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Multiple Pathways to Perspectival Learning: Children's Literature in Preservice Teacher Education

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Abstract: Using two case studies, we highlight preservice teachers' (PSTs) perspectival understanding to consider what experiences, or combinations of experiences, children's literature supports PSTs' journeys in building empathy in their teaching. The notion of *perspectival understanding* guided our examination as we unpacked PSTs' responses to opportunities to engage with multiple perspectives that existed in diverse children's literature. Two individual literacy courses served as the foundation for this analysis. The findings of the first case suggest that PSTs shifted their views on the roles of children's literature, gaining an understanding of how multicultural literature could more equitably represent and support diverse students' learning. In the second case, PSTs' participation in book club discussions of chapter books depicting immigrant children's experiences revealed that they were able to engage in perspective-taking to some extent by focusing on protagonists without considering other supporting characters. Productive future inquiries could include assignment-level, course-level, and semester-level study of teacher education programmatic redesign to center empathy, leading to the development of perspectival understanding, toward children from historically marginalized communities.

Keywords: Perspectival understanding, preservice teachers, multicultural children's literature, teacher education



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As K-12 students in the U.S. have become ever more linguistically and culturally diverse, we recognize the continuous need to prepare preservice teachers (PSTs) to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences, language practices, and cultures of students, families, and communities (Ladson-Billings, 2014, 2021). Regardless of their linguistic and racial background, contemporary PSTs are more likely to interact with students from diverse backgrounds than ever before (de Bray et al., 2019). However, research shows that PSTs tend to hold deficit perspectives of their future students from marginalized communities and that their limited experience with diverse students may hinder them from recognizing students' strengths and offering them equitable educational opportunities (Castro, 2010; Rowan et al., 2021). To redress deficit discourses toward students from marginalized communities, teacher educators have created varied opportunities for PSTs to expand their perspectives and thus to appreciate viewpoints of marginalized communities (Brown, 2013; Jackson & Bryson, 2018; Vlach et al., 2019). Particularly, multicultural children's books have been deemed valuable for introducing PSTs to diverse viewpoints and experiences that may represent those of their prospective students and their communities (Iwai, 2015; Senyshyn & Martinelli, 2020).

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PSTs' responses to and understanding of the value of multicultural literature continue to be an important area of inquiry, particularly in light of the sociopolitical turn piqued following the 2016 election. In particular, the recent uptick in book banning fervor may be obscuring and incapacitating attempts to strengthen the representation of marginalized communities in classrooms and in libraries (American Library Association, 2023; Fitz &

Nikolaidis, 2020). At this juncture, between expanding student diversity and contracting political contexts, it is with urgency that PSTs “enter classrooms with the knowledge of literacy teaching practices and transformative pedagogies necessary to serve their future students” (Flores et al., 2019, p. 228). Specifically, how PSTs came to see those perspectives and how that vision led to a change in their understanding were what we explored in this article.

The two case studies presented here are both contextualized within teacher education classes across one semester. They include the approaches that two teacher educators (the first two authors, Kwangok and Annamary) used while incorporating multicultural children's literature into their courses to foster PSTs' understanding of marginalized students' lives. Through analysis of these cases, we sought to understand better how children's literature served as a mediational tool for shifting and widening PSTs' perspectives on children's lives. In the next sections, we discuss perspectival understanding as a conceptual framework for our understanding of PSTs' perspective-taking when reading and discussing multicultural literature with PSTs.

Theoretical Framework

Perspectival Understanding

As we reflected on our work with PSTs' exploration of children's literature, the concept of perspectival understanding, or perspective-taking, provided us with a conceptual foundation. Perspectival understanding refers to one's exploration of alternative viewpoints in seeking an understanding of

concepts or situations (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995; Greeno & van de Sande, 2007). It involves arranging and aligning information necessary to view different aspects of concepts or situations and to transform one's thinking (Mezirow, 1978; Tennant, 1998). Boland and Tenkasi (1995) observed that "reflexive knowledge of one's own perspective...[facilitates]...the perspective-taking process" (p. 362). In other words, this self-examination allows individuals to ascertain how their perspectives are different from those of others. According to Greeno and van de Sande (2007), the process of developing perspectival understanding is activated in dialogues with people who evince perspectives other than their own. Ultimately, the ability to contemplate multiple viewpoints reflects a commitment to sustaining "dialectical flux" (Baxter, 2004, pp. 7-12) in which a person sets aside limiting viewpoints, decenters one's self, and accepts the limitation of single-minded views.

