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Critical Conversations: Supporting Elementary Teachers in Instructing with Inclusive Children's Literature

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Critical Conversations: Supporting Elementary Teachers in Instructing with Inclusive

Children's Literature

A Dissertation Presented

by

Susan Flis

Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

Lesley University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Ph.D. Educational Studies

Educational Leadership Specialization

Critical Conversations: Supporting Elementary Teachers in Instructing with Inclusive Children's Literature

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Ph.D. Educational Studies

Educational Leadership Specialization

Dissertation Approval

In the judgement of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards

that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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DEDICATION PAGE

To stories…powerful, beautiful, devastating, endearing, funny, honest, courageous stories. May

everyone see your value and your potential to change the world for the better.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT PAGE

I would like to first acknowledge the district where I taught for almost 20 years. Thank you to my superintendent, Jeffrey Schoonover, and my director of curriculum, Elizabeth Haskell. My research would not have been possible without your support. Thank you to Dr. Rebecca Hurley. I truly appreciate your help while I was designing my research instruments and have always enjoyed engaging in scholarly conversations with you. Thank you to my friend and colleague Melissa Andresen. Your encouragement and support have been so valuable to me. Thank you to my former team and lifetime friends, Brenda Gill, Megan Rejsek, and Megan Nascimento Fitzpatrick. You are my constant cheerleaders and reality checkers, but more than that you are reflective and innovative educators, who inspire me every day.

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated how an instructional coach supported elementary classroom teachers in critically analyzing interactive read-aloud texts and facilitating critical conversations with students about inclusive picture books. Extant literature highlights the importance of the representation of all identities in children's literature. This qualitative collaborative inquiry research study was framed by critical literacy theory. Six classroom teachers in grades kindergarten through 5th grade participated in this research. Children's books are a valuable instructional tool for a variety of reasons, but educators must think critically when choosing books for their classrooms. Many teachers are unaware of the effect that the books in their classroom libraries or the books they use for instruction can have on their students. One reason is because some teachers lack the critical literacy skills necessary to analyze these texts. The potential benefits of this study include recommendations for increasing teachers' positive perceptions and skills with instructing using inclusive children's books. If teachers become more comfortable using these materials and facilitating critical conversations with students, then students will gain a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and identities, which can build empathy, broaden perspectives, and develop social consciousness. Findings from this study could help instructional coaches mitigate teacher biases by supporting them in developing critical literacy skills.

Keywords: critical literacy, inclusive picture books, collaborative inquiry, instructional coach, critical conversations

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I grew up in a small, suburban town in Massachusetts where there was very little diversity. I went to college in New Hampshire, where there was even less diversity. It was during college that I realized that I am a lesbian. For me, it was not a sudden realization and then acceptance. There was a period of denial followed by years of hiding who I knew I was. Although I married the love of my life in my early thirties, I did not fully accept myself or truly come out of the closet until I was pregnant with our first child. I thought I was out, but really, I was not living openly and honestly. Once I was pregnant, I had a revelation that changed my perspective about my sexual orientation. I thought about my childhood, which was marred by a lack of transparency and a lack of confrontation of issues. I realized I did not want that for my children. I also thought that I never wanted my children to think that their family was something they needed to hide. So, I decided that I needed to live my truth, for myself and for my family. I am unapologetically open about who I am, including at my school. Because of this I have been told I was disgusting by a student, I have been called a "man hater" by a fellow teacher, and I have endured countless homophobic jokes and stories.

I am a White woman, who was raised to be a Democrat. I was always taught that skin color did not matter. My parents subscribed to a color-blind theory of race. I believe that they thought that was the right thing to do. They believed they were doing better than their parents did by teaching us to ignore color. Kendi (2019) wrote, "The common idea of claiming 'color blindness' is akin to the notion of being 'not-racist'—as with the 'not racist,' the colorblind individual, by ostensibly failing to see race, fails to see racism and falls into racist passivity" (p. 10). Color blind racism influenced me well into adulthood. I used to tell students and my own children that skin color did not matter. Although my intention was well meaning it was also

misguided. Then four years ago during the pandemic I started to read books by scholars like

Kendi, Tatum, Love, and Olou. This caused a shift in my thinking about race. I realize now that

ignoring someone's skin color devalues their identity. As a White person, I have never been

judged, denied access, falsely accused, or otherwise discriminated against based on the color of

my skin. One's race is a social identity that cannot be changed or hidden. People of color

confront each day knowing they may be judged by anyone who sees them. This is something I

will never be able to fully understand or relate to. As an ally, advocate, activist, and an educator,

it is my job to learn, grow, and challenge mine and others' thinking. This mindset prompted me

to become an instructional coach, and it informs my research.

My recognition of my various identities and how they impact me as an educator have led

me to my area of interest in research, which is the impact of inclusive children's literature and

how to support teachers in instructing with these materials. I think a lot about how many of us

live and work in spaces that are controlled by the dominant culture and how this informs our

socio-cultural perspectives. Children from families that identify as White, dominant English-

speaking, heterosexual, cisgender, Christian, able-bodied, middle to upper class, and educated

can be sheltered from having experiences with diverse identities. Teachers of those children have

a responsibility to create those opportunities and inclusive books are a way to do it. I believe that

stories and the conversations we have about those stories are a way for children and adults to

make connections and broaden their perspectives.

Philosophical Assumptions

When I think about knowledge and how we know what we claim to know, it seems to me

that knowledge is relative. This feels particularly true in the current political climate in this

country. One person's claim to knowledge varies greatly from another person's claim. Dewey

(1916) and Takacs (2003) argue that knowledge is socially constructed and is dependent upon one's positionality and perspective. For example, in the field of reading instruction, there is an ongoing debate about which methodology is more effective, the science of reading or balanced literacy (Tierney & Pearson, 2023). Science of reading proponents (Chall, 1967) claim their methods are based on scientific data and therefore more reliable. The research base of balanced literacy is primarily qualitative in nature (Clay, 1991). I do not think there is an absolute truth to one method being better than another. I do believe that the best way to gain knowledge is through direct experience. Reading about theories and research gives you a context for understanding, however personal experiences deepen that understanding and allow you to make an informed claim to knowledge.

I believe that the choices people make have an impact on outcomes. However, there are always external influences present. I was raised by seemingly liberal parents who claimed to not see color. This had an impact on my socio-cultural perspective into adulthood. Now I have the luxury to choose to push against this way of thinking because it is color blind racism. My wife and I read as much as we can, and we choose to raise our children differently than we were raised. People are influenced by their upbringing, their experiences, their community, and society at-large. However, people can also have agency and choice. In terms of the nature of our existence, I am sure that varies for different people. I believe in being a good person, who works hard to make education more equitable for all students. However, I see that path as the one I chose, not as a spiritual calling.

I believe that it is important to hear varying perspectives. I think we must actively listen to one another, even when we fully disagree. I also believe in right and wrong. I believe it is right to celebrate diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging. I believe it is wrong to be racist,

homophobic, sexist, classist, transphobic, misogynist, and any other exclusionary and hateful

practice. My research interests are centered around inclusive children's literature and the power

of stories to broaden perspectives. I do not believe that research can be neutral. My beliefs and

values influence how I conduct my research. I want to do this work to improve our society. I

believe schools should adopt a culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017) and an anti-

racist curriculum. I think that we can use education to fight systemic racism, instead of

continuing to maintain systems of oppression. My chosen research approach supported my

philosophical assumptions.

This chapter describes my research problem, the theoretical framework I used to guide

my study, the purpose of my study, and the significance of the research conducted.

Statement of the Research Problem

We live in a segregated society. According to Pew Research Center (2021), 79% of White

elementary and secondary public-school students attended schools where at least half of their

peers were also White. When children of the dominant identities are surrounded only by people

who look like them, they may grow up to believe their culture is superior to the culture of others.

They can perpetuate stereotypes and maintain narrow perspectives. Books are a way for students

to look beyond themselves, to question the status quo, and to think critically about systems of

power and oppression.

Books are a primary resource in a teacher's classroom. There is a great power in these

books; they can influence a child's perception of the world and society. Importantly, this

influence can have both positive and negative impacts. If classroom libraries are stocked with

homogenous books that omit diverse identities, then stereotypes about race, language, class,

gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ability will be perpetuated and the propaganda of the dominant identities becomes ingrained in children's way of thinking (Bishop, 1983).

Children's books are a valuable instructional tool for a variety of reasons, but educators must think critically when choosing books for their classrooms. In my experience, teachers are not fully aware of the impact that the diversity of books in classroom and school libraries can have on children. One reason is because they may lack the critical literacy skills necessary to analyze these texts. Regularly engaging in critical multicultural analysis of children's literature (Botelho & Rudman, 2009) is one way for teachers and students to disrupt these systems of oppression. This pedagogical stance helps teachers examine the power dynamics in texts and to see books as a vehicle for sociopolitical change. Based on my observations as an instructional coach, it appears that these educators struggle with the critical conversations that are necessary to foster the social consciousness of their students.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, I have defined the following terms: *critical conversations, critical literacy, critical multicultural analysis, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, dominant identities, inclusive children's books, interactive read-aloud, and problematic books.*

- **Critical Conversations:** Conversations that teachers have with students and students have with peers that extend their thinking about issues of social justice (Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2018).
- **Critical Literacy:** Critical literacy is a conceptual framework that promotes the questioning and examination of ideas. It teaches students to challenge the power structures within texts through analysis and evaluation. Critical literacy promotes social

justice by empowering students to dismantle social inequities (Freire, 1970). This study

applies the critical literacy framework to an early childhood and elementary setting

(Vasquez, 2014).

- **Critical literacies:** The plural form of critical literacy is used to express literacy as a

  multimodal concept, a way of being, and "literate practices individuals need in order to

  survive and thrive in the world" (Pandya et al., 2021, p. 3).

