"LES VRAIES COULEURS DU MONDE": ADOLESCENT LEARNERS' WORLDVIEWS
EXPLORED THROUGH MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

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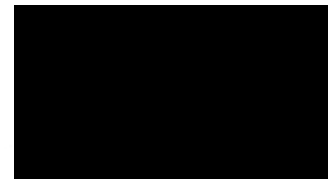is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

This study takes a teacher inquiry approach to examine the potential for multicultural literature to expand adolescent learners' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens. Being both a language arts teacher and researcher granted me an insider's lens as I framed the research in a single case study of my eighth-grade students' experiences within our ESL class. I drew on Sims Bishop's (1990) metaphors of *mirrors*, *windows*, and *sliding glass doors* to conceptualize a multilayered theoretical framework. While critical pedagogy and critical literacy remained central to the framework, theoretical tenets such as feminist pedagogies and socioconstructivist theories also guided this classroom research. Data gathering methods included a teacher journal, reflective questionnaires, and student portfolios. Key pedagogical practices contributing to the data included read alouds, dialogue journals, and multimodal creations through which students responded by expressing their thoughts and emotions in the face of injustices they encountered. A constant comparative method of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) led to multiple findings. A focus on the classroom as a whole revealed emerging themes of empathy, insight, and agency through a first lens. A second lens focused on my perspective as a teacher and unveiled the salient themes of pedagogical practices to teach about the world, the emergence of allyship, and teaching during a pandemic. Three participant portraits offered a third lens featuring a journey of learning through three distinct capabilities: passion, curiosity, and wisdom. Findings revealed how interacting with multicultural books and connecting with real-world persons and events provided moments for adolescent learners to further develop critical consciousness and social awareness, and occasions to cultivate humanity, by building on empathy and compassion as they become global citizens.

Acknowledgements

Our Real Work
by Wendell Berry (1983)

It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come to our real work,
and that when we no longer know which way to go
we have come to our real journey.
The mind that is not baffled is not employed.
The impeded stream is the one that sings.

Indeed, doing doctoral research is challenging, and the journey full of bumps and blessings can be a lonely one. However, difficulty comes with delight when fellow humans grace you with their presence and support. I would like to acknowledge these people now. Foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my Dissertation Supervisor, Dr. Tara-Lynn Scheffel. Her insightfulness, patience, and words of encouragement contributed to making my journey an enriching learning experience. I have valued her mentorship as she tended to every detail of my work with great care. Next, I humbly extend my thanks to my Supervisory Committee members: Dr. Susan E. Elliott-Johns and Dr. Terry A. Campbell. Both graciously gave their precious time, sound advice, and genuine feedback toward my research project. I would also like to thank other faculty members of Nipissing University who have significantly influenced my thinking and philosophy: Dr. Michelann Parr, Dr. Callie Mady, Dr. Warnie Richardson, and Dr. Carlo Ricci. Furthermore, I am deeply indebted to my students, past and present, with whom I have had the privilege to teach and learn. I am grateful for participants in this study, who willingly shared their learning journey with the rest of us. Of course, none of this work would be possible if not for the unceasing support from my family. I am extremely thankful for my parents, who have always led by example, showing me that anything is possible when you believe in yourself and work hard. I am indebted to my husband, who loved, trusted, consoled, encouraged, elevated, and sustained me throughout this journey. I am grateful for my children who cheered me on and never stopped believing in me, as well as the rest of my family for their constant love and support. Finally, I have a deep sense of gratitude for members of my PhD cohort: Susan, Vivian, and Balan. All were indispensable partners during our summer residencies, and our conversations were nothing short of exquisite. As I come to the end of this journey, I appreciate each person who endorsed my efforts and nurtured my soul.

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Chapter One

Reimagining Education: Investigating the Potential of Multicultural Literature in Growing Empathic Global Citizens

The world is our classroom.
~ Father (Parvana's Journey, 2002/2015, p. 22)

The Purpose of Education

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights articulates that education should benefit the full development of the human personality, and aim for "understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups" (The United Nations, 1948, art. 26, para. 2). Understanding. Tolerance. Friendship. When I began my career as an educator, my intentions and aspirations aligned with the goals of shaping future citizens to fully develop as humans who care about other humans. Yet, criteria like economic growth and material wealth are what tend to define success and well-being in our society, while systems of education continue to advance educational agendas that value productivity over empathy (Nussbaum, 2010). In a philosophical piece in which she contemplates the relationship between ethics and education, Bai (2008) suggested that the ultimate purpose of education "is learning the ways of life that promote well-being for all sentient beings with whom we share our planet" (p. 110); anything else is considered "*mis*education". Dewey's (1938) conception of education was not limited to a succinct activity toward preparing one for life; rather, he believed it to be a social process encompassing life itself. Moreover, the Organisation for Economic and Co-operation Development (OECD) confirmed that the human race faces unprecedented challenges due to a hastened globalization process, hence the need for broader education goals. Their international collaborative project called *The Future of Education and Skills 2030* breaks down the necessary capabilities students will require to navigate a complex world and a rapidly changing society,

namely (a) to respect and appreciate the ideas, perspectives and values of other, (b) to care about the well-being of their family, friends, community, and planet, (c) to develop a sense of purpose and responsibility in shaping their own lives and contribute to the lives of others, and (d) to exercise agency in their own learning and throughout life (OECD, 2018). After more than a decade in the classroom, as a teacher of adolescents, I realize that a disparity exists between the goals we have identified for a more sustainable education in the twenty-first century, and the pedagogical practices we implement in our classrooms.

In his book *The Answer to How Is Yes*, Block (2003) asked whether we should strive to "exchange what we know how to do for what means most to us" (p. 4). I believe questions like this one are timely, and as a teacher, I am committed to ask them so that I may be intentional in upholding my students' basic human right of receiving an education that fulfils its promise. Naturally, the next questions that come to mind are: How can I do this? Do my interactions with students in the classroom "embody an image of the society they will graduate into and the kind of contributions they are being enabled to make within this society?" (Cummins, 1996, p. 222). In the dawn of the twenty-first century, schools must contend with regenerated racism and issues that undermine ethical and just social conditions (Darling-Hammond, 2017). As an educator, these are relevant issues for me, for my students, and by extension, the interconnected global community of which we are members. In the *Global Education Futures Report*, Senge (2018) proposed that reimagining the purpose of education to cultivate human beings might be the shift in perspective required to address many of the most pressing problems we face today. Senge suggested that interconnectedness and striving to learn together can change the way we understand ourselves and others in the world. For Giroux (1988), a critical educator should endeavour "to raise ambitions, desires and real hope for those who wish to take seriously the

issue of educational struggle and social justice" (p. 177). In like manner, Bourdieu (2003) urged

researchers to become advocates in the larger social world, challenging the status quo by

focusing on matters of equity, access, and democracy. If critical research is about a researcher's

hope to use research as a tool for social change (Morrell, 2004), then Giroux's vision and

Bourdieu's plea correspond with the scope of my study.

A Personal Narrative

Before outlining the details of my research, I share how my lived experience as a young

girl, a teacher, and a PhD student contributed to shaping my project. Each of the following stages

of my life was instrumental in developing a worldview that would inspire and shepherd this

research project.

Une envie d'ailleurs [A Pull Toward Elsewhere]

Growing up in the rural part of a small Canadian town meant that my surroundings (my

neighbourhood, classmates, friends, and family members) were a kindred blend of familiar. Our

community consisted of mostly White, lower- to middle-class families. I understood culture to

mean my French-Canadian culture, in other words, the language and religion shared by most

everyone in my community. Diversity was a foreign concept to me, yet, I knew it existed, and

yearned to know how the rest of the world lived. As far as I can remember, I have had *une envie

d'ailleurs*, or a pull toward elsewhere, imagining the world (and people) beyond my own as

mysterious and exotic. When I was in fourth grade, I remember with detail the day Katya

(pseudonym) entered our classroom. She and her family had just immigrated to Canada, having

fled from civil unrest in another country, and her presence in our classroom was, for most of my

classmates and I, our first encounter with diversity. Katya and I became friends, and as I

discovered the ways in which we were different, I also realized just how much we were alike.

My friendship with her represented a life-changing moment because a connection with the world beyond my own had awakened my consciousness and prompted me to change the way I view the world: from the idea of mystery and exoticism, to a perspective of humanism.

The View From Teacher Eyes

After earning my B.Ed. degree, I began to contemplate the world as an adult, now through teacher eyes. I found there were many challenges as a White, middle-class educator, who strove to teach about diversity and social justice to mainly White students. My early experiences as one of those students motivated me to find ways to teach about the culturally diverse world in which we live.

About five years ago, I endeavoured to incorporate diversity into my teaching through multicultural literature and persuaded my school administration to expand its booklists in the language arts department. I began to introduce social justice books to my English as a second language (ESL) students, with the goal to push the boundaries of traditional second language instruction and widen the range of topics that might present opportunities for developing global awareness, student voice, and empathy. I began with *The Breadwinner* series by Deborah Ellis (2000/2015; 2002/2015), and what I observed was uplifting. My eighth-graders, at the time, loved engaging with multicultural literature, and responded to it with curiosity and fervour. I noticed that in addition to improving their linguistic skills, students seemed to find their voice as it pertained to issues that mattered to them. Stories anchored in social justice seemed to grant learners a space to partake in stimulating conversations as they learned about the world and others.

Curious to know how they perceived education after having experienced it differently through the multicultural books, I posed two questions: "What does education mean to you?"

and, "If you didn't have to come to school, would you come anyway?" About ninety percent of their answers bewildered me. To get a decent job/career and earn a living that would support a comfortable lifestyle, they would keep coming to school. They avowed that education was a means to an individually prosperous end to their life goals. It felt like I was part of a system that might be robbing these learners of a deeper understanding of the educational journey we had taken together in class. Despite months of engagement, they were still towing a line permanently etched in the fabric of our society regarding the purpose of mainstream schooling, and it left me wondering to what extent they viewed themselves as active members of our global community.

I began to question this gap, striving to grasp the missing piece that might take them beyond just liking the book, as it were. What can we say about students' perceptions, preconceptions, and attitudes in a classroom community where multiculturalism is unfamiliar? How could learners identify as real actors in the story of the world and acknowledge that they can speak, write, and act themselves into that story rather than observe from a distance? I wanted to explore this further and continue to find ways for students to build their critical, cultural, and global consciousness by way of diverse narratives in multicultural literature.

Learning Anew as a PhD Student

My learning journey as a PhD student at Nipissing University prompted me to examine different perspectives through countless readings, course work, and philosophical discussions. The journey that began almost four years before has been one of enlightenment and consolidation, in which I continued to discover the theoretical underpinnings hidden behind my everyday pedagogical practices as a classroom teacher. For the first time, I was able to associate and name the theories that supported my pedagogies: critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2016) as my students engaged in reading, writing, and learning from a position of agency; critical literacy

and social constructivism, as they participated in a form of learning that was both social and cultural in nature (Luke & Freebody, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978); and feminism (Noddings, 1995), as a culture of care flourished within our classroom community. The acts of teaching and learning became harmonious when I was able to see the big picture where theory and practice entwined.

My journey also educated me in unexpected ways. During my first summer residency, I spent time with a community that taught me a new way of knowing as I learned about the history and struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada. I grappled with the fact that even at my age and stage in life, I learned about something important, much greater than myself. Out of my comfort zone, I wrestled with this learning as it collided with parts of my belief system. Despite this, I was compelled to become a real actor in the story of the world, so I shared this conviction with my students in the autumn of that first year. Thus, it became clear to me that words and connections weave together and move through innermost thoughts and emotions in the process of learning. Campbell et al. (2009) believed that "learning includes change that transforms our deepest tacit understandings into visible, explicit forms" (p. 3). As a graduate student, I was learning to become a scholar, yet I was also learning to become a good learner. Like other key moments in my life, this humble experience changed my perspective and sparked my new journey as a researcher. Hence, I capitalized on my second summer residency to work through my research topic and each day, my thinking grew as did my vision for this dissertation.

Looking back on my narratives as a young girl, a teacher, and a PhD student, I can better understand the origins of my journey, and articulate my current teacher researcher identity with more clarity. My desire to know more about the world as a child, wanting to share it with my students as a teacher, and coming to terms with learning anew as a PhD student—these stages of

my personal journey guided an inquiry that would seek to uncover how knowing, teaching, and learning interconnect to fulfil a more sustainable education purpose.

Reframing Education to Cultivate Humanity

Nussbaum (1997) admitted that becoming a citizen of the world may entail leaving one's sense of security, "from the comfort of assured truths, from the warm nestling feeling of being surrounded by people who share one's convictions and passions" (p. 83). Efforts to reframe education toward a more humane enterprise might involve the consideration of alternative perspectives, values, and attitudes.

An Interconnected World Inspires a Global Perspective

Sleeter (1991) contended that multicultural educators are instrumental in empowering future generations of citizens to create a more just society. To this end, Sleeter believed that values and attitudes play an important role in what we see and how we think about our perceptions of the world, especially as they pertain to culture and diversity. Perspectives entail adopting a point of view, or lens, through which we make observations; in addition to an object of attention, which is the focus of our observations (Coombs, 1988). According to Fennes and Hapgood (1997), perspectives can be described on a scale ranging from an open-minded view to an ethnocentric view in which the world is interpreted through a narrow and judgmental vantage point. In the same vein, Case (1993) asserted that teaching more information about the world may not help students understand it better; rather, engaging in global education may mean providing them with appropriate conceptual and moral lenses through which to view the world. Providing such lenses is important: limiting classroom studies of other cultures to superficial features of their lifestyles fails to communicate multiple views of the world to students (Case, 1993; Short, 2009). Thus, Case clarified elements of a global perspective by proposing a

framework comprising a substantive dimension and a perceptual dimension. In the former, Case recommended teaching about the broader global community, beyond students' own community and country; in the latter, he promoted the use of a global lens with which students can tackle controversial global issues and learn to become open-minded. Similar to Fennes and Hapgood's view on intercultural understanding as perspective, Case conceptualized five elements as key cognitive and affective attributes connected to global perspective: (a) open-mindedness, (b) anticipation of complexity, (c) resistance to stereotyping, (d) inclination to empathize, and (e) nonchauvinism (or ethnocentrism). Case's two dimensions of global perspective help situate the significance of my research as elaborated in this chapter.

Why are global perspectives important in education? Apple (2011) advanced that as populations are growing more and more diverse, so is the need to think globally about education. His work in reconciling theory, policy, and practice to further critical educational efforts has been fuelled by a fundamental belief that understanding the social realities of schooling, and challenging existing structures of inequalities, can lead to developing critical educators who will teach in more socially just ways (Apple, 2018; Giroux, 2010).

A Diverse World Prompts a Social Justice Perspective

According to Bell (2016), diversity and social justice are distinct, yet interdependent terms. Bell associated social justice with the elimination of injustice, which entails the rebuilding of a more inclusive and equitable society. As both a goal and a process, social justice requires us to confront existing ideologies, patterns, and societal pillars that privilege dominant groups to the detriment of the marginalized (Bell, 2016). Because diversity and social justice are interconnected, Bell affirmed that we must first attribute value to each before change can occur. Social justice encompasses topics that take on issues of equity (Boutte & Muller, 2018; Freire,

1970/2016), and social justice education (SJE) implies the active participation of teachers and students in creating critical, and empowering, teaching and learning environments (Hackman, 2005).

Nonetheless, Hackman (2005) deemed that teaching from a social justice perspective can be challenging. To address this challenge, she proposed five key components: (a) tools for content mastery, (b) tools for critical thinking, (c) tools for action and social change, (d) tools for personal reflection, and (e) tools for awareness of multicultural group dynamics. In this way, a social justice classroom aspires to equip learners with the knowledge and awareness needed to analyze issues of oppression and injustice, and transform this learning into action (Bell, 2016; Hackman, 2005). Adding to this transformative endeavour, Stachowiak (2017) advocated cultivating a social justice mindset in students by (a) establishing a framework geared toward building critical consciousness, (b) stimulating self-reflection, (c) understanding systemic influences, and (d) engaging in social action. As students gain a sense of agency and become committed to the goal of social justice, they begin to see themselves as capable of interrupting structural systems of oppression, and actively contributing to social change (Bell, 2016; Hackman, 2005; Stachowiak, 2017).

Social and Global Processes Implicate Literacy and Literature

Cosmopolitanism, a term rooted in the Greek word for citizens of the world, is yet another way to define global perspective (Choo, 2013). In fact, Choo (2013) argued that in an increasingly diverse world, a broader goal of education supports world citizenship, in contrast to the narrow-minded ethnocentrism at the root of major historical conflicts. Choo referred to early advocates of this broader vision of education, like Maria Montessori who defended the need for education to promote the real values of humanity and the appreciation of civilization, and

Rabindranath Tagore (1961), who campaigned for compassion and proposed to instil in students "a sympathy with all humanity, free from all racial and national prejudices" (p. 216). Conjointly, Choo (2018) contended that literacy should be part of social and global processes, suggesting that, in a world that is more globally connected than before, cosmopolitan (global) literacy is paramount because it teaches the necessary critical, aesthetic, and empathic skills in a globalized world.

If literacy is "both the willingness and the ability to evoke, conceive of, express, receive, reflect on, share, evaluate, and negotiate meanings" (Wilhelm, 2016, p. 233), then it can be used as a window into the social world, helping readers gain a better understanding of perspectives different than our own. In the same way, literary experiences can be catalytic for students. According to Wilhelm (2016), it is worthwhile for language arts teachers like me to ask why we teach these arts, what we hope to achieve, and how it will make our students' lives better. For instance, Gilbert (1994) reminded us that stories can reveal the way cultures have defined human relationships, "whose histories have been authorized and whose have been silenced; whose lives have been acclaimed and whose have been devalued" (p. 128). Nussbaum (1997) argued for the power of literature in imagining possible worlds and expressing compassion toward characters experiencing human vulnerability as they face challenges. In Bruner's (1986) words, the power of the story world rests in "the trafficking in human possibilities versus settled certainties" (p. 35). Literature can offer insights into cultures learners may not have access to, as well as inspire them to become active global citizens who are equipped to ask questions about real-world injustices and prepared to practice empathy in the face of diversity (Choo, 2018). Collectively, global perspective, social justice, literacy, and literature offer a context for my research as outlined below.

Narrowing Down the Path and Purpose of My Study

My research focus is situated at the intersection of social justice and literacy. As I began to delve into the existing literature surrounding my topic, I realized that it involved many moving parts, and that my review of the literature would require me to compartmentalize it. This work resulted in various research areas/sections, each including their corresponding subsections. I begin by introducing research pertaining to SJE and multicultural children's literature. Within this area, I outline studies that speak to the call for SJE in the context of teaching and learning, followed by educators' experiences with SJE and multicultural children's literature. These experiences address struggles, risks, benefits, and strategies, as well as children as capable of engaging with tough topics. I then consider research that speaks to the challenge in teacher education and the development of culturally responsive teachers. Next, I delve into literature that addresses the need for dialogue about race/racism/White privilege and race as a social construct. Last, I review studies relevant to perspective-taking with multicultural literature. I provide a deeper analysis of salient literature pertaining to each area/section in Chapter 2.

My Research Questions

Like Monobe and Son (2014), I believe that "[i]n this era of globalization, where the next generation will interact more and more with diverse people around the world, students' ability to navigate and understand differing perspectives is increasingly important" (p. 563). Further, I adhere to Palmer's (1997) view that

> [e]ducation at its best—these profound human transactions called knowing, teaching, and learning—are not just about information, and they're not just about getting jobs. They are about healing. They are about wholeness. They are about empowerment, liberation, transcendence. They are about reclaiming the vitality of life. (p. 3)

Simply put, I worry about how my students perceive others, the world, and themselves as part of the broader world. Hence, from my classroom interactions emerged the following research question: *How might using multicultural literature in the classroom expand adolescent learners' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens?* I posed three related questions to further explore the matter: (a) *Does multicultural literature encourage learners to examine assumptions about cultural differences? If so, in what ways?* (b) *How can multicultural literature support developing a critical lens on global issues?* (c) *Does multicultural literature challenge learners to engage in social action? If so, how?*

The Purpose of My Study

Kincheloe et al. (2018) suggested that "[i]n the context of reading the word and the world, and problem-posing existing knowledge, critical educators reconceptualize the notion of literacy" (p. 239). What is meant by going beyond simply reading the word? School curricula should harmonize with students and teachers yearning to live just and ethical lives (Kincheloe, 2004) and promote young learners to "engage in critical analysis of the forces that shape the world" (Kincheloe et al., 2018, p. 239). Thus, leading students to engage with text critically from intellectual, cultural, social, and political standpoints might prompt the desire to learn to live together ethically and justly (Luke, 2000). Likewise, multicultural literature might be a way to invite students to look at their own culture and position in the world and consider others'. Literature offers a medium for reflection and learning through characters in stories who experience injustices, difficulties, or tragedies because of their differences. Hence, the purpose of my research was to explore the way multicultural literature might go beyond creating a level of interest in students and urge them to be transformed by it. Notably, encountering and engaging with social justice books might inform youth on their own cultural identities and assumptions,

encourage an attitude of perspective-taking, and therefore, widen the range of existing worldviews by means of a growing empathic awareness and agency.

Definition of Terms

As I began my journey with this study, certain concepts needed clarification. The following consist of a list of terms and definitions central to my teacher inquiry:

- *Agency:* This term signifies "a sense of responsibility to participate in the world and, in so doing, to influence people, events and circumstances for the better. . . . the ability to frame a guiding purpose and identify actions to achieve a goal" (OECD, 2018, p. 4).

- *Culture:* I understand *culture* according to Geertz's (1973) definition of "the shared patterns that set the tone, character, and quality of people's lives" (p. 216). Included in these patterns are race, gender, class, language, religion, ethnicity, relationships, and values which shape ways of living and being in the world (Short, 2009).

- *Empathy:* This term is defined as "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a).

- *Globalization:* This refers to the "expansion of global linkages, the organization of social life on a global scale and the growth of a global consciousness . . . the consolidation of world society" (Shahzad, 2006, p. 204). This is a relevant concept in critical education because it significantly influences educational policies and practices (Apple, 2011).

- *Global citizenship:* This is "an umbrella term for social, political, environmental, and economic actions of globally minded individuals and communities on a worldwide scale" (The United Nations, 1948, para. 1).

- *Global perspective:* This can be described as "a blend of many things and any given individual may be rich in certain elements and relatively lacking in others. . . . to cope with the challenges of an increasingly interdependent world" (Hanvey, 1976, pp. 1-2). Global education is a way of looking at the world (Perinbaum, 1989), and promoting a global perspective provides opportunities for students to perceive the world through adequate cognitive lenses (Case, 1993).

- *Multicultural education:* This term is considered "a process—a philosophy—a concept. It is a way of thinking. It is a strategy to accomplish a goal" (Bieger, 1995, p. 308). This concept is based upon a fundamental belief that all people should be respected, regardless of age, race, gender, economic class, religion, or physical or mental ability (Grant & Sleeter, 2009). *Multicultural social justice education*, a term coined by Sleeter and Grant (2007), is seated in the belief that "equity and justice should be goals for everyone, and that solidarity across differences is needed to bring about justice" (p. 184).

- *Multicultural literature* or *global literature:* Both terms are used interchangeably throughout the dissertation, as a pedagogical term rather than as a literary genre. The terminology depicts underrepresented cultures or groups and expands the curriculum to include a more pluralistic view of cultures (Cai & Sims Bishop, 1994), which encompass people who have been marginalized in a variety of ways (Yokota, 2001). I utilize this key term throughout to mean "literature which reflects a power differential between groups created by such things as ethnicity, race, gender, or economics" (Dressel, 2005, p. 754).

- *Racial literacy:* This term was developed by Twine (2004), after a seven-year ethnographic study with mixed-race families, in which she theorized White transracial birth parents' attempts "to cultivate 'black' identities in their children of multiracial

heritage" (p. 878). In other words, it is a form of socialization and skills development to counter racism.

- *Social justice education (SJE):* This terminology is influenced by humanistic education (see Patterson, 1973), and informed by Freire's critical pedagogy (1970/2016, 1974/2017). A social justice classroom aims to help students develop awareness and become conscious of their own worldview to examine justice/injustice issues pertaining to themselves and their local and global community (Bell, 2016).

- *White privilege/racism:* There is a common misconception that White privilege assumes a meritocratic attitude whereby a person's achievements are solely accredited to their efforts, or abilities (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Semantically, the terminology of White privilege may have suffered a lack of contextualization. Whereas the lay usage of *privilege* tends to mean good fortune, or luck, the use of privilege in critical social justice education refers to "the rights, advantages, and protections enjoyed by some *at the expense of* and beyond the rights, advantages, and protections available to others" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 58, emphasis in original). Correspondingly, racism can be understood as a form of oppression associated with the idea of White privilege and power, defined by Tatum (2017) as a system of advantage based on race.

An Inquiry Stance Frames the Project

Having refined my research questions and delineated the goals of my inquiry, I focused on the theoretical paradigms and methodologies that would frame my study. The initial layer of my theoretical framework consisted of critical pedagogy and critical literacy, two theories that would be instrumental to my research. I added feminist and socioconstructivist theories to complete the framework, and further expand on these theoretical perspectives in Chapter 3.

Because my research questions originated from my classroom observations, engaging in research from the location of practice seemed the logical path to take. After contemplating various potential methodological approaches, on which I elaborate in Chapter 4, I decided to conduct a single case study of teaching and learning in my language arts class. I chose to pursue a qualitative teacher research approach, convinced that adopting an inquiry stance allowed me to explore "in the constant flux and flow of classroom life and culture in order to generate new possibilities" (Campano, 2009, pp. 332-333). Based on his work as a teacher researcher and teacher educator, Campano (2009) suggested that teacher research challenges the assumption of theory and practice as separate entities and proposed that it "involves a metatheoretical stance whose underlying ethical imperative is to respond to students in their full humanity and dignity and thus must be understood within the dynamism and life-world of the classroom" (p. 327). My methodology corresponds with my desire to reconcile theory with practice, and my understanding of teacher research as "a genre, movement, way of knowing, and social educational critique" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. xi).

Significance of the Study

Conducting this study as a teacher researcher reminds me of my journey as a lifelong learner, and rekindles my aspirations to teach better (Lytle, 2008). hooks (1994) maintained that as teachers, we can learn to educate as a practice of freedom, believing that "our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students" (p. 13). Likewise, for Freire (1970/2016), pedagogy is not concerned with methods, training, or knowledge transmission; rather, it is a "political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens" (Giroux, 2010, p. 716). Further, because it is an emancipatory project, literacy

implies more than a technical skill to be acquired; specifically, it entails a "necessary foundation for cultural action for freedom, a central aspect of what it means to be a self and socially constituted agent" (Freire & Macedo, 1987). My intentions of immersing students in multicultural books study coheres with Cope and Kalantzis' (2009) assertion that "literacy teaching is not about skills and competence; it is aimed at creating a kind of person, an active designer of meaning, with a sensibility open to differences, change and innovation" (p. 175).

My study is significant because it examines the potentiality of multicultural literature to cultivate the aforementioned possibilities in my students. Inviting them to critically read social justice books could inspire them to interpret and analyze their own experiences and views of the world and develop a consciousness of others as well. Why does this matter? Students need to wrestle with ideas and words; reading the word and the world elicits questions like what is? who benefits? and what if? (Freire, 1970/2016), without which their perception of others may be distorted by an ethnocentric worldview (Sims Bishop, 1990). Multicultural education holds the promise of eliminating stereotyping and avoiding negative attitudes toward other groups, helps students to develop a more positive attitude toward other cultures and nations, and it is empowering as well as liberating (Samuel, 2011). Because it tells the real story of my students' and my encounter with multicultural literature, this study may inform future classroom practices. Also, I hope my teacher inquiry might contribute to changing the way learners perceive their roles in their own educational journeys, extend the scope of their learning processes as well as expand their views upon the world.

Looking Ahead: Organization of the Study

Returning to the quote that began this chapter, I ponder the meaning of what Parvana's father said in two ways. First, Parvana, the young protagonist searching for her displaced family

in war-torn Afghanistan, draws on the memory of her father as he tells her stories about the world and connects them to her life. Second, Parvana recalls the lessons he taught her, drawing on his adventures, experiences, and knowledge to educate her, despite a society that strips her of her right to go to school. Father's vision of education resonates with mine because my conception of knowing, teaching, and learning is not restricted to the confines of a building, a curriculum, or a fixed pedagogical mindset. The exploration of alternative ways of being as teacher and student is revealed in this dissertation, which unfolds over the course of ten chapters. Each chapter adds new information, shedding light on the different facets of the study, and guiding the reader toward subsequent emergent findings.

Chapter 2 expands on the salient literature that I briefly outlined in this introductory chapter. In Chapter 3, I lay out my multilayered theoretical framework, adapting Sims Bishop's (1990) metaphors of *mirrors*, *windows*, and *sliding glass doors* to conceptualize how the various theories commingle with practical manifestations of teaching and learning. I support the development of my theoretical framework with relevant literature. Chapter 4 describes the methodological design of the study, relying on a breadth of literature to sustain my choices. In this chapter, I also provide extensive details about the processes used for data gathering and analysis, as well as ethical considerations, including attention to methodological rigour. In Chapters 5 through 9, I borrow the metaphor of a patterned quilt to tell the story of my study's findings, through three distinct lenses: a first lens focuses on the classroom, a second lens centres on myself as teacher, and a third lens takes a closer look at three participants' lived experiences. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 each expand on the study's emerging themes, while Chapter 8 addresses my reflections on using multicultural literature as a pedagogical practice. In Chapter 9, I unveil the portraits of Amber, Kate, and Jessie. Chapter 10 offers a summary, discussion points, challenges,

personal reflections and limitations of the study, paths for further exploration, contributions from

this study, and concluding remarks.

Chapter Two

A Review of the Literature: Bringing Together the Many Moving Parts of My Teacher Research

We have inherited a large house, a great world house, in which we have to live together, . . . a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace . . . we cannot ignore the larger world house in which we are also dwellers. ~ Martin Luther King Jr. (1967)

Many Moving Parts

In this dissertation, I outline the details of the investigative journey through which students and I explored how encounters with social justice books might prompt us to reflect on our cultural identities and assumptions, inspire us to take on another's perspective, and consider potential worldviews. This dissertation addresses how using multicultural literature in the classroom might expand adolescent learners' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens. When I first presented my research questions to members of my PhD supervisory committee, they drew my attention to the many moving parts embedded in my inquiry; hence, a lot of working components to coalesce. I conceptualize the following literature review as the bringing together of these moving parts to describe the landscape of existing research related to my study and build a cohesive case for this teacher research.

My review of the literature explores several distinct areas: (a) social justice education and multicultural children's literature, (b) deeper connections to theory (critical pedagogy and critical literacy), (c) two effective strategies (read alouds and dialogue journals), and (d) the transformative power of story (see Table 1, p. 21). It looks at the perspective of educators, teacher candidates, postsecondary students, and K-12 students. Types of research include studies that draw on a range of approaches, from teacher research to action research, youth participatory

Table 1

Organization of the Literature Review Chapter

Many Moving Parts

Areas/Sections	Subsections
Social Justice Education and Multicultural Children's Literature	The Call for SJE
	Educators' Experiences With SJE and Multicultural Children's Literature ● Struggles, Risks, Benefits, and Strategies ● Children as Capable of Engaging With Tough Topics
	The Challenge for Teacher Education: Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers
	The Need for Dialogue About Race/Racism/White Privilege ● Race as a Social Construct: Teacher Candidates' Perspectives ● Race as a Social Construct: Students' Perspectives
	Perspective-Taking With Multicultural Literature
Deeper Connections to Theory	Critical Pedagogy ● Building Critical Consciousness and Empathy ● Bridging Story Worlds and the Real World
	Critical Literacy ● A Closer Look at Transactional Theory ● An Effective Approach in Second Language Classrooms ● Using Critical Literacy to Further Develop Critical Curiosity/Critical Consciousness in Adolescents
Two Effective Strategies	Read Alouds
	Dialogue Journals
The Transformative Power of Story	Stories as Simulated Social Experiences
	The Impact of Engagement and Agency

action research (YPAR), ethnography, and case study methodologies. In addition, I incorporate

practitioner-based, and theory-focused articles that offer content pertaining to classroom

practices and teacher experience relevant to my methodology.

Social Justice Education and Multicultural Children's Literature

I sought to gain a better understanding of how SJE has unfolded in the context of language arts. With my research questions in mind, I focused on the teaching and learning of social justice/global issues, race/racism/White privilege, and tough/controversial topics. This section is organized as follows: (a) the call for SJE, (b) educators' experiences with SJE and multicultural children's literature, (c) the challenge for teacher education: developing culturally responsive teachers, (d) the need for dialogue about race/racism/White privilege, and (e) perspective-taking with multicultural literature.

The Call for SJE

Banks (2003) declared that "[l]iterate citizens in a diverse democratic society should be reflective, moral, and active. They should have the knowledge, skills, and commitment needed to act to change the world to make it more just and democratic" (p. 18). Summarizing Nobel Prize laureate Rabindranath Tagore's vision of international education, Samuel (2011) suggested that through multicultural education, students become aware of social justice issues, identify stereotypes, and consider positive attitudes toward others, challenging them to instate ideas to improve their world. For this to occur, Banks (1991) reminded us that students require the skills taught through multicultural education to flourish in a changing and diverse society. Likewise, Banks et al. (2001) found that for students to interact positively with diverse groups of people, they must acquire civic skills, knowledge, and attitudes accordingly. Hence, teaching with an SJE agenda enables students to

> . . . develop awareness, knowledge, and processes to examine issues of justice/injustice in
> their personal lives, communities, institutions, and the broader society . . . to develop a

sense of agency and commitment, as well as skills and tools, for working with others to

interrupt and change oppressive patterns. (Bell, 2016, p. 4)

The challenge remains in helping students develop an understanding of equity and grow a social

justice mindset, while setting the example as teachers (Stachowiak, 2017).

Growing a social justice mindset requires educators to expand their consciousness. In a

practitioner-focused article, Broere and Kerkhoff (2020) suggested that middle level students'

cultural and intercultural consciousness needs to be cultivated if productive conversations about

sociopolitical and global issues are to take place in the classroom. Based on their teaching

experiences in seventh- and ninth-grade classrooms, Broere and Kerkhoff highlighted discussion

strategies teachers can integrate into their practice to build four types of consciousness in their

students. First, they advocated for the development of cultural consciousness, especially since

some White students may not consider themselves as cultural beings. Second, Broere and

Kerkhoff encouraged teachers to build intercultural consciousness, which involves considering

oneself in relation to others. Third, they suggested that students need critical consciousness,

meaning the ability to question society and the role of power and oppression within it. Fourth,

Broere and Kerkhoff stated that promoting the development of global consciousness can

strengthen students' global awareness from a lens of global citizenship rather than competition.

Lastly, Broere and Kerkhoff praised the use of picturebooks, read alouds, and current events to

animate conversations about social justice issues. In line with Banks et al. (2001) and Bell

(2016), Broere and Kerkhoff (2020) suggested that through scaffolded conversations about

complex local and global issues, teachers like me can help students "see themselves as connected

to something bigger . . . over time, students can develop the sensitivity and respect needed for

civil discourse" (p. 53).

The use of multicultural literature has also been shown to support cultural literacy. Huang and Kowalick (2014), one a university researcher and the other an English teacher, conducted a three-week qualitative action research. The study explored the use of multicultural literature to support literacy learning and cultural literacy, featuring the introduction of several strategies to improve students' engagement during one multicultural book study unit. Participants included 23 sixth-grade students in a rural American elementary school, ten of whom were African American or Hispanic, and thirteen, Caucasian. Although students had previously read some fiction books related to diverse ethnicities, few understood the heritage that was relevant to them. After having students work together in literature circle groups and engage in discussions, Huang and Kowalick assessed what they had learned through a KWL chart (Ogle, 1986). They found that the text, coupled with strategies, helped students (a) construct meaning from the fiction novel, (b) experience higher levels of thinking, (c) make connections with the real world, (d) grasp the author's intentions, (e) experiment with the language, and (f) acknowledge characters' viewpoints through different writing purposes (Huang & Kowalick, 2014). Huang and Kowalick concluded that with the help of effective reading and writing strategies, students had become more culturally aware, critical readers and writers, and able to access higher levels of thinking. These acquired strategies correspond with what Banks (1991, 2003) believed necessary to grow literate citizens in a diverse society.

Teacher researchers Morrell and Morrell (2012) built a case for making multicultural literature a focus of ELA classrooms. Morrell and Morrell asserted that incorporating multicultural literature in ELA classrooms is beneficial for students of all ages to (a) develop awareness of the world in which they live, (b) reflect on their sense of self, and (c) connect with texts through cultural and critical perspectives. Specifically, they recommended that educators

adopt a multiperspectival approach to reading, whereby students can examine issues of oppression, marginalization, and resistance. They also indicated that integrating multicultural literature in classrooms can (a) empower students to appreciate their own lives, (b) grow cultural competence, (c) engage in action upon the world, and (d) form powerful attachments with their teachers, peers, the literary and social worlds. In the same vein, Mirra (2020) addressed future goals for ELA instruction, encouraging educators to recognize their teaching platforms as opportunities to contribute to students' worldviews. Mirra suggested that educators ask their students what values they wish to see embodied in their learning, and then honour their voices by acting upon their given input.

Educators' Experiences With SJE and Multicultural Children's Literature

Studies that investigated teachers' adoption of SJE approaches reveal struggles, risk-taking, benefits reaped, and strategies used to meet the challenges of teaching with a SJE agenda.

Struggles, Risks, Benefits, and Strategies. Burke and Collier (2017) conducted a qualitative, multiple case study of twelve educators (Grades 5-9) in urban and rural Canadian schools with diverse student populations. Specifically, they investigated classroom teachers' struggles with the concept of social justice, and the possible challenges of using children's literature to address social justice issues with students. Data were collected through surveys, focus group meetings, interviews, and observational notes. Burke and Collier found that teachers established connections with their own lived experiences, in classrooms and otherwise, to grasp the complexities of social justice as it pertained to their teaching practice. Their study confirmed that teaching social justice in classroom settings is a complicated undertaking, sometimes influenced by political and social constraints related to structural agendas, or other people's opinions. Burke and Collier underscored several reasons for which teachers choose SJE, namely,

to help children (a) empathize with others in inequitable circumstances, (b) participate in actions for social change, and (c) see injustices in their everyday lives. Important to note, the teachers in this study expressed concern over their lack of preparedness to translate critical pedagogies into classroom practices. Nevertheless, Burke and Collier concluded that using children's literature for social justice purposes provided guidance for teacher participants; yet it also raised new questions, thereby positioning them as learners alongside their students.

In the search for literature pertaining to my topic, I came across a doctoral dissertation that corresponded with many aspects of my proposed study. Fifteen years earlier and miles away, Harper (2005) carried out her doctoral research, seeking to use literature as a vehicle to address issues of race and diversity, and explore how students in an affluent, almost all-White, suburban school community interpreted social justice issues in the books. A teacher researcher, Harper conducted a case study of her own language arts classroom. All 22 students assigned to Harper's sixth-grade class participated in the study, and data sources included a teacher journal, audiotapes of classroom discussions, students' reading response journals and other writing samples, collected over eight months during one school year. Through multicultural literature, students read and discussed social justice topics. Harper's teacher research uncovered three major findings: first, an emerging critical literacy lens allowed students to consider complex social justice issues, and increased their awareness of such issues in their community; second, students went from all being receptive to social justice issues to some eventually resisting the social justice books; and third, over time, Harper experienced bouts of certainty and uncertainty as a teacher researcher as she read "against the grain" (p. 277) with her students. Despite the overall enthusiasm shown by her students at the beginning of the school year, Harper concluded that the change in receptivity levels in some participants was nevertheless a constructive

outcome. In fact, Harper found that students' attitudes and beliefs had been challenged by sensitive classroom conversations throughout the book studies, and they had challenged her own way of thinking by expressing alternative perspectives that fuelled a critical literacy stance (a perspective expanded upon in Chapter 4). The struggles experienced by Harper as a teacher researcher helped me prepare for potential encounters with resistance, uncertainty, and ambiguity in my own path.

Although talking about race with students can be challenging, some researchers have found that taking the risk of introducing these conversations can be worthwhile. For instance, Kaczmarczyk et al.'s (2018) research team, composed of two former elementary school teachers and a university professor, considered their classrooms ideal venues to address race through picturebooks and dialogue journals. Their findings indicated that, although facilitating racial dialogue can be challenging, beginning such conversations can raise racial consciousness and eliminate racial illiteracy in our classrooms. According to Kaczmarczyk et al., teachers of all ethnicities, in particular White teachers, must be willing to take risks to teach about racism; providing a safe space for conversations to unfold depends on teachers calling out the role of Whiteness in examining past and present racial diversity, power, and oppression. Looking back to what motivated me to talk about issues like racial diversity, Kaczmarczyk et al.'s findings resonate strongly with me.

The use of multicultural children's literature for social justice was evident in other studies as well. Moya and Hamedani (2017) advocated for the benefits of literature in K-12 classrooms: they suggested that an ideal way to develop social and empathic imaginations to acquire racial literacy is through literature because it allows readers and writers to delve into social issues. According to Moya and Hamedani, readers make use of interpretive frameworks, or schemas, to

interpret narrative texts; if they are equipped with a limited lens through which to view the literature, for instance a dominant culture experience, they will not develop the full range of frameworks required to understand a complex human diversity. I heeded Moya and Hamedani's recommendation of exposing students of all grade levels to multicultural literature to cultivate the important 21st century skill of racial literacy. I related to their work due to the context of my research site.

Thein et al. (2012) investigated the problem of how teaching multicultural literature could be addressed by theorizing potential approaches for practical application in real classrooms. Their yearlong classroom inquiry involved five teachers in their respective middle and high schools. Thein et al. found that when teachers are positioned to critically reflect on their practice as intellectuals with agency and autonomy, they are also compelled to engage their students in new and innovative pedagogical activities in a democratic way. Despite the challenges and struggles evidenced by studies in this section, Thein et al.'s research showed how teachers were prepared to meet these challenges.

Children as Capable of Engaging With Tough Topics. In *Teaching Tough Topics: How Do I Use Children's Literature to Build a Deeper Understanding of Social Justice, Equity, and Diversity?* Swartz (2020) recognized that just as living in a challenging world where we are called to show compassion and respect viewpoints different from our own is challenging, it is equally challenging for students in the classroom. Teachers must confront their reluctance to include tough topics in their pedagogy if their goal is to grow empathic, caring citizens of the world who respect diversity, seek social justice, and create equity (Swartz, 2020). Such controversial topics might include concepts like race, racism, and White privilege. Because this

study involves books that underscore various controversial topics, I reviewed research pertaining to interactions with tough topics in educational settings.

For instance, Robertson (1997) used Paulsen's (1993) novel *Nightjohn* to probe into issues of knowledge gained, risks taken, and strategies utilized when attending to literature that unmasks loss or pain through human cruelty. Robertson examined journal entries and classroom discussions from 135 preservice teachers who had read the novel. These participants were cognizant of gaps in the curriculum concerning the inclusion of risky stories as genres for pedagogical teaching practices. One useful aspect raised in this qualitative research was the importance of preserving the true essence of stories without sensationalizing them or morphing them into alternate realities that ignore the historical conditions out of which they were born. Robertson's findings are indicative of potential emotional responses that led me to be wary, in my inquiry, of possibilities, limitations, and boundaries while engaging with sensitive content in literature.

Another example is Boyd and Miller's (2020) qualitative study in which they addressed the implications of talking about racism in two eighth-grade suburban classrooms. Similar to my study, both researchers identified as White women raised in the same small town where the study took place, and where the majority of their students were also White. Before tackling contentious topics like police brutality and racism through literature, Boyd and Miller felt they first needed students to understand the concept of privilege. They emphasized that prior to the study, each classroom teacher had built solid relationships with her students, establishing a dialogic classroom community. I resonated with their findings, knowing that one book I intended to read with students included matters of racism, White privilege, and police brutality. Boyd and Miller believed adolescence to be a time when students begin to develop their own identities and

perspectives on the world; hence, texts used in the language arts class can provide occasions to learn about inequities and engage in dialogues about social topics. Boyd and Miller concluded that middle school students want opportunities to wrestle with controversial topics, and although challenging, critical conversations about real-world issues in the classroom are necessary.

A seasoned middle-school ELA teacher, Kelly (2020) wrote a practitioner-focused article that draws attention to the sensitive subject of teaching about race. Drawing on DiAngelo (2018), a work I elaborate in a later section, Kelly reminded educators that "when a white person feels blamed or challenged their fragility will cause them to be defensive and even to turn to denial rather than to engage with these lessons" (p. 31). Herself a White teacher in a school where most students are White, she advised that educators should teach racism as a White issue and enter difficult dialogue with their students. To do so, Kelly modelled a range of visible thinking routines for her students, upon which they reflected through daily journalling and discussion. Kelly affirmed that middle school students were capable of taking on tough topics, and believed it was essential to teach White students that race is a White problem by focusing on a sense of responsibility and agency, rather than burden and shame. Boutte and Muller (2018) similarly argued that if we exclude children from conversations about difficult topics, they will not acquire the tools necessary to learn about racism, nor how to interrupt it. In their practitioner-based article, they urged educators to provide students with insights and strategies that deepen students' understandings about discrimination and systems of inequity. Boutte and Muller, both university professors, proposed engaging in dialogue using children's literature, supported by action-oriented activities, to process these sensitive topics in collective and intentional ways.

In their literature review, Lazar and Offenberg (2011) shed light on how little research had been done about the way teachers incorporate controversial issues like racism when they use

literature with students, as well as how teacher education programs can assist them in this approach. They conducted a mixed methods research involving 58 teachers in a graduate reading program, examining how they address issues of race and racism. As in Kaczmarczyk et al.'s (2018) study, participants employed picturebooks. The texts featured African American heritage read to elementary school children during a summer reading program. While one subset of these teachers had previously engaged in a course that addressed issues of racism, the remainder of participants had not. Data were collected from questionnaires, planning forms, lesson evaluation forms, and transcripts of teachers. Lazar and Offenberg discovered that teachers who had taken the course on racism focused on the activism of Black protagonists in the stories much more than their counterparts; they also found that teachers from both groups did not associate racism as a system of White privilege. This finding was significant and elucidated the importance of delineating the issue of racism within a structural system of power and privilege. Another finding suggested that for educators to be prepared for accurate and thoughtful conversations about issues arising in multicultural literature, teacher education programs need to address concepts like racism, power, and privilege. Lazar and Offenberg determined that when participants used personal reflection to study controversial topics using literature with young readers, these concepts became more relevant.

Lazar and Offenberg (2011) concluded that teachers need to understand concepts like structural racism when they use multicultural literature with their students. They suggested further collaboration between teacher educators and teachers to sustain their efforts in using literature in transformative ways. The purpose of this study aligned with Lazar and Offenberg's assertion that if educators remain silent about issues of social justice, they are guilty of sustaining

the status quo, cultivating a dominant ideology, leaving the truth about racism unproblematized, thereby contributing to its normalization.

Lastly, teacher researchers Ballentine and Hill (2000) collaborated to plan a unit for their third- and fourth-graders that would move beyond a superficial teaching of culture and address serious and potentially controversial issues in meaningful ways. By carefully selecting diverse texts, creating space for dialogue, incorporating art and drama, Ballentine and Hill admitted they took a risk in reading what they called "brave books" (p. 19) to their students—one they believed was worthwhile. Ballentine and Hill, along with other researchers (Boyd & Miller, 2020; Broere & Kerkhoff, 2020; Kelly, 2020; Lightner, 2020; Swartz, 2020), promoted young people as perceptive and capable of engaging with tough topics in the classroom, and how such stories enable them to envision possibilities of hope for a better world. Insofar as children have the capability to contend with sensitive topics, it seems warranted that educators take risks and experience struggles when addressing social justice issues arising in books.

The Challenge for Teacher Education: Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers

A concern revealed in some of the studies previously discussed was the level of preparedness of teachers addressing social justice issues through multicultural children's literature (Burke & Collier, 2017; Lazar & Offenberg, 2011). Villegas and Lucas (2002) asserted that although teacher education programs have added some multicultural education courses to address the growing diversity of students in K-12 schools, more needs to be done. They suggested moving beyond a fragmented approach to diversity by implementing sustainable teaching practices within the teacher education curriculum. Villegas and Lucas envisioned a comprehensive framework to develop culturally responsive teachers defined by six characteristics: (a) they are socioculturally conscious, (b) they possess affirming views of diverse

student populations, (c) they perceive themselves as capable of bringing about educational change, (d) they understand how learners construct knowledge, (e) they know their students, and (f) they design instruction based on this knowledge. These characteristics resonated with me from the onset of my study. Of particular significance is the development of sociocultural consciousness, in other words, our understanding that people's thoughts and behaviours are influenced by race, ethnicity, social class, and language (Banks, 1996). Hence, it is important for teachers like me to reflect on our own sociocultural identities (Banks, 1991). Important to note, Villegas and Lucas did not intend for their framework to be prescriptive but viewed it as a collaborative process in which teacher educators engage in dialogue geared toward a collective vision of teaching and learning in a multicultural society.

For their part, Colby and Lyon's (2004) qualitative research explored prospective teachers' knowledge of multicultural literature as a classroom tool. The study involved 100 preservice teachers enrolled in elementary language arts methods courses, who were instructed to respond to an article through various prompts. A thematic data analysis uncovered five emerging themes related to participants: (a) realizations of unexamined beliefs and assumptions about cultures other than the dominant one of which they were a part, (b) the importance of connecting with the stories and seeing themselves reflected in characters, (c) new awareness about the role of multicultural literature as a way to examine injustice, (d) acknowledgment of the importance of including a variety of representations in the literature, and (e) sense of responsibility to provide their students with quality literature that depict characters to whom they can relate. Colby and Lyon confirmed that participants benefited from probing their own beliefs, leading them to realize the importance of using multicultural literature in the classroom. Well-meaning teachers can practice unintentional discrimination, especially when conversations about

differences, like race, are neglected (Nieto, 2000). According to Colby and Lyon (2004), teachers

who are encouraged to continuously examine their beliefs and practices may create new ones;

creating awareness among teachers about the important role of multicultural literature, however,

remains a challenge that teacher educators must address. Hence, the benefit of acquiring such an

awareness is that culturally responsive teachers are poised to recognize the power of literature to

disseminate/dismantle stereotypes.

Like Colby and Lyon (2004), Dong's (2005) participants explored and reflected upon

their learning and teaching of multicultural literature. Participants were inservice English

teachers, most of them of European descent, who taught in middle and high schools in New York

City with high student populations of visible minorities. For a semester, they worked in a small

group book club format to discuss responses to eight multicultural novels and two readings.

Dong concluded that an approach focused on cross-cultural understanding and empathy

development facilitated the examination of cultural contexts from multiple perspectives.

Furthermore, the study showed that many participants' beliefs and assumptions about how

literature should be taught were challenged. The study also revealed that when the inservice

teachers experimented with multicultural literature in their classrooms, their young multicultural

and multilingual learners welcomed the change, and proved capable of engaging in discussions

about racial, cultural, and social issues.

The Need for Dialogue About Race/Racism/White Privilege

In her acclaimed book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria: And

Other Conversations About Race,* Tatum (1997/2017), affirmed that, to solve a problem, we

must be able to talk about it; yet many of us have been taught that race is a taboo subject, and

talking about it is socially unacceptable. Tatum asserted that understanding the process of

developing our identity can contribute to building bridges that will help us understand each other's differences. Likewise, Sleeter (1993, 1995) identified the need for White students to be given opportunities to learn how race shapes their own sociocultural identities, to examine their White privilege, and then evaluate whether it contributes to maintaining the racial inequality or challenges it. Sleeter's observations correspond with Villegas and Lucas' (2002) framework for culturally responsive teachers, as well as Banks' (1991, 1996) position on the need for teachers to develop sociocultural consciousness.

Many educators wonder if there is a right time, place, or way to address the issue of race with students. During a speech addressed to 200 New York inservice teachers, Baldwin (1963) suggested that "[c]hildren, not yet aware that it is dangerous to look too deeply at anything, look at everything, look at each other, and draw their own conclusions" (p. 42). More than a half century later, Hagerman (2019) mirrored Baldwin's observation by stating that children draw their own conclusions about race just by living their everyday lives in a racialized society. In a two-year ethnographic study, Hagerman found that children are neither too young nor too innocent to notice the world around them, and develop ideas about race and racism, despite their parents' or teachers' involvement.

Rasinski and Padak (1990) pointed out that despite efforts to promote inclusion and tolerance in American schools in recent decades, incidents of racially motivated violence and discrimination demonstrate a discrepancy between a vision of ethnic harmony and real-life events. Rasinski and Padak proposed that teachers and students can examine and act upon their cultural values through literature in a context that fosters interpersonal caring, selflessness, and citizenship. I now expand on two perspectives of race as a social construct.

Race as a Social Construct: Teacher Candidates' Perspectives. Hagerman (2019) asserted that children develop their own ideas about race and racism as they interact with others, which led me to explore prospective teachers' perspectives on racial identity. One example is Solomona et al.'s (2005) qualitative study featuring 200 teacher candidates in two post-baccalaureate university programs. Students of colour participated in a program focused on equity issues with diverse student populations, and Caucasian students enrolled in a regular mainstream program. All participants were required to reflect on McIntosh's (1989) frequently cited article, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, which describes how White privilege is perceived, and how it is rendered invisible by the dominant culture. For context, McIntosh believed that White students do not see Whiteness as a racial identity. Solomona et al. used discourse analysis to examine ideas, messages, values, beliefs, and worldviews contained in their participants' written responses to the article. The study uncovered themes related to (a) participants' dissonance in their belief sets, (b) White candidates' individualistic and meritocratic conception of education, and (c) their denial of the existence of White privilege. According to Solomona et al., these themes exemplified teacher candidates' struggle to address concepts like race and White privilege in educational settings. Many of the White participants admitted being unaware of issues of racism because of the communities in which they grew up. This was of particular interest to me because of the similarities in the local context of my study. Further, the study highlighted a need to better prepare White teachers in working with diverse student populations and dealing with issues of discrimination—a dilemma that was mentioned earlier by Burke and Collier (2017), and Lazar and Offenberg (2011). Solomona et al. encouraged teacher education programs to focus on teacher candidates' prior knowledge, provide spaces for them to

share concerns, prepare them for the experience emotionally, and offer strategies for anti-discriminatory teaching practices.

Lawrence (1997) examined whether the shifts in thinking White teacher candidates experienced about themselves as racial beings, and about systems of oppression during a multicultural education course, translated to their teaching practices. Lawrence interviewed three of five teacher candidates from a previous study (Lawrence & Bunche, 1996), after they completed a 15-week practicum experience. Lawrence noticed that although participants recognized themselves as White, they failed to acknowledge or understand the privilege their skin colour affords them, rendering this privilege invisible to them. Although teacher candidates initially resisted learning about racism and their own racial privilege, in time they became more willing to talk about race and accept the challenge of taking responsibility for racism (Lawrence, 1997). As I began my research project, like Lawrence, it was important for my students to know that "I, like them, am a work in progress struggling with uncertainties and experiencing many feelings while working toward a society more equitable for all" (p. 116).

Finally, Sleeter (1995) challenged her preservice class of 22 White students to see issues from "minority position" (p. 419) viewpoints within a course assignment. She asked her students to write a *why* question about a less understood aspect of race, gender, or social class and then answer their question from the perspective of the identified oppressed group. Most questions pertained to race and culture, and information was gathered via interviews with people from the oppressed groups. Sleeter noticed most participants were successful at starting to use the minority perspective: (a) their observations of inequality were described as systemic discrimination, (b) they recognized strategies used by oppressed groups to cope with discrimination, (c) they consulted with these groups directly, and (d) they acknowledged the

group's social change strategies. Sleeter's findings on multicultural education among dominant culture participants speak to the demographic context of my research site.

Sleeter's (2016a) lifelong work as a teacher educator has addressed issues of Whiteness and racism, initiated by research that revealed an "overwhelming presence of whiteness" (Sleeter, 2001, p. 101) in teacher education. Consequently, Sleeter (2016a) reflected on the problematics of Whiteness in teacher education and suggested paths for future research including the following: (a) explore further guidance that might assist teacher educators in addressing, and breaking through, White resistance in racial learning, (b) investigate the role of community-based learning on the abilities of teacher candidates to teach those who are racially/culturally different from themselves, and (c) follow teacher candidates into the classroom after certification.

Examining racial identities and recognizing privilege as White teachers can be challenging (Lawrence, 1997; Sleeter, 1995; Solomona et al., 2005), and consists of a "life-long commitment of critical self-evaluation" (Case, 2012, p. 91). Sleeter (2016b) reminded us that because every human is culturally constructed, White people need to first see themselves as racial beings, and as members of the dominant culture; by developing awareness of themselves as part of the multicultural collectivity, they might become sensitized to their role as potential racial justice allies. I heeded this reminder as I began my teacher research.

Race as a Social Construct: Students' Perspectives. Because concepts like race and Whiteness are socially constructed (Lawrence, 1997), I also examined studies that focused on the perception of White students' racial identities, and how their attitudes and behaviours are influenced by the dynamics of that perception. For instance, Tatum (1992) investigated students' emotional responses to race-related content, and the development of their racial identity. She

analyzed student journals and essays collected from predominantly White cohorts, during her decade of experience teaching an undergraduate course on the psychology of racism. Tatum found that her White students were often not aware of the power of their prejudice and tended to detach themselves from racism as a system that advantages them (Sleeter, 1995; Tatum, 1992, 1994). Findings revealed that students' acceptance or denial of racial differences depended on how they viewed their own identity in racial terms; in other words, White students initially resisted talking about racism, but they gradually developed their own racial identity (Tatum, 1992). Furthermore, Tatum discerned that when White students were educated about race and racism, their attitudes changed beyond the classroom context. As White students engaged in conversations and shared what they were learning with their peers, their heightened awareness impacts others in their surroundings, including members of disenfranchised groups (Tatum, 1992). Tatum established that White students who learned about racism in a supportive atmosphere were better equipped to become allies to students of colour. Although teaching White students about race and the privilege associated with Whiteness can be challenging (Kelly, 2020; Sleeter, 1994; Tatum, 1992), Tatum concluded that, given opportunities to explore race-related material in safe and supportive classroom spaces, students' level of understanding was greatly enhanced. These findings were enlightening as I sought to establish these safe spaces in the learning environment of my inquiry.

Invoking a Freirean perspective, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) believed that we must question the system that benefits dominant groups if we are to recognize oppression. The next two studies examined student populations of various ages whose beliefs were challenged. As part of a qualitative study about race and racism with college educated adults occupying gatekeeper roles in the education and human service fields, Bell (2003) examined narratives emerging from

106 participants' interviews, of which 65% were White and the remainder, people of colour. Bell concluded that for some White people, colour-blindness is a way to ignore racism by defending their unexamined White privilege under the premise of meritocracy, while others equated race with racism, proclaiming to not be racist by claiming they were colour-blind. In her acclaimed book entitled *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, DiAngelo (2018) claimed that White people are rarely challenged in their racial worldview; thus, an unchallenged status quo in a racially inequitable society sustains the racial comfort zones in which they remain. Yet, if we are to understand or challenge racism, adopting a colour-blind attitude is not helpful because it denies and rejects Black people's realities, prevents us from examining our own (DiAngelo, 2018), and serves to defend a currently unjust status quo (Lewis, 2001). Perhaps it is for this reason that Bell advocated for new stories to be created, generated from a place of acknowledgment and healing, rather than divisiveness and denial.

In a yearlong ethnographic study, Lewis (2001) sought to learn how race operated within a predominantly White suburban fourth- and fifth-grade classroom. Specifically, Lewis examined the racial messages students receive from adults in their surroundings, stating that few studies had probed the "hidden" curriculum of race in mostly White schools. Research methods included observations within the classroom and other locations on the school grounds. In addition, formal and informal interviews were conducted with most of the 30 students from the focus classroom, parents, and school staff; additional formal interviews took place with 12 of the 30 students and their parents, purposefully selected for their racial backgrounds. Lewis' findings underlined the importance of identifying how history has deliberately shaped White suburbs, like the one in her research. The study showed that the many explicit discourses of racial understanding at the school projected the idealized image of a community who saw everyone as

the same, and as "equal members of the human race" (Lewis, 2001, p. 799). However, Lewis concluded that participants' colour-blind statements hid an underlying racialized practice and colour-conscious understanding. Lewis stressed that although race and multiculturalism were viewed by the school's community as irrelevant, schools can be one of the few places where racial understandings can be successfully confronted. Further, Lewis reiterated the importance of talking about race, even more so in majoritarily White educational settings, because education that is centred on critical and multicultural awareness does not apply solely to students of colour. In fact, teaching White students about racial inequality should also involve teaching them about their role in its production (Lewis, 2001).

Perspective-Taking With Multicultural Literature

Using multicultural literature with learners supports the examination of sociopolitical issues like race, gender, poverty, and disability, and engagement in perspective-taking (Howard, 1991; Thein et al., 2007). For instance, Thein et al. (2007), two doctoral students and their advisor, investigated the manner in which 14 eleventh- and twelfth-grade, mainly White English students experienced change after interacting with multicultural literature. Having worked mostly with White, working-class students in urban schools in America, the authors designed a unit that challenged beliefs of power and inequity as portrayed in the selected literature. Qualitative data collection consisted of recordings of classroom sessions, interviews, observations, and focus group conversations. Despite students being highly engaged and challenged, Thein et al. concluded that their understanding of systemic oppression was not altered. As a consequence, they reconsidered their initial rigid definition of change, after realizing that students were in fact being transformed by the literature through confrontation of their belief systems over time (Thein et al., 2007). Participants were willing to "try on" (p. 57)

new perspectives and reconsidered their stance vis-à-vis cultural injustice seen among the disenfranchised as portrayed by characters in the stories.

Lightner (2020) examined adolescent students' assumptions about young adult (YA) novels. Lightner's qualitative study, which took place during small group book discussions with middle-grade students, featured vignettes from one group of four seventh-grade girls who read and discussed the novel *Speak* (Anderson, 1999). Similar to Boyd and Miller's (2020) and Kelly's (2020) conclusions stated previously, Lightner established that avoiding talking about tough topics involving issues of social, economic, and political nature in middle school classrooms could be dangerous. Instead, if teachers create critical spaces to do so, Lighter found that adolescent students will ask questions and voice concerns stemming from their own knowledge and experiences toward difficult issues, hence the importance of a critical literacy approach. Lightner's (2020) research found similar outcomes to Thein et al.'s (2007), whereby students' thinking and value systems were challenged, and gradually transformed. Because significant changes in beliefs and attitudes are difficult and can take time, the act of trying on alternative perspectives can be cathartic in helping students understand how their values are formed, and why others think differently.

Beach et al. (2003) conducted a qualitative study with 14 eleventh- and twelfth-graders in a diverse, urban U.S. high school. They explored how students' discussion of, and writing about, multicultural literature influenced their value stances regarding race, class, and gender. Some students changed their discourses when challenged by the teacher (one of the researchers), and their peers. Collectively, Thein et al.'s (2007), Lightner's (2020), and Beach et al.'s (2003) findings speak to the flexibility of researchers to adopt new lenses to see change in unexpected ways. This literature sheds light on how immersion in multicultural literature allows students to

encounter stories where they are postured for reflection, reaction, communication, and potential action.

Research unveiling perspective-taking as transformative complements my literature review. Hodges et al. (2018) carried out an exploratory, mixed methods research that documented four third-graders' comprehension of perspective-taking questions centred around a character-versus-character conflict from a narrative fiction text. According to Hodges et al., perspective-taking is a foundational skill for building empathy, a goal that can be achieved by affording students opportunities to transact with authentic literary fiction. A notable finding from the study was an enhanced ability for students to engage in perspective-taking and understand the story when texts with multiple viewpoints were associated with opportunities to discuss them. This finding provided useful insight in connection with multicultural text selection and choice of pedagogical activities for my inquiry.

Finally, Lobron and Selman (2007), an elementary school teacher and educational psychologist, featured one fourth-grader's interview, to discuss beliefs that children hold about complex social issues, and the way these were mediated through discussions of books like *Freedom Summer* (Wiles, 2001). They underscored the importance of incorporating strategies like asking theoretical perspective-taking questions and explaining historical events to sustain and scaffold students' interpretations of social messages in literature and heighten social awareness. Echoing Burke and Collier's (2017) belief that children's literature is instrumental in raising students' awareness about social justice, Lobron and Selman articulated that children could develop the necessary skills to tackle issues of racism and social justice when given opportunities to discuss social ideologies found in texts.

Deeper Connections to Theory

In this section, I explore relevant research that draws from the tenets of critical pedagogy and critical literacy—two main paradigms at the centre of a multilayered theoretical framework for my study, on which I elaborate in Chapter 3.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is an approach that informs my study and is founded on the notion of reading the social world (Freire, 1970/2016), adopting a social and educational vision of justice and equality (Kincheloe, 2008), and encouraging critical reflection and civic agency (Giroux, 2010). The studies within this section describe how using multicultural (also called global) literature in the classroom is one way of inviting students to thinking critically about the world. It is organized under these two subtopics: (a) building critical consciousness and empathy, and (b) bridging story worlds and the real world.

Building Critical Consciousness and Empathy. Monobe and Son (2014) noticed that first-grade students' thoughts and comments about Japan were misguided when Monobe shared her Japanese heritage with them. The students viewed the world through an us versus them dichotomy, which Monobe and Son suggested is an obstacle to preparing them for global citizenship in a culturally diverse world. Monobe and Son encouraged using global literature to help students develop awareness and empathy by introducing them to different ways of thinking, knowing, and communicating through multicultural literature. Monobe and Son indicated that scant culturally authentic literature, as well as teachers' lack of familiarity and discomfort with using global literature contribute to students and teachers maintaining the status quo, rather than expanding their cultural awareness. The study presented alternative perspectives from which

learners could examine their worldviews and educators could meet the challenge of addressing sensitive topics.

Similar to the origins of my teacher research, Robinson's (2013) five-month ethnographic study with her 20 third-graders was inspired by their responses during the interactive read aloud of a multicultural book. This teacher researcher's qualitative interpretive narrative inquiry argued three points: (a) educators need to consider critical multicultural pedagogy to promote social awareness, (b) children's appreciation of diversity depends on critically and emotionally engaging with multicultural texts, and (c) interactive practices promote understanding of multicultural topics. Multiple data sources included classroom observations, various genres of multicultural text read alouds, students' artifacts, and audio recordings of group discussions. A constant comparative analysis uncovered three salient themes: (a) students build on each other's comments and draw on prior knowledge when invited to respond critically to texts during interactive read alouds, (b) students show empathy as they construct and deconstruct meaning, and (c) interactive readings of multicultural literature provide students opportunities to articulate and challenge their understandings of social issues and reflect on their own lives.

Drawing on critical pedagogy to develop critical awareness during language arts, Morales et al.'s (2017) yearlong, qualitative ethnographic study used a youth participatory action research (YPAR) approach with fifteen youths. Morales et al. observed students' perceptions of higher levels of awareness, their examination of systems of oppression, and the reframing of their own local challenges as part of a broader cultural context. Through critical pedagogy and YPAR, researchers noticed that participants became more socially aware of various forms of injustice, were able to examine and interrogate the status quo, and felt valued due to engagement in activities that were relevant to their lives (Morales et al., 2017).

Concerned with what teachers actually do with multicultural literature in their classrooms once they have it, Osorio (2018) sought to examine the ways it could be used as a tool to foster critical consciousness in students. Osorio recruited students from her own second-grade bilingual (Spanish-English) classroom to participate in a two-year qualitative action research project. Data collected included audio recordings, ethnographic field notes, and student artifacts, and were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Similar to Morrell and Morrell's (2012) approach described earlier, Osorio uncovered ways in which multicultural literature was utilized as a tool, for the purpose of (a) developing or fostering an appreciation for diversity, (b) honouring students' voices, (c) making deep connections with students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and (d) promoting critical consciousness.