Gaining an understanding of different perspectives is critical to human learning and development, and it can take place throughout one's lifetime (Piaget, 1926, 1928). Perspective-taking is a cultural learning process in that it can be facilitated and further developed through situated learning (Tomasello et al., 1993). Specifically, the basic form of learning through observation of others' behavior can only contribute to simple perspective taking. With learning through instruction and collaboration, learners can consider and adopt others' perspectives. Warren (2017) suggested that active perspective-taking allows teachers to become aware of patterns in their thinking about differences as it is a critical component of enacting the empathy needed for teaching in a democratic society.

Perspectival understanding or perspective taking may not always be achievable effortlessly. Piaget (1926, 1928) explained that children develop their skills to decenter their egocentrism and to

distinguish others' perspectives from theirs through social interactions. Even adults may hold egocentric perspectives when they have limited expertise or experiences (Piaget, 1926, 1928). Flavell (1992) further pointed out that, because a self-oriented view is so easily available, many people interpret and analyze others' perspectives by using their own experiences as lenses. Active centering of others' perspectives, or perspective-taking, can allow emotional and cognitive connections and acknowledgment of one's limited experiences and social complexities (Coplan, 2011; DeStiger, 1998). Therefore, perspective-taking can bring transformation to one's existing understandings and raise the consciousness of possibilities for social action (Mezirow, 1978).

Literature as a Mediation Tool for Perspectival Understanding

Multicultural children's literature refers to children's books that accurately and equitably portray the lives of children from all backgrounds, in order "to present children with authentic representations of their lived realities in books" (Lopez-Robertson, 2017, p. 49). Particularly, reflecting multiple facets of ethnicity, race, gender, (dis)abilities, language, experiences, and cultures, multicultural literature opens possibilities for readers to explore the perspectives of children and their families with various sociocultural experiences (Taxel, 1997). Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may feel recognized and valued when their cultural and linguistic diversity are reflected in books used in schools (Limlamai, 2023). Through books representing multiple forms of learning and values in marginalized communities, all children can engage with multiple viewpoints (Cooke, 2023). Thus, multicultural children's literature can encourage readers to reflect on their own lives and to gain new insights as Sims Bishop's (1990a) noted as follows:

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined,

familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author (para. 1).

This cognizance of multiplicity in experiences and views acquired through reading literature, then, is one way to take and understand multiple perspectives. Building on Sims Bishop's metaphors of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors, others have developed additional metaphors to explain how multicultural literature affords or constrains perspectives. By applying Royster's (2000) suggestion of *kaleidoscopic views* to texts, Low and Torres (2022) explained how literature can illuminate unrecognized perspectives and provide readers with multiple configurations of meanings. Therefore, multicultural literature may offer opportunities for readers to better see viewpoints and lived experiences that may not surface in school curriculum representing the dominant values. These metaphors suggest that children's books may serve as a work zone in which readers, in this case our PSTs, may begin to shift stances in order to consider multiple perspectives.

However, books may not always allow readers to access multiple perspectives. For example, Reese (2018) suggested a metaphor of curtaining off to acknowledge how certain stories from indigenous groups are kept only within the communities to preserve and honor the sacredness of the culture and the endurance of oppression. Thus, readers may not fully gain the knowledge to interpret indigenous communities' experiences. Certain books, such as *Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 2022), may be viewed as disfiguring the intention to promote multidimensional understandings as it normalizes violence incited by the very text (Patel, 2016). In the midst of this work to encourage perspectival understanding in PSTs through multicultural literature, it is important to be aware of historical

realities and contexts because certain books may not always be suitable for generating multiple perspectives.

Engaging PSTs in reading and reflecting on multicultural literature has the potential to shift their perspectives in several ways. For example, Brindley and Laframboise (2002) demonstrated that by reflecting on multicultural literature that addressed experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse children through various multimodal activities (e.g., role-playing, discussions, dramas), PSTs engaged in revisiting their cultural beliefs, connecting historical events with current issues, and exploring practical applications designed to encourage perspective-taking in their teaching. Likewise, Howrey and Whelan-Kim (2009) demonstrated that by examining multicultural literature, PSTs were able to develop an awareness of children's varied cultural experiences and potential difficulties in children's lives, and to understand the urgency of building a classroom community in which their future students can feel included and respected.

