “overarching themes emerged as the bases of the stories” (p. 78). Twenty of the 33 books focused on introducing the Korean people and culture through special holidays, clothes, or foods. The other thirteen books “more implicitly depicted Korea as a culture” (p. 78), with cultural items such as family relationships embedded in the story or illustrations. According to the researchers, eight of the 33 books included the word “Korea” and offered some

background information and experiences in the story. Another finding was that frequently used images and text included both out dated content and illustrations. The researchers indicated that the majority of the sampled books presented Koreans and their culture only at the surface level. Based on their research, Wee, Park, and Choi suggest that authors and illustrators who had close associations with the Korean culture were more accurate in both their descriptions and illustrations.

Moving from Korean literature to South African literature, Labbo and Field (1998) shared South African educators' perspectives on selected picture books about South Africa, as well as provided suggestions for organizing and implementing a "Transformations and Social Action Approach" (p.465) to teach that literature. The Transformation and Social Action Approach involved promoting an awareness and appreciation of the perspectives of the people who live within a particular culture. First, teachers were given a survey that raised questions about how to select and use quality children's literature in a manner that provides an accurate and authentic perspective of life in other countries, such as South Africa. The teachers that came in contact with the diverse genres of children's books on South Africa (that are available in the U.S.) expressed their "uncertainty about the authenticity of stories, the accuracy of events, the reliability of information embedded within stories, and the possibility that some books may inadvertently foster stereotypical thinking about life in South Africa" (p. 465). Seventeen books were selected for this study because they all represent a variety of genres including realistic fiction, historical fiction, biography, and alphabetic concept books. The "insiders" perspective on the multicultural books about South Africa revealed they were impressed with the "overall excellent quality of the illustrations and accuracy of stories" (p. 469). Based on their research, Labbo and Fields suggest these teaching practices: sharing several books about the country as a collection of readings, designing discussion and response activities that allow students to "step into the story" (p.472), utilizing graphic organizers to guide students' ideas and understandings, and using a variety of resources to supplement the collection of books.

### **Implementing Multicultural Literature into Classroom Curriculum**

Moving from multicultural books in the classroom for self-selected reading to multicultural books for the classroom curriculum, the research studies in this section specifically examine

what books to use for inclusion in the classroom curriculum. Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) investigated teachers' perspectives in secondary English Language Arts classrooms in an effort to "discover the degree to which multicultural literature should be integrated into the state mandated curriculum" (p. 480). This study focused on teacher selection of book-length works and teacher perspectives on teaching multicultural literature compared to traditional literature. This study involved 142 English Language Arts classroom teachers working in 72 different public schools in Alabama. The student population in the Alabama public schools was "60.2% white, 36.3% black, 1.8% Hispanic, and 0.9% Asian, and 0.8% American Indian" (p. 480). Both a quantitative and qualitative survey was created to investigate the following questions: "what are the book-length works most frequently taught in the state's public secondary schools, what are English language teachers' reasons for including or excluding multicultural literature in their curricula" (p.481). The qualitative section of the survey focused on teachers' responses to open-ended questions about their reasons for including or not including multicultural literature in their classroom curriculum. The data analysis produced the following themes based on the teachers' qualitative responses: "traditional stability," "the evolving nature of the classics," "the issue of censorship," and "other obstacles" (p. 484) to including non-traditional literature. The traditional stability theme meant that English language arts curricula should include literature that appeals to students' interests and relates to their lives, thus the kinds of books that will foster lifelong reading habits. The evolving nature of the classics theme meant that the kinds of literature selections listed by teachers were made from newcomer teachers. The issue of censorship theme meant that teachers would continue to teach only from a "very narrow prescribed list of novels because they do not believe in updating the curriculum with diverse titles" (p. 484). The other obstacles theme indicated that most teachers teach what they consider "familiar and safe" (p. 484). Other issues related to use of multicultural literature also emerged: lack of resources, lack of expertise, and time constraints. Overall, the study revealed that teachers did not see relevance for updating their curriculum, and teaching multicultural literature and perspectives. According to the researchers, if some revisions in book lists were to occur, the "starting point" (p. 485) would be to involve "teachers and learners in conversation at all grade levels" (p. 485) and to provide teachers with some form of professional development on the practice of using multicultural literature. Lastly, the researchers concluded with recommendations for revising the

curriculum booklists, including “developing rationales” (p. 485) for using specific books before teaching those works.

In another study regarding multicultural books for classroom curriculum, Yoon, Simpson, and Haag (2010) reviewed cultural authenticity and accuracy issues in multicultural literature. In doing so, the researchers conducted an in-depth analysis of four multicultural picture books that “depict assimilation ideology under the framework of multicultural education” (p. 109). Yoon, Simpson, and Haag felt “a major purpose of using multicultural texts to be implementation of authentic multicultural education that promotes cultural pluralism, rather than ‘monoculturalism’ that focuses on assimilation to a dominant culture” (p.109). This emphasis on pluralism indicated that the researchers wanted to use the multicultural literature to promote a variety of cultural identities, rather than have all identities melt into the dominant “American” identity. Yoon, Simpson, and Haag invited two researchers to participate in the examination of 12 multicultural texts books from a middle school library. The researchers’ definition of “multicultural literature” referred to “books about specific cultural groups considered to be outside the dominant sociopolitical ideology” (p. 110). After the examination, the researchers concluded that, “two themes emerged from the analysis of the selected picture books” (p. 112). The first theme was a transition by the main character from “resistance” to “assimilation of a new culture, and the second theme is a focus on the United States as the land of opportunity” (p. 112). Relating to this research question, Yoon, Simpson, and Haag selected the multicultural literature based on the authenticity and cultural pluralism (both the mirror and window) that the literature promotes.