Bridging Story Worlds and the Real World. Other researchers (Dressel, 2005; Landt, 2006) agree that multicultural literature is a powerful instrument that connects students to the world by providing different perspectives from which it can be viewed. In a mixed methods study, Dressel (2005) analyzed samples of writing from 123 mostly White (93%) eighth-graders to understand what they learned from studying characters during a multicultural literature unit and whether they simply absorbed the values of the stories or were prompted to examine their own worldview along the way. Dressel questioned whether exposure to the literature was enough, referring to Naidoo's (1992) book, *Through Whose Eyes? Exploring Racism: Reader, Text, and Context*. This book describes how teachers play an essential part in creating a climate in which students will feel comfortable to question and challenge the status quo.

Dressel's (2005) findings revealed that students enjoyed the novels they read, connected personally with the characters and "clearly lived inside the story" (p. 756). Students' reflections in samples collected from Dialogue Journals and Book Club Organizers showed that their

understanding of others did not deepen. Less than 25% of participants seemed to think that people from non-dominant groups possessed cultural assumptions different than their own. A total of 75% did not acknowledge this, which demonstrated a chasm between their perception of stories and the world in which they lived. Dressel found that for her participants, being able to live within a story did not necessarily transfer to real life and concluded that unless we learn how to see the world through the eyes of people of different cultures than our own, cultural characteristics become stereotypes. Dressel warned that in learning communities, the absence of dialogue about controversial issues like racism perpetuates it, connecting to other studies like Tatum's (1992) which confirmed the need for dialogue about race, racism, and White privilege. Nevertheless, Dressel concluded that responding to literature involves empathizing with characters of a story, making connections with our own experience, and imagining alternate possibilities as well.

Rasinski and Padak (1990), as well as Bieger (1995), used Banks' (1989) theoretical framework to capitalize on children's literature as a tool to heighten cultural awareness and appreciation. This framework describes a four-step curricular model for incorporating ethnic content in the classroom. The two highest levels of the model, namely the transformation approach and the decision-making and social action approach are instrumental to the aims of my research. Banks' hierarchical model encourages students to think and care, use the cognitive skills they have gained from engaging with the stories, and critically analyze problems in order to take action toward resolving them. Moreover, Bieger (1995) noted that because attitudes are hard to change, breaking down barriers to prejudice can be taught through the heart. Hence, stories about human experiences and the human condition can potentially generate transformative emotional responses (Bieger, 1995; Cai, 1992; Rasinski & Padak, 1990). Further,

readers developed concern and empathy for the characters beyond their own experiences and realities (Dressel, 2005; Leland et al., 2018).

Critical Literacy

Gregory and Cahill (2009) addressed the topic of critical literacy from a critical theory paradigm, and effectively linked this worldview to practical applications in favour of a more democratic and liberating pedagogy. They focused on rendering critical literacy an essential part of classroom practices, without which we would be guilty of sustaining the status quo and cultivating a dominant ideology. Gregory and Cahill spoke of a tension that necessitates confrontation, quoting Dewey (1916) and Apple (2004) to support their claim of moving toward and not away from an equitable purpose in educational practices.

I begin with Rosenblatt's seminal work around transactional theory and move to a discussion of the implications of critical literacy in the classroom. The section is organized as follows: (a) a closer look at transactional theory, (b) critical literacy as an effective approach in second language classrooms, and (c) using critical literacy to further develop critical curiosity/critical consciousness in adolescents.

A Closer Look at Transactional Theory. Before discussing examples of research using critical literacy, I delve into the seminal work of Rosenblatt's (1978) reading theory. Rosenblatt affirmed that a unique transaction occurs between the reader and the text that can lead to a potentially transformative experience of literature. Her transactional theory posited that a reader can adopt two stances: efferent or aesthetic. In the former, readers are looking to extract specific information from texts (Rosenblatt, 1978). In the latter, Rosenblatt advanced that readers explore the feelings that are evoked during their reading experience, which puts the emphasis on meaning-making and pleasure derived from the text. Further, Rosenblatt (1938/1976) suggested

that readers who become personally involved in a story show greater understanding than those who read as a response to a task. In an in-depth analysis of Dewey's and Rosenblatt's seminal work, Faust (2000) indicated that classrooms are places where children can explore authentic questions through children's literature, and with their peers, mediate relationships between race and power. As such, when we teach children to question, and allow them the freedom to react by embracing or challenging new knowledge, we contribute to developing citizens who will look at the world through a critical lens (Rosenblatt, 1938/1976).

Rosenblatt further noted that both stances complement each other and fulfil readers' various intentions. The process by which readers move from efferent reading to aesthetic reading is influenced by many factors, including their experiences, cultural and linguistic background, personalities, as well as contexts involving time, text selection, and setting (Rosenblatt, 1985). Therefore, Rosenblatt (1985) warned that, because the act of reading is an organic and dynamic process, we should not think about it in a linear way, rather as a "complex network or circuit of interrelationships" (p. 101). Other researchers have brought to light possible limitations of Rosenblatt's transactional theory in the study of multicultural literature (Cai, 2008).

Yenika-Agbaw (1997) thoroughly analyzed the picturebook *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters* (McKissack & McKissack, 1994) from three perspectives—pleasure, postcolonial, and critical multiculturalism. In the process, she uncovered a missing component considering a world fraught with social injustices. Therefore, Yenika-Agbaw suggested that a third stance—a critical stance—should be added to Rosenblatt's efferent and aesthetic stances to bolster "readings that propagate social change—readings that enable readers to ask questions about situations and ideas they encounter within texts" (Yenika-Agbaw, 1997, p. 447). McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) proposed this same third stance be used in parallel with the

first two, as an additional component of the reading process. Lastly, Lewis (2000) pointed out

that research from critical literacy, feminist theory, and critical race theory perspectives, among

others, have challenged assumptions about Rosenblatt's aesthetic stance, namely its exclusion of

politics, culture, and social relations.

In response, Lewis (2000) suggested a broader view of the aesthetic stance, one that

addresses sociopolitical dimensions of texts, and encourages readers to adopt postures for

reading critically and for pleasure. Connecting personally with texts is enjoyable as well as

powerful because the study of literature can provide both an aesthetic and critical experience for

the learner (Leland et al., 2018; Lewis, 2000). In line with Rosenblatt's (1938/1976, 1978)

seminal work, research shows that awareness must occur on more than intellectual or social

levels if change is likely. However, Cai (2008) reminded us of the delicate balance between an

aesthetic and critical stance and recommended that educators be mindful in their critical literacy

approach, especially with students who are reading about cultures other than their own.

Galda and Beach (2001) provided an overview of salient research on the use of literature

in schools, and response-based practices in classrooms. They suggested that examining how

students respond to culturally laden literature might help us understand how readers develop

interpretive and social practices over time, and how educators can assist students in critically

reflecting on their constructions of text worlds, as well as their lived worlds. Galda and Beach

stipulated that when learners consider the social systems that shape characters in a story, they

begin to see them not as individual characters, but as part of a larger collectivity, who either

perpetuate or resist systems of power and culture. In doing so, readers reflect on their own

experiences to interpret characters' positions in text worlds, thereby allowing them to

contextualize characters' actions within a broader cultural and historical landscape. This

approach might be the antidote to the challenge of connecting characters' experiences with real life, stated earlier in Dressel's (2005) findings. Additionally, Galda and Beach postulated that students share their thinking and use language, images, drama, visual art, discourses, and multimodal productions as strategies to respond within their classroom community. Hence, they encouraged teachers to equip students with opportunities and tools to read, question, critique, and respond to literature, so that they might grasp the complexities of both text and lived worlds.

Drawing from a previous two-year project (Locke et al., 2008), Locke and Cleary (2011) took a closer look at case studies involving seven teachers teaching literature to culturally diverse students. One of the case studies featured Cleary, a New Zealand high school English teacher researcher who designed and implemented a novel programme among students she identified as low achievers. Locke and Cleary established that students were transformed from compliant to sensitized readers, who enjoyed reading various texts. The study revealed that critical literacy approaches are challenging for students as they struggle to work through the way language positioned them as readers and require careful scaffolding to support metalinguistic understanding. Understanding the challenges and mechanisms of adopting a critical literacy approach was key as I began my inquiry.

According to Cervetti et al. (2001), when readers engage in reading critically, they consider their own identities and self-construction, thus attributing meaning to the text rather than simply extracting meaning from it. This transactional process incites readers to further develop a critical consciousness that prompts them to "remake their own identities and sociopolitical realities through their own meaning-making processes and through their actions in the world" (Cervetti et al., 2001, p. 7). Cai (2008) recommended that principles of critical literacy be taught when reading multicultural books, though not at the expense of readers'

personal transaction with the text. Cai pointed out Rosenblatt's acknowledgment that reader response can include the application of critical approaches and stressed the need to include critical lenses when teaching multicultural literature. Cervetti et al.'s, as well as Cai's advice seemed particularly beneficial to the application of critical literacy in my study.

An Effective Approach in Second Language Classrooms. Having examined the benefits of critical literacy in connection with multicultural literature, I explored research that focused more specifically on how it was employed in second language classrooms. Newstreet et al. (2018) provided middle-grade educators with a list of multicultural texts and corresponding response activities. The authors, one of them a teacher researcher, praised the value of using children's literature with English language learners in fostering critical literacy and global citizenship skills. Newstreet et al. implemented Muslim-themed text sets in conjunction with activities like poetry, journal writing, and concept maps to encourage critical curiosity and deepen understanding. They found that blending carefully selected text sets with response activities inspired students to learn about themselves and others and realize that they share more similarities than differences with diverse others. Further, Newstreet et al. noticed that when teachers used children's literature with middle-grade learners, they were motivated to engage in their own learning through critical literacy practices.

Lau (2010, 2012, 2015) carried out an in-depth exploration of the ramifications of multicultural literature in ESL classrooms. To begin, Lau's (2010) doctoral dissertation detailed a yearlong, participatory action research (PAR) with 12 middle-grade, newly immigrated English language learners, in a Canadian school. Lau aimed to understand the processes involved in implementing critical literacy approaches in a classroom of ESL learners. The study revealed that students' critical literacy development and levels of self-confidence improved with sufficient

scaffolding, and the ESL teacher changed her perception of teaching critical literacy practices with her beginning English learners.

In a subsequent PAR study, Lau (2012) collaborated with an ESL teacher and 15 of her recently immigrated seventh- and eighth-graders to challenge the assumption that ESL teachers avoid using cultural texts based on their perception of students' limited ability to engage with complex social and moral issues. Findings supported a belief that critical literacy education is a social and cultural practice (Luke & Freebody, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978) in which language "learners are *acculturated* into skills and practices of critical inquiry" as they interact with various multimodal texts representative of actual social worlds (Lau, 2012, p. 329, emphasis in original). Like her previous study, Lau's second PAR supported that when appropriate resources are provided to learners, they can become critical language users. To facilitate students' ability to engage with issues that arise in texts, Alford (2001) also suggested increasing ESL students' background knowledge when they read critically. To do so, Alford recommended the following strategies: (a) activating existing prior knowledge to understand historical, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts in novels, (b) building on that knowledge from a contemporary localized perspective (i.e., associating with current events), and (c) adding new information during reading. Such activities can assist students in responding to texts, and draw conclusions about a writer's intentions (Alford, 2001).

Lastly, in yet another yearlong collaborative research project addressing students' intercultural competence and critical bi-literacy, Lau (2015) recommended including sociopolitical discussions into students' education early on. She underlined the importance of providing authentic learning experiences for young bilingual learners and supporting their growth as critical language users even as they are just starting to grasp the complexities of power

relations (Lau, 2015). However, Lau contended that despite the growing importance of intercultural education, related research with young learners is limited. Similarly, Alford (2001) indicated that research addressing the needs and experiences of ESL learners engaging in critical literacy is scarce.

Using Critical Literacy to Further Develop Critical Curiosity/Critical Consciousness in Adolescents. When students explore issues of equity and social justice through a critical literacy lens, it fosters the development of critical consciousness (Bell, 2016; Stachowiak, 2017). It follows that, when students engage in critical literacy, they can connect global events to themes and conflicts found in multicultural literature, which deepens their understanding of real-world issues (Norton, 2009). Equipped with this knowledge, I aimed to learn more about how critical literacy is acted upon in a classroom of adolescent learners.

Cai's (2002) book, *Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults: Reflections on Critical Issues*, contends that developing compassion and empathy through literary criticism is useful because prejudice and ignorance are major stumbling blocks to mutual understanding among diverse groups. According to Cai, every human being is multicultural because multiculturalism encompasses diversity and inclusion, while it underscores power and structure; therefore, adopting a critical stance is pivotal in educating responsible, caring citizens. Critical literacy plays an important part in fostering adolescents' social imagination where they can envisage others' realities through what Cai (2002) referred to as "crossing cultural borders" (p. 121). More than solely understanding cultural differences, Cai suggested that changing the status quo in order to achieve social equality and justice should remain the goal of multiculturalism. Furthermore, in *The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities,* Nieto (1999) emphasized that multicultural education is a transformative process that should involve

all students, even those who have not been disenfranchised. Likewise, Laminack and Kelly (2019) promoted multicultural education in their book, *Reading to Make a Difference: Using Literature to Help Students Speak Freely, Think Deeply, and Take Action*, in which they invite teachers to broaden students' understanding of the world. Laminack and Kelly believed "in the power of reading, writing, and conversation to stretch the known and expand the heart and mind toward a more inclusive and empathic way of being" (p. xxi).

Despite researchers advocating critical literacy approaches in multicultural education, some gaps remain in the literature. For instance, Clark and Seider (2017) recognized that few studies address ways of encouraging critical curiosity in adolescents. This led them to re-examine qualitative interviews collected during a prior, mixed methods longitudinal study. Clark and Seider randomly selected 60 of the interviews that had taken place with ninth-graders from five American charter schools. This time, they focused on students' perceptions of their respective school's social engagement programming, and its impact on their critical curiosity. Through thematic analysis, Clark and Seider uncovered that participants associated their curiosity to being exposed to new information, stating they were "learning the truth, or having their eyes opened" (p. 136). Three themes emerged from adolescents' explanations of how their critical curiosity was influenced: (a) the importance, and relevance, of providing new information, (b) using real world examples, and (c) proposing new perspectives. Clark and Seider's study aimed to develop a critical posture in adolescents, supportive of Freire's (1998) belief that critical curiosity is stimulated by reflexivity.

In her practitioner-focused article, Landt (2006) explored the challenge of bringing multicultural literature to the attention of adolescents and young adults. Using a kaleidoscope to express her own metaphorical encounters with books, Landt provided information pertaining to

the inclusion of multicultural literature in the curriculum, suggesting guidelines and examples for selecting high-quality books. Because adolescence is a time of questioning and reflecting, Landt emphasized the need for this age group to understand who they are and proposed to "connect students to the world by providing a wider view" (p. 691). Landt noted that adolescents are particularly interested in issues of power during a moment in their lives when they are trying to find their place amidst a frightening societal landscape.

Foss (2002) explored critical literacy with her mostly White, affluent students by reading classic novels and peeling away the multiple layers of meaning through classroom conversations. Foss, an eighth-grade language arts teacher researcher, was raised in an insular community with very little racial, linguistic, and religious diversity. Like me, she was never challenged to examine the world or herself critically until she left. By making conversation the central component of her critical literacy approach, Foss noticed that her students envisioned their actions toward social change by first taking steps to critically read the world. On one hand, Foss's teacher inquiry provided insight and strategies for teachers on engaging their students in critical classroom conversations around texts that address issues of inequality. On the other hand, her teacher research demonstrated that middle school classrooms can be spaces that provide opportunities for young learners to explore their developing identities during the period of adolescence (Boyd & Miller, 2020; Landt, 2006; Lightner, 2020). Researchers agree that dominant culture student groups, like marginalized student groups, need and deserve an opportunity to examine their own lives, and develop awareness about existing systems of power and privilege by reading literature critically (Foss, 2002; Landt, 2007; Morrell & Morrell, 2012; Nieto, 1999; Sleeter, 1995).

Two Effective Strategies

At the onset of my study, read alouds were already an established strategy in my teaching pedagogy. Dialogue journals represented a new practice I was inspired to implement in my classroom because of its communicative potential—a strategy I expand further upon in Chapter 8. The studies I reviewed investigated the value of these two strategies and found that they are effective classroom tools to promote teaching and learning with multicultural children's literature.

Read Alouds

Fox (2013), a children's author, declared that reading to children draws their attention, increases their understanding of vocabulary, familiarizes them with flow and grammar, and most of all, instils joy, engagement, and a love of literature. Such benefits are seconded by Serafini (2011) through recommendations to elementary teachers who wish to make space for children's literature in their classrooms. According to Serafini, reading aloud exposes students to a variety of information, topics, and stories that might introduce them to a world of books with which they were not familiar before; and it creates opportunities to respond to the literature through dialogue. The read aloud experience lays a foundation that strengthens all other components of a successful reading program (Atwell, 2007; Serafini, 2011). In a practitioner-focused article, Barrentine (1996) explored interactive read alouds, and provided advice and strategies for planning these for classroom use. Important to note, Barrentine did not advocate for a rigid approach when incorporating dialogue-centred read alouds. Rather, she advised teachers to adopt a more organic, open-minded view as the read aloud experiences may lead to unpredictable new directions.

I also reviewed research that focused on reading aloud to adolescents. Albright and Ariail (2005) surveyed 141 teachers (Grades 6-8) about their read aloud habits in the classroom. They found that 85.8% of the teachers reported reading aloud to their students. The study revealed that teachers most commonly perform read alouds to model aspects of fluent reading, and to make texts more accessible to students. Richardson's (2000) book *Read It Aloud*! supports the claim that read alouds are an effective tool to promote reading among middle and high school students because they model "expressive, enthusiastic reading, and invite listeners to be readers" (p. 3). Albright and Ariail emphasized that additional research is needed to understand the impact of reading aloud with older students. Furthermore, whereas existing studies have focused mostly on reading for instructional purposes, they proposed further attention be given to reading for aesthetic and critical intentions (Albright & Ariail, 2005).

Evans (2010) implemented read alouds as a strategy within a critical classroom ethnography to explore their influence on a diverse classroom of fourth-grade children's attitudes and behaviours from a social justice standpoint. Data included audio and video tapes, student journals, and classroom observations collected during the read aloud and discussion of 50 picturebooks. This research uncovered three major findings. First, students increased their awareness and acceptance of values, beliefs, and social practices belonging to people from a cultural background different from their own; second, they showed an increased understanding of their own culture; and third, incorporating dialogic and written responses to the read alouds broadened learners' knowledge and understanding of bias, prejudice, and tolerance (Evans, 2010). Evans contended that reading aloud could "hold potential power as a tool for developing a socially just society" (p. 92). The study's findings suggested that while the teacher reads aloud,

students have time to write and converse; thereby giving them an opportunity to sort out their understanding of social justice issues encountered.

Kesler et al. (2020) considered interactive read alouds to be instrumental in broaching social justice issues with elementary students. This team of one teacher educator and two classroom teachers worked together in one urban public school. Through daily interactive read alouds and reader response activities, Kesler et al. aimed to develop a critical consciousness of injustice in their young students, who are ethnically diverse and mostly emergent English speakers. Researchers selected the book *Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez & Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* (Tonatiuh, 2014) for read aloud sessions with participants. Aligned with Barrentine's (1996) approach, Kesler et al. involved their students in the planning and implementing of each session, at times forgoing their original teaching plan in support of student agency. Moving away from scripted curriculum in favour of a more organic process was significant to their study. Kesler et al. concluded that, although working with interactive social justice read alouds presented a risk because of actual challenges their student population confronted in their lives, the outcome fostered children's engagement with a process that supported a flexible and meaningful way of addressing relevant sociocultural issues.

As evidenced in the studies in this section, reading aloud can therefore be used as a tool to promote understanding of diverse cultures, and a space for questioning issues of power and injustice (Ballentine & Hill, 2000; Leland & Harste, 2002).

Dialogue Journals

Dialogue journals, or written dialogues, became a common practice among classroom teachers since shared by Atwell (1984). Despite the lack of research about how they contribute to students' reading development, this practice has received praise from countless teachers who

have published anecdotal evidence of its worth (Wells, 1992). In her yearlong qualitative study with eight students from her own eighth-grade classroom, Wells (1992) sought to categorize the ways in which learners used dialogue journals. Reading and journal writing was a 30-minute daily activity in her classroom, as students read chosen texts from a variety of genres and discussed them in journal entries addressed to their teacher and classmates. Wells determined that journal writing provided opportunities for her students to engage in reflection that fostered their reading development. Findings showed that (a) students' comments reflected classroom instruction, (b) their responses to teacher comments expanded their original thinking, (c) they used the teacher's questions as models for their own inquiring, and (d) students' entries were unique. However, Wells observed that journal writing did not work equally well for everyone, an outcome to keep in mind as I began my inquiry.

Some researchers aimed their attention on dialogue journal writing as an authentic practice among second-language learners. For example, in an ethnographic study based in Australia, Miller (2003) examined the relationship between second-language use, textual practices, and representations of identity among ten ESL high school students. Miller (2007) analyzed the journal data from her previous study, which included classroom observations, interviews, students' work samples and journals, collected over a three-month period. Besides valuable observations related to the language acquisition process, Miller discovered the central role reflective journal writing played in areas like affect, engagement, and sense of belonging. Miller's analysis further supported the use of dialogue journals to encourage authentic language use in a communicative approach, thereby opening spaces for genuine communication between students and teachers, and between students and their classmates.

Holmes and Moulton (1997) discussed their multiple case study in which they explored what second-language learners thought about dialogue journal writing as a strategy to learn English. During the 15-week university course, data collected from six American college students included their weekly journals and transcripts of four interviews. Findings revealed that participants viewed dialogue journal writing as an effective strategy for learning English, attributing it to an improvement in their writing fluency and motivation. Holmes and Moulton also found that although involving students in dialogue journal writing is time-consuming, teachers must believe that its impact on their students' writing abilities will be sustainable.

Other researchers examined how the act of journalling can benefit their teaching practice. Denne-Bolton (2013) postulated that "journals can function as a window into the learner's mind, if the teacher reads them. . . . Often it is in the act of writing a response that actual learning takes place, and ideally, this is how critical thinking develops" (p. 3). Detailing teachers' advocacy for using dialogue journals, Denne-Bolton outlined the ways they lead to: (a) increased motivation to write, (b) improved fluency in writing, (c) elevated levels of confidence in writers, and (d) competency with writing to express complex ideas. Teachers indicated that developing a daily habit of writing led to learners becoming more at ease with the act of writing and empowered as learners as they build their critical literacy skills. Furthermore, Denne-Bolton affirmed that teachers also reap benefits from the written dialogues because they are better informed about their students' needs.

Strickland et al.'s (1989) collaborative research project featured four teacher researchers who endeavoured to make significant changes in their classrooms by making literature rather than textbooks a central component of their language arts program. This research team sought to listen to students and observe them in literature response groups. Data collected in four

elementary classrooms (Grades 1-6) over two months included field notes of classroom observations, teacher logs, and video and audiotape recordings. In each class, students shared feedback about books they read, using response journals and discussion as vehicles. Findings revealed the importance of a collaborative approach, which permitted teachers to systematically examine their own instructional practices and classroom environment. Strickland et al.'s democratic and dialogic pedagogy corresponded with my philosophical intentions and pedagogical practice at the onset of this study. Similarly, Osorio's (2018) findings, mentioned earlier, also sustain a democratic and dialogic pedagogy, by "opening up space to have meaningful conversations around the literature and problematizing the teacher's traditional role, so that the students were now positioned and valued as the knowledge holders and the teacher as a learner" (p. 49).

Soter (1997) noticed most research focused on the content of multicultural literature and raised "the question of what we do with these books" (p. 215). Others like Beach (1997), Beach et al. (2003), Dressel (2005), Lightner, (2020), and Thein et al. (2007) have investigated how students respond to that literature, unveiling both constructive and unsettling aspects of their responses. A scarcity of studies related to how multicultural literature is used in actual classroom settings has also been noted (Galda & Beach, 2001; Soter, 1997; Thein et al., 2012). Thein et al. (2012) viewed this lack of knowledge as "a problem at the intersection of theory and practice" (p. 121). Earlier studies reviewed in this chapter spoke to the risks and struggles of educators who engaged with multicultural literature, as well as the benefits and strategies they uncovered from these experiences. Strategies like read alouds and dialogue journals, as evidenced in the studies reviewed, are examples of practical applications when using multicultural literature in the classroom.

The Transformative Power of Story

In this final section, I build on my investigation of the benefits of reading multicultural literature with students (Cai, 1992; Dressel, 2005; Short, 2009; Thein et al., 2007) to consider the transformative power of story to (a) simulate social experiences, and (b) impact engagement and agency.

Stories as Simulated Social Experiences

My literature review includes research pertaining to fictional texts and how readers transfer their reading experience and understandings to actual social worlds. To begin, Oatley (2011) advanced that stories are like simulations of the social world that can help readers extend their understanding of characters to humankind in general. Oatley suggested that reading fiction is akin to participating in human interaction; it can (a) develop social skills, (b) build our capacity for empathy, and (c) help us understand the mental state of others. Oatley's paper on the taxonomy of emotions in response to literary fiction described how readers experience a range of real emotions as responses to what characters go through in a story (Oatley, 1994). Furthermore, Oatley (1999) found that by way of fictional stories, personal truths can be explored through readers' own emotions, creating a deeply felt, simulated social experience. Extending from Bruner's (1986) work and the notion of narrative as a distinct mode of thought, as well as on Nussbaum's (1997) theory of narrative imagination, Oatley teamed up with other researchers to explore the relationship between social and story worlds further. Correspondingly, Mar et al. (2009) conducted a quantitative study of 252 participants, in which they investigated the link between exposure to narrative fiction and empathy; they found that reading narrative fiction can have important consequences. Other research showed that experiencing simulations of social worlds can affect readers' actual social worlds (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Mar et al., 2008). Mar et al.

(2006) suggested that future research to determine whether reading fiction improves empathy could authenticate stories as tools to educate people about understanding others; while Mar and Oatley (2008) confirmed that research about the role of fiction in psychological development is gaining ground.

In their article centred on teaching character perspective, McTigue et al. (2015) reported that more research is needed to evaluate the valuable role of literature in elementary classrooms and in children's development of social skills. McTigue et al. attributed the need to equip students with strategies to a current lack of teaching tools designed to help students comprehend stories and their characters' internal experiences. Like McTigue et al., Emery (1996) responded to this need by using various forms of story maps to guide their students into story worlds and improve comprehension by empathizing with characters' viewpoints. In her qualitative research, Emery involved 9- to 11-year-old students in six classrooms from a suburban U.S. school, for a period of six weeks. Emery concluded that engaging in discussions supported students' ability to interpret and infer as they examined the world from characters' perspectives. Hence, research demonstrates that stories place readers in a position that allows them to consider characters' internal experiences; therefore, helping them understand the social world in alternative ways (Emery, 1996; McTigue et al., 2015; Miall, 2006).

Wilhelm (2016) conducted a yearlong case study with nine of his adolescent students, focusing more intently on three of them. In this collaborative teacher research, students were asked to make visible what they were doing, thinking, and feeling as they read and responded to their reading. Using a teacher journal, literary letters, think-aloud protocols, among other tools, Wilhelm coded and organized the data into ten dimensions to describe participants' responses to literary worlds. Wilhelm narrowed these into three categories of response: evocative, connective,

and reflective, which underscored various purposes and ways of reading. First, Wilhelm noticed that readers who displayed evocative responses were willing and excited to read, and contemplated what the reading would be like by recalling previous real-life experiences. Readers manifesting in this dimension established a relationship with characters, took on their perspectives, and often felt intense emotions regarding the characters, their actions, and situations. Second, the study revealed that readers in the connective dimension actively and consciously excavated beyond the story, interrogating new possibilities for characters, and imagining alternate events or consequences that might occur in real life. In the third dimension, Wilhelm observed that readers acknowledged the act of reading as organic and enjoyable, as they reflected on it. A key finding suggested that "without the bringing of personally lived experience to literature, the reverse operation, bringing literature back to life, did not occur" (Wilhelm, 2016, p. 113). In other words, Wilhelm discovered that engaged readers made conscious connections from the fictional world, which led them to gain awareness of their personal identities. By occasionally role-playing what they would do in a character's situation, readers devised guidelines for their personal ways of living from the reading transaction (Wilhelm, 2016). One of Wilhelm's participants summarized his experience in a few words by saying "You have to live the story, . . . You have to be the book" (p. 168). This is the kind of reading experience I intended for my students to live.

The Impact of Engagement and Agency

Engagement and agency were often discussed as an outcome of students' encounters with multicultural literature. Diatta (2018) conducted a qualitative study with five seventh-grade classes in a suburban U.S. school, and investigated students' interactions with social justice issues through literary study. In addition, Diatta examined the impact of social justice texts on

student activism and observed how teacher morale was affected through the process. Participants read, analyzed, and researched topics involving issues of class, race, and gender through thematic literary texts, though the study focused largely on Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Analysis of data sources, including students' journals and an end-of-unit survey revealed several key themes, namely, gratitude, poverty, wealth, action, and awareness. Also, the study revealed that (a) many students felt strongly about witnessing injustices first-hand, (b) historical context was essential in establishing meaningful connections between text and real life, and (c) students grasped the importance of learning from the past to change the future. Among participants who were surveyed, 58% responded that their views on social justice had changed through reading the texts. Diatta suggested that further research is required to understand why some students make associations independently and shift their perspectives, and others do not. Diatta recommended a social justice pedagogy be implemented in the classroom by making literature come alive, and by scaffolding opportunities for students to address the challenges of making sense out of social justice literature.

Believing students must read to learn, and not the other way around, Short (1999) proposed infusing classrooms with a literature-rich curriculum, in which literature is used as a way of knowing and thinking about the world, and where students' dialogue about literature supports a critical and democratic learning environment. Short (2009) led a four-year, school-based, in-depth cross-cultural study focused on engaging children with international literature to build a better understanding of diverse cultures. Grounded in Freire's (1970/2016) conception of critically reading the word and the world, the purpose of Short's collaborative project was twofold: explore the pedagogical issues involved in merging global literature into curricula and examine how students' understanding of culture and the world is influenced by this literature.

The study invited students to participate in schoolwide inquiries on human rights and hunger, in a small, American elementary school. Short worked alongside teachers and administrators who provided data in the form of written vignettes published in an electronic journal. Short's study demonstrated (a) that students use deconstruction to understand the complexity of culture, (b) the way it influences their thinking because of heightened awareness, and (c) that difference is no longer represented as exotic but as something that defines others as human beings. Short concluded that children's engagement with literature potentially transforms their worldviews by understanding themselves better, imagining a world beyond what they know, and reconstructing it as a better place.

According to Short (2016), a cross-cultural study examines a specific global culture, providing students with a window on the world, noting that, if it revolves around thematic units limited on superficial elements such as food or folklore, the focus may yield misguided cultural understandings and gross stereotyping. Multicultural education should home in on social struggles of cultural groups, rather than adopting a "tourist" conception of ethnic diversity through the celebration of customs and traditions (Sleeter & McLaren, 2000). Short proposed that cross-cultural studies should encompass deeper exploration of values and beliefs and include a more comprehensive inquiry of cultural groups.

At the onset of my literature review, I considered Short's (1999, 2009, 2016) extensive research related to children's engagements with literature, its potential to transform worldviews and shape their decision to make the world a better place to be instrumental to my inquiry. In particular, I found Short's (2009) project to be relevant to my teacher research because of the multiple techniques, approaches, and theoretical underpinnings of multicultural education described in her study. Also, Short's inquiry served as an example of how to create instructional

contexts that encourage students to act toward social change (Short & Thomas, 2016). Short's philosophy resonated with mine as I prepared to immerse my group of learners in a literature-focused learning journey.

Summary and Looking Ahead

In this chapter, I brought together the many moving parts of my teacher research and address the eclectic nature of my teacher research. I discussed the significance of social justice education (SJE) and its relationship to multicultural children's literature. To do this, I drew on examples of educators' experiences, the capability of children to contend with tough topics, as well as challenges of integrating SJE in teacher education. This brought on a discussion about the need for dialogue about race, racism, and White privilege, and perspective-taking as a skill. Then, I addressed the central aspects of critical pedagogy and critical literacy when teaching and learning with multicultural literature in a social justice classroom. Next, I described two strategies as pedagogical tools, and finally, elaborated on the transformative power of stories portrayed in multicultural books. In the next chapter, I expand on my theoretical framework as it unfolds within the metaphors of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Sims Bishop, 1990).

Chapter Three

Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors: Using Metaphor to Illustrate How Underlying Theoretical Perspectives Unfold in Language Arts Teacher Research

Education is that process by which thought is opened out of the soul, and, associated with outward . . . things, is reflected back upon itself, and thus made conscious of their reality and shape. ~ Amos Bronson Alcott (1938, p. 43)

Unfolding My Theoretical Framework: Guiding Metaphors

Esteemed scholar Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) believed that literature can "help us to understand each other better by helping to change our attitudes towards difference" (p. xi). She developed metaphors to describe the issue of cultural authenticity in children's literature. According to Sims Bishop, books can act as mirrors, where readers' lives and experiences are reflected back to them; they can be windows, providing a view of other worlds; or they can become sliding glass doors, through which readers can enter those worlds in imagination (Sims Bishop, 1990). When I stumbled across Sims Bishop's metaphors, they immediately resonated with me. I draw upon these metaphors as a way of visualizing and making sense of my chosen theoretical discourses. First, I connect mirrors with critical pedagogy and critical literacy: the two main perspectives of my theoretical framework. Second, I employ windows to illustrate the second layer of the framework, which leaned on feminist pedagogies. Third, I envision sliding glass doors to represent a final layer of my framework: constructivist and sociocultural approaches. The metaphors of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors helped conceptualize a theoretical framework for my study. Although most aspects of Sims Bishop's metaphors paralleled the dynamics of my inquiry, I adapted others to correspond with my research context, which I explain in the next sections.

Delineating My Theoretical Framework: Perspectives to Inform My Inquiry

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I situated myself as a White, middle-class teacher, working in a predominantly White, suburban town. Student cohorts at my school are largely representative of our small community with a non-diverse population. I have been teaching for several years with a global education mindset, geared toward a better understanding of humanity, in particular cultural differences. My perspective is akin to what Choo (2013) described as a global-oriented education, emphasizing a spherical way of seeing that "prioritizes students' consciousness of themselves as citizens of the human race first" (p. 96), and focuses on engaging with global, social justice issues. Equipped with this lens, my intentions as a teacher researcher became an extension of my broadened vision of education as a critical educator.

Accordingly, the ontological impetus for my theoretical tenets hinged on Kincheloe's (2001) notion that "knowledge is always in process, developing, culturally specific, and power-inscribed" (p. 689). Because there is a need for students to wrestle with ideas and words, reading the word and the world elicits questions like what is? who benefits? and what if? (Freire, 1970/2016). Asking questions, challenging the status quo, and going beyond receiving knowledge bolsters criticality, which occurs when we examine our own conflicting assumptions. Burbules and Berk (1999) acknowledged this criticality as a valuable tool to navigate through life. This posture also endorses social justice education (SJE), which seeks to enable students to become conscientious members of their communities through the goals of social responsibility, student empowerment, and the equitable distribution of resources (Bell, 2016). Since my central research question (How might using multicultural literature in the classroom expand adolescent learners' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens?) originated from the practical context of my language arts classroom, turning to a set of critical theories was a

philosophically natural choice. Adding perspectives of feminist and constructivist influences

provided a comprehensive dimension to the theoretical underpinnings of my inquiry. For each

theoretical perspective, I associate four action verbs that speak to the more practical, critical

stance of learners. Although these verbs are not exclusive to each theory, I chose them according

to what I saw as resonating with learners in relation to the mirrors, windows, and sliding glass

doors dimensions. Important to note, because the process is organic, learners can move back and

forth between the metaphoric dimensions.

In this chapter, I address critical pedagogy and literacy (mirrors), as they constitute a

major part of my theoretical framework, informing both the SJE and methodology pieces of my

research. To begin, I delve into critical pedagogy through Freire's (1970/2016) concepts of

conscientização and *praxis.* Then, I elaborate on Kincheloe's notion of critical social science

(1991) and outline the four central tenets of critical pedagogy (2008). I associate the theoretical

approach of critical pedagogy with the following action verbs: wonder, question, examine, and

challenge (see Figure 1, p. 72). When manifested in the classroom, I connect these actions to

concepts of *reflexivity* and *problem-posing* in both students, and myself as teacher researcher.

Second, I analyze the role of critical literacy through Luke and Freebody's (1997) four-tiered

approach of reading instruction, and what it means to adopt a "theoretical and practical attitude"

(Luke, 2000, p. 454). I also discuss Lewison et al.'s (2002) four-dimensional model, and Jones'

(2006) three-part framework for critical literacy to describe the way this theory takes shape in the

classroom. As I did with critical pedagogy, I liken critical literacy to students' actions of reading,

reflecting, exploring, and discovering, which in turn inform *perspective-taking* and *positionality*.

In addition to the critical theories, I expand on the second layer, which reveals feminist

pedagogies (windows) that are rooted in a philosophy that nurtures a critical and reflective stance

Figure 1

Visual Representation of My Metaphoric Theoretical Framework
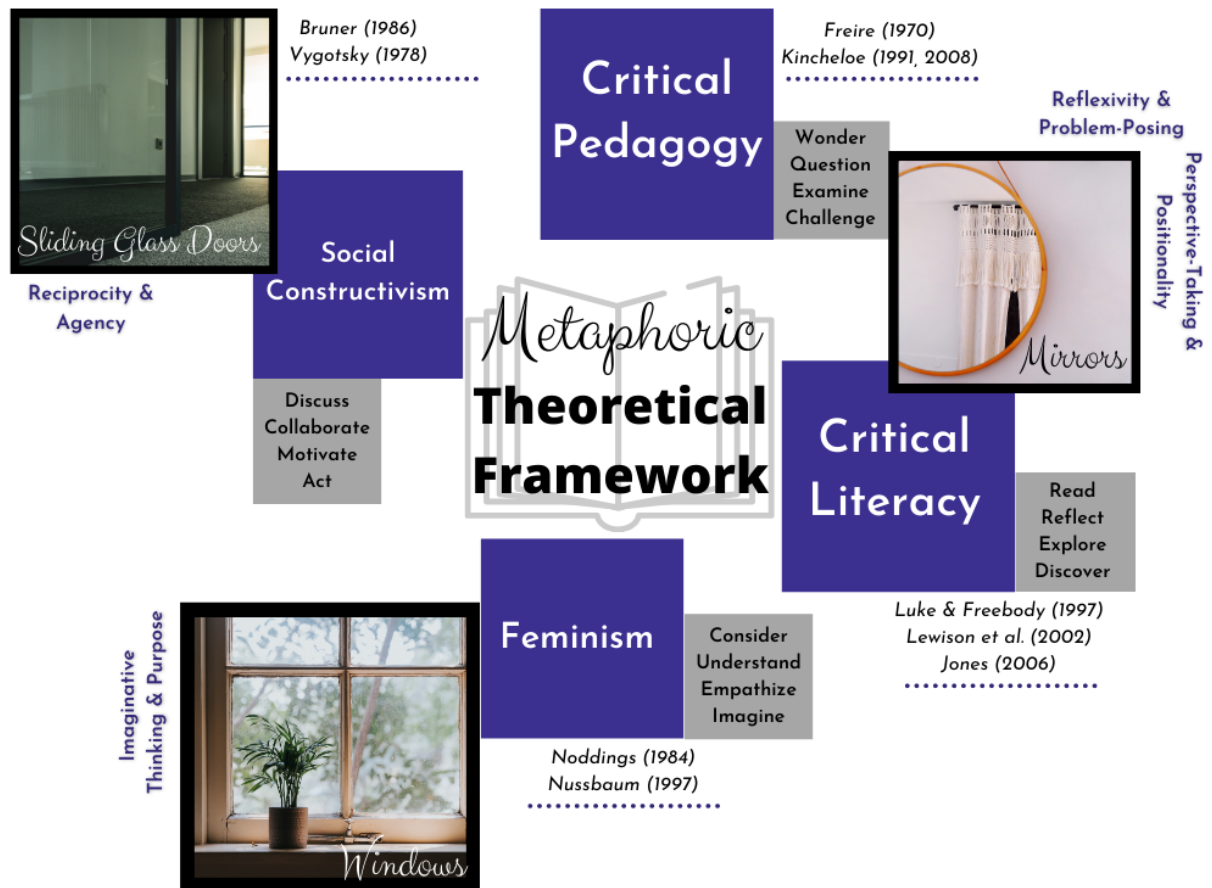
to social realities, and resists structures of domination and oppression. Built upon Nussbaum's

(1997) philosophy on cultivating humanity and the narrative imagination, as well as Noddings'

(1984/2013) ethic of care, these feminist theories inform *imaginative thinking* and *purpose* of

teacher researcher. Here, learners' actions correspond with their willingness to consider,

understand, empathize, and imagine.

Finally, I reveal the third and final layer of my theoretical foundation (sliding glass

doors), consisting of socioconstructivist lenses. On one hand, I use Bruner's (1986) notion of

narrative as a mode of thought to bring dynamics of meaning-making and storytelling to light.

On the other hand, I lean on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which supports the concept of social learning and development. Like Bruner's approach, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is exploratory and collaborative in nature, therefore, both make space for participants to discuss, collaborate, motivate, and act. These theories highlight notions of *reciprocity* and *agency*, whereby actors are invited to transcend knowledge acquisition and engage in the active process of meaning-making.

Together, the three-layered framework provides a theoretical context in which my inquiry unfolded. It is important to note that although I informally associated the three sub-questions of my research with each of the three metaphors, these were not solely manifested within the scope of the metaphors. In keeping with the organic nature of my teacher inquiry, the questions sometimes overlapped with the different layers of the framework.

Mirrors: Critical Theories Guide SJE and Methodology

Sims Bishop's (2012) concern about authenticity in children's literature led her to the conclusion that historically, children from the dominant culture have been given books that reflect their own realities (mirrors), while children from disenfranchised groups read books that provide a glimpse of alternate lives, different from their own (windows). According to the author, children from all walks of life should benefit from both the mirrors and windows aspects when they read. Further, Sims Bishop has long advocated the need for diversity in children's literature, as demonstrated in her book *Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction* (1982), which consolidates her analyzes and recommendations for the selection of children's literature written for and about African Americans.

I draw on the mirrors component of Sims Bishop's (1990) metaphor to conceptualize the critical approaches of pedagogy and literacy within my study and parallel the reflective

properties of mirrors to the concepts emerging from both these theories: reflexivity, problem-posing, perspective-taking, and positionality. My use of the mirrors metaphor differs from Sims Bishop's (1990) original posit that readers seek to see themselves in the books they read as a means of self-affirmation. Sims Bishop felt this happens when children read books in which they perceive characters as similar to themselves and feel a sense of belonging. Instead, I conceptualize the critical dimension as connected to mirrors to portray the work of reflexivity from both myself (teacher researcher), and participants, as they learn about social justice. In this research, we are fully engaged in looking at ourselves as we are, in the present moment. Looking in the mirror can sometimes be difficult, especially when we begin to recognize that what is reflected back to us does not coincide with what we would like to be. The critical theories in this study require us to ask questions, about our beliefs, about what we read, about our position, as new knowledge is gained; by consciously engaging in the wondering, the questioning, the examining, and sometimes the challenging of what we see (mirrors), then comes the possibility of considering alternatives, and making decisions about what we see.

Despite these differences, Sims Bishop (1990) found that children from dominant cultures have also suffered from a lack of exposure to literature featuring stories about people different from themselves. She stated:

They need books that will help them understand the multicultural nature of the world they live in, and their place as a member of just one group, as well as their connections to all other humans. In this country, where racism is still one of the major unresolved social problems, books may be one of the few places where children who are socially isolated and insulated from the larger world may meet people unlike themselves. If they see only

reflections of themselves, they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own

importance and value in the world—a dangerous ethnocentrism. (p. x)

Although the author referred to racism as a problem in the United States, I consider her

assessment to be relevant here in Canada too. This quote connected deeply to my worldview and

dovetailed with my aim as a teacher researcher to explore how multicultural literature might

expand my students' worldviews, as well as shape the way they perceive themselves as part of

the larger human experience. I began to see how within a mirrors metaphor, my students were

positioned to explore their current worldviews, reflect on their values, assumptions, and biases,

and examine their sociocultural identities in the context of a broader, more diverse collectivity.

This context speaks to the way students might engage in self-reflection (mirrors), and consider

their membership within a larger global community, despite the lack of diversity in their

immediate surroundings. Interacting with multicultural books and participating in conversations

about real-life situations associated with the stories offered access to such a context.

Once I began exploring criticality as the main frame for my research, I turned to the work

of Freire (1970/2016, 1974/2017) and Kincheloe (1991, 2008) to uncover the rationale for

endorsing a critical pedagogy approach. In the context of my inquiry, this approach anchors the

premise of creating conditions for empowerment and social justice in the classroom. As such, it

informs reflexivity and problem-posing, both in my participants, and myself, the teacher

researcher. By subscribing to a critical constructivist epistemology, I recognized, like Kincheloe

(1991), that my research was the farthest thing from a neutral undertaking because for critical

qualitative researchers, "it draws upon our values, our hopes, and the mysteries which come out

of our social worlds" (p. 162).

Luke and Freebody (1997), Luke (2000), Lewison et al. (2002), and Jones (2006) helped to tie together the theoretical underpinnings of critical literacy. Understanding how critical literacy informs perspective-taking and positionality is an example of how conscientious pedagogical practices contributed to bridging the theory to practice gap.

Critical Pedagogy. Knoblauch and Brannon (1993) postulated that:

[c]ritical teaching is about the willingness of people to inquire and change and make changes, to accommodate themselves to difference, to read the social world, in its complexity, for the promises it makes about the quality of its members' lives and the extent to which it delivers on those promises. (p. 49)

Knoblauch and Brannon's goal might be a lofty one for educators. However, as I mentioned in my introductory chapter, for me, knowing why we do what we do, and re-evaluating how we do it, is a fundamental principle on which to stand as an educational professional. Critical pedagogy subscribes to this principle. Giroux proposed the idea of teachers as transformative intellectuals who understand the democratic nature of a classroom, and "give students the opportunity to become agents of civic courage, and therefore citizens who have the knowledge and courage to take seriously the need to make despair unconvincing and hope practical" (Giroux & Aronowitz, 1985, p. 37). According to Giroux (2020), because "pedagogy is never innocent", critical pedagogy focuses on knowledge as it is socially interpreted and is effective when "educators encourage critical reflection and moral and civic agency rather than simply mould them" (p. 87). As a teacher researcher, I welcomed such a responsibility and embraced the vision of educational possibilities within my classroom, one that might help both me and my students make sense of our place as citizens of the world, and actively engage as such. Freire's (1970/2016) notions of conscientização and praxis are compatible with the realization of Knoblauch and Brannon's

earlier statement. In the following paragraphs, I expand further on Freire's teachings and their significance to my study.

Freire: Reflexivity and Problem-Posing. Just as mirrors let us see our image reflected back, adopting a critical stance can prompt us to reflect on reality in ways that might lead us to change our thoughts and behaviour (Shor, 1992). As such, critical pedagogy informs reflexivity in my study where students and myself, a teacher researcher, engaged in discourse that fostered personal and social responsibility. I elicit Freire's concepts of conscientização to further illustrate my approach.

Freire (1974/2017) saw humans as being unique because they engage in relationships with others, interconnect with the world, respond to challenges of their environment, relate to the world in a critical manner, and create culture. According to Freire, the awakening of critical awareness, or conscientização, is manifested through attitudes, gestures, and stances. He further explained how this renewed consciousness assesses one's position as oppressed or oppressor, and compels an examination of one's behaviour, ethical beliefs, and view of the world (Freire, 1970/2016). Since French is my native language, I interpreted the word *conscientização* as very closely tied to the frequently used verb *conscientiser*, which means to raise awareness. When I first came across Freire's concept of conscientização, I immediately correlated it to the environment in which I work. In fact, Freire (1970/2016) perceived a pedagogy of the oppressed as one that is humanist- and libertarian-inspired; "a pedagogy of humankind" (p. 54) that encourages people to "take into account their behaviour, their view of the world, and their ethics" (p. 55). My perspective as a White educator led me to conceptualize and understand his notion of conscientização as an awakening for my dominant culture learners. For this reason, "conscientiser les élèves par l'entremise de la littérature multiculturelle" [raising students'

awareness through multicultural literature] seemed like the ideal lens to reconcile my teacher research methodology.

Furthermore, Freire (1998) advanced that critical curiosity motivates critical consciousness, inciting people to understand and participate in social action against systems of oppression. Because Freire (1970/2016) believed that education is a means for transformation, intended as a practice of freedom, it aims to counter dehumanization tainted by injustice, domination, and oppression. Indeed, Freire posited that learning can be transformative because consciousness is "*reflexive* of reality" (Shor, 1987, p. 13, emphasis in original). As my students and I immersed ourselves in the narratives of multicultural literature that depict social injustices, we were poised to develop such a posture as well. After reading literature written by, and about, Freire, I noticed that the concepts of reflexivity and conscientização were fundamental components of my inquiry because students' critical awareness was challenged upon engaging with multicultural literature.

In addition to developing the concept of conscientização, Freire (1970/2016) campaigned for a problem-posing education that rejects the banking concept of education, whereby the goal is to deposit knowledge in students as empty vessels to be filled and replace it with "the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world" (p. 79). Freire defined praxis as "the reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (p. 126). This problem-posing education is characterized by intentionality and dialogue (Freire, 1970/2016), and cultivates empowerment and agency. As such, Freire insisted that the dynamics between teacher and students change through dialogue: the teacher is being taught while she teaches in an environment where responsibility is shared, and growth flourishes. According to Freire, when the vertical pattern of authority is shattered, the teacher reshapes her reflections concertedly with her

students because they are critical co-investigators in constant dialogue with her. Freire pointed

out that "whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing

education involves a constant unveiling of reality" (p. 81). In her work examining problem-

posing and Freire's (1970/2016) culture circles, Souto-Manning (2010) corroborated the benefits

of this view in problematizing inequalities and confronting unjust realities. Likewise, Hackman

(2005) concurred with Freire's notion of praxis, highlighting its role in encouraging students to

critique systems of power and social injustices, maintaining that critical thinking combined with

praxis optimizes students' engagement in SJE.

In the same way that the concept of reflexivity and conscientização informed my study,

problem-posing and praxis, occupied an equally important role. Praxis, as a principle of critical

pedagogy, endorsed my methodology of qualitative teacher research, set in a single case study,

on which I elaborate in Chapter 4. In fact, Lather (1986) examined what she calls "research as

praxis" as a favourable emancipatory goal of social science research. Lather argued that such an

epistemological position would first encourage self-reflection and help us understand and

renegotiate the maldistribution of power and resources in our society; and second, challenge the

status quo in favour of a more just society. Involving my students in a more collaborative,

reciprocal, and democratic process of critical inquiry responded to the call to shift educational

motives toward more just and ethical purposes.

Knoblauch and Brannon (1993) called teacher research "the current liberatory

movement" (p. 179) at a time when the conception of teachers becoming inquirers in their own

classrooms was gaining ground. The logic of teacher research (practitioner inquiry) is explained

by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) as "an ineluctable twinning of theory and the activism of

teaching" (p. 336). For my students and I, participating in this inquiry created occasions to read

multicultural literature and consider alternatives to current worldviews. If "reflection—true reflection—leads to action" (Freire, 1970/2016, p. 66), then conscientiously reflecting upon our *weltanschauung*, or worldview, and espousing a problem-posing education, might lead to progressive change. Similar to Freire's convictions, Kincheloe (1991) assented to the value of critical research as praxis by recognizing the apportionment of the practical in the relationship between theory and practice.

   Kincheloe: Critical Social Science and Central Conditions. To continue with the mirrors metaphor, I turn to Kincheloe's (1991) belief that critical social science advocates self-reflection, which in turn causes people to make attitudinal changes that preserve "the centrality of the individual and the powerfulness of individual endeavour" (p. 1). In essence, Kincheloe's conviction that an individual's consciousness of himself shapes his understanding as a social being was at the heart of my teacher research. Kincheloe believed that critical social science is akin to the concept of the practical and is concerned with the connection of research to society, and theory to practice. For this reason, Kincheloe adhered to Dewey's (1908) belief in the notion of democratic work, and that critically grounded social research is not solely reserved for the academic elite, a point I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4. Likewise, Piaget (1973) noted that teacher research is not separate from teacher education, suggesting that teachers become familiar with the nature of research from the beginning of their training. Further, teacher researchers Patterson and Shannon (1993) noted that reflection, inquiry, and action are reciprocal in a teacher inquiry because teachers take on multiple roles as thinkers, learners, and practitioners.

   I consider myself a critical teacher researcher who believes in the idea of praxis and appreciates the way smaller-scale change can affect broader educational transformation (Kincheloe et al., 2018). In pursuing social justice from the perspective of critical

multiculturalism, I aim "to educate students who [were] ready, willing, and able to take charge of their own worlds" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997, p. 74). Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) professed that if we are to learn from difference, we must go beyond tolerance and use our critical thinking to nurture a sense of empathy. Diversity encompasses the notion that differences exist among us and necessitates social understanding: a message I endeavour to share with my group of students, amidst our less-than-diverse community.

Critical pedagogy scholars, namely Freire (1970/2016, 1974/2017, 1998), Freire and Macedo (1987), Giroux (1984, 1993, 2010, 2012, 2020), Giroux and Aronowitz (1985), Kincheloe (1991, 2008), Darder (2011), and McLaren (2008), have largely contributed to laying the groundwork for more democratic forms of education to be implemented. Among them, Kincheloe (2008) compiled a set of four central conditions defining critical pedagogy, deriving from the work of these researchers.

First, critical pedagogy takes root in a social and educational vision of justice, equality, and is based on the understanding that education is always political. Kincheloe (2008) insisted that teachers must contend with these inherent political dynamics because "critical pedagogy wants to know who's indoctrinating whom" (p. 11).

Second, critical pedagogy is geared toward the alleviation of human suffering. By its very nature, it prevents students from being blamed for their failures or disregarding the knowledge they bring to school. Based on this premise, critical pedagogy recognizes that students come to school with experiences and knowledge that have been shaped by their worlds. Freire and Macedo (1987) echoed this principle by stipulating that worlds and words are both socially and historically located. Above all, critical pedagogy ensures that schools are not hurtful places by

allowing the development of curricula that values the interests of marginalized cultures instead of perpetuating the dominant culture.

Third, Kincheloe (2008) reported that critical pedagogy is based on generative themes, a Freirean belief in which students read the word and the world in the process of problem-posing. Reading and generating meaning from texts is the student's creative responsibility and "reading always involves critical perception, interpretation, and *rewriting* what is read" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 36). As these themes emerge from students' own experiences, blurring the roles of teacher and learner (Freire 1970/2016) becomes instrumental to sustain an equitable and organic classroom environment. As Shor (1999) characterized it, "a critical process is driven and justified by mutuality" (p. 13).

Last, critical pedagogy positions teachers as researchers of their students, and as learners alongside them. Here, the teacher's authority converts into a dialectical relationship with her students, in which she acts as a facilitator. In fact, Giroux (2020) paralleled Freire's argument that beyond the transfer of knowledge, pedagogy becomes more meaningful when "students are moved by their passions and motivated, in part, by the affective investments they bring to the learning process" (p. 94). This supports critical pedagogy's contention that a fundamental task of educators is to be geared toward a more socially just world (Giroux, 2010). In the same vein, Kincheloe believed that school curricula should harmonize with students and teachers yearning to live just and ethical lives (2004) and encourage young learners to critically analyze "the forces that shape the world" (Kincheloe et al., 2018, p. 239).

To encapsulate, my inquiry corresponds with critical pedagogy: it is about seeking a more humanizing education, one that encourages learners to become more conscious about who they are in the world and how their words and deeds affect others (Darder, 2011).

Critical Literacy. I have been a language arts teacher for more than a decade, yet it was only after I began my PhD journey that I was able to name the dynamics of my literacy practices. From the onset of my teacher research, the theoretical underpinnings of critical literacy came to life as I continually connected the dots during teaching. The following words by Shor (1999) perfectly summarize the way I came to understand my practice as critical literacy:

> We are what we say and do. The way we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become. Through words and other actions, we build ourselves in a world that is building us. . . This is where critical literacy begins, for questioning power relations, discourses, and identities in a world not yet finished, just, or humane. (p. 2)

Seated in the mirrors metaphor, critical literacy was essential to the theoretical context in which my study took place. According to Knoblauch and Brannon (1993), critical teachers develop an "informed reflectiveness" (p. 7) about every aspect affecting their students' and their own quality of life. As a critical educator and researcher, I embraced this posture by being constantly reflective of my pedagogical practices, and responsive to my students' needs when I introduced them to multicultural literature. Like Janks (2019), I considered it my responsibility as a critical literacy teacher to help my students "read with and against a text" (p. 561) so that they may make informed decisions about their positions in relation to texts. Further, by interacting with multicultural literature for the first time, I recognized that my students and I were engaging in what Leland and Harste (2000) called a "non-neutral form of cultural practice—one that positions readers in certain ways and obscures as much as it illuminates" (p. 3). I also found Locke's (2004) definition of critical literacy as "an overt consciousness-raising exercise, concerned to make language-users aware of the verbal and non-verbal choices . . . and the ways in which these choices are used" (p. 39) to be pertinent within our context. Reading

critically was instrumental for participants, especially during this teacher inquiry in which they were ongoingly examining their own values and assumptions.

The multicultural texts we read featured tough topics and sensitive issues of social justice that might prompt participants to be confronted with difficult questions, strong emotions, and conflicting thoughts. Adopting a critical literacy lens furnished "a pair of eyeglasses that allows one to see beyond the familiar and comfortable" (Jones, 2006, p. 65) with which to navigate our multicultural study units.

Luke and Freebody: Reading as Social Practice. As I introduced my students to multicultural books, I counted on literature to provide a medium for reflection and learning through characters in stories who experience injustices, difficulties, or tragedies because of their differences. The critical literacy portion of my theoretical framework was thereby a key element in my exploration of the way literature might go beyond creating interest in learners and urge them to be transformed by it. For instance, engaging with multicultural literature encouraged an attitude of perspective-taking and invited the participants in my single case study to examine possible ethnocentric presumptions. As a result, they might be inclined to reflect on, and question, their own culture and position in the world, and consider those of others. Luke and Freebody's (1997) model of reading as social practice, based on an earlier four-tiered approach developed by Freebody and Luke (1990), includes four necessary but non-exhaustive sets of social practices needed in critical literacy. According to Luke and Freebody, readers must take on the roles of code-breaker, meaning-maker, text user, and text critic (p. 214).

The first role of the reader in Luke and Freebody's (1997) model involves developing resources to gain competence in breaking the code of written texts: cracking the text by understanding patterns, conventions, sounds, spelling, etc. The second role requires the reader to

become a text participant and engage in making meaning from written, visual, or spoken texts: this includes making sense of the way ideas come together in a text, and how cultural meanings are constructed within it. Third, the reader is positioned as a text user, seeking to understand how texts are shaped by different cultural and social influences, and whereby pragmatic decisions are made about their functionality and purpose. Finally, the reader assumes the role of a text critic and analyst: critically analyzing, transforming, and critiquing texts with the understanding that they represent multiple viewpoints.

As demonstrated in Luke and Freebody's (1997) model, reading is a non-neutral enterprise if performed as a cultural practice. Because texts are never neutral, reading critically obliges us to understand that texts are not necessarily positioned in what we might perceive as ideologically natural. By acknowledging this, critical literacy summons us to make ethical decisions throughout the act of reading and invites us to position ourselves in relation to texts, even if "[w]e often do so without recognizing their power to shape our identities" (Janks, 2019, p. 561). Furthermore, Leland and Harste (2000) affirmed that, just as reading is non-neutral, teaching is also not a neutral form of cultural practice. As a critical educator, I concur with Leland and Harste's appraisal of critical literacy:

> [R]eimagining teaching as a set of critical practices means that teachers are able to help children critique and outgrow the systems in which they live and work. They become individuals who are motivated to interrogate their personal assumptions as well as those that are embedded in the educational and larger social systems in which they operate. (p. 4)

Luke and Freebody's (1997) four-tiered model was used as a pragmatic approach to help young readers develop useful critical literacy skills. By problem-posing learners' worldviews with the

help of multicultural literature in the classroom, my teacher inquiry adhered to Luke and Freebody's belief that "teaching and learning to read is about teaching and learning standpoints, cultural expectations, norms of social actions and consequences" (p. 208). As evidenced in this section, the concept of positionality informed my research. Borrowing a critical lens to explore this concept in my inquiry was relevant considering the nature of my research site.

Luke (2000) contended that, far from exhibiting a finite set of practices, critical literacy encompasses a more intuitive, organic approach. In fact, critical literacy advocates have resisted the conception and implementation of normative instructional strategies bound for curricular use (Luke, 2000). For example, faithful to her view of critical literacy as a means for interrogating texts, Comber (2001) believed in a constant redefining of critical literacy within pedagogical practices. In like manner, McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) asserted that "[t]here is no list of methods in critical literacy that work the same way in all contexts all the time" (p. 54). Therefore, in considering the sustainability of a socially critical approach to literacy in modern times, Luke envisioned critical literacy education as "a theoretical and practical attitude toward texts and the social world, and a commitment to the use of textual practices for social analysis and transformation" (p. 454). Because we are shaping the world as much as it is shaping us (Shor, 1999), language is a powerful tool in how we view and project our identities, and how we engage in relationships with others. In this sense, critical literacy aims to envision the possibilities of creating a more just and democratic world (Janks, 2014).

When uncovering the theoretical frame for my study, I contemplated how learning about social justice could be achieved in real-time when adopting a "theoretical and practical attitude" (Luke, 2000, p. 454) during the act of reading. Similar to Luke's (2000) affirmation that texts are never neutral, Street (1984) indicated that literacy practices are not neutral either. He suggested

that researchers should consider the implication of worldviews and question the uniformity of

literacy models by addressing issues of power and identity that frame them (Street, 1984). By

introducing multicultural literature units in my ESL class, I believed I was bringing a dimension

to my literacy practices that might cultivate deeper, meaningful reading experiences in learners.

This pedagogical choice corresponded with Luke's theoretical perspective, which he described as

"unruly and at times discordant" (p. 453). As a result, by making connections between theory

and practice, I became cognizant of my classroom practices as critical literacy.

Rosenblatt (1938/1976) posited that readers who become personally involved in a story

show greater understanding than those who read as a response to a task. Further, Rosenblatt

(1978) theorized that a unique transaction occurs between the reader and the text that can lead to

a potentially transformative experience of literature—a point to which I referred in the literature

review chapter. Indeed, connecting personally with texts is enjoyable as well as powerful

because the study of literature can provide both an aesthetic and critical experience for the

learner (Leland et al., 2018; Lewis, 2000). As a PhD candidate, I now understood that I was

offering learners a critical literacy agenda brimming with occasions to wrestle with their

positioning vis-à-vis the text, understand what the author's intentions were, put on characters'

perspectives, and evaluate the social, cultural, and political dynamics encountered. A critical

literacy lens equipped my students with opportunities to read, write, reflect, and discuss across

the board, from their standpoints.

Luke (2000) conceptualized a critical literacy classroom as a place where students and

teachers work together to explore how texts help construct their worlds, cultures, and identities in

ideological ways; and to employ texts as social tools for the purpose of transforming these

worlds, cultures, and identities. Throughout my teacher inquiry, I aimed for a critical learning

environment, which Luke characterized as an organic approach, that encourages students and teachers to design their own critical literacies rather than follow more rigid curricula.

   Lewison et al.: Four Dimensions of Critical Literacy. Remaining in the mirrors metaphor, I perceived a critical literacy lens as an instrument much like the surface from which light reflects, and an image bounces off. As was alluded to in the previous section, critical teaching incorporates planning, observing, and reflecting. Kincheloe (1991) claimed that teacher research involves a more textured reflection on teaching practices, which requires self-understanding, especially concerning ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions. According to Knoblauch and Brannon (1993), teacher research as a methodology of critical literacy proposes "to construct new knowledge of educational life from the vantage points of its primary participants—teachers and students" (p. 186). Bearing that in mind, pedagogical practices can take many forms in a critical literacy classroom. Lewison et al. (2002) harmonized definitions of critical literacy into a four-dimensional model: (a) disrupting the commonplace, (b) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (c) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (d) taking action and promoting social justice. Implementing this model in my classroom inquiry corresponded with the critical lens and social justice approach underpinning my framework.

   The first component of the model promotes an activist perspective whereby teachers see "the everyday through new lenses" (Lewison et al., 2002, pp. 382-383). Lewison et al. relied on empowering principles from Shor (1987), Luke and Freebody (1997), Shannon (1995), Vasquez (2000), Fairclough (1989), and Gee (1990) to mobilize the application of critical literacy. Lewison et al. considered disrupting the commonplace as a historically radical stance to adopt because of the way teachers are traditionally perceived as passive actors. When teachers problematize knowledge and interrogate texts, they engage in a more agentic role as critical

educators. As teachers involve their students as co-investigators in the act of reading, they share this power of language as a means for questioning and critiquing texts (Shannon, 1995). According to Leland and Harste (2000), some books disrupt the commonplace by focusing on perceptions of otherness; when students interact with such texts, they discuss how the results of this perspective can be harmful, and their conversations "can help them begin to see and understand the world in new ways" (p. 5). Reading social issues texts might be a disruptive activity because the in-depth examination of students' beliefs and everyday life destabilizes the status quo. Nevertheless, according to Lewison et al., it might also increase their level of engagement.

The second aspect of Lewison et al.'s (2002) model is consistent with a perspective-taking attitude, which encourages understanding experience from multiple viewpoints, including our own. In a process that can lead to conflicting views, this dimension invites participants to reflect, interrogate, and examine perspectives, yielding sometimes unsettling discoveries (Lewison et al., 2002). Like the first dimension, Lewison et al. confirmed that interrogating multiple viewpoints can also be an unconventional path for teachers to take. Reflecting on and challenging contradictory perspectives is often a messy and unpredictable endeavour, one that educators are often reluctant to embark upon, even if Freire named conflict as "the midwife of consciousness" (Shor, 1987, p. 176). Be that as it may, when we listen to different points of view, we are attentive to hearing every voice, especially those who have traditionally been silenced or marginalized (Harste et al., 2000; Luke & Freebody, 1997). Harste et al. (2000) insisted that when we read critically, choosing diverse literature provides readers opportunities to explore dominant systems in our society, incites them to act on social issues, and makes difference visible.

The third element of the model points to a social justice lens, through which participants question sociopolitical systems and power relationships (Lewison et al., 2002). The focus at this stage is on language, inequalities, and cultural citizenship. As Knoblauch and Brannon (1993) reminded us, "[c]ritical teaching doesn't politicize education; it recognizes the political nature of education and works to make students, no less than other citizens, aware of the consequences of that recognition" (p. 49). In keeping with Leland and Harste's (2000) posit that teaching is not a neutral social practice, focusing on sociopolitical issues moves readers beyond a personal response to texts, as they venture into questioning how systems of power and sociopolitical structures shape our perceptions (Lewison et al., 2002). In a sense, Lewison et al. defined this dimension as an exercise in redefining literacy, and recontextualizing literacy practices to include how larger power structures influence readers.