Additionally, through in-depth engagement with multicultural literature, PSTs can develop an awareness of the injustices enacted upon culturally and linguistically diverse communities and the concomitant need for teaching toward social justice (Robinson, 1998). Escamilla and Nathenson-Mejía (2003) examined how teacher candidates in a graduate course reflected on their experience of using Latino multicultural literature in their internship classrooms that served students mostly from Latino communities. Recognizing injustices that marginalized communities experienced, these teacher candidates expressed the need to address difficult topics such as racism, religion, and discrimination and began to see their responsibility, as future teachers, to promote tolerance and acceptance among their future students. Focusing on one PST's reflection on multicultural children's

literature in a children's literature course, Landa and Stephens (2017) also highlighted that the focal PST in their case study expressed empathy toward the experience of children from diverse backgrounds depicted in children's books and commitment toward advocacy (pp. 61-62) for students from marginalized communities. Across these studies, it was evident that multicultural children's literature allowed PSTs to recognize the struggles existing in marginalized communities and to begin developing a sense of responsibility to address injustice and biases that marginalized communities may encounter, and thus, awaken their critical consciousness. Building on this line of work, we present two case studies conducted in two different institutions to demonstrate how different approaches for engaging PSTs with multicultural literature could contribute to perspectival understanding.

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Voices of Teacher Educators: Two Cases

The two cases below drew from data collected for two separate studies related to the use of diverse texts with PSTs in teacher education programs: one in the Southcentral and the other in the Midwestern United States. Participants included PSTs at the start of their preparation journey to those getting ready for student teaching. In both settings, like most of their counterparts around the U.S., PSTs were overwhelmingly white and female, and heading into diverse classrooms (Souto-Manning & Emdin, 2023) which makes this work of perspective-taking even more germane than ever (Flores et al., 2019). According to the Cooperative Children's Book Center (2023) that tracks the number of multicultural books published each year since 1985, approximately 40% of

3,450 books published in 2022 were written by a person of color and have at least one primary character from linguistically, racially, and culturally diverse communities. Additionally, the number of books written by authors of color and with people of color as primary characters has been steadily increasing in the last decade. This increasing availability of multicultural literature, itself, urges teacher educators to create additional opportunities for PSTs, who may well interact with children from marginalized communities, to use multicultural books as tools to explore multiple perspectives. Thus, both course instructors invited their PSTs to consider children's literature that featured characters from underrepresented sociocultural groups. These inquiries explored how engagement with multicultural children's literature shaped PSTs' perspective-taking and their

thinking about the role of diverse representation within their future classrooms. In other words, a goal of the classes featured in this article was to familiarize PSTs with multicultural literature that reflected their own future students' "racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world" (Sims Bishop, 1997, p. 3) as well as these students' families' and communities' "values, beliefs, attitudes, institutions, social relations, language, [and] customs" (Sims Bishop, 1990b, p. 5). Given these shared purposes, this study focuses on PSTs' perspectival learning through consideration of diverse children's literature across sites. Each case is described separately below, and a discussion follows that highlights what we learned from joining cases together.

Case One: Developing Egalitarian Perspectives in Library Exploration of Multicultural Children's Literature

A qualitative case-study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used to conduct semester-long research into whether and how PSTs attitudes changed toward reading, books, and kinds of literature as a result of taking a required course on children's literature and its pedagogical applications. An underlying principle of this course was to underscore the importance of children seeing themselves and learning about the world in the literature they read. Conducted at a public university in the southern United States during Spring 2017, the inquiry focused on one of several themed class sessions across the semester that was held in the university library. These classes began with a short overview of the day's focus then most of the time was spent with PSTs examining texts that represented that day's theme. This particular session was centered on multicultural children's literature. Participants were 14 PSTs, all identifying as female, 13 white and one Latina. One PST identified as differently abled visually. All were sophomores or early juniors and either two or three semesters away from their student teaching. All were engaged in K-6 classroom field experiences at the time. The session was preceded by textbook readings along with a recorded lecture and quiz. Prepared in this way, when PSTs came to class in the library, they were ready to spend the better part of an hour exploring carefully selected texts at book-laden tables. Toward the end of each class, all members engaged in a discussion about what they found, talked about, and what they were thinking about differently. Each library session was facilitated by both the instructor and the subject librarian. After a short lecture in which their evaluative assignment was explained, and good and poor examples of texts demonstrated, the students had time to handle, examine, preview, and skim books. They chose two books to analyze and shared the findings in a whole class discussion. After the

discussion, each wrote a reflection on what they noticed about the books they examined and how they multicultural literature could be incorporated into their future classrooms.