Still another study that explored multicultural literature as part of the classroom curriculum is by Lovelace and Stewart (2009) who examined the effect of a systematic vocabulary instruction technique for African American second-grade students with below grade level vocabulary skills. The researchers’ second goal was to examine the role of book type in the retention of novel vocabulary words. Researchers used an “adapted alternating treatments design” (p. 170) meaning that each time the five participants were seen, they received a different intervention for vocabulary growth using story books as a source for “contextualizing vocabulary training” (p.170). Participant vocabulary growth was measured using a 4-stage continuum ranging from “no knowledge” (p.170) to “full concept knowledge” (p. 170). The criteria for the two selected story books were: “nonstereotyped portrayals, positive images, lack of derogatory language, accurate historical information and cultural details, and realistic illustrations of

Caucasian and African American ethnic groups” (p. 170). Selected book A was *Miss Viola and Uncle Ed Lee* (Duncan, 1999), which featured an African American cultural theme and images of a young boy helping two neighbors. Selected book B was *Sophie’s Knapsack* (Stock, 1988), featured a Caucasian cultural theme and images of a young girl accompanying her parents on an overnight hike and camping trip. All of the participants were African Americans: three boys (two were twins) and two girls all ranging between 7 and 8 years old. Each session began with a storybook reading activity, followed by a vocabulary lesson targeting instructional words from the story. Findings indicated that “robust interactive book-based vocabulary instruction” (p. 174) produced “greater” (p. 174) results than traditional non-book-based instruction. Analysis of the impact of the book type revealed that two participants showed a “separation” (p. 174) in word learning from the Caucasian book (book B), and that generally the participants had “comparable word knowledge of words for each book” (p. 174) before instruction. Specifically, the researchers concluded that using story books that displayed sociocultural images and experiences similar to the students instead of different from their own “may not have had” (p. 174) a measureable effect on word learning among the African American children. However, the researchers did not discuss whether the lack of measurable effect was due to the type of book used or the level of vocabulary skills of the participants.

Moving from using multicultural literature to aid vocabulary instruction to using multicultural literature to develop textual connections, Huang and Kowalick (2014) who investigated if the use of multicultural literature can help students “make textual experience connections” (p.2) through a range of literacy activities. The participants in this study included 32 grade six students, 12 boys and 11 girls for the course of three weeks. Six of the students were Hispanic, four were African American, and the remaining students were Caucasian. The context for this study was in the southeastern part of the United States. The researchers selected the multicultural novel titled *Now is the Time for Running* by Michael Williams (2009). Before the project started, the classroom teacher provided a KWL chart to assess and evaluate students’ prior knowledge regarding the culture and geographic location of Zimbabwe, Africa. Next, the researchers created a range of literacy activities (e.g. book discussions, writing workshops, drama, and new technologies) that enabled the students to “extend and share their understandings” (p. 3) of the multicultural text. The data consisted of observational notes and student work samples. At the end of the unit, the classroom teacher used the KWL chart to

reassess the students' learning outcomes. The results indicated that the text and strategies enabled students to "derive meaning from the text," to move "more towards higher level thinking," and to "make connections to the world by personal reading and lived through experience with the text" (p. 3). Another finding indicated that the reading and writing activities allowed students to become more aware of other cultural groups. The last finding indicated that the reading and writing strategies allowed students to become critical readers and writers through the expansion their "current reading horizons" (p.3) through reading a multicultural novel. Results of this study showed that these literacy activities can help teachers who plan to use multicultural literature in the curriculum to help students to develop critical literacy skills and cultural awareness.

### **Using Multicultural Literature as a Supplementary Instructional Tool**

The largest group of studies found are those that examine the use of multicultural literature as a supplementary tool, that is, not studying the literature as literate but using it to teach other things. Thein, Barbas, Carnevali, Fox, Mahoney, and Censel (2012) used Design-Based Research (DBR) "as a methodology for engaging teachers and researchers" (p. 122) in an examination of "what was possible in terms of translating theory about multicultural literature instruction into authentic practice" (p. 126). This DBR method allowed teachers to "push the boundaries of their status quo instructional practices" (p. 126): meaning that the teachers moved beyond their standard and familiar instructional practices and used their theories about multicultural literature to guide how they actually taught the multicultural literature in their English classes. In doing so, the participants engaged in four "cycles of lesson drafting, enactment and analysis" (p. 122), and met for a total of 10 sessions. The participants were four female and one male teacher selected because they taught at four "very different" (p. 123) middle and high schools in and around a large American city. Each lesson plan was required to include an explanation of the overarching goal of the lesson, an indication of how success in meeting that goal was measured, and step-by-step instructions with rationale behind each activity. Next, the teachers were encouraged to provide feedback on the lesson drafts, and participate in collaborative discussions on each lesson. Results of this study showed that using the DBR design

benefited the teachers' instructional practices, and yet still met the demands of the school and curricula.

Louie (2006) also studied multicultural literature as an instruction tool and provided suggestions for educators on "instructional principles, and demonstrated what types of understanding students may acquire when teachers apply such principles in teaching multicultural literature" (p. 438). The goal for this study was to enhance students' understanding and enjoyment of stories regarding diverse cultural groups. Louie provided the following principles for guiding the reading of multicultural literature:

check the authenticity of the story, understand the world of the ethnic characters, view the world through the characters' perspectives, identify values that shape the characters' conflict-resolution strategies, relate self to the text, use variations of the same story (to build schema), and talk/write/respond throughout the reading of the multicultural literature (p. 438).