The last component of the model embodies the other three, adding to it the goal of attaining social justice. Lewison et al. (2002) suggested engaging in praxis, using language to question practices of privilege, analyzing the power of language in discourse, and challenging existing cultural borders to meet this goal. According to Lewison et al., and many other proponents of critical literacy (Comber, 2001; Freire, 1970/2016; Giroux, 1993; Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993), taking action and promoting social justice quintessentially defines critical literacy. Flint (2000) asserted that when readers are presented with opportunities to share what they think and how they feel about texts, and participate in social action initiatives, "[r]isks are taken as assumptions and beliefs are shared about race, disabled people, homelessness, fairness, and justice. In doing so, students come to hear and respond to diverse points of view" (p. 32).

Freire (1970/2016) suggested that students will meet the challenge when posed with problems pertaining to themselves in relation to the world. Freire believed that engaging in

praxis—the action and reflection upon the world in order to transform it—challenges the notion

that the world exists apart from humans. Furthermore, taking action against oppression and

promoting social justice might encourage students to cross cultural borders as they seek to

understand others (Giroux, 1993).

  Jones: A Frame for Thinking, Planning, and Enacting. By borrowing stories from her

own lived experiences as a child, Jones (2006) wrote *Girls, Social Class and Literacy*, a book in

which she shares a framework for critical literacy, with practical tools aimed at dismantling

stereotypes, and providing a path to understanding others better. Jones' framework consists of

three parts: (a) deconstruction, (b) reconstruction, and (c) social action.

  Jones (2006) believed that multiple meanings exist in every text. The initial component of

her framework entails taking apart the deeper meaning of a text by "[peeling] away the layers

through the consideration of perspective, positioning, and power" (p. 79). In this phase of the

process, students literally deconstruct issues in an attempt to understand them. Clarke and

Whitney (2009) proposed combining Jones' framework with multiple-perspectives texts to

expose the multiple voices within them and allow readers to experience "how things change

when seeing an issue through a different vantage point" (p. 532). Multiple-perspectives texts are

books in which different viewpoints are represented through characters. Such books may be used

to introduce concepts like perspective-taking and positioning, thereby encouraging learners to

reflect upon themselves and the world around them. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) also

found that "[w]hen reading the world, the critically aware readers comprehend beyond the literal

level and think about the function of the text" (p. 53).

  Clarke and Whitney (2009) suggested that integrating classroom activities such as readers

theatre, graphic organizers, and making connections and disconnections with texts can be

effective ways to consolidate learning. For instance, when students establish connections with characters through an experience similar to their own, or when they disconnect with characters by recognizing a major difference; powerful conversations can emerge, heightening their critical consciousness about differences (Clarke & Whitney, 2009). For this reason, disconnections are an important aspect of the process. As teachers, we acknowledge that texts are constructed from the author's perspective, yet careful consideration must be given when asking students to make connections with it, that we may avoid "positioning them to believe in the authority of texts instead of acknowledging, questioning, challenging, and critiquing them" (Jones & Clarke, 2007, p. 100).

The second component of Jones' (2006) model invites students to apply the knowledge gained from the deconstruction phase and create new ways of thinking. Therefore, in the reconstruction step of the process, learners use journalling, diary entries, and recreation of stories written from alternative perspectives to show their understanding of texts.

Lastly, students enter the social action component of Jones' (2006) framework when they take their new perspectives and connections beyond the walls of the classroom. Building on the two previous steps of deconstruction and reconstruction, engaging in social action, whether on a small or large scale, allows students to view themselves as part of the broader, global community (Clarke & Whitney, 2009). Clarke and Whitney (2009) recommended that learners participate in social action projects by sharing new texts with their peers, write letters to magazines and newspapers asking for multiple perspectives to be represented, interview community members about specific issues, or organize a schoolwide campaign with multiple viewpoints.

I am fundamentally guided by a Freirean approach in which critical literacy is enacted by reading the word and the world and aimed at challenging the status quo. Shor (1999) echoed that

such a literacy employs "words rethinking worlds . . . [connecting] the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequity" (p. 2). McLaughlin and Devoogd (2004) illustrated well the way I contemplated critical literacy in the context of my inquiry:

> Beyond the first steps into critical literacy lies an increasingly fascinating intellectual world. It is a world filled with multiple perspectives, one in which the subordinated are acknowledged and valued. It is a world in which we naturally participate in reflection, action, and transformation; a world in which critical literacy is not viewed as a classroom activity but rather as a stance used in all contexts of our lives. (p. 62)

To conclude, both the critical pedagogy and critical literacy approaches described using the mirrors metaphor served to guide my teacher inquiry.

Windows: Feminist Pedagogies Define Imaginative Thinking and Purpose

I return to Sims Bishop's (1990) metaphors and ponder the meaning of windows as I applied it to my theoretical context. Sims Bishop compared books to windows, in that they sometimes offer "views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange" (p. ix). However, Sims Bishop (2012) added that windows could also act as barriers, in the sense that children could look in but not be able to become a part of the experience they observe. I liken the second layer of my theoretical discourses to windows in two manners. First, I visualize it as a way that feminist pedagogy sheds light on my role as a teacher researcher and my vision of the classroom as a liberatory environment. Specifically, I draw on Noddings' (1984/2013) ethic of care as it relates to my purpose as teacher researcher (carer), who fosters an equitable classroom setting in which students can view (windows) possibilities and other realities presented to them

in multicultural literature. Second, I imagine it as a type of looking glass for learners, through which multicultural literature allows them to see realities different than their own. In this manner, windows are the second dimension of the metaphors, through which learners contemplate possibilities and other realities. It also corresponds with my second research sub-question, whereby windows represent a means to explore how multicultural books can help students develop a critical lens on global issues. In addition, Nussbaum's (1997) notion of the narrative imagination allows me to approach my teaching and learning in a way that sustains feminist values from the perspective of cultivating humanity. Therefore, windows portray the dimension through which feminist pedagogies are explored two ways.

It was an immutable love of learning (and a strong resolve to impart it) that led me to my teaching career. According to hooks (1994), being a responsible educator requires a commitment to engage in continuous self-reflection so that we might inspire our students to view their own journeys of learning and growth as meaningful. I found pertinence in turning to feminist pedagogy for the conception of my theoretical frame. According to Shrewsbury (1997), feminist pedagogy is "a theory about the teaching/learning process that guides our choice of classroom practices by providing criteria to evaluate specific educational strategies" (p. 166). It involves a vision of the classroom as a democratic and liberatory environment, in which the Freirean concepts of student-teacher and teacher-student are considered as dialogical and equitable relationships. Shrewsbury suggested that feminist pedagogy offers a new way of engaging with one another in the classroom, characterized as "persons connected in a net of relationships with people who care about each other's learning as well as their own" (p. 166), and where everyone works together to move beyond social injustices and toward social change. As a theory that incorporates concepts like *empowerment*, *community*, and *leadership* (Shrewsbury, 1997),

feminist pedagogy complements the critical theories outlined in my theoretical context, most notably Nel Noddings's ethic of care and Nussbaum's (1997) view on cultivating humanity.

Noddings: An Ethic of Care. Gilligan (2002), and Gilligan and Richards (2009), defined a feminist ethic of care as one that resists injustices within a patriarchal society and from a democratic standpoint—a human ethic whereby every voice is respectfully heard and equally valued. This perspective embraces Freire's notion of education as the practice of freedom described earlier, at the centre of which is a dialogic relationship between students and teacher. Noddings (1984/2013) postulated that caring and acting ethically can be developed by choice through receptivity and commitment: two qualities I strove to emulate in my teaching practice, and purposely remained aware of throughout my teacher inquiry. For this to transpire, I believed open-mindedness was key in allowing dialogue about sensitive topics, enabling the explicit exploration of values with my students. Noddings (1984/2013) proposed that for there to be open dialogue in a school setting, "it must be legitimate to discuss whatever is of intellectual interest to the students who are invited into dialogue . . . killing, loving, fear, hope, and hate must all be open to discussion" (p. 183).

Noddings (1995) advocated for the theory of an ethic of care by affirming that more than academic achievement, education should nurture children and cultivate their nurturing of others. In this study, engaging with multicultural literature implied participants coming across issues of social justice, and therefore dealing with themes such as war, poverty, racism, loss, bullying, and so on. Despite the difficult topics that arose, I planned our multicultural study units with caring in mind, knowing that this approach might contribute to my students' growth as carers (Noddings, 1995). In light of Noddings' theory, I was confident that tough topics surfacing in our books could be broached with respect and care. Because I had established a

strong rapport with my students, the aspect of relatedness was elemental during the study.

Noddings reminded us that as educators, our teaching and learning environments can be

expressly designed "to support caring and caring individuals, and this is what an ethic of caring

suggests should be done" (p. 182). Gay's (2002) work on culturally responsive teaching echoes

this principle, and advocates caring as pedagogically necessary and morally imperative.

Noddings (2015) stated that to develop critical thinkers in students, educators need to

"cultivate an attitude of respect for opposing views" (p. 106). In a classroom setting, it is worth

noting that Noddings stressed the value of an ethic of care when teachers mediate sensitive

discussions. In their book *Teaching Controversial Issues: The Case for Critical Thinking and

Moral Commitment in the Classroom*, Noddings and Brooks (2017) reminded educators that

shaping young people's minds involves "[producing] people who can think for themselves" (p.

8). For instance, when addressing controversial topics, Noddings and Brooks (2017) suggested

that teachers should present all sides, express their own opinion if asked without presenting it as

the official position to be accepted by all. In an equitable environment, students "should feel free

to draw their own conclusions" (p. 33). Noddings (2018) described the longing to be cared for

(need for love, respect, recognition) as paramount for the ethic of care. Embedding an ethic of

care in my classroom throughout this inquiry was imperative as issues of social justice were

inevitably encountered and discussed.

Nussbaum: The Narrative Imagination. Cultivating humanity, according to Nussbaum

(1997), is an urgent matter. Nussbaum argued that as citizens of the world, it is essential to

develop three abilities if we are to cultivate humanity. The first is the capacity for critical

examination of oneself and one's traditions, which refers to Socrates' belief that "the

unexamined life is not worth living" (p. 15). The second ability we require is to see ourselves as

not simply citizens of a local community, but more importantly, "as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern" (p. 10). This aspect encompasses the notions of global citizenship, diversity, as well as social justice and human rights. Lastly, Nussbaum envisioned the third ability as closely related to the first two and based on the posit that "citizens cannot think well on the basis of factual knowledge alone" (p. 10). Nussbaum advanced the concept of narrative imagination:

> the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. (pp. 10-11)

Nussbaum contended that narrative imagination prepares us to confront moral dilemmas, which are brought to life in literature. Because my teacher inquiry was enacted in a language arts class and was directly aimed at exploring the use of multicultural literature, I focused mostly on this last component of her aforementioned abilities for cultivating humanity. As such, an axiological perspective was added to the philosophical composition of my framework.

Nussbaum (1997) considered storytelling as a powerful vehicle to promote narrative imagination. She drew on the habits of wonder and empathy to promote the cultivation of citizenship for humanity. As I invited my students to interact with the narratives in our multicultural books, they were poised to experience a literary imagining that draws "intense concern with the fate of characters", learn respect for a fictional world, and "[see] its importance in defining a creature as fully human" (p. 90). Within this process, Nussbaum claimed that when children participate in narrative imagination, they develop compassion, defined as "the recognition that another person, . . . has suffered some significant pain or misfortune in a way for which that person is not, or not fully, to blame" (pp. 90-91). According to Nussbaum, this in

turn, requires the complex moral ability to imagine what it is like to be in that person's shoes; in other words, to empathize. Having compassion requires a sense of our own vulnerability to misfortune—be willing to imagine that we could be that suffering person—thereby heightening an awareness of our common vulnerability. Nussbaum asserted that novels foster the development of imaginative thinking and feeling about others. Like Nussbaum, I recognized that a salient role of literature is to cultivate such an imagination and was paramount to citizenship development in my adolescent learners.

Both a consideration of an ethic of care and narrative imagination illustrate the significance of feminist pedagogies in my theoretical framework, associated with the windows metaphor. Noddings's (1984/2013) posture of caring supported my purpose as a teacher researcher and explained how Nussbaum's (1997) philosophy corresponded with learners' imaginative thinking. When education is linked to critically thinking about one's social environment, intense passion, and investment on the part of teachers are noteworthy factors toward defining a more democratic education (Nussbaum, 2006). As previously mentioned, this was also a distinguishing feature in Noddings's (1984/2013) ethic of care.

Sliding Glass Doors: Socioconstructivist Lenses Reveal Reciprocity and Agency

Sims Bishop (1990) imagined the windows of her metaphor as sometimes transforming into sliding glass doors, a realm within which "readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author" (p. ix). To break the potential barrier mentioned previously, she visualized sliding glass doors as "a way to suggest that a book can offer what Rosenblatt (1978) called a lived experience for a reader" (Sims Bishop, 2012, p. 9). The final layer of my theoretical framework sits within this sliding glass doors metaphor to imply motivation, engagement, and action from the part of readers. The

third and final sub-question of my inquiry asks whether, and how, multicultural literature

challenges learners to engage in social action; therefore, I found a parallel with this metaphor. I

draw upon Bruner's (1986) work on narrative as a mode of thought and storytelling and

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which considers social interactions and relationships as

important elements in learning and development. Both theories highlight notions of reciprocity

and agency.

Bruner: Narrative as a Mode of Thought. Considered by many as one of the greatest

contributors to education, Bruner (1986) conceptualized two distinct approaches to cognitive

functioning, one of which he identified as the narrative mode and considered as an art form in its

expression.

Bruner (1986) proposed that narrative is a distinctive and legitimate mode of thought that

explores our concept of humanlike agents and analyzes the way intentions and interactions are

enacted. According to Bruner, this mode of thought encompasses "the vicissitudes of human

intention" (p. 16), is manifested through storytelling, and is particularly concerned with

meaning-making (Bruner, 1986). Within what he called a *mathetic* function of language, the

imaginative role is "the means whereby we create possible worlds" (p. 125). Bruner (1991)

defined narrative as a conventional form, narrative constructions that are transmitted culturally,

and can only achieve "verisimilitude" (p. 4). Bruner (1991) reiterated that the main concern is

"not how narrative as text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in

the construction of reality" (p. 6).

In this sense, Bruner's work on developing a narrative construction of reality coheres

with the tenets of critical literacy, to which I alluded in the introductory sections of this chapter.

In fact, I considered it relevant to my research, because it entails learners reading fiction and

non-fiction stories, as well as becoming deeply involved in the characters and the delicate issues affecting their worlds. This approach coincides with Nussbaum's (1997) narrative imagination. Interestingly, Bruner (1986) insisted that a story's elements such as character, setting, and action were inseparable and "deeply rooted in the nature of narrative thought" (p. 39). Reciprocally, the telling of personal stories because of that interaction offered optimal occasions for students to engage in dialogue and debate. In a social justice classroom, choosing a narrative mode as defined by Bruner, engaging in meaning-making, and participating in imaginative thinking fosters an environment that opens the possibilities for collaboration. According to Bruner (1990), when young people partake in the dynamics of narrative, the outcome surpasses the cognitive level and benefits their social life as well; in fact, he considered "the human propensity to share stories of human diversity" to be "one of the most powerful forms of social stability" (p. 68).

Vygotsky: Learning as a Social Process. The intent behind opening a sliding glass door is to cross its threshold and get to the other side. In much the same way, I imagined this crossing over to represent the potential of moving, individually, and collectively, toward social change. Classroom interactions play an important part in collectively shaping students' lives. To this point, Cummins (1996) asserted that thinking critically about the systems of power that influence such interactions can have lasting effects on the role of schools and society. As learners moved from awareness, to reflection, to imagination, to action, acknowledging the share of social context and practices in which they were taking part was an inescapable feature of my theoretical scheme.

Vygotsky (1978) believed that social interactions and relationships play an essential role in learning and development, mobilizing learners as active agents in these processes. Much like Freire (1970/2016), he viewed learning as a reciprocal enterprise between teacher and students.

The overarching theme in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is the emphasis of social interaction in the development of cognitive processes. In line with Vygotsky's theoretical premise, using multicultural literature to encourage learners to try on new perspectives demands concerted efforts in meaning-making, and connecting thought and lived experience that went beyond knowledge acquisition. The collaborative nature of such learning supports the use of Vygotsky's sociocultural approach in the context of my classroom community, particularly as we discussed contentious issues relating to social justice.

Important to this work as well is Vygotsky's (1978) notion of a *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), or the idea that "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers" (p. 90). As the theory suggests, strategies can be used, by the teacher or other learners, to support students and facilitate learning. In the context of a social justice classroom, the creation of a supportive social network was capital. Cummins (1996) affirmed that when respect and trust are established, empowerment can be created in classroom interactions as a tool for students to reflect on their experiences and identities. Accordingly, my pedagogical choices in preparation for social interactions and activities were not made haphazardly. Like Dewey (1897), I believe in the importance of considering the social motives of pedagogical choices:

> Language is almost always treated in the books of pedagogy simply as the expression of thought. It is true that language is a logical instrument, but it is fundamentally and primarily a social instrument. Language is the device for communication; it is the tool through which one individual comes to share the ideas and feelings of others. When

treated simply as a way of getting individual information, or as a means of showing off

what one has learned, it loses its social motive and end. (art. 3, para. 15)

Considering the nature of my teacher inquiry, and the students' journey with multicultural book

studies, the germaneness of language as a social instrument cannot be overstated.

Summary and Looking Ahead

In this chapter, I expanded on the theoretical composition that guided my teacher

research. As I placed my research project within the context of a multilayered theoretical

framework, I imagined a conversation among theorists from all perspectives, harmonizing in a

theoretical complicity that informed the awakening of critical and democratic consciousness in

young learners. To enhance this framework, I borrowed Sims Bishop's (1990) metaphors of

mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Using this visual and metaphorical representation, I

shared how I, a teacher researcher, discerned my theoretical underpinnings, consciously

exploring them from the beginning to the end of my research process. As previously stated,

melding the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of my project with my everyday

pedagogical practice was pivotal to my inquiry; this metaphoric theoretical framework provides

the necessary scope for me to engage in praxis bound with purpose.

After establishing my theoretical foundation and delineating how each lens contributed to

the relevance of my study, I proceed with the disclosure of my methodological framework. The

following chapter uncovers details regarding my choice of methodologies and their contexts,

methods used in gathering data, tools and approaches used for teaching and learning, data

analysis processes, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four

Thinker, Learner, and Practitioner: Using an Insider's Lens to Rethink, Research, and Reflect

So what is a teacher-researcher?
A teacher-researcher is an observer
a questioner
a learner
and a more complete teacher.
~ Bissex (1987)

Prolegomenon

When I debuted my career as a teacher twelve years ago, I was already equipped with a wealth of lived experience, both professional and personal. Nonetheless, I entered the world of education with an open mind, and eager to learn what I needed to become a good teacher. As years went by and I grew into my own as a pedagogue, it seemed I was caught in the pitter patter of educational busyness that resonated more like the slow, incessant hum of knowledge consumption. Admittedly, I became immersed in the culture of schooling, as it were, without imagining or immediately recognizing the presence of a dissonant discourse. I needed to decide if I was going to perpetuate this culture by getting caught up in the gears of habitual, long-standing teaching practices, or emerge as a critical educator, ready to approach my new profession with a sense of inquiry, wonder, and innovation. I wanted the latter. More than a decade in the classroom bestowed a path that led me to want to know even more and become a teacher researcher.

According to De Lissovoy (2013), "if democracy is to be authentic it must include an interrogation of the fundamental norms governing collective life, as well as the possible meanings for the democratic community within which that life takes place" (p. 219). Where I was once overly compliant to question the way things were being done, I now consider a means

to interrogate traditional pedagogical frameworks in favour of a purposeful, democratic enterprise. The notion of good teacher changed drastically for me as I continuously reflected on my pedagogy. I sought to sync my words and actions with the rhythm of my students', and they responded with genuine personal investment in their academic journey.

Amidst prescribed curricular guidelines and language arts programs, I developed my teaching philosophy and practice. Along the way, I discovered that, just as the teaching profession was not packaged in a convenient box of instructions (nor did I wish it to be), neither was becoming a good teacher a finite destination. Instead, I came to know a humbling pilgrimage, strewn with authentic listening, sharing, collaborating, innovating, and most of all, learning. This way of knowing is where my story as a teacher researcher begins. In the following paragraphs, I trace back the origin of my inquiry by describing my positionality as a teacher, the questions that guided my study, and the methodologies I contemplated to carry it out.

Teaching: A Fundamentally Political Activity

To acknowledge that teaching is fundamentally a political activity in which every teacher plays a part (Ginsburg, 1988; Willis, 1978) is to recognize the absence of neutrality in educational settings. Villegas and Lucas (2002) stated that schools and classrooms have built-in curricular, pedagogical, and evaluative structures that advance the dominant culture. Although schools and classrooms are sites where power struggles exist and contribute to sustaining dominance and oppression in society, I was convinced that the work of teachers could be impactful toward social change (Cochran-Smith, 2004). As Villegas and Lucas suggested, it is essential for teachers to gain sociocultural consciousness by recognizing their own sociocultural identities, acknowledging the relationship between schools and society, and understanding that

"schools help to reproduce existing social inequalities while giving the illusion that such inequalities are natural and fair" (p. 23).

Like Kreisberg (1992), I believe that "[w]ho we are as teachers and students in school is mediated by our culture of domination and by our social identities and lived experiences that have been forged within them" (p. 198). My profound conviction to teach against the current resonated with Kreisberg's plight that our experiences need to "be problematized and critically encountered" (p. 198). By acknowledging that teaching is "already politicized and that its political side needs finally to be taken into account more explicitly" (Bruner, 1996, p. 29), I sought to collaborate with students to challenge the status quo. As a teacher researcher, I was intimately connected to the context of my classroom, thus, uniquely positioned to complicate, and problematize the dynamics within it (Fleischer, 1995).

The Problem: Describing the Path and Purpose

The ways in which we see the world are largely influenced by our location in it. As a language arts teacher in a mostly White, suburban community, I strive to educate about diversity and social justice issues. I often wonder about the extent to which students view themselves as active members of a larger, global community, especially in a context where there is little ethnic and racial diversity. I experienced a yearning to know more about the world; few windows into the world were ever presented to me during my youth. Years later, and particularly when I began my PhD journey, the work of understanding my attitudes, values, and biases helped gain deeper insight into my qualitative inquiry (Patnaik, 2013), and I felt compelled to change things. As a language arts teacher, I wanted to impart my yearning to know more about the world and ignite a similar critical curiosity in my students. Compatibly, my appreciation for literature and my belief in the power of a story came into the mix.

As I listened to my voice and the voices of my students, I could hear the question that awakened my inquiry: *How might using multicultural literature in the classroom expand adolescent learners' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens?* I posed three related questions to excavate further: a) *Does multicultural literature encourage learners to examine assumptions about cultural differences? If so, in what ways?* b) *How can multicultural literature support developing a critical lens on global issues?* and, c) *Does multicultural literature challenge learners to engage in social action? If so, how?* The rationale for my research project dwelled in a critical stance vis-à-vis multicultural literature, one that provoked learners to examine their current worldviews, further develop critical consciousness, and inspire agency.

Framing the Inquiry: Possibilities Considered, Authenticity Revisited

During my doctoral journey, I considered several methodologies that might correspond with research as praxis, or critical reflection on practice, which Lather (1986) deemed to be an emancipatory goal of social science research. I adhere to Lather's epistemological assumption because it encourages self-reflection and challenges the status quo in favour of a more equitable world. Because my interest originated with my observations as a teacher, I believed the ebb and flow of classroom life to be an ideal site for research. As such, I sought to engage in this inquiry with my students during the course of a school year. Many concerned voices surrounding the issue of ethics, however, prompted me to consider alternatives to my original plan.

First, I explored autoethnography as a possible approach because of its autobiographical nature. Ellis and Bochner (2000) described an ethnographic process that connects the social and cultural aspects of personal experience, and features a first-person account of dialogue, action, emotion, and self-consciousness. Then, I contemplated narrative inquiry as it embodies the

potential of storytelling in educational experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Stories have the power to clarify student and teacher identities and expound on social justice issues (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). The nature of this narrative approach aligned with concepts such as contexts, difference, and perspective-taking within my study. Finally, I thoroughly examined portraiture. Portraiture is described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) as a Geertzian approach shaped through dialogue between researcher and participant that seeks to interpret meaning through detailed description, and thoughtful interpretation. The creative aspect of research portraits corresponded with my aim to grasp the complexity of human experience inside a classroom. Still, each of these methodological choices excluded what I considered crucial data: *my* journey with *my* students. In my view, a substitution would be disingenuous.

While every option I contemplated featured a sound methodological framework, none satisfied the motivation behind my problem statement. Despite the perceived ethical risks presented by the power relations inherent to my position as a teacher and researcher, I kept circling back to what Hollingsworth (1989) identified as the best form of educational research: teaching. In fact, I agree with Martin's (1987) assertion that classroom teachers are favourably positioned to "ask questions about learning, to accumulate data, and to take up teaching directions based on the learning patterns that emerge" (p. 20). And, because my research did not intend to prove something, rather was "a process of discovering and learning" (Ray, 1987, p. 220), it became clear to me that the ordinary goings-on of my own classroom life was the most authentic mise en scène. Therefore, I selected a qualitative teacher research methodology (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2009), set as a case study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 1988), to carry out my quest.

In this chapter, I expand on the methodological issues considered in crafting the design for my research project. First, I provide background information about my chosen qualitative methodological approach, supported with related literature. I elaborate on the reasons for the design and provide details about teacher research and case study methodologies. Second, I set the context and add details about participants, recruitment, and timeline. Next, I present the data-gathering component of this study, in which I review the methods used to implement my inquiry and provide information about the multicultural texts used in the inquiry. Then, I describe the data analysis process that ensued. Last, I address salient points regarding the quality and trustworthiness of my research, such as ethical concerns, and methodological rigour. I conclude the chapter with a summary on the methodological decisions that shepherded my research.

Methodology

My research design utilizes teacher research embedded in a single case study. I choose a qualitative research design that supports an insider's lens to learn from and about students' lived experiences as they explore multicultural literature.

Teacher Research

Teacher researchers ask questions and pay attention; an attitude that echoes Berthoff's (1981) understanding of research to mean looking—and looking again. Researchers' conscious methodological choices affirm ethical decisions that impact the concept of knowledge within their research practices (Kuntz, 2010). To choose a research method is to consciously select a lens through which one sees and knows, includes, or excludes—therefore raising the political question of who is empowered to do so (Bissex, 1987). In a podcast, Cochran-Smith reiterated that teacher research challenges the assumption that all the knowledge required for teachers to teach is generated by university researchers who are outside of classrooms and schools (Krukta

& Milton, 2017). Quoting her and colleague Susan Lytle's long-established argument, she suggested that because they know teaching from a different angle and are closely related to the work on a daily basis, teachers should also contribute to the knowledge base in education (Krutka & Milton, 2017). Hubbard and Power (2003) echoed this assertion by characterizing teacher research as a redefining of roles, and "looking at research possibilities from new angles" (p. xvii). As such, teacher research is defined as the systematic and intentional study of a teacher's own practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2009; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). In addition to being systematic and intentional, Mohr et al. (2004) also characterized teacher research as "public, voluntary, ethical, and contextual" (p. 23). Each characteristic, as defined by Mohr et al., is explained in Table 2 (see p. 110).

An Insider's Perspective. Rather than test hypotheses, qualitative research methods aim to uncover significant questions, relationships, and processes (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Often, questions come from real-world dilemmas, but for teacher researchers like me, they emerge from actual classroom queries, which are valuable for our work (Hubbard & Power, 2003), and matter to us (Mohr et al., 2004). By using these questions as a starting point, I acquired what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) call an "inquiry stance" toward my teaching practice, one that was "critical and transformative" (p. 46) and linked to social justice. According to Cochran-Smith, this is a broader stance exhibited by good teachers who are always thinking, critiquing, and examining underlying assumptions (Krutka & Milton, 2017).

Schön (1983) believed professional practice to be an intellectual endeavour in which teachers are best suited to identify and engage in problem posing. In my twelve years as a teacher, I noticed an emphasis placed on problem-solving, assuming problems as givens. Like

Table 2

Characteristics of Teacher Research, Adapted From Mohr et al. (2004)

Characteristic of Teacher Research	Definition
Intentional	- involves intentional gathering of data - TR identify topics to investigate and choose research questions that matter to them - is responsive to TR's learning needs - TR may set out in one direction, but change course with new understandings of teaching and learning - TR may revise plans (data collection, methods, data analysis) with improved understanding
Systematic	- TR use methods and strategies to document, collect, analyze data - TR articulate theories, findings, and implications - TR collect a variety of data to triangulate findings - TR engage in constant comparison of data collected and check interpretations with colleagues, students, parents - TR respond to challenges to their thinking - TR provide accurate pictures of teaching and learning contexts, which leads to deeper understanding
Public	- TR examine assumptions, withhold judgments, look at issues from alternative perspectives - shift from private to public perspective to encourage challenges to understandings - TR often enlist co-researchers, include them in whole research process - TR engage in professional discourse - shared research processes and findings; disseminated beyond schools - aims to understand classroom and teaching contexts better - contributes to the body of knowledge
Voluntary	- presents potential of risk and vulnerability: examination of beliefs, assumptions, biases, understandings of teaching practice - TR choose to conduct research - voluntary and inclusive: done by preservice and experienced teachers - teachers not evaluated on the choice or merits of teacher research projects
Ethical	- students are TR's primary responsibility and primary beneficiaries - TR collect data that is representative, seeking student affirmation of interpretations, checking for discrepancies - TR search for additional data to confirm or disconfirm perspectives - TR obtain students' permission to use quotes or work samples - TR protect information, privacy - TR report successes and failures to better understand teaching and learning
Contextual	- seeks to define, articulate, elucidate the context of teaching and learning as a whole - shapes and is shaped by its context - research questions reflect teachers' current understanding of topics, students, teaching context - it is context-dependent, context-relevant, context-responsive

Note. Teacher Researchers = TR

Schön, I believe we often ignore "problem-setting", an important process whereby problems must be formulated out of "situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain" (p. 40). For instance, when teacher researchers adopt an inquiry stance (problem-pose) on diversity, it allows for the problematization of concepts like culture, language, and power (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). In this sense, because the inquiry emerged directly from my teaching practice, I undertook to negotiate the borders of research and educational practice, and aspired to "rethink practice, question [my] own assumptions, and challenge the status quo" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011, p. 18).

The dynamics in my classroom left me with "a wondering to pursue" (Bissex, 1987, p. 3). As a teacher researcher, I considered myself appropriately located and equipped with what Campano (2009) called a "privileged emic vantage point" (p. 329), or insider's perspective, to investigate it. By seeking to disrupt the commonplace and reimagine my teaching as a critical practice (Leland & Harste, 2000), my students and I were poised to examine what constitutes a worldview, and most importantly, "what is left out and silenced" (Giroux, 1984, p. 35).

A New Scholarship. The idea of teacher research is not a novel one. Dewey (1926) compared classroom teachers' contribution to "an unworked mine" (p. 46), believing in the practical application of scientific recommendations through which teachers working as researchers test educational theory (Hodgkinson, 1957). In fact, Dewey (1929) argued that viable educational research could only be achieved through investigation of pedagogical issues from teachers themselves. From Dewey's (1904) concept of teachers as students of learning came Schön's (1987) notion of teachers as reflective practitioners. Teachers' ways of knowing are referred to by Schön (1995) as the *new scholarship*. Similarly, Dyck (2008) talked about teacher researchers as a "new breed of educators" who are willing to be vulnerable, openly question their

practices, and use what they learn from their classroom research to create better teaching and learning environments.

Stenhouse et al. (1985) claimed that research was the path to teacher emancipation and that it is researchers who should justify their work to practitioners instead of the other way around. Campano (2009) also challenged assumptions that theory and practice are two separate entities, supporting Dewey's (1933) understanding that teachers are reflective professionals, able to develop theory from practice. As both a teacher and a PhD candidate, I consider myself well-positioned to conduct this study because I believe, like Fleischer (1995), that educational research should account for the complex and multifaceted nature of teaching and learning. According to Bissex (1987), there is division within our educational system between those considered to possess knowledge about teaching and those who teach but are not trusted to know what and how to teach. For the reasons stated below, I did not want to choose between knowing and doing.

A characteristic of teacher research is that it does not follow the protocol of traditional research paradigms (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Many researchers, namely Kincheloe (1991), and Carr and Kemmis (1986), believed teacher research to be a liberatory act toward mutual democracy (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Stenhouse (1975, 1983) was a staunch critic of curriculum development that circumvents his model of teacher as a reflective practitioner who seeks to understand the world, and their own practice, through action and reflection. In their book, Carr and Kemmis argued that a critical approach is essential to inquiry, and stressed that more than human understanding, emancipation should be at the centre of interpretive research. By pushing back on traditional forms of research, both Stenhouse, and Carr and Kemmis were

influential critics of conventional educational research philosophies and have championed practitioner research through their widespread advocacy of it (Hammersley, 1993).

An Intimate Participation in the Research Process. In the words of Charles Kettering, research is simply "nothing but a state of mind . . . a friendly, welcoming attitude toward change . . . going out to look for change instead of waiting for it to come" (Dyck, 2008). Pioneered by Stenhouse (1975), who inspired teachers to participate intimately in their own research to improve classroom practices, the term teacher research arose from Lewin's (1948) concept of action research, initiated in the mid-twentieth century (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Although both are considered practitioner inquiry, key differences exist between teacher research and action research. Action research emphasizes collaborative efforts between school-based teachers and other educators, university-based colleagues, parents, and members of the community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Central to action research are activities that use a cyclical process of investigation involving reflection and action, with the goal of creating change usually focused on social justice (Elliott, 1991; Check & Schutt, 2012), and aiming to better understand or improve on practices (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) contended that in action research, practitioners seek to systematically collect information to expose unjust practices and recommend actions for change that might include reshaping school practices or altering curriculum (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

In comparison, Check and Schutt (2012) explained that teacher research can employ many methodologies and involves class- or school-based inquiries that do not require a specific improvement as the outcome. Lytle (2008) defined teacher research as a passionate, political, and even radical act in which teacher researchers' primary goal is to teach better. This definition represents a truth that has resonated with me from the moment I stepped foot in my very first

classroom. Through the years, I instinctively taught with the mindset of a lifelong learner and the goal of teaching better, even though I could not name the theoretical underpinnings that were driving my work. When I entered the PhD program at Nipissing University, I aspired to grow into a scholar, and I became acquainted with philosophical tenets and academia-worthy topics. In my heart, I was, and will always be, a teacher, first and foremost. Teacher research seemed a logical path for someone who was critically curious and profoundly passionate about understanding her profession while practicing it.

Teacher research was a good fit for me as a language arts teacher: it implies an intimate relationship between theory and practice, providing a sound methodology in which literacy can be redefined, and literacy practices, reinvented (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2009; Simon et al., 2012). Because of the unique, direct educational context in which teacher researchers work daily, their theorizing processes inform new practices and open possibilities for their students (Simon & Campano, 2013). Additionally, teacher research is a form of practitioner inquiry that implicates a duality of roles (practitioner/researcher) that facilitates participation in the inquiry process (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This aspect is discussed further in the researcher identity section of the chapter.

Why Teacher Research? My research design espouses the notion of praxis (Freire, 1970/2016), whereby theory interweaves with practice (Kincheloe, 1991). Informed by Dewey's (1908) principle of democratic work, Kincheloe (1991) believed that social research is not solely reserved for the academic elite and called on a disenfranchised teaching profession to offer alternative ways of seeing the world. Traditionally, university researchers were viewed as "the knowers [who] studied the doers" (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 257), recommending their conclusions on educational policies, and contributing to a discrepancy between theory and

practice. In fact, Hammersley (1993) claimed that teacher research advocates the principle that both the roles of teacher and educational researcher can coexist. Thus, a teacher research methodology challenges the notion of educational research as an academic enterprise and aligns with my theoretical framework.

   Dissemination. Though teacher research draws from various methodological approaches, it is unique and possesses an integrity of its own because it moves educational theory away from academic hierarchy, and shows how theorizing can be a liberating, collegial effort (Campano, 2009). In contrast to outside researchers, teachers conducting inquiries in their classrooms develop ownership by making critical decisions about every aspect of their research (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) noted that much of the work of practitioner research remains local and consequential to immediate participants, while dissemination for academic audiences is rare. Simon et al. (2012) believed there is a disconnect between the valuable contributions of literacy teacher researchers and the theories generated by universities. According to the authors, the ideals of scholarship are compromised because practitioners' insights are not engaged by university-based researchers, and their work is underrepresented (Simon et al., 2012). Thus, the difference in the purpose of research performed by academics and that which is conducted by classroom teachers is noteworthy. The former values academic advancement and impact, while the latter focuses on providing insight to improve classroom practices (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020). This is not to say, however, that teacher research cannot impact the field of education in a broader sense.

   Despite these differences, Shagoury and Power (2012) affirmed that schoolteachers and university professors share the "need to show that [their] work is relevant and to bring it to a larger audience" (p. 237). For teacher researchers, dissemination of research can occur through

conference presentations, blogging, op-ed articles, school- or board-wide training. Because they incorporate classroom anecdotes, teacher research studies are well received by teachers who can relate the information to their own experiences (Shagoury & Power, 2012).

Quality and Rigour. Grounded in Stenhouse et al.'s (1985) position on "democratizing research" (p. 16) and fixed in practitioner inquiry's goal of examining educational systems that maintain inequalities (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kincheloe, 1991; Noffke, 1991), the impetus of teacher research involves legitimizing the teaching profession, elevating the social responsibility of educators, and solving educational problems (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). At the onset of this research, I considered myself to be part of a movement that might bring change of a broader scale. Although I conducted a case study in my small classroom environment, I deemed myself accountable to my students as well as to the teaching profession at large. According to Cochran-Smith et al. (2017), rendering teacher education more accountable would advance teacher quality and individual prosperity. Furthermore, MacLean and Mohr (1999) believed qualitative teacher research to be a democratizing act, and Cochran-Smith (1991, 2009) proposed changes in teacher education that promote educators' agency and decision-making toward transformative policies and practices.

Concerns about rigour and theory building, according to Patterson and Shannon (1993), come from outsiders who are not directly involved with teachers' and students' work. I was encouraged to learn that, despite their many challenges, literacy teacher researchers continue to theorize in the thick of things and they are actively engaged in current and relevant inquiries (Simon et al., 2012). The organic, often unpredictable, and uncertain world of teacher research destabilizes the scholarly world. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2011), teacher research, with its basic tenet of "inquiry as stance" (p. 20), challenges and disrupts the idea of educational

research as dichotomous: practitioners and researchers. Because the legitimacy of teacher

research in academia is often criticized, it must remain a rigorous and disciplined enterprise

(Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). I return to this discussion in the ethics portion of this chapter.

Pioneers of the Trade. Goswami and Stillman (1987), Bissex and Bullock (1987), Mohr

and MacLean (1987), and Strickland et al. (1989) all claimed that teacher research contributes to

the teaching community in significant ways, like collaborating with students to address

meaningful questions, and becoming critical readers and users of current research. Also,

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) underlined the value of teacher research for the academic

community, namely critique and revision of theories about teaching and learning. These early

pioneers of teacher research have paved the way for its relevance today.

Following in their footsteps, several teacher researchers have engaged in the study of

their own practice, and numerous were subsequently published. For example, Pincus (2001,

2010) asserted that adopting an inquiry stance on her practice fostered ongoing questioning, and

often derived from dissonance. Ballenger (1999) observed her young students and learned that

Indigenous literacy theories are at the root of different forms of literate engagement. For his part,

Campano's (2007) study revealed how his students came to identify and resist issues of

inequality through a performance art group. Cone's (2002, 2005) teacher research questioned the

status quo by challenging established systems to promote more equitable opportunities for

student learning. Harper (2005), a teacher in a suburban, almost all White community, examined

her affluent students' reactions to reading literature that included issues of race and diversity.

Van Boven (2015) used practitioner research to conduct a case study of his planning and

implementation of instructional support services for an individual learner within a push-in

middle school gifted and talented program model. As evidenced by these studies, teacher

research is alive and well.

Case Study

Like Erickson (1986), I sought to explore the complex human experiences via the

qualitative and interpretive tradition. I framed my teacher research inquiry in a single case study,

drawing upon Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) definition of case study as "an intensive, holistic

description and analysis of a single, bounded unit" (pp. 232-233). In a case study, the researcher

identifies a social unit (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), which in this teacher inquiry consisted of

eighth-grade students' experiences within one language arts class. Dyson and Genishi further

explained that this social unit becomes a case of some particular phenomenon, defined in my

research as teaching and learning with multicultural literature.

Bissex (1987) claimed that, unlike research methods that seek to establish causation and

control, case studies embrace a more democratic and participatory approach to research, one that

"lets us view learners as in control of their own learning—as self-directed or interactive" (p. 12).

Bissex' view corresponds well with my intentions as a teacher researcher; I believe that prior to

this inquiry, I was already "observing and thinking like a case-study researcher" (p. 7), although

I was not fully conscious of it yet.

Stake (1995) cautioned that a case is not studied with the purpose of understanding other

cases. Traditional research sought to generalize based on similarities found, whereas case studies

"enable us to see individuals as individuals" (Bissex, 1987, p. 10). For instance, Baghban's

(1984) case study depicted the story of her daughter's learning journey to read and write, from

birth to age three. Another example is Bissex's (1980) study, which chronicled her son's reading

and writing development through personal literacy milestones. Generalizability in case study

designs is irrelevant because researchers do not intend to standardize outcomes, rather, they research a particular case of something (Schwandt & Gates, 2018). As Dyson and Genishi (2005) stipulated, a case is particularistic in the sense that the phenomenon studied within it may look and sound different in another case. Unlike experimental studies, qualitative case studies investigate the relationship between the case and the phenomenon, the making of meaning, and the importance of context (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). In addition, Yin (2009) suggested that investigating through case studies is appropriate when research questions begin with *how* or *why*, which corresponded with my inquiry because of its aim to explore, describe, and explain (Yin, 1994) from my perspective as a teacher.

I shared examples of case studies related to my research topic in Chapter 2. For example, Burke and Collier (2017) conducted a case study of schools and teachers, which investigated classroom teachers' understanding of social justice. For her part, Harper (2005) carried out a case study of her own language arts classroom, which explored issues of race and diversity through social justice books. Lastly, Wilhelm (2016) conducted a case study, in collaboration with his adolescent students as research partners, to examine how they read and responded to their reading.

Classroom as Research Site

This study took place in a French public high school that enrolls students in grades ranging from 7 to 12. It is located in a small town in Eastern Ontario. The suburban community in which the school is located has a population of approximately 12,000 people. Most of the population is Francophone, Caucasian, and of North American or European descent.

A total of four groups of eighth-grade students were enrolled for the 2019-2020 school year. Having been a regular, middle-grade teacher at this school for several years, I was usually

assigned to teach French (first language) and English as a second language (ESL) classes, as well as Social Studies. During the 2019-2020 academic year, as the only *Français* specialist, I was assigned to teach French to all four groups of eighth-grade students daily, and ESL to only one of these groups (based on a random assignment from school administration). My ESL class served as the context in which this study occurred. We met for three, 60-minute periods per week.

Participants: Students as Partners

I selected a nonprobability sampling method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) for my qualitative research design. According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling conforms with inquiries aiming to discover, gain insight, and understand from a specific, or information-rich, case. Furthermore, I used what Patton calls a typical sampling strategy because it reflected an average situation, "not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual" (p. 284). My ESL class, which included a total of twenty students at the time of recruitment, provided a convenience sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), from which twelve participants assented to engage in the study, and whose parents/guardians consented as well. Participants consisted of six male and six female French-speaking students, ranging between 13 and 14 years old, all of whom were enrolled in the ESL class. Most participants were Caucasian.

Recruitment and Timeline. Due to the nature of this study, special considerations were factored into my research design as I was both the researcher, and my students' (participants) teacher. The study was designed in two phases. Phase 1 began in January 2020 but did not require consent as it was considered normal classroom instruction. Invitations to participate in the second phase were scheduled to be sent at the beginning of June, after all final marks were submitted by seventh- and eighth-grade teachers. For this second phase, students were invited to engage in a year-end, reflective conversation with me, and share access to their student

portfolios. However, because face-to-face reflective conversations (interviews) were not feasible due the pandemic, I submitted a request to Nipissing University Research Ethics Board (NUREB) and my school board's ethics committee, with proposed modifications to the original requirements for student participation which adapted to the imposed physical restrictions. Participants were instead invited to answer a written reflective questionnaire that consisted of ten open-ended questions. Sharing access to their portfolios was also included in the revisions, with suggestions on how to do this remotely.

These changes followed an email communication from my school administration on April 27th, 2020, indicating that the Ontario Ministry of Education had decreed that to ensure equity for all students due to remote learning, all student assessments were no longer mandatory, and the minimum mark for each student should be the one earned as of March 13th, 2020. This announcement allowed for a more flexible timeline for student participation, while maintaining the integrity of the project. The modifications honoured the choice for students to include their voices while also ensuring flexibility and accommodations, allowing all those interested to be able to participate despite the removal of the physical classroom space due to the pandemic.

Methods Used for Data Gathering

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) interpreted the notion of inquiry as stance as "perspectival and conceptual—a worldview, a critical habit of mind, a dynamic and fluid way of knowing and being in the world of educational practice" (p. 120). Because teacher research is not an add-on activity, it manifests as part of the everyday classroom flow where every student receives equal attention and remains an active member of the classroom community, regardless of when consent forms are collected. In this study, the focus was on my pedagogical practices. Students participated in everyday teaching and learning activities in the classroom, as already

occurring. Classroom activities were the same for everyone and were not specially planned for this project.

Data was gleaned from three research methods: my teacher journal, students' reflective questionnaires, and student portfolios. Two distinct phases of data collection took place. In an initial phase of gathering data, I used a teacher journal, which is an account of classroom life and a practice regularly used by many teachers to reflect on pedagogical practices taking place in their classrooms. In the second phase of the inquiry, participants were invited to respond to an end-of-year reflective questionnaire, and share a copy of their entire student portfolio, or specific pieces they selected.

Phase One

Teacher Journal. Reflexivity was a central feature in my theoretical framework and included the method of journalling. I began writing entries in my teacher journal on January 16th, 2020, after receiving approvals from NUREB and my school board's ethics committee. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), teacher journals comprise a written record of pedagogical practices that can be re-examined and analyzed over time. For example, Banford's (1996) yearlong study of a student's participation in a writing workshop showed that the researcher's reflections changed his views about the student and caused him to think more deeply (Check & Schutt, 2012). The purpose of my teacher journal was to reflect on the pedagogical practices taking place in my ESL class, that I could then re-examine and analyze at the end of the school year. I chose to write in a physical journal rather than an electronic version.

At the end of the school year and the end of data collection, my teacher journal consisted of a total of 102 pages, spanning a period of 22 weeks. I wrote on a regular basis (an average of 2-4 times per week), and my entries included reflections on my practice, descriptions of my

pedagogical approaches using multicultural literature, and questions I had as a teacher. The journal was not evaluative of students in any way and did not identify specific learners by name. At times, I referred generally to ideas shared by groups of students during collaborative discussions, or the ways in which learners as a whole were connecting, or not connecting, with characters in the stories. During this first phase of the study in which I was journalling, nothing was required of my students. Every student took part in everyday teaching and learning activities in the classroom as they were already occurring. Classroom activities were the same for everyone and were not specially planned for this research project, meaning there were no add-on tasks or additional time commitments.

Phase Two

Reflective Questionnaires. The goal of this second phase was to add my students' voices and experiences to the project in a way that was separate from course evaluation. The original research protocol included an invitation for participants to engage in a reflective 20-minute, face-to-face conversation with me in mid-June. The reflective conversation was designed to offer open-ended questions, while allowing for participants to take the lead as they shared their journey with the multicultural texts. Safeguards, including member checking and timelines, had been put in place for these reflective conversations to occur, as well as procedures regarding the audio recording, translation, and transcription of the exchanges. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, school closure, remote learning conditions, modifications to the initially approved research protocol were necessary.

Although weekly communications with participants were maintained via weekly Google Hangout sessions through the school board's secure platform, recording reflective conversations would have raised privacy issues. To remedy this situation, in lieu of recording reflective

conversations (interviews), I prepared a reflective questionnaire containing a revised list of ten open-ended questions (see Appendix A). These questions pertained to students' experience with multicultural literature throughout the year and were designed for written response by participants. I translated the questionnaire to French and both versions were offered to allow students to answer in their preferred language (as was the goal for in-person interviews). With these changes, the follow-up member checking meeting that was included in the first draft of the protocol was no longer required.

I shared the reflective questionnaire directly with participants on May 12th, 2020, so that they had enough time to review the questions and to answer in a timeline that worked best for them. To ensure all questionnaires remained confidential, I sent them through the Google Classroom platform, on which participants could access their individual copy, and return it in the same manner once completed. Participants could choose to answer all, some, or none of the questions on the reflective questionnaires. A total of ten out of 12 participants responded and returned the reflective questionnaires, five in French and five in English. One participant indicated by email that he preferred not answering the questionnaire but was willing to share his portfolio as data. One other participant did not respond. Some participants returned their finished questionnaire on Google Classroom, while others notified me by email, with an attached copy of their completed document.

Student Portfolios. As a teacher, I was continually searching for ways to position students in a more agentic role vis-à-vis their own learning, one that might provide them with a more critical lens on their growth. This year, I decided to incorporate student portfolios within my ongoing teacher practice. To help learners grasp the concept of a portfolio, I brought a model of my portfolio, which I had created while a student at the Faculty of Education. These student

portfolios were designed to include an array of learning materials, ranging from dialogue

journals, short reader response tasks, artwork, and culminating projects in relation to each novel.

Students were encouraged to use them to compile samples of their work as a way to document

growth and learning in ESL, thereby giving them an occasion to regularly consult and revisit

their productions. Students possessed their own expanding file folder, which was located on a

classroom shelf, where they could access it at any time. They were invited to insert pieces like

drawings, personal reflections, poems, photographs, newspaper clippings, or items they thought

connected with the books or something they learned. After the school closure, students continued

to contribute to their portfolios by adding creative artwork or written work to their Google Drive

folder. Those who chose to continue using paper at home, uploaded scanned copies of their work

on their electronic portfolios.

Intended as a reflective tool, portfolios provided an opportunity for participants to revisit

and reflect upon in relation to their lived experiences and see examples of specific moments they

considered meaningful and at times, transformative. According to Fernsten and Fernsten (2005),

fostering a reflective practice in learners cultivates independence and learning. Student portfolios

consisted of an essential supportive part of data collection during the second phase of the

inquiry; the contents of participants' portfolios allowed me to look at their overall learning

journeys, from the standpoint of both teacher and researcher.

Hebert (1998) deemed student portfolios to be not only more substantive evidence of

teaching initiatives, but profoundly meaningful for students as they yearn to tell their story

through the contents of their portfolio. For this reason, I believed every product inserted in the

portfolios should not be used as an evaluative instrument for academic performance. Some

pieces included in student portfolios were evaluated for marks (prior to the school closure in

March), like end-of-unit projects; others, like dialogue journals, were never graded. As

mentioned previously, all schoolwork produced by students after March 13th, 2020 did not bear

negatively on their final report card.

    Dialogue Journals. For every unit, students were asked to write in their individual

dialogue journal. Dialogue journals are journals written by students at school, to which another

person responds, thereby engaging them in a dialogue. I opted for a format in which the

respondent is traditionally the teacher (Denne-Bolton, 2013). Students were invited to voluntarily

jot down thoughts, observations, feelings, and questions as they read the books and interacted

with each other during our multicultural literature units. Mostly, journals were a space where

students responded to assigned weekly journal prompts. Dialogue journals were assessment-free

zones; I did not correct students' spelling or grammatical errors. Rather, I read their entries, and

inserted comments or thoughts, thereby creating a space for "nonthreatening, authentic

communication and mutual learning" (Miller, 2007, p. 26). To help students get started, I

provided examples of sentence starters, as shown in Figure 2 (see p. 127), and modelled writing

a journal entry.

    Occasionally, I invited students to engage in student-to-student dialogues, in which they

wrote entries addressed to each other, at times responding to an assigned prompt, and engaging

in a back-and-forth written conversation; at other times, they were encouraged to pursue informal

questioning or "I wonder" statements that pertained to the books. However, this practice between

students became more challenging while learning remotely, and ultimately ceased.

    At the beginning of the school year, I provided students with their own notebooks, which

they personalized by colouring them or adding special details. Some students used an electronic

Figure 2

Sentence Starters as Prompts for Dialogue Journals (ESL Classroom Whiteboards)
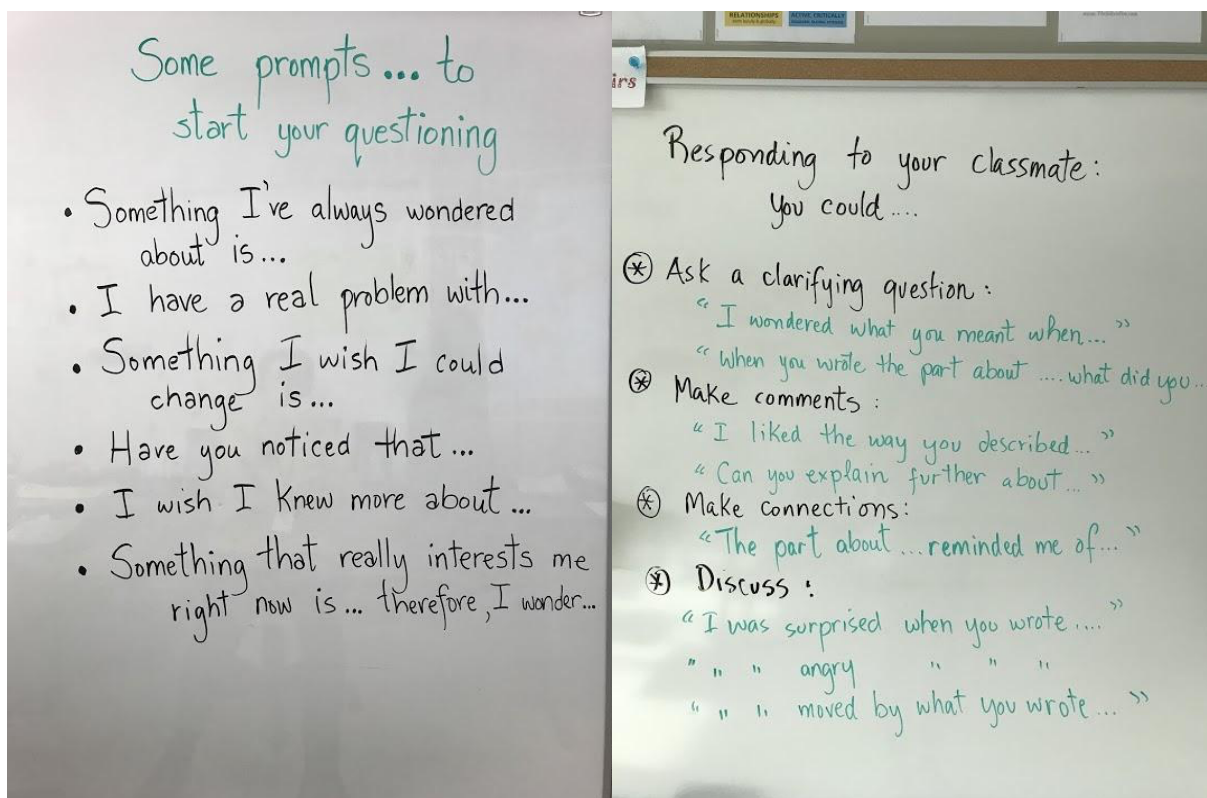
version of dialogue journal, choosing to type their entries rather than journalling in their notebooks. Once everyone was restricted to distance learning, electronic portfolios became more widespread, though some still preferred handwritten journal entries (which they later scanned and uploaded on their Google Drive folders).

I regularly assigned dialogue journal prompts as a method of responding to reading. According to Galda and Beach (2001), journal writing helps learners "think through what they want to express, and experience with various writing prompts gives them access to different ways to think and talk about texts" (p. 69). Every so often, I provided questions that required writers to respond from alternative viewpoints, such as "Put yourself in Parvana's position. What do you think you would do in her place? What would you keep with you as you continue

walking? Would you have left the books behind? Would you have taken care of Hassan? Asif? What do you think she is feeling and how would you feel in her exact situation?"

Now and again, prompts were designed to encourage deeper thinking and reflecting about a topic or situation. For instance, halfway through reading their selected book in the final unit, I asked students to choose their favourite character in that book and write them a piece of advice at that stage of the character's evolution. Other times, the assigned prompts initiated thought-provoking conversations among readers, like "How will you use what you learned from the characters in our books to do things that matter to you (and others around you) in your life beyond the classroom?"

Finally, dialogue journal prompts sometimes sparked more intense discussions that carried on for longer periods of time. For example, after posting two news articles about police brutality and racial discrimination, I asked students, "How do you think you would react? What do you believe we must do to eliminate racism in our society?"

Short Reader Response Tasks. As a language arts teacher, I decided, many years ago, to move away from assigning students traditional worksheets and arbitrary comprehension questions after reading. Like Short (1999), I thought they took up valuable time by simply keeping students busy, and "I often felt as if children were learning to read in spite of me rather than because of me" (p. 130). Instead, in addition to dialogue journals, I prepared short reader response activities before, during, and after our readings of multicultural books.

Utilizing a variety of reading and writing strategies to instigate punctual reader responses to texts allowed learners to make meaning, engage in higher level thinking, and make connections to real-life events and people (Huang & Kowalick, 2014). These strategies, or short reader response tasks, were associated with the novels, and designed to support students'

development of critical and cultural consciousness. An example of this featured a question I posed as we were reading *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora* (Cartaya, 2017): "What does Abuela's phrase mean to you when she says, 'Love and faith are most important'?" I posted the question on an online discussion board called Slido, where students were invited to create a collective word cloud with their responses, in real-time, as I projected the results on the classroom interactive Smartboard.

I often assigned task cards, adopted from a pedagogical resource I had purchased (Story Trekker, 2019). The task cards offered instructions to an assortment of multimodal ways for students as a response to reading; students tended to use them only as a source of inspiration and adapted them to their own vision. Two examples of these task cards are displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Task Card Instructions

Gather

Make a collage of pictures and words that describe the main character of the book. Your collage must fill all the space of an 8x11 piece of paper. You may cut pictures and words from magazines and newspapers or use a computer to design them on your own.

Write a short paragraph (3-5 sentences) to explain your choices for the collage. Use specific information and examples from the text to support your choices

Be Grateful

Write a thank-you note to one of the characters in your book. The best thank-you notes include a specific reference to the thing for which you are thankful. It should be short and have a greeting and closing, like a letter. You can consider thanking a character for:

- Teaching you some kind of truth or lesson
- Being an inspiration in the way they acted
- Speaking up for a person/issue
- Entertaining you
- Causing you to think differently about something or someone
- Moving you into action
- Causing you to think differently about yourself

Note. Images used with the permission of Leslie Spurrier (Story Trekker, 2019)

Another example of a short reader response task was that of book talks. I shared a list of potential prompts (see Figure 4, p. 130) with students to assist them in preparing for scheduled book talks at the end of the final unit of study. These sentence starters were meant as

Figure 4

Prompts Suggested for Book Talk Starters

suggestions, and readers had the option of joining in the conversation using whatever approach they preferred. I tailored the short reader response tasks to be incorporated in a way that respected the organic rhythm of our study units.

Artwork and Culminating Projects. As a teacher, I hold a long-time belief that complying with a rigid, curricular-driven pedagogy is no pedagogy at all—at least not one I want to disseminate. Alternatively, I stray from the beaten path and expand the possibilities for learners to actively participate in their own learning, and flourish on their own terms. Campbell and Parr (2013) warned us that dynamic literacy landscapes require teachers and learners to

adapt and reconceptualize reading and writing, and "accept literacy challenges that allow us to traverse formal and informal boundaries in and out of school" (p. 131).

By providing multiple options in reading and writing strategies, students can develop into critical readers and writers, and grow more culturally aware (Huang & Kowalick, 2014). Thus, end-of-unit projects became an opportunity for my students to stretch their horizons and explore their interests and skills, to produce unique and personalized productions. Even though these culminating projects were evaluated for marks (prior to March 13th, 2020), my students collaborated with me to develop learning expectations and learning outcomes. They also planned, directed, and generated their final products based on choice. Contents of student portfolios included an array of artifacts, including culminating projects and artwork as described below.

The end-of-unit project I planned for the completion of *The Breadwinner* series urged students to collaborate as teammates. It involved an oral presentation that connected children's rights with the child characters' experiences in the stories. Groups were given the opportunity to communicate their final product using paper or electronic posters, integrating artifacts like diaries and photographs, performing drama, or simulating promotional videos as awareness tools. At the end of our reading of *Ghost Boys* (Rhodes, 2018), serious and controversial topics left students with a range of ideas to respond to the text. Among several options, students could conduct a research project on topics like the Civil Rights movement, Emmett Till, the Tulsa Race Massacre, desegregation, etc.

Learners who were more artistically inclined could produce art in their chosen form to express their ideas in relation to the novels. Tools such as colouring pencils, pastels, paint, charcoal, photography, and musical instruments; and techniques, such as scrapbooking, wood

burning, and collage are some examples of mediums used. For the digitally inclined, other

options were also welcome. For example, Google Slides or Google Draw, iPad Pro applications

for digital drawings, etc. Artwork was not solely a result of culminating projects, some pieces

finding their way in students' portfolios as spontaneous expressions of their thoughts and

emotions in response to the multicultural readings throughout the year.

A Closer Look at the Multicultural Texts Used for Teaching and Learning

During the year of this study, I implemented a topics-oriented, yearlong multicultural

book study (see Appendix B). Specific everyday teaching and learning activities included a total

of six, 6- to 7-week units, the majority focused on different multicultural novels. Except for the

first unit, which featured persuasive texts as genre, each multicultural unit included one focus

novel study accompanied by supporting picturebooks. For each unit, the multicultural novels

were read mostly through the process of teacher read alouds. In the following paragraphs, I

outline the selection of multicultural novels and picturebooks, as well as the schedule of delivery

for the books, before March and afterward, at which time students were pursuing their school

activities remotely.

Text Selection

When selecting quality multicultural literature for the classroom, teachers should ensure

that texts depict human experiences in culturally and historically authentic, accurate, and credible

ways, thereby shedding light on a broader view of the world (Landt, 2006; Wilkins & Gamble,

1998; Yokota, 1993). According to Landt (2006), several criteria should be considered when

selecting books that focus on non-mainstream cultures. These characteristics include accurate

portrayal of a culture in the narrative, diversity that does not represent characters in a

stereotypical manner, and depiction of realistic social justice issues; all should substantiate authenticity and accuracy (Landt, 2006).

I selected all the novels and picturebooks for their social justice potential, based partly on recommendations from the *National Council of Teachers of English* (2018), as well as the Social Justice Books project from *Teaching for Change* (n.d.). Because I was mindful about portraying characters and situations in realistic, credible, and authentic ways, I consulted a website powered by the University of Arizona, which provided a list of criteria on how to evaluate the authenticity of books (Worlds of Words, 2020). Finally, I heeded the advice of authors Leland and Harste (2000), whose extensive research pertained to meaning making within the reading process, and the importance of book selection in language arts programs that support critical literacy. Every novel read this year was fictional, although some could be defined as historical fiction because they are based on both fictional and real people and events. For readability purposes, I specify the author and year of publication upon first reference of each novel/picturebook used in the following paragraphs. When referring to these texts throughout the rest of this dissertation, I include only the title.

The first novel I introduced was *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora* (Cartaya, 2017). This story features a Cuban American boy named Arturo and his extended family, who must face challenges regarding the survival of the family restaurant which has been at the centre of their lives and their community for decades. I chose this as our first read because the story, told from the perspective of a teenager, features a lighter tone, and depicts themes like love, family, tradition, community, and youth activism. The tale of the Zamora family also sheds light on social systems that perpetuate economic inequities as they stand up to gentrification. Adhering to one of Leland and Harste's (2000) criteria for selecting books that bring awareness to systems of

power, this novel illustrates "how people can begin to take action on important social issues" (p. 4). In addition to themes of gentrification and activism, this story revolves around the culture of Cuban Americans, namely the Spanish language, family, poetry, and culinary art. Although loss is one of the sensitive topics, it is not predominant.

The Breadwinner (Ellis, 2000/2015) and its sequel *Parvana's Journey* (Ellis, 2002/2015) comprised our second and third novel studies. *The Breadwinner* begins when a young girl named Parvana, living under the strict and unjust rules of a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, watches as her father is violently taken from their home. As the rest of the family struggles to survive, she must disguise herself as a boy, and become the sole breadwinner. In *Parvana's Journey*, as Parvana's mother and siblings are missing, she must continue her journey to find them, alone, after the death of her father. Some passages from both these books are fragments of actual stories from Afghani women who were interviewed by Ellis in refugee camps. In deeply moving narratives, the author "helps her readers to see, through the eyes of children, the horrors of homelessness, starvation, political oppression, sexual discrimination, imperialism, and war" (Greenlaw, 2005, p. 46). Despite the sensitive nature of these topics, they "enrich our understanding of history and life by giving voice to those who have traditionally been silenced or marginalized" (Leland & Harste, 2000, p. 4). Because students generally loved these two choices in the past, I felt compelled to include them in this year's reading itinerary.

I read *Seven Blind Mice* (Young, 1992) aloud to my class as an introduction to picturebooks. I chose to insert this book at the time we were reading *Parvana's Journey* because it exhibits themes—taking on another's perspective, open-mindedness, and avoiding judging too quickly—which we had already begun to explore in the books. At the end of *The Breadwinner*

series, I presented the second picturebook, *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey* (Ruurs, 2016) for its authentic artwork by a Syrian artist.

We began reading our next novel, *Ghost Boys* (Rhodes, 2018), on March 9th, 2020, during the last week of in-class learning before school closures were imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It tells the story of Jerome, an African American boy shot by a White police officer who mistakes his toy gun for a real one. Told in a back-and-forth timeline where the protagonist witnesses the devastating consequences of his killing from "Dead" and "Alive" viewpoints, the narrative weaves in historical and sociopolitical elements. As Jerome meets other ghost boys like Emmett Till, he tries to make sense of his death as the story serves up a scathing portrayal of racism and police brutality, still present in our current society. I selected this novel in part because of its controversial content and style, and because it allows readers to consider perspectives different from their own, leading to "interrogation of common, unexamined behaviours and beliefs" (Lewison et al., 2000, p. 10). The multi-view approach in confronting difficult social justice issues, as demonstrated in the different characters' voices, shows readers the impact of putting oneself in others' shoes. Also, it corresponds with Leland and Harste's (2000) recommended characteristics that books should "explore dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people. . . . help us question why certain groups are positioned as 'others'" (p. 4). Lastly, I incorporated a read aloud of our third picturebook by Tuck (2019), *As Fast as Words Could Fly* (SAGFoundation, 2019). I thought its themes of discrimination, racism, civil rights, Black history, perseverance, and courage coincided with our reading of *Ghost Boys*.

For our final multicultural unit study, the original plan was to read *Harbor Me* (Woodson, 2018) as a class. However, students did not have their classroom copy of the book because of the

remote learning situation. I, therefore, revised my plan, and offered students options from a list of six books, which included (1) *Harbor Me*, (2) *Stella by Starlight* (Draper, 2015), (3) *Allies* (Gratz, 2019), (4) *Sit* (Ellis, 2017), (5) *A Bird on Water Street* (Dulemba, 2014), and (6) *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel!* (Dumas, 2017). Because unpredictable circumstances due to the pandemic impeded students' access to reading, many authors provided relaxed copyright rules, while some educational platforms offered free online access for students to continue reading.