For this study, data sources include pre- and post-survey responses, as well as an analytic grid and reflections completed by students in the focal library session. First, the survey was a slightly modified version of McKenna and Kear's (1990) Elementary Reading Attitude Survey and consisted of 12 Likert scale questions with an added open response option for further explanation. Surveys were used at the beginning and end of the semester to capture changes in the ways that PSTs thought about various genres and kinds of literature. The post-survey was sent out electronically after the last class meeting with a 78% return rate. The survey asked respondents to determine their level of "happiness" with each genre/form, the language reflected in the original survey tool. For example, the directions state: On a scale of 1-4 (4 representing "most happy" and 1 representing "least happy") circle how you feel about reading different types of genres/forms of children's literature. Second, at the onset of the focal class for this study, PSTs completed an analytic grid adapted from Bucher and Hinton's (2009) rubric for determining the quality of young adult multicultural literature. This rubric attended to determining stereotypical depictions of marginalized groups as well as to literary quality. Finally, students were asked to write reflections on their experiences at the end of the focal library session.

An iterative analysis was conducted (Miles et al., 1994) that included reduction and display of data including references to multicultural literature in the survey responses, survey comments, and library session reflections. First, student reflections were coded by using the following analytic questions: (a) How did PSTs reveal their new knowledge?; (b) In what ways were PSTs able to see beyond their own

survival as new teachers to imagine themselves using these texts for/with students in their future classrooms?; and (c) In what ways was perspective-taking apparent in their reflections? Table 1 shows the coding schemes and examples.

Findings

The findings presented here illustrate the tensions between essentialist and dominant narratives around “single story” (Adichie, 2009) explanations of people and their lives. PSTs’ various structured engagements

Table 1
Code Book Example

Code	Excerpt	Perspectival Understanding
Learning: Students expressed changes in their thinking or new realizations.	My thinking has changed because I honestly never thought about the importance of multicultural books.	This quote shows an early form of perspective-taking. This PST is in the beginning stages of considering her future students’ social needs.
Learning	I didn’t know what qualified as a multicultural book. I thought they only dealt with ethnicity & religion, not disabilities & LGBT as well.	This excerpt shows the earliest foundational understanding of the function of multicultural books which may enable her to engage in perspective-taking when making curricular decisions for her future students’ social needs.
Classroom: Students envisioned the future utility of multicultural books.	My thinking has changed about using multicultural books in my classroom by having multiple/different options rather than focusing on just one specific area/topic.	Very early stages of perspective-taking are evident here in that this PST is in the beginning stages of considering her future students’ social needs including specifically, choice.
Classroom	By finding books that show that they are not alone the student may feel more comfortable.	Perspectival understanding, in the abstract, appears in this quote. The PST is considering, in general, social needs of their students.
Action: Students made a goal to take action.	I will definitely have a wide variety of multicultural books in my library.	Having taken the inner step to decide to include a variety of multicultural books, this PST is showing some perspectival understanding. Still in the beginning stages, her perspective-taking is centered in a future-oriented envisionment of her classroom library.

with children’s literature across a long semester appeared to have only begun to peel away previous conceptions of what kinds of texts belong in a classroom and why.

Survey Data from Before and After the Course

The survey points to multicultural literature introducing PSTs to topics and experiences of people who are underrepresented in dominant narratives with which they are most familiar. For example, Isabella’s (all names are pseudonyms) pre-survey comment was “I’ve never read any multicultural books, but I think it would be interesting to me.” Her post-course comment was:

I really like the idea of multicultural books. It gives a feel of a different culture and I have always found that interesting. I have always been stuck in my own ways around [this region], but these books bring other cultures to life.

Isabella’s comments indicate a recognition of perspectival stasis, and, now, a roused willingness to consider the perspectives of others, at least through the safety and distance that books can offer. Yet, the word choice “idea of multicultural literature” infers abstraction. It was in this course that she learned that the category (the “idea”) of multicultural literature existed. It is evident that she had never encountered the “idea” in twelve years of grade school, or in two prior years of college. The disruption to the stasis in her thinking opens the possibility of other ideas taking root.