The participants were 23 fourth grade students (13 girls and 10 boys): 12 were minority (either Hispanic or African American) in a school in a small town in Pacific Northwest. Louie collaborated with the classroom teacher to design a unit plan that incorporated those guidelines for using multicultural literature. The unit involved five variations of the "tale of Mulan" (p. 440) with 10 one hour sessions taught over a three-week period. Data included videotaped records, field notes, teacher journals, student journals, student projects, and student interviews at the end of the unit. Most of the students were familiar with the Disney movie *Mulan*, and showed an interest in reading the variations of the tale. According to Louie, the students "developed a critical understanding of the Mulan stories when they went beyond literal comprehension to analyze and evaluate the various versions" (p. 442). In addition, the students appeared to demonstrate an "empathetic understanding" (p. 442) when they "took the perspective of Mulan, sympathized with Mulan's decision, and felt the emotions similar to those of Mulan" (p. 443). However, only a few students demonstrated "conceptual understanding" (p. 443) at the end of the unit. Research results showed that as a result of using variations of a piece of multicultural literature for instruction, most of the students in the fourth grade classroom developed a critical

understanding of Mulan and ancient China, as well as the ability to critique the authenticity of story variations.

Moving from English class to content area class, McCarthy (2007) examined the significance of using multicultural trade books to supplement social studies curriculum. Using the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) ranking system for books, McCarthy selected three chapter books for this study: *Facing the Lion: Growing up Maasai on the African Savana* by Joseph Lemaslai Lekuton (2004), *Nino's Mask* by Jeannette Winter, and *An Elephant in the Backyard* by Richard Sobol. McCarthy conducted this study once a month over a course of three years to the fourth grade class in a small rural community. For the first book, McCarthy read the story aloud to the class then had each student create a trifold display titled "Facing our Lion," in which the students drew a picture of the lion (middle column), attached one of their school pictures (left column), and drew a picture of one of their fears (right column). According to McCarthy, the discussion was "easy to stimulate" (p. 51) once the students learned that Lekuton failed the first time he faced his lion. The themes addressed through this story included "culture; individual development and identity; people, places, and environment; and global connections" (p. 51). For the second book, McCarthy had the students read the book independently. However, students struggled with comprehension until they learned the cultural meaning of the "Fiesta of the Tigre" celebrations. Students then "became very involved" (p. 51) and were able to match the chosen animals name in another language (Spanish). This second book had themes similar to the first book: culture, people, places, and environment. The third book featured the same themes. Students read this story independently as well. McCarthy then challenged the students to become photojournalists like the author, so the students took photos of what they saw and liked in their own backyards. According to McCarthy, results indicated that the use of notable multicultural literature as a teaching tool "strengthens and supplements" (p. 52) social studies content in elementary classrooms.

Guzzetti, Kowalinski, and McGowan (1992) also developed, implemented, and evaluated a literature-based approach to social studies instruction. The participants in this study consisted of a sixth-grade classroom teacher and her class, a professor of content reading, and a social studies class. The adults in the study collaborated on the preparation of the instruction and assessment of one unit taught without a textbook but using only children's literature and literature-based instruction. Guzzetti, Kowalinski, and McGowan suggested that in their planning

for “implementing and linking children’s literature within a global educational framework” (p. 117), classroom teachers should address four issues: “selecting quality trade books, instructing students about the content, illuminating the link between the books selected and social studies concepts, and determining when trade books are most needed to enhance the curriculum” (p. 117). Guzzetti, Kowalinski, and McGowan felt that once implemented, this process of using literature and multicultural literature not textbooks “reinforces and expands each particular social studies concept by making global issues not only tangible, but also meaningful for young learners” (p. 117) by enabling them to connect multicultural examples with illustrations. The researchers found that using children’s literature to teach social studies concepts resulted in the students’ acquisition of more concepts and a “greater depth” (p. 117) of understanding of those concepts. In addition, Guzzetti and McGowan found five areas in which trade books “facilitated” (p. 118) the students’ social studies understandings; one key area was that using literature books with a more coherent text structure than traditional expository text books appeared to enhance a student’s knowledge of global educational concepts. Other results indicated that the class that used the multicultural story books were “more engaged and performed better” (p. 118) than the class that used the social studies textbook. Thus findings indicated that using multicultural literature as a supplementary instructional tool in the content area of social studies appeared to produce a benefit for the students.

In the content area of science, Farland (2006) investigated the effects of using historical nonfiction trade books as part of “kit/module-based science instruction” (p. 35). Farland explained that the goal for this study was to demonstrate that “science is a human endeavor” (p. 35) through the use of a literacy program involving books that showcased diversity among scientists. The participants were 156 third-grade students and their teachers. The treatment group consisted of six teachers that read a non-fiction trade book on six occasions in an eight-week span to 74 students in their classes. The other seven teachers maintained their regular science instruction for their 82 students. The methodology consisted of the students’ completing a “modified Draw-A-Scientist Test” (mDAST) (p. 35). Further, the students were prompted to draw a scientist working and create a caption that told what the scientist might be saying about the work the scientist was doing. In addition, the mDAST included a second page with four questions to aid the score while understanding the illustration. By the end of the eight-week period, all students had completed another mDAST. Farland selected six trade books to use for

this study based on the following characteristics: each book “contained simplified story about scientists and their work that goes beyond their facts and timeline of their lives” (p. 36), demonstrated “non-stereotypical portrayal of scientists” (p. 36), contained accurate information, used “age-appropriate language” (p. 36), displayed a “common theme of the struggles the scientists faced” (p. 36), and contained colorful illustrations and an “easy text” (p. 36). The researchers concluded that the drawings from the students who had experienced the multicultural trade books showed “expanded views of who does science” (p. 36), thus demonstrating the “value of using such books” (p. 36) for teaching in the content area of science.

