

## Chapter 26

# Selecting Diverse Literature for Interactive Read-Alouds

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to explain how a course, Teaching of Reading and Writing, uses its key course assessment to enhance preservice teacher candidates' appropriation of diverse children's literature. In this chapter, the authors provide an overview of the Teaching of Reading and Writing course and the key course assessment, an interactive read-aloud with a diverse book. Additionally, the authors provide a rationale for why exploring and using high-quality diverse literature is intentionally embedded within the assignment. The chapter also includes a description of how the authors support their teacher candidates' appreciation of diverse children's literature through scaffolded instruction and text evaluation. The authors share their candidates' experiences with the interactive read-aloud as well as successes, challenges, and next steps for this assignment.*

### INTRODUCTION

Recently, the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) reported the population of U.S. residents ages 5 to 17 as being 51% White, 14% African American or Black, 25% Latinx, 5% Asian, less than 1% Pacific Islander, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 4% identifying as two or more races. Despite the growing diversity of school-age students, according to the U.S. Department of Education's 2016 *State of Racial Diversity in the Educators Workforce* report, public school teachers in the United States are overwhelmingly homogenous with 82% identifying as White. The same report noted the lack of diversity in educator preparation programs with 73% of enrolled bachelor-degree-seeking, preservice educators identifying as White, 12% Black, 11% Hispanic, and 4% as other. Taken together, there is a

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clear disparity between the racial identities of U.S. school-age students and their teachers. Noting this incongruence, Piper and colleagues (2017) concluded, “There is a critical need for future educators to embrace the reality that they will be working with students whose backgrounds will, more often than not, be unlike their own; teacher educators need to prepare their students to embrace this reality,” (p.15), and we agree. Incorporating diversity literature into teacher education provides an avenue for preparing candidates for discussing diversity in their future classrooms.

One way we help prepare preservice teacher candidates is by not only educating them about the importance of diverse literature but also teaching them how to evaluate and use diverse children’s books within an interactive read-aloud. We define diverse literature as text that includes categories such as religion, race, ethnicity, social groups, families, gender, and ability identity. Diverse literature provides our preservice teacher candidates and their elementary students opportunities to expand their knowledge and understanding about diversity (Evans, 2010; Piper et al., 2017) and allows them to see themselves reflected in the books they read. Additionally, when used in an interactive read-aloud to generate rich discussion, diverse literature can become a tool to develop a more socially just society (Evans, 2010).

Disappointingly, high-quality diverse literature can be difficult to locate. Using statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC), Huyck and Dahlen (2019) created an infographic portraying the percentage of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds. Of the 3,134 books published in 2018 that were examined by the CCBC, 1% portrayed First Nations or American Indians, 5% Latinx, 7% Asian Pacific Islander or Asian Pacific American, 10% African or African American, 27% animals or other, and 50% White. While the *School Library Journal* (2019) noted that the statistics had improved since 2015, these statistics do not indicate the quality and accuracy of diversity represented in children’s literature examined. Huyck and Dahlen shared their concerns about quality and accuracy by including illustrations of cracked and funhouse-style mirrors beside each character portrayed in the infographic, stating, “Children’s literature continues to misrepresent underrepresented communities, and we wanted this infographic to show not just the low quantity of existing literature, but also the inaccuracy and uneven quality of some of those books,” (School Library Journal, 2019). Misrepresentations, lack of authenticity (Fox & Short, 2003), and poor quality prevent literature from becoming windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990) for the diverse students who read them. By educating our teacher candidates on how to evaluate literature, they are more likely to choose high-quality books that represent the diversity of the students found in their classrooms and to create a reading experience in which students can see their own lives reflected back through the real and imaginary worlds they explore in books (Bishop, 1990).

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how our collaborative instruction in a course entitled *Teaching of Reading and Writing* utilizes a key course assessment to enhance preservice teachers’ appreciation for diverse children’s literature. First, we provide an overview of our *Teaching of Reading and Writing* course. This section provides the context in which our diverse interactive read-aloud assignment is situated. Next, we explain how to support teacher candidates’ appreciation of diverse children’s literature through text evaluations and scaffolded instruction. This section includes a discussion of the importance of using high-quality diverse literature and provides a framework for evaluating literature for quality. Then, we explain the key assessment, a diverse interactive read-aloud, and describe what an interactive read-aloud should look like in the classroom. Finally, we conclude by sharing our teacher candidates’ experiences with the interactive read-aloud as well as our successes, challenges, and next steps for this assignment. These ideas are meant to demonstrate the effectiveness of the assignment and potential for its improvement. We have three objectives for this chapter: to discuss how diverse literature fits into

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