Madeline’s pre-course comment, too, indicated she was completely unfamiliar with multicultural literature. Madeline was a top student, and she experienced some challenging physical issues for which accommodations were provided. In her post-course survey, she wrote, “Ever since I learned that multicultural books include protagonists with disabilities, I can honestly say I enjoy multicultural books because some of my favorite books are

multicultural books.” Madeline’s comment illustrated her growing understanding that allowed expansion of her definition of multicultural books to be more inclusive of differences that included characters with disabilities. It is a start: Madeline’s personal connection to representation in literature enabled her to begin perspective-taking. Her growing awareness opens the possibility of a broader understanding of the importance to her future students of representation in literature.

Library Session Written Reflections and Analysis

Revealing that representation is a new concept for her, Isabella wrote, “I’ve thought more about how diversity has changed over the years. It is becoming more relevant than ever.” While this remark may indicate some awareness, the word choice “more relevant than ever” may point to her own lack of awareness that for those in a marginalized population, “diversity” has always been “relevant” and even urgent. Yet, she appears to be beginning to grapple with expanding perspectives and understandings of diversity. Isabella then went on to express that “[w]e as teachers need to be aware of the diversity in our schools and classroom. We also need to make our students aware so the bullying and teasing will decrease.” One can sense Isabella leaning into these new ideas – nascent as they are. There is a kernel of perspective-taking here as Isabella conflates diversity with difference because she is aware that bullying often victimizes those who display differences. She seems to be saying that well-chosen books could help to reduce bullying, by increasing familiarity and understanding. Isabella and the other members of this class needed sustained and supported engagement with thoughtful, ethical, and responsible use of high-quality multicultural texts in their future classrooms.

Echoing some of the survey responses discussed earlier, Alicia described her shift: “My thinking has

changed because I honestly never thought about the importance of multicultural books.” She appears to have, then, envisioned her future students need to see themselves represented in books: “Now, I understand I will have a variety of students from different backgrounds, and I would like to have books in my classroom they can relate to.” Within this response, her concern that her students have books to which they can relate indicates a marker of perspective-taking. In contrast, Bonnie’s reflection showed generally positive feelings, though abstract, about the incorporation of varied texts for her future students: “I think multicultural books are important to have in your class. They are important for everyone to read.” Bonnie also revealed concern about criticism by writing that she “realized you have to be very careful about what books you pick.” She does not say “I have to be careful about what books I pick” which might point to her envisionment of her future classroom. Instead, her choice of words distances from the problem of book selection from first person to second person. Bonnie’s responses point to the shaky, very beginning of perspective-taking while at the same time, her cautious remark speaks to the tensions in classrooms and schools concerning book selection and potential blame fallout on teachers.

Revealing real growth in perspectival understanding, Fern’s written reflection specifically notes societal constructs as well as the equity implied in classroom library books that offer representation to a wide array of student experiences:

When I would think of multicultural books I used to only think about different ethnic groups, not people with same-sex parents, or anything like that. I realize it is good to have a wide variety of topics in the classroom,

including books that could help the child to feel accepted.

Later in her reflection, she recapped her awareness of the importance of providing an accepting social environment in the classroom for her future students by valuing the solidarity a child might feel when finding themselves in a book: “Books that help them feel like they’re not alone.” And, displaying a focus on her future students’ perspectival learning, she went on to note that students also needed to have their horizons broadened: “Multicultural books are great for the individual to feel welcome as well as for others to learn about problems they may not know about.” Fern’s writing suggests degrees of perspective-taking that helped her to move beyond generalities and a single story to a consideration of how her future students need books that serve as both mirrors and windows.

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Reflection

A little more than a third of the class showed markers signs of perspective-taking. In the course that this study sought to examine, explicit teaching, critical evaluation of books using analytic grids, and guided textual analysis were used to create a consistent learning environment that strove to be both engaging and illuminating while holding PSTs to high expectations. Students came to grasp—to greater and lesser degrees—the educational possibilities of the power of representation, through accurate portrayal of marginalized populations in multicultural literature. The results suggest that far more attention must be paid to paving the way to PSTs’ development of perspectival understanding, as they will become teachers whose responsibility is to guide, support, and teach children from all backgrounds.

While Fern and Gillian’s reflections indicated noticeable growth, Bonnie and Isabel’s commentary

did not reflect perspectival development. In fairness, limitations of this case study include that some of these students may have developed further perspectival learning, but not been able to express it in the given assignments. Additionally, across teacher preparation programs, the limits of course time and design have long been barriers to the development of critically conscious teachers. Yet, considering how these intentional engagements with multicultural books contribute, or not, to the perspectival learning of our students gives insights into future design and development.