I communicated with the authors of books (1), (2), (3), and (4) via email, and obtained their permission to record and post audio files of read alouds on my Google Classroom profile. As for books (5) and (6), I selected them from Epic!, an online platform for students and educators that included access to a variety of electronic books. Readers who picked these novels were invited to register on the website, where I assigned their selection to their profile, to be read online. After providing a short summary of each novel, along with the respective method of delivery, students made their selections via a Google Forms survey. *Sit* was the only novel students did not select. The remaining five novels were distributed as per Table 3 , where details, including book summaries for each novel, are outlined.

I integrated the remaining picturebooks: *La Frontera: A Journey with Papa* (Mills et al., 2018), *The Treasure Box* (Wild, 2013), and *Dreams of Freedom* (Amnesty International, 2015), by posting video files of my read alouds for each text on Google Classroom. These were sent between April and June and connected with various themes and topics that arose in the various novels students were reading or had read. I provide an overview of all six picturebooks and their topics in Table 4 .

Table 3

Novel Selections for the Final Unit of Study

Title	Author	Format	Readers	Summary
A Bird on Water Street	Elizabeth O. Dulemba	Epic! website, eBook	Jessie	Jack is a boy growing up in a Southern Appalachian town environmentally devastated by a century of poor copper-mining practices. After Jack's uncle is killed in a mining accident the Company forces massive layoffs, a strike changes the lives of everyone in town. Jack is opposed to the mine where so many of his relatives have died but doesn't know how to tell his father who wants him to follow in his footsteps. This story of hope features family life, friendship, and teenagerhood adventures. Topics include poverty, environmental exploitation and pollution, corporate dependence (historical fiction).
Allies	Alan Gratz	Recorded read aloud	Phoebe, Shane	This story takes place during one single day, D-Day, on the beaches of Normandy, France, in the midst of WWII. Dee, a young soldier, is on a boat racing towards the French coast. Behind enemy lines in France, Samira works as a spy, trying to sabotage the German army. Meanwhile, paratrooper James leaps from a plane to join a daring midnight raid. And in the thick of battle, Henry, a medic, searches for lives to save. Every character's story impacts another as their lives become intertwined in this tale of teamwork, survival, and heroism against all odds (historical fiction).
Harbor Me	Jacqueline Woodson	Recorded read aloud	Kate, Leo, Andrew	This story starts when six students are sent to a room weekly, to chat by themselves, with no adults to listen in. At first, they fear this new unfamiliar and wonder what they will say or do, but they discover it's safe to talk about things they usually keep private. As kids yearn for family connections and a sense of belonging, sharing their secrets brings them together as they form a relationship. Topics include racial profiling, fears of deportation, bullying, discrimination.
It Ain't So Awful, Falafel!	Firoozeh Dumas	Epic! website, eBook	Carter, Timothy, Vincent	Zomorod, the only daughter of Iranian immigrants, is trying to adjust to her new surroundings after her family moves to California's Newport Beach. In her attempts to fit in, she chooses "Cindy" as her new American name. The story is set in the late 1970s, just as Iran makes U.S. headlines with protests, revolution, and the taking of American hostages. The family tries to integrate, experiencing kindness from their community, as well as cruel harassment. Topics include stereotyping, political unrest, immigration, linguistic, cultural, and religious identity (historical fiction).
Stella by Starlight	Sharon M. Draper	Recorded read aloud	Esther, Amber, Brooke	The story is told from the point of view of Stella, an 11-year-old, African-American girl, living in the segregated South in the 1930's. One late night, she and her young brother witness the burning of a cross at the hands of the Ku Klux Klan. Afterward, Stella's community faces injustice, violence, and cruelty, but rises up in solidarity with courage and hope for a brighter future. Topics include segregation, discrimination, racism, the KKK, civil rights (historical fiction).

Table 4

Picturebooks Used Alongside Multicultural Novels

Title	Author(s)	Topics/Concepts
Seven Blind Mice	Ed Young (1992)	Multiple perspectives, open-mindedness, knowing in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole
Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey	Margriet Ruurs; artwork Nizar Ali Badr (2016)	Refugees, Syrian civil war, displacement, immigration, family, loss, belonging
As Fast as Words Could Fly	Pamela M. Tuck; read aloud by Dulé Hill (2019)	Discrimination, racism, civil rights, desegregation, Black history, perseverance, courage
La Frontera: A Journey With Papa	Deborah Mills, Alfredo Alva, & Claudia Navarro (2018)	Immigration, poverty, history of U.S./Mexican border, courage, resilience, family
The Treasure Box	Margaret Wild (2013)	War, survival, cultural identity, legacy, hope
Dreams of Freedom	Amnesty International (2015)	Human rights, freedom, equality

Vivifying Stories Through Read Alouds

According to Kesler et al. (2020), interactive read alouds, or instances when a teacher reads aloud a high-quality book and in which dialogic discourse takes place before, during, and after the reading, are a valuable tool when addressing social justice issues with students. In previous years, I experienced success using this approach, especially among reluctant readers, and in ESL classes. Read alouds seemed to keep students in rapt attention, and I believed, like Fox (2013), that the stories themselves captivated them, so "[w]e have to trust ourselves to trust them to learn what books can teach" (p. 7). For this reason, engaging in interactive read alouds for each text was part of my teaching approach for this year's multicultural literature units. As a critical educator, I planned to continue exploring innovative strategies like interactive read

alouds that might help students grasp tough topics emerging from books, and prompt them toward social action (Evans, 2010).

After March, distance learning interfered with our established routine of interactive read alouds. At this time, audio recordings of my readings of *Ghost Boys* served as an additional support for students as they read from their classroom copies, which they had brought home. As mentioned in the previous section, our final unit consisted of a selection of novels, of which three were only available through read alouds. Audio files of chapters read aloud from readers' respective books were posted weekly on the Google Classroom platform. In essence, despite learning from home, I aspired to maintain the notion that oral language contributed to building our community of learners (Campbell & Hlusek, 2015).

Considering the challenges and constraints presented in my qualitative research design, I acknowledged Rubin and Rubin's (1995) advice: I braced for ambiguity, prepared for multiple possibilities, and welcomed the challenges as part and parcel of a dynamic design.

Data Analysis

As a teacher, I continually reflected on my teaching practices and sought to be responsive to every student's needs (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993), having established a trust relationship with them. As a teacher researcher and case study researcher, I attempted to holistically understand my case by analyzing data from an insider's lens. This perspective differed from an outside observer's viewpoint and helped me analyze the patterns and discrepancies through interpretive frameworks (see Blackberry et al., 2019; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, 2009; Walton, 2010). Bulterman-Bos (2008) contended that the shift from teacher to researcher entails a significant transformation in occupational roles—from normative to analytical. According to Gibbs (2007), researchers' analyses are interpretations. Sharing socially constructed realities

"does not make them more real, but simply more commonly assented to" (Guba & Lincoln,

1989, p. 89). As I entered the stage of data analysis, I remained conscious of the intentional,

systematic, and ethical criteria that would ensure the integrity of my study. In so doing, I added

to my reading list several texts as well as research articles that focused on analyzing data.

Organization of Data Sources

One challenge consisted of managing voluminous and assorted data (teacher journal

reflections over many months, multiple questionnaires, contents of student portfolios). Merriam

and Tisdell (2016) proposed bringing the information together in an organized manner. To

analyze the data more intensively, I followed Patton's (2015) advice to create a case record,

which converges all data into a "comprehensive, primary resource package" (p. 537), and in

which information is edited and categorized for accessibility. I implemented this process at the

end of the school year once I had collected all the data. I sorted the information from

participants' physical portfolios (the ones I had obtained from the classroom after the school

closure), copied their Google Drive folders, migrated them from the school platform to my

personal electronic filing system, itemized each item in the new folders, and created a backup on

an external hard drive. Next, I printed copies of each participant's reflective questionnaire, and

made confidential the print versions as well as the documents in their electronic folders by

attributing pseudonyms to them. I also typed the contents of my teacher journal on a Google

Document. Once the data were compiled and organized for accessibility and thoroughness, I

proceeded to analyze them.

Constant Comparative Method

I elected a qualitative approach to data analysis that best suited the nature of my teacher

research, one that recognizes that along with description, the data analysis process also

implicates some interpretation in the selection of research outcomes (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Maykut and Morehouse suggested this 'interpretive-descriptive' approach, described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as a researcher who seeks to accurately describe what she understood, and "[reconstruct] the data into a 'recognizable reality' for the people who have participated in the study" (p. 122). Closely related to the goal of case study research, this approach guided me to better understand the phenomenon of teaching and learning with multicultural literature and describe what I learned using a minimum of interpretation. To proceed with an inductive analysis of the data, I adopted a method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), called the *constant comparative method*, which combines the act of coding while simultaneously comparing all units of meaning obtained. The first stage of my analysis was ongoing as I continuously reflected upon my teaching practice and wrote in my teacher journal. During this first phase (January to June), I remained attentive to emerging themes and relationships within them but did not engage in a coding process until after June, at which time I continued writing in my teacher journal in a separate section identified as memo writing for data analysis.

At the end of the school year, my first task consisted of reading through all three sets of data once: my teacher journal, students' reflective questionnaires, and contents from students' portfolios. To become fully immersed in the data, Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended reading through the entire data at least once before initiating the coding process. Next, I engaged in an important first step in my qualitative data analysis called *discovery* (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), in which I began noticing potentially salient experiences and concepts in the data. I started an *open coding* process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), by first assigning an identifying code for each piece of data and reading through the first set of data: my teacher journal (paper version). Then, I proceeded to attribute preliminary codes to the raw data. According to Saldaña

(2013), a code is a word or short phrase that captures the essence of a specific portion of the data.

To familiarize myself with the data, I read and reread through my journal ten times overall, once from beginning to end without marking it up, then highlighting key words or phrases using seven colour codes, and finally, reading it through while inserting notes in the side margins, or *memo writing* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process of memo writing caused me to notice that a substantial part of this set largely referred to procedural notes, like tasks assigned to students, or actions I took to assist them in their learning. As I read my journal, line by line, noting words and phrases that appeared relevant, I began to move beyond behavioural descriptions to ponder the social meaning of situations (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Also, memo writing allowed me to observe recurrent terms relating to my feelings, pedagogical approaches, reflections of my thinking, as well as reactions to the COVID-19 situation. Memo writing was an important part of the analysis process because it was during this time that I contemplated my data through the eyes of a researcher first. This step contributed to bridging the gap between the open-coding and theorizing portions of my analysis (Charmaz, 2015). This period in my analysis provided an important space for me to sort out and prioritize the contents of my 102-page teacher journal and see it from a different perspective by zooming in on the data at first before zooming out to obtain a bigger picture.

During open coding, reading reflectively resulted in adding preliminary codes in the journal margins, and led to the identification of potential categories. These low inference codes, described by Punch (2014) as codes that summarize portions of the data to be refined into more interpretive codes later, consisted of a first level coding process. According to Saldaña (2013), coding is not simply a process of reducing the data; because it is interpretive in nature, I was also

summarizing and condensing them. Mostly, I produced *descriptive codes*, as they aptly

summarized topics (Saldaña, 2013), along with some *in vivo codes*, which use participants' (in

this case my own) words, and according to Creswell (2015), are best because participants' voices

should be reflected in the final report of a study. This first level coding is when I began

connecting certain parts of the data to my theoretical framework. Once all low inference coding

was completed for the teacher journal, I began extracting the first sets of categories from the

preliminary codes.

A total of 33 potential categories were generated initially, defined by Creswell (2013) as

"broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (p.

186). I wrote these down on individual sticky notes with their corresponding page numbers and

proceeded to look for patterns. A closer look resulted in the amalgamation and suppression of

some initial categories, as I noticed patterns repeating themselves. I charted the revised

categories on a Google Document. In a second level coding activity, I began *unitizing* the data,

or identifying chunks or units of meaning from them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Next, I used

oversized, coloured sticky notes as labels for each category. I posted these labels on a wall, a

working surface that would become my audit trail, or visual record of my analysis (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). Afterward, I pulled direct quotes, which I called data cards, from my teacher

journal, cut and pasted these under each potential category on the discovery wall according to

recurrent words, phrases, concepts, or topics I observed in them.

Next, I tackled the other sets of data: student questionnaires, and the dialogue

journals/discussion board responses portion of student portfolios, setting aside components of

student portfolios considered as artifacts, or artwork, for later analysis. I applied the same

process of discovery to these pieces—from reading and rereading, to unitizing, to creating labels

for each category, and associating to them salient quotes from participants—all of which was displayed side-by-side on the discovery wall. This lengthy but joyful process of discovering, and the thrill of revisiting my students' writing and artistic productions, allowed me to reacquaint myself with them repeatedly as I found delight in uncovering what they had learned.

After the preliminary step of discovery came the process of inductive category coding, the first of four steps in Glaser and Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method. I was now able to zoom out, look at the categories that surfaced from each set of data, and begin to see patterns. According to Charmaz (2015), the central idea of a category is its explanatory power, by which all other thematic ideas can be explained; and ceases once a level of saturation is attained. In this phase of inductively deriving meaning from the data, I imposed a tighter lens on the categories as I compared them. As such, I posed questions to determine similarities or discrepancies within the categories and verified how they connected back to my original research questions. This comparison step also permitted me to zoom in, inspect the relevance of the categories, and refine the concepts within them. This second level coding generated eight categories of data from the reflective questionnaires, and four categories of data from the dialogue journals/discussion board responses. Categories also included several subcategories. Like Scheffel (2011), I believe interweaving direct quotes into the process to be vital in sharing my participants' lived experiences in the classroom by means of their own voices. By meticulously canvassing these data sources, I could hear their words resonate long after they had been articulated. For these reasons, each category contained anywhere between five to 20 direct participant quotes (data cards), some of which were copied twice because they fit in more than one category.

The second step of the constant comparative method focused on my efforts to refine existing categories. To do so, I developed rules of inclusion for each category by carefully

rereading the data cards (quotes) and finding common properties for the group of data cards

under each category (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) advice

and wrote these rules of inclusion as *proposition statements*, using sentence structures that

emphasized the essential meaning contained in the categories. I wrote each propositional

statement on sticky notes and added them to the respective category on the discovery wall. As I

looked intently at the wall, I experienced what teacher researcher Gilbert did when she said:

"I . . . suddenly see this beautiful pattern emerge and as I move in for a closer look, I find

smaller, tighter webs within the web: concentrations of connections" (Shagoury & Power, 2012,

p. 119). During this step of the process, my understanding of the phenomenon increased, and

research outcomes began to take shape.

    The third step of the constant comparative method involved a close examination of the

propositional statements that emerged from my analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Even as

the propositions formed the basis for the outcomes of the study, they were not yet connected with

each other and therefore, the goal of this important step was to explore salient relationships and

patterns across categories. I engaged in third level coding, where I proceeded to reread the data

cards and their propositional statements, looking for those that could stand alone, and others that

connected to form *outcome propositions* (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Themes and subthemes

began to emerge from the data, as I continued with the dynamic work of finding relationships

among them, and associating outcome propositions for each. Saldaña (2013) defined a theme as

an outcome of coding and categorization and characterized it as "an *extended phrase* of *sentence*

that identifies what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it *means*" (p. 175, emphasis in original).

The thematic analysis provided an opportunity for me to examine the perspectives of my

participants as well as my own, notice similarities and differences, and shed light on surprising

insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As themes emerged, I noticed that they naturally diverged into three lenses: a first lens representing a focus on the classroom as a whole and students' experiences with multicultural literature; a second lens focusing on my perspective as teacher; and a third lens featuring three participant portraits.

In the fourth and final step of the constant comparative method, I sought to harmonize the data in a narrative form. Analyzing data takes a long time to break down because typically, text data are dense data (Creswell, 2015). The data analysis process detailed in this section spanned eight consecutive weeks, culminating into an outline and potential headings for the research findings chapters. When I started writing these chapters, I did not envision a chronological approach to telling the narrative of our journey but opted for a thematic story told from the three lenses mentioned above. Although a fixed number of emerging themes had already been identified, I quickly realized that the process of writing up my research did not equate the end of the analytical process; rather, it was simply a part of it (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Thereupon, I continued to use the analytical tools I had learned, which led me to adjust the way I organized my findings as I wrote. It was during this stage that I reviewed a final set of data: student artifacts comprised mostly of participants' artwork, poetry, digital productions, etc., which I incorporated in the themes that had emerged already. I considered this rich source of data "tangible evidence of what kids are able to do and of the range of ways in which kids respond to different learning tasks" (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 115), essential to the storytelling. I remained vigilant in weaving together the pieces of data into a "patterned quilt" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 111). In fact, Dyson and Genishi reminded us that through analysis, we seek to share what is important from the perspective of participants, and it is "the competing stories, put into dynamic relation with one another, that allow insight into participants' resources

and challenges and, moreover, into the transformative possibilities of social spaces for teaching and learning" (p. 111).

Shagoury and Power (2012) conceded that because human relations are complex, our attempt to be thorough in data analysis comes with a considerable level of uncertainty. By fully immersing myself in the data, I endeavoured to see the data—and see it again (Hubbard & Power, 2003). Nevertheless, I was confident that by utilizing research-based analytical tools and procedures, documenting the process, and creating an audit trail, I was able to impute epistemological soundness to my research.

Ethical Considerations

As alluded to earlier in this chapter, the teacher research movement is not without controversy and it was, therefore, imperative that the methodological research design be taken into consideration. In fact, MacLean and Poole (2010) suggested that ethical challenges expressed by teacher researchers as they engage in inquiries about teaching and learning "should be viewed as opportunities to examine the critical relationships between teachers and students and how they affect learning" (p. 9). Through thoughtful planning and consideration, I addressed such ethical challenges. Because participants were children and I occupied a position of authority as their teacher, a power dynamic existed as a result of my duty to assess their academic performance. Consequently, multiple safeguards were integrated to minimize potential harm, especially concerning real or perceived undue influence. Like Mohr (1996), I considered myself bound to ethical behaviours as both a teacher and a researcher and associated the quality of my teaching and research to how I treated my students. In addition to these safeguards, informed consent accounted for a transparent and forthright process to which I subscribed.

Quality of research and methodological rigour were continually at the forefront of my mind as I conducted my teacher research case study. According to Nowell et al. (2017), although different qualitative research approaches ascribe to their own methods for conducting, documenting, and analyzing data, "it is the individual researcher's responsibility to assure rigor and trustworthiness" (p. 2).

Informed Consent

Transparency was essential from the beginning as I disclosed details about everything from methods used to data interpretation and dissemination. Because my students were minors, I informed their parents/guardians of every detail pertaining to the research project. In January, a letter of acknowledgment (Appendix C) advised parents/guardians that I was engaging in the initial phase of my study by reflecting about my teaching practice in a teacher journal. The letter specified that nothing was required of their child at this time. This letter of information and acknowledgment was handed to each student in my ESL class, to be delivered to their parents/guardians. A copy of this letter was also posted on our Google Classroom profile, accessible to parents/guardians. Synchronously, I informed every student in my ESL class of the project and let them know they would be invited to participate in the second phase, in June, at which time a second letter along with a consent form would be provided to them and their parents/guardians.

In May, a second letter with a consent form (Appendix D) was sent electronically to parents/guardians' individual email addresses, asking permission for their child to participate in reflective questionnaires and provide access to their portfolio. Parents/guardians expressed their decision by marking appropriate checkboxes, signing the letter, and returning a scanned copy to

me via email. Several parents/guardians experienced some issues with the scanning process and confirmed their consent by messaging me via email.

Students received their own assent letter (Appendix E) via their individual Google Classroom profiles, inviting them to respond to a 10-question reflective questionnaire and share the contents of their student portfolio. On the assent letter, students were informed of what their participation entailed in Q & A style. They were asked to make a decision to participate or not by marking appropriate checkboxes and signing the letter.

This second letter stressed the voluntary nature of the study and included statements underlining the choice to withdraw from the study at any moment or decline to be involved in parts of the inquiry. One student notified me of his decision to decline via email, indicating that he did not feel comfortable sharing personal information. I was informed of one other student's decision through an email from her mother. Additionally, participants could choose to answer all, some, or none of the questions on the reflective questionnaires—a choice that was manifested by several of the participants. Also, the letter made clear that participants would not be penalized for choosing not to participate, nor would it affect their academic standing. Letters provided details such as procedures, timelines, methods, risks, and benefits. All documents were provided in both French and English to ensure full comprehension.

Safeguarding

First, because I grade my students, doing research with them presents an ethical dilemma and exposes their vulnerability. To address this vulnerable status, I divided my study into the two distinct phases outlined earlier in this chapter. Phase One (January to June) included reflections of my practice, descriptions of my pedagogical approaches using multicultural literature, as well as questions I posed as a teacher. The nature of this research instrument was strictly reflective;

therefore, I did not use my teacher journal as an assessment tool, nor did I identify individual students in my entries as the focus was on my pedagogical practices. I occasionally reflected about moments of collective learning and referred to my ESL class' group dynamics in a generalized manner. As indicated in the recruitment section of this chapter, the power imbalance factor related to grading was removed and the previously outlined timeline for Phase Two (waiting until final grades were submitted the first week of June) was no longer necessary.

Second, it was important that I remained conscious about sensitive subject matters as we engaged with social justice literature. Stories can sometimes stir up feelings of guilt, resistance, or denial. Because participants read passages involving topics like poverty, racism, or brutality, this opened the possibility of instigating difficult or conflicting emotions. Likewise, if students recalled sensitive and personal issues resembling the ones addressed in the stories (i.e., loss of a loved one, bullying, feeling ostracized or marginalized for being different), they might have felt emotions related to sadness or anger about these issues. Tough topics arising from our multicultural units meant unpredictability in student responses, and the act of trying new perspectives, such as the characters in stories, was challenging. Providing mutually agreed-upon safe spaces was key for this inquiry. The ongoing practice of journalling enabled students to express their thoughts and emotions in confidence. Also, I closely monitored classroom activities, as always, to always ensure a safe environment during group conversations (as was already taking place as part of the regular classroom teaching). As we moved on to remote learning after March, these safeguards were maintained during virtual gatherings after my students and I mutually established some online how-to's and common practices.

Third, throughout the inquiry, respecting the dignity and welfare of others through what Stark (1998) called "awareness of and sensitivity to issues relating to power and vulnerability"

(as cited by Josselson, 2007, p. 558) was imperative. Choice and voice were respected under all circumstances. In like manner, I sought to recognize my own vulnerability, verify unchecked biases, and suspend possible assumptions I might harbour about my students' reactions to multicultural literature. On multiple occasions before and after the school closure, students were reminded of resources/support outlets located in their individual agendas, on the classroom community bulletin board, as well as on our Google Classroom platform. These resources for emotional support included contact information for the school social worker, the Kids Help Phone hotline, a local psychosocial intervention centre for children and adolescents, and the Mental Health Crisis Line.

Fourth, creating adequate conditions for the process of reflexivity to occur in an authentic and just manner was elemental. Thus, respecting participants' native language and their choice in manners of expression warranted a differentiating, and inclusive approach. French being the first language for most, students and I communicated in French in ESL class, when needed, to ensure full comprehension. In keeping with this approach, the end-of-year reflective questionnaire in Phase Two was also provided in both French and English to allow students to read the questions and write their answers in the language they preferred. As much as possible, I inserted direct quotes from participants in the data chapters and preserved the language in which they were originally written in the raw data. I reviewed the quotes in French for grammatical errors but maintained participants' verbatim accounts. I added my translation of these as well, for the reader. Participants' quotes that were originally written in English remained intact. By respecting participants' native language and their choice in manners of expression, I minimized the risks involving sensitivities relating to language barriers and misunderstandings, thereby preserving authenticity and comprehension. This measure also ensured that all voices were heard freely.

Fifth, safeguards were put into place in this study to manage the risk of a real or perceived teacher-student imbalance. For instance, I assigned pseudonyms to all participants in order to protect anonymity. Further, I only asked for permission to collect non-identifying pieces within students' multimedia portfolios (e.g., an inserted URL, a video clip, or a publicly available image that was used to represent learning). Therefore, no video or photography of the participants themselves was collected.

Sixth, I developed a reliable and ethical database through proper documentation, record-keeping, and safekeeping of electronically stored data to assure participants' confidentiality. As such, secure storage measures were planned for and maintained throughout the study. Before March, my teacher journal (paper copy) was stored in a locked document holder when I was in the school, and the key was always on my person. During remote learning, I kept my teacher journal locked in a drawer, inside my home office. All digital and text files pertaining to my reflections were saved on my school Google profile, a password-protected space. Hard copies of student portfolios were kept in the classroom until I obtained access to retrieve them during a COVID-19, safety-monitored visit of the school facility. I then placed them in a locked cabinet in my home office. Digital and text files were kept on students' individual Google profiles, which they accessed with a password provided to them by the school board.

Lastly, as some participants provided their written responses in French on the end-of-year reflective questionnaires, I translated them myself for data analysis and dissemination.

Self as Researcher: My Identity Surveyed

In the introduction to this chapter, I recall wondering what it meant to be a good teacher when I first entered the profession. One characteristic has always been of utmost value to me: that of relationship. The idea of being objective in research was foreign to me, and I considered

the rapport with my students to be an enriching vantage point as I partnered with them to explore their worldviews with multicultural literature. My posture as a teacher researcher and as a case study researcher contradicted the notion of distancing myself to gain knowledge about my students and our classroom experience. As such, Bissex (1987) suggested that "objectivity is not the sole route to knowledge" (p. 13), noting that knowledge can be achieved through closeness and intuition, thus eliminating the requirement of being "antiseptically detached" (p. 3). In the process of creating change, Freire (1970/2016) stated that to deny the important role of subjectivity is "naïve and simplistic," reiterating that people and the world "do not exist apart from each other, they exist in constant interaction" (p. 50). I, therefore, deliberate on my identity as both teacher and researcher, within the purview of a critical educator.

Negotiating a Duality of Roles. Despite some ethical concerns relating to my position as teacher and researcher, I believed it contributed to an empowering research approach, where my students and I would become what Lather (1986), quoting singer-poet Chris Williamson, referred to as "the changer and the changed" (p. 263). Consequently, attending to ethical concerns were a priority as I sought to ensure trustworthiness and credibility in my study. As previously stated, I contemplated several methodological options, most of them placing me as a researcher in the context of someone else's classroom. However, these choices did not seem to correspond with the research questions that had germinated in my classroom. Ultimately, I opted to preserve the genuineness of my research intentions by resolving to be my own instrument of research, which left me with a duality of roles to ponder. Scheffel (2011) described her quandary as a qualitative researcher working alongside children in a classroom as "[s]traddling the border between identities" (p. 62), one in which she learned to balance her roles as a teacher and researcher. Like

Scheffel, I determinedly negotiated the boundaries and biases that skirted my position, as detailed in the ethics section of this chapter.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) contended that duality of roles enhances participation in the inquiry process because "the borders between inquiry and practice are crossed, and the boundaries between being a researcher and being a practitioner are blurred" (p. 94). My interpretive frameworks as a practitioner equipped me with what Cochran-Smith and Lytle called a "truly emic view" (p. 18) that differs from an outside observer. As a teacher researcher who spends significant time at the research site and experiences a sense of place and history within it, I saw myself as ideally located to bring "a depth of awareness to [my] data that outside researchers cannot begin to match" (Hubbard & Power, 2003, p. xiv). Admittedly, I believed that by enacting the roles of both teacher and researcher in my own classroom environment, I could gain the kind of knowledge that comes from being emotionally involved, sharing the perspectives of my students, and therefore, being able to empathize with them (Diesing, 1971).

Recognizing My Sociocultural Identity. Engaging in a study that purposely sought to examine worldviews, and critically explore issues of social justice, forecasted an unpredictable journey of self-reflection for both myself and my students. Just as Parker Palmer claimed that good teachers possess a strong sense of personal identity (Centre for Courage & Renewal, 2016), so do good researchers, in my view. Before embarking on a journey of teaching and learning with multicultural literature and expecting my students to bare their thoughts and emotions, I wanted to avoid making the mistake Behar (1993) cautioned educators about when she said, "we reveal little or nothing of ourselves; we make others vulnerable, but we ourselves remain invulnerable" (p. 273). Indeed, when addressing tough topics like race, privilege, gender inequality, etc., making visible our own racial identities becomes "part of the research process

itself that must be theorized and interrogated along with other data" (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003, p. 12). As a White woman, taking stock of my sociocultural identity was a significant part of engaging in this inquiry; the process of examining values, assumptions, and biases was not solely imputed to my students, but one that I had to take up as well. Just as Weis et al. (2000) recognized the necessity to write ourselves in the research, I was prepared to uphold my responsibility to become partners with my students, in the journey of teaching and learning with multicultural literature. Glesne (2011) reminded me that by writing myself into the story of my research, I acknowledge that what I know about my research is entwined with what I know about myself. The reflexive character of my inquiry exposes the notion that as a researcher, my "effort to understand others' understandings is mediated by [my] own professional, personal, and collective knowledge and experiences" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 82). This reflexive work was crucial as I surveyed my sense of personal identity as a teacher and researcher in this study.

In earlier sections of this chapter, I discussed concerns of validity in teacher research due to the expansive and complex nature of this methodology, as well as the potential challenges arising from a duality of roles context. According to Klehr (2012), as teacher researchers work *against the grain* (Cochran-Smith, 1991), they are concerned that "people lose sight of . . . classroom research as a dynamic professional process" (p. 126). Teacher research, just as other qualitative research, is conducted in an ethical way to ensure validity and reliability, and it is trustworthy as long as there is rigour in accomplishing the inquiry (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Traditionally, the quality of a study has been measured with the criteria of validity and reliability; however, I entrusted the evaluation of my research according to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) redefined concepts of credibility (internal validity), consistency (reliability), transferability (external validity), and confirmability.

Methodological Rigour

Patterson and Shannon (1993) acknowledged that for teacher researchers, methodological rigour is manifested through reflection, creativity, inquiry, and action. Intrinsically, conducting research with my students can result in "a legitimate knowledge-creation exercise" (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, 2012) when devoting special attention to ethical issues, as sustained in the previous section. Nonetheless, Morse et al. (2002) asserted that it is the researcher's challenge to evaluate the quality of her qualitative inquiry and provide sufficient pragmatic evidence using ample verification strategies. To attend to this challenge, I sought to establish trustworthiness in my study.

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness in qualitative research, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), represents one way researchers can profess their research findings as legitimate. According to Kincheloe (1991), it is more accurate to use the term *trustworthiness* because "it connotes and signifies a different set of assumptions about research purposes than does the term 'validity'" (p. 135). In my efforts to establish trustworthiness within my data, I sensed I was revealing my own trustworthiness and competence as a teacher researcher (Patton, 2015). I strove to authenticate my study by adopting rigorous techniques and methods, motivated by a philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry, and a commitment to methodically report sufficient details of the entire process—from the data gathering to writing phases of my research (Patton, 1999). Nowell et al. (2017) argued that Lincoln and Guba's trustworthiness criteria, which I mentioned previously, "are pragmatic choices for researchers concerned about the acceptability and usefulness of their research" (p. 3).

Credibility. Credibility relates to the way research findings simulate reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In fact, Guba and Lincoln (1989) deemed the credibility of a study as achieved

when readers recognize the experience represented in the study. I borrowed several strategies to increase the credibility of my research, namely, immersing myself in the data for prolonged periods of time, triangulating data collection methods, comparing and cross-checking the data from multiple sources, and reflexivity (reflexive journalling and theorizing, recording reflections about potential codes/themes) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I heavily relied on the methodological principle of triangulation; a strategy originally introduced by Denzin (1970/1978) for validating qualitative research. According to Patton (2015), this powerful strategy increases a study's credibility "by countering the concern (or accusation) that [its] findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's blinders" (p. 674).

Consistency. Consistency pertains to replication of research findings, but because qualitative research involves inconstant human behaviour, it is more valuable to examine "whether results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 251). Merriam and Tisdell described the difference between reliability and consistency (or dependability) this way: "a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense—they are consistent and dependable" (p. 251), rather than expecting the study to be replicable.

During the coding and categorizing process of data analysis, the act of creating categories based on their relatedness to content, and devising rules of inclusion (proposition statements) to describe common properties for each category, are examples of methods I used to "render the category internally consistent" (p. 347). It is relevant to note that according to Spencer et al. (2014), the aim when analyzing data is not "to produce a perfectly consistently coded set. . . . the objective is to produce a meaningful account of the phenomenon . . . in a systematic and

transparent way so that the reader can see how concepts, themes or categories were developed"
(p. 278).

I applied several strategies such as triangulation, developing awareness of my dual roles
as teacher and researcher, and establishing an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I built the audit
trail from the start by clearly documenting every step of my research process: using a coding
framework and describing the coding and analysis processes in detail, selecting Glaser and
Strauss' (1967) constant comparative method to validate the accuracy of data, diagramming to
make sense of connections between categories/themes, and noting my thinking and decisions in a
memo section of my teacher journal. By putting all these strategies into place, I can explain how
I arrived at my findings from the data I collected.

Transferability. External validity deals with how research outcomes can be used in other
contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Antithetically, because this single case study aimed at
understanding the phenomenon of teaching and learning with multicultural literature within my
ESL class, I did not allege the outcomes to be true for every other classroom or school.
Therefore, by using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notion of transferability, I instead sought to
produce "sufficient descriptive data" (p. 298). According to Patton's (2015) view, other
researchers might extrapolate the findings, and consider other applications to similar situations,
rather than their generalizability. Ideally positioned as a teacher researcher, I used *thick
descriptions* to describe my accounts from an insider's point of view (Maxwell, 2013, p. 138) as
a strategy to increase the transferability of my study.

Confirmability. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), this last criterion is established
once credibility, consistency, and transferability are achieved. To confirm the legitimacy of my
research findings and my interpretation of the data, Koch (1994) suggested being transparent

about the manner in which theoretical, methodological, and analytical decisions were made, for instance, by reporting the reasons that motivated these choices throughout the study.

Summary and Looking Ahead

Inasmuch as teachers have a primary responsibility to their students, teacher research promotes an ethical standard to respond to students in their full humanity and dignity (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Throughout this chapter, I substantiated my methodological choices with salient literature, and rationalized those decisions with supportive arguments. I shared the pedagogical approaches and methods I envisioned and devised to conduct my research. I was transparent and took steps to contextualize my case study, and divulge all methods and procedures employed. I also discussed the ethical concerns that were present in my research design and described the actions I took to address them. Lastly, I communicated the manner in which I ensured the quality of my research by establishing methodological rigour.

More than a matter of sound procedures, I have also come to believe, like Hostetler (2005), that good research must include beneficial aims, one of which is to serve the well-being of students, teachers, and communities. From the beginning of this chapter, I have asserted the decision of engaging in teacher research as a way to re-examine my practice and challenge the status quo. Enacting inquiry as stance axiomatically placed me in the critical habit of mind in which I contemplated knowledge as both teacher and researcher, viewed practice as transformative, articulated thoughts on teaching and learning as part of a collectivity, and, engaged in research for democratic purposes and social justice ends (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011). Inviting my students to share this stance positioned us to espouse a critical and sociopolitical lens toward issues of social justice together.

In Chapters 5 through 9, I impart the experiences of a series of encounters with multicultural literature, from the viewpoints of both participants and teacher researcher. I tell the story of my ESL class' journey with multicultural books—more than that—of a learning adventure on which "horizons sprung wide and fear went away and the unknown became knowable" (Steinbeck, 2003, p. 142).

Chapter Five

A Focus on the Classroom: First Lens, Theme 1—Empathy

The goal of every storyteller consists of fostering in the child, at whatever cost, compassion and humanness, this miraculous ability of man to be disturbed by another being's misfortune, to feel joy about another being's happiness, to experience another's fate as your own.
~ Chukovsky (1928/1963)

The Making of a Story

Stories are read, told, and heard. They are inhabited by curious and imaginative souls who seek to breathe life into them with their hearts and minds. Stories reside in a question, a dialogue, a response, or a sigh. They are shared with intention, determination, courage, and a vulnerability that allows them to live on. Stories live on the pages of a chapter book, the illustrations in a picturebook, and everywhere in between. They shout injustices just as they whisper the promise of hope. Stories vibrate on the intonation of a well-performed read aloud, leap from the prosaic content of a novel, resound in a passionate debate, or unfold within the lines of a written journal entry. They awaken the senses: stirring excitement as a conflict heaves into view, provoking anger on the cusp of a climax, instilling hope from a character's courage, or drawing a tear as empathy is manifested. Most of all, stories are mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors, and they have allowed my students and I to live a unique experience abounding in growth and understanding as humans.

Five novels, six picturebooks, paper and electronic journals, numerous discussions and debates, portfolios brimming with poems, songs, research, and various artwork, all contributed to expanding our perception of self, other, and the world. The storied experience of Jessie, Amber, Kate, Phoebe, Timothy, Brooke, Carter, Esther, Shane, Andrew, Leo, Vincent, and myself begins

in this chapter and exposes our individual and collective journeys with the phenomenon of teaching and learning with multicultural literature. All participant names are pseudonyms.

After completing a careful analysis of the multiple data sources, I found myself contemplating the findings from three different viewpoints, or three lenses (see Table 5). I draw upon these three lenses to share my findings, the first of which is introduced in this chapter and is expanded through Chapters 6 and 7. The first lens is lengthy as it considers the data as a whole within the context of the classroom to contextualize and explore emerging themes in relation to students' experiences. Each subsequent lens narrows in focus with the third offering three portraits. The lenses are presented in order of analysis to highlight the process I undertook, one that reflects the "messiness of everyday experience" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 110) that is ingrained with rich data sets.

Table 5

Overview of the Three Lenses

Lens	Focus	Description
Lens 1	A Focus on the Classroom	A consideration on the classroom as a whole and themes emerging from students' learning experiences with multicultural literature
Lens 2	A Focus on my Perspective as Teacher	Themes emerging from pedagogical practices used in the classroom throughout this teacher inquiry
Lens 3	A Closer Look at Three Participant Portraits	Three distinct portraits of students' experiences with multicultural literature

The First Lens

The first lens features learners' experiences with multicultural literature units in our English as a second language (ESL) class. I outline three emerging themes within this first lens: empathy, insight, and agency, and expand on their salient relationship with each other (Maykut

& Morehouse, 1994). Each theme unveils secondary motifs, explaining how students were impacted by this pedagogical approach and its noteworthy ramifications. Findings were drawn from several data sources, including participants' end-of-year reflective questionnaires and portfolio contents such as dialogue journal entries, responses from discussion boards, artwork, and various multimodal productions. I also draw upon my teacher journal as a supportive data source in my quest to understand the role of multicultural literature in expanding learners' worldviews and shaping their perceptions as global citizens.

Emerging Theme 1: Empathy

When I embarked on this journey of multicultural book studies with my students, I felt a mixture of anxiety and excitement, but mostly, I was energized about sharing this experience together with them. As I revisited the question that would guide my inquiry, *How might using multicultural literature in the classroom expand adolescent learners' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens?* I remained attentive to what the data would reveal. In the analysis stage, I sought to prioritize the data for its relevance and prominence (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), and one of the main themes that emerged was empathy. In this chapter, participants' testimonials reveal how they strove to examine their assumptions about cultural differences through multicultural literature. The theme of empathy revealed three emergent subthemes (see Table 6, p. 164).

Developing Critical Awareness: The Value of Empathy

As students delved into each novel, I observed how their curiosity and enthusiasm soon turned into a growing sense of awareness that led to a desire to know more. From the summertime adventures of Arturo, a spirited thirteen-year-old who loves his Cuban American family (*The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*), to the journey of Parvana, a courageous Afghani girl

Table 6

First Lens, Theme 1

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Theme 1: Empathy</th></tr>
<tr><td>Developing Critical Awareness: The Value of Empathy</td><td>● Learning About the World in Authentic and Credible Ways
● Examining Assumptions and Biases
● Acquiring a New Lens</td></tr>
<tr><td>Engaging in Perspective-Taking: The Power of Empathy</td><td>● Perceiving Others Differently
● Connecting With Characters
● Cultivating Compassion</td></tr>
</table>

Homo Empathicus:
The Nature of Empathy

struggling for survival (*The Breadwinner* series), to the tragedy of Jerome, a Black teenager killed by a White police officer (*Ghost Boys*)—each of these characters and their stories, among others, left an imprint on students. Novelist Julian Barnes admitted that "[i]t was through books that [he] first realized there were other worlds beyond [his] own; first imagined what it might be like to be another person" (Barnes, 2012). Learners, like Kate, noticed early on during our multicultural book studies that their knowledge of the world and others could be expanded through reading our novels. Kate shared, "The books helped me understand the world is more than just our little town here and there is a lot more to learn about. It changed the way I see certain things and people" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). The subthemes in this chapter provide examples of the way students were disrupting the commonplace and questioning the usual way of seeing the world (Lewison et al., 2002), daring to interrogate the text and their positions toward it (Luke & Freebody, 1997), and reading words that would engage them with the world of facts, life, and struggles (Shor, 1987). Students acknowledged the impact of the

multicultural book studies on their worldviews and responded to this new way of seeing the

world by opening their minds to, and examining, cultural differences.

Learning About the World in Authentic and Credible Ways. Reading books with

greater representation and cultural diversity appeared to open the door for my students to learn

about different cultures, historical contexts, as well as global issues. As we encountered concepts

such as gentrification, poverty, gender inequality, the effects of war on children, discrimination,

prejudice, police brutality, racism, etc., I noticed that the outcome went beyond simply

expanding their knowledge base. More than previous years, learners listened attentively, asked

many questions, shared their wonderings and their reactions intently, and responded humbly, as

described in the quotes to follow. It was the beginning of a journey in critical literacy that would

have them questioning textual intentions and contemplating new frames from which to interpret

experience (Lewison et al., 2002). As such, Jessie recognized that,

> Reading the multicultural novels, I began to better understand the state of the world and
> the states that other people live in. I am now more aware than ever of the inequity of our
> world. The inequity that affects people daily, relentlessly, and unfairly. (Reflective
> Questionnaire, June 2020)

Amber was clear about why she liked the book:

> I also love this book cause it shows what is going on in Afghanistan without just being
> facts thrown at us or being just not developed stories, it's more about great stories with
> beautiful characters and we are learning at the same time about them and their cultures
> and what they're going through to survive. (Dialogue Journal, February 2020)

Boyd and Miller (2020) would suggest that Amber "[*wants*] opportunities to wrestle with social

topics in their classrooms" (p. 19, emphasis in original). Though students expressed a panoply of

emotions like sadness, frustration, and guilt after engaging with the book studies, they also

asserted their eagerness to gain authentic and credible information. Like Jessie and Amber,

students noticed how the books we read aimed to reflect cultural authenticity, or "the accuracy of the language, customs, values, and history of the culture" (Landt, 2006, p. 695), a goal I outlined in Chapter 4 regarding my text selection.

For example, after reading the first book of *The Breadwinner* series, we continued with the sequel, *Parvana's Journey*. As I read aloud the initial sentence, students gasped as they found out Parvana was burying her father. Students admitted it was an abrupt introduction to the new book and "emotions were running high among students—many disappointed that Father died so soon—even as they had made predictions during their book walk that Father would find the family with her" (Teacher Journal, January 16, 2020). Phoebe noted how Parvana felt a mixture of both disappointment and hope along her journey yet appreciated the author's willingness to include them: "I love how Deborah Ellis wasn't shy about describing how brutally challenging, difficult and miserable these children had to live through" (Dialogue Journal, February 2020). Generally, students recognized being changed by their reading experience and began to see the world in new ways because of the literature, acknowledging that by briefly immersing themselves in the stories and lives of the characters. Rather than learning only with facts, as Amber pointed out, they were being taught through both their minds and their hearts (Bieger, 1995; Rasinski & Padak, 1990).

Jessie became so enthralled with the story of Parvana that she took it upon herself to research Ellis' background and intentions in writing the series for young readers. She was curious to know whether social norms exposed in the story were representative of the culture (Cai, 1997). After learning more about the Canadian author, Jessie shared her appreciation:

> I admire Deborah Ellis because she portrayed an accurate and realistic depiction of what being a kid in Afghanistan is actually like. She didn't use these characters as a way to pity and dehumanize them but as a way to educate, show and teach people. She didn't put

words in the mouth of real kids but rather she listened to them. I know I'm getting off topic, but I think that just makes the story a hundred times better. Deborah Ellis travelled to places like Afghanistan. She was willing to go learn, listen and help . . . learning about the world is so important to me and I am very thankful to authors like Deborah Ellis. Parvana somehow felt real to me. As if she is out there, somewhere, and real. (Dialogue Journal, February 2020)

Deborah Ellis, an award-winning novelist, has often faced backlash from parents who do not think children should read about tough topics involving abuse or other forms of violence. Ellis defended her purpose for writing such books, admitting that "whatever we do to children around the world should be reflected in their literature, otherwise we shouldn't do it. If we're too embarrassed to tell them about it in their books, then we shouldn't be doing it" (Alex, 2019).

At the onset, I involved my students in deciding what type of activities they would like to include in our book studies. As we began to read *The Breadwinner*, we agreed to invite a war veteran as a special guest, who had served in Afghanistan, the book's setting. In advance of the speaker's visit, I asked students to prepare questions in a KWL chart graphic organizer (Ogle, 1986), a classroom instrument I use regularly to assess what a student *knows*, *wants* to know, and has *learned*. During the study of *The Breadwinner*, we addressed issues like the Taliban's oppressive regime at the beginning of the 21st century, Afghanistan's lengthy history of invasions, and refugee crises as a consequence. Students already knew some facts, including the injustice against women and girls in matters of gender rights, marriage, and education, but they were eager to ask questions to someone who may have witnessed the transgressions portrayed in the novel. Before the visit, the guest inquired about the content and level of censure for his presentation, in consideration of my students' age group. He proposed a choice of format, which I immediately shared with them. Students unanimously voted for the "gritty, boots-on-the-ground version" the veteran had suggested, rather than a more watered-down account of his

experience (Email Correspondence, January 9, 2020). The much-anticipated visit was a success, as the guest speaker delivered his testimonial to an attentive audience. During and after the visit, "I wondered if their impression of Afghan people would change or be influenced by what he had to say and his own interaction with the people (including children) in the context of a country in conflict/war" (Teacher Journal, January 27, 2020). Despite the graphic nature of our guest's personal testimony, authenticity and credibility were pivotal as learners tried to make some tangible sense of Parvana and her family's tragic story in the context of actual historical facts.

When asked students about the value of inviting veterans like our guest to come share their story with young people, they affirmed that "raising awareness" was essential "because veterans are the only people with first-hand accounts of what happened" (Teacher Journal, January 30, 2020). During this same group discussion, they agreed that "it was important for everyone to 'remember' what happened and pass it on, so that we can learn from the past and make better decisions" (Teacher Journal, January 30, 2020).

Authenticity was also mentioned as a key characteristic of the books and authors. While reading our first novel together as a class, *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*, Andrew appreciated the way the author used family as a main theme because of its importance, and "sometimes people die or become sick because this happens for everybody, but we got to pass over it" (Dialogue Journal, November 2019). Despite the harshness of life events like death or illness, students preferred reading stories depicting realistic human situations which they themselves may have lived and expect people to live. After reading her selected novel for our final unit of study, *A Bird on Water Street*, Jessie pointed to the authentic nature of her book as she described this passage in her journal:

> They all experience and live life differently. They all have different beliefs and views and goals. This diversity affects the story by giving it a sense of authenticity . . . That's also

why I have such a deep sense of respect for the characters (and their author). They aren't just blank pieces of paper, they're all complex and lively . . . This book makes me think a lot, it's truly eye-opening. (Dialogue Journal, May 2020)

The above examples demonstrate how learners recognized, appreciated, and respected authors' decisions to address social justice struggles in their books by depicting genuine characters and situations, and rendering them credible within a historical context. By reading authentic and credible narratives, immersed in cultural richness, and faithfully portraying people in their historical and social contexts (Yokota, 1993), they learned about the world in which they live in deeper, meaningful ways by developing empathic awareness.

Examining Assumptions and Biases. Just as students appreciated how multicultural books address tough topics in authentic and credible ways, the multicultural books we read encouraged them to examine their own assumptions and personal biases. Jessie disclosed,

The books were sort of a revelation, they gave me a new and improved understanding of what I've never experienced, or even seen, for myself. Reading *The Breadwinner* series, I noticed how some things that would seem odd to me are part of other people's lifestyles and routines. I was blinded by my own surroundings for so long and *The Breadwinner* series made me see what I couldn't before. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Jessie began to enter a critical process in which she used language to identify "implicit modes of perception" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383) and possibly challenge them. As we embarked on this journey of self-reflection and self-examination, students, like Jessie, came to realize that learning entails risk, and may even require them to "[give] up a former condition in favour of a new way of seeing things" (Boostrom, 1998, p. 399).

In the end-of-year survey, when asked how the novels differed from other novels they read in the past, ten of the twelve participants spoke to one common difference. The difference they noted was the entertaining yet informative aspect of our books, especially as they engaged

in deeper-level thinking about real world issues and different cultures. For instance, Phoebe stated that books she usually read in her leisure time were ones in which you could escape. Realizing the stark reality of ongoing issues such as racism, gender inequality, and poverty, Phoebe acknowledged how the multicultural books we read "didn't let you escape, they let you come in if that makes sense. Show you what the world really is" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Timothy, Phoebe, Jessie, and Shane each explained how the books "opened their eyes" (Reflective Questionnaires, June 2020) to new cultures, issues, and worldviews.

Taking a closer look at the differences in the lived experiences of others in the world, albeit through fictitious characters, created sobering moments in our classroom. Like Phoebe's comment below, in connection to *Parvana's Journey*, others also confessed they sometimes take their good fortune for granted:

> I also wanted to talk about another part of this book: adults. See, in this book rarely adults are mentioned when they were mentioned, the one scene that really made my heart break for the children was when the man in the village had cheated on them. He knew they were homeless and hungry and tired children, but still, he didn't care. I know here, in our reality, we take our shelter, our home, family and food for granted. (Dialogue Journal, February 2020)

By inviting learners to read provocative stories of others, they were able to share their own stories, thereby "gaining a greater understanding of the text, [coming] to a greater appreciation of their own voyage through life" (Morrell & Morrell, 2012, p. 12).

A new set of social justice issues was introduced as we began our fifth novel study featuring *Ghost Boys*. With it came new opportunities for students, individually and collectively, to consider the novel's overarching theme of racism. I began by reading aloud the afterword, as suggested by the author, which introduced the concepts of *conscious* and *unconscious racism* (Rhodes, 2018, p. 205). This prompted a discussion around these terms. I reflected: "students are

listening attentively and engaged already at this early stage. . . . Many have ideas about [racism]"

(Teacher Journal, March 6, 2020). Many students were quick to report that they had never

engaged in racism, consciously or unconsciously. It seemed others were reluctant to avow or

disavow in front of the others, and I reminded everyone about their choice and right to privacy as

we tackled these complex issues in a mutually agreed upon, safe, and respectful environment.

hooks (1994) reminded us that when we introduce topics that impassion students, "there is

always a possibility of confrontation, forceful expression of ideas, or even conflict" (p. 39). We

defined and discussed other terms such as *prejudice*, *oppression*, *privilege*, *discrimination*, *bias*,

diversity, and *ostracism*. I asked students to ponder these concepts and comment in their

journals. The honesty of their remarks stood out to me. Vincent, for example, shared: "I am able

to be prejudice [*sic*] sometimes but I realize it only when it is too late sometimes" (Dialogue

Journal, March 2020). Surprised that so many people remained unaware of Black children being

bullied because of their skin colour, Andrew speculated that "[a]fter reading our books . . . we

know so little about what's happening in the world around us. A lot of times, we don't even

realize that we are being racist" (Student Portfolio, May 2020).

  In the year-end questionnaire, Jessie recommended teachers use questioning and self-

reflection to "make [students] think. Lead them and make them consider instead of letting them

read without truly taking in the words they see", adding that this kind of learning would be

impactful as students would "use what they've learned in the span of a year their entire lives"

(Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). In her longitudinal study, Naidoo (1992) concluded that

when addressing topics like racism with White students, we are "challenging them not only to

extend their range of empathy but to question their frames of reference and thus elements of their

own identities" (p. 146). In preparing for *Ghost Boys*, we talked about possible challenges they

may face, such as reconciling the perception of ourselves to our words and actions. The concepts

of conscious and unconscious racism, found in Rhodes' (2018) afterword, led us to consider our

own positionality as it pertained to race. As Gladwell (2005) pointed out, "our unconscious

attitudes may be utterly incompatible with our stated conscious values" (p. 85). In this study,

Ghost Boys was instrumental in helping learners consider their attitudes, assumptions, and

values, as evidenced in students' feedback across all themes.

In addition to drawing humbling conclusions, engaging with multicultural literature

prompted students to make discoveries about their current perspective and contemplate the

possibility of adopting a new lens with which to see the world and others. For example, Carter

observed the following about himself after reading his novel for the final unit:

> [A] quote that really made me think was 'My dad says the dogs and cats in America are
> luckier than most people in the world.' I had never thought of it like that when I read the
> quote, I thought about it for a while, something I hadn't done for any other quote in the
> entire book. It is crazy to me that some pets have more rights than people. (Dialogue
> Journal, June 2020)

Diatta (2018) suggested that when given the opportunity to analyze topics like race, gender

inequality, or poverty through literature, it allows learners who are not directly affected by these

issues to open their minds to their significance and impact. Moreover, according to Miall (2006),

the power of stories can help students understand the social world in new ways by offering

alternative frameworks to understand and feel about the world differently. As evidenced in

multiple responses from participants, heightened curiosity, and appetite to know more about the

world motivated learners to reflect on what they saw in their mirrors and weigh in on possible

new lenses with which to see the world.

Acquiring a New Lens. Amber focused on testing and worldview in her

recommendations to other teachers interested in using multicultural novels:

Aussi une petite recommandation que je donnerais à l'enseignante est de ne pas essayer de donner un test sur le livre après, donne un test sur comment que l'élève se sent après le livre sur le sujet et si ça a affecté sa version du monde, à cause que tu veux vraiment essayer de faire sentir l'élève pas comme s'il apprend tout ça juste pour le test, mais vraiment pour sa vision du monde, si cela fait du sens.

[Also, I would recommend that the teacher not test on the book, rather test on how her students feel after reading, their reactions on topics and if it affected their worldview because you want students to feel like they've learned not just for a test, but truly for the way they see the world, if that makes sense] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

For Amber and her classmates, talking about the effect of acquiring a new lens seemed to trump other assessment activities to which they had been submitted in the past. Amber's recommendation reflected the significance of being asked about her worldview, and the opportunity to connect her learning to real-life applications. Each participant indicated that they had gained some form of new awareness, whether through a sudden realization, or progressive change in their perception. They discovered that after reading the books, the world they lived in was "not what it seems" (Esther, Student Portfolio, May 2020), was really different than previously imagined, and was "not fair for everyone" (Brooke, Student Portfolio, May 2020). Students' responses supported that engaging with multicultural literature not only provided an opportunity to foster awareness, but also to instigate action upon the world (Morrell & Morrell, 2012; Newstreet et al., 2018).

Students described the repositioning of their viewpoints as sometimes sudden or surprising, while also welcoming their unsettling learning process. Some ascertained that they had not been granted occasions in their educational journey to learn about a more truthful version of the world. Amber divulged,

J'ai découvert que ma vision du monde était en rose comme un peu l'expression de la vie en rose! En fait, je me sentais après avoir eu toute cette information comme si je ne connaissais pas le monde du tout, comme ma version du monde toute ma vie avait été

différente, je ne vivais pas sur la même planète. . . . J'aimerais vraiment que tout le monde ait une éducation avec les livres multiculturels comme celle que moi j'ai eu! Je crois que ça ferait en sorte que nous aurions une meilleure société! Aussi j'aimerais que tout le monde ait les mêmes privilèges que moi j'ai!

[I discovered that my worldview was through 'rose-coloured glasses'! In fact, after learning from all the books, I felt like I didn't know the world at all, like my version of the world until now had been different—not living on the same planet. . . . I would like everyone to receive an education from the multicultural books like the one I received! I think this would allow for a better society! Also, I would like everyone to have the same privileges I have] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Amber's discovery was critical in the way she viewed her own education. Lewison et al. (2000) explained that by trying to protect children from the complex and sometimes contemptible issues of our society, educators project an ideal but unrealistic world that "is disconnected from children's everyday experiences and makes classrooms appear to be places where one cannot engage in anything real or important" (p. 14). Recalling her learning with multicultural literature as a privilege, Amber was able to regard her journey as impactful, not only as a student, but as a teenage girl. For her part, Jessie responded similarly in that she felt she had not been exposed to a more authentic interpretation of the world during her school years. She acknowledged that being taught about the consequences of war on people, for example, evoked a deep learning experience:

I always knew war was a prominent issue in the world but reading about how it truly affects people—children—spoke to me differently. Maybe that's because I was always given the watered-down version of things, or maybe it's because I wasn't properly informed and educated on the matter. Whatever the reason, *The Breadwinner* series taught me the most. You learn a lot from books that are set in environments different to your own. There's an element of shock that comes with it; an element of shock that everyone should experience, mind you. (Jessie, Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Jessie was not the only one who experienced shock. Before we started reading the Ellis series, and to provide a historical and political context for the books, I showed a video documentary

(Journeyman Picture, 2013) about the Taliban and women in Afghanistan. Asked about their impressions of the video, Esther responded, "I was so shock [*sic*] and sad because it's not fair that these womens [*sic*] are not allowed to do there [*sic*] own decision! . . . I really learned how lucky I am to make my own decision" (Student Portfolio, November 2019). Kate also found the information in the video shocking and was surprised that so many "innocent female civilians" were being treated cruelly (Student Portfolio, November 2019).

According to Bean and Harper (2006), students need to become troubled by reading texts, especially involving global politics that deal with matters of freedom and equality, such as *The Breadwinner*. In *Teaching for Hope*, Werner (2016), subscribing to the tenet that knowledge is power, argued that teachers can strengthen young people's belief in their future by addressing global topics with care, rather than avoiding them. Like many others, Jessie understood her learning with the books to be a disruptive process through which she believes everyone should go if they are to empathize. Faundez and Freire (1989/1998) reminded us that, "[a]t root human existence involves surprise, questioning and risk. And because of all this, it involves actions and change" (p. 37).

In their own words, students affirmed that acquiring a new lens with which to see the world was an exercise in reflexivity, responsibility, assertiveness, and the hope of change. Through reading multicultural literature, learners developed awareness and new ways of seeing; in sum, achieving cultural competence (Fennes & Hapgood, 1997; Morrell & Morrell, 2012) that contributed to a flourishing sense of empathy. As a critical educator and researcher reflecting on her practice daily, I realized the pedagogy I was employing throughout the book studies advocated for conditions that would enable students to question systems of power and provide spaces where they could explore their potential as critically engaged citizens (Giroux, 2010).

Engaging in Perspective-Taking: The Power of Empathy

      As students read and participated in the multicultural novel activities, they grew more attentive to what the act of perspective-taking would teach them, and the unexpected lessons it would reveal. In the acclaimed novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960/2010), the protagonist, Atticus Finch, claims that "[y]ou never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it" (p. 39). As humans, it can be difficult to change our mindsets and attitudes. Bieger (1995) plainly admitted that "[c]hildren cannot be sensitized to the existence of people who are not like them by merely being told to like others" (p. 308). Jessie divulged that because of the multiple perspectives offered in the novels, she "could see how each character was affected by their surroundings and how the events made them feel", and by looking at a situation from different points of view, "it was easier for us readers to put ourselves in others' shoes" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Jessie's thoughts corresponded with Emery's (1996) belief that students might gain a better understanding of the human condition, be moved by the characters' experiences, and become more empathic. Although perspective-taking proved to be a contributory element to the emerging theme of empathy, I noticed that learners had been inspired to use it throughout the entire novel studies. In other words, more than being a single-use strategy, adopting perspective-taking as a stance had invited students to develop it "as a habit of mind through which they acknowledge, respect, understand, and possibly still disagree with alternative perspectives" (Thein et al., 2007, p. 59). To that end, when trying to promote empathy, Case (1993) says that it is not sufficient to merely learn about other people and cultures if we seek to understand them better. For this reason, implied in my pedagogical approach was the goal of developing empathy. While empathy was present to begin with, engaging in perspective-taking revealed how it became a

central component of students' experiences. As such, their sense of empathy matured as they interacted with the books and their characters.

Perceiving Others Differently. As students examined assumptions about cultural differences, I noticed how, like Atticus Finch, some willingly slipped into characters' skins and transported themselves into a powerful moment. Many students expressed their thoughts unprompted, in their journals, or in group conversations. Engaged in a written dialogue with her classmate, Brooke shared her opinion about an injustice encountered in *The Breadwinner*, and seized on the power and potential of perspective-taking:

> Something I've always wondered about is why the Taliban have to beat up women when they go outside alone. It shouldn't be the end of the world if women go outside without a burqa or a man. They are like everyone else but the only difference is their gender. If only the Taliban would put themselves in the girls' position and imagine how they would feel if women beat them up and men couldn't go outside without a woman. (Dialogue Journal, in response to Andrew, December 2019)

In the same vein, Amber imagined herself in another time, place, and position when she was taken aback by the cruelty in *Stella by Starlight*. In this story about Stella, a young African American growing up in the 1930s segregated South, the right to vote is not viewed as a privilege for all. When Stella rides into town with her father and his friends seeking to register their vote, she witnesses the blatant inequality and disrespect dispensed by the White townsmen. Despite the mistreatment, her father and companions stand together, and bravely exercise their right to vote. Surprised by the story's historical context and its crude racism, Amber internalized the characters' experience by mirroring how they reacted (Oatley, 2011),

> The thing that surprised me the most so far, is the way that they treat black people and how the Ku Klux Klan operate. Like how rude can they be to other people. Like when they went to go vote, they made Stella's father and the priest pay for voting when white people didn't even have to pay or to take the test before. Plus they say it right to their face that the reason that all of this is happening is because they're black. Honestly, imagine if

like people told this to you and how shocked you would be? Like if I tried to go vote which is one of our rights and people tried to stop me from doing that, I would have done the same thing as them. (Dialogue Journal, May 2020)

About midway through the reading of *Ghost Boys*, students contemplated characters' perspectives as they faced different consequences at this point in the book. To contextualize, Jerome is the protagonist, a Black boy who is shot by a White police officer, Officer Moore. From his perspective as "Dead" and "Alive", we read accounts of the story as he moves back-and-forth from one state to the other. In his ghost state, Jerome struggles to understand his death and its devastating consequences on his family. In contrast, the White Officer Moore defends his actions during a preliminary hearing and admits that he truthfully feared for his life when he shot the boy. Witnessing this allegation, Jerome asks, "When truth's a feeling, can it be both? Both true and untrue?" (Rhodes, 2018, p. 132). Phoebe explained it this way:

> When truth is a feeling, it can be both, true and untrue. It always is. Because there is always someone somewhere that is gonna say that your truth is wrong and theirs is right. A person will choose whether the feeling regarding the truth is true or untrue based on their perspective. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Phoebe's assuredness was palpable as she pointed to a decisive factor—one's perspective. Students wrestled with this concept and juggled with their understanding of it, especially as it pertained to absolutes, like truth versus untruth, and right versus wrong. Whether writing in their dialogue journals, debating with their peers in class, or individually reflecting on their own beliefs and assumptions, learners were grappling with the mechanics of perspective-taking. Andrew shared his thoughts on it:

> The thing that can influence a person to see a certain situation is from where he or she sees the situation. If a person is in the situation in the street, he will see a situation a different way than if he was looking at the situation. When someone only hears [about] a situation he will not know what happened so he would see the situation differently than someone that was in it. Officer Moore was scared for his life when he [saw] Jerome with

the toy gun so he decide [*sic*] to shoot because he didn't know it was a toy. So he sees the situation like someone is dangerous. Jerome has seen the situation completely differently. Jerome was praying when he got shot so we see that as racism, he was thinking that the officer doesn't like black kids and he sees them as dangerous. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Andrew attempted to describe his understanding of perspective as he applied it to Jerome's and Officer Moore's predicaments. He imagined what the situation would look like from the victim's point of view and interpreted what it might feel like to occupy the perpetrator's shoes. Using a critical literacy approach, students were thinking on different and contradictory perspectives (Lewison et al., 2000; Nieto, 1999), therefore realizing that the aspect of positionality played a crucial role in how they read the story. It became second nature for them to adopt characters' viewpoints and consider the story through these multiple filters as it unfolded. Digging deeper to understand human qualities embedded in stories (Emery, 1996), learners began to infer characters' motivations behind their actions. Timothy wrote,

> [T]he officer that killed Jerome let his personal opinions influence how he saw the situation. It made the officer think that Jerome was dangerous when in reality Jerome just had a toy. This is the same sort of situation with the others [ghost boys], the person that killed them let their biases get the better of them and that clouded their judgment. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Students discovered that positionality was not the only aspect that could shape someone's perspective. Reading the text critically also means paying attention to the voices that might have been silenced (Harste et al., 2000), as well as questioning whose voices are missing (Luke & Freebody, 1997). Timothy's entry illustrates his suspicion that bias and clouded judgment were influential in the deaths of Jerome, Emmett Till, and the other ghost boys roaming about—a thought that was echoed by Phoebe, who added emotions and prior experience to the mix:

> A person's perspective is how they view a certain thing or situation. They use previous knowledge and experiences to choose on what "side" they are on. But some people also

let their emotions cloud their judgement. Which can interfere with the actual perspective. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Although students noted that many elements can significantly affect a person's individual perspective, they questioned whether it could ever be right or wrong; students' viewpoints varied. Both Phoebe and Jessie believed that it can be right or wrong, depending on the information, and the person. For example, "some people just agree with others based on what they say. Sometimes, people take a stand for what they believe, they use what they see through their eyes to justify a certain thing" (Phoebe, Dialogue Journal, April 2020). Jessie explained that,

> [s]ome perspectives are harmful and they are harmful in a way that is meant to be. Some people believe it is okay for them to hurt others and put them in the way of harm. Some people do so consciously and while completely aware they are being unfair. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Brooke believed that we cannot qualify someone's perspective as right or wrong, because that is how each of us sees the world, "almost like an opinion. Different, no right or wrong" (Dialogue Journal, April 2020). By analyzing the contents of numerous journal entries, I was able to see, in a very practical way, how "[a]s inventors of these alternative voices and positions, these students were beginning to shift from their typical role of meaning-consumer to meaning-makers in their own right" (Locke & Cleary, 2011, p. 137).

Students were asked to remember a time when their perception of a character was altered in the books they had encountered. Kate concluded that Nooria (*The Breadwinner*) acted the way she did because she was in a life-or-death situation, and after all, she had been "viewing her all wrong" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Amber viewed Jerome and Parvana's personalities a certain way in the beginning, admitting that she did not comprehend why they reacted the way they did: "je voyais la personnalité de chacun des personnages vraiment

différemment et quelque fois je me demandais pourquoi il réagissait comme cela" [I saw their personalities differently and at times wondered why they reacted the way they did] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). However, after reading their stories, she concluded, "je comprends pourquoi" [I finally understand why] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020).

Phoebe was convinced Asif was just going to be a snob, but "he turned out to be better than that, was just hidden behind the pain, fear, hatred and anger that dwelled within" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Jessie described her thinking process like this:

> At first, I had a very negative point of view of Officer Moore. I had no empathy and no commiseration for him. . . . Although his actions are not excusable, I wouldn't use them as a way to judge him in the future. I think it's important to be open to the possibility of people being able to change. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

In his study, Oatley (2011) deemed that, aside from improving social skills, building empathy, and helping to consider others' points of view, reading stories are simulations that "can help readers understand not just the characters in books but human character in general" (p. 63). Could perspective-taking, coupled with curiosity, help us envision a more understanding society? Gladwell (2020) suggested that we must be curious about people if we are to empathize with them and avoid imputing inaccurate first impressions to them. As evidenced in learners' responses above, putting on another's perspective when engaging with literary fiction allowed them to perceive, explain, understand, and empathize with their situation differently. Thus, perspective-taking becomes a fundamental skill to acquire for building empathy (Hodges et al., 2018).