Moving from strategy instruction, Wan (2006) conducted a study using multicultural literature in a thematic teaching approach. Wan used the thematic approach by using children’s books with “common themes to address differences and similarities among people and cultures” (p. 142). The researcher selected themes that were relevant to all human experiences regardless of the cultures: “family traditions, major holiday celebrations, religious ceremonies, nursery rhymes, folktales, and emotions that people share and ways of life” (p. 143). Family traditions include birthday celebrations and family gatherings. The researcher then selected the reading material based on certain criteria: that books “should have literary merit” (p. 143), be age appropriate and up-to-date regarding information, create possibilities for class discussion, and “contain enough cultural elements to enable students to construct new cultural knowledge” (p. 143). In addition, the reading materials should “allow students to learn to appreciate new knowledge and accept their own culture” (p. 143), illustrations should be authentic, and the materials should provide the students with “hands-on activities and projects” (p. 143). Having selected the themes and books, Wan chose teaching procedures that included motivating students with an introductory activity, providing the students with “ample time for reading” (p. 143), allowing “incubation time” (p. 143), and providing a follow-up discussion and “extension activities” (p. 143). Participants were a group of fifth grade elementary students. Wan selected the folk tale of Cinderella because according to Wan there is a “Cinderella story in almost every culture” (p. 144). Wan selected eight versions of the Cinderella story: African, Native American, Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean, Hawaii, and Vietnamese. For teaching procedures, Wan provided students with a summary for each story, an introductory activity that included a video or pictures related to culture that was the context of a version. Next, Wan read aloud the familiar version of the Cinderella story, and provided the class with a story map worksheet for support.

The students then formed small groups and each group read one of the Cinderella versions. Each group prepared a book talk or a reader's theatre script of their story and used a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the familiar Cinderella story with the version their group had. The class as a whole then discussed the cultural elements that students had noticed in their group version. For extension activities, the students completed a country and culture study activity. Results of this study indicated that using a thematic approach to multicultural literature "enhanced children's awareness of diversity" (p. 148), and allowed the students to understand that there were "more similarities than differences among cultures" (p. 148). Thus findings indicated that using multicultural literature in a thematic instructional approach provided classroom teachers with positive experiences and produced cultural awareness for students.

### **Using Multicultural Literature to Guide Classroom Discussion**

Moving from multicultural books as a supplementary tool to using multicultural literature to guide classroom discussion, the research studies in this section specifically examine how books influence and guide classroom instruction. Glazier, and Seo (2005) examined the experience of a group of ninth grade students as they read and responded to *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, by N. Scott Momaday. This "multigenre" (p.686) text focused on the Kiowa Nation. The researchers indicated that for this study the instructional practice changed from "monologic to dialogic" (p. 688); this meant that instead of the teacher as a single voice of authority, the student also had a "voice" to be heard in the classroom. This study was conducted in a suburb of a major metropolitan area in the eastern United States. The participants in this study were teachers and their students from diverse demographic groups: "41% white, 19.2% black, 21.6% Hispanic, 15.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3 % other" (p. 689). This class was chosen because the teacher had participated in a "yearlong professional development project, where teachers read and discussed multicultural literature" (p.689) that they would later teach to their students. The ninth grade class was observed 27 times over a three month period, each consisting of full class sessions. The data consisted of audiotapes of teacher and student interviews, videotapes of classroom events, artifacts of student work, and researcher field notes. Ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods were used to analyze the data in order to determine what occurred during the process as students engaged in conversations prompted by multicultural literature. The

conversations in the classroom took two basic forms: small-group talk and whole-class talk. Data analysis suggested that the degree of student participation “reached its highest points” (p. 689) by making the most text-to-self connections during the whole-class of “Ghost Dance discussion” (p. 689) and the whole class “Shaken faith discussion” (p. 689). As a result of including multicultural texts in the ninth-grade curriculum through “talk about text, talk about others in relation to text, and opportunities for students to make text-to-self connections” (p. 689), the classroom teacher felt that she had helped students learn to respect and understand the cultures represented in both the text and the classroom community. The classroom discussions appeared to have produced several benefits for the students: students were able to interpret the meaning of the text perceived through their cultural lens, were enabled to share their cultures and express their thoughts, and were allowed the chance to observe different cultures.

Murray and Puchner (2012) also investigated whether a seventh grade classroom teacher could use her “district prescribed literature selections” (p. 38) to effectively increase her students’ awareness of sociocultural issues. The classroom teacher used the instructional strategy of Think-Aloud to explicitly discuss social and cultural issues as they related to the characters in the literature. Murray was a white woman teaching 21 seventh grade English Language Arts students at the time of the study. The classroom teacher began the study by implementing a modified version of the Think-Aloud strategy and collecting parallel data. The teacher first modeled identifying the socio-cultural context of the literature, how she responded to it, and how she connected to it. Next, she introduced appropriate dialogue for discussing culture with “others” (p. 38) while using the Think-Aloud strategy. She gradually required her students to increasingly participate in the process by using the strategy in small groups, and then individually. Data came from both classroom observation and student work. The instruction consisted of working on the broad concept of culture, focusing on what it might look like and what it might include. Next, the class as a whole created a classroom web, a visual aid that consisted of both abstract and concrete ideas (e.g. behavior, government, tolerance, laws, etc.). In addition, the classroom teacher prompted the students to use a graphic organizer to introduce and represent the Think-Aloud’s. Data indicated that when the students were involved in whole-group discussions, they appeared to gain a deeper understanding of the literature and of the socio-cultural issues such as discrimination and prejudice, of the characters, and of their own personal ideas regarding life than when in small groups. Results showed that fictional multicultural

literature studied during English Language Arts can provide a “forum of discussion and learning for socio-cultural misconceptions and issues in the classroom” (p. 47). The Think-Alouds teaching approach encouraged students to discuss and talk about their ideas related to socio-cultural conflicts.