Instead of relying on stereotypical understanding of marginalized groups, PSTs examined ways to identify accurate and equitable portrayals of cultures and experiences of diverse children. They further evaluated how children's literature could serve as mirrors and windows for their diverse students while considering the experiences and perspectives of characters from diverse backgrounds. PSTs had opportunities to understand the value of diverse stories reflecting the lives of their students with varied experiences and, perhaps, become more self-aware (Warren, 2017). While the current research did not undertake an examination of *characters* in these multicultural texts, that would be a potential for future research.

Case Two: Preservice Teachers' Exploration of Multiple Perspectives in Online Book Clubs

This qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) aimed to understand how PSTs engaged in exploring multiple perspectives in online book clubs as they read and discussed chapter books depicting the border-crossing experiences of children of color. The book clubs were intended to engage PSTs in thinking about ways to use chapter books in their teaching and to grow in their understanding of the experiences of immigrant communities.

Participants included 24 female PSTs, seeking

elementary certification, in a literacy methods course in a large university located in the U.S. Midwest. Two students identified themselves as Latina, one was an international student from China. Twenty-one students identified themselves as White. They were sophomores and juniors, and most expected to complete a one-year internship in the following year. The undergraduates engaged in asynchronous online book clubs on Blackboard, the university's learning management system at the time of this study, across four weeks in small groups of four or five members and completed reflections when online discussions ended. From the list of chapter books that the instructor provided, each PST chose their top three books that they were interested in reading for book clubs, then, the instructor created groups based on their book preference. PSTs posted at least one initial comment and one response to each of their group members. After the completion of all book club discussions, PSTs collaboratively created a book review in a format that they chose (e.g., brochure, poster) and, individually, completed a short survey to reflect on their experiences in book club discussions.

Data analysis involved reading the discussion transcripts carefully and taking notes of the ways PSTs expressed their perspective-taking (Corbin & Strauss, 2017). In identifying PSTs' perspective-taking, the following analytic questions were used: How did PSTs take up characters' perspectives?; How did they respond to each other's perspectives?; and How did they take up the perspectives of themselves as future teachers? According to Du Bois's (2007) framework to analyze stance, the expression of emotions (e.g., "it made me sad" or "I felt happy") and the use of cognitive stance-taking (e.g., I think, I agree, I guess) were identified. Finally, themes were developed through the comparison and contrast of PSTs' expressions. The findings below report the themes developed in the data analysis.

Findings

Imagining Characters' Perspectives. The findings showed that PSTs took up characters' perspectives at varying degrees while imagining how characters would feel, think, and react in particular situations. In doing so, they expressed sympathy toward characters who experienced difficult life issues (e.g., discrimination, car accidents, loss of family members). PSTs shared concerns about characters, and engaged in imagining how they, themselves, might react to such challenges. In the following excerpt, for example, Cynthia responded emotionally to White neighbors' violence toward the Muslim community as depicted in the book entitled *Shooting Kabul* (Senzai, 2011), a book illustrating an Afghanistan refugee family's experience:

It was hard for me to read this part of the book and I felt a mixture of sadness and anger for the violence and verbal assault going on in Fadi's life and the lives of his community. In order to combat this, I think that Fadi's family and most or all of the other individuals in Little Kabul will do their best to lay low and not do anything that could trigger their white neighbors and colleagues. That is probably the best option, but it really upsets me, similar to you, that Muslims or even people who look remotely Middle Eastern have to deal with all this racism and discrimination when they have nothing to do with the terrorists.

In the excerpt above, Cynthia's perspective-taking was evident in that she aligned her emotions with the book's characters and shared this with her classmate to demonstrate her own understanding of the unfair treatment that Muslims may experience in real life. Taking her response a step further, Cynthia stepped outside of the book's narrative and expressed concern for real life people when they encounter similar issues as those depicted in the story.

Nevertheless, PSTs' understanding of characters' perspectives was somewhat limited to protagonists who were children and expressed less compassion toward adult characters. Particularly, when discussing the books written from a child character's point of view, PSTs expressed their empathy toward the focal child character. As a result, their interpretation of secondary characters' actions was overwhelmingly drawn from the main child-character's views. For example, after reading *Lucky Broken Girl* (Behar, 2017) written from the viewpoint of Ruthie, a Cuban-Jewish immigrant child protagonist who was bed-ridden due to a tragic car accident, Lexi, a PST, criticized the girl's mother as follows:

I feel as though her mother is being extremely selfish and having a difficult time with the responsibilities of a bedridden child. Which, to be fair, is very stressful on a mother. But it helped me even put things into perspective, because I know that my mother would be by my side day and night, helping me, entertaining me, and making me feel better. However, I know that not all mothers are as great as mine and it really made me thankful.