Connecting With Characters. When students participated in perspective-taking, the effects went beyond developing an ability to perceive others differently, as demonstrated in the previous section. Students emotionally connected with many of the characters, saw themselves in

them, and used them as role models (Bruner, 1986). Amber described how she bonded with

Parvana throughout the reading of *The Breadwinner* series: "Je me sentais comme si je pouvais

être amie avec elle et comme nous connections à quelque part" [I felt like we could be friends,

that we connected on some level] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). In the same series,

Brooke identified with the character of Leila, seeing herself reflected in her:

> My least favourite part was when Leila died because she was like a little sister to
> Parvana. She was an important character in the book, and also one of my favourite
> characters because of her personality. She kinda reminds me of myself. (Dialogue
> Journal, February 2020)

In narrative worlds such as Parvana's, students became deeply affected by conflicts portrayed,

reacted to characters' relationships, and found themselves feeling genuine emotions (Oatley,

1994). When young Leila is killed by a landmine, Amber reflected,

> I found that it's very sad how Leila died and I find it very sad how children die this way
> and actually have to face these struggles. . . . When in the book Leila passed away, it was
> something that really marked me, and I almost cried cause I don't know why but she
> really sticked [*sic*] out for me and reminded me of my little cousin that I love more than
> the whole entire world. (Dialogue Journal, February 2020)

Through Leila, Parvana, Asif, and other characters in Ellis' novels, students grappled with

foreign concepts like war and its devastating consequences on children especially. Like Monobe

and Son (2014) discovered, emotions became a very central and prominent characteristic in my

students' journey with multicultural literature. In fact, Oatley (1999) reported that literary works

of fiction necessarily involve emotions, and echoed Bruner (1986) in his statement that narrative

reflects an important mode of thinking "about what is possible for human beings in which

protagonists, on meeting vicissitudes, experience emotions" (p. 103). Further, my students

understood characters in our novels to be extensions of real human subjects. Although the

concept of a character is "an extraordinarily elusive idea" (Bruner, 1986, p. 37), they yearned to

connect with them, make meaning of their circumstances, and even feel hope for them. For

example, Jessie admitted growing attached to the characters and not anticipating coming to the

end of a good novel:

> I want to know what happens next. I want to know Shauzia's story and what has
> happened to her. Most importantly I want to know if all the characters will be okay. I
> guess it's kind of silly since chances are, none of them actually exist. At least, if I knew
> these fictional kids were okay, it would give me hope for all the real ones. (Dialogue
> Journal, February 2020)

Like Wilhelm (2016), I noticed that readers consciously connected with characters by

bringing a great deal of their own lives to the literature, thereby enabling them to "draw

comparisons from the literary experience to their own lives" (p. 114). Phoebe wished she could

talk to Henry, the Black medic in *Allies*. Moved by his story amid the World War II, she noted

how "people still fight, people still judge, people still discriminate. I'd tell him that I'm proud of

him to want to save lives, even when it was hard for him to maybe even save his" (Reflective

Questionnaire, June 2020). Jessie yearned to understand Officer Moore's (*Ghost Boys*) mind and

the way he sees the world because "it would give insight on how many real people, who have

done things similar as him, see it" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). As I watched my

students engage with characters in the stories, I observed what Oatley (1999) called a simulated

social experience, both cognitively and emotionally. Kate testified to the affective reaction she

experienced: "That book [*The Breadwinner*] made me feel so many emotions, not like crying but

anger, sadness, guilt, and many more that I expressed in my dialogue journal" (Reflective

Questionnaire, June 2020). Experiencing such a deeply-felt simulation may even impact

students' actual social worlds (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Mar et al., 2008)—an instance evident in

Esther's reaction to *The Breadwinner*. She recalled how Parvana left a lasting impression on her,

and that her love for her family and willingness to risk her life to find them "nous montre que

nous aussi on doit aimer notre famille et savoir servir les autres avec amour" [shows us we must love our family and learn to serve others with love] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Jessie described the influence the books had on her, especially through her affinity with the characters:

> Because I could see myself in some of the characters of the books we read, I was able to use them as role models. I could relate to some of them. Even if our situations were different in most ways, we still had similarities. And when a character you can see yourself in succeeds or finds what they were looking for, it makes you feel like the same is possible for you. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Monobe and Son (2014) suggested that students are inclined to critically view the world once they connect personally to characters' lives, and vicariously experience others' emotions by reading literature, participating in discussions, and engaging in other pedagogical activities that deepen their understanding of global matters.

As shown above, participants' responses revealed that they were not left unscathed by Parvana and Leila's unjust environment, nor were they left uninspired by their constant courage and determination. Aside from *The Breadwinner* series, the other novels we read also played a significant role in transforming students' viewpoints; like the way *Ghost Boys* left students perturbed by characters' struggles and grappling with injustice. Fictional stories are akin to art forms, and according to nineteenth-century novelist George Eliot, "a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellowmen beyond the bounds of our personal lot" (Cook, 2004, p. 145). Amber, Brooke, Kate, Esther, Phoebe, and Jessie's responses testify to Robinson's (2013) belief that learners need to engage with literature depicting human experiences and emotions that "provide opportunities for catharsis and empathy" (p. 43). The intimate connections with characters, and their lasting impression on students, as established in their own words, is a testament to the power of literature in contributing to the development of empathic responses.

Cultivating Compassion. Students imagined conversations with some of their favourite characters that included messages of concern, encouragement, hope, and compassion. As they created artwork, poems, and wrote letters to them, they developed relationships with characters and became keenly invested in their fictional lives. These relationships moved beyond the act of perspective-taking, toward developing compassion through imagination. At the same time, they were increasingly willing to examine their own assumptions and to remain open to perceive differences more critically and consider alternative viewpoints. Phoebe created a collage (see Figure 5) out of the myriad of feelings she was experiencing after reading *Ghost Boys*. In it, she included several poems and messages written from both her point of view, and Jerome's, the protagonist. She described it as a "comic book style" timeline project in which she paid tribute to the characters in the story who left an impact on her. Phoebe described her work as a "great long-lost love I never knew I needed to make" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020).

Figure 5

Phoebe's Comic Book Style Collage (Student Portfolio, April 2020)

Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Brooke expressed her gratitude to Stella (*Stella by Starlight*), thanking her for lifelong lessons

and an opportunity to change her worldview: "I find that Stella has taught me more than I

already knew. She changed my point of view on the world and the people who live in it. And I

thank her for that" (Dialogue Journal, May 2020). Phoebe's and Brooke's examples demonstrate

how reading fictional stories lets us set aside our own concerns in exchange for the story's

protagonist; although we don't literally experience the character's emotions, we do respond by

feeling our own genuine emotions befitting the situation described by the author (Oatley, 2011).

The powerful impact of the characters on my students left an impression on me. I noted

in my journal:

> There is something powerful about a teenager expressing worry, sadness, and other
> feelings of being "unsettled" about fictitious characters in a book. The character is not
> real, and they are aware of this, yet their emotional reactions are! They are reacting as if
> the people were alive and real. I think they grasp the potential of them being real,
> especially the children characters. Also, based on many of their comments, they
> comprehend the truth about the characters' representation of real people, living in such
> circumstances even today. Students do demonstrate a care for justice and are very skilful
> at identifying injustices. (Teacher Journal, March 8, 2020)

Like Nussbaum (1995), I was cognizant of the narrative imagination that occurred as we engaged

with literature because of "an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of

other people whose lives are distant from our own" (p. xvi, preface). Indeed, when students were

prompted to imagine themselves inviting a favourite character to their house for one day, they

responded without hesitation. Knowing the hardships most of the characters in our stories faced,

some displayed vivid imagery and were elated at the prospect of such a moment. Amber planned

to pamper not one, but two characters:

> If I could invite my favourite character from the previous books that we read it would
> probably be Stella. I had a hard time choosing between Stella and Parvana. You know
> what, I changed my mind. Can I invite them both? You know what I would do, a runway

show at my dad's house trying on all of my clothes, then we would go make homemade pizzas. I would say to them remember this day when all of your world is upside down and tell yourself one day it will be happy like that again. . . . We would sleep in the coziest bed in the house and just enjoy life together, kind of like a spa day! I feel like both of them would need it. (Dialogue Journal, June 2020)

Kate visualized this opportunity from a different angle when she picked Jerome. She confessed not being sure what they would do for that whole day, but that she has many questions she wanted to ask him:

What was your first thought of being shot? Did you immediately think it was because of your skin colour? Were you surprised when you realize [*sic*] that after death you become a ghost? . . . I would ask him questions like that but, the biggest question I would ask him before he left would be: 'How can I, a white person, help stop racism?' (Kate, Dialogue Journal, June 2020)

Kate was the one who asked the most questions, and throughout the whole multicultural book adventure, she learned to feel comfortable with all those questions, even when they remained unanswered. Bruner (1986) considered narrative as a distinctive mode of thought which deals with possibility rather than certainty. As such, learners explored their conceptions of human nature, and within this subjunctive reality of storytelling, grappled with the way characters' intentions collide with reality (Bruner, 1986).

About halfway through her last novel, *A Bird on Water Street*, Jessie decided to create a digital collage (see Figure 6, p. 188), seizing the mood of this story which revolves around Jack Hicks, a boy living in a small, Appalachian mining town. Jack is the protagonist who seeks to remain true to himself as his family and community endure economic hardships, and an environmental landscape ravaged by decades of pollution. Once she was finished reading the book, Jessie decided to reproduce the collage (see Figure 7, p. 189), this time capturing the essence of Jack's personality, struggles, and hopes, as well as his evolution as a character.

Figure 6

Jessie's Initial Digital Collage About Jack Hicks, With Comments (Student Portfolio, May 2020)

May 27th, 2020

A BIRD ON WATER STREET

Jack Collage

One thing I absolutely wanted for my collage of Jack Hicks was the portrayal of the mood of the book. I wanted to get the same feeling from it as I get by reading the book. ~~I wanted~~ To achieve that, I had to incorporate several important aspects of the story into the collage. Things like the dryness and erosion of Coppertown but also the nature that plays a big role in the life of Jack. The background image, as well as the cut-out of the Company, are from real pictures of Copperhill, Tennessee. To most accurately represent Jack I included seedlings, like the ones he's growing, his Converse shoes, his dream BMX bike and the leafs he grew so fond of while picking a pumpkin. I also included the train that almost him, seeing as that part of the book plays a big role in Jack's life. Hopefully I succeeded in making the collage true to him.

Note. Images used with the permission of the participant.

Figure 7

Jessie's Second Digital Collage About Jack Hicks, With Comments (Student Portfolio, June 2020)
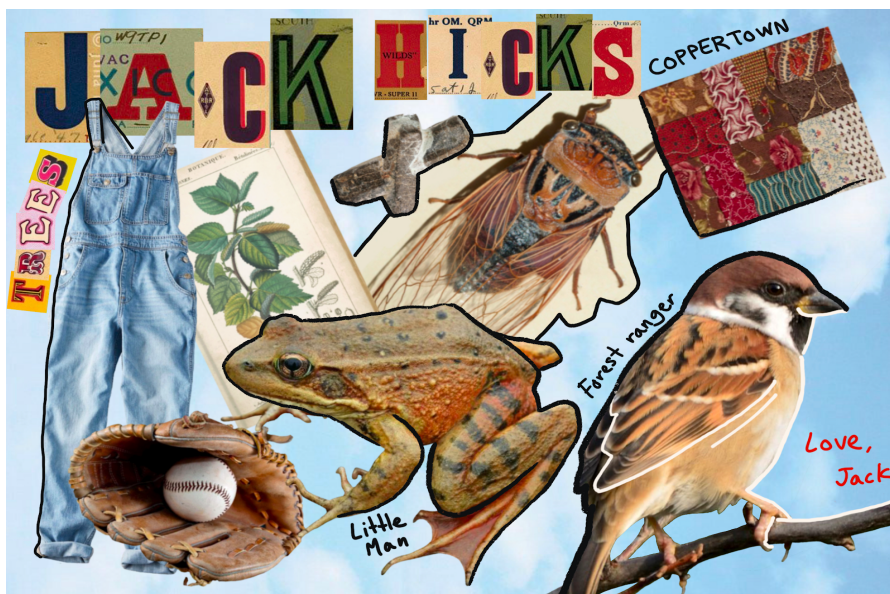
June 4th, 2020

Jack Hicks Collage

I just finished reading A Bird on Water Street and I must say, deciding upon a layout for my collage wasn't easy. There were so many things I wanted to include (a fishing rod, trees, more plants) but couldn't because of the limited space. I wanted to make the collage as true to Jack as possible. I wanted for the viewer to get a good sense of who Jack is by looking at the components of my collage. Last time I made a collage for this book, I made it represent the story more than Jack himself. And although I didn't include the picture of the Company or the dry land this time around, I do believe they shaped Jack as a person and are part of him. My biggest goal was to show the character development Jack experienced throughout the story. For example, in my first collage, I included Jack's shoes but in my latest one I left them out. Jack prefers to run around barefoot and carefree. We can see it along the book, how he evolved the same way Coppertown evolved and will keep evolving. Jack loves nature and all that it brings and he doesn't like the Company one bit but Coppertown is still his home. My collage is about the good parts of Jack's life; the things he loves.

Note. Images used with the permission of the participant.

Gerrig (1993) referred to the way stories can draw in and enthral their readers as

narrative engagement. When this phenomenon occurs, readers' thoughts and emotions move

beyond solely entertaining to impacting them with actual, durable consequences (Mar et al.,

2006). To illustrate, students were invited to write a piece of advice to their favourite character in

their current book. We can see an example of engaging more deeply with characters in Kate's

message to Esteban (*Harbor Me*). Esteban is a young Dominican boy whose father is detained by

an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent:

> Dear Esteban, I don't know what it's like when someone takes your Papi from you and
> you don't know where he is, but it must be hard. Sometimes you just have to try hoping
> for the best and ignore the worst. I'm not [Dominican] or Black and I don't have the
> problem of walking down the street and everyone assuming I'm a bad person, but I do
> want to apologize. What white people do and think of people of colour is wrong and I
> wish I could change the way some think, but I can't. If I could give you some piece of
> advice it would be to always look on the bright side of things and appreciate the people
> around you who respect you like if you're no different. (Dialogue Journal, May 2020)

While Kate's advice to Esteban focused on encouragement, Jessie's letter to Jack reflected a

more personal account as she confided knowing how he feels. Even if circumstances in

characters' stories are very different from the learners' environment, their lived experiences may

be similar. Jessie's words to Jack demonstrates her empathy toward him (see Figure 8, p. 191).

By their very nature, the novels in which we immersed ourselves urged my students and I

to imagine our place in the world. Jessie evoked her narrative imagination (Nussbaum, 1997) in

the letter she wrote to Jack Hicks, showing her ability "to be an intelligent reader of another

person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed

might have" (p. 11). Nussbaum added that being able to consciously take the perspective of

another with compassion is equally essential to the development of empathic, cultivated humans.

Figure 8

Jessie's Letter to Jack Hicks (Dialogue Journal, May 2020)

Dear Jack,

As I've noticed, things in Coppertown aren't like they used to be. I can only imagine what that's like for you. I know what it feels like to see people you love not be themselves. It's terrible. When everyone around you is sad, it's hard to stay positive. I can understand the want for things to go back to normal. I've also noticed that you feel the need to hide the fact you don't want to be a miner. What I want to say to you is that there is nothing wrong with wanting different things than what people expect from you. You should talk to your mom about it, I know she would understand. And to your dad too. Even if he doesn't understand immediately, he'll come around at some point. As for what it is of the gloomy mood that has overcome Coppertown, my best advice is to be patient. Bad things never last forever. They are only a part of our lives, they don't have to define our entire existence. Try to do things that make you happy. I know you've been reading plenty about trees. It is a truly wonderful thing that you are able to really appreciate them. I will hope with you that one day, Coppertown will recover what once was and that trees will come back in big numbers. Remember that you are in control of your own life.

Sincerely, a supporter of your thinking

Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Referring to a 2,550-year-old quote from Heraclitus that, "[l]earning about many things does not produce understanding" (p. 85), Nussbaum pointed to ancient arguments that address pivotal ingredients in our quest for democratic citizenship, and the cultivation of humanity—a philosophy I described in detail in Chapter 3. More than simply acquiring knowledge,

philosopher Marcus Aurelius believed it necessary for our becoming world citizens to cultivate an ability for sympathetic imagination that would help us understand others' differences, yet not consider them as foreign to ourselves (Nussbaum, 1997).

One of my goals in introducing multicultural literature was to educate my students to become democratic citizens of the world. According to Nussbaum, such a goal includes them being able to think critically, engage in self-reflection, and see themselves as part of a global community, bound to all humans. In my inquiry, I mindfully attended to manifestations of compassion and empathy as I guided my students along our multicultural journey. Through a narrative imagination, I observed learners forge a deeper understanding of our common humanity, working to dismantle the notion of *us* versus *them*, and replacing it with a *we* perspective (Monobe & Son, 2014).

Homo Empathicus: The Nature of Empathy

As stated previously, the notion of empathy is valuable and powerful. As a critical educator and researcher, empathy was embedded in my pedagogical attitude. Inadvertently, this theme was also manifested as central by the students. As shown throughout emerging data that illustrated the numerous ways global stories impacted my students this school year, each of their experiences with multicultural literature had been an empowering one. All along their journey until the end, participants described how they remembered the stories and characters, and the way they used them as a scaffold to understand newly acquired ideas about the world (Short, 2016). Jessie ascribed her learning about strength and courage to the characters in *Parvana's Journey*, noting that:

> All these kids were being couragous [*sic*] and strong. At the beggining [*sic*] of the book, when Deborah Ellis dedicates her novel to 'the children we force to be braver than they should have to be', it really goes to show how being brave can sometimes be harmful . . .

> I admire every kid who has to feel like they have to be an adult. This novel really put that into perspective for me. It will make me remember to be strong, just like all it's [*sic*] wonderful characters. (Student Portfolio, February 2020)

Kate shared how the multicultural novels taught her to imagine a better world:

> Reading books is a great way to change our perspective, in a good way, of the world we have today and make us imagine how different our society could be. All the books we read reflect on something, either a good thing or a thing we can change. (Student Portfolio, May 2020)

Through their journey in narrative landscapes, students attributed to others, and recognized in themselves, that which makes us human: our proneness to hope, distress, courage, perseverance, and fairness (Nussbaum, 1997). They tapped into their better selves, or what social theorist Jeremy Rifkin refers to as "*homo empathicus*—wired for empathy" (2010, p. 42). When we engage with novels, "*empathy*, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading" (Keen, 2006, p. 208). Oatley (2011) stipulated that the work of cognitive psychologists in the past quarter century has gained appreciation for stories to understand people better. Although the notion of empathy is not new, Krznaric (2014) suggested that one of the reasons it has resurfaced in the last decade may derive from neuroscience research, which shows evidence that human beings' empathic natures are just as strong as their selfish ones. As we seek to educate students to become better humans, could empathy be the highest form of critical thinking "that doesn't just read the words on a page but rather truly sees, hears, and acts upon a world beyond ourselves" (Schneider, 2020)? Empathy, defined by Hoffman (2000) as "the involvement of psychological processes that make a person have feelings that are more congruent with another's situation than with his own situation" (p. 30), grows when we are "reminded to notice,

understand, and respond appropriately to the feelings of others" (Noddings & Brooks, 2017, p. 15).

During a keynote address, Deborah Ellis alluded to the idea of *creating a day before*, reminding the audience about the power of our best selves and the possibility of making a difference before it is too late. Praising good children's literature as a powerful vehicle to achieve a more sustainable future, the author hoped her own books would allow children who read them to "carry the compassion they hopefully learn from them into their adult lives and their adult decision-making—whether to be kind or to lash out, whether to give a helping hand or let their government drop a bomb" (Ellis, 2018). In the same vein, Jewell Parker Rhodes believes that literature can ignite conversations about the world's most pressing social justice issues, such as race, and poverty, among others. The author confessed that the pandemic has crystallized her need to write stories in which she hopes to remind readers of our common humanity (Terrill, 2020). If "empathy is at the heart of storytelling itself" (Krznaric, 2014, p. 150), then my students experienced it first-hand through the stories they read, as much as in the ones they told.

Summary and Looking Ahead

As I close this chapter on empathy, I think back to the intricate process by which students, "[immersed] . . . in a new consciousness" (Krznaric, 2011, Question 3), began to see the world differently. Their journey corroborated the argument that literature supports building empathy (Mar et al., 2006). They first employed mirrors to scout empathy and discovered its value in their enhanced critical awareness. Second, they used windows to cultivate empathy, and became empowered in the act of perspective-taking. Last, they used both mirrors and windows to showcase empathy, and endeavoured to cherish the stories and characters which helped them acquire new ideas about the world. Looking ahead to the next chapter, a second emerging theme,

insight, sheds light on the dynamics of learning about social justice and moving beyond the

acquisition of knowledge by expanding their understandings about social justice.

Chapter Six

A Focus on the Classroom: First Lens, Theme 2—Insight

Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less. ~ Marie Curie

Emerging Theme 2: Insight

In the beginning of our journey with multicultural literature, students were introduced to social justice issues as we read the stories. By connecting with the characters and their plights, they empathized with them and attempted to sort out the meaning of the injustices they suffered, namely by putting themselves in their shoes. What was initially a visceral reaction to the narratives expanded into a broader scope. However, as Cai (2002) revealed, for multicultural literature to empower us, it must be used as "a means of personal and social exploration and reflection" rather than merely as a source of information (p. 134). Learners came to problematize the situations lived by the characters, and their learning process jumped from the story to the real world. In their eyes, this was no longer just a story, rather, they were gaining new insight on actual social injustices.

In the previous theme of empathy, students' responses bespoke their eagerness to know more about the world, and by extension, global issues. As the multicultural book studies progressed, students manifested critical curiosity, a notion defined by Freire (1998) as the impetus through which a deeper understanding of issues of social justice ripens their critical consciousness. The adolescents in Clark and Seider's (2017) study stated that their curiosity could be associated with their exposure to new information, and as a result, they had their eyes opened and "[learned] the truth" (p. 136). Much like them, the students in this inquiry felt this way about their learning throughout our multicultural literature units. Exploring my second

supporting question *How can multicultural literature support developing a critical lens on global issues?* the data revealed evidence of their critical curiosities. Focusing on sociopolitical issues (Lewison et al., 2002), learners engaged in critically reading texts, and began to question the way power operates in the lives of characters, in the lives of actual people, as well as in their own. They started to gain more insight, particularly as it pertained to issues involving racial inequalities. Students' curiosity about their social worlds grew as they worked to understand systems of oppression and discovered their desire to challenge these injustices (Freire, 1970/2016; 1998). The theme of insight uncovered four emergent subthemes (see Table 7).

Table 7

First Lens, Theme 2

Theme 2: Insight
Learning From Injustice
Recognizing Privilege
Understanding Racism
Bearing Witness

Learning From Injustice

When a group of students tackles the complex and sensitive topic of racism, they must first confront their own identities, and unpack the unchallenged burdens they might carry. Students testified repeatedly about the many important lessons they learned throughout the multicultural book units, and the pedagogical activities associated with them. Overall, learners established *The Breadwinner* series and *Ghost Boys* as the novels that impacted them most, and

by extension, gender inequality and racism as the two prominent social justice issues (Reflective

Questionnaires, June 2020). Esther revealed,

> Pendant qu'on lisait Parvana, Ghost Boys, ces deux livres là m'ont fait beaucoup réfléchir
> et mise très en colère parce que premièrement dans Parvana, les femmes n'ont pas le droit
> de sortir et que dedans moi, je me dis que ces hommes-là pensent que les femmes ne sont
> pas importantes, qu'elles ne sont pas obligatoires dans ce monde. . . . Deuxièmement c'est
> le racisme, le racisme c'est quelque chose que moi je ne peux pas tolérer parce qu'on est
> tous et toutes dans ce même monde et on est en train de respirer le même air et on est tous
> humains.

> [When we were reading *Parvana's Journey* and *Ghost Boys*, these two novels made me
> think a lot and get very angry because first, in Parvana's Journey, women can't go out
> and in my mind I think these men don't view women as important or necessary in this
> world. . . . Second, racism—I can't tolerate it, we are all in the same world, breathing the
> same air, all human] (Esther, Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Esther, who also read *Stella by Starlight* as her final novel, often expressed shock and

discontentment regarding the cruelty of gender discrimination, but mostly the racial injustice she

encountered in the books. Upon starting the novel *Ghost Boys*, other students expressed similar

feelings when they researched real-life people, namely Emmett Till, Tamir Rice, and Trayvon

Martin, and learned about the historical impact of these ghost boys' tragic stories.

Conversations about race and racism that had begun during the reading of *Ghost Boys*

continued until the end of the school year. Students shared that reading and talking about

important world issues was necessary and needed to move beyond simply being informed; in a

sense, they recognized that developing "cultural and intercultural consciousness creates a

foundation for productive conversations around sociopolitical local and global issues" (Broere &

Kerkhoff, 2020, p. 50). Jessie disclosed that, "the multicultural literature we read this year was

enlightening, influential, edifying, and sincere in the best possible ways. Each book taught me its

own lessons and morals, but I noticed they all shared the same theme, injustice" (Reflective

Questionnaire, June 2020). Kate claimed that "[r]eading any of the books we've read in class would give a lesson to some who had no idea injustices in the world were going [on] . . . You change the perspective of kids by showing them how the world around them is" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020).

Participants also expressed the benefits they reaped by reading the novels. Shane, for instance, viewed multicultural literature as a way to "montrer que dans le monde pas tout est toujours égal et faut faire un changement" [show that the world is not always equitable and we need to make change] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). This was echoed by Andrew's sentiment, that the books "nous faisaient comparer notre mode de vie et comment on se fait traiter et eux comment ils se faisaient traiter" [allowed us to compare our lifestyle to others' and how we are treated as opposed to how they were treated] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Both these students noted that in the past, the books they were asked to read often involved topics that had no connection to real life, whereas this year, they taught them more things about the world and different cultures (Shane and Andrew, Reflective Questionnaires, June 2020). Students were ready, willing, and able to tackle injustice as it emerged from the novels. For this reason, they were also open to address complex concepts such as White privilege.

Recognizing Privilege

Remaining conscious of the relations of power, and the dominant worldview at stake, was essential in my endeavour to make race visible throughout our reading journey. As a teacher researcher, I was *working the hyphen* (Fine, 1994), knowing that if I expected vulnerability from my students, I had to be prepared to expect it of myself. When I selected *Ghost Boys* to be part of my list of books, I knew it would trigger conversations about race, although I was unaware of the depth and direction my students would take them. As a teacher researcher, I was learning

alongside my students during our discussions around White privilege. I observed their level of engagement, inevitably fuelled by current events surrounding the topic of racial injustice at the time. Jessie wrestled with the concepts of racism and White privilege, as other students did. We discussed terms like privilege, oppression, and racial bias, and she reflected,

> [w]hen I think of "privilege", I think of oppression and unfairness. . . . It all comes back down to that, the abuse of power. The word evokes questions such as: Why is it that some people have access to more privileges than other people who are just as deserving? Sometimes, privileged people don't even realise they are privileged. We're all guilty of that. (Jessie, Dialogue Journal, March 2020)

Jessie was recognizing how White privilege, as defined in Chapter 1, does not assume that someone has not worked hard or does not deserve what they have; rather, it explains how society works in that structurally, and historically, White people have benefited from specific advantages simply because of the colour of their skin or race.

In the novel *Ghost Boys*, the protagonist Jerome tells Sarah, the daughter of the White police officer who shot him, that she will never be shot because she is White and a girl (p. 69). Students were invited to reflect on Jerome's comment, and consider what they believed he meant by it. The conversation that followed spanned several days and was cathartic. Brooke thought that Jerome had a point, and that "being a white girl in America will keep you safe. If she was in the position Jerome was in, she wouldn't have been shot at because of her skin colour. Racism takes a big part of history" (Student Portfolio, March 2020). Kate agreed with Brooke as they engaged in a back-and-forth exchange on the online discussion board. She explained that,

> When Jerome tells Sarah that she will never be shot because she is white and a girl, he does have a point. For an example [*sic*], try to imagine Sarah in Jerome's place, would she have been shot for having a toy gun? Probabilities are slight. She is white and that gives her some privilege. I can't agree 100% that she won't get shot, because no one can guarantee that. But it won't be for that reason. Everyone has a chance of being shot, but not everyone lives it. Jerome did, he died. Two gunshot wounds. Would you see that on a

white little girl? Nope. Not for those reasons anyways. (Kate, Student Portfolio, March 2020)

As we delved deeper into what the ghost of a murdered, Black teenager's assumptions might be, students became quite invested. Kelly (2020) claimed that "teaching white students that the history of racism is a white issue is a tough lesson to deliver" (p. 31). However, I felt neither reluctance nor resistance as we contended with the topic. Instead, I detected open-mindedness, and a willingness to confront the implications of White privilege the plot offered up. I wanted to remain aware of the challenges in the act of perspective-taking as we dealt with the issue of race. Because my teaching aspired to encourage intercultural understanding through global literature, I recognized that it could not be neutral, nor could it disregard how sociopolitical systems, power relationships, and language are tightly linked, and incorporated into my practice (Lewison et al., 2002). Jessie believed that Jerome was denied privileges that other people have, solely because of his race, but she struggled to find rhyme or reason. Perplexed but hopeful, she confided in her journal: "Being bullied, being oppressed, being shot. How come Jerome has to endure all of that? Let's stay hopeful for change" (Jessie, Dialogue Journal, March 2020).

Students may not be aware of this, but their emotional responses to stories about racism, such as embarrassment, anger, or guilt, are intimately connected to the development of their own racial identities (Tatum, 1992). Amber typically experienced strong emotions to what we were reading, and like Jessie, she struggled to make sense of senseless events in the *Ghost Boys* narrative. Like her peers, she acknowledged that Jerome had a point in saying that Sarah was privileged:

> What I'm trying to say is, if we would have taken Sarah and put her at the same place as Jerome was when the police came well, I think that Sarah would have never been shot

> and she would have just been sent home. I think that what happened is that Officer Moore was raised probably in a racist environment or that without even knowing his judgement took over and that is why he shot Jerome. . . . People don't think of this but what if white kids were treated how black kids have always been treated all around the world what if before in the old days, we were the slaves for the black people, how would we feel? (Amber, Student Portfolio, March 2020)

Amber's powerful response reveals her dismay and empathy toward Jerome and people of colour around the world, past and present. She imagined possible scenarios to explain the officer's actions and frame of mind, even if the situation was so far removed from her own experience, culturally. When she looked at the same situation from Sarah's point of view, Amber's thoughts included how the police officer's daughter might be feeling. Most notably, she purposely placed Sarah in the shoes of her father, and imagined a different sequence of events from that angle:

> It makes Sarah embarrassed when people tell her that she is lucky to be her father's daughter because she knows that the boy his father killed was her age, her height, probably wasn't threatening at all. I also think that she is embarrassed because if Jerome was a white kid like Sarah, Sarah's dad would have probably not even pointed a gun at Jerome. I think also that Sarah doesn't want to be like her father and not like any other white officer that would have done the same thing, she is her own person, and she doesn't want to be blamed or to be encouraged because of her dad's actions. (Amber, Student Portfolio, March 2020)

The examples in this subtheme reinforce that the topic of White privilege cannot be ignored or avoided, because it is intertwined with the problem of racism. Addressing White privilege in our classroom grew from our interaction with novels like *Ghost Boys* and escalated into glimpses of insights from both sides of the racism coin. DiAngelo (2012) asserted that "White ignorance is not born of innocence, is not benign and is not simply a matter of not knowing" (p. 258). Raising cultural consciousness in youth is significant, not only because it is a time when they are discovering their identity, but because White adolescents may not always consider themselves as cultural beings whose identities are shaped by culture (Broere & Kerkhoff, 2020). Including

global literature in the language arts class provides the means to explore culture and race with students, allowing these complex issues to be the focus of reflections and discussions, and an instrument for the development of more positive attitudes toward race (Banks, 1993). Concurrently, Brooke, Kate, Jessie, and Amber recognized the value of in-depth cross-cultural learning as they examined their own cultural identities, as White teenagers, while acquiring a better understanding of how race can affect others' experiences in the world (Short, 2009).

Understanding Racism

Students often initiated conversations about racism especially during our small group, virtual book talks on the Google Meet platform. At the time, I wrote: "What I noticed was a strong need for them to express their opinion about the incident [George Floyd's death] and they displayed a passionate sense of injustice" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). My students were well into the final novel (selected from a list of five options), which did not necessarily involve the theme of racism. Nonetheless, the discussions that had taken place previously while reading *Ghost Boys* resurfaced after the news of George Floyd's murder, and the global repercussions that ensued. I noted: "It is so evident that they are affected by all this and though far-removed from the brunt of the situation, they are expressly passionate about engaging with this global conversation" (Teacher Journal, June 2020).

The issue of race is complex and can sometimes be the subject of uncomfortable conversations. However, Tatum (2017) suggested that avoiding the topic with young people, or awkwardly silencing them when an ignorant comment is uttered, teaches them that talking about race is socially inappropriate. Like Robinson (2013), I observed the power of my students' voices coming through when interacting with multicultural texts, as did their sense of empathy (see Chapter 5) and democratic values. During the book talks, one group of three students

reading *Harbor Me* remarked being impressed about how "characters (students like them, a bit younger) were aware of serious issues like deportation, incarceration, racism, discrimination, etc. They compared their lives to the characters' lived experiences, and this was one of the most impactful messages for them" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). Students from every group chatted about their books, sharing likes, dislikes, and memorable moments, also steering the topic to racism. I recorded the impact it had on me in my journal:

> One reaction that struck me was the thought that George Floyd was changing the world, but not the way we wanted it to happen. The question about tragedy and why it needs to happen in order for change to occur. Profound response coming from thirteen-year-olds! I realize as we encounter and engage with social justice issues such as racism, that students are extremely perceptive, courageous in their willingness to confront their own way of thinking and determined not to sit on the sidelines. (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020)

As my students and I conferred about the Floyd incident, it opened opportunities for me to address racism not only as a current global issue, but one that has been lingering for centuries. As such, it became a moment in which learners began to interpret racism's history, its impact, and the challenges for social change. When Shane conceptualized racism, he thought about "how unfair the world can be. Racism is something that's been going on for so long and it's not ok" (Dialogue Journal, March 2020). He recognized that the issue everyone was talking about in the news, and the motivation behind the widespread protests across America and elsewhere, was not a novel one. Esther, one of the students who had been reading *Stella by Starlight*, expressed being troubled by events involving racism in this fictional story. She was greatly disturbed when she learned that the story, set in a segregated town in southern North Carolina, was inspired by the author's own grandmother's diary, whose "spirit is the background of the tale" (Draper, n.d.). Esther noted in her journal that she did not like to see

> . . . how Black people are threatened, I mean Black people breathe the same air as white people, but I don't get it why [*sic*] they think the opposite of Black people. What did

Black people do to them to hate them so much? . . . I just want to tell all Black people that we need to be strong because I'm Black too. (Esther, Dialogue Journal, May 2020)

Brooke, who also picked *Stella by Starlight*, appreciated the author's storytelling as a way to explain the ugly truths about the Ku Klux Klan through the eyes of a little girl:

I notice how the author has written the book in a way where we can realize more things in a simpler way and understand the story. I also realize that it wasn't Sharon Draper talking about the past, but she made the past talk to us. (Dialogue Journal, June 2020)

Reading *Allies*, Phoebe imagined a conversation she wanted to have with the character Henry, an African American working as a medic on Omaha Beach on D-Day:

Even if D-Day was what seems a long time ago, people still fight, people still judge, people still discriminate. I'd tell him that I'm proud of him to want to save lives, even when it was hard for him to maybe even save his [own]. With what is happening now in the world, the lives taken, it isn't right. All lives can't matter until black lives matter. Always feels good knowing you are seen, even when you feel you aren't. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

The idea of being seen often came up in our conversations. Phoebe pointed out the importance of being recognized as a person, a human, regardless of your skin colour. I prompted students to consider Sarah's thoughts in the story of *Ghost Boys*. Echoing Phoebe's thoughts above, Jessie projected what might have been going on in Sarah's mind after her father shot Jerome (see Figure 9, p. 206). In Sarah's thought bubbles, Jessie referred to seeing and being seen, as Phoebe communicated. This was an aspect that deeply touched her, and she commented on it again in her journal: "'He didn't see you. My father didn't really see you'. It touches me because what she meant wasn't that her father didn't physically see Jerome, she meant that he didn't see Jerome for who he really is" (Jessie, Dialogue Journal, March 2020).

For students, Jerome's, Stella's, and Henry's stories were poignant. However, the prejudice they suffered because of racism entangled many other characters, just as the fallout of

Figure 9

Jessie's Projected Thought Bubbles for Sarah (Student Portfolio, April 2020)
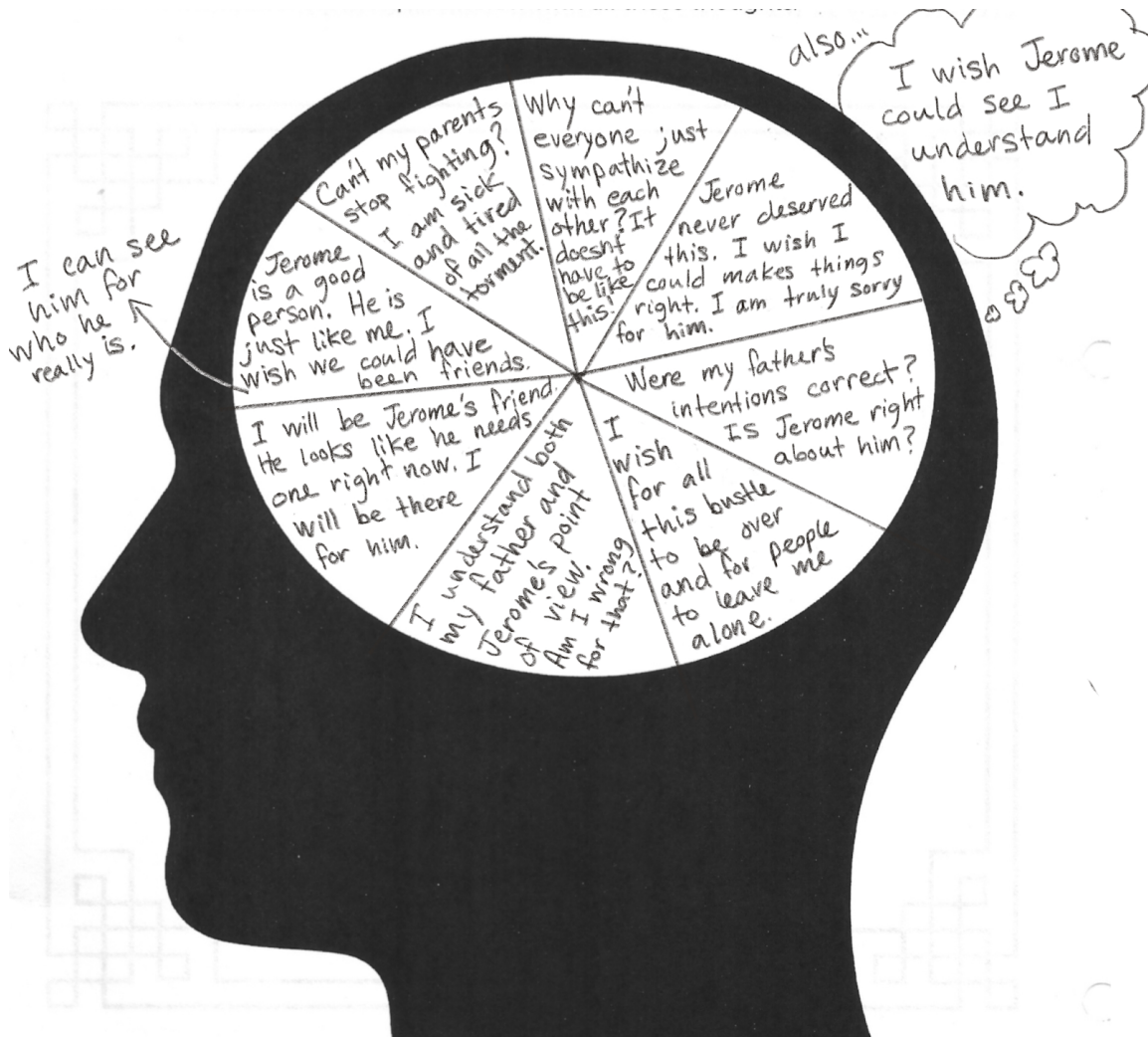
Note. Template image used with the permission of Leslie Spurrier (Story Trekker, 2019).
Image used with the permission of the participant.

racism reaches far and wide in real life. Amber alluded to this notion when she reflected on

Jerome's dead, wandering spirit, and attempted to explain his purpose through the tragedy:

> . . . he may need to show Sarah the reality of what black people go through. Also, I think
> Jerome needed to know he's not the only one that this happened to, there's [*sic*] many
> boys young like older that have been murdered by white people. I think maybe he needed
> to see the point of view of Sarah and her family and how it doesn't only affect people he

knows. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Likewise, Shane believed Jerome had not moved on from his spiritual state because he still had a crucial role to play in Sarah's life, and his family's as well. Shane took on the perspective of Jerome and expressed his confusion and outrage:

> . . . since Sarah can see him, he kinda has the responsibility to try to help her. If I was Jerome, I would feel very confused, I'd feel confused because you would think that if you're dead it would be over, no more stress and no more thinking, but instead he is stuck with Sarah, which brings me to my next point. This next point is that if I was Jerome, knowing that I can affect Sarah's life while being dead would make me want to blow up. I say that because imagine trying to help the family that killed you? (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

These examples demonstrate how the issue of racism is a challenging one to understand, to discuss, and about which to feel.

Seidel and Rokne (2011) asserted that "[p]urposeful, shared, and intimate classroom readings can create a space for the emergence of authentic and transformative dialogue" (p. 247). A noteworthy moment in relation to this quote took place after I posted a video on Google Classroom from the French series "Vérités et conséquences" (Urbania, 2017). The clip demonstrated facts and consequences about racism, using statistics and information from Quebec. I asked students to watch it and prepare for our next scheduled virtual discussion. What stood out from this second virtual meeting was how animated the discussion turned out to be as students brought up very relevant points about the issue of racism. Some of these thoughts as a group included (a) how people do not consider themselves racist (because they associate racism with violence), (b) racism holds a negative connotation, yet everyone sees themselves as a good person, (c) when times are hard, racism is prominent, and (d) racism is like a 'zero sum game' which projects the false belief that in order for someone to gain something, someone else must

inevitably lose something. Phoebe pushed the task further by associating it with the novel, and

the previously learned concept of unconscious racism. She jotted her thoughts in her journal:

> After listening to the video about racism, there was this one part that really struck me as relevant to the book we are currently reading, *Ghost Boys*. Complex world = proximity guilt. In the case, Officer Moore was a rookie, in Chicago, patrolling in a rough part of town. . . . He didn't even analyze further, he acted. And shot Jerome, at 12 years old. Maybe it's unconscious racism? I don't believe that he has something against him because of his skin colour directly, but there is probably some part of him in the deep part of his mind that does not see him as an equal, a human being. (Phoebe, Dialogue Journal, May 2020)

About halfway through *Ghost Boys*, a final decision was rendered by the judge in Officer

Moore's preliminary trial for the death of Jerome. Reacting to the situation, they responded with

emotion and confusion. In the story, the White police officer is found not guilty and avoids all

charges due to lack of proof. When Jessie responded that she was not sure if she did, or did not,

should, or should not, empathize with Officer Moore (Student Portfolio, April 2020), I

commented:

> Indeed, it is difficult to pinpoint how we feel, even as we are simply reading a fictional story for now. But I do think taking a moment to ask ourselves what we think and how we feel and perceive something is the beginning to understanding better and maybe even changing something for the better. What do you think? (Teacher's comment to student entry, Jessie's Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Grappling with the situation, Jessie wrote:

> My reaction to the judge's final decision was disappointment. I was hoping for more out of the situation . . . I just would like for there to be a better way to go about things. Something else than not guilty = not punished and guilty = punished. . . . The further I look into it, the less I know how to feel. Being angry and blaming won't solve anything but in situations like these, don't we have a right to be angry? (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Jessie's plight was not unlike many others considering the current racial tensions and political unrest ignited by George Floyd's murder this spring. Her quote speaks to the complex nature of racism, with the added contentious issue of police brutality. Such a scene may not have been familiar to these students, yet they were determined to engage in thoughtful reflections and conversations about it. The data illustrated that, through the literature, learners were able to look at a global issue, racism, using a critical lens framed in compassion.

Bearing Witness

In the chapter entitled "Listening" (*Ghost Boys*), Emmett Till, one of the ghost boys roaming in the backdrop of Jerome's story, finally tells his own brutal tale from Money, Mississippi, more than sixty years before. Emmett bears witness to Jerome, after which he understands why he now belongs to the ghost boy's family:

> Then, I feel an urge. Deep inside me. A recognition. *Injustice*. *Tragedy*. My mouth opens. A sound I didn't know I could make keens out of me. Terrifying, mournful. Only the dead hear it. My wail rises and falls, rises and falls. Emmett's spirit blends with mine. Merging, we cry, "Not fair. I died too young. Too soon." Ghost boys scream, holler, echo, "Not fair. Died too young. Too soon." We exhaust ourselves. (Rhodes, 2018, p. 160)

We were no longer in class physically when students read or listened to the recorded read aloud of this chapter. Though the effect was different, students still demonstrated strong, emotional responses, and responded to this heartbreaking story in creative, tender ways. Students wrote poems, journalled, created artwork, composed, and performed music as they interpreted the events of the story, which referred to the past, but are significant in the present (see Figures 10 to 13). Esther emphasized Jerome's ghost-like state by drawing empty sneakers and a shadow reflection (see Figure 10, p. 210). Amber's book cover creation showed Jerome's spirit leaving his body as he lay dying on the street (see Figure 11, p. 210).

Figure 10

Esther's Redesigned Book Cover of Ghost Boys—Wax Pastel (Student Portfolio, April 2020)

Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Figure 11

Amber's Redesigned Book Cover of Ghost Boys—Colour Pencils (Student Portfolio, April 2020)
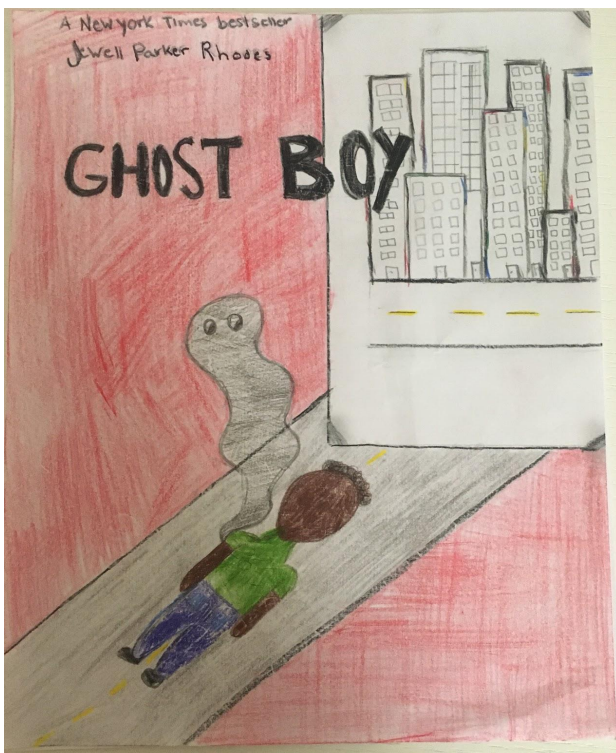
Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Jessie used words from a chapter in the novel and reframed them to create a found poem representing Jerome's emotions during his own funeral (see Figure 12). Amber chose to create a playlist of ten songs featuring what she considered to be significant moments in Jerome's life (see Figure 13, p. 212). She drew the album covers, front and back, and added a personalized description of each song, along with the reason she selected them.

Figure 12

Jessie's Found Poem—Ghost Boys (Portfolio, March 2020)

Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Figure 13

Amber's Ghost Boys Playlist Song Selections and Comments (Student Portfolio, May 2020)
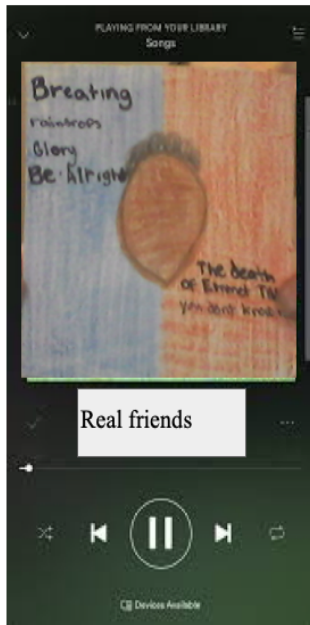
Real friends

The next song that I choose was real friends with Camila Cabello. This song represents Jerome before he meets Carlos. This song talks a lot about looking for real friends. Like for example, it says skip the conversation and the oh I'm fine, well that was Jerome everyday after school even though he got beat up he said to his grandma, I'm fine. I feel like maybe this is how Jerome felt towards going to school and finding friends. Finally, at one point in the song I had cause the place I'm living in just doesn't feel like home, well, I feel like in Jerome place well they would be talking about school, how he doesn't feel safe.
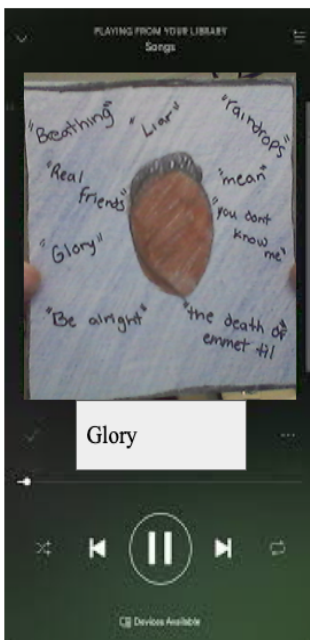
Glory

Glory is a song that I found singing by John Legend. I choose this song because its against racism. Racism is the theme of the book and I feel that it's one of the most important songs on this playlist. We all know that Jewell Parker wrote this book to inform or generation that racism is a big thing in this world and we need to be aware of it to make a change. I choose it to represent the book and because this song is explaining a lot about what black people go true.

Note. Images used with the permission of the participant.

Others, like Kate, wrote letters of gratitude to characters (see Figure 14, p. 213).

Figure 14

Kate's Letter of Gratitude to Jerome (Student Portfolio, April 2020)

> Dear Jerome,
>
> I just wanted to say thank you for teaching me the best lesson any human being could ever learn, **to always enjoy every second of life**. Because, truth is, with society of today and all the action that happened and is happening, you never know when you're life could be over. It could be ending with the blink of an eye. What happened to you, taught me to never ignore my surroundings and always be alert. This lesson made me have a new perspective on the society and life we have today. Life is short and it's important to make the best out of every moment and second that goes by and spend it with the people you trust & love. So, with all of that being said, thank you for the important lesson Jerome and i promise to never forget it and make sure to teach it to others around me.
>
> My sincerest gratitude,

Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

This letter, along with the artifacts in Figures 10 to 13 highlight the ways my students constructed their own meaning of bearing witness. We also pondered the following quote from *Ghost Boys*: "Emmett murmurs, 'Bear witness'. 'What's that mean?' 'Everyone needs their story heard. Felt. We honour each other. Connect across time'" (Rhodes, 2018, pp. 160-161). Initially, my students and I looked up the definition of *bearing witness* in the dictionary, which means "to show that something exists or is true", or more formally, "to make a statement saying that one saw or knows something" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). Emmett Till calls attention to the added values of honour, empathy, and time. Upon encountering this quote, students had come full circle in connecting Jerome's story to the ghost boys'. I encouraged them to reflect on what message the author intended by having Emmett Till say those words. Underlining how the quote was "the most important and the culminating point in the story" (Teacher Journal, April 14, 2020), I asked

them to consider what the idiom meant to them personally, and how their perception of it might

connect the story to their own everyday lives.

Brooke divulged that she was "bearing witness emotionally. I think everyone is at a time

like this. It's hard and emotional for most people. they are losing family and friends and I hope

that it will be over soon" (Dialogue Journal, April 2020). Echoing her classmate, Phoebe

compared bearing witness to "seeing it with the eyes, your eyes. Currently, we are all bearing

witness to COVID-19, we are seeing it, living it, and frankly I feel like people are dropping like

flies" (Dialogue Journal, April 2020). Many shared Brooke's and Phoebe's distress at the time,

so it was good to bear witness together as we talked and listened to each other, albeit through a

computer screen. Thus, as students aimed to connect what they read to their own realities, they

started to see a bigger picture. Jessie noticed that:

> [t]o bear witness can also mean to give context, something that often comes back in
> *Ghost Boys*. The book's themes include racism, friendship, death, bullying, oppression
> and more. Relating to people when we tell our stories about those themes can be quite
> empowering. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Jessie ascertained the power of storytelling in addressing serious social justice issues. It made a

difference in her learning that such topics were broached through the lens of characters in a

novel. Brooke also connected her learning to the power a story holds:

> [s]ome people don't really listen when people are telling stories. And I feel that if
> someone has a story to tell you, it could be important. Like when Emmett told his story to
> Jerome, he was honouring him and taking his time to listen. We never know who we can
> hurt by not listening to what someone has to say. (Brooke, Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Brooke recognized the potential harm of *not* listening to people's stories. Other students, like

Jessie contemplated what the world would look like if people did not bear witness:

> When we don't bear witness, people don't know our true story. If we were to keep it all
> to ourselves, people would never know about how we feel and felt. It would be harder to

really connect with other people. In more serious situations, bearing witness helps us make sure we are hearing all sides of a same story and not missing anything important. It helps us understand all points of view and most importantly, how a series of events truly unravelled. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Carter, who manifested a particular interest in history and politics, included his thoughts about possible consequences should people not bear witness:

If it weren't for these people bearing witness we would have more people believing dumb conspiracy theories such as not believing the Holocaust happened. . . . Furthermore, say we take an example of a child being bullied. If no one bears witness and says what is happening, nothing will happen. Until someone bears witness, there is no solution . . . if no one bore witness it would be a tragedy, the rise of false information, more pain, suffering and millions of years of history lost. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Exploring what is meant by bearing witness, students reflected on what they learned about racism and began to bridge the experiences of Jerome and Emmett to a larger narrative as it applied to their own lives. They grasped the crucial role listening to people's stories has in connecting with and understanding each other better. Amber admitted being frustrated because society, despite its history, had not learned its lesson to include diversity and embrace tolerance. She lamented that "[e]ven in 2020, people keep not accepting us as part of society because we're not pretty enough, or skinny, or white, or don't believe in religion. What does it really take for society to accept?" (Dialogue Journal, May 2020). In kind, Kate professed that all she wanted was "to make people understand how we all have something in common, humanity" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020).

Rhodes (2018) claimed that the deaths of Emmett Till, and numerous other Black boys and men, were the result of conscious or unconscious racism. By writing *Ghost Boys*, she hoped that "through discussion, awareness, and societal and civic action, . . . our youth will be able to dismantle personal and systemic racism" (Rhodes, 2018, p. 206). These students achieved such a

purpose as they read critically and attempted to go beyond the personal to dig deeper, thereby gaining a better understanding of the sociopolitical systems in which they live (Lewison et al., 2002).

Summary and Looking Ahead

This chapter draws to a close with abundant evidence highlighting the ways in which students examined global issues through a critical lens. Gaining insight on issues like White privilege and racism, for instance, proved to be more than a momentary acquisition of knowledge, as they engaged and wrestled with systemic social injustices happening in the real world. *The Breadwinner* series and *Ghost Boys* played an instrumental role in the development of students' awareness on controversial issues like gender inequality and racism. Deeply moved by these topics, they gained insight by poring over the concept of White privilege, engaging in thoughtful conversations to better understand racism, and appraising the purposefulness of bearing witness.

In the next chapter, learners contemplate a new dimension of their learning with multicultural novels: crossing the threshold of sliding glass doors to participate as resolute agents of social change.

Chapter Seven

A Focus on the Classroom: First Lens, Theme 3—Agency

Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time. ~ Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Emerging Theme 3: Agency

In Chapter 5, I spoke about students developing empathy as they initially learned about social justice issues by getting acquainted with the characters. In Chapter 6, I explained how their learning journey evolved from examining cultural differences depicted in the novels, to recognizing inequalities in the real world, and consequently gaining new insight by expanding their understandings of current social injustices. As students deepened their awareness through reading and making connections with current events, I noticed how they were challenged to act. In this chapter, I outline the third theme arising from Lens 1, that of agency. Hackman (2005) suggested that social justice education inspires young people to become more active in their own education. This inspiration towards agency was also evident in my students. Given opportunities to think, write, share, create, and express themselves in a democratic classroom environment where decisions were shared, I highlight the ways the students in this inquiry explored the landscape of agency, and claimed ownership of their learning.

Also, this chapter features examples of the way multicultural book studies challenged my students to step through the sliding glass doors and imagine possibilities for a better world. The theme of agency revealed two emergent subthemes (see Table 8, p. 218).

Communicating Through Self-Expression

This initial subtheme of agency depicts how learners began to claim ownership of the knowledge gained by questioning texts, and the society in which they live (Harste et al., 1988).

Table 8

First Lens, Theme 3

<div align="center">

Theme 3: Agency

</div>

Communicating Through Self-Expression	Safe Spaces
	Creative Freedom
	Voice
Acting for Social Change	A Work in Progress: Self-Transformation
	Creating Change: One Small Step at a Time
	"Vraies Couleurs" [True Colours]: Promoting a Path to Lifelong Learning

In a letter, co-written by herself and Phoebe at the end of the school year, Amber confided that:

> This year for one of the first times in my life, I felt like I was finally being able to speak my mind and people around me could understand me and we could talk about those things. I felt like it wasn't even school and grades, but more about my education. (Student Portfolios, June 2020)

Looking back, it seemed that the more students engaged with issues of diversity and social justice within the multicultural novels, the more they asserted their learning by communicating their thoughts and emotions. Laminack and Kelly (2019) found that it is readers who hold the power to become change agents by co-constructing meaning through dialogue, not the books themselves. Witnessing this dynamism, I noted in my journal how my students were developing "their own reader identity", and the way interactive learning opportunities had "allowed them to grow and mature as young readers and writers" (Teacher Journal, June 15, 2020). Throughout this inquiry, learners formed their identities as critical readers and writers, authenticating them through safe spaces, creative freedom, and voice, as means of self-expression.

Safe Spaces. Data showed that dialogue journals provided a space for learners, as they committed their innermost thoughts and feelings to the writing form. According to Holley and Steiner (2005), a safe space is "an environment in which people are willing and able to participate and honestly struggle with challenging issues" (p. 49). I provide examples of this type of safe space in the following paragraphs.

Kate described her reaction to journalling as follows:

> When you announced the Dialogue Journal and told us that it was meant to write in it about the books we were reading, I was excited, but not about the part of writing, but about the part of expressing my emotions and arguments about a book without being judged. Everytime [*sic*] you put up a question that we had to answer in our DJ, I knew that all my thoughts would come pouring down. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

The journals became alternatives to whole-class discussions, encouraging every student to talk without imposing the potentially complex dynamics of a larger group (Daniels & Daniels, 2013). For some students, the aspect of privacy was critical, like Amber, who admitted, "j'ai beaucoup apprécié les avoir pour m'exprimer ça m'a donné un endroit pour des choses que je ne voulais pas nécessairement dire à toute la classe" [I greatly appreciated having it to express myself and it provided a space for things I didn't necessarily want to say to the whole class] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020).

Phoebe stated that she "really enjoyed the dialogue journals because it allowed me to express myself in a way that I would not do with my voice" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Though she considered herself a shy person, Phoebe was also assertive. By her own admission, she enjoyed writing very much and found that she could express herself with more ease this way. Likewise, Brooke revealed that she "loved the dialogue journal entries. I love how I can express myself in it and that I wouldn't be judged on my opinions" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Most participants noted that journalling enabled them to express their

thoughts and feelings without fear of being judged (Reflective Questionnaires, June 2020). Jessie echoed both Phoebe's and Brooke's sentiments:

> What I enjoyed most about them was the way they gave us an opportunity to speak our minds without fear. The Dialogue Journals gave us safe spaces I was very thankful for. Personally, I felt I could express myself without the fear of having to formulate everything I say perfectly. I felt like I wouldn't be judged or looked down upon. I had the time to really think about what I wanted to say and the points I wanted to make. Most importantly, the Dialogue Journals taught us to communicate and debate in respectful ways and while being considerate of others' points of view and opinions. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

The conviviality garnered from the interactive aspect of journalling was noticeable. Amber recalled the dialogue journal becoming a liberating outlet for her, for several reasons:

> Je pouvais exprimer mes idées, sentiments et plusieurs autres sachant que c'était un endroit où je pouvais m'exprimer sans que personne ne me juge. Aussi le fait que je pouvais écrire sans me soucier toujours des fautes d'orthographe . . . Le Dialogue Journal m'a aidé à dire des choses que je ne savais pas même que je ressentais jusqu'à temps que je les écrive.

> [I could express my thoughts, feelings, etc. knowing that it was a place where I could express myself without anyone judging me. Also the fact that I could write freely without worrying about spelling mistakes. . . . The Dialogue Journal helped me say things I didn't even know I felt until I wrote them down] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Throughout the multicultural literature units, students acknowledged the significance of safe spaces on their growth as learners, as disclosed in their responses. Such opportunities enabled them to explore tough topics and sensitive issues emerging from the multicultural literature we were reading. Safe spaces also sustained the reciprocity I had hoped to cultivate in our learning environment. Like Atwell (1984), I discovered I was journeying with my students, alongside them, as "partners in this enterprise, all of us moving together *inside* writing and reading" (p. 252).

Creative Freedom. My students also realized that journalling provided them with a margin of creative thought. For instance, Andrew acknowledged that he enjoyed writing in his dialogue journal "parce que ça me faisait réfléchir et ouvrir mon imagination" [because it made me think and open my imagination] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Likewise, Phoebe relayed that she "really liked that you had kind of freedom over the writing, there wasn't really any structure, if your thoughts are a blob, you splat the blob on the paper and that's what was given, and for some reason, in the end, it made sense" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Phoebe was a prolific writer, often sharing with me her desire to become a novelist someday. In the year-end survey, she explained the way she felt about both reading and responding to the books:

> I think some part of me was lifted while reading the books. Like a little pixie, hiding away waiting to be set free. Hiding behind everything until words are shown, words are said. Then she comes out to play and twirls with the words and her heart gets all warm and fuzzy being able to say what she thinks, without it feeling like a 'bad or wrong' answer. (Phoebe, Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

In addition to dialogue journals, students completed short choice-based assignments, or task cards, as well as longer, summative projects for each novel. Students also proposed other venues that were not on the list, which they thought might be a better fit for them. Amber and her teammate requested to co-write a love story that would feature all the characters from the book, as they imagined them in the future instead of writing a research project on a topic from *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*. Their idea turned out to be a unique tale! Amber incorporated her new knowledge and understanding of the Cuban culture into her composition. Engrossed by its strong themes of family and loyalty, she found this novel interesting because of "the cultural differences and the difference of characters compared to the people I'm surrounded by, for example: in the

book, there was Abuela that had these family meetings every Saturday (I think) and in my family

we don't have that" (Amber, Dialogue Journal, November 2019).

More instances of creativity were apparent in the way students expressed themselves.

One such moment was while reading the first chapter of *Parvana's Journey*. The protagonist

faces the unknown as she begins her new journey to find her family by herself: "There was not

another person in sight, just hills and sky. 'I'm all alone,' she said out loud" (Ellis, 2002/2015, p.

21). I asked students to respond to this moment by creating anything they wanted (drawing,

poem, song, painting, etc.). I suggested "it could be an actual rendering of where Parvana is and

what she sees OR it can be a more abstract creation, expressing her feelings, fears, anxieties, and

thoughts" (Teacher Journal, January 16, 2020).

Esther wrote a short free verse poem to go along with her wax pastel drawing of Parvana,

contemplating the horizon (see Figure 15, p. 223). Jessie experimented with digital art, choosing

to interpret Parvana's state of mind by creating a scene using the application Procreate on her

personal iPad Pro tablet, as seen on Figure 16 (p. 224). Many students unveiled their affinity for

drawing as a medium, like Timothy who stated that "[t]he thing I am most proud of in my

portfolio is my drawings, . . . I like to draw, I think that drawing is a good way to express

yourself and in English class even though we had to draw a certain thing, you gave us creative

liberty" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). While reading *Parvana's Journey*, Timothy

produced several drawings, often using subtle, neutral earth tones, which he said he preferred

(see Figure 17, p. 224). Esther shared Timothy's love for drawing, although her fondness for

brighter hues surfaced in much of her artwork. While reading *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*,

students like Esther transported themselves into the story's setting and imagined what the

Zamora's Cuban American culture would look and feel like (see Figure 18, p. 225).