Still another study that used multicultural literature to guide classroom discussion was by DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) who conducted a qualitative study of the implementation of literature circles using quality multicultural children’s literature. The context for this study was a bilingual elementary school district in a large Midwestern city. Students in this urban elementary school received English language arts instruction and Spanish language arts instruction. In addition, this school district used a mandated “highly scripted curriculum” (p. 159) called Open Court. The participants in this study included fourth-grade bilingual students. The researchers used “ethnographic methods” (p. 159) to collect and analyze data to determine how literature discussion groups influence English language learners who primarily speak a language other than English in their homes. The ethnographic method consisted of a collection of field notes, interviews, audio and video tapes, and student work samples. The classroom teacher used the literature discussions in a way that used students’ life experiences as “linguistic and cultural tools for personal understanding” (p. 163) and for understanding others. The first finding of this study was that the “transformation of the literature discussion groups” enabled all four girls to equally participate in the discussion and “utilized a variety of essential literacy skills” (p. 167) (i.e. listening, responding, reading, and imagination). Another finding indicated that supplementing language arts instruction with literature circles provided students with the opportunity to “take up increase responsibility” and access “multiple linguistic codes in making meaning of the text” (p. 160). Meaning that, the classroom teacher organized instruction to “effectively support” (p. 160) students in both teacher directed format through the scripted curriculum and the participation through the new practice of literature discussions. The last finding was that literature circles enabled students to consider multiple perspectives regarding “unjust events” (p. 168). This study found that the bilingual students were able to think critically about the “imprint of racism on children their age” (p. 168) Results from this study indicate that utilizing literature discussion groups for quality multicultural literature provide students with several opportunities to explore and discuss social issues and understand diverse perspectives.

Following DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006), Robinson (2012) investigated her students' reactions to her arguments that educators need to regard critical multicultural pedagogy for promoting social awareness, children's appreciation of diversity and making connections, and interactive practices that facilitate and promote critical understanding of multicultural themes. The methodology for this ethnographic study was to "seek member meanings, participant observations, and connecting reoccurring themes" (p. 46). Robinson selected multicultural read-aloud texts that specifically motivate students' critical thinking and formulating ideas about issues and themes in the literature. The participants include 20 third grade students. The data analysis used for this study was commentary format, in which data were formulated that "reflected common themes presented in students' responses to social phenomenon" (p. 48). In addition, Robinson took observational notes both before and after the lesson, and during the students' responses during an interactive read-aloud. The findings produced a "salient theme" (p. 49) during instances of construction and deconstruction of meaning, in which students would build off one another's comments. In addition, interactive multicultural readings allowed students the opportunity to reflect on their own lives and provided "cathartic experiences" (p. 50). The last finding revealed that students think critically about social phenomenon in relation to themselves and others, and were "socially and emotionally engaged as critical text users, participants, and critics" (p. 50). The findings for this study show that interactive practices create an opportunity for students to both critically engage and learn about social and cultural phenomenon presented in multicultural literature.

### **Summary of the Review**

This literature review contains 18 research studies. The research studies have been sorted and grouped according to four sections inferred in the research question. The sections of this review are studies (4) that examine the selection of appropriate and authentic multicultural literature for self-selected reading, studies (4) that explore implementing multicultural literature into a classroom curriculum, studies (6) that explore using multicultural literature as a supplementary instructional tool, and those (4) that examine the use of multicultural literature to guide classroom discussion. All of the studies have been conducted in the United States. All studies

involve participants in the elementary and high school grade range except for one (Yoon, Simpson, & Haag 2010) which is a text analysis study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

To address the research question of effective strategies or best practices for using multicultural literature in a culturally diverse elementary classroom, a methodology of research synthesis was conducted. This chapter explains the data collection process, the data analysis and the synthesis of that methodology. The data collection section includes an explanation of how the research studies were found for this research and what was done to organize the data. The data analysis section provides an examination of all the research studies that were collected and analyzed through common themes. The synthesis section includes a summary of the results from the data analysis, as well as the findings for this research.

#### **Data Collection**

To begin the data collection for this research question, a basic Google search of the phrase “using multicultural literature” was conducted. To increase the data, a more extensive search was then conducted of all major academic and education databases (including Academic Search Complete and ERIC) using the related phrases of “best practices for using multicultural literature,” “best practices for using multicultural literature in an elementary classroom,” “implementing multicultural literature in a classroom,” and “strategies for using multicultural literature.” The data for this research synthesis study consist of 18 research studies found through the data collection process. The found studies were then arranged into four categories related to classroom “use” of multicultural literature: selecting appropriate and authentic multicultural literature for self-selected reading, implementing multicultural literature into classroom curriculum, using multicultural literature as a supplementary instructional tool, and using multicultural literature to guide classroom discussion. Analysis of the data in each of these categories is presented in the next section of this chapter.

#### **Data Analysis**

Once the studies were grouped into categories the studies within each category were then analyzed and synthesized to produce new findings in that category. Findings from each category

were then further synthesized to produce results related to using multicultural literature in an elementary classroom. The remainder of this section details the analysis process and the results.