- **Critical Multicultural Analysis:** Critical multicultural analysis is a pedagogical

  approach that "acknowledges that all literature is a historical and cultural product and

  reveals how the power relations of class, race, and gender work together in text and

  image, and by extension, in society" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 1).

- **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:** A philosophy and methodology of teaching where

  students feel empowered intellectually, socially, and politically (Ladson-Billings, 1995 &

  2021). This pedagogy values the cultural differences of students.

- **Culturally Responsive Teaching:** A philosophy of teaching where teachers learn about

  their students' cultures and use this knowledge to plan their instruction. This teaching

  validates and empowers students of all identities to succeed (Gay, 2018).

- **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy:** A pedagogical theory and practice that aims to sustain

  "linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social

  transformation" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1).

- **Dominant Identities:** Dominant identities include people who are White, Dominant

  American English-speaking, Christian, male, cisgender, heterosexual, middle to upper

  class, and non-dis/abled (Jewell, 2020). Historically, people with these identities have

  held power in the U.S. These identities are most often represented in children's literature.

- **Inclusive children's books:** Inclusive children's books are books that contain characters from diverse cultural, linguistic, and societal groups, promote diverse points of view, and are inclusive of all identities. There are places in this paper where the term multicultural literature is used in reference to the works cited; however, the term inclusive children's books is used to be inclusive of all identities and the intersection of identities.

- **Interactive read-aloud:** Interactive read-aloud is a whole group learning activity. The teacher reads a selected book aloud while engaging the students in conversations before, during, and after reading. The benefits of interactive read-aloud include building a community of learners with shared knowledge regardless of their reading ability level and actively engaging readers in processing language and ideas (Fountas & Pinnell, 2019).

- **Problematic books:** Problematic books are books that perpetuate harmful stereotypes about race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language, and ability (Kohl, 1995). Examples of these books include *If I Ran the Zoo* by Dr. Seuss, *Babar the Elephant* by Jean de Brunhoff, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl, *Skippyjon Jones* by Judith Schachner, and many others.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical framework that informed this research is critical literacy theory (Freire, 1970). Developed by Paulo Freire in 1970, critical literacy theory has been expanded upon by many other scholars, including Macedo (1987) and others. Freire (1970) believed that education and literacy can shape people's lives; they can use the power of literacy and education to reshape society through the lens of social justice (Adams et al., 2022). Integrating inclusive literature and nonfiction texts is one way to frame instruction within a critical literacy perspective.

Three tenets of critical literacy theory include teaching multiple literacies, teaching continuous inquiry, and teaching reflection (Freire & Macedo, 1987; New London Group, 1996). An underlying component of critical literacy theory is the understanding that positionality impacts how we read and make meaning of texts; therefore, learning from texts is never neutral. Freire encouraged readers to challenge the power relationships that exist within texts and called for reflection and action. He developed the concept of conscientização (Macedo, 2018), a process where students build the critical thinking skills necessary to understand systems of oppression and to become change agents who denounce social inequities. The idea of conscientização was the foundation of this study, but because it is such a complex concept I needed to find a way to make it accessible to all participants, regardless of their experience with critical literacy theory.

In the next section, I will describe each tenet in relation to the current study. It is important to note that critical literacy theory was discussed in relation to power, privilege, and social justice by many scholars (Adams et al., 2022; Giroux, 1987; hooks, 2010; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Macedo, 1987; Shor, 1999; Vasquez, 2014). These theorists and researchers expanded upon and extended Freire's work. Vasquez, in particular, argued that critical literacy is not a pedagogical stance; it is a way of being and a way to participate in the world. As such, the tenets of critical literacy theory vary somewhat across scholars. I chose the following tenets to guide my study and to provide a foundation for supporting teachers' capacity to instruct with inclusive picture books. Each of these tenets offer teachers pathways to enact social justice pedagogy within their classrooms. This enables students to engage in the self-reflection necessary to address implicit biases and to fight against systems of oppressions (Adams et al., 2022).

Teaching Multiple Literacies

The first tenet, teaching multiple literacies, promotes the understanding that all literacies must be respected and seen as vehicles of learning. However, it also recognizes that we must not accept all social practices blindly. While we should adopt an inclusive stance towards all races, linguistic backgrounds, and cultures, it is important that we teach students to examine social practices through a critical lens (Lee, 2016). Teaching multiple literacies promotes inclusivity in the classroom, which is a component of social justice pedagogy (Adams et al., 2022). The multiliteracies framework was first described by the New London Group (1996), who defined multiliteracies as an innovative literacy pedagogy that accounted for cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as diverse text forms, whereas conventional literacy pedagogy focused only on traditional printed texts and was not inclusive to all cultures and identities. They argued that students need a multimodal approach to learning in order to make meaning. Multimodality engages multiple senses, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Teachers can plan their interactive read-aloud lessons with multimodalities in mind to make learning accessible for all students and to support comprehension as they make connections with texts.

Teaching Continuous Inquiry

Freire (1970) theorized that to be literate, one must be able to read texts and also leverage their literacy to take action and promote social justice. When students are taught to think critically about texts, they develop leadership identities of learner, ally, advocate, and activist (Bruce & McKee, 2020). This involves teaching students to develop the habit of continuous inquiry. Continuous inquiry involves a cycle of asking questions, sharing thoughts, challenging and extending one's thinking, asking deeper questions, and sharing learning. This includes encouraging students to question and challenge the status quo. Freire (1970) wrote, "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing,

hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p. 72). When teachers apply critical literacy theory to their instructional practices, students build their capacity for inquiry. During interactive read-aloud lessons, continuous inquiry can be supported through open-ended questions that push and extend student thinking.

Teaching Reflection

Freire (1970) forwarded the idea that a critical education includes reflection and action. Teachers must be able to reflect on their instruction and students must be able to reflect on their learning. This requires a shift from the traditional view of the teacher as the expert or depositor, as Freire calls it. Freire argued that the "banking" (p. 72) model of education forces students to be passive receptacles of information, rather than reflective thinkers. The banking model stifles thinking instead of promoting it. When students are merely collectors of information, they are not able to work towards social justice and the betterment of society. Freire also called for a "reconciliation" of the teacher-student relationship, "so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (p. 72). This idea encourages reflexivity from both teachers and students. During interactive read-aloud lessons, students often present ideas from their own construction of knowledge. This invites teachers to reflect on their questions and to be responsive to their students. Reflection is a key component to social justice education (Ingram & Walters, 2007).

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Purpose of the Study

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There is a critical need to better understand how to support teachers in using inclusive children's books in their instruction. Scholars and educators have discussed the importance of inclusive literature and ways that problematic children's books harm readers (Kohl, 1995). Despite strong evidence that access to inclusive literature and instruction with diverse texts has positive benefits (Holmes, et al., 2017; Husband, 2019; Peterson & Robinson, 2020; Welch,

2016;), many school districts do not provide teachers with the instructional support necessary to engage their students through the use of inclusive texts or to teach critical literacy skills. Critical literacy skills include the ability to question and examine ideas presented in texts, as well as the ability to analyze and evaluate texts for biases that may be present (Vasquez, 2014).

The purpose of this collaborative inquiry research was to explore an approach to supporting teachers planning for critical literacy instruction with inclusive picture books. The study had two primary goals: first, to engage students in critical conversations about picture books, and second, this study aimed to support teachers in developing their own critical literacy skills and build their capacity to instruct with inclusive picture books. The research questions emerged from the need to support teachers in this work.

Guiding Research Questions

1. How can I as an instructional coach support elementary teachers in critically analyzing interactive read-aloud texts?

2. How can I as an instructional coach support elementary teachers in facilitating critical conversations with students about inclusive picture books?

Significance of the Study

Stories have a profound impact on children of all identities (Bishop, 1990). They allow children to see themselves represented, but also to see others with vastly different cultural backgrounds. Through the themes presented in stories children can make connections, build empathy, and broaden their perspectives. Inclusive children's books, both fiction and non-fiction, tell the stories of people's identities. To facilitate learning and growth with inclusive children's books, teachers need instructional support.

The potential benefits of this study include increasing teachers' positive perceptions and skills when teaching with inclusive children's books. When teachers become more comfortable using inclusive texts and facilitating critical conversations with students, then students will gain a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and identities, which can build empathy, broaden perspectives, and develop social consciousness. Also, this study could help to mitigate teacher biases by supporting them in developing critical literacy skills. Although this study is not generalizable due to the small sample of participants and the context-bound nature of collaborative inquiry research, valuable lessons learned from this study may inform the work of teachers and instructional coaches in other settings.

Importantly, this collaborative inquiry research contributed to my own professional development. Over the course of this study, my coaching skills and confidence grew through iterative cycles of practice and reflection. Moreover, my district colleagues benefitted from the opportunity to grow in confidence and proficiency in instructing with inclusive children's books. The instructional decisions that schools make reveal their values. In my school district, the setting for this study, diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the vision statement. Instructing with inclusive children's books and supporting teachers in building critical literacy skills allowed me to operationalize those values and enact our shared vision statement.

Finally, this study contributes a model for using literature in ways that benefit children of all identities. When students feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, they are more likely to succeed in school. One way to create that sense of belonging is to ensure that classroom texts reflect the identities of the children who learn there (Enriquez, 2021).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of this review was to examine the research on the use of inclusive children's books in instruction and the need to support teachers with this instruction. This review asks the following questions: (1) What are the benefits of the representation of diverse identities in children's literature? (2) What does the literature recommend for using inclusive children's literature as an instructional tool? (3) What are the benefits of coaching to support classroom teachers who are instructing with inclusive children's literature?

