

Chapter 11

Promoting Race Talk With Elementary Preservice Teachers Through Diverse Picture Book Read Alouds

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide teacher educators with considerations on how to incorporate diverse picture book read alouds into their own education courses in an effort to promote race talk with preservice teachers (PST). The chapter begins by explaining the need for children to talk about race and the resistance of many PST engaging in these important discussions. Next, an explanation is provided of why diverse picture book read alouds may be a catalyst for preservice teachers to engage in race talk. The chapter continues with a description of the developed Race Talk Read Aloud Curricular Framework which includes a Race Talk Text Set. Eight considerations explain how the curricular framework and text set were developed with the purpose of promoting race talk with PST as they read and discussed the history of racism in the US, how it applies to ourselves, and current literacy instruction in our nation's schools.

INTRODUCTION

I argue that early childhood is the very place that explorations of the social construct of race should begin. And, for that to happen, we need to start with the teachers who impact or who will impact our nation's youngest children. (Miller, 2015, p. 28)

Talking about race can be tough. It can be awkward. It can be uncomfortable and create uneasiness as we might not know what words to use or even how to begin the conversation. But talking about race, especially in our schools, is becoming more of a necessity rather than an option as our country continues to divide itself over racial misunderstandings. As the population in the United States becomes increas-

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ingly diverse, so does our school population and the need to discuss race in school contexts. However, the majority of our public school teachers in the United States are White females from middle-class backgrounds (de Brey et al., 2019), which often creates a large cultural disconnect between teachers and students as teachers overwhelmingly focus on the Eurocentric perspective of schooling that silences the voices of others (Demoiny, 2017). In addition, many of our nation's teachers question the need for discussions surrounding race in our elementary classrooms in the first place. Some early childhood educators claim they do not want to broach topics of race with young children because they want to protect them from difficult topics, yet this is often a mask for the fact that many elementary educators themselves do not have the comfort levels or strategies to address these issues (Demoiny, 2017). Conversely, young children are already forming ideas about race (Miller, 2015) and there may be a very small window of opportunity for their racial habits to change.

This chapter addresses the need for race talk within our nation's preservice education courses and one researcher's journey in attempting to make race talk a reality in their own university classroom. However, this chapter specifically addresses Black and African American identity in the context of race. Discussion surrounding the historic oppression of other people of color within the United States is as much needed as the one discussed here. Admittedly, the researcher focused on race talk within the context of Black and African American history because of access to resources already purchased and utilized within the previous 20 years of teaching in public elementary schools and institutions of higher education.

Divided into two main parts, the first part of this chapter begins with discussing the necessity to talk about race with elementary age students along with the need for teachers discussing race in the classroom setting. Next, the resistance preservice teachers demonstrate over discussing topics related to race in university courses is addressed as well as possible reasons as to why this resistance continues to hold steadfast even today. Continuing, the author explains the potential diverse picture book read-alouds may have in serving as a catalyst for race-related discussions with preservice teachers. Using the considerations and advice of other researchers who have engaged in similar lines of inquiry, the second part of this chapter details a curricular framework designed by the researcher to purposefully engage preservice teachers enrolled in an undergraduate children's literature course in discussions surrounding race. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the outcomes of implementing the curricular framework along with providing several suggestions for teacher educators who may want to implement a similar curriculum into their own teaching.

BACKGROUND

The Need to Talk About Race with Elementary Age Students

Race talk, typically a dialogue or conversation that involves the topic of race, racism, whiteness, and white privilege (Sue, 2015), is not a typical topic of classroom conversations in our nation's schools. As previously mentioned, some educators believe that children are not old enough to handle conversations focused on race and others maintain that young children should be taught the colorblind perspective and discussing race may actually foster racist dispositions (Winkler, 2009). On the contrary, Miller (2015) argues that race talk should start with young children. Research has shown that children, as young as three to five years old, have already started to create racial categories and that they act upon those portrayed stereotypes assigned to these categories (Hirschfeld, 2008). Even more alarming, "developing racial

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