The first category is studies that examine the selection of appropriate and authentic multicultural literature for self-selected reading and contains four studies. Analysis of this category indicates that one way to consider multicultural literature is both as a mirror (accurately reflecting a culture) and a window (allowing a view into a culture) (Brinson, 2012). On the issue of quality of literature, a 1998 study of a sampling of South African children's books found that for the most part, the books had good quality and cultural accuracy (Labbo & Field, 1998); a 2014 study of a sampling of Korean children's books found that for the most part, the books depicted Korean culture only at the surface level of the culture (Wee, Park, & Choi, 2015). At the surface level means that the literature only involved broad aspects of the culture, instead of providing abstract and more conceptual experiences of the Korean culture. In the issue of self-selection, third grade students who were free to self-select their reading books, did not differentiate book selection based on culture (Holmes, Powell, & Holmes, 2007). However, selection and quality cannot be factors in multicultural literature book selection when nearly 70% of a sampling of pre-service and in-service teachers are not able to identify any children's books featuring characters from several well-known cultures (Brinson, 2012). Overall, analysis of this category of selecting appropriate and authentic multicultural literature for self-selected reading finds that no matter how authentic or accurate the multicultural literature may be, it will not be selected or read if it is not included in a school or classroom library because classroom teachers are unaware of existing multicultural literature.

Category two contains four studies that explore the implementation of multicultural literature into a classroom curriculum. These four studies cover grade 2, grade 6, and the secondary level plus a study of multicultural books used in a middle school curriculum. At the second grade level, multicultural literature that reflected the culture of the students was successful in helping those students learn vocabulary because the literature contextualized the vocabulary words for the students (Lovelace, & Stewart, 2009); that is, multicultural storybooks that displayed sociocultural images and experiences similar to students had a measurable effect on word learning of those African American students. At the sixth grade level, the multicultural literature used in the curriculum helped students make text connections to the content and produced critical literacy skills and increased cultural awareness (Huang & Kowalick, 2014).

However, the multicultural books included in the middle school curriculum were found to focus on the great value of the American dominant culture and on assimilation into that culture (Yoon & Haag, 2010). Meanwhile English Language Arts teachers at the secondary level chose not to include multicultural literature in the ELA curriculum because they saw no compelling reason to do so (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006). Analysis of this category finds that multicultural literature appears to be implemented successfully into the curriculum only at the elementary grade levels, and that implementing the literature enables students to contextualize vocabulary, make text connections, and increase cultural awareness.

The third category contains studies that explore using multicultural literature as a supplementary instructional tool. These six studies cover the use of multicultural literature in the content areas of English Language Arts (3), Social Studies (2), and Science (1). Integrating multicultural literature into the middle and high school English Language Arts curriculum benefited four teachers' instructional practices, as well as met the demands of the school and curricula (Thein, Barbas, Carnevali, Fox, Mahoney, & Censel, 2012); that is, using the Design Based Research approach allowed teachers to translate theory about multicultural literature instruction into authentic practices in their classrooms. In a fourth grade ELA class, 23 students developed a critical understanding of the variations of the Mulan stories because they went beyond basic surface level story comprehension to analyze the multicultural literature and culture presented in the text, as well as evaluate and critique the authenticity of the various versions (Louie, 2006). However, using multicultural literature in a thematic unit approach enhanced students' awareness of diversity, as well as allowed students to understand that there were more similarities than differences among cultures (Wan, 2006). Meanwhile, Social Studies teachers in a fourth grade classroom selected three chapter books and used those notable multicultural literature as a teaching tool, which appeared to strengthened and supplemented the students' understanding of the social studies content presented in the curriculum (McCarthy, 2007). At the sixth grade level, implementing multicultural literature instead of textbooks reinforced and expanded social studies concepts by making global issues not only tangible, but also meaningful for fourth grade students (Guzzeti, Kowalinski, & McGowan, 1992). Moving from sixth grade social studies to third grade science, a treatment group of six teachers used non-fiction trade books to teach their science instruction. The results from this study revealed that students who had experienced the trade books showed more expanded views of the science content than those

students who used the regular science instruction (Farland, 2006). Overall, analysis of this category of using multicultural literature as a supplementary instructional tool finds that multicultural literature that is integrated into the content areas in elementary and early adolescent curriculum provides students with concrete experiences, as well as in-depth understanding of the content in that curriculum.

The fourth category contains four studies that examine using multicultural literature to guide classroom discussion and shows that students' thinking and understanding was conceptually deeper when using multicultural literature. These four studies cover grade 3, grade 4, grade 7, and grade 9. At the third grade level, multicultural literature allowed students to construct and deconstruct the underlying meanings presented in the text, allowed students the opportunity to reflect on their lives, as well as think critically about social phenomenon in relation to themselves and others (Robinson, 2013). However, at the fourth grade level implementing literature circles using multicultural literature allowed the participants to not only equally participate in the discussions and use a variety of essential literacy skills, but also enabled students to think critically and consider multiple perspectives regarding unjust events (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006). Meanwhile, at the seventh grade level whole-group discussions allowed students to gain a deeper understanding of the multicultural literature and of the social cultural issues (e.g. discrimination and prejudice) of the characters, and of their own personal ideas regarding life (Murray & Puchner, 2012). Additionally, integrating multicultural at the ninth grade level enabled students to talk about the text and others in relation to the text, as well as make text-to-self connections (Glazier & Seo, 2005); that is, keeping in mind the respect and appreciation of the cultures presented in the text and in the classroom community. Analysis of this category of using multicultural literature to guide classroom discussion finds that, students at various grade levels that participate in discussions regarding multicultural literature that contains unjust events enables students to gain a deeper understanding, but also allows students to consider multiple perspectives using critical literacy.