Using a systematic approach, the following databases were searched using key terms from the guiding questions: Lesley University's library database, Research Gate, EBSCOhost, Sage, and ProQuest. The search time frame parameters mainly focused on the last 15 years; however, seminal research was included, which provided a foundation for more recent studies. The search terms included the following: critical literacy theory in an elementary classroom, representation in children's literature, inclusive children's literature, and benefits of instructional coaching. The sampling strategy focused on studies and articles published in academic, peer-reviewed journals. Some books and websites were also included. The search results were organized using a literature review summary table, after which empirical literature was analyzed and interpreted by looking for patterns and themes in the results and synthesizing the information. The following themes emerged from this thorough review: practical application of critical literacy theory, inclusive children's books, and critical conversations. This chapter will discuss the literature under each of those themes.

Related Literature

As stated in Chapter One, this study was framed by critical literacy theory (Freire, 1970). Therefore, the development and evolution of critical literacy theory and application of the tenets of critical literacy theory to elementary classroom settings is presented first. Next, research that examines the benefits of inclusive children's literature is presented. Finally, this review presents research on engaging students in critical conversations and the instructional support necessary for that work to be successful.

Development and Evolution of Critical Literacy Theory

Critical literacy theory (Freire, 1970) is a theoretical and conceptual framework that argues for the need to teach students to critically analyze texts and evaluate them based on the topics of equity, power, and social justice. This theory promotes the idea that literacy is not merely a skill to obtain, but rather a social practice that is impacted by social structures and power relationships (Barton & Hamilton, 2010). It is important to ground instructional practice and decision making in the theories that inform effective, culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018). When educators have knowledge of a range of theories, it expands their base of instructional tools they can draw from to support students (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). When teachers apply the tenets of critical literacy theory to their instruction, they facilitate critical conversations with their students and foster critical thinking. This is important because education aims to develop engaged citizens in a democratic society.

Critical literacy theory was developed by Paulo Freire in the 1960s and 1970s. Freire wrote that education and literacy can shape people's lives and people can use them to reshape society. An underlying component of critical literacy theory is that our positionality impacts how we read texts, therefore our learning is never neutral. Freire encouraged readers to challenge the power relationships that exist within texts. He called for reflection and action and developed a

social justice pedagogy that focused on empowering populations against oppression and balancing social inequities (1970). Freire's student and colleague, Donaldo Macedo (1987) expanded on Freire's work. Together they sought to end oppression by changing the ways schools teach (Freire & Macedo, 1987). They explained that critical literacy theory was creating self-awareness, or conscientization. They promoted the idea that schools should teach students to examine texts for bias and question the power structures in society.

Henry Giroux is the educator and theorist who first used the term critical pedagogy. In the introduction to Freire and Macedo's *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987) Giroux wrote, "critical literacy is both a narrative for agency as well as a referent for critique" (p. 10). Like Freire and Macedo, Giroux proposed that transforming the way schools teach will lead students to promote social action and change unjust structures.

The work of critical literacy theory and critical pedagogy has been taken on by other educators, researchers, theorists, and social activists. Ira Shor is a professor and theorist who collaborated with Freire and Macedo. He wrote that, "critical literacy…challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development" (Shor, 1999, p. 2). Lankshear and McLaren (1993) wrote about two perspectives within critical literacy theory. The first perspective is the modern social theory of Freirean philosophers and the second is the postmodern turn to social theory. While both perspectives support the idea of multiple literacies, modern social theory centers the reader as an individual and postmodern social theory decenters the reader. Another major contributor to critical literacy theory, bell hooks (2010), advocated for a democratic education of literacy that includes teaching children how to engage in critical thinking. According to hooks, "critical thinking is an interactive process, one that demands

participation on the part of teacher and students alike" (p. 9). She argued that critical thinking is empowering.

Many other scholars and educators looked to critical literacy theory to frame their work. Related theories have emerged, including critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and critical queer theory (Handsfield, 2016). Although there has been recent controversy over these theories, critical theories invite us to think critically about societal issues and existing power structures, in order to develop plans of action that will dismantle systems of oppression.

Practical Application of Critical Literacy Theory

Knowledge of the philosophical underpinnings and tenets of critical literacy theory can inform a teacher's instructional practices. This holds true at every level of education, from early childhood through secondary and beyond. Vasquez (2014) examined the instruction of critical literacies with preschool-aged students. She conducted action research in her classroom to investigate the implementation of a critical literacy curriculum. Vasquez found that when she employed critical literacy instructional practices, her students learned to question the status quo, examine existing power structures, and reflect on what they can do to create equity.

In an earlier review of research, Creighton (1997) wrote about applying critical literacy theory in an elementary classroom and urged teachers to use the theory when selecting texts for students to read. She argued that critical literacies prepare students to consider the larger impact of diverse texts and that they examine the dynamics of language and power structures within texts. Creighton cited child development theorists when asserting that elementary aged children have the capacity for critical thinking and empathy towards others.

Similar to Creighton, Leland and Harste (2005) conducted action research with a first-grade teacher, Kimberly Huber, examining her application of critical literacy theory to her

instruction. Huber was a participant in an Indiana University grant-funded project called

"Collaborations for Peace", which supported teachers in critical literacy instruction in K-8

classrooms. After a year of implementing critical literacy practices, Huber found an

improvement in how her students responded to texts through their conversations, drawings, and

writing. The first graders were able to critically analyze texts to discover the author's message

and to disrupt their perspectives of "normal". A limitation to consider here is that this data, like

all qualitative data, could be subjective to Huber's perception. Also, how did this particular

group of first graders compare to previous groups in terms of their capacity for empathy and did

their critical abilities continue to develop in subsequent school years?

Other studies have revealed that early-childhood and elementary students are able to

participate in critical literacy practices. For example, a study conducted by Hawkins (2014) with

preschoolers aged three to five years old found that the young students engaged in dialogue

about social justice issues when teachers employed open-ended questions and active listening.

Another study of critical literacy practices in primary schools conducted in New Zealand found

that employing critical literacy strategies allowed students to engage with texts more deeply

(Sandretto, et al., 2006). The aim of this study was to demonstrate that critical literacy practices

increase student reading achievement. Sandretto and colleagues did not find an increase in

reading achievement; however, students' engagement was evidenced in the ways they made

connections with the texts and discussed the themes of the texts with their peers.

Similarly, a 2012 study by Chafel & Neitzel revealed students' capacity for empathy and

text connections. Sixty-four eight-year-old students listened to a critical literacy text about

poverty and then were interviewed. The demographic backgrounds of the students were analyzed

along with interview data. These scholars found that, regardless of their backgrounds, the

majority of the children (68%) expressed empathy for the characters in the story or a desire to help them. Empathy is a necessary characteristic for the promotion of critical literacy practices because it allows readers to connect with characters and encourages action. The researchers noted a limitation of the study could be prior exposure to the text used. They suggest further research is needed into how teachers can analyze student responses to critical literacy texts.

There has been some research on supporting preservice and beginning teachers in using critical literacy practices. Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys (2002) worked with a group of teachers who were participants in a study on implementing critical literacy practices. They found that teachers need support to first understand what critical literacy entails and then to implement critical practices in their classrooms. The teachers they worked with also expressed a desire to expand their knowledge of societal issues and sociopolitical power structures. In a study of preparing preservice teachers to use critical literacy practices, Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe (2012) found that preservice teachers saw critical literacy as an essential tool in primary classrooms, because critical literacy allows students to understand different perspectives and to become aware of community and global issues. They also noted the concerns of preservice teachers about the potential barriers to critical literacy practices. These barriers were the comfort level of teachers, parental opposition, and resistance from the school district due to the existing curriculum, lack of time, and lack of resources. The researchers concluded that teacher preparation programs must support preservice teachers in overcoming these barriers, while teaching them how to construct effective critical literacy lessons.

In their work with preservice teachers and critical literacy, Kelly, Laminack, & Gould (2020) wrote, "when we teach students to move beyond passive acceptance of the word and the world, they learn that there is more to the story that has often been overlooked because of bias"

(p. 303). They argued that students of all ages can confront these biases and that teachers must

do this work themselves first. They concluded that teacher education programs must provide

opportunities for preservice teachers to engage in critical analysis. Similarly, a qualitative study

conducted by Ticknor, Overstreet, & Howard (2020) argued that teacher educators have a

responsibility to prepare preservice teachers to become equitable and inclusive literacy

practitioners. They examined preservice teachers' perceptions of teaching diverse students after

modeling lessons in a course titled Literacy Learning in a Diverse World at their university.

These lessons used social justice interactive read-aloud texts. The researchers found that the

preservice teachers either did not change their deficit thinking, began to reflect on equitable

teaching practices, or started to implement equitable teaching practices. A limitation of this study

is that the researchers studied their own students, which could influence the students' responses.

Also, the scope of the study was restricted to three modeled lessons. Expansion of the sample

and scope could lead to more conclusive results. Even within the limitations, this study points to

the need to explicitly model equitable and inclusive literacy practices for preservice teachers and

to engage preservice teachers in reflective conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion in

literacy instruction.

      Critical literacy theory is a lens through which teachers can frame their literacy

instruction. As reviewed in the studies above, when put into practice, this theory teaches students

to think critically about texts and the world. The critical conversations that teachers facilitate

through the critical literacy theory lens foster skills in students that can only help society. These

critical conversations lead to more learning and reflection, which builds empathy and broadens

perspectives. Students should be taught to question the status quo. Otherwise, systems of power

and oppression are maintained. This practice should be implemented in classrooms of all grade

levels. However, many scholars argue that critical literacy is not as much as a pedagogical practice as it is a way of being (Janks, 2018; Vasquez et al., 2019). They argue that critical literacies must be defined within an individual's context and that definition is dependent upon a teacher's identity and disposition. This has implications for how preservice teachers should be instructed about critical literacies.