Figure 15

Esther's Drawing and Poem in Response to Parvana's Situation (Student Portfolio, January 2020)
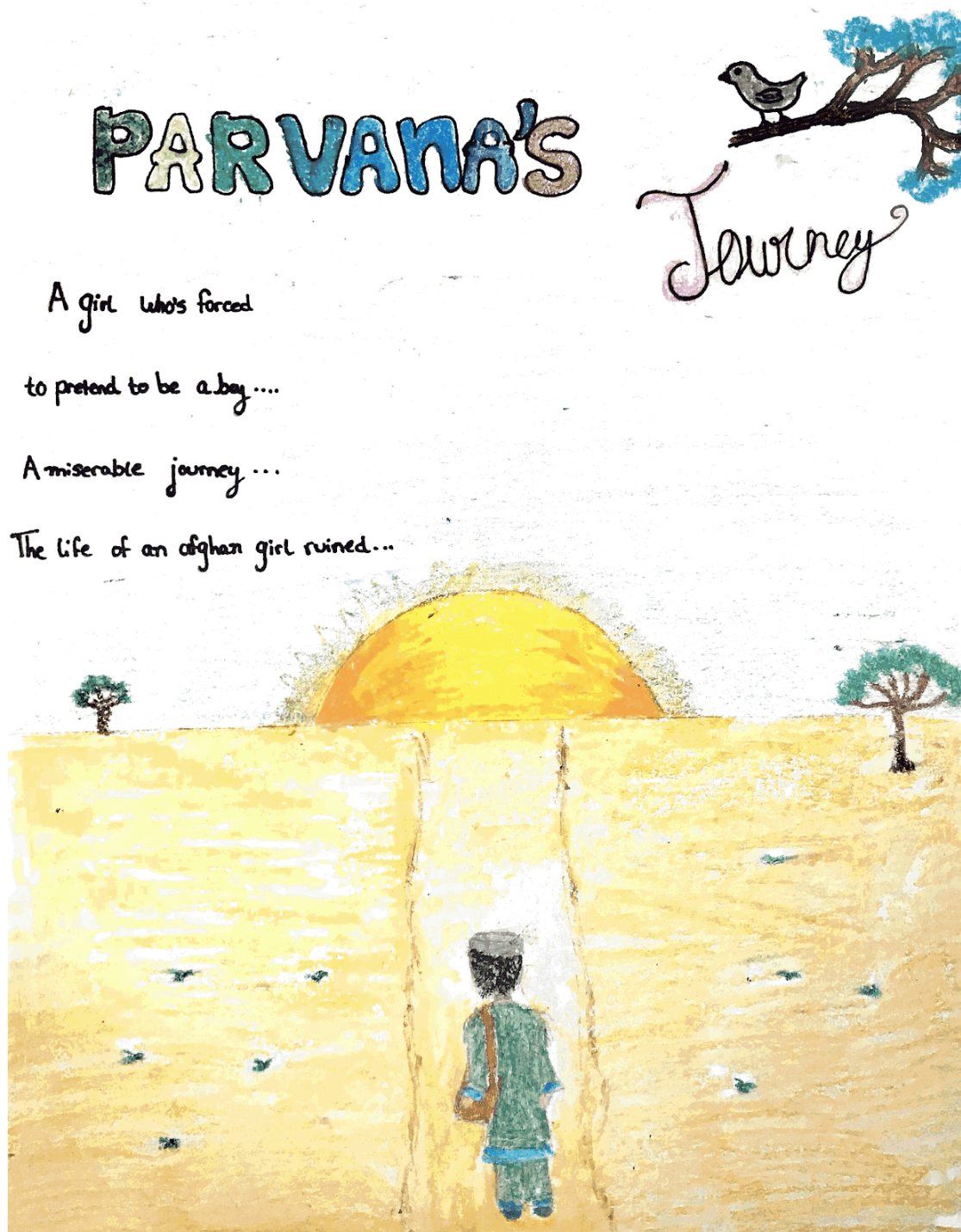
Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Figure 16

Jessie's Digital Drawing in Response to Parvana's Situation (Student Portfolio, January 2020)
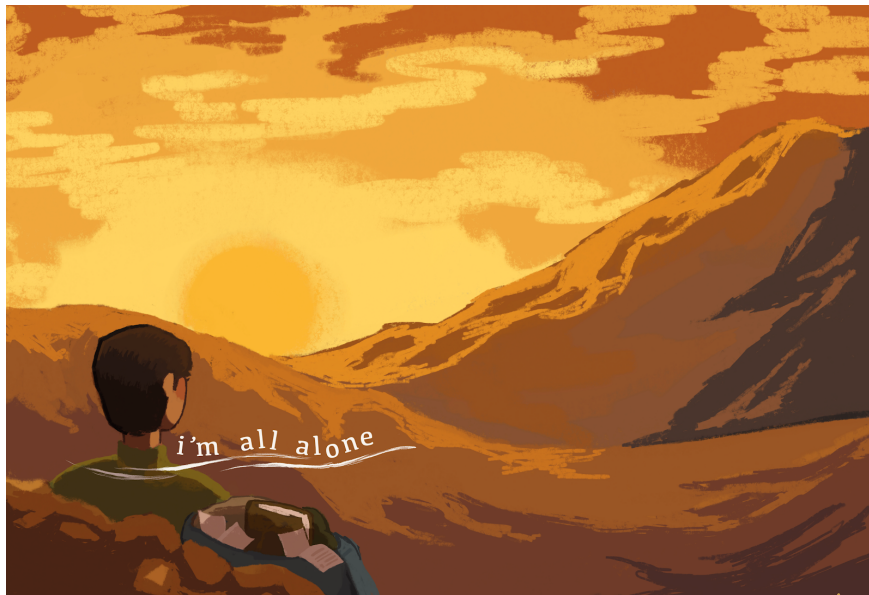
Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Figure 17

Timothy's Drawing—Parvana's Journey (Student Portfolio, February 2020)
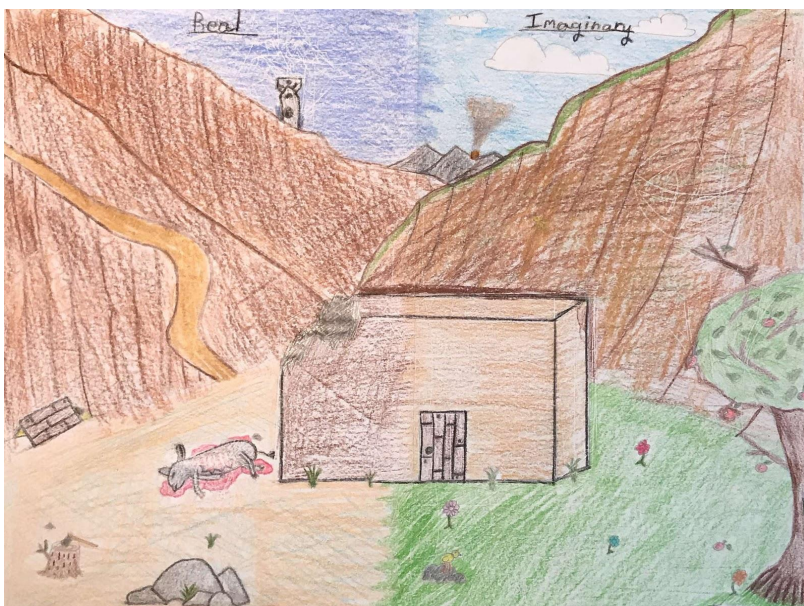
Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Figure 18

Esther's Drawing of La Cocina de la Isla (Student Portfolio, December 2019)

Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Jessie attempted to conceptualize the one-room space inside the bombed-out building where

Parvana's family resided (*The Breadwinner*). She sketched out their living quarters, carefully

using details from the text to arrange the contents of the space (see Figure 19, p. 226).

In the previous examples, students connected with stories by selecting from a panoply of

sign systems. Broadly defined by Short et al. (1996), sign systems encompass multiple ways of

knowing within which students construct meaning and share with others through art, music,

drama, etc. Jessie explained why drawing was the activity she was most proud of:

It's nice to be able to look back at all that I've drawn over the year and see the progress I've made, not just in my art but as a person as well. By looking at my drawings, I can remember who I was when I made them. They serve as little glimpses into my mind at the time. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Figure 19

Jessie's Sketch of Parvana's Family's Living Quarters (Student Portfolio, December 2019)
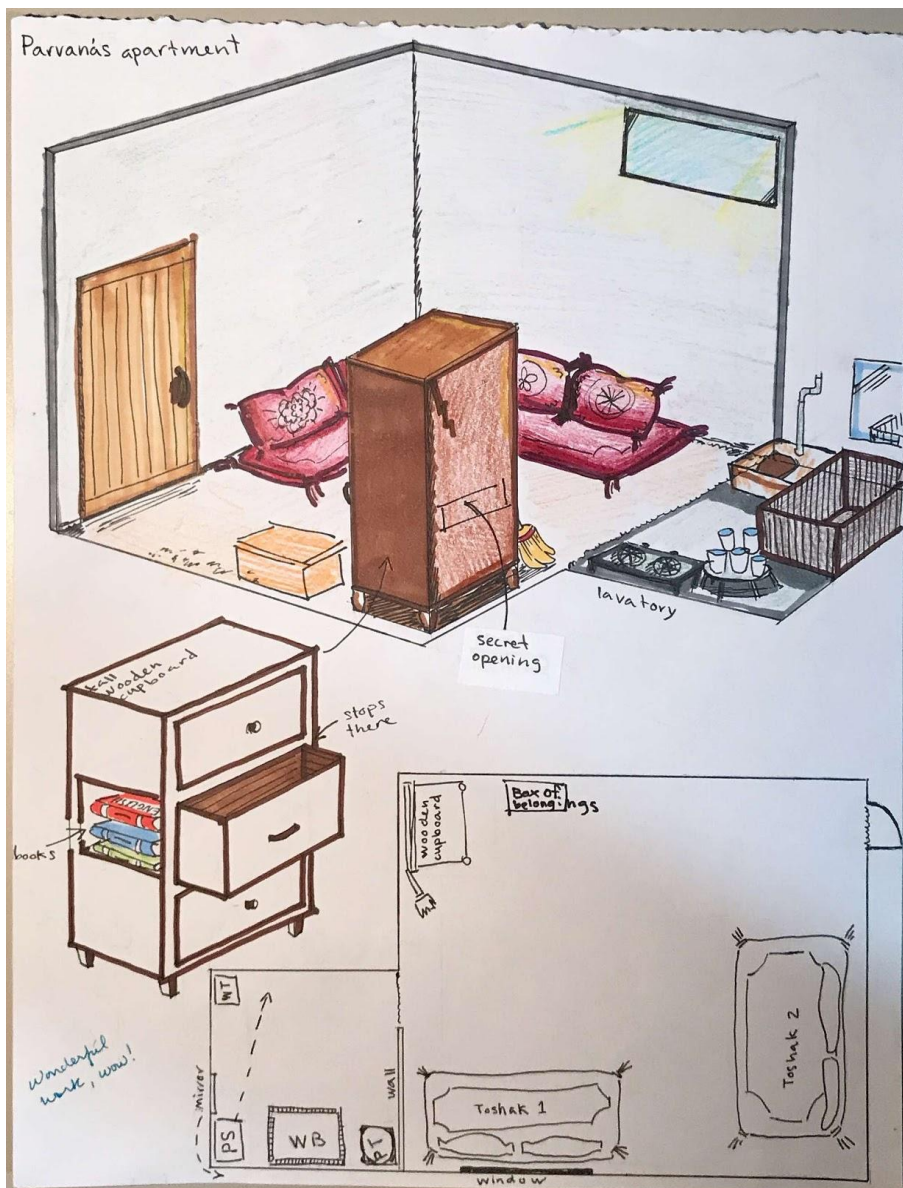
Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Jessie recognized that in the process of reading multicultural books and responding to them by virtue of different sign systems, she grew as a person. She continued to mobilize the potential for art in uncovering the messages she wanted to communicate. I noticed drawing was a preferred mode of self-expression for many students. When designing and fabricating their pieces, or preparing for presentations, students were not simply transferring meaning from the books onto the products; rather they engaged in a more complex understanding of the literature by using alternate sign systems as tools for thinking and the creation of new ideas (Short et al., 2000).

For example, after reading *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*, students could choose to create a family tree. Jessie jumped on this opportunity and relished the occasion to sort out the Zamora family dynamics on canvas. Deeply invested in her project, what she produced was above and beyond expectations: a poster-sized family tree, including the carefully crafted faces of each character, which she combined to a slideshow, explaining her design. Figure 20 (see p. 228) details her oversized poster. Like other learners, Jessie appreciated the creative liberty that extended into her schoolwork. After reading *Ghost Boys*, she interpreted one of the task cards from a unique angle, assembling a montage of digital drawings inserted in a slideshow, with animated viewing prompts for storytelling. Her goal was to tell the story of Jerome, through eight crucial moments of his life. Figure 21 (see p. 229) reveals two of the slides from her 11-page showpiece.

Some learners elected digital applications and electronic platforms as methods for self-expression in the age of technology. Others embraced different channels to do so. For instance, Brooke and Carter's love for cooking inspired them to explore their culinary skills in their final projects for *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*, a story centred around a family-owned Cuban restaurant. They both researched Cuban cuisine, chose a recipe of their liking, and designed their

Figure 20

Jessie's Zamora Family Tree (Student Portfolio, December 2019)

Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Figure 21

Jessie's Digital Montage of Key Moments in Ghost Boys (Student Portfolio, April 2020)

EMMETT - P. 30
"I'm you."

Jerome meets the ghost who had been circling him. He looks concerned, perturbed almost. Emmett will be a very important figure for the characters of this book. He will guide Jerome and help him through his journey. The two share similar experiences that allow them to understand each other and work together. For this drawing, I referenced a picture of the real Emmett Till.

ALIVE - P. 197
I turn. Try to run away.
Pow. Pow.

This is the part where the story comes full circle, coming back to the very beginning of the book. I wanted to show the feeling of urgency in this scene. Jerome trying to run away but being hit anyway, even if he didn't mean any harm. Just like that, everything went from good to bad. In a way, even if the book is ending, it's only the start of things.

Note. Images used with the permission of the participant.

own cooking show. After obtaining the necessary ingredients, they filmed themselves (or took pictures) cooking the dish, sharing details about the history and ethnicity of the food, and interviewing family members as food critics. Carter chose a chicken dish and recollected how much fun he had during the experience, including some mishaps, which he made sure to include in his presentation! Figure 22 (see p. 230) shows a slide from his final presentation.

Figure 22

Carter's Arroz Con Pollo Cooking Experiment (Student Portfolio, December 2019)

Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Brooke picked a Cuban-style churros recipe, and after presenting the video in class, she offered samples of her delicious creation—a treat enjoyed by all!

Besides being kitchen-savvy, Carter was also a budding musician, and taught himself to play several instruments. After reading *Parvana's Journey*, he composed and played a short clarinet piece with the rest of the class. As a final project for *Ghost Boys*, he wanted to compose and interpret another piece, this time a 5-minute musical rendition on his piano, reflecting Jerome's timeline in the story. Each segment of his composition projected the mood and sentiment in connection with moments of Jerome's home and school life, such as (a) when he gets bullied at school, (b) when he walks through his impoverished neighbourhood, (c) when he witnesses lawyers arguing at Officer Moore's preliminary trial, (d) when he meets Sarah, and (e) at his funeral. Like the children in Short et al.'s (2000) study, Carter responded in a way that was

personal, allowing him to express his feelings, experiment with his interpretation of the book, and experience Jerome's emotions. Carter was proud of his production, which he recorded and uploaded on YouTube before sharing it with the class (see Figure 23).

Figure 23

Carter's Musical Composition of Jerome's Sequence of Events (Student Portfolio, May 2020)
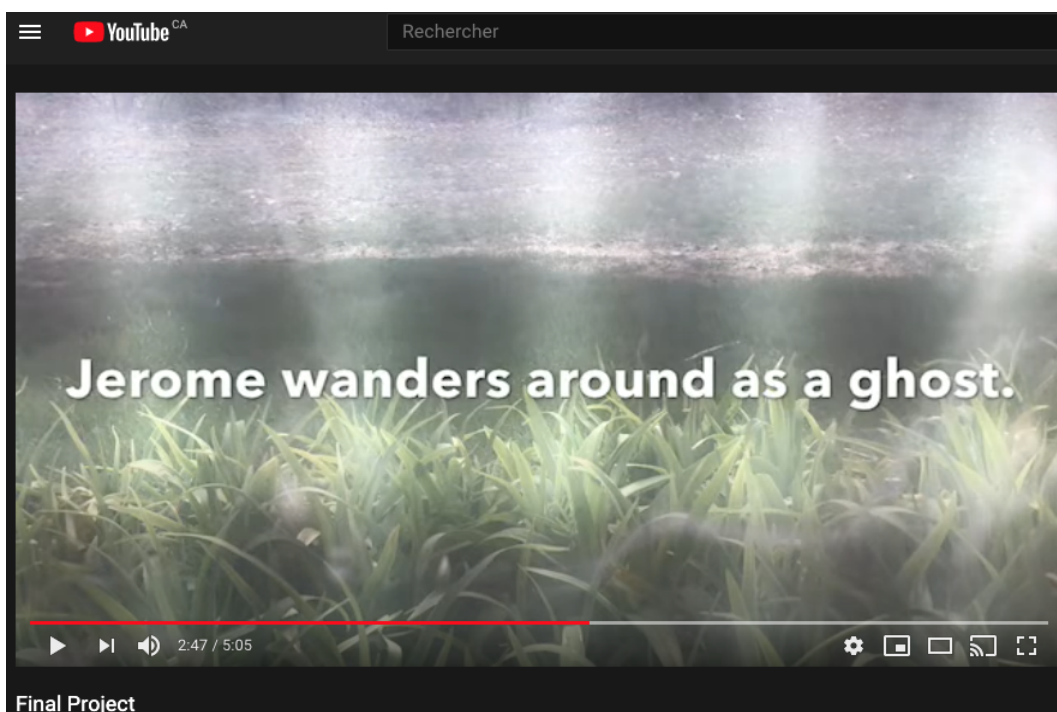
Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

As mentioned already, in the final unit of our multicultural novel studies, I asked students to reflect back on all the books we read. One of the prompts I provided was: "If you could rewrite the end of ANY of the stories you read this year, how would it end differently? Why?" None of the participants wished to alter the endings of the stories. Still, Jessie proposed an alternative to my options for her final book critique, suggesting she would add an epilogue instead:

> I quite like the endings to all the books we've read, and I wouldn't want to change any of them; they were all written the way they were because they had a purpose. Because they

gave closure to the stories in important ways. I want to add [my epilogue] to a story instead of changing it. That being said, I chose *A Bird on Water Street* because there are so many things about that book I still want closure on. . . . I felt like most of the other books already gave the closure I was looking for. I found myself still thinking about *A Bird on Water Street* after I had finished reading it. Not to say it's a bad thing that Elizabeth O. Dulemba chose to end her story with questions still unanswered, I thought it was clever. It doesn't feel like the story is incomplete, rather, it's Dulemba giving you the chance to make up your own ending. I loved this book. I realise I didn't do much of a review for it but know that it made me think outside the box. (Dialogue Journal, June 2020)

Looking back, students navigated through the multicultural novel studies by reading critically and responding through written language and discussion. Synchronously, they responded critically to texts by capitalizing on more encompassing venues. Taking the shape of digital drawings, culinary dishes, free-verse poetry, digital and drawn collages, wax pastel and charcoal sketches, musical compositions, and dramatizations, among others: these multimodal responses exhibited students' *critical expressionism* (McLaughlin & Devoogd, 2020).

As teacher and researcher, I was mindful of the importance of developing an informed reflectiveness toward my pedagogical practices, so that I would remain responsive to my students' needs (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993). Furthermore, I firmly believed that this self-reflection could prompt a change in the way I included learners in their own educational journeys. Providing them with opportunities to unearth their creativity in various ways aligned with Henry Giroux's belief that "transformative intellectuals treat students as active agents . . . and seek to make learning a process where self-understanding and emancipation is possible" (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 24). Making choice a central factor in students' learning and enabling them with opportunities to seek multiple ways of knowing, proved to be meaningful when engaging with multicultural literature. As evidenced in all the examples shown, the data confirmed the precedence creative freedom took in my students' growth as learners, and as individuals.

Voice. In a letter she co-wrote at the end of the school year, Amber disclosed what finding her voice meant for her:

> I felt like I was not doing french [*sic*] and English and waiting for the bell to ring so I could run off, but I was doing this for myself . . . it wasn't only because I needed to do that for school, but I was passionate about it and when I would go home, I could talk about it for hours even if they didn't listen to me . . . my voice mattered. (Student Portfolio, June 2020)

Amber is noticing what McLaren (2008) described as the delicate struggle of creating spaces for critical learning where "building reciprocal feelings of trust is paramount" (p. 478). One of the essential ingredients required in establishing such trust is student voice. Even so, McLaren suggested that balancing the tension between challenging students, and the risk of invalidating their voice, remains a lofty goal of critical pedagogy.

The concept of voice as blended also stood out in the data. For example, after reading *The Breadwinner*, I included a political cartoon analysis as a writing task in the final assignment. The cartoon featured Malala Yousafzai (Bagley, 2012), to whom Malali, a young heroine in Parvana's father's stories, is compared in the book. Jessie's copy demonstrated the extent to which she juxtaposed Malala's voice from the cartoon to her own (see Figure 24.1, p. 234). In her thorough analysis, Jessie made multiple inferences, such as referring to the book in Malala's hands as representing not only her education, but also "her rights as a human being. She is holding her capacities" (see Figure 24.2, p. 235). Jessie also noticed Malala intensely looking at her and attributed the gaze as a deliberate choice by the illustrator to "really get Malala's point across". Jessie seemed to be rallying with Malala in getting her point across too, considering the gender inequality issue that had been in the foreground of *The Breadwinner*.

As we continued to read multiculturally, students examined the positions of oppressed characters from our books, thus better understanding the source of their courage and strength.

Figure 24.1

Jessie's Political Cartoon Analysis (Student Portfolio, December 2019)

My analysis of the political cartoon:

Initial reading: When I looked at the political cartoon it didn't take me long to realize that the girl was in fact Malala Yousafzai. Next to Malala is a quote that I know she said during a speech she gave at the United Nations. *True!* She talks about the Taliban, a terrorist group that affects her life and thousands of others. They are the ones that shot her in the head. The Taliban don't believe in women having rights or people being educated, that's what scares them. As Malala says, the Taliban aren't scared of war or conflict. They're scared of a girl with a book, a girl like Malala. Look at it more closely/details: The cartoon may look simple enough but there is so much to unravel. For example, Malala is looking straight at the viewer with her big eyes. I think that the artist made it like that to really get Malala's point across. She stares at the viewer with such an intense gaze. She is also holding a book with the label "knowledge" on it. I think the book symbolizes education, wisdom and even the future. *yes* The text on the left is crowded and occupied, it comes across as loud but *wow!* persuasive. The text on the right is simple and small but gives a feeling of importance. *good* In the picture Malala is small, the book looks really big next to her. *True!* It may suggest that there is a lot to learn. Behind Malala is her shadow that was drawn with scribbles. I think it represents her dark past. Take a better look at her face and you'll even see her little smile. Conclusion: I don't know where to start with the conclusion. I believe that if you look close enough you can see Malala Yousafzai's journey in the illustration. Her journey with the Taliban and how they wanted to stop her but didn't succeed. What she is holding in her hand isn't just her education, it's her

Figure 24.2

Jessie's Political Cartoon Analysis, Part 2 (Student Portfolio, December 2019)
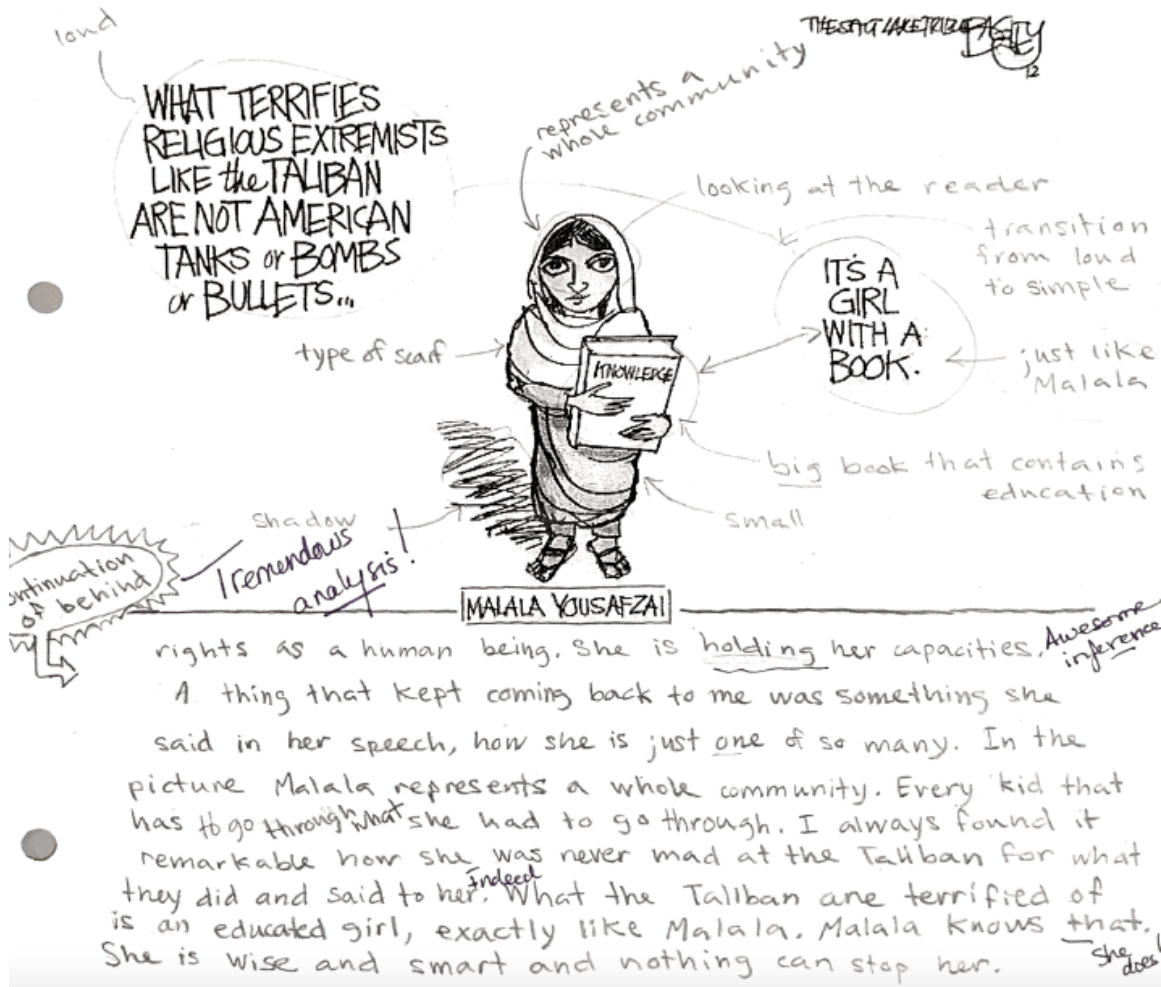
Note. Images used with the permission of the participant.

For instance, Shane admitted that if he was face-to-face with Parvana, he "would probably want to say a lot of things, but she probably knows best"; and later confessed that "then again, I don't know the struggles they're [her family] going through" (Dialogue Journal, November 2019).

Amber, who had emotionally connected with the character of Parvana, stated that she wished she

could hug her, and say "You are strong, brave, intelligent, beautiful. . . . You have rights and you were really brave today" (Dialogue Journal, November 2019). As for Jessie, given a platform to speak for Parvana, she believed that "it can get better and that things change" (Dialogue Journal, November 2019). Timothy shared, "To me courage means that when you know something can be dangerous or can turn out bad you do it anyway because you know that it's worth the risk" (Student Portfolio, February 2020).

Learners grasped that characters, and by extension, real persons in the world, "strive to change their situation, even if it means understanding how the world works from a dominant perspective and using this knowledge to serve their own purposes" (Yenika-Agbaw, 1997, p. 452). As demonstrated throughout this chapter, my students learned about the realities of social injustice, grew fond of characters in the novels we read, and were compelled to make their own voices heard. In line with hooks' (1994) engaged pedagogy, I sensed that reading multiculturally helped build community in our classroom, where everyone aspired to learn, and valued each voice.

We were presented with many opportunities to explore the texts in critical ways by reflecting on systems of dominance such as gender-based oppression, and White privilege, about which learners spoke their minds. The novels challenged us to make connections with real-life issues. Harste et al. (2000) suggested that books we read give voice to those traditionally silenced and questioned why certain groups were disenfranchised. In a way, students were talking back to them, and turning up the volume on the stories they told. It seemed like my students' voices intermingled with characters' voices, and authors' voices as well.

I noticed that when my students first embarked on our journey with multicultural

literature, it appeared they approached these texts with the lens of mirrors and windows, which

initially led them to examine themselves and others in a passive manner. As time went by, I

observed my students not only arriving at a threshold of agency but taking up the invitation

provided by the texts to cross it. Agency became a choice that they took up. Amber described

how this transformation occurred for her:

> La littérature multiculturelle a été quelque chose que j'ai beaucoup aimé et qui m'a aidé à en apprendre plus sur le monde. . . . J'ai lu plusieurs romans dans le passé mais aucun d'entre eux m'ont donné une opinion, un point de vue et une voix que je voulais utiliser grâce aux romans, en plus de m'éduquer sur des choses importantes à apprendre.

> [Multicultural literature was something I enjoyed very much and helped me learn more about the world. . . . I've read many books in the past but none of them provided an opinion, a point of view and a voice that I wanted to use because of the novels or educated me on important things I needed to learn] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Amber noticed a difference between her experience reading books in the past, and her current

experiences with multicultural books. She realized the books provided her with an opportunity to

see herself as part of the bigger picture, not only by allowing her to gain new knowledge about

the world, but by reacting to it in an agentic way. Osorio (2018) suggested that multicultural

literature can be used as a classroom tool toward developing critical consciousness (Freire,

1970/2016), and promoting students' appreciation for diversity. Freire also believed pedagogy

must be meaningful if it professes to be critical and transformative, thereby allowing students to

connect their personal narratives to new knowledge gained (Giroux, 2012). Once again, Amber

voiced her opinion about the urgency of being directed toward agency:

> Les romans que nous avons lus cette année m'ont beaucoup aidée personnellement et émotionnellement à mieux comprendre le monde. Grâce à eux, je sais beaucoup plus sur les vraies couleurs du monde! Ça me fait beaucoup penser aux choses que je ne sais pas encore, comme par exemple cette année j'ai appris que des centaines de personnes noires se sont fait tuer à cause du racisme et le racisme est quelque chose de vrai qui se passe à

chaque jour! Ce que je veux dire est que si je ne savais pas ce qui se passe en Afghanistan et que les femmes et filles se font enlever leurs droits, combien d'autres choses me reste-t-il à découvrir et à en parler pour que toutes les injustices arrêtent et combien de temps cela va-t-il prendre? Aussi, nous, nous demandons comment on saurait tout cela s'il n'y avait pas ces livres ou encore que la société ne voudrait pas nous exposer aux livres multiculturels!

[The novels we read this year really helped me personally and emotionally to understand the world better. Thanks to them, I know more about the world's true colours! It makes me think of all that I haven't learned yet, for instance I learned that hundreds of Black people are killed because of racism and racism is a very real issue happening every day! What I mean is that if I wasn't even aware of women's and girls' situation in Afghanistan, their rights being taken away, how many more things are left for me to discover and talk about and how long will that take? How would we know all this if those books were not available, or society did not expose us to multicultural literature?] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

When Amber realized she had a voice, she longed to use it. Like Amber, other students asserted they wanted to be informed, and as revealed in Chapter 5, they emphasized the importance of authenticity and credibility when learning about social justice issues. Amber and her classmates were validating Shor's (1987) allegation that "[s]tudents are not silent by nature. They have a great deal to say, but not in the script of the traditional classroom" (p. 117). For instance, after reading *Ghost Boys* and later, learning about the murder of George Floyd in the news, students became impassioned about adding their own voices to this heated, ongoing narrative, as connoted previously in this chapter. Timothy recognized that,

[t]he way that people can make a change is by making their voice heard and speaking out about the things that aren't fair, a lot like the situation going on right now with George Floyd, everyone who is against what happened is making their voices heard. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

During our book talks, I noted: "What seemed to be most upsetting to them was the fact that in 2020, these kinds of racist acts are still unfolding" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). Amber paralleled this observation in her year-end survey response:

> Les romans lus cette année m'ont donné une voix que je n'ai jamais eue dans le passé pour aider à combattre les injustices. Même les auteurs de romans nous encouragent à en parler et à combattre les injustices! Puis, la plupart des situations dont les livres nous parlent ne sont pas juste du passé où nous ne pouvons plus rien faire d'autre que d'espérer que ça n'arrive plus. En fait, les situations représentées dans le livre sont des situations pour la plupart qui se passent encore en 2020.

> [The novels this year have given me a voice I never had before to help fight injustice. Even the authors encourage us to talk about it and fight injustice! Furthermore, most situations in the books don't just address the past, but issues represented in the books are situations that still exist in 2020] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

It seemed that students had understood, and accepted, that "silence on issues of discrimination is not an option. Silence makes us complicit" (Boutte & Muller, 2018, p. 8). The students' lenses had been "their own lived experience and the reality of a small, mostly White town. However, they do recognize that they are not sheltered from racism, nor do they believe they should have no part in the solution" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). Further, it dawned on me that, as a critical educator, I could not know my students' questions, concerns, or curiosities about race without asking them (Hagerman, 2019). Like Mirra (2020), I recognized my awesome responsibility and contribution toward the development of my students' worldviews, and therefore intended to listen to, and honour their voices.

The data brought to light the power of literature as a catalyst for deepening learners' understanding of social justice issues (Bieger, 1995). In this first subtheme of agency, my students were transparent about the importance of safe spaces, creative freedom, and voice as we

journeyed with multicultural literature. The second subtheme of agency extended to action, as described next.

Acting for Social Change

Guided by my final research question, I continued to investigate whether our multicultural novel studies challenged students to engage in social action. A dialogue journal entry from Kate, in which she shared a quote from *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*, sparked our initial discussions around social change:

> The quote that didn't escape my mind after reading the book was, one of the sentences that Abuelo wrote for Arturo in one of his letters: 'A young person has the power to do many great things.' That sentence just really hit me hard, in a good way! To start, I think that that sentence is a very powerful sentence. In my head that sentence means, everyone has the ability to do great things by using their own sets of skills 'power'. (Dialogue Journal, November 2019)

Sharing Kate's excerpt with the class, I had encouraged students to ponder their "own sets of skills 'power'".

Ralph Waldo Emerson once declared that "[t]he ancestor of every action is a thought" (n.d.). As the classroom educator, I also invited conversations around social change: "I reminded them about my invitation to think about 'What now?' and 'What do we do with the knowledge gained from the characters in our books and how can we contribute to making a positive change for the present and the future?'" (Teacher Journal, June 1, 2020). Key moments stood out in my journal as significant to social change discussions: "This is a good time to move the conversation to social action, agency, and voice" (Teacher Journal, June 1, 2020). Throughout the year, I observed how students were "thinking about this, beyond the 'what I've learned', 'what I've realized', and 'what I've noticed' levels" (Teacher Journal, May 1, 2020). They responded with fervour and honesty, as illustrated in the following three sections.

A Work in Progress: Self-Transformation. After we finished reading *Ghost Boys*, I asked students to reflect on the following passage in which the ghost character of Emmett Till says: "People change, but not enough at the same time. Or, maybe, people change, then forget they've changed and keep hurting" (Rhodes, 2018, p. 101). In thinking beyond what they had learned, my students pondered the concept of change. Jessie weighed in with these observations:

> Emmett says that because even after all these years, people are still making the same mistakes. Sometimes, it's hard to see the change. Sometimes, we question if people are even changing at all. The process of change is a slow and frustrating one. (Dialogue Journal, March 2020)

Amber associated Emmett's words to the realities of her actual world, explaining that "the author was talking about people and racism, people change with that through the generations for better, but they don't change fast enough" (Dialogue Journal, March 2020). Jessie's and Amber's take on the process of change mirrored the late civil rights activist John Lewis' belief that "[o]urs is the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes, and each one of us in every generation must do our part" (2012, p. 43).

In their dialogue journals, students identified lessons they had learned from characters. Jessie recalled such a moment and conveyed that the multicultural units taught her to acknowledge that she may have had a harmful or wrong opinion or point of view somehow, however, "[n]o one is always correct at all times, so I shouldn't expect to be either. Instead, I should learn from my mistakes and carry on" (Jessie, Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Looking back, it seemed that learners had seized on the critical awareness they had developed through the novel studies and were willing to explore further what that meant for them as members of the global community. Despite the numerous critical conversations my students and

I had participated in, I felt it was important to follow up with calls for action: urging them to consider the power they beheld, and direct it toward social change (Boyd & Miller, 2020).

Jessie, like many of her peers, had begun to imagine ways she could use what she had learned in her own life. She contemplated the prospect of transformation when she was asked if the books prompted her to want to make a change, and answered:

> What I've learned to do is to not tolerate harmful comments and to interrupt them. I try to challenge stereotypes and prejudiced ideas when I hear them from others and even from myself. Having conversations is extremely important and it gives you the opportunity to teach someone else what you've learned. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Jessie had unwittingly followed Freire's notion that "naming the world becomes a model for changing the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. xix). By crossing the threshold of sliding glass doors, she and her classmates had learned that change could be a slow, frustrating, and complex enterprise. Despite this, they were also prepared to face the challenge of becoming agents of change.

Creating Change: One Small Step at a Time. When students met with difficult passages, cruelty, or blatantly unjust situations in the books, they reacted with emotion, as evidenced in previous examples. They were also preoccupied with trying to understand the reasons behind the injustices or make sense of them somehow. Sometimes, characters found themselves perplexed, too, and searched for meaning in their misfortunes. For instance, in *Ghost Boys*, there is such a moment in the story when Jerome angrily demands to know why he and the other ghost boys were killed (p. 120). Asking my students about their thoughts on the matter, I recall Amber opening a series of discussions amidst our group during our virtual meetings. She reasoned Jerome's death as follows:

> If I had something to say to Jerome I would say probably, even though you think it's unfair and don't get me wrong it's not okay to be killed like that but, the world needed to

see you die to realise how much they need to change. It's like they needed to see you die to realise how much society needs to change and how much this is something that affects way more than only the people you know. . . . Also, even though you may not understand this now but all of you that were killed, you changed the world a [*sic*] little by little. (Amber, Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

Amber's idea of changing the world little by little reiterated what learners had previously brought forth about Emmett's quote from the book. More than that, her comment recalled two salient observations from earlier conversations: tragedy precedes change, and change affects everyone (Book Talks, June 4, 2020). Students had begun to grasp the complexity of social change and even recognized their role in creating it. However, as they contemplated the possibilities to become more active, identifying concrete ways they could engage was more problematic. Jessie shared how this dilemma unfolded for her:

I often struggle to come up with ways I could make a change but there is one thing I am certain of; we can't go on pretending that everything's fine anymore. It's with that mindset that I'm able to see how doing nothing is only contributing to the stagnation of our society. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Like many of her classmates, Jessie asserted that the status quo was no longer acceptable in her view but struggled to move from thinking to doing. They had invested themselves in reading, writing, and talking through the stories of injustice, and now wrestled with crossing over to action, with the mindset that you "[do] the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better" (Maya Angelou). In a way, learners had been operating under the banner of "critical literacy as a way of knowing and doing in the world" (Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 308). As mentioned, the news of George Floyd's death sparked the most intensity in our dialogues. I revisited this moment in my journal:

The discussion quickly turned to the George Floyd incident, so I was engaged in yet another rigorous discussion, this time revolving around what our role in the fight against racism is or should be and how they view their responsibility in the midst of this global

outcry. I found it interesting that students felt 'powerless' because they felt like they could not contribute monetarily for the cause. This same concern had been expressed earlier today as well. There seemed to be a common impression that they were not old enough or independent enough financially to contribute to the solution (value was put on the fundraising aspect of a global solution). (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020)

It had become clear to me that this group of students was inspired to act, but somehow felt powerless, and perhaps unequipped to fully contribute to the kind of change our society was demanding. I remember one specific discussion we had about this dilemma, in which they proposed educating those around them on social media or with family and friends, then "admitted they didn't feel like that was really an 'action' that could bring change!" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). Amber felt this helplessness also but indicated in the year-end questionnaire that she felt each book she read this year about injustice had nevertheless inspired her to act. To this, she added:

> Pour une raison ou une autre, ce qui m'a le plus fâché dans tous les sujets que nous avons parlés était le racisme qui se passait dans le monde! Ça me frustre tellement même à ce jour cela me frustre encore mais, j'ai commencé à en parler de plus en plus aux personnes autour de moi. Puis j'en ai discuté avec ma professeure, car, je n'avais pas l'âge pour donner de l'argent ou signer des pétitions ou encore aller protester, puis elle m'a dit que je pouvais faire une différence seulement à en parler. Selon moi, je crois que la raison que ça me frappe le plus fort, le racisme, que le reste des livres que nous avons lus était que le racisme est quelque chose qui se passe dans ma communauté et c'est quelque chose qui se passe maintenant!

> [For some reason, racism is the issue that frustrated me most and still frustrates me so much, but I started to talk about it more and more to people in my surroundings. I discussed it with my teacher because I thought I was too young to make a change like give a donation, sign a petition or participate in a protest, and she told me I could make a difference by simply talking about it. I believe the reason racism affects me so much more than other issues is because it is happening now, in my own community] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Here, Amber caught sight of racism as a social justice issue in her own surroundings, not only

prevalent in foreign lands. She also acknowledged that change was possible, one small step at a

time, by carrying out simple gestures. About the June 4th conversation mentioned above, I

remarked in my journal: "We then discussed how simple gestures like 'listening to others',

'talking about the problem', 'having difficult conversations', and 're-evaluating our own point of

view' could in fact be significant 'ACTIONS' toward progressing forward, to change for the

better" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). After our conversation, it seemed that students felt more

empowered and reassured that they could indeed make a difference. Kelly (2020) reported that

learners acquire "a sense of responsibility and a belief in their own agency to be guardians

against allowing the problems from the past to re-emerge, or even to work for greater equity and

justice in the future" (p. 33). Jessie described how she consolidated her role and that of her peers

in becoming agents of change:

> In my judgement, the way to make a change is to take the responsibility to do everything
> that I'm capable of doing. I should contribute by offering everything that I'm able to
> offer. What I mean by that is that I should do what is within my reach, instead of finding
> excuses not to participate. I think that everyone has something to offer in this fight
> against injustice; we must each do what we can to make this change happen. There are
> multiple ways to do so. For example: donating, lifting others' voices (without speaking
> over them), listening to others' stories, advocating things and people who work hard for
> justice, working alongside those people and most importantly, educating ourselves.
> (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

The data showed how my students' yearlong involvement with multicultural literature

allowed them to learn about themselves, and the diversity in the world around them, thus

enabling them "to arrive at reasoned conclusions and [promote] their taking informed action"

(Newstreet et al., 2018, p. 567). In fact, once they discovered that "there is no historical reality

which is not human" (Freire, 1970/2016, p. 130), they began to understand their own connection

to history, and realized that "conditions of injustice, although historically produced by human beings, can also be transformed by human beings" (Darder et al., 2009, p. 11). Learners experienced Freire's (1970/2016) conscientização and reflected on their identities as conscientious global citizens. By their words, and commitment to engage in social action, these young adolescents hastened the pace of change imposed by the current political landscape.

"Vraies Couleurs" [True Colours]: Promoting a Path to Lifelong Learning. My students also shared how the multicultural literature units impacted them as young people and contributed to their growth as lifelong learners. Discussion opened with the following question: "So far, after reading our books, what have you discovered about your own worldview (how you perceive the world and others)?" (Teacher Journal, May 1, 2020). Jessie offered her thoughts on change, and human nature:

> When it comes to my own worldview, I have learned that it can be wrong and to be willing to change it for the better. No one wants to be wrong, we all just do what we think is right. (Student Portfolio, May 2020)

Jessie's statement exemplifies Thoreau's (1854) famous quote that "[t]hings do not change; we change" (p. 247). Kate supported this notion as well when she accredited her interactions with multicultural books to her changed view of the world and people:

> All the books we read reflect something, either a good thing or a thing we can change. Every book and novel we read made me discover and learn new things that I have never been completely informed about. . . . I perceive new people in a different angle now and make sure that I get to know them well enough before saying anything. (Student Portfolio, May 2020)

In her dialogue journal, Brooke spoke to using what we learn to teach others and perpetuate our commitment toward positive change:

> I will use the things I learned from the characters from the books we read to teach people to be nice and respectful to others. I feel like if I do that it would work because I would

tell people to put themselves in the characters' shoes. I would ask them if they would like those things to happen to them and if they are okay with it. It is also important to teach people about what's happening in the world right now so they can also teach other people and spread the word so maybe one day all of this can change, and someone can make the world a better place. (Dialogue Journal, May 2020)

Phoebe reflected on what specific characters had taught her:

I will use what I learned from the characters to do things that matter by being the person they taught us to be. Sarah taught me to forgive and to denounce the wrong. Carlos taught me to forgive myself and to be positive. Emmett taught me to keep on fighting for change. The Ghost Boys taught me hope. Jerome taught me to see through the anger and injustice. Like Jewell Parker Rhodes said, hopefully more teachers and parents will make their kids read *Ghost Boys* so more people can have access to these lessons. (Student Portfolio, May 2020)

When responding to the question about what advice they would give other teachers, Amber expressed her concern that students be given opportunities to learn in authentic ways. Further, she conveyed her hope that others could experience what she had lived through her own journey with multicultural literature. In a final occasion to share her opinion on the matter, she professed that:

J'aimerais vraiment que d'autres personnes aient la même expérience que moi, car dans la société il n'y a pas assez de personnes qui nous sensibilisent sur les vraies couleurs du monde et les gens ne devraient pas essayer de nous les cacher! Je me sens comme si personne ne nous l'apprenait maintenant, c'est quand que nous allons l'apprendre? Est-ce qu'il faut qu'on attende jusqu'à temps que nous en voyons par nos propres yeux ou on voit des personnes dans notre entourage leur arriver des situations comme celles vu dans les livres? Aussi, le fait que nous apprenons à partir des personnages à qui nous nous attachons, fait une géante différence à cause que c'est comme si cela est en train d'arriver à un de nos ami(e)s.

[I would love for others to have the same experience I had because not enough people raise our awareness about the world's true colours, and they shouldn't try to hide them from us! I feel if no one teaches us now, when will we learn it? Must we wait until we witness injustice ourselves or see people around us live through it like we saw in the books? Also, learning from characters whom we grew fond of makes a huge difference

because it is as if it's happening to one of our friends] (Amber, Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Although students' feedback about the introduction of multicultural books was positive overall, learning with these texts throughout the whole academic year was more challenging for some than for others. Leo indicated: "Je lui dirais d'en choisir quelques-uns mais pas tous parce que je trouvais que ça commençait à être long lire des livres toute l'année" [I would say to choose a few of them but not all because I was getting tired of reading books all year long] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). While students shared how novels encouraged their learning in sustainable ways, Leo's comment reminded me about the importance to differentiate pedagogical approaches to meet students' specific needs. For learners like Leo, the intention of showing the world's true colours might have become secondary in the context of overwhelming reading expectations.

To summarize the emerging theme of agency, I am reminded of a quote from John Lewis (2012) in light of the ongoing protests in the United States: "To truly revolutionize our society, we must first revolutionize ourselves. We must be the change we seek if we are to effectively demand transformation from others" (p. 13). Moving through the multicultural novels and engaging in constant dialogue prompted my students to apprehend what Lewis meant; they made meaning of their experience, and committed to bring their learning to bear, on individual and collective levels. There seemed to be a direct link between agency and responsibility, as it pertains to learners' own learning and lived experiences. In all their accounts, my students conveyed an openness to transform their attitudes vis-à-vis the status quo, and engage in social action, beginning with themselves.

Summary and Looking Ahead

As I conclude this portion of our story, and the first lens of my research findings, I find myself thinking about the metaphorical quilt to which I alluded in Chapter 5. The analytical process led me to piece together a patchwork of my participants' words, thoughts, actions, and emotions, in the context of our classroom community, into "a familiar, comfortable form" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 111). The emerging narrative exhibits how learners were transformed by their participation with multicultural literature units. In an interpretive case study such as this one, Dyson and Genishi (2005) made clear the particularistic and contextual nature of findings: what fuelled our story about teaching and learning with multicultural literature were "thematic threads, meaningful events, and powerful factors" (p. 111) at work in our English as a second language class.

As a teacher researcher, I aspired to find out how using multicultural literature in my classroom might expand my students' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens. At the end of each of their individual and unique journeys, I saw the ways my students had become critical readers and writers. By developing critical awareness and engaging in perspective-taking, they uncovered the value and power of empathy. By learning about social justice, students recognized privilege and explored their understandings of racism, thus gaining insight into social justice issues. Lastly, by communicating through self-expression and acting for social change, learners grappled with the potential of agency, and demonstrated growth as young citizens of the world. Looking ahead, I resume my storytelling endeavour, this time through a second lens. The next chapter emphasizes my reflections on using multicultural literature as a pedagogical practice.

Chapter Eight

A Focus on My Perspective as Teacher: Second Lens

The question is not what you look at, but what you see. ~ Henry David Thoreau

The Second Lens

In the previous chapters, I elaborated an initial lens: the impact of multicultural literature through the eyes of my students. In this chapter, I offer a second lens focused on my pedagogical practices where I weave in an equally important facet of the data: my teacher journal. Beginning in January 2020, I chronicled the ebb and flow of classroom life so that I might ongoingly reflect on my teaching practices and re-examine them at the end of the school year. As I constantly observed, questioned, scrutinized, and reflected on my practice, I never lost sight of what Giroux (2010) believed to be a fundamental task for critical educators: "to make sure that the future points the way to a more socially just world" (p. 717). Multicultural literature predisposed my students and I to consider alternative perspectives on others and challenged us to explore how we perceive ourselves and the world from different viewpoints (Sims Bishop, 1994). In so doing, it served to inform and empower us: more than a source of information, multicultural literature became "a means of personal and social exploration and reflection" (Cai, 2002, p. 134).

The following paragraphs contain detailed observations of my pedagogical approach, which were generated by an uninterrupted stance of reflexivity and recorded in my teacher journal. Moreover, I have intermingled my reflexive voice along with participants' accounts. This second lens uncovered three emerging themes (see Table 9, p. 251).

Theme 1: Pedagogical Practices to Teach About the World

As a critical educator, I heeded Freire's (1970/2016) advice to move away from the banking concept of education and adopted a more reciprocal relationship with learners. I traded

Table 9

Second Lens, Emerging Themes

	Emerging Themes
Pedagogical Practices to Teach About the World	Adopting a Stance of Constant Inquiry
	Engaging With Tough Topics
	Exploring Historical Context
	Connecting to Current Events
	Journal Writing as an Ongoing Practice
	Utilizing Picturebooks
	Fostering Multimodal Response Options
The Emergence of Allyship	Joining the Global Conversation
	Sliding Glass Doors: Crossing the Threshold
Teaching During a Pandemic	Embracing an Organic Timeline
	Re-Evaluating Purpose
	Bringing Narrative Alive During Remote Teaching
	Journal Writing as a Way to Stay Connected
	Nurturing Relationships

the traditional dichotomy of teaching and learning for a more equitable rapport. I became the

learner as well; through dialogue, both me and my students were "jointly responsible for a

process in which all grow" (Freire, 1970/2016, p. 80). As a teacher researcher, I was enthusiastic

about sharing this role and becoming a "[*student*] *of* [*my*] *students"* (Nieto, 1999, p. 142). But

first, I felt it was crucial to co-create a classroom environment that would not only encourage,

but sustain a safeguarded space in which self-expression, creative freedom, and critical curiosity could thrive.

Adopting a Stance of Constant Inquiry

As a teacher, I always felt it was my responsibility to introduce learners to realities different than their own. Stemming from a lifelong yearning to *know* more about the world, as described in Chapter 4, I wanted to *teach* about the world. From the onset of our multicultural novel studies, I introduced students to a critical, "question-centered" approach (Shannon, 1995) by first providing prompts to activate the process, and second, by encouraging them to maintain this stance of inquiry throughout. I invited them to adopt this approach as a looking glass for their learning, and a habitual way of being in our English class. This invitation summoned learners to move beyond simply reading texts, and actively engage with texts by way of a "theoretical and practical attitude" (Luke, 2000, p. 454) as they analyzed and interacted with them. In my journal, I indicated that "I did prepare students that they would be asked to self-reflect and invited to share their thoughts and perspectives" (Teacher Journal, March 6, 2020). This was challenging for both my students and I at first, but as we grew accustomed to the concept of uncertainty, we eventually "tamed the annoying feeling of inadequacy when a question remains unanswered" (Teacher Journal, March 13, 2020). This attitude of constant inquiry emboldened learners "to ask even more questions and dare to explore further about issues" (Teacher Journal, March 13, 2020).

As we were wrapping up our third novel of the year, *Parvana's Journey*, I observed how I was moved by the many profound thoughts and questions coming from my students,

> [striking] to the heart of difficult issues like the injustices that Parvana, Asif, and Hassan
> face in the novel. Many seem to really take the matter to heart . . . which in most cases do

not reflect any obstacle they have ever been faced with. (Teacher Journal, February 2, 2020)

As a language arts teacher, I wanted to expose my dominant-culture students to multicultural books that might invite them to experience alternative views of the world and people (Dressel, 2005). In her opinion, Jessie thought that "[i]ntroducing diverse literary works in younger people's lives was very important, if not necessary, to their learning", adding that multicultural literature "informs us on problems that might not affect us specifically but that we should still know about" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). I recall a wondering I noted in my journal about the potential influence of diversity on learners' perceptions. It was motivated by the discussions my students and I were having about racism, following the events surrounding George Floyd's death in the news. For all my classes, not just my ESL class doing the multicultural book studies, I posted a question on Google Classroom: "Who should get involved in the fight against racism, and how?" I wrote:

> I noticed that the responses/comments coming from my group . . . were coming from a different perspective. Less of a 'they', more of a 'we' approach was evident. I wonder then could the journey with the books have had an effect on their thinking? (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020)

Later, during our penultimate virtual meeting, something stood out to me about their overall experience with global literature. I remarked in my journal that "[g]enerally, they stated feeling better equipped, 'more knowledgeable' and therefore more ready to answer a question asking them to think about what their role is in the fight against racism" (Teacher Journal, June 12, 2020).

Jessie considered the multicultural books valuable "because it opens the door for students to start learning and educating themselves. It encourages them to look more in depth at pressing world issues" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Jessie's testimony in support of more

culturally diverse literacy practices in the classroom reaffirmed my intentions as a critical

educator. Her opinion and those of her peers paralleled Cope and Kalantzis' (2009) position on

diversity:

> The kind of person who can live well in this world is someone who has acquired the capacity to navigate from one domain of social activity to another, who is resilient in their capacity to articulate and enact their own identities and who can find ways of entering into dialogue with and learning new and unfamiliar social languages. (pp. 173-174)

One of the ways I introduced diversity in my classroom was by ensuring that a wide range of

topics was featured in the multicultural literature I had selected, a process itemized in the

methodology portion of the dissertation. Furthermore, I conceptualized my students' journey

with multicultural literature in terms of topical conversations I wanted them to enter, and to

which they could return, rather than direct language instruction (Applebee, 1997). An important

feature of these topical conversations included engaging with tough topics with students as they

arose in the multicultural narratives.

Engaging With Tough Topics

Teaching tough topics in classrooms is a contentious issue that may entail some level of

controversy. A debate in an online educational blog posted in March of 2017 exposed such

concerns and arguments from the teaching community, and parents, about social justice

education (Bennett, 2017). Challenges include parental concerns, and the age-appropriateness

when addressing politically driven issues with children (Reynolds, 2012).

What makes a topic tough? According to Swartz (2020), if teachers are ill-equipped to

deal with certain issues and fear they might interfere with their planned lessons; if the subject

matter makes students uncomfortable; if addressing it stirs up intense emotions and strong

opinions: all are examples of what might render a topic, tough. Engaging with complex social

justice issues in the classroom requires care and sound judgment. Broere and Kerkhoff (2020) proposed that by gradually scaffolding conversations, students can eventually learn respect for difference and develop a cultural sensitivity needed to imagine themselves as connected to the larger global community.

When I started teaching with multicultural literature and addressing social justice issues through current events with my students, I was aware of the challenges and became even more conscious of them as I underwent the process of ethical approval for my research project. Nonetheless, avoiding pressing global issues simply maintains the status quo, which is not helpful. By introducing multicultural literature units this year, I intended to invite learners into critical conversations, aware this might make them uncomfortable, or stimulate deeper thinking. Like Foss (2002), I was passionate about critical consciousness, and sometimes worried I might be pushing too hard or painting an "overwhelmingly bleak" (p. 402) picture of the world. Near the end of our multicultural book studies, I reflected in my teacher journal about sharing such a worry with my group of students:

> I have been pondering about this and it was on my mind all weekend—I felt I needed to be upfront. I told them that it seemed like, along with providing them books about tough topics, I was only offering 'negative' facts, stories, events (i.e., about racism, poverty, discrimination). I told them that I didn't want them to only think or feel like the world was horrible and hopeless and I explained why I shared all these things with them. (Teacher Journal, May 29, 2020)

I remember it being important for me to be transparent with my students, even if I had prepared them for such critical conversations prior to the novel studies, also providing guidelines to ensure safe spaces.

The dialogue I had been reflecting on above took place during our tenth Google Hangout, in the midst of remote learning. My reflection continued:

> Right away, I was amazed to see that all of them were writing in the 'chat box' that they would rather be 'informed' and learn about this, even if what they learn about the 'reality' in the world is 'sad'. They were forthcoming in their comments and responded in a manner that really impressed me. (Teacher Journal, May 29, 2020)

Looking back, I was amazed but not surprised, because my students' responses were congruent with what they had been expressing in their dialogue journals, during group discussions, and in their artwork. As evidenced in Lens 1, students yearned to wrestle with matters of social justice, like Shane and Andrew who stated that they had never been asked to read books involving topics that had a connection to real life. Learners had clearly voiced their inquisitiveness and were fervently poised to tackle tough topics when they emerged from the novels. Like Robinson (2013), I took a critical and transformative perspective focused on further developing critical consciousness, examining assumptions about cultural differences, and questioning systemic patterns of oppression. Moreover, Boyd and Miller (2020) suggested reading texts that address social justice problems might "teach students to analyze all facets of the world they encounter and to become critical participants in those worlds" (p. 19).

Not only did I intentionally choose multicultural books with tough topics, but my students also took up the invitations these books offered. They voiced their desire to learn about the world's "true colours", as described by Amber in Chapter 7. Lens 1 revealed how students were ready and able to tackle tough topics depicted in the fictional novels, as well as engage in global conversations about injustices unfolding in their actual world. After we finished reading Ellis' first book of the series, Jessie penciled her thoughts about it in her journal:

> *The Breadwinner* is a book with contents that can leave the reader upset and confused. It's full of events that can be hard to comprehend or to fully wrap your head around. When Deborah Ellis was writing the book, I think that she wanted people to see the truth, she wanted for us to understand other people's lives. I don't think we talk about that kind of stuff enough. Not a lot of people know what's really going on out there. (Dialogue Journal, December 2019)

Despite the difficulty of dealing with subjects like gender inequality, wartime violence, and poverty, Jessie acknowledged the need to talk about them. Lightner (2020) asserted that engaging adolescents in conversations about controversial issues can be precarious; however, young adult novels provide a critical perspective through which they "could raise questions and voice concerns about their own connected knowledge and experiences" (pp. 28-29).

During the few years prior to this study, I encouraged my students to read a variety of texts by further examining their content, interrogating what the texts say about how the world is and why it is so (Comber, 2001). It was only after I began my doctoral studies that I could name my pedagogical practices as critical literacy. Bennett (2017) indicated that educators who engage in curricular activities that support a sociopolitical agenda endorse a social justice pedagogy. In order to help beginner as well as novice teachers with their social justice teaching practices, Lewison et al. (2002) developed four key dimensions that encourage the development of critical literacy skills. According to Leland et al. (1999) and their review of vast numbers of controversial books, literature containing sensitive topics is extremely relevant because critical literacy endorses "the kind of conversations we cannot afford to ignore" (p. 73). For instance, Timothy discerned how the characters in his book depict "what it's like to be from a culture that is very different from ours, . . . how hard it is to try and fit in when you're not familiar with the same stuff as the other people who live there" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). On the other hand, Brooke concluded: "I used to think the world was a perfect place and I never focused on the reality. And now it's all I can think of. I never thought people could be so cruel" (Reflective Questionnaires, June 2020). Andrew mentioned that after reading the books, he "[perceived] the world in a completely different way than before", and "[realized] the injustice, racism, intimidation" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). As for Kate, she appreciated that

the novels "were written from an author that wanted to spread a message instead of just trying to entertain people" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020).

Whether the books depicted issues like racism, loss, police brutality, discrimination, or poverty, learners resoundingly testified to their relevancy and were willing to actively partake in the conversations alluded to by Leland et al. (1999). My intention when teaching tough topics through multicultural literature was not for students to feel shamed or burdened by history. Instead, I observed compassion and hope as they encountered difficult or sensitive issues, like racism and White privilege. Therefore, as a critical educator, I believe it is important to provide safe spaces for conversations about race, without which our complacency about Whiteness and White privilege risks "[shutting] down explorations of past and present racial diversity, power, and oppression" (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2019, p. 524). By providing students with appropriate channels for reflection and dialogue, they felt empowered to make a difference. Another way I incorporated diversity in my teaching practice was by examining circumstances that emerged from the fictional narratives through the lens of actual historical contexts.

Exploring Historical Contexts

Prior to this study, I had begun to believe it necessary to approach multicultural novel studies from a multidisciplinary perspective. In part this was due to my experience within an International Baccalaureate (IB) program where I embedded social studies in my French and English language arts classes. As a teacher researcher, during this study, I could now name my approach as critical pedagogy, one that advocates that "all knowledge is created within a historical context and it is this historical context which gives life and meaning to human experience" (Darder et al., 2009, p. 10). In retrospect, this standpoint became pivotal as I

navigated through the books with my students, mindful of the historical contexts in which stories were unraveling.

For instance, *Parvana's Journey* abounded with examples of children's rights violations, as forewarned by the author in her dedication: "To children we force to be braver than they should have to be" (p. 5). When we finished reading the novel, I assigned an oral and visual communication task revolving around an artistic presentation of a scene from the book in connection to selected articles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Known as the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history (UNICEF, n.d.), the Convention recognizes children as individuals with their own rights, listing 54 articles aimed at protecting those rights. I noted in my journal:

> Learning about the articles of the UNCRC was an important layer added to the reading of the novel. I believe it is important and essential for me to associate external information and facts and open a space for students to be able to connect the fictional aspect of the story to real-life historic events and documents. (Teacher Journal, February 26, 2020)

Like Dressel (2005), I considered it critical to teach my students to assess the way novels position them as readers and evaluate the role of power and society as they discussed disenfranchised groups portrayed in the narratives. I recollect another instance when I first introduced the novel of *Ghost Boys*. I noticed being preoccupied with the fact that this novel gave prominence to the tragic events of real-life persons. I expressed this uneasiness in my journal:

> My concern with reading and teaching through this book is that the story regularly refers to historic events and real-life personalities—and they are mostly known in American culture but not so much here in Canada. The tragic events surrounding Emmett Till's death, the Civil Rights Movement, Black Lives Matter, etc. are less known facts among my community of students. I have pondered lengthily about different ways to broach these topics. (Teacher Journal, March 6, 2020)

To resolve this dilemma, I sought to expand my students' knowledge of the historical/societal

context of African American realities. I watched a few documentaries and decided that "one

video in particular, told from Emmett Till's mothers' POV, would be an appropriate one to

show" (Teacher Journal, March 6, 2020) (see Till Mobley, 2012). A week later, I invited my

students to team up with classmates for an in-class research activity. In groups of two or three,

they selected a name from a list that included Tamir Rice, Emmett Till, Thurgood Marshall,

Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Laquan MacDonald. Equipped with chart paper, markers,

and Chromebooks, they researched key facts about these real-life personalities and why they

were important historically. I noted,

> . . . lots of shocked reactions when they started reading and learning about their stories.
> Teens are so keen on justice—and when there is clearly a lack of it, they react so
> strongly! Their 'fairness' compass is so sharp at this age. Love this dynamic of sharing,
> discussing and yes, asking questions! (Teacher Journal, March 13, 2020)

Looking back, I believed these responsive teaching moments to be quite useful for students to

engage in conversations that brought them "face to face with the present-day ramifications of

values inherent in systems and how they privilege particular groups of people" (Dressel, 2005, p.

761). Conducive to the organic approach I had adopted, I thought inserting additional

information such as a video, an article, a line of questioning, or an activity might situate the

different contexts of my students' books and help deepen their understanding. This often

occurred sporadically and spontaneously, whether in class or during remote teaching, in response

to their reactions and questions. For example, during the final unit, I recall trying to mindfully

provide historical contexts for each group of learners and their respective books as they

independently read (or listened to) their novels at home. In my journal, I reflected about "[trying]

to add what I can to provide more context for the stories—especially for those who are receiving

audio files only [due to remote learning during COVID school closures]" (Teacher Journal, May

5, 2020). Sometimes, I shared links to videos providing information directly from the author of

their books. For instance, for readers of *Stella by Starlight*, I posted a video of Sharon Draper

presenting her novel (Simon & Schuster Books, 2015). I sent students reading *Allies* a video of

Alan Gratz' book trailer (Scholastic, 2019). I forwarded a link to another book study group of an

interview with author Elizabeth Dulemba (FultonGovernmentTV, 2014), about her inspiration to

write *A Bird on Water Street*. Other times, I posted links to articles or websites that shed light on

the context of the stories they were reading.

Despite my best intentions, I realized that accompanying my students through five

different book studies remotely during our final unit of study was a real juggling act! One

moment stood out to me when my students had just started reading their chosen novels. Six girls

had picked *Stella by Starlight*, a tale about a young girl who witnesses the burning of a cross at

the hands of the Ku Klux Klan. The story begins with this daunting scene, and my students were

already well into the initial chapters (which I had posted as audio files) when they had requested

a small group virtual meeting with me, after mentioning that "they didn't understand the

beginning of the story and needed some clarifications" (Teacher Journal, May 15, 2020). I

preserved this moment in my journal:

> Many questions are asked about the conflict presented at the beginning of this novel
> (Stella witnesses the burning of a cross by the KKK across the pond). I suddenly realized
> that I had posted the early chapters and a bit of information about the story's timeline,
> location, and context, but not specifics about the KKK. We discussed it and I provided a
> little bit of history with regard to this group. Later, I posted a few links on Classroom.
> (Teacher Journal, May 19, 2020)

I was thankful for how my students reminded me about the importance of historical context as

we delved into the novels, and for their part, they had sorted out some confusion with the

information I had provided (see Banfield, 2015; Brut, n.d.). Robertson (1997) pointed out that, "[i]n teaching stories of loss, careful thought needs to be given to identifying the social and structural conditions that led to the violations depicted in the story" (p. 462). As I continued to journal my reflections and pondered my teaching practices, I found myself encouraging my students to keep connecting stories to the real world. One way to achieve this was by continuously keeping abreast of current events as they intersected with circumstances depicted in our books.

Connecting to Current Events

Of all the injustices that arose during our readings, racism proved to be the most outstanding, as demonstrated by Lens 1. I reflected,

> The issue of racism has surfaced in an unprecedented way just in the past week and for me, a mirrors/windows/sliding glass doors metaphor has never been more relevant and alive. (Teacher Journal, June 1, 2020)

Williams (2020), a professor in Ohio, encouraged all of us to keep talking about race in the context of a society rife with racial misconceptions and racialized inequalities. As my students and I beheld a race crisis of international proportions, we were leaning toward Williams' conviction that "meaningful change begins with talking about race reflectively, repeatedly and responsively" (para. 4). This tumultuous moment in history was fresh in my mind when I contemplated,

> I am thankful, at this moment, for having introduced earlier this year the stories of Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, etc. Through our *Ghost Boys* book study (this was such a great pick), students and I delved into the issue of police brutality, unequal justice proceedings, discrimination, 'unconscious racism', white privilege… there was no way to know that George Floyd's death and 'The Overdue Awakening' (Time Magazine, June 2020) would ignite such animated conversations among us. (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020)

As evident in my journal entry, it seemed that "the explicitness and widespread public eruption of racist, sexist, and hate speech of all kinds [gave] us a direct opportunity to bring anti-racist teaching out of the closet" (Darling-Hammond, 2017, pp. 134-135). From the emerging themes of insight and agency in Chapters 6 and 7, my students had become emboldened to be a part of the fight against racism. In her year-end survey, Amber asked: "Comment voulez-vous bâtir une communauté qui va changer le monde s'ils n'ont pas eu l'enseignement pour le faire?" [How are we to build a community that will create change if we haven't been taught to do it?] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). I recall being taken aback after first reading her comment and felt obliged to read it twice! At every turn, I was convinced that not only contextualizing learning in history, but also current world events, was an essential factor in utilizing multicultural literature as a classroom tool. Like one of Diatta's (2018) students in her study, Amber had figured out the importance of historical context, not only in her understanding of the books, but in how she could use her learning to make the world better. Diatta also reminded us, as educators, about our role in explicitly and implicitly providing opportunities for our students to become agents of change.

Associating current events with our multicultural readings became a prevalent component of my pedagogical practices. As a critical educator, I was aware that preparing topical lessons would require a lot of time and constant reflection if I intended to engage learners in informed activities and discussions, oriented toward action (Boutte & Muller, 2018). As I reflected on the critical approach I adopted throughout the year, it was noticeable that current events coalesced with our multicultural novels in a very organic and dynamic fashion. This pedagogical model supported raising students' level of critical awareness (Morales et al., 2017), and created teachable moments in which they discussed global challenges and inequities they might have

been struggling to understand in the news (Broere & Kerkhoff, 2020). Consequently, the decision to integrate current events into my teaching practice produced the emergence of allyship, which I explain further in this chapter.