The quote above demonstrates how Lexi bought into Ruthie's (main character) internal narratives about her perceived neglectfulness by her mother: Ruthie was upset because her mother did not instantly attend to some of her (Ruthie's) needs immediately. Thus, Lexi described the mother as "extremely selfish." Merely mirroring Ruthie's brief recognition of the challenges that the mother caused, Lexi briefly expressed sympathy toward the mother ("Which, to be fair, is very stressful on a mother"). However, Lexi did not even try to delve into Ruthie's mother's state of mind and the reasons why Ruthie had felt her mother was indifferent at that moment. Thus, Lexi did not attempt to shift her perspective, but, instead, circled back to her own experiences with her mother and her own assumption of what she imagines her own mother would do in a similar situation to

criticize Ruthie's mother. Yet, Lexi was clearly empathetic toward Ruthie while her perspective-taking was one-dimensional, not comprehensive.

Both Cynthia and Lexi engage with the texts to entertain perspectives other than their own, but in different ways. Cynthia seemed to move much further toward an awareness of how power is functioning not only in the story but also in real life. Cynthia seemed to be able to expand her mental horizon by connecting what she observed in the book with real-life circumstances. Unlike Cynthia, Lexi relied on one character's point of view, which in a way hindered her from taking on additional perspectives from another character but gravitated her attention only to the child-narrator's point of view and experienced a more reactive and emotional encounter with her text. Interestingly, the book Cynthia read was written from a third person omniscient point of view whereas Lexi's book was from a first-person point of view. Perhaps points of view from which a book was written may facilitate or hinder PSTs' perspective-taking. Whether results would have been different had the readers switched books, or if both read books written from the same narrative standpoint, are questions these data points raised.

Taking Perspectives of Future Teacher Self. PSTs assessed the future utility of the books that they had read for the course book clubs, through the lens of themselves as future teachers. Considering that these books addressed difficult issues related to children of color and their families, PSTs viewed that it was critical to use such books in elementary classrooms. For example, Briana, who had read *Inside Out and Back Again* (Lai, 2013), a book about a Vietnamese refugee girl's immigration experience, shared, "I think that it is important for students to get that window view of looking inside a student's life that may be new when they have never had that experience before in their lives." Likewise, several other PSTs discussed the potential benefits of using

the book that they had read for book clubs in their future classrooms, acknowledging how the book could allow their future students to understand those with different experiences from theirs. Briana may be still thinking of the narrative as solely a window to a world "out there" and not yet able to see her future classroom as including children for whom this will be a mirror book, "in here." Grasping the idea of books as "windows" may be the more available shift in thinking.

In addition to considering their future students' engagement with the books, PSTs discussed issues depicted in the books to think further about their roles as teachers, particularly in the context of interacting with English language learners or students who came from different countries. After reading about the immigrant child character's schooling experience in *Lucky Broken Girl* (Behar, 2017), Lexi noted:

The teacher picked on her, then became immediately impatient when she couldn't say the answer. This caused me to make a mental note of how not to behave as a teacher. As we have discussed in many other classes, it is extremely important to be patient, understanding, and motivational to our ELL students.

As shown in the excerpt above, Lexi was able to step into the perspective of her future teacher self while acknowledging the need for learning from these chapter books. In doing so, she expressed mindfulness of the situations that the characters faced. Lexi further reflected on how the protagonist, as a newcomer, was treated at the school and might have felt about discrimination and bullying. Connecting her perspectival understanding with what she had learned in her teacher education course, she was able to express her determination on how she should interact with English language learners.

However, PSTs expressed uncertainty about using the very books they read because issues depicted in books could be “too heavy” or “too complicated” for upper elementary-grade students. In the final discussion session, Jeanelle who had read *Lucky Broken Girl* (Behar, 2017) posted, “This book does discuss some pretty heavy topics for elementary schoolers. I think it would require a lot of explaining on our part, which is okay, but I could see it being really difficult at times.” Like Jeanelle, several PSTs also questioned the appropriateness of the books in elementary classrooms. They viewed that students in upper grades might better be able to read and discuss books with difficult issues. Concomitantly, they believed it is important to provide background for students by explaining certain issues depicted in the books.