Inclusive Children's Literature

Throughout this chapter the terms *inclusive children's literature* and *multicultural children's literature* are used. Historically, the genre category is described as multicultural children's literature. However, to ensure that all identities are represented, the term inclusive children's literature is applied in this paper. Inclusive children's literature encompasses identity representations that fall under the following categories: race, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, class, and ability, as well as the intersection of various identities. Many scholars and educators argue that inclusive, or multicultural, children's literature is essential for a democratic education for all students (Bishop, 1990; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Cunningham & Enriquez, 2013; Muhammed, 2020). The next section first summarizes the history of multicultural children's literature, then discusses the literature on culturally sustaining pedagogies. Next, the review presents research on applying a critical multicultural analysis of children's literature. Finally, research is presented on the impact of inclusive children's literature.

History of Multicultural Children's Literature. Until the mid-nineteenth century, learning to read was more about the alphabet and phonics than literature (Creighton, 1997; Venezky, 1987). Moreover, much of the reading material available to children was religiously motivated. When more books for young readers started to surface, the main audience was children of the middle class. At that time, diverse identities were rarely represented in print. It

was not until the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement that multicultural children's literature

became a category. In response to biased publishers, the Council on Interracial Books for

Children was formed in 1967 by a group of writers, teachers, librarians, and parents. They sought

anti-racist children's literature and curriculum materials. In the 1970s the mission of the Council

expanded to fight against sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism, ageism, and language

discrimination in children's texts (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Larrick (1965) conducted a study

of children's literature and found that out of the 5,206 children's books published by the

Children's Book Council in 1962, 1963, and 1964, only 6.7% included any children of color. The

few books that did feature Black characters often advanced dangerous stereotypes. Although this

was a landmark study, there was not much change over the next few decades.

In a similar study conducted in the 1970s, Chall et al. (1979) found that of the 4,775

children's books they surveyed, only 14.4% contained at least one Black character. The

percentage more than doubled over ten years, however that number was still critically low

compared to the number of all-white texts. In her work with multicultural children's literature,

Bishop (1982) cited the previously mentioned studies and pointed to the biased practices of book

publishers. She highlighted the negative images of Black characters and the dangers those

images posed for both Black and White children:

> This situation damages black and white children alike, since literature is one of the most
>
> important vehicles through which we socialize children and transmit our cultural values
>
> to them. White children, finding in the pages of books only others like themselves, come
>
> to believe in an inherent "rightness of whiteness" that grants to other races no important
>
> place or function in the society. Exposed only to ludicrous and pathetic images of blacks,

white children absorb even more deeply the poison of racism—and grow to perpetuate

this evil for yet another generation. (1983, p. 650)

Bishop (1990) later coined the phrase "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" when writing

about the benefit of multicultural children's literature. This concept is discussed in more detail

later in this paper.

Historically there has been a profound lack of representation of diverse identities in

children's literature. The most recent update to the diversity statistics of primary character and

subject representation from the Cooperative Children's Book Center (2023), shows that out of

1,362 books reviewed 29% had a White primary character, 22% had an animal primary

character, and 15% either had an object as a primary character or no primary character. This is a

stark contrast to the BIPOC representation where 12% had a Black/African primary character,

9% had an Asian primary character, 6% had a Latinx primary character, 1% had an Indigenous

primary character, and 0.3% had a Pacific Islander primary character. Also, many attempts to

include characters with diverse identities have done so in a negative and damaging way. The next

section of this review argues that teachers must adopt a culturally sustaining pedagogy when

selecting texts for their classrooms.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. The concept of a culturally sustaining pedagogy has

evolved through different iterations. Ladson-Billings (1995) defined culturally relevant pedagogy

as a philosophy and methodology of teaching where students feel empowered intellectually,

socially, and politically. Teachers adopting this pedagogy use a student's culture to support them

in gaining knowledge and skills. Gay (2018) applied Ladson-Billings' work to her concept of

culturally responsive teaching. In culturally responsive teaching, the students' home cultures and

their identities inform and shape the curriculum. Muhammad (2020) took this further with her

work on historically responsive literacy. This recognizes the sociocultural and political contexts

of education by requiring that educators be responsive to the histories and identities of students.

HRL is a multiliteracies approach. While this paper recognizes the value and importance of both

culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, the concept of culturally

sustaining pedagogy will be used going forward. Diverse identities and cultures must not only be

acknowledged, but they must also be celebrated and preserved, because diversity is an asset to all

students.

      A culturally sustaining pedagogy is an educational theory and practice that embraces

cultural ways of knowing and being of all communities of color and other historically

marginalized groups. This framework reimagines the purpose of schooling from the goal of

assimilation to one where the cultures, histories, and languages of communities of color are

sustained (Paris & Alim, 2017). Historically, in nations such as the United States, these cultures

and histories have been erased which has caused vast inequities in schools. The lack of a

culturally sustaining pedagogy is an obstacle to promoting the ideals of diversity, equity,

inclusion, and justice in schools. Bishop and Noguera (2019) wrote about the inequities in

education. Curriculum and educational practices have not been designed to support equity and

have caused inequality based on race, class, culture, and language. There is a disconnect between

the stated goals of U.S. education policy and the structure and practice of the education system.

Bishop and Noguera argued that the pressure from the No Child Left Behind act of 2002 caused

further inequity, because out of school factors like class and culture were ignored.

      The lack of a culturally sustaining pedagogy has impacted many groups, including

Indigenous students in America. Almeida (1998) argued that mainstream education has used the

excuse of equality to strip Indigenous students of their cultural identities. Stereotypes of

Indigenous people continue to be taught and promoted in U.S. schools. A culturally sustaining

pedagogy would allow for different ways of knowing. Brayboy and Lomawaima (2018)

differentiated between the concept of schooling and the concept of education. While mainstream

educators see those concepts as the same thing, many groups understand that there is a difference

between what people learn in school and what they learn through their cultural practices. They

identify mainstream education as "colonial schooling" (p. 83), which does not align with the

knowledge that comes from Indigenous culture. However, they describe three schools where

schooling and cultural education are combined to best serve the needs of the Indigenous students.

Similarly, Simpson (2002) wrote about Indigenous environmental education. Like Brayboy and

Lomawaima, Simpson argued for the need to incorporate cultural ways of knowing in

mainstream schooling:

> Challenging the popular scientific assumption that science is the *only* way of knowing is
>
> also important and Western science can begin to become more palatable to Aboriginal
>
> students if it is presented as another tool they can use to advance the agendas of their
>
> people and the environment. (p. 21)

Adopting a culturally sustaining pedagogy is essential for the success of all students (Paris &

Alim, 2017). One way to adopt a culturally sustaining pedagogy is through classroom text

selection. In her work with culturally relevant teaching Parker (2022) wrote, "students should not

have to negotiate between who they are and how they identify to be successful in our

classrooms…we do not limit their exposure to only texts that do not provide them with a range

of representation" (p. 33). Similarly, Bennett et al. (2018) described five areas to cultivate

culturally responsive practices in early childhood classrooms. One of those areas was

multicultural literature. They argued that multicultural literature builds empathy, identity

development, and cross-cultural knowledge in children. Teachers must think critically when

choosing texts for their classrooms. Adopting a culturally sustaining pedagogy and developing

skills in critical multicultural analysis will guide teachers when making decisions about

children's texts.

   Critical Multicultural Analysis. Critical multicultural analysis applies critical literacy

theory to children's literature. It asserts that literature is reflective of history and culture and

uncovers the power relationships in society. When examining children's literature through

critical multicultural analysis the class, gender, and racial identities represented in the texts are

explored. This analysis implores educators to question the power and language structures in texts

(Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Ong (2022) conducted a study that analyzed 15 multicultural

children's picture books. The aim of the study was to employ critical multicultural analysis to

investigate the social construction of culture, characters, and literary genre. Ong found that the

texts she analyzed fell into four different levels of multicultural education. These levels are

labeled as the contributions approach, additive approach, transformative, and social action

approach (Banks & Banks, 2004). The contributions approach is just a surface level, where

things like food and celebrations of another culture are introduced. The additive approach is

about sharing experiences and stories from another culture. The transformative approach

encourages students to see issues from varying perspectives. Finally, the social action approach

pushes students to work towards social justice and equity. Ong argued that while using these

texts in early learning settings can build empathy and deconstruct stereotypes, there are also

limitations. Many teachers have a limited understanding of cultural diversity and there is a need

for professional learning to support educators in adopting culturally sustaining practices (Lin &

Bates, 2014). Later in this review research on instructing with inclusive children's literature will

be presented. The next section will review research on the important and positive impact

inclusive children's literature can have on students of all social and cultural identities.

      The Impact of Inclusive Children's Literature. It is imperative that classroom libraries

are stocked with literature where all identities are represented. Representation has an impact on

students from historically marginalized groups and on students from the dominant culture.

Bishop (2016) described an approach to integrating diverse texts into a classroom:

> When diversity is absent from the literature we share with children, those who are left out
>
> infer that they are undervalued in our society, and those whose lives are constantly
>
> reflected gain a false sense of their own importance, a sense that they are the privileged
>
> 'norm'. (p. 120)

Privileged identities include people who are White, Dominant American English-speaking,

Christian, male, cisgender, heterosexual, middle to upper class, and non-dis/abled (Jewell, 2020).

The following subsections review research on the representation of various identities in

children's literature.

      Race. As mentioned earlier in this review, historically there is a lack of representation of

diverse identities in children's books. This is especially true when considering the social

construct of race. While there has been an increase of children's books with Black characters

since the studies conducted by Larrick (1965) and Chall et al. (1979), the increase has not been

significant enough to overcome the dominating whiteness of children's literature. When children

of color do not see themselves represented in texts, they feel undervalued. When White children

regularly see themselves represented in texts, it cultivates a sense of superiority and promotes

racial biases (Welch, 2016).