### **Synthesis**

A synthesis of the research finds first of all that multicultural literature can have four uses in an elementary classroom: as self-selected reading, as part of the curriculum, as a supplement to

curriculum, and a teaching tool to generate discussion. While elementary students may not frequently self-select a reading book based on the students' culture or on the culture of the book, elementary students cannot select a multicultural book if their teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of multicultural books to put quality multicultural books in the library for students to select. Therefore the second finding is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature is to have teachers who are knowledgeable about the existence and quality of multicultural books so they can make them available for students to select. For using multicultural literature as part of the curriculum, the synthesis shows that at the grade 2 level, multicultural literature that reflects the culture of the students in the class can assist those multicultural students to learn vocabulary because the literature contextualizes the words. This synthesis also shows that at the grade 6 level, using multicultural literature helped students make text connections to the content, produced critical literature skills, and increase cultural awareness. Therefore the third finding is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature in the curriculum is to use the literature in a way that is cognitively and developmentally appropriate for the age and grade of the students.

Moving to using multicultural literature as a supplementary instructional tool, this synthesis finds that in English Language Arts at the grade 4 level, using the literature assisted students to analyze and compare the multicultural literature and its culture, and enhanced in a positive way students' awareness of diversity. Further, as a supplementary instructional tool for social studies and science, multicultural literature can strengthen and supplement students' understanding of the subject area content by expanding students' views of the content and connected and meaningful for them. Therefore the fourth finding is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature as a supplementary teaching tool is to use the literature as a means for students to connect to cultural awareness and diversity and connect to subject area content in ways meaningful for them. For the fourth use of multicultural literature as a teaching tool, this synthesis finds that discussion (either whole group or small group) of multicultural literature can deepen elementary students' thinking about cultures and multicultural issues, allowing them to construct and deconstruct to underlying meanings in the literature, to reflect on their lives, to think critically about social phenomenon in relation to themselves and others, and to consider multiple perspectives on cultures and socio-cultural issues. Therefore the fifth finding of this study is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature as a teaching tool is to use the literature as a beginning and a basis for discussion in the elementary classroom.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Application**

### **Review of the Results**

After completing a review of the literature to determine what research shows about effective or best practices for using multicultural literature in a culturally diverse elementary classroom, this study has produced five findings. First is that multicultural literature can be used at least four ways in an elementary classroom: as self-selected reading, as part of the curriculum, as a supplement to the curriculum, and a teaching tool to generate discussion. Second is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature as self-selected reading is to have teachers who are knowledgeable enough about the existence and quality of multicultural books to make them available for elementary students to self-select. The third finding is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature in the curriculum is to use the literature in a way that is cognitively and developmentally appropriate for the age and grade of the students. The fourth finding is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature as a supplementary teaching tool is to use the literature as a means for students to connect to cultural awareness and diversity and connect to subject area content in ways meaningful for them, and the fifth finding of this study is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature as a teaching tool is to use the literature at the beginning and a basis for discussion in the elementary classroom.

### **Application of Results to Professional Development**

Because these five findings all deal with best practices for teaching, these findings are very applicable to classroom teachers. By implication, learning best practices is a form of professional development. Therefore these findings will form the basis of a professional development project intended to provide new knowledge to elementary teachers about using multicultural literature in the classroom. For the purpose of presenting best practices to teachers, the most appropriate form of professional development is a pre-made DVD.

**Design of Professional Development Project**

The design of this professional development project will be in the form of a DVD. This professional development is intended for elementary educators that teach in an urban school district or that teach students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The information and instruction that the educators will obtain from viewing this DVD are supported by the findings from this research synthesis.

**Literacy coaching [project] goals and objectives.**

The ultimate goal of this professional development DVD is to support elementary educators who are working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. To reach this goal, the following four objectives have been created. The first objective of this DVD is that participants will learn about the four ways multicultural literature can be used in an elementary classroom. The second learning objective is that participants will become knowledgeable about how to select quality multicultural literature to place in the classroom or school library for student self-selected reading. The third objective is that participating elementary educators will determine one way they can implement one of these best practices for using multicultural literature in their curriculum that is cognitively and developmentally appropriate for their grade and students. The fourth objective is participating teachers try the best practice of using multicultural literature as a discussion starter for their classroom.

**Proposed audience and location.**

This professional development project is proposed for the professional audience of elementary classroom teachers in urban school districts. Because of the rapid increase of culturally and linguistically diverse students in elementary schools, there are no limitations of the number of states that this professional development will take place in. The educators can access this DVD at any time, and may be completed in professional environments at the teachers' school, or on a less professional basis (e.g. at home). This professional development is intended to be easily accessible to teachers by the building administrator.

**Proposed project format and activities.**

The format for this professional development will take the form of a DVD. The DVD (see Appendix A) will include an overview, as well as the four underlying objectives of this professional development. The video will contain a live lecture from this candidate. In addition, the DVD will include graphic representations and video descriptions of how to effectively use multicultural literature in the classroom. Lastly, viewers will be provided with a hyperlink to complete a survey that contains four questions encouraging them to provide feedback and evaluate the professional development.

**Proposed resources for project.**

The resources utilized for this professional development include a television and DVD player or computer access with a CD drive for participants. The DVD will include appropriate videos and instruction that support and present best practices for use of multicultural literature in the classroom. This reading specialist candidate will create the DVD for classroom teachers to view. Teachers can watch the DVD after school hours, or during their prep times. The benefit of this professional development is that teachers do not need to watch this in one sitting; thus, they can refer back to this disk at their convenience.