When asked about recommendations they would offer other teachers who might want to use multicultural literature with their students, Andrew answered, "Le conseil que je donnerais serait de s'assurer de montrer des vidéos ou des articles de ce qui se passe dans le livre et dans le monde en même temps. Comme ça nous pouvons faire des références après" [The advice I would give is to make sure to show videos or articles about what goes on in the books as well as in real life simultaneously, that way we can make connections] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Andrew was referring to real-world circumstances as a scaffolding tool to his learning experience with literature. Looking back, the benefits of adding this layer to learners' activities and discussions seemed to provide a useful bridge for further understanding of controversial issues. Even though we steadily immersed ourselves in our novels, the messiness and unpredictability of world events crept up on us with news of racial injustice and police brutality. One such event occurred in early May, as I mentioned in my journal,

> This morning I posted an article from CTV.News about Ahmaud Arbery, a young black man who was killed by two white men in Georgia, US. Because we have been discussing and writing (and reading) about a very important social justice issue, RACISM, I wanted to connect the stories (GB, Stella, etc.) to real-life events that are unfortunately unraveling at the moment. (Teacher Journal, May 8, 2020)

Exploring an unsettled political climate with my students through current events had been a powerful element in our interactions. Every time I shared an article or video, I invited learners to read the post, think about their position in relation to the issue at hand, connect it to the characters and events in the novels, and prepare to share with their peers during our weekly virtual gatherings. By inserting news and current events into my practice, I had been ready to

engage in these interactions that represented potentially ambiguous moments, and to "adapt to the highly unpredictable and sometimes galvanizing nature of classroom discussions and activities" (Moore, 2013, p. 327). Table 10 outlines examples of how I used this method to connect various topics with our readings. Referring to current events also helped clarify key concepts within our book studies. An example of this was the way they scaffolded the learning of new vocabulary. By talking about concepts like ostracism, prejudice, and unconscious racism in the context of actual news, students were able to interpret social justice issues more easily.

Table 10

Examples of News/Current Events Used to Provide Historical/Geopolitical Contexts

Topic	Connection	Headline or Current Event	Source
Current struggles for peace and gender equality in Afghanistan	*The Breadwinner*	Video documentary about women's oppression at the hands of the Taliban regime	Journeyman Pictures, 2013
		Attempted assassination of Fawzia Koofi, female politician, activist, and peace negotiator	BBC News, 2020
Racial injustice and police brutality	*Ghost Boys*	CNN article about the reopening of Emmett Till's murder case	McLaughlin & Grinberg, 2018
Ostracism	*Ghost Boys*	CNN article about Indian doctors ostracized being of their exposure to coronavirus	Yeung & Gupta, 2020
		CNN article about attacks on Asian-Americans related to the coronavirus	Yan, Chen & Naresh, 2020

As my students and I pursued our discussions about social justice debates in the news, they circled back to the authenticity component of their learning, many of them confirming in their dialogue journals "that the authors of their book did not make any effort to gloss over truth

or reality and students noted they were glad for that fact" (Teacher Journal, May 21, 2020). As I continually reflected on my decision to post links to articles, videos, and documentaries, I recognized just how instrumental these were for learners to fully grasp the complex and sometimes troubling issues that came up in multicultural literature.

Lastly, a review of my data led me to detect another important effect of integrating current events on a regular basis. Aside from heightening their level of critical awareness and providing opportunities for them to converse about issues of inequity on a global level, it seemed my students took more ownership of their education by engaging in their own quest for knowledge. After posting articles about racism and related concepts,

> . . . [two] students shared with me some videos they had watched (this was unsolicited, not part of assignments!) about racism and wanted me to post on Classroom for others to see. One of them was a social experiment about a woman with her dark-skinned child and responses from other people in the restaurant where she was. (Teacher Journal, April 3, 2020)

This ownership continued among some of my students:

> . . . since about the time we started reading *Ghost Boys*, a few students have occasionally been sending me their own links to videos or documentaries that concern the topic of conversation. I am so amazed because this is an indication that they are willingly going beyond reading the book and taking time to research current events or a certain topic further. And then, they go the extra step of sharing it with me. I wonder if my habit of regularly posting materials on Classroom has encouraged them to seek information for themselves too. (Teacher Journal, June 16, 2020)

As I wondered about the impact of my pedagogical practices on learners, I also recollect feeling confident about the meaningfulness of news and current events as they commingled with the lives of my students. Like Moore (2013), I could see how this practice "actively [shaped] their values about the world" (p. 326) and solidified their growing understanding of global citizenship.

As learners engaged in reading and dialoguing, they also participated in multicultural studies by writing in their dialogue journals. Instilling a practice of consistent journalling yielded many learning opportunities, as I recount in the next section.

Journal Writing as an Ongoing Practice

The idea of dialogue journals first came to me after we watched the movie *Freedom Writers* (LaGravenese, 2007). Students were enthralled with the story and impressed with the method of communication that was introduced by the teacher in the movie. According to Holmes and Moulton (1997), ESL learners might engage in conversation daily, but few of them write as frequently. Ergo, journal writing as an ongoing practice seemed like a wonderful way to communicate and connect with my students. Thus, from early in the school year, I invited students to voluntarily jot down thoughts, observations, feelings, and questions as they read, in addition to responding to specific weekly journal prompts. Incorporating ongoing dialogue journal writing was a pedagogy that unfolded in response to my students. It meant committing to a time-consuming task, but I was convinced that these efforts would be impactful in making a sustainable difference in my ESL learners' motivation and ability to write in English (Holmes & Moulton, 1997).

Sometimes, I assigned a prompt—a question or statement related to the readings— and students would address their entries to a classmate. A back-and-forth, written conversation would follow to which I added my own comments at the end. During the reading of a novel, I invited learners to respond to specific prompts, and challenged them to use questions and "I wonder" statements when they addressed their peers. I recall a slow start: "this being a newer approach to what they were familiar with or had ever experienced in an ESL class, I didn't know what to expect, or how much to expect!" (Teacher Journal, June 15, 2020). I initially provided them with

a list of potential sentence starters to support my ESL learners with responding to prompts and observed how "it didn't take long for most of the class to feel comfortable with it and 'befriend' it" (Teacher Journal, June 15, 2020). Students grew quite proficient and subsequently abandoned the cookie-cutter language.

I recollect the content of students' exchanges with their peers as honest, respectful, and provocative at times. Below is an example of such a conversation between Kate and Esther, as they discussed *The Breadwinner*. The dialogue was instigated by the following prompt: Write an entry addressed to a classmate about questions you may have about something that you have learned so far in the novel.

> December 9, 2019
> Dear Classmate,
> Something I've always wondered about is, why do women and girls c'ant [*sic*] go outside and if they do, they need to wear a burqa or a chador and they need a letter from their husbands or men? This topic is the thing that bothers me the most, what about you? It's really sad to think that women aren't allowed to go outside. It's actually like saying "women and girls aren't allowed in the girls bathroom". To me it's like saying that. That is something I wish I could change. But why is the Taliban against women? Like without women they wouldn't even be alive! It's true, they wouldn't be alive. What are you're [*sic*] thoughts?
> [Kate]
>
> December 16, 2019
> Dear [Kate],
> I truly understand your opinion and your question. I'm against this law too! I want women and girls to be free! The things that really surprise me the most about your "quote" is why can't women go to the girls bathroom and I do understand your meaning. Also, I was surprise [*sic*] when you wrote "without women they wouldn't even be alive". I've never think [*sic*] of that before but thanks for making me more intelligent. When you wrote about that the Taliban needed a letter from their husband, well I think the Taliban are really <u>stupid</u> because the girls and women could lie about it.
> Thank you for your question. I've really appreciated talking with you.
> See you again,
> [Esther]

December 16, 2019
Dear [Esther],
Thank you for understanding my opinion and my questions. Thank you for understanding that this law is horrible. Women and girls should be free! I see you understand my quote "it's like saying women aren't allowed to the girls bathroom". I see you had a great laugh, but you do have to agree that it's true. What, it's true, without women they wouldn't be alive, I know I think of bizarre things! You're welcome, for making you smarter. And you're so right about women could just lie about the letter from their husbands. I know that I would lie if I we're [*sic*] in their position!
Thank you for understanding and answering my questions! I hope my writting [*sic*]wasn't to [*sic*] hard to read! I appreciated talking (writting) [*sic*] to you too!
Bye,
[Kate]

I noticed how Kate and Esther did not hold back on their opinions and reactions to reading about discriminatory practices such as the ones portrayed in the book. Like Kate and Esther, many students shared their thoughts and provocative questions about complex social issues.

Most often, students addressed their dialogue journal entries to me as they interacted ongoingly with global literature. From the start, we established that their journals were assessment-free zones, which meant that I would not correct spelling or grammatical errors. Like Amber in Chapter 5 and Phoebe in Chapter 7, I also recognized how significant it was for journalling to remain a non-evaluative activity. I observed:

> I can see the growth in the content and style of each entry, and I notice a much more 'relaxed' learner, one who is not afraid or ashamed of writing what they truly think and how they honestly feel! This is of consequence, in my view, for 13-year-olds in a second language English class. (Teacher Journal, June 15, 2020)

I explained to learners that as I read their entries, I would insert notes in the spirit of dialogue, rather than as a critic. Often, this dialogue would develop into a back-and-forth exchange between us where I would "comment on their entries by adding a thought, and sometimes pushing the conversation even further by delving deeper in a subject, or something they have

brought up in their journals" (Teacher Journal, April 6, 2020). Denne-Bolton (2013) claimed that

this is ideal for developing students' critical thinking skills because "it is often in the act of

writing a response that actual learning takes place" (p. 3). The more I read their dialogue journal

entries, the more I observed improvement in their writing: a feature I had not anticipated but

stood out more than other years. I noticed that "the growth in their writing skills is evident in the

content, style, and what made them want to write in the first place. As second-language learners,

I feel this is as important, if not more important a focus, than spelling mistakes" (Teacher

Journal, May 19, 2020). Once students started writing, I noticed how they adopted the journals as

an outlet for self-expression, complementary to reading. I remember being impressed with the

way students quickly embraced this new method:

> I am moved by their thoughts and feel privileged to read their entries. I think the fact that
> I am not evaluating the DJ at all, nor am I correcting spelling or grammar, allows for this
> venue to be a safe and free space where thoughts, feelings, and questions can exist on the
> pages without judgment. (Teacher Journal, January 30, 2020)

In my journal, I recalled "feeling [guilty] about 'cutting corners' instructionally and with regard

to teaching proper grammar. But I do not feel this way anymore" (Teacher Journal, May 19,

2020). I realized that instead of a traditional, instructionally oriented language arts class, what we

were creating together was a space where everyone could be both student and teacher, and where

reading, writing, and dialoguing naturally forged our "literate environment" (Atwell, 1984, p.

240). Shor (1987) argued that when teachers create spaces in which learning is a reciprocal act,

and where students can learn about themselves and their peers, it fosters such an environment. I

even detected a positive change in my students' confidence level as second language learners. In

my teacher journal, I pointed out,

> I can say that I truly believe this 'habit' has allowed for students to express themselves
> freely and trust their responses, which are gut reactions, but thoughtful insights as well.

> What strikes me most about the conversation is the truthfulness. I do not feel like students are trying to 'say something they think I want to hear', and that is very encouraging in my view. (Teacher Journal, April 30, 2020)

On the final reflective questionnaire, Timothy recognized his growth as a learner, noting that writing in the dialogue journals was "a great way to express how [he] felt about the book", and found that it "was a great way to build on our ideas that we had about the book" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Leo admitted: "J'ai bien aimé ça car je trouvais que c'était une façon de pouvoir s'améliorer en anglais, mais vers la fin je trouvais que ça devenait trois répétitif" [I enjoyed them because I thought it was a way to improve my English skills, but near the end I thought it was too repetitive] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Leo's comment offered a point of reflection as this was the first time, I implemented ongoing journalling in my classroom. Nevertheless, like the students in Holmes and Moulton's (1997) case study, Timothy and Leo had noticed a gradual growth of their writing skills, and they attributed this growth to the dialogue journal process. Reflecting back, journal writing became a very successful habit, appreciated by most students. Overall, I gained an appreciation for this practice:

> Writing regularly in DJs was the best decision I made, at the beginning of the year, to encourage my students not only to write more, but to write better. It is not a perfect solution to teaching ESL, but in my view, it is one way that connects practice with ongoing reflection . . . I have noticed stark improvement on technique (use of metaphors, expressions, sentence structure, etc.) for many students. Also, and more importantly, I have noticed that for several students, a unique style of narrative is being developed as they write in their DJs each week. (Teacher Journal, May 19, 2020)

Implementing journalling as a regular classroom activity encouraged students to express themselves, as well as practice their writing skills. Standing by Vygotsky's (1978) belief that writing should occur as a natural process and be "'cultivated' rather than 'imposed'" (p. 118), launching the dialogue journals corresponded with my pedagogical values and objectives.

Further, the non-assessment aspect of the dialogue journals along with the element of reciprocity appeared to contribute to a positive experience overall. In addition to dialogue journals, I included the use of picturebooks in the panoply of teaching practices at the onset of our multicultural units.

Utilizing Picturebooks

Early on in my PhD journey, my supervisory committee suggested providing picturebooks as options to complement students' reading experiences. Although I had used picturebooks with students in previous years, I had not done so systematically. This time, I integrated a reading repertoire that included carefully selected picturebooks in connection with themes and social justice issues that emerged from the five multicultural novels. Our reading list featured six global picturebooks, as described in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Like Sims Bishop (2012), I trusted that picturebooks could be used as conversation starters, allowing students to find common ground around difficult and sensitive topics/concepts. Mostly shared through read alouds, I can still remember the puzzled look on my students' faces as I read from my gently used, personal copy of *Seven Blind Mice*! However, I noticed it seemed like they did not mind jumping in to share their thoughts, which were very perspicacious. I reflected in my journal afterwards,

> This is new for them; they are so weirded out! When we discuss the concept of 'story time' in primary school or 'bedtime stories', everyone has fond memories of someone reading special books or stories to them. I said, 'Why should we stop when we grow up?' I was surprised to hear what students had to share about this particular story by Ed Young. As a group, we talked a bit about what lessons or thoughts we can take away from this story. Honestly, for eighth-graders, I was so impressed! They really surprised me; it was so profound. Not judging others—gather all the facts before drawing conclusions—know all the information before making a decision. (Teacher Journal, January 10, 2020)

The message in *Seven Blind Mice* foreshadowed the concept of perspective-taking, which turned out to be a focal activity throughout our multicultural novel studies. This first picturebook helped present "a more complex and fluid understanding of one's neighbour: someone who is different in some respects from oneself, yet so similar in others" (Shapiro, 2009, p. 11). Kate was the one who had summarized many of her peers' opinions when she said: "I want to make people understand how we all have something in common, humanity" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). It was evident that students yearned for a sense of commonship, and more than simply tolerating or accepting others, they attributed value in respecting each other's humanity.

The next picturebook I shared was *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey*, which included illustrations of stone artwork by Syrian artist Nizar Ali Badr. The story is about a girl and her family, in war-torn Syria, who are forced to leave behind everything they know and love to seek refuge in Europe. This story, told in English and Arabic, corresponded with both novels from Ellis' *The Breadwinner* series which we had already read. Although students did not comment on the picturebooks in their dialogue journals, or in the end-of-year questionnaires, the artwork in this book stood out to them. Martens et al. (2012) pointed out that "[a]lthough the art in picturebooks relates to the written text, it is also created to communicate its own meaning" (p. 287). I recall meeting with my students virtually during the pandemic, and how a major takeaway from this picturebook was the beauty and craftsmanship of the stone art. At the beginning of the school year, I shared with them my love of the ocean, as was evident from the vast collection of beach pebbles resting on my classroom windowsill. This book features the artist telling his story with pebbles, and it reminded them of my collection, as our thoughts temporarily drifted back to our classroom environment.

Unfortunately, my plans to read aloud the remainder of the picturebooks in class were

interrupted by the school closure due to the pandemic. Not willing to remove them from my

readers' full experience, I resorted to other means of dissemination for the books: (a) locating

already prepared virtual read alouds, and (b) recording videos of myself reading aloud the

picturebooks, zooming in on the illustrations.

As we moved to virtual teaching, learners had the opportunity to post in response to the

picturebooks but no comments were made. I aimed to share why I had selected each book such

as in this entry:

> This picturebook, called *The Treasure Box*, is one of my favourites. It talks about
> refugeeism, immigration, family, perseverance, new beginnings, etc. The story reminds
> me a bit about Parvana and her father and what was most important to them and what is
> 'precious'. It also reminds me of Hana's story in *La Valise d'Hana.* (Google Classroom
> Post, June 5, 2020)

Informally, my students shared with me that they viewed the videos of picturebooks, however it

was not a practice I prioritized due to the extraordinary situation imposed by remote learning.

Despite this, I believe the picturebooks inspired us to pursue a different kind of dialogue that

dovetailed our conversations about the novels. Further, because the narratives of the selected

picturebooks were historically located, this was yet another occasion for my students to develop

their "historical consciousness" (Seidel & Rokne, 2011, p. 245).

As I look back on this aspect of my pedagogical approach, I recognize many things that I

would do differently; a point on which I elaborate in further detail in Chapter 10. This said, I do

agree with Colby Sharp, a prominent advocate of picturebooks, when he encouraged teachers to

include this genre when reading with older students. Sharp (2020) supported this choice and

explained that in addition to building empathy, it encourages them to have important and

powerful conversations, in turn building a better community that fosters kindness, compassion, and understanding of other people.

Introducing picturebooks to my middle-grade students reflected my intention to teach authentically and wholeheartedly with literature, especially as it pertained to social justice. In the same vein, I privileged yet another pedagogical practice, self-expression through multimodal responses, on which I elaborate in the next section.

Fostering Multimodal Response Options

As a teacher researcher, I was convinced that my words and actions, along with my students', needed to "actively transform knowledge rather than simply consume it" (Giroux, 2020, p. 5). By widening the range of interpretation and the space for self-expression, I adhered to Leland and Harste's (1994) posit that, as educators, welcoming multiple ways of knowing allows for the appreciation of new perspectives on knowing. In my teaching practice, encouraging learners to illustrate their understanding by responding in multimodal ways was not a new approach, though I intended to facilitate this further through our multicultural readings.

For example, when I read aloud *Parvana's Journey*, I remember wanting to make inspired learning and 'aha' moments more visible during readings. To do so, I prepared a wall-sized poster by taping chart paper end-to-end at the back of the classroom. I called this *Parvana's Journey Graffiti Board* (see Figure 25, p. 276), and invited students to contribute to it "at any time during reading—whether it is a thought, a feeling, reaction to something read, a favourite quote from the book, a doodle, a drawing, a symbol . . . anything goes!"; the response was positive, and I recorded seeing their "happy reactions to such freedom. I told them they do not need to raise their hand to ask to go add something on the board—it is meant to be SPONTANEOUS!" (Teacher Journal, January 17, 2020).

Figure 25

Parvana's Journey Graffiti Board (ESL Classroom Wall)

Note. Image used with the permission of the participants.

Instituting this new creative space in the classroom paved the way for students to engage in the social construction of reality as they interacted together (Geertz, 1973) while reading the book. Such occasions of social interaction allowed them to spontaneously comment on each other's contributions to the graffiti board, instigate more in-depth discussions relating to difficult situations the characters were going through, and even spark conversations with students from other classes who were curious about the display.

To encourage this type of sociable interaction and trigger ongoing discussions, I integrated several other reading and writing strategies. These included posting questions and statements on Slido, an online discussion board, where students used individual electronic devices to exchange their views in real-time while I projected their responses on the classroom Smartboard. I also shared messages through Padlet, an application on which I created an interactive bulletin board. Other creative tools included online word cloud builders, which I

intermittently used as an alternative format for exit slips (to verify understanding, mood, etc.), or as a method to visually gather our ideas as a group.

Just as I endeavoured to establish a more equitable relationship between me and my students, and activate a constructivist learning dynamic in the classroom and beyond, I was resolute about laying the groundwork for creative independence, despite certain curricular restraints. At the beginning of the school year, I introduced the idea of student portfolios to my students, informing them they could insert any piece of their choosing, in connection with our multicultural units. I explained "[t]hese could be drawings, poems, photographs, newspaper clippings, random thoughts, even objects they deem worthy of being included in the portfolio as a manifestation of their learning/interpretation of our study" (Teacher Journal, January 17, 2020). Every student procured an expanding file folder that could contain a variety of their productions, which remained in the classroom for easy access. My intentions for implementing student portfolios were not to enforce yet another rigid mode of assessment; rather, I believed my students could play a major role as primary stakeholders in the process of their own learning (Hebert, 1998), in English class.

The student portfolios served as a reflective tool; one that they and I could revisit and reflect upon in relation to their experiences with multicultural literature. Some pieces were evaluated (prior to the school closure in March), like final projects, and others, like dialogue journals, were not. Considering this being a new pedagogical practice, I noted that learners "were still feeling strange because they are not used to this kind of freedom when it comes to schoolwork" (Teacher Journal, January 17, 2020).

I sought to put into place a culture of choice about assignments and projects in connection with the multicultural units. First, I thought it was important that they be able to

choose the format of their written, aesthetic, oral, and visual productions. Then, it seemed just as meaningful to enable learners to decide the manner in which they would share their work with me and their classmates. I noted my observations at the time,

> I felt like students were more personally engaged in their own education simply by having the option to choose certain elements of the 'task'. Also, I sensed a mutual respect present—almost as if they didn't mind so much doing this 'assignment' because they had some control over it and enjoyed a certain level of freedom through the process. . . . I felt a real sense of democratic understanding among the group which was accompanied by a certain calm (or lack of stress). (Teacher Journal, January 20, 2020)

Lens 1 unveiled a myriad of examples in which students engaged with multicultural novels in self-determining ways. As displayed in Chapter 7, whether students opted to write poetry, draw pictures, produce digital collages, compose, and perform music, or create culinary dishes, they engaged in critical expressionism which allowed them to think innovatively as they read critically (McLaughlin & Devoogd, 2020). A good language arts program, according to Leland and Harste (1994), "is one that expands the communication potential of all learners through the orchestration and use of multiple ways of knowing for purposes of ongoing interpretation and inquiry into the world" (p. 339). Given the opportunity, adolescent learners showed their willingness and ability to engage in critical literacy (Leland & Harste, 2000; Luke & Freebody, 1999; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

Fostering multimodal response options was faithful to a critical pedagogy approach. Enacting a critical pedagogy was a choice, but for me, it also coincided with teaching alongside my values. Freire (1970/2016) stated: "Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness" (p. 81). As I reflected on my experience through this study, incidentally aimed at

building critical consciousness, I understood what Freire meant as I watched the theory come alive into practice. To yield part of my inherent power as a teacher to establish a more democratic environment in the classroom did not mean to forfeit. This burgeoning equilibrium between teacher and student bore fruit; it transformed teaching and learning by honouring the value and contribution of each human in the room. What I observed was singularly positive.

Theme 2: The Emergence of Allyship

Integrating news and current events into my teaching practice generated an unexpected outcome: allyship in the fight against racism. To begin, politics was always an interest for me personally. As a critical educator, I advocated for creating an environment that "disrupts the familiar and challenges students to look at themselves and the world in a new way" (Foss, 2002, p. 402). Hence, associating current events with the stories we read corresponded with my pedagogical intentions of developing critique and activism by means of a critical literacy that disrupted the commonplace (Lewison et al., 2002). What I had not intended was the overwhelming response from my students to become part of the solution to a social justice issue of global proportion: racism. I think back to how it inspired me that "students are extremely perceptive, courageous in their willingness to confront their own way of thinking and determined not to sit on the sidelines" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020).

In the following paragraphs, I uncover two subthemes surrounding the theme of allyship: (a) joining the global conversation, and (b) sliding glass doors—crossing the threshold.

Joining the Global Conversation

As evidenced in Lens 1, my students refused to remain neutral and were determined to be a part of what was going on, even if they did not yet know what that entailed. Because neutrality is never a standard for texts and practices, "the world, as text, can be read from a critical literacy

perspective, especially given that what constitutes a text continues to change" (Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 301). The murder of George Floyd, and the protests that befell and are still taking place, is a case in point. After having read the novel *Ghost Boys* in early spring, and following this highly publicized incident, my students and I were attentively and purposefully reading the world as it was manifesting its disgust of current racial injustices. I denoted my perception of the atmosphere at that moment:

> [t]he world was shaken up by the killing of George Floyd. The global conversation and a revolt happening far away stretched to our little corner of the universe and created real-life connections to newly acquired concepts, and social justice issues learned through the characters in our books. As teacher and students in regular times, we would have been reading, discussing, debating, and exchanging as a group together, physically in the same room. However, circumstances changed all of that. Distance became a major barrier, however, injustices, either lived by characters in stories or by real people, made us 'tune in' to the same channel and challenged us all to grow. And grow, we did! (Teacher Journal, June 9, 2020)

It was from that point on that most of our online meetings included discussions that revolved around the issue of racism. I recall our conversations being encumbered with raw emotions at first:

> They expressed a strange connection to George Floyd and how he was treated—a confusion about feeling such sadness even though they didn't know that person. I believe I was witnessing raw empathy at this moment; they just couldn't identify what it was. (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020)

Looking back to Lens 1, empathy seemed to be a fateful precursor for what was to come. In their reflective questionnaires (June 2020), participants expressed that they had gained a "new understanding of issues, like racism", and they wanted to "contribute to change", especially about this same issue. *Ghost Boys* is an example of a multiple perspective text, in which students contemplated "how things change when seeing an issue through a different vantage point" (Clarke & Whitney, 2009, p. 532), within the first layer of Jones' (2006) critical literacy

framework. In interrogating multiple viewpoints, I asked my students to "imagine standing in the shoes of others" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383) through various prompts; for example: "Why is [Jerome] still there? Why do you think he has not moved on? How would you feel if you were him?" Thein et al. (2007) asserted that when students partake in literature from the stance of multiple perspectives, "they experience tensions between the beliefs and perspectives they bring with them from their experiences and those they meet within text worlds" (p. 55). As incongruences emerge from these tensions, they can become more critically aware of their perspectives and therefore be more willing to try on alternative ones (Thein et al., 2007). Our conversations evolved from visceral reactions to more proactive attitudes. Once again, I connected a recent news article to our interactions:

> As a follow-up to ongoing news about anti-racism protests and to our discussion on Friday, I posted a more 'positive' article about a sheriff who put down his baton to listen to protesters and then walked alongside them. I reminded them about my invitation to think about 'What now?' and 'What do we do with the knowledge gained from the characters in our books and how can we contribute to making a positive change for the present and the future?' This is a good time to move the conversation to social action, agency, voice. (Teacher Journal, June 1, 2020)

As learners demonstrated empathy toward fellow humans, whether fictional characters or real-life persons, they gained deeper insight on social justice problems. They began to see themselves as part of a broader citizenry and considered the steps of becoming allies with those they had come to understand as oppressed. Students now recognized the need to engage in social change.

Sliding Glass Doors: Crossing the Threshold

As we began our final multicultural book unit, I recall thinking about my third and final supporting research question: *Does multicultural literature challenge learners to engage in social action? If so, how?* I explicitly noted in my journal:

My thoughts are that I'm hoping to enter the "Sliding Glass Doors" phase of the project. I want to really begin looking at how students can start imagining their role as young people in their society. I have noticed that some important ground has been gained with respect to self-awareness, self-reflection, and even perspective-taking. (Teacher Journal, May 1, 2020)

Thinking back, I remained aware and purposeful within my pedagogical practices. I was also determined to co-navigate the landscape of agency with my students, an emerging theme from Lens 1, as well as the extent to which multicultural literature might shape their perception of it. In the fourth dimension of their critical literacy model, Lewison et al. (2002) challenged readers to take action and promote social justice. Bell (2016) described social justice education as both a goal and a process, democratic and participatory in nature, empowering students to examine society's inequalities and strive to actively participate in social change. Concurrently, as a critical pedagogue, I considered it my responsibility to "[provide] students with the opportunity to become critically thinking citizens capable of engaging their cultural agency" (Morales et al., 2017, p. 406).

The exchanges in which my students and I partook matured and developed into an in-depth inquiry about the kind of actions that could make a difference in our society. During small group book talks near the end of our final novel unit, the focus of our discussions covered the concepts of non-racism and antiracism, especially how they differed from each other. In my journal, I noticed that all students, across groups, were talking about a common obstacle, ". . . feeling 'powerless' or unable (or too young) to really contribute and make an actual difference in the fight against racism" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). During these book talks, students overwhelmingly agreed that "racism is a problem in the world and not just in the U.S.", and arrived at the conclusion that "in 2020, racial injustice shouldn't be happening, how it is 'not normal' and why haven't we learned from our past mistakes as a society?" (Teacher Journal,

June 4, 2020). Learners homed in on "the difference in how we react, in each of our responses. The need or 'call' to 'stand up' against racism instead of simply admitting 'I'm not racist'" and had been able to "recognize the difference between 'non-racist' and 'anti-racist' in that the former is passive and the latter is proactive" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). And so together, we examined the notion of allyship, and considered what that meant for us vis-à-vis the fight against the systemic problem of racism. Born out of the need to discuss White privilege as revealed in Lens 1, my decision to prioritize time and space for such dialogue encouraged students to seek ways to become allies in the fight against racism. Tatum (1992) stated that "White students who have had the opportunity to learn about racism in a supportive atmosphere will be better able to be allies to students of colour in extracurricular settings" (p. 23). Students had already begun to manifest attitudes and communicate ideas that supported this statement. Even as they grappled with feelings of helplessness, I noticed their desire to engage actively despite not always knowing how to. Our classroom community came to recognize this desire as allyship.

For example, students proposed "they could 'educate' those around them on social media or with family and friends", and "discussed how simple gestures like 'listening to others', 'talking about the problem', 'having difficult conversations', and 're-evaluating our own point of view' could in fact be significant 'ACTIONS' toward progressing forward, to change for the better" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). As a follow up to our conversation, I shared a link to a podcast (Nnamdi, 2020), featuring an interview with Jason Reynolds, a YA author, and young readers, and questions they had about the issue of racism. In addition, I shared a video that presented practical tips on how to be an ally (Chescaleigh, 2014), along with a link to a website containing advice on how to promote and defend human rights (The United Nations, n.d.). In line

with Rhodes' (2018) wish, as expressed in the afterword of *Ghost Boys*, I hoped that by talking together, developing awareness, and anticipating civic action, learners could become active participants in the stamping out of personal and systemic racism.

In light of the racial injustice uproar in the news, and the numerous conversations about it with my students, I am reminded of the mirrors component of my theoretical metaphor. Two major findings from the emerging theme of insight in Chapter 6 underscored the significance of interrogating White privilege and confronting racism. Indeed, students were able to use literacy to both examine and challenge themselves, and "through their participation in a classroom community that treated reading and writing as political acts" (Singer, 2006, p. 141), recognized their potential to affect change in a larger, global community.

Even if they knew that fighting racism was not easy, my students nonetheless embraced this new idea of allyship. I remember wanting them to feel that "they [were] not lone voyagers on this antiracist journey" (Lawrence, 1997, p.115). Therefore, as a teacher, I was ready to discuss racial illiteracy (DiAngelo, 2012) with my students by means of global literature studies combined with current events. Like Kaczmarczyk et al. (2019), I was determined to take the risk of being uncomfortable, continue to check my own assumptions, and fulfil an agenda that included antiracism teaching in my everyday practice. Looking back, making myself vulnerable along with my students, and choosing to integrate moments and spaces aligned with antiracism teaching seemed to contribute to the emergence of allyship.

Theme 3: Teaching During a Pandemic

Perhaps of no surprise, my teacher journal held moments of reflection around what it meant to teach during a pandemic. Unprecedented and disconcerting, this moment in time imparted a new age of pedagogical resiliency. After two months of coping with the phenomenon

of remote teaching, I cogitated: "I am noticing that teaching from a distance is truly challenging" (Teacher Journal, May 15, 2020). Be that as it may, my students and I discovered that multicultural literature proved to be a rallying point for us. We realized that we could learn and grow amidst the challenges, and the following subthemes emerged as means for such learning and growing: (a) embracing an organic timeline, (b) re-evaluating purpose, (c) bringing narrative alive during remote teaching, (d) journal writing as a way to stay connected, and (e) nurturing relationships.

Embracing an Organic Timeline

In light of a series of unpredictable circumstances such as a province-wide teacher strike, frequent snow days, and most of all, a global pandemic that forced schools to adopt a last-minute, alternative delivery model, time was a constant preoccupation for me. Prior to the school closure, I noticed how I "worried about the timeframe in which I planned my units . . . I am readjusting some class activities and need to prioritize them to remain faithful to the multicultural/social justice perspective-taking approach as we read the books" (Teacher Journal, February 11, 2020). This self-imposed feeling of pressure came to light on several occasions. I noted wanting to be able to "stop more frequently during the reading, to allow students to write in their DJs", and readjusted accordingly, thinking "this [meant] compromising (in my opinion) important moments in which writing, and discussion would be optimized while we read" (Teacher Journal, February 14, 2020). After the school closed, I recall feeling that time was a contributing factor in the challenges I faced, especially as my students and I were beginning a new unit. I documented my thoughts about ensuring an effective continuity within our units of study: "I must admit, it is time-consuming and especially energy-consuming to try to maintain a reasonable flow with the class" (Teacher Journal, May 15, 2020).

Prior to and during this study, I often stopped momentarily to allow for discussion whenever I read a passage in which characters, especially children, experienced hardship. As Barrentine (1996) invited us to do, I prepared to surrender definite lesson plans in exchange for listening to my students' interactions and responses. As evidenced in the theme of empathy in Lens 1, learners often reacted by comparing their own situations to their fictional counterparts, and many expressed overwhelming feelings of both guilt and gratitude. In fact, Phoebe confirmed that taking a break every few chapters to discuss it "really helped [her] understand the full extent of the book" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020).

Despite periodically feeling a lack of control, I was aware that teaching with a social justice education agenda required me to embrace a more organic timeline (Kesler et al., 2020). In this sense, social justice issues arising from the books were examined in conjunction with factual reference points, while readers responded spontaneously in our open-ended learning environment. In the same way I learned to respect a different pace in my teaching, I let myself take stock of the situation to assess the learning needs of my students. The path forward taught me, once again, how teacher research can sometimes be "messy, unpredictable, and generative— just like teachers' lives" (Patterson & Shannon, 1993, p. 9). I responded by remaining open to changes in a previously established teaching plan.

Re-Evaluating Purpose

The constant reflexive attitude on my teaching practice led me to modify my original framework for teaching with multicultural novels. I recall reading an article, passed on to me by my dissertation supervisor, which highlighted an eighth-grade teacher's story about re-evaluating our purpose as educators through the pandemic (DiZebba, 2020). I wrote: "It made me think about this out-of-the-ordinary situation we are in with our students being at home and

incorporating learning where they are" (Teacher Journal, April 19, 2020). Sensing the urge to

respect my commitment to an organic and democratically inclined classroom (though virtually), I

revamped my original booklist to include six new options to choose from in the final unit of

study. I remember being very excited about this decision, eager to share it with my students for

feedback and approval. I prepared a short Google Forms survey that included the book choices,

along with a brief description for each book, to which students had responded so enthusiastically.

Being offered these choices in a remote learning environment seemed to hit the right note with

them. Answers from the online survey came back quickly as they selected their preferences

based on information I had provided.

Like most changes, this modification required some level of compromise. I thought,

"practically . . . this of course could be a challenge. I mean, reading 4 books aloud plus the book

I am reading in French class . . . that's a lot of work. But worth it" (Teacher Journal, April 23,

2020). One student, Esther, was the only one to select a Deborah Ellis book, but emailed me to

let me know she changed her mind. That left five novels in which my students were engaged.

Two of them were accessible through the Epic! online educational platform, and I posted audio

recordings of read alouds for the other three via Google Classroom. Feeling overwhelmed at the

time, but determined to offer choice in our reading journey, I contemplated my predicament:

> I am realizing that although I do not regret offering a choice of novels to study for the
> final unit, I am struggling to manage my time efficiently . . . It's almost like I am still too
> involved in the 'practical' aspect of education, with my role and duties as a teacher, yet I
> have trouble fully immersing myself in the 'scholar' aspect of education. (Teacher
> Journal, May 8, 2020)

Notwithstanding, after doing the legwork—communicating with authors to request

copyright permissions for read alouds, surveying my students on their opinions for this idea,

compiling their book selections, and rallying some help to read and record the read alouds—we

finally inaugurated our diversified, multicultural novel studies with which to end our ESL classroom journey, despite the pandemic.

Bringing Narrative Alive During Remote Teaching

Within my classroom, read alouds offered a space for my students and I to gather as a community. Like Kesler et al. (2020), responsive teaching through read alouds afforded us with opportunities for a dialogic discourse that deepened our understanding of the social justice issues that arose in our books. The read aloud routine I established with my students when we were in person became a lifeline during the transition to school at home. With the change to remote learning, I found myself adapting but not sacrificing my read aloud practice:

> This is a moment when I'm also feeling so happy about my confidence in the read aloud approach, even with my eighth-graders. I knew the value of it for a long time and saw how it was effective in the classroom. But now that it has become a necessity so to speak, how great is it that this approach and method is already part of my students' routine? It's business as usual amidst new and strange rules of confinement! (Teacher Journal, April 23, 2020)

It seemed evident that the action of reading aloud, even through recordings, had "[created] a shared emotional experience that [had brought] narrative alive in ways that silent reading cannot" (Denzin, 2008, p. 21). This had only been possible because of the open-mindedness and generosity of authors, and I was "really thankful for these 'relaxed' copyright rules" (Teacher Journal, April 23, 2020) in the middle of a pandemic.

As stated in the preceding section, a few of the books my students selected for their final study were not available online, therefore I posted recorded audio files of read alouds. This mode of delivery differed slightly from my reading aloud as students needed to rely solely on the auditory readings. I pondered, "this might be a new challenge for students: listening to read alouds but without the print version to follow along or even go back to" (Teacher Journal, May

5, 2020). Despite the advantages I associated with the read aloud approach, I realized that it was not a perfect fit for everyone. Timothy's comments reminded me how students possess their individual preferences when it comes to reading: "The advice or recommendation I would give based on my experience this year would be that instead of reading the books as a class, maybe to kind of assign certain chapters for us to read at home" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020).

I recall being preoccupied with the transition to individual book choice and acknowledged that some students needed guidance to adjust to this new delivery model. I noted: "This is our first experience all reading different books, and more self-discipline (time management skills) is required from individual students" (Teacher Journal, May 8, 2020). I both anticipated and noticed challenges:

> I had put a 'disclaimer' on the three book studies that featured only audio files, but students selected their option for other reasons, like content and subject interest as well. This was the first time that they consumed a book auditorily and added to this limitation was the quarantine aspect as well. Whereas we could have 'unpacked' some of the questions or misunderstandings in [our] classroom as they listened to the story, now that they had to access audio files from home and at different times, made it a clear challenge. (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020)

A few readers confided that listening to the audio files without the print version of the book was an obstacle to overcome. This affirmation stood out to me, and I noted:

> When the sole method is listening to a story via audio files, it presents significant challenges, especially for students who are more visual, less auditory. I was glad that this student shared this obstacle, it confirmed a flaw in the delivery of this multiple book unit that I suspected from the beginning but was willing to risk. (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020)

Looking back, I realize that the acts of gathering virtually as a classroom community and dialoguing were precious commodities during a pandemic. Unknowingly, our well-established

method of journalling proved to be just as essential for sharing, venting, confiding, and staying connected.

Journal Writing as a Way to Stay Connected

The habit of consistent journalling I introduced as a classroom practice was a successful venue to dialogue with my students. In light of COVID-19, students appeared motivated to write in their dialogue journals as a way of bringing their own lived experiences into their everyday learning (Denne-Bolton, 2013). When we were still in class physically, everyone wrote entries in their paper journal, after which I would collect them for commenting. After schools closed in mid-March, I continued this process via our usual Google platform. As students proceeded with the method of their choice for journalling, I noted: "some continue to write in their paper DJs and send me a photo of their entries. Others have created Google Docs in their English folders in Drive and submit their entries this way" (Teacher Journal, March 26, 2020).

Like Noddings (1984/2013), I considered relatedness to be critical in my role as a teacher, and that "the student is infinitely more important than the subject matter" (p. 176). In Lens 1, my students noted the safe spaces they found themselves in as they read, reflected, journalled, and talked, and how these spaces proved to be a significant aspect of their learning journeys. However, being confined to our homes for an undetermined period induced a certain level of stress and anxiety for everybody. I reflected:

> I'm finding it a challenge to remain positive. I read my students' DJs this week, and I've noticed that some are feeling a stress like none before—I read it in the words they use or the connections they make with real-life situations (because of everything that people must go through due to the COVID-19 pandemic). (Teacher Journal, April 17, 2020)

During the first few weeks of the pandemic, my students and I were required to adjust

to uncertainty and adapt as best we could. We needed to resort to alternate means of communication to stay connected. Recognizing this need, I urged learners to "consider connecting once a week, simply to maintain a sense of community, ask questions or clarifications, or even vent about their feelings or frustrations!" (Teacher Journal, March 30, 2020). As my students and I participated in our first virtual meeting, I listened to them, observed the unsettled atmosphere, and related in my journal how "[t]he uncertainty about everything school-related is palpable. Many have expressed their discomfort with being at home for so long and not having the school routine" (Teacher Journal, March 27, 2020).

During the months when students were learning from home, they used the dialogue journal "as a vehicle for reflection and sometimes even as a release of emotions" (Teacher Journal, April 6, 2020). I noted that "[i]t quickly became clear to me that using a DJ as a tool to reflect, react to, and record personal experiences with the text, was overall a positive initiative" (Teacher Journal, June 15, 2020).

Through the ups and downs of teaching remotely, I recall how "[r]eading journal responses [was] a joy for me and in a strange way, a way to reconnect with my students" (Teacher Journal, April 6, 2020). Noddings' (1984/2013) notions of relatedness and care suddenly become very real to me, to us. More than ever, I acknowledged that "[teaching] in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (hooks, 1994, p. 13). In like manner, humility became a huge component of my acclimated pedagogical practice, as emphasized in this journal entry:

> Reading my students' journals is a sobering activity and I feel truly humbled and privileged to witness their innermost thoughts. They always have relevant comments, intelligent questions and such insightful wonderings. Yet just like they can't check their

true state of being at the door when in school, they can't check their true feelings at the 'virtual door' when writing in their journals. (Teacher Journal, April 14, 2020)

Like Gay (2002), I believe caring to be "a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity" (p.109). Many students infiltrated their own worries in their journal entries, after I invited them to, if needed. This materialized as yet another form of storytelling in which my students participated. Amid precarious circumstances, learners shared their personal narratives with me through journalling, and with their peers during virtual gatherings. What stood out to me was how students appreciated the camaraderie and collegiality that had been missing since the school closure. I recall feeling grateful for the opportunity to convene virtually as a classroom community, understanding the consequential effects of socializing on my students' learning (Vygotsky, 1978). During our initial virtual conferences, I recollect those in attendance "[being] quite happy to see each other", "expressing how much they miss each other" (Teacher Journal, March 27, 2020), and "happy to be there" (Teacher Journal, April 3, 2020). They found connections to each other, and to the stories they read, all the while validating each other's' lived experiences, and attributing meaning to them (Lundy & Swartz, 2011).

As I weighed in on the overall outcome of implementing a consistent habit of journal writing with my students, I noted:

As I read final DJ responses, it occurred to me that throughout this weekly activity, students have actually been developing their own 'reader identity'. . . I have appreciated the frequent back-and-forth exchanges resulting from my commenting on their entries, sometimes in the form of questions and wonderings, and their answering me back. I have noticed, in many of my students' journals, a willingness to push the boundaries a little further on their own thinking as well as in their critique of the texts they are reading. (Teacher Journal, June 15, 2020)

As I reflect on the atypical teaching and learning environment in which my students and I were immersed during the pandemic, journal writing offered a means to connect and share. Lastly, I

recount what I believe was the binding ingredient for my classroom community as we weathered the pandemic: nurturing relationships.

Nurturing Relationships

As suggested in earlier sections of this chapter, one of the most compelling findings within my reflexive posture was the power of relationships. In the following paragraphs, I look more closely at how my students and I persevered amid an unpredictable academic year, replete with stumbling blocks. Nurturing relationships and caring for one another became our compass through uncertain, and at times, anxious moments. Using my teacher journal as a primary source of data, I relate these moments within a sequenced timeline, as the year progressed.

When I first started writing in my teacher journal, approximately four months of schooling had passed and my students had already settled into their homeroom group of classmates, as well as into the flow of our multicultural literature units. I noted early on the dynamics of the group: "They are courteous, thanking their classmates for their questions and engaging in a written conversation that is very mature and always relevant . . . I feel there exists a mutual respect among this group" (Teacher Journal, January 30, 2020).

When I introduced the novel *Ghost Boys*, we inspected both the "Dead" and "Alive" perspectives of the protagonist. Then, I invited students to engage in a group discussion around the concepts of conscious and unconscious racism, as presented in the book's afterword. This being a new topic, I discerned: "Students are listening attentively and are engaged already at this early stage" (Teacher Journal, March 6, 2020). Like *The Breadwinner*, which we read together in November, this novel quickly captured my students' attention, though the hook effect was suddenly interrupted when schools closed in mid-March because of the pandemic. Thus began

our participation in an alternative mode of teaching and learning, and our tenacious efforts to adapt, and preserve our classroom community remotely.

Determined not to let this hurdle disrupt the positive classroom environment we had established since the beginning of the school year, I resolved to actively listen to my students' needs, be prepared to forfeit pre-planned lessons if necessary, re-establish some form of stability, and most importantly, make myself available for them. Morrell and Morrell (2012) stipulated that using literature can help students find commonalities with their classmates and allow educators to nurture meaningful relationships with them.

First on the list was to organize for regularly scheduled meetings via the Google Hangout platform. I memorialized this first encounter in my journal:

> The purpose of this first virtual meeting is really to touch base with students and check to see how they are doing in the midst of this COVID-19 situation . . . everyone is quite happy to see each other. The girls are giddy, and they are expressing how much they miss each other. We work out some how-to's together. (Teacher Journal, March 27, 2020)

This was a precarious time, partly because decisions were still being sorted out at the ministry and school board levels, and teachers were still grappling with how to navigate these unfamiliar waters. I found comfort in the rapport I had already established with my students, and relationships I had nurtured within the classroom setting. Like Nieto (1999), I understood "teaching as consisting primarily of social relationships and as a political commitment rather than a technical activity" (p. 131). So, when we gathered for our second virtual meeting, we felt a bit more relaxed and connected the way we were accustomed to in the classroom. I recorded details of that moment in my journal:

> I didn't remember how to set up the meeting, so it took about 10 minutes before I got everything up and running (this made my students laugh and I was teased quite a bit). But, once we got it going, everyone joining in was happy to be there and were starting to

get the hang of it… they seemed to be getting familiar with our own new routine as a class. (Teacher Journal, April 3, 2020)

During that same virtual gathering, I asked students to watch a video pertaining to racism (Urbania, 2017), and invited them to prepare for a group exchange. I observed:

The discussion was very animated, and students brought up very relevant points about the issue...overall, students were pleased with the discussion—of course, some are quieter than others but that is very similar to how things usually are in the classroom. (Teacher Journal, April 3, 2020)

Diatta (2018) alleged that providing occasions for students to talk about "prominent, current social issues", making time for dialogue to be "free-flowing, genuine", and nurturing a "positive classroom climate and strong rapport with students" (p. 381) are instrumental in a classroom rooted in social justice.

A few weeks later, I distinctly remember how the initial optimism of this new reality withered away, leaving the aftermath of a challenging new normal with which to grapple. Despite this, I was determined to press on, constantly mindful of my students' well-being above all else. This was unquestionably unchartered territory for all of us. What stood out for me was the vulnerability we felt as our routine had suddenly been interrupted by a global pandemic. Yet, reading and talking about our books kept drawing us together. An example of this transpired during our *Ghost Boys* novel study. As mentioned in Chapter 7, I assigned a prompt with Emmett Till's quote: "Bear witness . . . Everyone needs their story heard" (Rhodes, 2018, p. 161). I recalled this fragile moment in my journal:

As I read my students' DJs this week, I noticed that some are feeling a stress like none before—I read it in the words they use or the connections they make with real-life situations (because of everything that people must go through due to the COVID-19 pandemic). . . . I was particularly touched and moved by a student who shared how she was 'bearing witness emotionally' and referring to everyone else having to do this because of the suffering whether from confinement and separation to illness and death.

> She was demonstrating empathy on a global scale as she talked about her own feelings. It made me really pause and consider to what degree and depth this difficult citation leaves consequences that are lasting. (Teacher Journal, April 17, 2020)

Shortly after this impactful episode, I awoke one Sunday morning, feeling nostalgic, and "missing the sound of a full classroom", and "my students—their chatter, their humour, their kindness as much as their quirkiness" (Teacher Journal, April 19, 2020). I decided to send them a message on Google Classroom, informing them that I was doing an Emotion Check-In—a mindfulness strategy I thought might help everyone, five weeks into this pandemic. I committed to completing the Emotion Check-In too, and to sharing my journal entry with all of them. I wanted to be transparent with my students, and admitted: "I'm sad, a little. Mostly because I think that for many people, this staying at home gig isn't all it's cracked up to be. I wonder if someone I care about is feeling isolated, or anxious, or depressed, or discouraged, or even unsafe" (Teacher Journal, April 19, 2020). It seemed obvious that if I professed to foster a holistic learning environment, then by asking my students to trust me enough to share their innermost thoughts and feelings, I should also make myself vulnerable (hooks, 1994).

Students appeared to seize on this opportunity to release their stress and concerns. Vincent was struggling with learning from home and confided that "staying home is difficult because it's hard for me to concentrate at home. I find it difficult to not see my friend's [*sic*] at school, my routine as [*sic*] changed and it makes it difficult for me" (Dialogue Journal, April 2020). Many of my students expressed that they missed their friends, but Phoebe was heartsick, and wrote:

> I miss having people to talk to. They could read my face when I said I was fine when I wasn't. I miss being able to have fun with someone other than the other half of my brain. It gets lonely. I miss them, I miss my friends. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

For Amber, this was a particularly difficult time. In her Emotion Check-In, she included a laundry list of activities she missed doing at school and together with her friends, but also revealed a sense of worry as she closed her entry somberly: "I'm thankful for everything, but I just wish this nightmare would be over . . . I hope the universe will give me a break and I don't see anyone die" (Dialogue Journal, April 2020). Cummins (1996) suggested that "students respond very positively when they sense that their teachers care about them and want to connect with them as people" (p. 222). Looking back, my students' well-being was a central focus, and validating what they thought and felt became part and parcel of my teaching practice through an unsettling fulfillment of their elementary school days.

As weeks rolled by, students seemed to be going through the motions. We were wrapping up our fourth novel study, *Ghost Boys*, and they were busy working on individual end-of-unit projects. I noticed solid attendance and participation levels from their part. On our fifth virtual meeting, I noted:

> Students in my group seem to still be engaged, for the most part. They don't chatter too much during the Meet, but those who do entertain the others who don't—the camaraderie persists on a virtual platform that presents an array of disadvantages. Hopefully this positive atmosphere can sustain us to the end of the school year. (Teacher Journal, April 24, 2020)

Although thankful for the camaraderie, I could not help but notice that teaching remotely presented some unforeseen challenges. I found myself leading most of the online discussions after students often chose not to turn on their cameras, in favour of the chat option. I attempted to improve the situation by varying the technological applications in my pedagogical activities. I commented on one such example in my journal:

> I've created a Slido for tomorrow's Meet, in preparing for discussion, to try and get students to offer a bit more during the weekly virtual meetings. Last week was so quiet and I struggle with having to do all the talking. I've noticed this is one the COVID

> struggles: the distance is a huge barrier and the Google Hangout platform, though quite efficient and practical, leaves out any human contact qualities. The 'social' and convivial aspect of discussing topics in a classroom and experiencing presence and facial reactions, tone of voice, spontaneity . . . all of these are forsaken by the screen. I'm trying this new strategy, with the hopes that our meeting tomorrow requires less of my leadership and more of the students' own contribution. (Teacher Journal, April 30, 2020)

My search for a range of delivery models originated from my understanding that students can explore new ideas by means of discussion boards, and "benefit most from discussing and defending their opinions with fellow students in conversations" (Serafini & Blasingame, 2012, p. 148). Despite these valiant efforts, I noticed, much like my colleagues at school, that numbers of attendees were dwindling as the spring weather metamorphosed into a summery climate. Nevertheless, by the eighth Google Hangout, I could still expect a group of approximately eight to ten zealous students who never missed a beat, though I continued to worry about the others who didn't join in.

According to Cummins (1996), as educators, we must contend with "choices and constraints with respect to what and how we teach" (p. 222). Consequences of a global pandemic simply added to the mix. However, because "students need to feel cared about and cared for" (Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 137), maintaining an ethic of care was elemental for me as a teacher. Providing safe spaces and dependable outlets for socializing in the context of learning remotely was pivotal in my pedagogical practice, both before and during the pandemic. The following journal entry described a segment of our tenth virtual meeting:

> I thought sharing all of this was important, and especially now when distance separates us and we can no longer enjoy a group discussion complete with facial expression, tone of voice, spontaneous outbursts, or manifestations of emotions . . . We all agreed today that these are so much better when we are together. (Teacher Journal, May 29, 2020)

During our day-long, small group book talks near the end of the school year, I caught sight of two ingredients which had kept our meetings afloat: "I am appreciating their honesty and the fact that they feel comfortable openly sharing their concerns and opinions" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). I documented how "[i]t is so evident that they are affected by all this and though far-removed from the brunt of the situation, they are expressly passionate about engaging with this global conversation" (Teacher Journal, June 4, 2020). Reading all the multicultural books and connecting the stories to current events seemed to be a critical approach to pedagogy that had nurtured relationships not only among learners, but by encouraging them to view themselves as members of the broader global community (Mirra, 2020).

As I arrive at the end of our story, I can acknowledge that it was veiled with perseverance, dotted with trust and care, sprinkled with humor, cloaked in respect, and wrapped in open-mindedness. Writing myself into the storied lives of my students as we shared this journey with multicultural literature created yet another tale. Parr and Campbell (2012) suggested that these new stories, "the ones that come to be at the intersection of personal self and story", have the ability to, among other benefits, "develop intimacy and build community" (p. 343). Our narrative encapsulates this very experience, where stories, both fictional and veritable, interweaved.

Summary and Looking Ahead

The present chapter displayed a second lens as I attempted to stitch the fabric of my story at the seams of my students' quilt of anecdotal experiences. When I undertook the data analysis portion of my teacher research, I felt like I was vicariously reliving it, moment by moment, from the perspective of my students. Reflexively speaking, I began to hear my voice coming together with theirs. The throughline in our collective story travelled through each of our lived

experiences, as we explored the ways of knowing the world's "true colours" with the help of multicultural literature. The three themes exhibited in this second lens encapsulate my responsibility as a critical educator "to teach students to analyze all facets of the world they encounter and to become critical participants in those worlds" (Boyd & Miller, 2020, p. 19).

My original research questions poised me to investigate how using multicultural literature in my classroom might expand my students' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens. Could it encourage them to examine assumptions about cultural differences, help them develop a critical lens on global issues, and challenge them to engage in social action? As my own journey elapsed, I can attest to my pedagogical decisions having contributed to sustainable teaching practices and a democratic learning environment.

My teacher journal entries, coupled with some of my students' testimonials, pointed toward evidence of learners' growth as global citizens. Multicultural literature was the vehicle for introducing diversity, tough topics, and social justice issues that instigated deeper learning. It was the catalyst for rich dialogue and meaningful activities that propelled agency (Bieger, 1995). Finally, it was the channel that brought us together and nurtured our relationships. In hindsight, I heeded one of my students' advice about teaching with multicultural literature by "[challenging] students to think more overtly and grandly" and making sure that there were "no borders or limits to their ideas and trains of thought" (Jessie, Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020).

Looking ahead to the final chapter of my research findings, a third lens is applied to behold the unique lived experiences of three participants: Amber, Kate, and Jessie. The three portraits bind together vignettes to complete the patchwork of our metaphorical quilt.

Chapter Nine

A Closer Look at Three Participant Portraits: Third Lens

What is honourable, what is fair, what is becoming, what is noble, what is generous, takes possession of the heart, and animates us to embrace and maintain it. What is intelligible, what is evident, what is probable, what is true, procures only the cool assent of the understanding; and gratifying a speculative curiosity, puts an end to our researches.
~ David Hume (1751/2021, Section 1)

The Third Lens

The third and final lens provides a glimpse into three participants' personal encounters with multicultural literature, each unique to the other. Excerpts from their dialogue journals and portfolio contents reveal, in their own voices, how this experience deeply moved and changed each of them. Eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume, quoted above, believed that human actions follow human emotions, as does reason (Kemerling, 2011). Noddings and Brooks (2017) recalled three human capacities deemed by philosophers as central to moral life: passion (feelings), reason, and character. Through my analysis, the three students featured in these portraits were noticeable for the ways their experiences encapsulated three similar, distinct, yet centralizing capacities around multicultural literature: passion, curiosity, and wisdom. I outline each compelling viewpoint in this chapter. Together, the three portraits showcase a personalized characterization of my research findings.

Pulling at Heartstrings: Amber's Journey

Amber's experience throughout our multicultural literature unit studies reflected her personality. She found her voice as she shared how the books and their characters affected her, and what they meant to her. From the first book we read, Amber became endeared by the story's teenaged protagonist and his experience with loss, courage, and even first love. Next, she immediately became engrossed as a reader of Parvana's experiences, and manifested her concern

for the young Afghani girl through a poem, as she imagined her facing the prospect of beginning

a journey alone (see Figure 26).

Figure 26

Amber's Poem in Response to Parvana's Situation (Student Portfolio, January 2020)
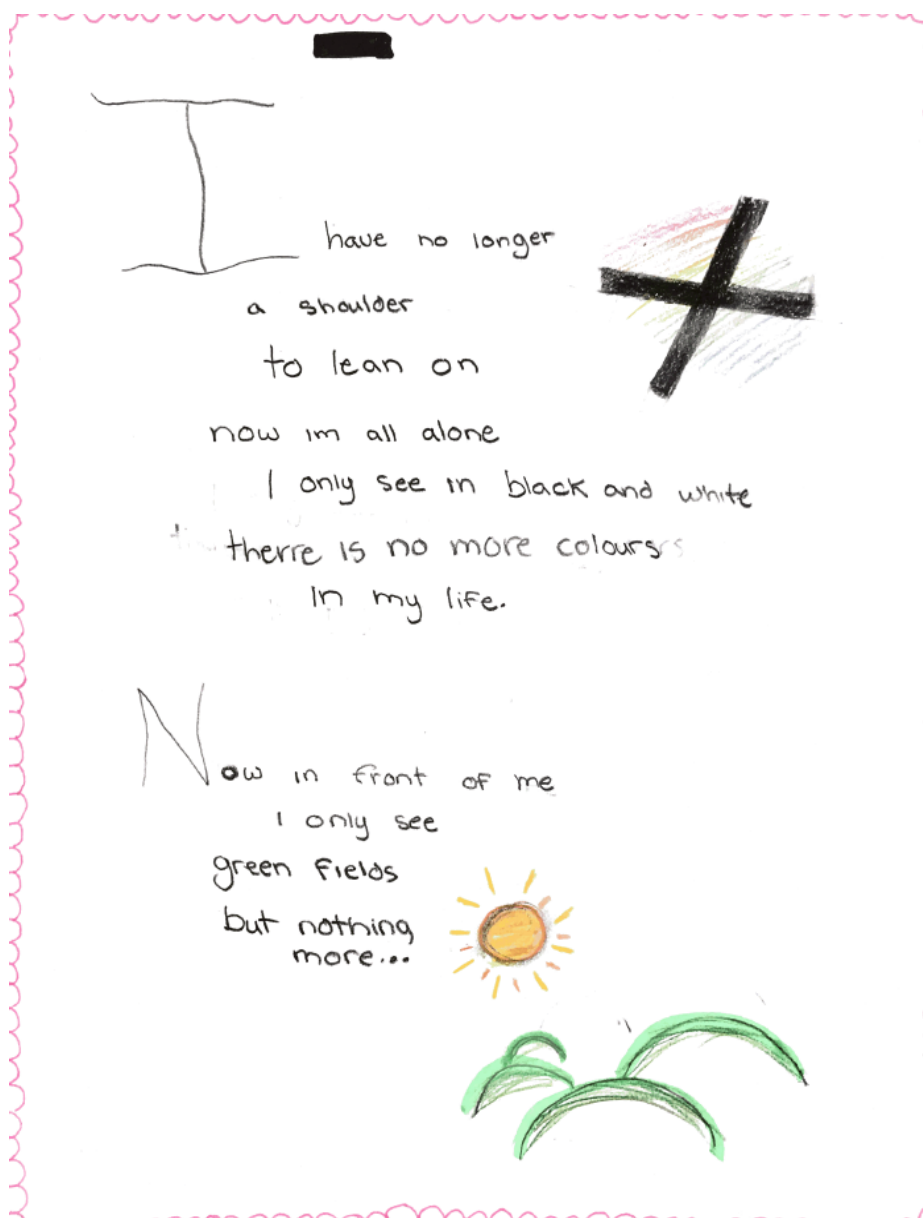
Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Ghost Boys left the greatest impression on Amber, as she explained in her questionnaire:

Chacun des livres a eu un impact majeur sur moi et ma perspective du monde mais celui qui a eu le plus gros impact a été *Ghost Boys*. Dès la seconde que Madame a sorti le livre et a commencé à lire le résumé, c'est à ce moment que j'ai su que ce livre allait me rendre très émotionnelle et m'apprendre plusieurs choses. Je ne comprends pas encore à ce jour pourquoi, mais dès le moment qu'elle a commencé à lire, j'ai eu un moment où on dirait que tout mon monde autour de moi allait en "slow motion" mais que mes pensées allaient 10 000 km à l'heure. Ce livre est le livre qui m'a mise le plus furieuse contre le monde entier et a voulu me donner une voix pour m'exprimer, pour que le monde comprenne . . . C'est triste de voir qu'en 2020, la société n'a pas changé. Il y a quelques semaines, la même chose est arrivée avec un homme nommé George Floyd. On aurait pensé qu'après toutes ces années, notre société aurait changé un peu mais non, après toutes ces personnes mortes à cause de leur couleur de peau, rien n'a changé! La société n'a pas encore compris.

[Each of the books had a major impact on me and my worldview but the one that had the greatest impact is definitely *Ghost Boys*. The second Madame introduced us to the book, I knew I would be affected emotionally and be taught many things. To this day, I still don't understand why but from the very moment she started to read the book, it's like everyone around me moved in slow motion but my thoughts were going 10 000 km an hour. This book was the one that infuriated me the most against the whole world but wanted to give me a voice to make people understand . . . It is sad to see that in 2020, society has not changed. A few weeks ago, the same thing happened to a man named George Floyd, after all these years, after all these people dying because of the colour of their skin, nothing has changed! Society hasn't yet understood.] (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Amber noticed that learning about tough topics through literature went beyond a momentary acquisition of knowledge. She understood that issues like race and gender played a significant role in how she interpreted the texts, as well as how she made sense of her own experiences in the world (Short, 2009). She recognized that reading critically became an instrument that could shape the way she perceives the world and others, and her potential to make the world a better place.

During a group discussion about worldviews, Amber admitted that the readings, especially those involving Jerome's and Emmett's stories, left her with many feelings to contend with, about humanity, how people see things, and just how much she had yet to learn (Student

Portfolio, May 2020). Amber willingly put herself in others' shoes, especially during their

moments of struggle. When she created a playlist to represent key events in the protagonist's life

in *Ghost Boys*, she explained one of her choices this way:

> I chose *Raindrops*, by Ariana Grande, because I thought that [was] another way that all
> those people that have lost someone feels like. So, this song made sense to put in this
> novel playlist because of Jerome dying in the first pages of the book. Once again, this
> song is how Jerome's family and the ones [who] loved him feel like with this lost [*sic*].
> So, in other words, this is how they feel when Jerome was shot and or been through his
> death. This is a short little song that I feel fits perfectly with how it feels when you lose
> someone important to you. (Student Portfolio, April 2020)

This song choice is one of many examples through which Amber bore compassion and empathy.

When Amber picked *Stella by Starlight* as her final book, she wanted to accurately depict her

favourite character, Stella. Wanting to bring to focus the message of "stopping the racism", she

created a collage of things that represented Stella "like family, God, learning, caring" (Student

Portfolio, May 2020), and included somber tones to reflect the timeline (see Figure 27, p. 305).

Finally, Amber summarized her thoughts and feelings about injustices in one of her final

dialogue journal entries. She shared the following reactions of frustration:

> To start, I would say that it is very painful to see that *Stella by Starlight* and *Ghost Boys*
> were books written [about events from] years ago but still in 2020, things haven't
> changed a bit! And that is truly messed up, white people still think that they have power
> over black people and are superior to them because of their skin colour. . . I could never,
> never understand how black people feel and what they are going through because I have
> the privilege of having white skin, but somehow it affects me and makes me cry!
> (Dialogue Journal, June 2020)

Connecting her thoughts back to the real-life murder of George Floyd, Amber continued:

> Did I know George Floyd? No. Did I know he existed before this? No, but do I feel
> destroyed and disgusted cause George could have been one of my friends, yes! Not only
> that, but the fact that this officer put his knee on his throat and killed him and the other
> officers were just watching! (Dialogue Journal, June 2020)

Figure 27

Amber's Collage of Stella (Student Portfolio, May 2020)
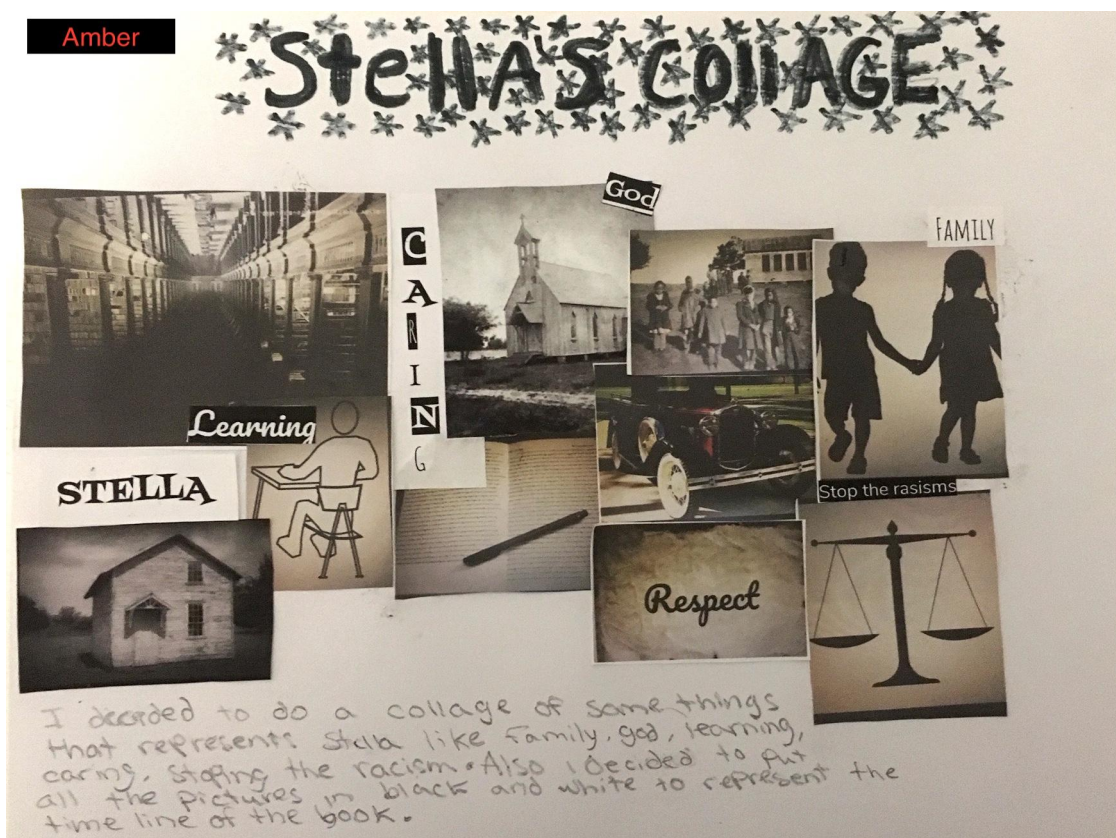
Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

Although Amber reacted passionately to unjust events that were still happening in 2020, she

recognized that she could choose to use her voice and take part in the solution:

> Sometimes it's hard to take action because I am only 13 years old and I cannot sign a
> petition or donate money, and sometimes adults don't listen to us cause we're just kids
> but you know what, we have a voice and we can speak it and tell people about problems
> in the world and that is more than a start! (Dialogue Journal, June 2020)

In this journal entry, and on several other occasions, Amber asserted the power of her voice in a

way that she had not realized before. Whether she felt pain, hope, shock, sorrow, or everything in

between, Amber lived these raw emotions vicariously through and with the stories' characters.