Across the country some states are banning books that discuss race and racism, as well as forbidding critical literacy practices. Holmes et al. (2017) wrote about using counter-stories with first-grade students to promote racial justice. Counter-stories highlight the lived experiences of BIPOC communities. The authors found that first graders were able to engage in conversations about racism, slavery, Civil Rights, and fairness. The researchers noted that successfully implementing this curriculum hinges on the comfort level of teachers and that teachers need support. Similarly, Husband (2019) wrote about the importance of using multicultural picture books to promote racial justice in early childhood classrooms. He argued that "in addition to providing affirming and cross-racial experiences for children, multicultural picture books can also help children develop a sense of empathy toward other racial groups in society" (p. 1069).

Often when diverse racial identities are represented in children's texts, those identities are portrayed in a harmful way through tokenism and stereotypes. In response to studies that highlighted the lack of racial diversity in children's texts, some publishers changed secondary character names or races (Smith, Flores, & Gonzalez, 2016). However, the original stories remained the same and they were not reflective of diverse cultures. Stories with Indigenous characters have been particularly guilty of perpetuating dangerous stereotypes. Both children's books and children's movies have portrayed harmful representations of Indigenous characters. Also, history textbooks have told lies and half-truths about the history of Indigenous people in the United States and Canada. Peterson and Robinson (2020) wrote about using Indigenous children's literature as reconciliation in education. They selected ten Indigenous texts published in Canada between 2015 and 2019 and analyzed them for authenticity. They argued that introducing inclusive stories into the classroom is not enough. Educators must use Indigenous

knowledge as a framework to instruct with Indigenous texts, while being careful to not engage in cultural appropriation of Indigenous customs.

Linguistic Identity. Although the United States does not have a national language, most children's books feature characters who speak Dominant American English. When linguistically diverse students enter classrooms, their native language is seen as a deficit and they are pushed to focus solely on English (Fu, et al., 2019). This not only devalues a student's cultural and linguistic identity, but it is also a detriment to the school community. Diverse linguistic identities are valuable and enrich the lives of all stakeholders. Machado (2017) reviewed how early childhood teachers foster and sustain students' diverse language and literacy practices. The studies she reviewed highlighted the need for early childhood teachers to support bi/multilingual students with learning the language of the dominant culture while also sustaining their own cultural and literacy practices. One of the ways teachers can do this is by taking a multiliteracies or multi-modal approach to literacy instruction. This includes blending literary genres to be more reflective of a student's cultural practices. Likewise, Reyes-Torres and Raga (2020) wrote about using a multimodal approach when teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) with picture books. Based on the New London Group's (1996) multiliteracies pedagogy, they developed a multimodal toolkit to support preservice and in-service teachers. They used *The Snow Lion* by Jim Helmore and Richard Jones (2018) as a model and they concluded that "picturebooks prove to be an effective multimodal artifact in helping students develop the three dimensions of literacy—cognitive, conceptual and sociocultural—in the FL and create a natural bond with creativity, stories and literature" (p. 115). Indeed, picture books have a strong impact through their visuals, rich language, and the themes they present. This is one of the reasons why critical text selection is so important.

One way for schools to support bi/multilingual students and to celebrate linguistic

diversity is to stock classroom libraries with dual language picture books. Dual language picture

books can be translingual, where the text moves between two languages, or bilingual, where the

text appears in both languages on the same page, or dual versions, where the same book is

published in multiple languages (Short, et al., 2023). Even with dual language picture books, a

critical analysis is necessary because sometimes English is prioritized with the placement of the

text, font type, or text color choice. This promotes the false idea that the language of the

dominant culture is superior. Bucholtz, Casillas, and Lee (2017) wrote about language and

culture as sustenance:

> When young people's language and culture are recognized as valid and valuable, and
>
> when young people themselves are respected as linguistic and cultural experts, then
>
> educators and students become partners in learning and in using their collective
>
> knowledge to bring about social change. (p. 55)

Linguistic diversity should be seen as an asset, not a problem to be solved.

Religion. Christianity is the religion of the dominant culture in the United States.

However, there are many children in this country who practice non-Christian religions or no

religion at all. When Christian children are not introduced to other beliefs or the possibility of

other beliefs, they may assume that theirs is the only way. Children's literature is a way to

educate students about diverse religions and beliefs. Green and Oldendorf (2005) studied

religious diversity in children's literature. They offered guidance for teachers about text selection

with diverse religious representation. They wrote, "when teachers and children learn about

different spiritual traditions, they develop empathy for others and become global citizens with

interests and understandings beyond their own experiences" (p. 216). This also applies to children from families who do not practice any religion or who identify as atheists.

Introducing texts with religious representation can be controversial for public school teachers. Many public schools ignore religion out of fear and a lack of cultural knowledge. Dávila (2015) wrote about religious neutrality in schools and argued for religious and cultural pluralism. She surveyed preservice teachers asking them if they would use the text *In My Family/En Mi Familia* (1996) by Carmen Lomas Garza in their future classrooms. *In My Family/En Mi Familia* is a memoir of special events in the author's life. One of these events is "The Miracle/El Milagro" and another is "The Virgin of Guadalupe/La Virgen de Guadalupe". These are both religious events that are tied with Garza's culture. Based on the preservice teachers' responses, Dávila concluded that preservice teachers need foundational knowledge of the diverse cultures and religions of the world. She wrote, "otherwise, the national call for more diverse books will do little to advance multicultural education, let alone cultivate children's cultural/religious literacies in becoming citizens of a pluralistic society" (p. 78). Offering students texts with representations of a variety of beliefs can turn assumptions and judgements into acceptance and understanding.

Gender and Sexual Orientation. Many children's texts present gender as an either/or binary with the cisgender male identity clearly represented as a privileged gender identity. Problematic children's texts include stereotypes about binary gender roles, yet research examining the problem are few. Most research is aimed at studying gender representation in texts. A study conducted in 1993 by Patt and McBride examined gender equity in children's books in preschool classrooms. The purpose of the study was to explore the frequency of male versus female characters in children's texts and examine pronoun usage in the texts. A total of

471 books were surveyed; among those books, the researchers found that most of the characters were either considered male or nongendered (animal characters or personified objects), with only 22% of the sample considered female. They also found that 70% of the main characters were considered male. Finally, traditional male pronouns were read aloud 3.3 times more frequently than traditional female pronouns. Although this study raises many questions, the limitations, such as the small sample size of teachers and classrooms in a single school (Patt & McBride, 1993), limit the generalizability of their findings.

There have been multiple studies about the representation of gender in children's books. For example, Ernst (1995) analyzed titles of children's books and found that traditional male names appeared twice as often as traditional female names. Even more dangerous than the lack of representation is the way female characters are presented in many children's texts. Fox (1993) wrote, "gender stereotypes in literature prevent the fullness of female human potential from being realized by depriving girls of a range of strong, alternative role models" (p. 84). Although there was progress in female characterization throughout the 1970s, that progress was delayed in the 80s with the conservative political climate. Studies conducted at the end of the century have highlighted the need to critically examine children's texts for damaging gender stereotypes (Worland, 2008). In more recent research, Filipović (2018) found that there is a lack of awareness amongst educators about gender role representation in children's texts.

Being that male and female are not the only gender identities, it is important to consider the representation of non-binary and transgender characters in children's literature. Crawley (2017) conducted a critical content analysis of nine realistic picture books that featured children who identified as a different gender than their biological sex. While he acknowledges the important role these texts serve in the advocacy and representation of trans youth, he also found

that these texts continue to perpetuate gender stereotypes. For example, when the protagonist

identifies as female, they often want to wear dresses or grow their hair long. Also, the families of

gender nonconforming characters are all white, mostly middle class, and cisgender. While

Crawley only analyzed nine children's books, it is important to note the similarities across these

texts in advancing conformity and ignoring the intersectionality of social identities.

Tapia (2020) wrote about cultivating an inclusive culture for LGBTQIA+ students and

the need to start at the elementary level. He argued that children as young as preschool apply

stereotypes and that elementary students are aware of discrimination. He also wrote that when

schools do not disrupt systems of oppression and inherent bias, then children accept that as

"norm". He encouraged teachers to select stories with a diverse representation of gender roles

and to consider the intersectionality of the representation in these texts. Likewise, Luecke (2021)

studied children's books with representation of gender diversity and their impact on elementary

students. She conducted a book group discussion with five elementary students, some who

identify as transgender and some who are cisgender allies. They listened to various stories where

LGBTQIA+ identities are represented. She found that the participants engaged in conversations

about identity and power. She suggested that gender expansive books be a part of the elementary

curriculum, and she wrote, "readers of all genders should be affirmed in knowing that they can

be true to themselves and develop compassion toward others" (p. 35). It is important for teachers

to critically examine their text selection, so they disrupt the harm caused by gender stereotypes

and thereby create a classroom culture of belonging.

This also applies to sexual orientation identities. Bentley and Souto-Manning (2016)

conducted a collaborative classroom research study to analyze what preschool students

understand about same-sex marriage. The concept was introduced through reading aloud the

book *King & King* by de Haan and Nijland (2002), a story of a prince who marries another

prince instead of a princess. The authors argue that critical literacy and issues of identity can be

discussed in early childhood classrooms. Through the discussion of the read-aloud text, they

found that preschoolers offered innocent, yet insightful responses about marriage. They do

caution readers that building a trusting classroom community is critical to this work. Similarly,

Hartman (2018) wrote about reading the same picture book to second graders. The students'

responses were more critical than the preschoolers in the previously cited article. Many of the

second graders' ideas about gender and sexual orientation pointed to heteronormativity already

taking root. The data collected here supports the argument by Bentley and Souto-Manning that

discussions about gender and sexual orientation identities belong in early childhood settings.

