

Chapter 15

Latinx Third Graders' Reading and Employing Activism During Tumultuous Times

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ABSTRACT

This chapter offers preservice candidates and in-service teachers a portrait into a classroom context where one teacher: 1) identified the experiences and backgrounds of 20 culturally and linguistically diverse students, 2) used critical literacy as a theory to purposefully select critical multicultural literature grounded in the lives and experiences of her culturally and linguistically diverse third graders, and 3) used critical literacy and multimodal text types to enhance students meaning making and talk as they discussed social activism. Implications for practice and research are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Read alouds serve as a central figure to classrooms across K-12 settings. They have come to be known as central tasks among literacy classrooms to support children in becoming strategic readers and writers. In my own Elementary Literacy Instruction course, Sharon Taberski's *On Solid Ground: Strategies for Teaching Reading K-3* (2000) provides an overview of teaching reading to elementary students. For my preservice candidates, Taberski's text offers a window into how to support readers strategically during whole group discussions. On page 81 of *On Solid Ground* (2000), Taberski defines a read aloud by saying:

During a read aloud, the teacher reads a book to the children that is beyond what they can read on their own. Since the children aren't reading the text themselves, she only shows children the actual text when there are illustrations to share (2000, p. 81).

However, read aloud become more than just a place to demonstrate comprehension strategies and offer children opportunities to respond orally to texts, they become tools for which teachers can help

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children see themselves reflected in texts, communities, their school, and society. Rudine Sims Bishop (1992) contends that texts serve as windows by helping children who do not belong to an ethnic and cultural group to gain new perspectives. Texts also serve as mirrors by showing young readers how their lives fit within a broader human experience.

A recent campaign by a grassroots organization has placed an interest on the diversity of books written by diverse authors and representing diverse people. The We Need Diverse Books campaign has sparked an interest in children, teachers, parents, authors, and others to look at the ways people of color and diverse issues are being represented in literature written for kids. According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center (2018), which examines picture books, novels, and non-fiction annually, their report revealed that the number of books written by and about people of color has increased but the numbers are still bleak. In 2017, the CCBC received 3,400 books:

- 122 were by African American authors
- 340 were about African Americans
- 38 were by American Indians authors
- 72 were about American Indians
- 274 were by Asian Pacific/Asian Pacific American authors
- 310 were about Asian Pacific/Asian Pacific Americans
- 116 were by Latino authors
- 216 were about Latinos

Although the quantity of multicultural children's texts that sit within elementary schools is important, it is not enough to just place or use a book in a classroom if students do not see themselves accurately reflected and/or portrayed. The CCBC notes on its website that the books they document vary widely with regard to accuracy and authenticity. This is critical since the children that sit within schools vary in their experiences and backgrounds. Therefore, it is vital that they have diverse books that are diverse in regard to race, gender, religious affiliations, and topics. Nevertheless, in thinking of the children consuming the stories and messages in literature, we must gear our focus as teacher educators towards supporting and scaffolding preservice candidates and practicing teachers in intentional instruction around selecting literature and engaging in a critical inquiry with students. For this reason, this chapter offers preservice candidates and inservice teachers a portrait into a classroom context where one teacher (1) identified the experiences and backgrounds of her culturally and linguistically diverse students; (2) used critical literacy as a theory to purposefully select literature grounded in the lives and experiences of her culturally and linguistically diverse third graders; and 3) used critical literacy and multimodal text types to enhance students meaning making and talk. For this chapter, multicultural literature is defined as literature that takes up themes related to people of color, gender, class, religious, and language differences are highlight. Children's literature that highlights diversity and social justice issues relevant to diverse learners is defined as critical multicultural literature. This literature offers students an avenue to discuss power differentials, sociopolitical relationships, and taken for granted assumptions (Allen, 2014).

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