Amber's trademark, well-known by her classmates especially during remote learning, was her signing off with a "TOOOoooooo DOOOOooooo DOOOOoooo" in reference to Céline Dion's famous song (Lamoureux, 2007) from the movie *Titanic*. On multiple occasions, Amber described how the reference to the theme song was her way of expressing sadness and acknowledging the emotional nature of our interactions with multicultural books.

Yearning for Knowledge: Kate's Journey

When I remember Kate, I think of a quote from Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* (1943/1999): "Ce qui embellit le désert, dit le petit prince, c'est qu'il cache un puits quelque part" [What makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well] (p. 82). Kate manifested her constant curiosity in the way she approached new learning situations. She likened reading our multicultural books to lessons learned, raised awareness about a world she knew little about, and changed perspectives about others who are different from ourselves (Kate, Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020). Kate shared her views with her classmates on the Slido discussion board:
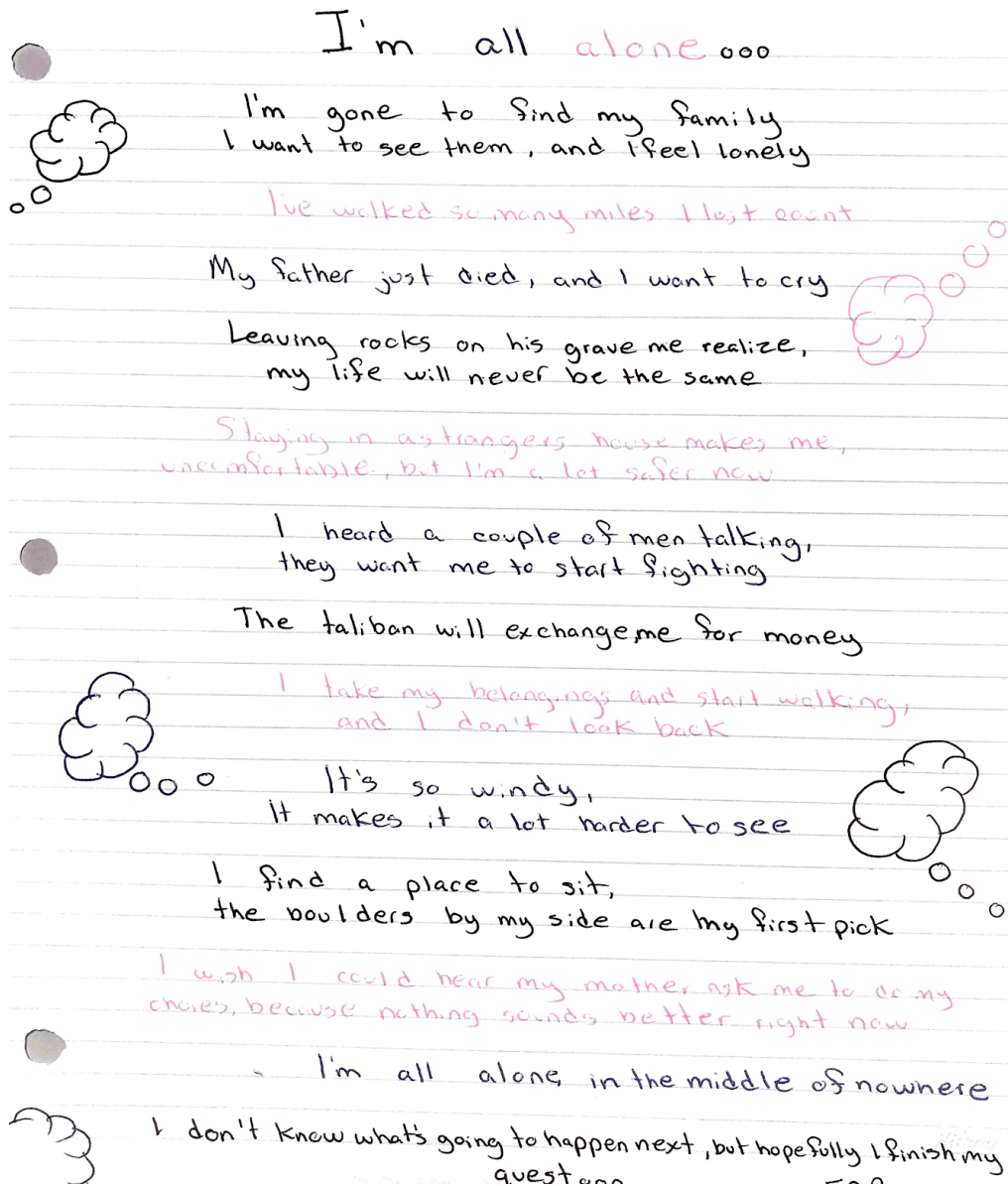
> Every book and novel we read made me discover and learn new things that I have never been completely informed about. Like I never knew in Afghanistan that things were that bad or that racism in America led to the death of certain kids, I never knew that, and learning this informed me more and made me realize and question about, what if things would have never changed? I perceive new people from a different angle now and make sure that I get to know them well enough before saying anything. (Student Portfolio, May 2020)

During our readings of *The Breadwinner* series, Kate expressed shock and dismay with regard to Parvana's harsh predicaments. I recall her being deeply intrigued about a little girl having to face the unknown on her own. After working through several drafts, Kate finally articulated her thoughts about Parvana in a poem (see Figure 28, p. 307).

I observed how Kate embraced her learning journey with multicultural literature, and

Figure 28

Kate's Poem in Response to Parvana's Situation (Student Portfolio, January 2020)

I'm all alone ooo

I'm gone to find my family
I want to see them, and I feel lonely

I've walked so many miles I lost count

My father just died, and I want to cry

Leaving rocks on his grave me realize,
my life will never be the same

Staying in a strangers house makes me,
uncomfortable, but I'm a lot safer now

I heard a couple of men talking,
they want me to start fighting

The taliban will exchange me for money

I take my belongings and start walking,
and I don't look back

It's so windy,
It makes it a lot harder to see

I find a place to sit,
the boulders by my side are my first pick

I wish I could hear my mother ask me to do my
chores, because nothing sounds better right now

I'm all alone in the middle of nowhere

I don't know what's going to happen next, but hopefully I finish my
quest ooo

Note. Image used with the permission of the participant.

seized opportunities to develop her understanding of social justice issues, such as researching the

Cuban Revolution, and the life story of Emmett Till. When provided assignment options, Kate

was quick to dive into research projects rather than artistic venues like artwork or poetry. Kate

admitted that she became more comfortable with asking questions, at times letting her

wonderings simmer for a while before making sense of the new knowledge gained. At the core

of her learning journey, Kate expressed how she yearned "to make people understand how we all

have something in common, humanity" (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020).

Adding to her investigative nature, Kate's approach was often honest and direct when she

came across injustices encountered in the books. One moment that stood out to me was during

the reading of *Ghost Boys*, at the point of the story where Jerome's spirit searches for meaning

behind his death. Kate responded to a dialogue journal prompt in which she was asked to explain

to Jerome why he and Emmett were killed. She passionately expressed:

> Life is not fair, no matter the situation or circumstances. Not everybody realizes the damage they can do by pulling a trigger especially on a person of colour. Officer Moore was being unconsciously racist, he won't admit it because he didn't realize until now what he has done wrong. He shot you because you were a boy of colour holding a "gun" in Chicago. . . . Officer Moore's skin colour gives him the power of being the winner in a situation he should be the loser in a prison cell. You and Emmett were killed because, people make stereotypes about black people and some are stupid enough to believe those stereotypes. . . . Jerome, you and Emmett died because of your skin colour. It doesn't matter what Officer Moore says, we both know the real reason. (Dialogue Journal, April 2020)

As Kate carefully examined concepts like bias, prejudice, and fairness through a critical literacy

lens, she became more critically conscious (Bell, 2016; Stachowiak, 2017). Kate framed her

critical consciousness and curiosity within a lifelong learning attitude. As described in the

following journal entry, Kate was determined to use each characters' experiences as life lessons

for her own future:

> But how will I use what I've learned from the characters to do things that matter? Well first, I will be thankful. Thankful that I have a safe country, a home, a good family and food. What I also learned from a character in a book, Parvana, is to never give up no matter what's in your way and always finish what you started. I'll use this to reach my goals in life. Next, to always enjoy every second of life. I'll make sure my life will be full

of adventures. A lesson that changed my perspective is, to never turn down an opportunity because once it is gone, you can never get it back.

Referring to Esteban in *Harbor Me*, Kate continued:

> . . . the lesson I've learned from a character that I will never forget, don't be afraid. Life is dangerous but you can't let fear prevent you from living life. The characters each have helped me, and I will use their lesson. (Dialogue Journal, May 2020)

Kate's examples above are a testimonial to her curiosity, enthusiasm, and determination in seeking knowledge and awareness as she read each multicultural text. Her responses are evidence that she did not take learning for granted.

Seeking Wisdom: Jessie's Journey

Akin to the moral in Young's picturebook *Seven Blind Mice* (1992), Jessie came to understand that "[k]nowing in part may make a fine tale, but wisdom comes from seeing the whole" (p. 35). She pondered deeply on the notion of worldviews, and how each person's is interconnected with the whole, somehow. She explained:

> Worldview is a tricky thing since no one has the same as another's. I discovered how my worldview might have been distorted, even if subtly so. What I would like to change is the way we address how we talk about our opinions. We tend to act as if everything we think is controversial and wrong, therefore making us scared to even speak up. Of course, we should be considerate of how we say things and how it may affect people, but we shouldn't stop ourselves from asking questions and sharing our thoughts because of it. (Reflective Questionnaire, June 2020)

Jessie understood that "[a]s literate beings, it is also important to understand how language works and to what ends, so that we can better see ourselves in light of the kind of world we wish to create and the kind of people we wish to become" (Leland et al., 1999, p. 71). Constantly mindful of others around her, Jessie demonstrated her ability to reflect critically on the state of our diverse world and sought to imagine solutions to make it better.

> So far, I have discovered that sometimes, what you might think is right, can instead be more hurtful than you thought. That our personal worldview will always be changing and evolving. As humans, we are always growing and learning, and our perceptions of the world change as well . . . No one wants to be wrong, we all just do what we think is right. Sometimes, it's for small things and sometimes it's for bigger things but in hindsight, all we need to do is listen to try and understand others a little better. (Student Portfolio, May 2020)

Jessie associated efforts to cultivate humanity (Nussbaum, 1997) with notions of bravery and the strength to persevere. For example, when asked to describe the theme of courage and strength as it unfolded in the book *Parvana's Journey*, Jessie stated that "strength and courage signifies doing something or acting in a way even though doing so would scare you or intimidate you. You show those values when you are being brave and surpassing your fears" (Student Portfolio, February 2020). Jessie explored bravery in most of her artwork, like the digital drawing of Parvana in Chapter 7, and her collages about Jack Hicks in Chapter 5, which show her interpretation of each protagonist's resilience and determination to press on in the face of injustice and adversity. When Parvana and her friends faced imminent starvation and hopelessness, Jessie wanted to demonstrate the courage and strength required to keep on living. In her digital drawing of the children's imaginary world of plenty they called *Green Valley*, Jessie took particular care to include each of the author's detailed descriptions to emphasize such fortitude (see Figure 29, p. 311). Aside from the message of courage displayed in her artwork, Jessie also confided: "Sometimes it's unfair because every humain [*sic*] should have the chance to be a little less brave. Everyone should have the chance to take a break when everything becomes overwhelming" (Student Portfolio, February 2020).

Hope also seemed to be a focal point in Jessie's learning journey. She often circled back to interpret new knowledge and express optimism, as evidenced across her journal entries, art pieces, and conversations. Jessie's end-of-unit project for *Ghost Boys* is one example of her

Figure 29

Jessie's Digital Drawing of Green Valley With Description (Student Portfolio, February 2020)
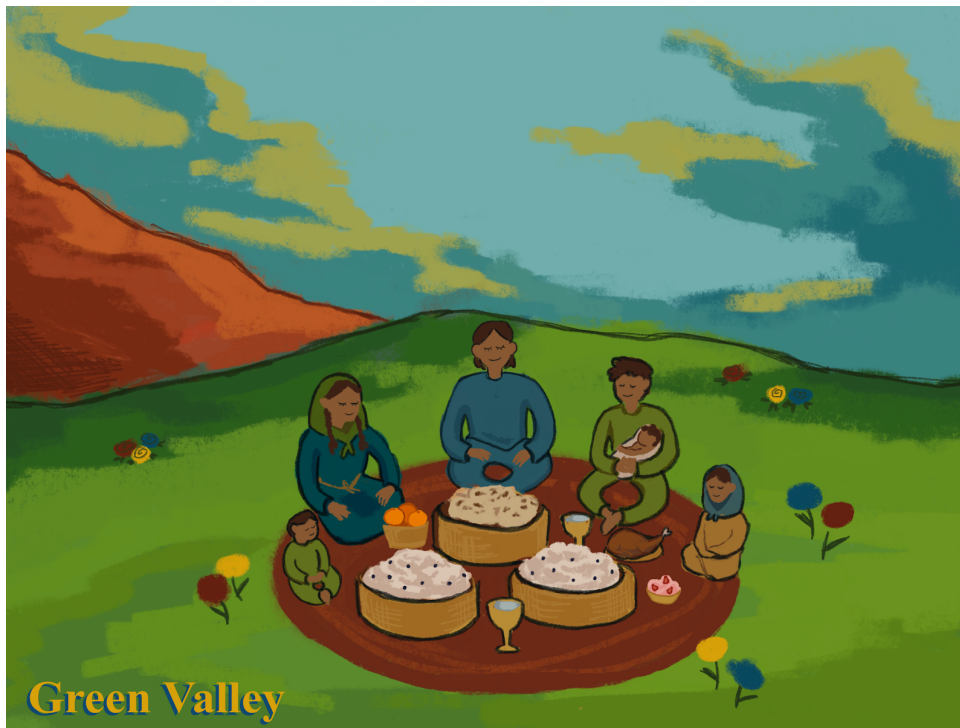
Description:

For this drawing of Green Valley I wanted the scene to be as accurate as possible to the real one. I wanted to incorporate every little detail. For example, I made sure that Asif (the one holding the baby) had both his legs, for no child in Green Valley is injured or amputated.

  Green Valley also has infinite amounts of food. I added all the food Parvana talked about, like strawberry ice cream. I wanted all the colors Parvana described in the image. Since Green Valley is hidden in mountains, I drew one in the background. Finally, I made all the kids happy because that's how kids feel in Green Valley.

Note. Images used with the permission of the participant.

depth of thought and expression of wisdom. Similar to Amber, she chose to create a comprehensive playlist, in which she researched, compiled, and designed artwork digitally for a list of songs that corresponded with events she considered pivotal in the story. She designed both front and back covers for her digital album (see Figure 30.1, p. 313), described each selection in a Google Slideshow, and embedded the compilation on the actual music platform Spotify. Jessie concluded her list of 12 songs with a pick from Michael Jackson (see Figure 30.2, p. 313), referring to the protagonist's quote to justify the hopeful and wise message behind the story's tragedy. Like Kate, one of the most powerful influences Jessie reported throughout our multicultural book studies were the lessons taught by the stories' characters. She shared some of the most significant lessons in her journal:
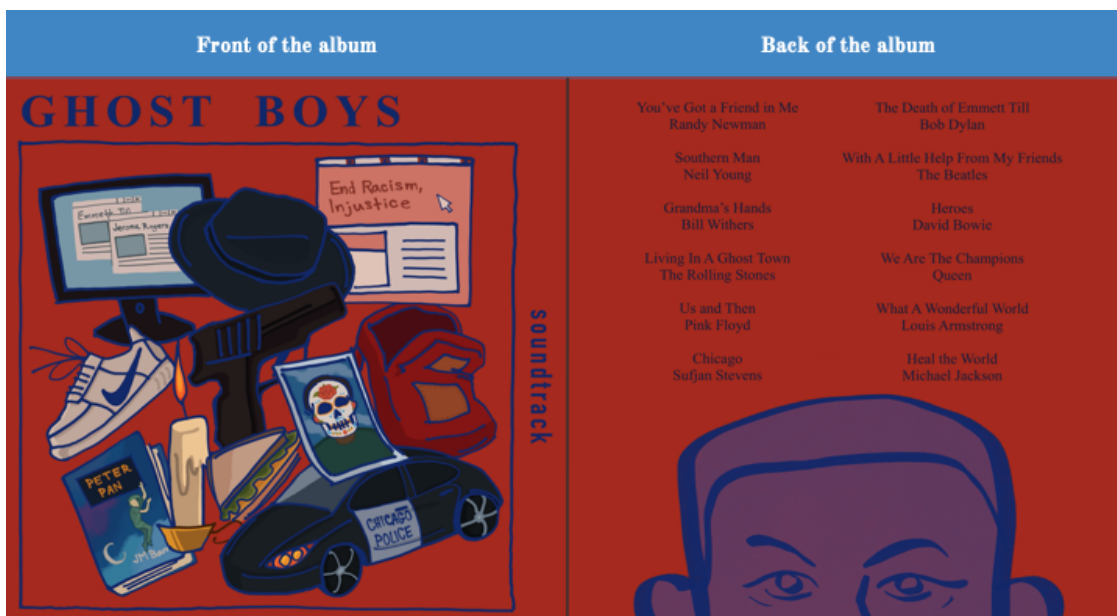
> The characters of our books all go through some sort of character development, and so I will do the same. I will keep on learning, keep on reading and expanding my understanding. So overall, each character had their own values and qualities, but what they all had in common was their determination to do what's right. I think that by doing that, I can help myself and others. (Dialogue Journal, May 2020)

The notion of doing what is right was central to Jessie's learning experience—one she came to understand as sustainable as she intended to apply it to her own life.

When I reflect on the unique characteristics of Amber's, Kate's, and Jessie's portraits, I am reminded of Oatley's (2011) statement in which he professed that an encounter with books is "actually an exercise in human interaction" (p. 64). As expressed in Hume's (1751/2021) statement introducing this chapter, Noddings and Brooks (2017) also believed educating the heart to be as necessary as educating the reason of our students, emphasizing that "students are motivated to think and argue because they have feelings on the matter at hand" (p. 34). I recall how my goal as a critical educator had been to teach about the world through multicultural literature, and my objective as a teacher researcher, to explore how this might expand readers'

Figure 30.1

Jessie's Front and Back Album Covers for Ghost Boys Playlist—Digital Art (Student Portfolio, May 2020)

Figure 30.2

Final Song in Jessie's Playlist for Ghost Boys—Google Slides (Student Portfolio, May 2020)

Note. Images used with the permission of the participant.

worldviews and perception as global citizens. Circling back to the introductory paragraph of this chapter, each portrait aligns with Noddings and Brooks' pivotal human capacities—passion (feelings), reason, and character. Amber's emotionally laden revelations, Kate's persistent inquisitiveness, and Jessie's steadfast insightfulness bring together the colourful nuances of a multidimensional learning journey. Hence, these three portraits embody what I consider to be a fundamentally worthwhile teaching endeavour: that of educating toward "a fuller life and more generous society" (Noddings & Brooks, 2017, p. 34).

Summary and Looking Ahead

With the closing of this chapter, I end the story of our journey together by stitching the last thread of our metaphorical patterned quilt. My students and I experienced an array of emotions, encountered new knowledge through curiosity, and gained wisdom with the multicultural narratives. As a teacher researcher, I was able to acknowledge that Amber, Kate, and Jessie each lived a unique and personal journey that shaped their way of thinking, knowing, and being. However, as I analyzed the data from each participant, I recognized how other learners seemed to connect with the three distinct lenses described above. Hence, Amber, Kate, and Jessie's lived experiences are also reflective of other participants' experiences as they engaged with empathy, developed more insight, and recognized the power of agency.

I, too, was not left untouched by this multicultural journey with literature. In the next and concluding chapter of this dissertation, I communicate my observations, and contemplate the meaning of my experience alongside learners. I discuss several elements of my research findings, share personal reflections, and elaborate on the challenges and limitations of my study. Last, I suggest paths for further exploration, expand on my study's contributions, and conclude with final remarks.

Chapter Ten

A Window to the World: Our Transformational Journey With Multicultural Literature

For me, the child is a veritable image of becoming, of possibility, poised to reach towards what is not yet, towards a growing that cannot be predetermined or prescribed. I see her and I fill the space with others like her, risking, straining, wanting to find out, to ask their own questions, to experience a world that is shared. ~ Maxine Greene (2018)

Opening Remarks

I appreciate Maxine Greene's words from the introductory quote, especially the last part of her statement. Indeed, we must find a way to *share the world* if we intend for children to *experience it*; a mindset I resonated with from the beginning of this research journey. In this final chapter, I revisit significant junctures at which multicultural literature as a classroom tool was eye-opening for my students and myself. To start, I briefly return to the theoretical framework that supported a worldview deeply connected to my perspective-taking and growth as a teacher, student, researcher, and lifelong learner—that of assembled critical, feminist, and constructivist paradigms, as envisioned through the mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors metaphors. These theories provided a lens for investigating how multicultural literature could be used to explore the potential for expanding the worldviews of adolescent learners. My methodological design complemented and corresponded with my positionality as a classroom teacher, also driven by the research questions undertaken. What unfolded was the story of a transformational journey, experienced by me and my students as we read and contemplated the world through multicultural books, making up the tapestry of this dissertation. As outlined in Chapter 3, the theoretical and epistemological components that guided and commingled within my inquiry included (a) reflexivity and problem-posing, (b) perspective-taking and positionality, (c) imaginative thinking and purpose, and (d) reciprocity and agency commingled. I now draw to a

close by allowing both myself and you, the reader, to "[ponder] the essential issues" (Wolcott, 2009, p. 115) born out of my teacher research.

This chapter expands on what I sought to find out through the study and what I learned as a teacher researcher, as well as new questions raised along the way, and how this new knowledge can contribute to the larger educational community. I organize this chapter under the following sections: (a) learning through the power of stories, (b) summarizing and reflecting, where I look across lenses, recount observations about teaching in a pandemic, share personal reflections about my experience as teacher researcher, and address limitations encountered during the inquiry, (c) looking onward, (d) educating as a sustainable enterprise, and (e) closing remarks.

Learning Through the Power of Stories: What I Sought to Find Out

In this study, I investigated the phenomenon of teaching and learning with multicultural literature in the context of my ESL class. As a teacher researcher, I drew upon my knowledge and teaching experience to contemplate my pedagogical approach theoretically, and improve my practice (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Furthermore, I engaged in research to address a question that emerged from classroom interactions and to increase understanding in the context of my classroom environment (Johnson, 2002). Hence, the purpose of this case study was not to be prescriptive; rather, it was about exploring how the narratives in social justice books could be used as a means for self-reflection and growth among adolescent learners. Throughout the journey, I invited students to read critically, reflect on their cultural identities and assumptions, engage in perspective-taking, and imagine alternate ways of seeing the world and others through a broadened consciousness. As I traversed this journey alongside them, I committed to do the same.

My concern for how my students perceive others, the world, and themselves as part of the broader world led me to engage in problem-posing (Schön, 1983), out of which came the central research question, *How might using multicultural literature in the classroom expand adolescent learners' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens?* As I explored this question, I adopted an "inquiry stance" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001), and abided by Bateson's (1979) approach on teaching and learning which suggests finding "the pattern which connects" (p. 12) as a path for deeper understanding of our complex world. To accomplish this, learners were immersed in multicultural novel studies, employing strategies like read alouds, dialogue journals, classroom discussions, and student portfolios that included various multimodal productions. My analysis of these data sources resulted in findings that uncovered several themes as described in Chapters 5 to 9, on which I reflect subsequently.

Summarizing and Reflecting: What I Learned as a Teacher Researcher

When I began to tell the story of this journey with multicultural literature in Chapter 5, I resisted composing neat narratives out of rich sets of data assembled "from the messiness of everyday experience" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 110). Indeed, as a teacher and as a person, I prefer neatness, at times obsessively. But as a researcher, I learned to embrace the unruly nature of thoughts, behaviours, and events, allowing me to weave together the threads that would eventually emerge into a patterned "quilt of persuasive images—a coherent narrative" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 113). Just as I met this challenge while writing the data chapters, I sought to appreciate the significance of my concluding chapter rather than "trying to tie everything up into neat, understandable packages" (Glesne, 2011, p. 233). In Chapter 1, I discussed the need for educators' pedagogical practices to reflect broader education goals in light of a more diverse, global society. Additionally, I argued for the inclusion of a global perspective (Apple, 2011;

Case, 1993), and a social justice component in classrooms, supported by researchers who confirm SJE as a tool to address issues of oppression and injustice, potentially leading to acting for social change (Bell, 2016; Hackman, 2005; Stachowiak, 2017). Furthermore, I advocated for implementing a global literacy approach (Choo, 2018) in language arts to foster the development of critical and empathic skills. Lastly, I shared my dilemma of teaching about diversity in the context of my classroom, thereby proposing to introduce multicultural literature, and use the power of stories to teach and learn in more sustainable ways.

As I reflect on my teacher research, I discern several insights that were particularly meaningful to my project. To begin, I notice two similarities with Burke and Collier's (2017) findings: first, my undertaking of teaching social justice issues using children's literature represented a challenging task; and second, as I drew from my lived experiences and values, I would also become a learner, negotiating my own understanding and implementation of social justice education in the context of my community. Although it can be a challenging task, this study supports that teaching tough topics through social justice books provides opportunities for students to develop their critical literacy skills (Lewison et al., 2002). Adopting a critical literacy approach became necessary in our classroom as we attempted to 'put on' another's perspective and reflected on what perspective entails. Such an approach to reading summons learners to consider alternative ways of seeing and re-evaluate the concepts of truth and perception in texts. Further, my research corroborates with previous findings confirming that adolescents are not only ready, but able to confront contentious issues in the classroom (Boyd & Miller, 2020; Broere & Kerkhoff, 2020; Kelly, 2020; Lightner, 2020; Swartz, 2020). Therefore, I acknowledged the challenges, but more importantly, I recognized the harm in not addressing pressing global issues with learners. In fact, participants also identified this need, and voiced

their desire to engage in difficult conversations. By engaging in reflection, journal writing, and discussion, they found a space to examine their voices and positions on issues that might otherwise have remained unprobed.

Next, I recognize how significantly my goals as a teacher researcher resonated with Short's (1999, 2009, 2016) work. Like Short, I believe that literature was an effective venue through which my students could examine alternative ways of knowing and thinking about the world, and socially engage within a critical and democratic learning environment. Lastly, I acknowledge that, like Morrell and Morrell (2012), and Osorio (2018), using multicultural literature as a classroom tool fostered a deeper appreciation for diversity, promoted the development of critical consciousness, and empowered students to appreciate themselves and others. Like Broere and Kerkhoff (2020), I believed my adolescent learners could develop the cultural sensitivity they needed to envision themselves as part of the broader global community.

Looking Across Lenses

Findings from this study suggest that multicultural literature can be a powerful instrument in developing students' ability to empathize. I recall Schneider's (2020) question about whether empathy could indeed be the highest form of critical thinking in which to engage our students. From the onset of their interaction with multicultural books, the examples shared in Chapter 5 show how students exhibited curiosity and enthusiasm; the more they read, the more their cultural awareness grew, and the more they wanted to know. Learners recognized that reading stories that featured social justice topics could extend their knowledge of the world and others, even as most of them noticed changes in their own worldviews. Nine of the ten participants who completed the year-end reflective questionnaire expressly noted that their perspectives were altered by the multicultural books we read; while five of them used the term "opened my eyes"

to describe their personal experience—a description that permeated the data across all themes. Overall, their new empathic awareness was indicative of a critical consciousness, awakened because of their encounter with multicultural literature. Students seized on characters' motivations and pleas as they further understood the human qualities encapsulated in each character and story (Emery, 1996).

My students' journey with multicultural books shaped not only the way they view the world, but more importantly the way they view themselves in relation to the world. As I return to my first supporting question, *Does multicultural literature encourage learners to examine assumptions about cultural differences? If so, in what ways?* the answer is a resounding yes based on the experiences shared by my students. Numerous examples illustrate the ways reading multicultural literature encourages learners to examine existing values, biases, and assumptions about cultural differences through the lenses of empathy, insight, and agency. Like Bateson (1979), I noticed the patterns that connected at every turn as my students engaged in self-reflection and made sense of their learning.

My second supporting question, *How can multicultural literature support developing a critical lens on global issues?* correlated with the progression I observed in my students' growth. I detected how hard my students were working to grapple with systems of oppression, most evident in *The Breadwinner* series; and racial injustice, which sparked strong reactions after reading *Ghost Boys*. They responded with critical curiosities that led them to ask questions, examine social disparities, and seek to challenge these injustices (Freire, 1970/2016; 1998). Despite the constraints of remote learning due to the global pandemic, the topics of race, racism, and White privilege catapulted us out of our racial comfort zones. I adapted my teaching in response to the situation, which inspired me to be flexible, creative, and attentive to my students'

voices. Although my students wrestled with the concepts of race and privilege, I did not observe any form of resistance from their part. Unlike the adolescent learners in Harper's (2005) study who had initially been receptive to social justice issues, but later resisted the social justice books, my learners appeared to keep an open mind throughout. I believe delving into novels like *Ghost Boys*, contextualizing it with historical events, and linking it to a current racial crisis acted as a steppingstone toward understanding these concepts more deeply.

Looking back, the notion that comes to mind is taking the road less travelled with my students: an attitude I have adopted from the start of my teaching career. However, through the lens of teacher research, I recognize that sustainable change, especially pertaining to deeply ingrained beliefs and attitudes about issues like race, can only happen over time. Like Harper (2005), I experienced some ambiguity as a teacher researcher when I decided to read "against the grain" (p. 277) with my students. Like Foss (2002), taking the risk of introducing sensitive topics and controversial issues to my students sometimes left me with feelings of uncertainty and worry about potential reactions, as described in Chapter 8. Despite this, I learned to perceive my contribution to students' learning as constituent, a part of a whole.

Through this study, I realized that the way we engage with multicultural book studies is just as significant as the books themselves. This research experience marked a milestone for learners who began to claim ownership of their own educational trajectory, empowered to engage in learning about the world despite all its flaws. Lewison et al. (2000) reminded us of the importance of rendering classrooms places where students can connect their own lives to learning that is real and meaningful to them.

Returning to my final supporting question, *Does multicultural literature challenge learners to engage in social action? If so, how?* I see how my role as a teacher researcher

afforded me a platform from which I could testify to the steady progression in my students'

learning process. I recognized their readiness to take up the invitation of crossing the threshold of

sliding glass doors, but only once the difficult work of self-examination and reflection had been

undertaken. Despite the harsh realization that change most often occurs as a slow and complex

process, my students showed courage in their willingness to participate in a journey that had

challenged their existing worldviews and belief systems. A sociological definition of agency

suggests it "is the power people have to think for themselves and act in ways that shape their

experiences and life trajectories" (Cole, 2019). Learners expressed an urgency, as well as their

intent, to become agents in making the world a more just place. I was awestruck by the display of

self-determination from learners to actively engage in social change. I found it to be such a

concrete manifestation of Bell's (2016) understanding of social justice education: one that is

democratic and empowers students to examine society's inequalities as willing participants.

Reflecting back on those moments, I can honestly say that we were quite literally "reading the

word and the world" (Freire, 1970/2016) together.

Reflecting on White Privilege

In recent years, I have spent considerable time reflecting on my Whiteness, not only as it

pertains to its history and reputation, but in how I hold myself accountable because of it.

Historically, Whiteness has been constructed as neutral and invisible, thereby socializing White

people to perceive their own racial identities and positions in the world as advantageous

(Solomona et al., 2005). I have come to understand my White privilege as an "invisible package

of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to

remain oblivious" (McIntosh, 1989, p. 10). Like McIntosh, I was brought up to perceive racism

as someone acting maliciously toward people of colour, rather than as a systemic problem that

encompasses dominance and oppression. I have often witnessed people's reactions as they adopt

a defensive stance when they hear the phrase White privilege, myself included. It became

important for me to share my journey of self-reflection and transformation about my own racial

identity, in the context of this inquiry. If we consider this dimension of White privilege and the

power within it, and if we care about our fellow humans who happen to be people of colour, then

"we need to acknowledge these privileges and work to ensure that others have opportunities and

access that is equal to that which we are afforded in our lives" (Gasman, 2020). By delving into

stories that portrayed racism and White privilege, addressing these issues together positioned me

as a learner alongside students. As a teacher researcher, and like Kenyon (2019), I considered my

own White privilege as students pondered theirs—a shared journey of humility, honesty, and

hope for change. I continue to reflect on the meaning and power of the words we use when

describing individuals and communities. Furthermore, I take to heart what Case (2012) called a

"life-long commitment of critical self-evaluation" (p. 91) as I remain constantly mindful of my

identity and responsibility as a researcher.

Teaching in a Pandemic

I cannot overlook that the unanticipated pandemic situation created a learning moment as

I mindfully absorbed the significance of developing caring relationships with our students. As

the captain of our virtual ESL learning ship, I felt the responsibility to ensure that everyone

aboard felt safe, heard, and able to continue their learning journey as best they could. I took the

role to heart, empathizing with my students, and being transparent about my own vulnerability

(hooks, 1994)—a posture about which I became even more conscientious amidst the pandemic.

Like Noddings (1984/2013), I considered relatedness to be critical in my role as a teacher, and

that "the student is infinitely more important than the subject matter" (p. 176). Although my

relationship with students was necessarily unequal, I felt it was nonetheless mutual and reciprocal (Noddings, 2005), especially during this precarious time. As such, the relationship I established with my students permitted me to observe how each of our stories interweaved with the ones we were reading, in a space where intimacy and community flourished (Parr & Campbell, 2012).

Personal Reflections

My doctoral journey taught me the concept of multiple ways of knowing, thinking, and being. Returning to Dewey's (1904) conception of lifelong learning for teachers, and Schön's (1987) understanding of reflective practitioners, my lens as teacher researcher exposed the synergy of teaching and learning. Teacher research became an extension of myself, as manifested through my desire for sustainable teaching, and perpetual learning. Taking up teacher research alongside my students, the joy was tenfold. Parker Palmer reminded us that the *who* of the teacher is important because "we teach who we are"—selfhood matters (Centre for Courage & Renewal, 2016). In like manner, I believed the *who* of the researcher to be equally as significant in my inquiry. What I learned as a teacher researcher is that the relationship between teaching and learning necessitates empathy; a teacher must be able to "put on" the perspective of a learner, and vice-versa, learners must adopt an empathic stance to be open-minded toward teaching. In this sense, I believe the teaching and learning bond to be synergistic, reciprocal, collaborative, and democratic.

This said, I recall from Chapter 4 how teacher researchers were described as a "new breed of educators" (Dyck, 2008). In it, I characterized my research journey to an "intimate participation in the research process", and Dyck's (2008) reference to Charles Kettering's definition of classroom research as "a positive motion towards improvement" inspires me still.

As Bulterman-Bos (2008) advanced, teacher research is a highly contextual form of educational inquiry, one that, if further considered, might bridge the theory to practice chasm in favour of credible education research that is relevant for educational practitioners.

As I reflect back on my experience as a teacher researcher, I notice how being and becoming more conscientious about my teaching practices allowed me to see the purposefulness of my decisions. By adopting a continuously reflexive posture, I was able to consider, select, and adjust pedagogical practices that corresponded with my objectives of creating a more sustainable and democratic classroom. I noticed the way varying these practices bolstered my students' unfolding conception of global citizenship, in the context of a caring, organic teaching and learning environment. As a teacher researcher, the road upon which my students and I travelled provided an opportunity for them to learn in more meaningful ways, and for me to teach better (Lytle, 2008). Consequently, my journey as a teacher researcher changed the way I think, the way I teach, and the way I learn.

Limitations of the Study

Investigating the phenomenon of teaching and learning with multicultural literature within one classroom limited the findings to this context. In addition, conducting the study with second language learners in an ESL classroom setting further narrowed implications for the study, although it opened possible venues for future studies in different educational contexts. Despite these limitations, my single classroom case study offered an ideal starting place for discussion and presented potential benefits for participants such as increasing their awareness of social justice issues in the world and learning about cultural differences. Conducting teacher research amid the pandemic introduced its own set of challenges as school closures possibly influenced the process of gathering data. For example, as participants were asked to submit the

contents of their student portfolios and year-end reflective questionnaires electronically, these COVID-imposed measures may have influenced the total number of returned copies.

Exploring the phenomenon in my classroom also posed challenges as I was not able to include direct observations in my teacher journal due to safeguards put in place. My status as the classroom teacher demanded careful ethical considerations to address the power dynamic. Therefore, I used my reflective journal solely to record reflections of my practice, descriptions of shared classroom experiences in a general manner, and questions I had as a teacher. These safeguards were intended to minimize potential harm, especially concerning real or perceived undue influence.

On a curricular level, I detected the effects of an ingrained culture of schooling. I noticed that students were preoccupied with a list of inculcated expectations about performance, assessment, grading, equating success with marks, connecting grades to how much they invest in their student work (i.e., writing, culminating projects, oral presentations, etc.). As a result, when I tried to establish a more democratic and reciprocal classroom environment, the receptivity was progressive, and students required time to become accustomed to being given more freedom. I learned that reorienting my classroom toward a more equitable relationship between myself and my students was not an instantaneous proposition, and most students came to appreciate a less evaluative approach to learning. For example, in Chapter 5, Amber expressly suggested that, instead of testing students on a book they read, teachers should inquire about their feelings about the book, and the way it affected their worldview. Although I was intrigued by my students' reactions of surprise and hesitancy toward more creative independence, I later understood that with any substantial change comes uncertainty.

On a pedagogical level, my decision to introduce picturebooks to my middle-grade students represented a risk that I had been willing to take due to their potential as conversation starters to engage with social justice topics (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2018; Sims Bishop, 2012). However, remote teaching made interacting with the picturebooks a bit more challenging. For the most part, the study showed that learners did not respond to the picturebooks, nor did they connect with the social justice thematic as deeply as they did with the multicultural novels. In the future, I would rethink the way to introduce these as a support for novel studies, and spend more time contextualizing the genre as well as the contents. Another pedagogical limitation was accessing multicultural literature during the pandemic; a hurdle that required some maneuvering. For instance, although individual hard copies of one novel were sitting on a classroom shelf, I was not able to ship them to my students due to COVID restrictions. As I searched for books online, I realized access was limited. Therefore, recording read alouds and sharing audio files called for extra steps that included negotiating authors' permissions under exceptional circumstances.

A final limitation dwelled in the challenge as a qualitative researcher to decide what not to include in my final dissertation (Wolcott, 2009). Because my research engendered voluminous and rich data, I found omitting what I perceived as valuable information to be a significant quandary. However, I continued to trust the process of a thoughtful analysis in which I had been immersed from the start. I heeded Glesne's (2011) advice of using Trimble's (1974) approach to *tighten*, *sharpen*, and *brighten* the manuscript as I prepared the final draft.

Looking Onward: What New Questions Have Been Raised?

Several gaps were addressed in this inquiry: namely, the development of critical curiosity in adolescents (Clark & Seider, 2017), and the opportunity for dominant group students to

engage in self-examination and build awareness about existing systems of power and privilege through critical literacy (Foss, 2002; Landt, 2007; Morrell & Morrell, 2012; Nieto, 1999; Sleeter, 1995). However, true to the nature of teacher research, the end of my study generated as many questions as it did answers. I highlight some of these questions next, as well as suggested avenues for further research.

1. *How might using fiction/nonfiction multicultural books in a social studies classroom, or as a cross-disciplinary approach beyond language arts, endorse social justice education?* This study demonstrates how an organic teaching approach that incorporates history, current events, and multimodal literacy supported a social justice agenda. Based on these conclusions, researchers might consider how expanding multicultural literature across the curriculum could diversify its use and produce outcomes that sustain broader educational goals.

2. *How might using French multicultural literature in French classrooms challenge the worldviews of student populations in similar insular, non-diverse areas?* Like this study, research of this nature would address the need for dialogue about race, racism, and White privilege as supported by Tatum (1992). Also, when engaging in studies through literature that include controversial topics requires students to first grasp the concept of privilege (Boyd & Miller, 2020).

3. *What might teaching with a social justice agenda using literature pertaining to Indigenous Peoples in Canada look like?* Reading literature that featured a panoply of global social justice issues, and an array of cultural differences prompted me to reflect about issues and differences within my community, on a local and national level.

4. *How could using a critical literacy approach with multicultural literature as integrated literacy instruction benefit second language learners?* We know that little research has addressed the way critical literacy can promote intercultural education with ESL learners (Alford, 2001; Lau, 2015). In fact, Alford (2001) suggested it might even be advantageous to use critical literacy with ESL learners because they are least likely to resist authors' intentions, as they are not the predicted audience. To better understand the implications of such an approach, future research in the form of a longitudinal study might prove worthwhile.

5. *How might teacher educators contribute toward teacher candidates' preparedness in addressing tough topics in the classroom? How might teacher educators encourage new teachers to teach with a social justice agenda through literacy practices?* As I reflect on Burke and Collier's (2017), Kaczmarczyk et al.'s (2018), and Lazar and Offenberg's (2011) studies, I consider the need to further explore teacher preparedness in light of the call for SJE described in Chapter 2. I also noticed how several research projects featured partnerships between universities and schoolteachers—a collaborative aspect I believe to be instrumental in investigating such topics.

Educating as a Sustainable Enterprise: What Is My Contribution?

Seidel and Rokne (2011) postulated that "[i]nterpretive and careful reading of literature in classrooms is one way to inspire contemplation and practice of peaceful and just ways of being together through a community of inquiry into the human condition" (p. 247). Considering this quote, I bring back a question I posed in my introductory chapter: What is meant by going beyond simply reading the word? Well, my journey as teacher researcher testifies to a multitude

of ways in which my students and I answered this question. The first of many pedagogical decisions toward doing so involved taking risks.

I have stated throughout this dissertation that teaching with a social justice perspective is no simple feat. Nonetheless, just as educators are invited to take the risk of talking about tough topics, this study has shown how students are willing and capable of doing so. It is important for teachers to grasp concepts like race and racism when they read multicultural literature with their students (Lazar & Offenberg, 2011), because such issues are as complex as they are deep-seated in the fabric of our society. I believe my study might offer a glimpse into the potential of multicultural literature as a practical, versatile tool to teach about diversity and social justice. Beneficial for teachers and the larger educational community, my unique experience can lead to multiple applications for practitioners.

Further, my hope is that this teacher research can be disseminated among teacher education advocates. Like Villegas and Lucas (2002), it is my position that, although teacher education programs have now incorporated some multicultural education courses, more work is needed to meet the demands for more sustainable teaching practices, and more humane educational goals. As such, I recommend that teacher education curriculum consider ways to move beyond a traditionally fragmented, didactical approach toward a more holistic continuum that might (a) embrace a more organic classroom approach, (b) trust in a more democratic classroom environment, and (c) develop a problem-posing and critical thinking posture. These steps might offer a starting point in reimagining a socially-just education.

As Cochran-Smith et al. (2017) reminded us, a more accountable teacher education program advances teacher quality and individual prosperity. As a teacher researcher, I recognized the value of being aware of my sociocultural identity before asking my students to do

the same. Engaging in this study compelled me to acknowledge that individuals' racial identity is molded largely by their interactions with other people (Hagerman, 2019; Tatum, 2017). In their book *Is Everyone Really Equal?* Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) compared the invisibility of privilege for the dominant group to a current that flows in a direction we want to go and does not require any thinking when we have it. When we seek to become more inclusive communities, learning about the realities and lived experiences of disenfranchised groups come from conscious efforts to make this invisible current visible. Raising social justice awareness in what Lewis (2001) called "White spaces" (p. 796) may be a worthwhile endeavour for other educators. One way of accomplishing this is using multicultural literature to develop students' consciousness of their own citizenship amidst a pluralistic global society. What is more, Colby and Lyon (2004) reminded us that creating awareness among teachers about the power of multicultural literature in addressing social justice issues may lead to more culturally responsive educators.

Looking back to the beginning of my teaching career, I remember letting my heart— "the place where intellect and emotion and spirit converge in the human self" (Palmer, 2007, p. 11)— guide my every word and action. As a language arts teacher, I aspired to weave the threads of connectedness that would embody a sense of classroom community, in which every student could claim a sense of purposefulness. Through the years, I carried on the momentum of teaching from the heart, leading me to continue reflecting on my teaching practice, and wondering about how it shaped my students' perceptions as citizens of the world. When I chose to carry out this teacher research, I was essentially accepting Greene's (1994) invitation for teachers to "break out of the confinements of monologism, open themselves to pluralism, become aware of more possible ways of being and of attending to the world" (p. 21). I can honestly say that I reaped the benefits of this decision and judging from their feedback and

experiences as shared in this study, my students did too. Like Pincus (2001), "I do not believe that the work of teacher scholars must imitate the work of academic researchers. Classroom teachers make and use knowledge differently from academic researchers" (Conclusion section, para. 1). Hence, by realizing this teacher research, my students and I constructed knowledge differently; thus, I expect it will also be shared differently (Pincus, 2001).

Closing Remarks

More than a digital manuscript, more than ink on paper, I believe this dissertation to be a living document. As I wrote it, I was energized by the content, remembering each student as they uttered their words, expressed their emotions, and confided in their journals. It transported me back to an amazing journey together, complete with twists and turns, unpredictable circumstances, and unexpected, yet rich teachable moments. The writing process brought me immense joy; though it felt, at times, quite nostalgic. More than a document, I consider this dissertation a testimony, the telling of a story that is very much alive, interactive, and yes, unfinished. My hope is for educators like myself to be brave, take more pedagogical risks, and welcome stories like Parvana's and Jerome's to be shared with their students as a window to a world less familiar. After all, isn't it our responsibility to heed a ghost boy's imploration to "[b]ear witness . . . Only the living can make the world better" (Rhodes, 2018, p. 203)?

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Appendix A

END-OF-YEAR REFLECTIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

I am happy and honored to have shared this journey of reading multicultural novels with you throughout the school year.

At this time, I would like to invite you to answer the following questions. The purpose of this reflective questionnaire is to **add your voice** and **experience** to my research project. You can reflect back on some of your own learning and thought processes and provide your perspective in connection with the books we read in English class.

If you wish, you can also include and/or create additional pieces with your written answers (i.e., artwork, poem, passage from a book, song, letter, etc.). Take the time you need to think about each question before answering them. I am including a list of the multicultural novels (as well as the picturebooks I presented) as a reminder, so that you may refer to them in your answers. You can answer directly on the document.

List of novels (in bold) and picturebooks we read this year:

The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora (by Pablo Cartaya)	*La Frontera, a Journey with Papa* (by Deborah Mills, Alfredo Alva, & Claudia Navarro)
Seven Blind Mice (by Ed Young)	***Allies*** (by Alan Gratz)
The Breadwinner (by Deborah Ellis)	*The Treasure Box* (by Margaret Wild)
Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey (by Margriet Ruurs)	***A Bird on Water Street*** (by Elizabeth O. Dulemba)
Parvana's Journey (by Deborah Ellis)	*Dreams of Freedom* (by Amnesty International)
Ghost Boys (by Jewell Parker Rhodes)	***Stella by Starlight*** (by Sharon M. Draper)
As Fast as Words Could Fly (by Pamela M. Tuck; read aloud by Dulé Hill)	***It Ain't So Awful, Falafel!*** (by Firoozeh Dumas)
Harbor Me (by Jacqueline Woodson)	

1. What are your thoughts on the multicultural literature we read this year? How did the novels we read differ from other novels you read in the past?

2. What book left the greatest impact on you? Please explain.

3. What did you think about the Dialogue Journals? What did you enjoy most or least about writing your entries?

4. Which activity (DJ, reflections, drawings, etc.) in your portfolio are you most proud of and why?

5. Did you notice a time when your initial perceptions of a character changed? What did you think initially and how did it change? Please explain.

6. If you could talk to one character in any of the stories read, who would it be? What would you like to talk to this character about? What do you think his or her answer would be?

7. Did you discover something about your own worldview (how you perceive the world and others) while engaging with these multicultural units? Is there something you would like to change? Please explain.

8. We've talked about acting for change in response to social injustices in our society (like racism, gender inequality, prejudice, poverty, etc.). Did any of the books prompt you to want to make a change? If so, how?

9. What would you say to another teacher thinking about using some of the books we read? What advice or recommendations would you offer based on your experience this year?

10. Did the books we read help you in any way we haven't yet talked about? Please explain what you mean.

Appendix B
Overview of Multicultural Book Studies

Date	Novel Study	Activities
September/October	*The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora*	- Task Cards - Introduction to dialogue journals + sentence starters - Portfolios (artwork) - Slido discussion board - Multimodal options for end-of-unit project
November/December	*The Breadwinner*	- Video (Taliban war on women) - Dialogue journals (prompts + free writing) - Portfolios (artwork) - Video (Malala Yousafsai) + girl brides documentary - Political cartoon analysis
January/February	*Parvana's Journey* Picturebooks: *Seven Blind Mice*, *Stepping Stones*	- KWL chart, book walk questions - Dialogue journals (prompts + free writing) - Special Guest (war veteran) - Graffiti board - Portfolios (artistic creations, poetry) - Reading booklet + UNCRC end-of-unit group presentations
March/April	*Ghost Boys* Picturebook: *As Fast as Words Can Fly*	- Discussion (videos, author website, news articles) - Class community potluck - Dialogue journals (prompts + free writing) - Padlet discussion wall - Videos (Emmett Till documentary, racism clip) + news articles + group discussion - Portfolios (artwork, poetry, music) - Task card options on Nearpod - Slido discussion board - Emotion check-in - Multimodal options for end-of-unit project
May/June	Book choices: *Harbor Me* *Allies* *Stella by Starlight* *It Ain't So Awful, Falafel!* *A Bird on Water Street* Picturebooks: *La Frontera*, *Dreams of Freedom*, *The Treasure Box*	- Dialogue journals (prompts + free writing) - News articles (Ahmaud Arbery/George Floyd murders, political cartoons, headlines RE: protests, discrimination, racism) + discussion - Links to websites (information on authors, KKK, Iran, Appalachia, UN, Tulsa Race Massacre, etc.) - Videos (documentaries linked to each novel, author videoclips, PSA) + group discussion - Podcasts (racism) - Portfolios (various productions) - Task card options for end-of-unit project - Emotion check-in - Small group Book Talks - Recommended book lists, movie lists, and websites for books on social justice

Appendix C

Research Acknowledgment for Parents/Guardians (January)

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am writing to share with you my goals for a teacher research project I am conducting this year as the teacher of your child's ESL class. The project is entitled *Awakening Critical Consciousness: Adolescent Learners' Worldviews Explored Through Multicultural Literature*.

The purpose of this study is to examine issues of diversity and social justice and how reading multicultural novels about characters who may live under different circumstances than our own can affect the way we perceive the world and others. The following question leads my teacher inquiry:

> ***"How might using multicultural literature in my classroom expand adolescent learners' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens?"***

This is a question I have pondered for some time as I have been using multicultural literature for many years in conjunction with the curriculum and IB goals for the ESL course. This year, as part of my doctoral research, I seek to explore this question more deeply by keeping a teacher journal between January and June 2020.

Teacher journals are accounts of classroom life and are a practice regularly used by many teachers. The purpose of my teacher journal is to reflect on the pedagogical practices taking place in our ESL class that I can then re-examine and analyze at the end of the school year. The teacher journal will include reflections of my practice, descriptions of pedagogical approaches using multicultural literature, as well as questions I have as a teacher. **The journal is not evaluative of your child and will not identify specific learners in any way**. For example, I may refer generally to ideas shared by groups of students during collaborative discussions, or the ways in which learners as a whole appear to be connecting or not connecting with characters in the stories. **Nothing is required of your child at this time.** Your child will take part in everyday teaching and learning activities in the classroom as already occurring. Classroom activities will be the same for everyone and are not specially planned for this project.

In June, you will receive a second letter from me with a consent form that invites your child's voice and experiences to the project through an interview (only if they are interested). Further details will follow prior to June when you and your child will have the opportunity to indicate a desire to participate or not. Please note these interviews will take place after final grades have been submitted but before the end of the school year.

Although this is not a board-mandated study, the XXXXXX School Board and the school administration of XXXXXX have reviewed and approved this research project.

While this research is focused on my practice, potential benefits to society include understanding classroom literacy practices that enable educators to teach about diversity and social justice issues.

To recap, my teaching journal will be used for research purposes only. I will not be observing students directly, but rather my own pedagogy as their Language Arts teacher.

The teacher journal will be kept confidential, and I will be the only one who will have access to it. It will be stored in a locked document holder and the key will be on my person at all times. All digital and text files pertaining to my teacher journal will be stored on an encrypted USB flash drive. The digital and text files will all be disposed/shredded within five years post publication.

Research results will be published in my doctoral dissertation and may be presented at conferences as well as published in articles for academic communities. A summary of findings will be shared with the school board (XXXXXX) and potentially as a workshop for educators. For students who may be interested in seeing the findings of my research looking at my teaching practice, I will create a poster that I will post in my classroom. It will only highlight key findings in relation to what I have learned about my practice. If you wish to hear about the findings or read any of the work produced, you may contact me directly. The data collected in my teacher journal will not be used in any future studies.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me by phone at **XXXXXX** (school). You can also send me an email at **XXXXXX** or you may contact my research supervisor, Dr. Tara-Lynn Scheffel, at **XXXXXX**.

Thank you,

Dany Dias

Appendix D

NIPISSING UNIVERSITY | **Schulich** SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Letter of Information for Parents/Guardians (May 2020)

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Your child is invited to take part in a research project entitled *Awakening Critical Consciousness: Adolescent Learners' Worldviews Explored Through Multicultural Literature* conducted by me, Dany Dias, your child's English teacher. The research is a component of my doctoral degree. As you know, throughout the school year, I have been keeping a teacher journal to reflect upon my practice (e.g., thoughts and questions I have about my teaching in this class and the impact of the stories we've been reading on the learners). At this time, I would like to invite your child to **add their own voice and experience** to the project.

Participant Procedures

First, your child is invited to **answer a written reflective questionnaire**, which consists of 10 open-ended questions prompting him/her to share his/her journey with the multicultural texts we read this year and reflect back on some of his/her own learning and thought processes. The purpose of this reflective questionnaire is to gather your child's input and experience surrounding his/her overall journey with multicultural literature. The questionnaire may take from 20-45 minutes depending on what your child would like to share with me. I will send your child a copy of the questions electronically once consent forms have been received. Then, s/he will have until the end of the school year to prepare the answers and submit to me electronically. Your child may also wish to include and/or create additional pieces with his/her written answers (i.e., artwork, poem, passage from a book, song, letter, etc.). Please also note that I will provide all questions in both English and French, therefore, your child may choose to answer them in his/her preferred language.

Second, I am requesting permission to **keep a copy of his/her student portfolio** (or specific pieces s/he chooses to share with me), with your child's permission. The reason for this request is to revisit and reflect upon the experiences s/he shared within our classroom, and experiences specific to the multicultural texts we read together throughout the year. I will only collect non-identifying pieces within his/her multimedia portfolios (e.g., an inserted URL or video clip or a publicly available image that is used to represent learning). No video or photography that can identify your child will be collected.

Any data collected will be used for research purposes only, and your child's name will **not** be used (participants will all be assigned a pseudonym). Participation in this study is entirely **voluntary** and your child will have the right to choose to respond to any, all or none of the questions asked on the reflective questionnaire. Your child can also indicate what, if any, part of the portfolio can be shared with me. Your child is free to choose to participate or not without penalty or consequence. It will be your child's choice to answer and submit the questionnaire. If after submitting the questionnaire, your child changes his/her mind, s/he can send me a private email up until the end of the school year, or June 18, 2020, to withdraw his/her questionnaire from the study after which time I will begin to analyze the date for my teacher research.

All data will be kept strictly confidential. All digital and text files pertaining to the reflective questionnaire will be stored on an encrypted USB flash drive. As for the student portfolio, digital and text files are currently stored on your child's Google Drive file and I will make a digital copy for my own files. If anything is in paper only (e.g., the completion of Dialogue Journals at home), your child is welcome to send me a photo or scan through Google platform to be included. All digital and text files will be disposed/shredded within five years post publication of the research study.

There is no known risk to being involved in this study. It is possible that certain themes encountered as we read the books (i.e., poverty, discrimination, loss) brought about feelings like sadness or guilt, for example. However, while I consistently aim to create a safe and respectful classroom environment (physically and virtually), when discussing themes, your child will have additional supports available to him/her as well if s/he wants to express himself/herself further, beyond the questionnaire. The following contacts are posted on Google Classroom, in your child's school agenda, as well as on the assent letter that your child received: Kids Help Phone: call XXXXXX or to text, send the word "text" to XXXXXX; XXXXXX; Mental Health Crisis Line (www.crisisline.ca) or call XXXXXX.

There are potential benefits to participating in this research. As students share their experiences with the multicultural literature we explore, they may gain an increased awareness of social justice issues in the world and learning about cultural differences. Discussing their engagement with multicultural literature might also encourage an attitude of perspective-taking in students as they examine their own culture and position in the world and consider those of others. Potential benefits to society include improving classroom literacy practices that enable educators to teach about diversity and social justice issues. Your child's participation may also contribute to advancing the concept of a more humanistic education, where understanding inequalities, empathizing with others who experience them, and fostering critical curiosity, reflexivity, and courage may lead to action.

Research results will be published in my doctoral dissertation and may be presented at conferences as well as published in articles for academic communities. Also, a summary of findings will be shared with the school board (XXXXXX) and I may also share what I learned about teaching with multicultural literature as a workshop for educators. You may contact me directly if you wish to

hear about the findings or read any of the work produced. The data collected in this research will not be used in any future studies.

Confidentiality Process

Any information obtained in connection with this study that may be identified with your child will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission. This research project is intended to explore and understand learners' voices rather than exercise judgment. Although the name and specific location of the school will not be disclosed, there is a high possibility that the school could be identified by someone who knows I am a teacher at this school as well as the researcher in this study. However, all participants will be attributed pseudonyms throughout data collection and in the final publication of the research.

Please read and complete the attached **Consent Form**. You may wish to scan the signed form and send it back to me via email at XXXXXX, or if you are not able to scan, you may also email me from your personal email indicating "**yes**" or "**no**" to both of the questions on the next page. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me by phone at **XXXXXX** (mobile) or email at the address above.

Thank you,

Dany Dias

Participant Consent Form for Parents/Guardians

Awakening Critical Consciousness: Adolescent Learners' Worldviews
Explored Through Multicultural Literature

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I have read the attached *Letter of Information* and all my questions have been answered. I understand that steps are being taken to protect my child and that I am free to withdraw my child from this project up to June 18, 2020. I understand that my child will receive a separate letter electronically on which they can indicate if they would like to participate. I understand that the data collected may be shared in scholarly conferences, research journals, and workshops for the XXXXX.

Please check 'yes' or 'no' to indicate your agreement of the following options for data. You may consent to **some, all** or **none** of the following:

☐   ☐   *<u>End-of-year reflective questionnaire:</u>

Yes   No

        I agree to my child participating in a **written reflective questionnaire**. I understand that the responses to the questionnaire may be shared (confidentially without names or identifying details) in presentations/publications.

☐   ☐   *<u>Student portfolio:</u>

Yes   No

        I agree to my child sharing a copy of his/her **student portfolio** (or specific pieces they choose). I understand that the contents of the portfolio may be shared (confidentially) in presentations/publications.

_____
Name of Child

_____
Printed Name of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian(s)

_____   _____
Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian(s)   Date

Appendix E

Assent Letter for Students (May 2020)

Dear Student of XXXXXX,

You are invited to participate in a research study I am conducting about reading and discussing books concerning diversity and social justice issues. As you know, throughout the year, I have been keeping a teacher journal to reflect upon my practice (e.g., thoughts and questions I have about my teaching in this class and the impact of the stories we've been reading on you as learners). This research project is part of my own studies as I work towards the completion of my doctoral degree.

As a next step, I would like to invite you to **share your experiences** with the books we've read through your portfolio examples. Here are some questions you might be wondering about this project. Please read my responses and consider this invitation together with your parents/guardians. If you have any questions or concerns, please send me an email.

What am I being invited to do?
You are invited to participate in a <u>written reflective questionnaire</u> which consists of 10 open-ended questions. It will take a minimum of 20 minutes, but you can take as much time as you need to answer each question.

What is the purpose of this reflective questionnaire?
The purpose of this reflective questionnaire is to gather your input about your overall experience surrounding the multicultural books we read in English class over the whole year.

How will I respond to this reflective questionnaire?
Your individual (private) copy of the reflective questionnaire will be shared with you electronically on Google Classroom. You can take the time you need to think about your answers and write them directly on the questionnaire. You can choose to answer all or some of the questions. If you need clarifications about the reflective questionnaire, you may use the "private comments" section on Google Classroom. If you wish, you may also include and/or create additional pieces with your written answers (i.e., artwork, poem, passage from a book, song, letter, etc.). I will provide all questions in both English and French, therefore, you may choose to answer them in your preferred language.

How much time will I have to respond to the reflective questionnaire?
You will receive your copy of the reflective questionnaire in early May, and you will have until the end of the school year (June 18, 2020) to prepare answers and submit them to me electronically, by saving your finished copy of the questionnaire and clicking "Submit" on Google Classroom so that I know you have completed it.

Is there anything else I am asked to do besides respond to the reflective questionnaire?
I am also asking your permission to <u>keep a copy of your portfolio</u> (or specific pieces that you feel comfortable sharing) as part of the research. The reason for this is so that I can revisit and reflect upon the experiences you shared through the contents of your student portfolio (i.e., Dialogue Journal entries, artwork, short assignments, etc.). I will only collect non-identifying pieces within your multimedia portfolios (e.g., an inserted URL or video clip or a publicly available image that is used to represent learning). No video or photography that can identify you will be collected.

Are there any risks involved in participating in the study?
There is no known risk to being involved in this study. It is possible that certain themes we encountered in the books (i.e., poverty, racism, discrimination, loss) brought about feelings like sadness or guilt, for example. While I consistently aim to create a safe and respectful classroom environment (physically and virtually) together with you and your peers to discuss these themes, please know that you have additional supports available to you if you want to talk further beyond the reflective questionnaire. For Kids Help Phone: call XXXXXX or to text, send the word "text" to XXXXXX; XXXXXX, Mental Health Crisis Line (www.crisisline.ca) or call XXXXXX.

What if I do not wish to participate or change my mind along the way?
Participation in this study is entirely **voluntary** and you have the right to choose to respond to any, all or none of the questions asked on the reflective questionnaire. You can choose not to answer a question if you do not feel comfortable doing so. If you submit your responses, and change your mind, you can write me an email to let me know about your decision before the end of the school year, or June 18, 2020, after which time I will continue the work on my teacher research project.

Who will be able to access my information (my answers on the reflective questionnaire and the work from my portfolio)?
All data will be kept strictly confidential. All digital and text files pertaining to your written responses will be stored on an encrypted USB flash drive. As for your student portfolio, digital and text files are currently stored in your Google Drive and I will make a digital copy for my own files. As for any paper components of your portfolio, I will invite you to send me a photo or scan contents you have at home through the Google platform.

What will happen with the final results of this study?
Research results will be published in my doctoral dissertation and may be presented at conferences, as well as published in articles for academic communities. Also, a summary of findings will be shared with the school board (XXXXXX) and I may also share what I learned about teaching with multicultural literature as a workshop for educators. If you are interested in seeing the

findings of my research, you can send me an email and I will send you a poster summarizing key findings of the research. Pseudonyms will be used, and no identifying features of participant contributions will be included on the poster.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
You may find that the potential benefits of participating in the research include an increased awareness of social justice issues in the world as well as learning more about cultural differences. Your participation will contribute to society by improving classroom literacy practices that enable educators to teach about diversity and social justice issues.

Will anyone know that I participated in the study?
The names of all participants in the research will be replaced by pseudonyms. Any information obtained in connection with this study, that can be identified with you, will remain confidential and will only be disclosed with your permission.

Thank you for reading this letter of invitation. Please check the boxes on the next page to say **"yes"** or **"no"**. It is okay whichever you decide.

Sincerely,

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This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Nipissing University's Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: Research Coordinator, Nipissing University, 100 College Drive, North Bay, ON P1B 8L7 or ethics@nipissingu.ca.

Assent Form for Students

Awakening Critical Consciousness: Adolescent Learners' Worldviews
Explored Through Multicultural Literature

As a participant in this research project, I clearly understand what I am agreeing to do. I have read the attached *Letter of Information* and all my questions have been answered. I understand that steps are being taken to protect me and that I am free to decline involvement and/or withdraw from this project up until June 18, 2020. I also understand that the research findings may be shared in scholarly conferences, research journals, and workshops for the XXXXXX.

Please check 'yes' or 'no' to indicate your agreement of the following options for data. You may consent to **some, all** or **none** of the following:

☐   ☐   *End-of-year reflective questionnaire:*

Yes   No

                  I agree to participate in a 20-45 minute, **written reflective questionnaire** which consists of 10 open-ended questions. I understand that the contents of the interview may be shared (confidentially without names or identifying details) in presentations/publications.

☐   ☐   *Student portfolio:*

Yes   No

                  I agree to sharing copies of my **student portfolio** (or specific pieces, as identified here: _____)**,** I understand that the contents of the portfolio may be shared (confidentially) in presentations/publications.

_____
My Name

_____   _____
My Signature   Date

Appendix F

Dissemination of Outcomes Poster for Participants

Case Study

How might using multicultural literature in the classroom expand adolescent learners' worldviews and shape their perceptions as global citizens?

EMERGING THEMES

1 First Lens

A focus on learners...that's you!

♥ EMPATHY - You learned about the world in authentic & credible ways, examined yourself, and acquired a new lens! By putting yourself in characters' shoes, you perceived others differently, connected with them, and cultivated compassion!

⬡ INSIGHT - You moved beyond simply knowing, and learned from injustice, recognized White privilege and sought to understand racism better. You bore witness!

🛡 AGENCY - You took ownership of your learning, used your voice and expressed yourself creatively! You were willing to be a part of the solution against racism!

2 Second Lens

A focus on teacher perspective...

TEACH ABOUT THE WORLD: I noticed the importance of addressing tough topics, adding historical & current events, using journaling, picturebooks & multimodal options in our lessons! ALLYSHIP: racism → I witnessed our class join the global conversation about racism & be ready to act for social change! TEACH DURING A PANDEMIC: I realized the benefit of an organic timeline, book choices, read alouds & relationships!

3 Third Lens

Three distinct portraits...

Some experienced their journey with multicultural books through PASSION (emotion, voice, desire to act for change)

Others viewed it as a path to seeking knowledge and CURIOSITY (inquiry, understanding, lifelong lessons)

And some lived the experience by gaining WIDSOM (bravery, strength & hope help cultivate humanity)