Inclusive picture books that disrupt stereotypes about gender and sexual orientation are a way for

teachers to engage students in discussions that broaden their perspectives.

Class. Class is an identity that is often ignored in children's literature. With about 1 in 6

children living in poverty in the United States, the normalizing of the middle and upper class in

picture books is not an accurate representation of many of this nation's youth (Children's

Defense Fund, 2019). Jones (2008) wrote about "the great void" (p. 46) in children's literature.

This void refers to the lack of representation of working-class and poor families in texts. She

argued that just increasing the amount of representation will not be enough to engage readers and

urged teachers to enact critical literacy practices with texts that have "validating representations

of working-class and poor families and children" (p. 49). Similarly, Dutro (2009) argued for

critical inquiry of children's texts. She examined how middle schoolers responded to a

curriculum mandated response to text prompt. The text used was *Leah's Pony* (1996) by

Elizabeth Friedrich. This story takes place during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and the students

were prompted to write about the signs of hard times. Their responses were connected to their

own experiences of hard times living in poverty. Dutro argued that the curriculum makes social

class assumptions and does not allow the teachers or students to engage in critical literacy

practices.

In a more recent study, Terrile (2021) analyzed the depictions of housing and homes in

185 picture books that were published in the United States from 1999 to 2019. She discussed the

representation of homelessness and housing instability, but also characters living in apartments,

trailers, or other kinds of homes that are not middle to upper-class single-family homes. She

found that many of the books she analyzed displayed single-family homes where children had

their own bedrooms and material possessions. She also found that kitchens were represented with

an abundance of food. She argued that these images advance middle-class values and norms.

Finally, she found that many books with representation of diverse home settings presented the

lived experiences of the characters in these homes as a problem. This attaches a stigma to people

of lower-income or working-class backgrounds. She pushed for more picture books where

diverse homes are represented and where the concept of home is not the focus of the story.

Children who live in middle to upper-class single-family homes need to see that other home

settings exist. Also, children who live in diverse home settings need to feel represented in

positive ways.

Ability. The ability identity is another area where representation is either lacking or

problematic. In the past, children's literature with portrayals of characters with dis/abilities were

either poorly written or the representations were inaccurate. These books may have advanced

deficit thinking around diverse abilities (Wopperer, 2011). A study conducted in 2016 examined

elementary students' perceptions of dis/abilities through the use of children's literature (Wilkins,

et al.). The researchers used 12 books with characters with dis/abilities in third and fourth grade classrooms at three elementary schools. They found that the students' responses to these texts were influenced by external factors like societal messages and academic responses, as well as internal factors like how the dis/ability was portrayed in the book and the influence of the adult reading the text. They argued that this has implications for teachers. Teachers must be aware of how they influence their students' responses and allow for open-ended discussions that will promote critical thinking. Teachers must also apply critical thinking to their text selection. The representation of differing abilities in children's books is a pathway to developing an inclusive mindset. Pennell et al. (2017) wrote about respectful representations of dis/ability in children's literature. They conducted a review of picture books with the goal of compiling a list of books that would not only give all students insight into the diverse range of abilities, but also give students with dis/abilities an opportunity to see themselves represented in text. The result was a list of 72 books that met their criteria. They noted that they found mostly books with characters with physical impairments and far fewer books with characters with autism spectrum disorders or learning dis/abilities. This points to the ongoing gap in the representation of ability identities in children's literature.

As stated in previous sections, representation of an identity is not enough. Teachers must engage students in critical conversations about inclusive texts. Adomat (2014) conducted a study about literature discussions around books that have characters with dis/abilities. She recorded elementary students' talk before, during, and after literature discussions. At the end of the teachers' unit on dis/ability, they noted that general education students were more empathic and understanding of students with dis/abilities in their classrooms. There were more positive social interactions within the classroom and within the school community at-large. It is important to

note that this study took place during a curriculum unit focused on dis/ability. Representations of

diverse ability identities and all diverse identities should be ongoing and not presented in

isolation.

The literature reviewed shows the positive impact of inclusive children's books. This

points to the idea that teachers should think critically when selecting texts for instruction. The

inclusion of diverse identities in children's books is not the only factor to consider. Texts must

be critically analyzed for their degree of cultural responsiveness and how the diverse identity is

represented. The final theme that emerged through the research involves engaging students in

critical conversations around inclusive books.

Critical Conversations

Ensuring access to children's books with representation of diverse identities is imperative

for all students. However, just stocking classroom libraries with these books is not enough.

Teachers must think critically about using these texts in their instruction. Inclusive children's

books are a source for engaging students in critical conversations about diverse identities and

social justice. Lewison et al. (2002) wrote, "when critical conversations become part of the

regular curriculum, school has the potential of becoming an exciting place where stimulating,

intellectual work is the rule rather than the exception" (p. 216). In most early childhood and

elementary classrooms these critical conversations occur during interactive read-aloud lessons.

Interactive read-aloud typically takes place as a whole group learning activity. The teacher reads

a selected book aloud while engaging the students in conversations before, during, and after

reading. The benefits of interactive read-aloud include building a community of learners with

shared knowledge regardless of their reading ability level and actively engaging readers in

processing language and ideas (Fountas & Pinnell, 2019). Kesler et al. (2020) wrote, "interactive

read-aloud gives children opportunities to talk about topics of social justice with the teacher's guidance, learning by and through talking" (p. 210). They conducted action research on the power of interactive read-aloud in a 3rd grade classroom. They argued that students gain deep understandings of social justice issues and a range of reading skills when they participate in critical conversations about picture books.

Interactive read-aloud and the conversations that stem from those lessons can build empathy in elementary students. Empathy is a necessary quality in the healthy psychological development of children. It lowers aggression, encourages inclusion, and broadens a child's perspective. Empathy development includes two domains, cognitive and affective empathy. Cognitive empathy is the ability to accurately name another person's feelings. Affective empathy is how the other person's feelings make us feel (Dadds et al., 2008). Both cognitive and affective empathy can be fostered through interactive read-aloud using inclusive children's books. Developing reading skills, acquiring understandings of social justice, and building empathy all come from the conversations students and teachers engage in during interactive read-aloud lessons. Harste et al. (2000) wrote, "critical conversations are important because they highlight diversity and difference while calling attention to the nature and role of literacy in our society" (p. 507). Interactive read-aloud is not a passive story time. It is an immersive, social experience. Since learning is social, students learn a great deal from the discourse they participate in with their teachers and peers during interactive read-aloud lessons. Pantaleo (2004, 2007) examined conversations that occurred in a 1st grade classroom during read-aloud sessions. She found that the students were able to use oral language to think collectively about the texts. She noted the evidence of children interthinking during read-aloud, which is when students are engaging in critical conversations with peers and extending their own thinking based on those conversations

(Mercer, 1995). However, reading and talking about books is still not enough. Dewey (1916) wrote about the need for schools to encourage students to be active participants in social learning:

> While books and conversation can do much, these agencies are usually relied upon too exclusively. Schools require for their full efficiency more opportunity for conjoint activities in which those instructed take part, so that they may acquire a *social* sense of their own powers and of the materials and appliances used. (p. 40)

Engaging students in critical conversations about diverse children's books encourages them to reflect on what they can do to disrupt systems of oppression. The next section of this review will look more deeply into instructing with inclusive children's books and review the literature that supports teachers in making critical instructional decisions.

Instructing with Inclusive Children's Books. As stated previously, interactive read-aloud is not a passive activity. Teachers must fully understand the benefits of interactive read-aloud to implement it effectively. They must also apply critical literacy theory when selecting the texts they read and when planning the questions they pose to students. Cunningham and Enriquez (2013) wrote, "read-alouds can provide the necessary scaffolding for the close reading of complex, powerful, and transformative texts" (p. 29). They provided recommendations to teachers on text selection and instructional practices with read-alouds. They encouraged teachers to examine the questions they plan to pose to students during an interactive read-aloud. The open-ended questions they proposed pushed students to take an inward glance at how a text may have changed their own attitudes and beliefs and what they can do to advocate for social justice.

As discussed previously, Bishop (1990) developed an often-cited model for exploring books using the metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Books as mirrors reflect

a student's culture and identity. Books as windows provide a view into other realities. Books as sliding glass doors allow readers to step inside those realities to gain a deeper understanding of diverse cultures. Although this metaphor provided teachers with a valuable framework for instructing with inclusive children's books, other researchers have highlighted the need for teachers to take a more critical stance when selecting texts. Botelho (2021) encouraged critical multicultural analysis of texts. She wrote, "just because a book is deemed multicultural does not mean its words and images will resonate with readers, and that it is immune to stereotypes and dominant worldviews" (p. 122). She argued that when instructing with inclusive children's books, teachers must use text sets as mirrors, windows, and doors. Text sets are a collection of multiple books around a similar theme. Botelho wrote, "analyzed side by side, texts can generate intertextual ties, connections, disconnections, and questions, while allowing the reader to take notice of the context of the text" (p. 122). This is not limited to books. It includes other text sources like newspapers, music, videos, and blogs.

Enriquez (2021) applied Bishop's metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors to instructional practice. When thinking of inclusive children's books as mirrors, she urged teachers to gain an understanding of their students' various identities and to engage students in classroom text selection. To effectively use books as windows, teachers must analyze the yearlong curriculum across all content areas. Inclusive children's books should be read aloud all year long and should be integrated into other content areas like writing, science, and social studies. Finally, when using inclusive children's books as sliding glass doors, teachers must consider the perspective of the text and what texts they can choose that highlight the voices of people from historically marginalized groups over those who traditionally hold power and privilege.

It is imperative for teachers to think critically about their text selection and their instructional practices with those texts. Offering students diverse perspectives through inclusive children's books is a way to disrupt systems of oppression. The lingering question that remains is what should teachers do with the children's books in their classrooms that advance dangerous stereotypes about diverse identities?