**Proposed evaluation of project.**

The proposed evaluation of this professional development will be to encourage viewers to complete an online survey where they will be asked to assess the effectiveness of this professional development for their own teaching situation. At the end of the DVD, a hyperlink will be provided for the viewers. The survey will seek to determine if teachers could clearly comprehend the information shared in the DVD, and if the best practices for use of multicultural literature in the classroom were provided appropriately and effectively. Teachers will be given a scale to determine the level of appropriateness and effectiveness. In addition, the survey will contain a component for educators to rate whether they plan to utilize these best practices in their

own personal classroom. Lastly, the survey will end with an informal assessment to determine if the educators have met the projective objectives.

### **Project Ties to Professional Standards**

This professional development project ties to the professional standards of the International Reading Association (IRA) because Standard 6 is Professional Responsibilities and Collaboration in which candidates “demonstrate professional responsibility and engagement relevant to stakeholders to maximize student growth, development, and learning” (IRA, 2010, p. 15). In addition, this professional development project also ties to standard specifics for the classroom teachers level; specifically Professional Growth (Standard 7) in which candidates “access and use professional literature and other professional development opportunities to increase their understanding of teaching and learning” (NYSED, 2011, 15). Elementary educators who participate in this professional development DVD will meet these standards because they will be learning to maintain or improve their professional competence.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

### Overview of Study and Findings

The demographics of children in elementary school are rapidly shifting because of an increased enrollment of children who are culturally and linguistically diverse. This increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse children means that white educators with limited cultural knowledge will be encountering classrooms with greater numbers of culturally diverse students. The problem arising from this increase is that with limited cultural knowledge comes limited knowledge about teaching “best practices” for use with culturally diverse students. Using multicultural literature in a classroom may be one way to increase teachers’ cultural knowledge, but it raises the research question of what are effective or “best practices” for using multicultural literature in a culturally diverse elementary classroom? The most appropriate way to address this research question was with an extensive literature review and research synthesis. This synthesis has produced five findings. First is that existing research has found that multicultural literature can have four uses in an elementary classroom: as self-selected reading, as part of the curriculum, as a supplement to the curriculum, and a teaching tool to generate classroom discussion. Second is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature is to have teachers who are knowledgeable about the existence and quality of multicultural books so they can make them available for students to select. The third finding is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature in the curriculum is to use the literature in a way that is cognitively and developmentally appropriate for the age and grade of the students. The fourth finding is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature as a supplementary teaching tool is to use the literature as a means for students to connect to cultural awareness and diversity and connect to subject area content in ways that is meaningful to the students. The fifth finding of this study is that a best practice for use of multicultural literature as a teaching tool is to use the literature as a foundation for discussion in the elementary classroom. These five findings are relevant to the professional development of elementary teachers, and will therefore be made available to them through a professional development project in the form of an educational DVD.

### **Significance of the Findings**

The five findings are significant to the field of elementary classroom practice because they can influence teacher performance in the classroom. The best practices presented in the findings can allow classroom teachers to provide age and grade appropriate support and instruction as well as books themselves when working with culturally diverse students. These findings are also significant to the field of literacy because they provided a research-based identification of how using multicultural literature in the classroom can provide a positive impact on literacy components across a wide age and grade range of diverse students.

### **Limitations of the Findings**

The findings for this study do have limitations. The first limitation is that the findings are based on the existing research, and that research into using multicultural literature in an elementary classroom has proven to be very scarce. There was a significant amount of research for pre-service teachers and teacher preparation courses and how they can use multicultural literature in the teacher preparation courses; however, there was a limited amount of empirical research that had personal experiences with the use of multicultural literature. The research has been conducted at various grade levels in the primary stages; however there was limited empirical research with participants at middle school age and adolescence. As classrooms are becoming more culturally diverse, perhaps more empirical research will be conducted in each of the grade ranges in order to provide classroom teachers with stronger support for using multicultural literature in the classroom in one of four ways.

### **Conclusion: Answer to the Research Question**

The research question that began this research study is, what are effective or “best practices” for using multicultural literature in a culturally diverse elementary classroom. After conducting this study and performing a research synthesis, this researcher determined five findings. These findings identify four specific “best practices” for using multicultural literature in a culturally diverse elementary classroom. These best practices are to increase teachers’ knowledge about the

existence and quality of multicultural books; to use multicultural literature in the curriculum in a way that is cognitively and developmentally appropriate for the students; to use multicultural literature as a means for students to connect to cultural awareness and diversity and in ways that are meaningful to them; and to use the literature as a teaching tool for starting classroom discussions.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The limitations of the findings of this research study provide a basis for these recommendations for future research. The first recommendation is that for more empirical research be conducted to explore this topic of using multicultural literature in a culturally diverse classroom, specifically looking at each of the elementary grade levels and at the various types of cultural diversity the students bring. The second recommendation is for this type of research with multicultural literature to be conducted with participants in middle and high school and with multicultural books appropriate for that age and grade level.

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**Appendix A:  
Format of Professional Development**

Module Contents

Overview of the rationale and purpose for this study

Graphic representation and video descriptions of effective use of multicultural literature

Data analysis and synthesis of findings for this research study

**Appendix B:  
Evaluation of Professional Development**

Feedback and Evaluation Questions Included in Module

How beneficial were the best practices address in this module?

Where the visual descriptive and explicit for the use of multicultural literature?

How effective were the best practices, when applied in the classroom situation?

Four objectives

- The first objective is that participants will learn about the four ways multicultural literature can be used in an elementary classroom.
- The second objective is that participants will become knowledgeable about how to select quality multicultural literature to put in the school or classroom library.
- The third objective is that participants will be able to implement these best practices of using multicultural literature into the curriculum in a way that is cognitively and developmentally appropriate for the age and grade of the students.
- The fourth objective is that participants will understand how to use multicultural literature as a teaching tool for a discussion starter.

These objectives will be measured by an informal assessment.