Reflection

The findings of this study demonstrated how reading and discussing chapter books provided PSTs with opportunities to explore multiple perspectives. Like the PSTs in previous studies (e.g., Escamilla & Nathenson-Mejía, 2003; Landa & Stephens, 2017), the PSTs in this study evaluated the utility of books dealing with social issues (e.g., immigration, learning a new language, loss of a family member) in upper elementary classrooms. They could see how these challenges were connected to their future students’ experiences. In a way, PSTs demonstrated emotional and cognitive connections with characters, demonstrating their perspectival understanding. However, instead of taking a stance to advocate for using such books, PSTs expressed uncertainty toward students’ understanding of the social and historical issues illustrated in the books. PSTs could encourage students to seek credible resources from

organizations and/or individuals who deeply understand the issues at hand and could communicate with children about those issues. PSTs’ perspective-taking suggested that further opportunities and guidance must be provided in order to allow PSTs to explore multiple perspectives presented in literature and to deepen their understanding of varied human experiences. Perhaps, PSTs may benefit from further encouragement and explicit guidance to explore supporting characters’ viewpoints and their future students’ potential connections to children’s literature.

“... further opportunities and guidance must be provided in order to allow PSTs to explore multiple perspectives presented in literature and to deepen their understanding of varied human experiences.”

Discussion and Implications

Perspectival understanding includes gaining understanding of varied viewpoints or experiences in an effort to gain better understanding of others (Greeno & van de Sande, 2007). The two cases discussed in this paper demonstrate ways to use multicultural children’s literature as pathways for PSTs to navigate and develop multiple perspectives. We acknowledge these situated attempts to create perspectival understanding in PSTs were imperfect and highlight the complexities and challenges of developing perspectival understanding in PSTs. It is through stretching and reaching toward other-oriented perspectives that PSTs can grow as practitioners who can be empathetic to diverse students’ experiences and communities. While the participants in both cases could see value in reading stories featuring diverse characters in authentic settings, their shift into a perspectival understanding was limited or emerging. To some degree, PSTs were able to expand their perspectives to take on characters’ perspectives. In other instances, PSTs made detached observations about characters’ experiences and choices. Additionally, some PSTs

ended the semester envisioning a classroom filled with diverse books, and using multicultural books in their classrooms for varied purposes. The findings of both studies suggest that PSTs need multiple opportunities to grow into greater consciousness of how they will create environments to value diverse students' experiences (Robinson, 1998).

The findings of these two case studies suggested that PSTs have the potential to benefit from the reading of multicultural children's books serving as window books as they are in the process of developing their own understanding of teaching students from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. In this sense, books are one of the key resources PSTs can have to build empathy toward students from varied marginalized backgrounds (Ross, 2019). A diversity of books in classrooms and curricula offers readers perspectives on lived experiences other than their own with the potential to ignite their social imaginations (Gay & Johnston, 2015; Johnston, 2012). These case studies highlight the possibilities of classroom-based experiences for PSTs' perspective-taking to explore other-centered, diversified, and inclusive perspectives. With careful design and management of learning spaces, PSTs could examine, express, and hopefully resolve their uncertainties about exploring multiple viewpoints.

As discussed earlier, knowledge and understanding are essential, but questions remain to be explored as to how to provide an immersive, authentic experience that could engage PSTs in a cycle of learning about a community. Future research could examine how PSTs' understanding would change from the beginning to the end of such transformative experiences. Given the limits of reading and discussing multicultural literature within their PST education courses as discussed in this study, PSTs could benefit from transformative opportunities that could allow them to bridge children's literature to

reality. Then, they could expand their perspectives of children from the communities that are different from those they have experienced. For example, in Hitchen's (2020) class, PSTs first learned about local, under-served people and children's challenges in which they visited a local women's shelter and learned about adverse childhood experiences. Then, they looked for and studied children's books linked to those challenges, then, they read those books with children who were in attendance in another community help organization setting. Through such experience, PSTs were invited to grapple with the differences between their own abstract understandings and the real, lived experiences related to the literature being studied. PSTs will eventually teach children and youth from various cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds. To connect with their future students and families in meaningful ways, PSTs need to be able to understand and empathize with students' varied ways of being, thinking, communicating, and acting in worlds. At stake is the ability to build trust, rapport, and community with their future students and families.

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