Problematic Children's Books. When teachers develop a critical multicultural analysis stance regarding children's literature, they develop the skills needed to assess texts for stereotypes about race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, class, and ability. Texts that perpetuate dangerous stereotypes advance problematic thinking about diverse identities. Kneeskern and Reeder (2022) conducted a study to examine the impact fiction literature with non-stereotypical protagonists had on the gender perceptions of 8- to 12-year-old children. Using the Gender-Stereotyped Attitude Scale for Children (GASC, Liben & Signorella, 1980), they found that when children were exposed to a multi-chapter story that featured a counter-stereotypical protagonist, those children's endorsement of gender stereotypes was reduced. This was most prevalent in male-identifying students when the protagonist was a non-traditional male. They point out a limitation of this study is the scale they used. Although the GASC is a published tool, it could be outdated, especially given its binary nature. However, the reduction of children's stereotypical perceptions points to future research concerning other categories of stereotypical perceptions, like race, class, sexual orientation, and ability.

As mentioned previously in this review, non-dominant identities are vastly underrepresented in children's literature. The literature supports the argument that all classrooms need libraries full of inclusive and diverse children's books. Also, teachers must engage students in critical conversations about these books. If teachers continue to use books that promote

dangerous stereotypes and problematic thinking about diverse identities, they are cultivating

dominant biases and maintaining systems of oppression. Kohl (1995) wrote about the role of

power in children's literature. He analyzed the classic children's story of *Babar the Elephant* by

Jean de Brunhoff (1931). At first glance, *Babar* may come across as a charming children's tale

that serves the purpose of entertaining readers. However, Kohl adopted a critical multicultural

analysis stance when examining this text. He asked, "who has the power in *Babar?* Who makes

the decisions in the story? Who is obeyed and tells the other characters what to do? And how is

power distributed among the characters in the text?" (p. 5). Upon analysis, *Babar* is a story that

glorifies colonization and promotes racist and sexist ideas. Teachers must make critical decisions

about what books remain on their shelves. The intention of this is not to encourage censorship or

book banning in any way. However, to disrupt systems of oppression, we must stop teaching

children a white-washed version of society. Instead, we can teach students to critically analyze

texts by asking these questions: *which identities are represented in this text, and which are not?,*

how are those identities represented?, who holds the power?, and whose voice is heard and

whose voice is silenced? The next section of this review will examine literature on how

instructional coaching can support teachers in enacting critical literacy.

Benefits of Instructional Coaching. Previous studies cited in this review emphasized the

need to prepare preservice teachers to engage students in critical literacy practices (Lewison,

Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe, 2012; Kelly, Laminack, & Gould, 2020;

Ticknor, Overstreet, & Howard, 2020). Such preparation and support would benefit teachers at

all stages of their careers. Through collaborative relationships between instructional coaches and

classroom teachers, critical literacy practices can be developed and utilized. As coaches use

dialogue and inquiry to create safe spaces for the teachers they support to express their

perspectives and reflect upon their struggles in the classroom (Haneda, Teemant, & Sherman, 2017). Biancarosa, Bryk, and Dexter (2010) conducted a longitudinal study over four years to determine the effects of Literacy Collaborative (LC). LC is a school improvement initiative that uses one-on-one coaching to improve student literacy learning. They found significant gains in students' DIBELS and Terra Nova scores for each year that literacy coaching was implemented. DIBELS and Terra Nova are both norm-referenced assessments used in elementary schools to measure the acquisition of literacy skills. Biancarosa and colleagues acknowledged that there were multiple reading initiatives implemented at the participating schools during their study; therefore, student gains may not solely be attributable to the benefits of coaching. However, they argued that their evidence shows that literacy coaching leads to positive change in teacher practices and ultimately improvement in student literacy learning. It is important to note that many literacy scholars would not consider DIBELS and Terra Nova scores as a true measure of a students' literacy skills.

In another study centered on literacy coaching and critical literacy, Rogers (2014) found that teacher educators and coaches play an important role in supporting teachers develop critical literacy practices. Using data collected within the context of a university course for educators preparing to become literacy specialists or literacy coaches, Rogers concluded that teachers without knowledge of critical literacy needed specific examples of what critical literacy looks, feels, and sounds like in a classroom. She also found that coaches must differentiate their coaching moves based on the needs of the individual teachers they support.

Coaching is a way for teachers to practice self-reflection and improve their instruction. Aguilar (2013) wrote, "coaches encourage us to explore our core values, behaviors, beliefs, and ways of being and compel us to venture into new behaviors, beliefs, and ways of being" (p. 15).

With the support of a literacy or instructional coach, teachers can reflect on their own

positionality and the positionalities of the authors of the books they use for instruction. This

opens the pathway for critical literacy for both teachers and their students.

Conclusion

This review examined the following questions: (1) What are the benefits of the

representation of diverse identities in children's literature? (2) What does the literature

recommend for using inclusive children's literature as an instructional tool? (3) What are the

benefits of coaching to support classroom teachers who are instructing with inclusive children's

literature? Extant literature argues that the representation of diverse identities in children's

literature is critical for children of all identities. When children do not see themselves

represented in the texts they read or when they only ever see the dominant culture represented,

they are not able to make critical connections with texts. Not only must children see themselves

through the books they read, but they must also see everyone else. This broadens their

perspectives and builds empathy. When children of the dominant culture only see their privileged

identities through texts, it creates a false sense of superiority and fosters biases.

Applying the tenets of critical literacy theory to curriculum and instructional practices

allows educators to encourage students to become allies, advocates, and activists. The

development of these identities is crucial if we hope to disrupt systems of oppression and achieve

a true democratic education for all. One way to employ critical literacy theory is through

instructing with inclusive children's books. At the early childhood and elementary level, this

instruction often comes in the form of an interactive read-aloud lesson. It is crucial that teachers

think critically about their text selection and about the questions they ask students to engage

them in critical conversations about inclusive children's books. Instructional coaches can support teachers in adopting and applying the tenets of critical literacy theory.

Although much of the research reviews points to the need to support pre-service and in-service teachers in developing critical literacy skills, there is a dearth of literature examining the practical application of critical literacy theory. Therefore, I was left wondering how school districts can utilize instructional coaches to guide teachers in developing critical literacy skills and in engaging their students in critical conversations about inclusive children's literature. Thus, this study used a collaborative inquiry research method to explore the problem of lack of critical literacy skills amongst teachers and to implement a practical application to support teachers in this work. Despite the research that currently exists, many school districts do not provide teachers with the instructional support necessary to engage their students in critical literacy skills. There is a need to better understand how to guide elementary teachers in adopting a critical stance that will inform their literacy instruction.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Although the original intention was to conduct a Participatory Action Research (PAR) study and the values of PAR informed this work, upon reflection this study used a collaborative inquiry approach. Given the constraints of dissertation research, the participants did not inform the design of the study. I did engage them in collaboration and reflection. They analyzed student data in the form of student responses to their questions and instruction. However, the teachers did not participate in any of the analysis of the surveys, interviews, or observations. Collaborative inquiry is a design for professional learning that uses a cyclical approach (Donohoo & Velasco, 2016), much like PAR and instructional coaching. It aims to address problems of practice and improve instruction, focusing on student outcomes. Learning Forward (2022) lists collaborative inquiry as a part of their professional learning standards. They describe the following elements of the culture of collaborative inquiry:

- Educators engage in continuous improvement.

- Educators build collaboration skills and capacity.

- Educators share responsibility for improving learning for all students.

Donohoo (2013) described four stages of a collaborative inquiry cycle. Those stages are framing the problem, collecting evidence, analyzing evidence, and documenting, sharing, and celebrating. In this study, I acted as the facilitator who inquired about teachers' and coaches' professional practice and designed an action plan. I collected evidence and guided participants in building knowledge and competencies. Participants analyzed student responses to their questions and instruction, while I analyzed observation notes and participants' responses to interview

questions. Finally, every cycle ended with a reflective debrief of their lessons where we celebrated success, analyzed challenges, and set goals for future instruction.

Collaborative inquiry is closely aligned with action research; however, collaboration is not always a necessary component for action research (Donohoo, 2013). This study was dependent upon the collaboration between the primary researcher and the teacher participants. Hamre and Oyler (2004) studied collaborative inquiry groups amongst preservice teachers in their goal of designing inclusive teacher education programs. They found that the preservice teachers held strong beliefs, values, and assumptions about education and that engaging them in collaborative inquiry groups was a way for them to see other perspectives. The pre- and post-observation interviews I conducted with the participants were collaborative inquiries where we discussed instructional moves and the needs of the students. This reflective dialogue allowed us all to examine problems of practice and to develop action plans to remedy those problems.

Sample

Participant selection was conducted using a criteria sampling approach (Leavy, 2023). Specifically, participants were general education classroom teachers in grades kindergarten through 5th grade who teach at a public elementary school in a suburban district in Massachusetts. The reason for this is because I observed their interactive read-aloud lessons and all K-5 general education classroom teachers in this district are required to plan and conduct these lessons. Years of experience teaching was not a criterion; however, it will be noted in the participant summaries.

This research took place in a public school district in a suburban town in Massachusetts. There are three elementary schools in this district and teachers from all three schools were invited to participate. This predominantly White town is considered middle class with a median

income of $90,260. (Data USA, 2020). Many of the teachers live in the town as well. Amongst

the elementary classroom teachers across the three schools, only one is male-identifying and

there is only one classroom teacher who is not White. There are several LGBTQIA+ identifying

teachers. The student population of this district is 89.5% White, 0.6% Black, 1.7% Asian or

Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.9% Latinx, and 0.2% Indigenous (U.S. News & World Report, 2023).

One of the three elementary schools is identified as a Title 1 Targeted Assistance School.

I identified six participants for this study. My goal was to have one participant from each

grade level, K-5. I recruited participants by sending out a Google Form that informed my

colleagues of my study, asked if they would participate, and asked them for informed consent

(see Appendix A). The ethical considerations that I kept in mind are that my research site is the

school district where I work and that I know all my participants. I maintained the anonymity of

every participant on the surveys and the confidentiality of every participant for the rest of the

data. I followed the same data collection procedure for each participant. I also obtained

permission from my superintendent prior to any collection of data. My participant recruitment

and informed consent survey resulted in six participants, one at each grade level K-5. The six

participants in this study were the only teachers who responded to my recruitment form. All six

teachers work at the same elementary school, which is also the only elementary school in the

district that is identified as a Title 1 Targeted Assistance School. Importantly, this school has the

highest population of bi/multilingual learners and is the only elementary school in the district

that has students who are unhoused or are from migrant families. Every participant in this study

identified as a White female. Table 1 and the following narratives provide additional participant

summary data.

Table 1

Participant Summary Data

Participant	Preferred Pronouns	Grade Level	Years of Experience as a Classroom Teacher	Experience with Instructional Coaching	Coursework/PD on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Justice
Researcher	She/her	Instructional coach grades K-5	21 years (4 years at a private school, 17 years at current district)	Trained as a literacy coach, obtained literacy coach certificate in 2021, 2 years as an instructional coach	PhD coursework and research
Teacher #1	She/her	Kindergarten	19 (3 at an urban charter school, 16 at current district)	Nothing structured	Graduate course on diversity in literature
Teacher #2	She/her	1st grade	22 (same district)	Not before this year	Course on inclusion and diverse learning styles
Teacher #3	She/her	2nd grade	2 (same district)	2 cycles last year, 1 cycle in fall 2023	Undergrad course on diversity
Teacher #4	She/her	3rd grade	21 (multiple districts)	None	None
Teacher #5	She/her	4th grade	28 (multiple districts)	None	None
Teacher #6	She/her	5th grade	13 (multiple districts)	Coaching through Literacy Collaborative in previous district	Multiple graduate courses on diversity and equity

Participant Summary Narratives

Researcher. I was the primary researcher for this study. I am an instructional coach, supporting teachers in grade K-5. I have been in that role for two years and was a classroom teacher for over 20 years prior to stepping into this role. I have completed extensive coursework and research on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, as well as culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy. I fully acknowledge that my beliefs impact my motivations and decisions, and therefore played an influential role in the design of this study.

Teacher #1. Teacher #1 is a kindergarten teacher with 19 years of experience. In the first three years of her career, she taught at a charter school in an urban district. For the past 16 years she has taught in her current suburban district. She reported taking one course on diversity in children's literature and not having any previous structured coaching experience. In our first interview she reflected on the lack of racial diversity in the district. However, she also reported that her 2023-2024 class was the most diverse she's had in this district. She had three students from Haiti and two others who are bilingual, as well as several students who are neurodiverse.

Teacher #2. Teacher #2 is a first-grade teacher with 22 years of experience, all in the same district. She reported taking a course on inclusion and diverse learning styles and not having coaching experience until this school year. Similar to teacher #1, teacher #2 reflected on the lack of diversity in the district and the increasing amount of diversity this year. She also had a student from Haiti, another bilingual student, and several students who are neurodiverse. Additionally, she spoke about the diverse family structures amongst her students.

Teacher #3. Teacher #3 is a 2nd grade teacher and is a beginning teacher, with only two years of classroom teaching experience. However, she had the most experience with instructional coaching. She completed two cycles with an instructional coach in her first year of teaching and

one in the fall of 2023 prior to this study. She reported taking an undergraduate course on diversity. She also had two students in her class from Haiti.

Teacher #4. Teacher #4 is a 3rd grade teacher and has been a classroom teacher for 21 years, with the last 12 being in this district. She reported no prior experience with instructional coaching or DEIJ coursework. She agreed to participate in this study under the condition that it would count as her district-mandated coaching cycle, which is an initiative the district implemented for this school year.

Teacher #5. Teacher #5 is currently teaching 4th-5th grade humanities and has been an educator for almost 30 years. She's had different roles including reading specialist and classroom teacher. This teacher reported no prior experience with instructional coaching or DEIJ coursework.

Teacher #6. Teacher #6 is currently teaching 4th-5th grade humanities and has been an educator for 13 years. She was also a reading specialist prior to becoming a classroom teacher. She taught in multiple districts, including urban districts in other states. She participated in instructional coaching through the Literacy Collaborative in her previous district. This teacher has completed multiple graduate-level courses on diversity and equity.

Research Instruments

Table 2 provides a list of the research instruments that I used to collect data for this study. The format of each instrument is described along with its purpose and how it was analyzed. These instruments were designed to meet the needs of the teachers and also to help me as a researcher to glean my findings. Since this study took place within the context of my position as an instructional coach, it was important to account for my dual role as coach and researcher. These instruments allowed me to continue to perform my occupational responsibilities, while

also collecting the data I needed to answer my research questions. The data collected through the

interviews and observations helped all participants to reflect on and improve instruction.

Table 2

Research Instruments, Data Collection, & Data Analysis

Data Instruments	Description	Purpose	Analysis
Pre-Intervention Survey (see Appendix B)	• Likert scale • Google Form	To gauge how teachers feel about instructing with inclusive children's books and their level of comfort	Descriptive statistical analysis (median, frequency distribution analysis)
Pre-observation and Post-observation Interviews (see Appendix C)	• Semi-structured • Open-ended questions • Google Meet (recorded & transcribed)	To gather data on how teachers plan interactive read-aloud lessons and to set goals for improving instruction	*Participant analysis occurred during post-observation interviews through their reflection on the impact their instruction had on different students in their classes A priori codes (tenets of critical literacy theory: teaching multiple literacies, teaching continuous inquiry, and teaching reflection) Open-coding for 1st cycle through deductive thematic analysis A priori codes for 2nd & 3rd cycles Atlas-ti software Analytic memos

Data Instruments	Description	Purpose	Analysis
Observation Protocol (see Appendix D)	• 3 interactive read-aloud lessons per participant • Open-ended observation notes on physical environment, teacher's questions and responses, and students' responses and interactions with the texts	To gather data on teacher instruction that will inform the coaching support provided and gauge the progress of the teachers	A priori codes (tenets of critical literacy theory: teaching multiple literacies, teaching continuous inquiry, and teaching reflection) Open-coding for 1st cycle through deductive thematic analysis A priori codes for 2nd & 3rd cycles Atlas-ti software Analytic memos
Post-Intervention Survey (see Appendix E)	• Likert scale • Google Form	To reflect on the coaching cycles that took place and inform future coaching	Descriptive statistical analysis (median, frequency distribution analysis)

I started my data collection by having participants fill out an anonymous pre-intervention survey. This was a Likert scale through a Google Form. I asked questions about how teachers feel about instructing with inclusive children's books and their level of comfort with facilitating critical conversations with students (see Appendix B). I kept the survey anonymous with no identifying questions, because I wanted the participants to feel free to answer honestly.

I conducted pre-observation and post-observation semi-structured interviews with each participant. These interviews took place over Google Meet, and they were recorded and then transcribed. Google Meet transcribed the interviews, but then I went through each transcription and recording to ensure accuracy. Each interview took 10-15 minutes. The interviews were open-ended questions about how teachers plan their interactive read-aloud lessons and the goals they

have. They were semi-structured, because there were certain questions that prompted follow-up

questions based upon the participant's response (see Appendix C). It is important to note that the

teachers set individual goals for their instruction; therefore, the interview questions varied

depending upon the type of instructional support I provided. The pre-observation and post-

observation semi-structured interviews took place three times for each participant.

I conducted three observations of each participant's interactive read-aloud lessons using

an open-ended observation protocol (see Appendix D). I observed the teacher's questions and

responses only. No student responses were recorded. I recorded the questions the teachers asked

their students about the interactive read-aloud texts, as well as my reactions and questions on the

observation protocol form. Also, I wrote down the teachers' responses to their students. This

became important for the post-observation interviews when we reflected upon the lesson and the

instructional moves of the teacher. I developed this observation protocol form during the

Qualitative Research Methods II course.

After the third cycle, I administered a post-intervention survey (see Appendix E) to each

participant through a Likert scale Google Form again. This survey was also anonymous and

allowed participants to reflect on the coaching the teachers received during the research cycles.

Validity

The validity of my data collection instruments was confirmed in a pilot study using the

same instruments. Specifically, the research instruments were reviewed for face validity within

the context of the Qualitative Research Methods II course. The instruments were used for one

cycle of data collection and analysis, which was abbreviated due to limited time.

The research questions that guided the pilot study were: (1) How can instructional

coaches support teachers in selecting inclusive picture books and removing picture books that

advance dangerous stereotypes about historically marginalized groups? (2) How can instructional coaches support teachers in facilitating critical conversations with students about diverse picture books? These research questions were revised for the current study to be more precise and to more closely align with the research design but allowed for the use of the same instruments with minor changes. For example, the same pre-intervention survey was used in the pilot study as well as the present study; however, another question was added for this study (see Appendix B) to include the measure of teachers' desire for instructional support given that their disposition towards instructional coaching would play an important role. The same interview questions and observation protocol were also used for both studies. Analysis of pilot study data revealed the need to support teachers in instructing with inclusive children's books.

It is important to note that a post-intervention survey was added to this study. This created an opportunity for participants to engage in reflection about the research process and allowed me to reflect on my intervention from my position as instructional coach. I obtained face validity (Leavy, 2023) for this instrument by sharing my research instruments with three colleagues who have a background in literacy. Two have been literacy coaches and two are administrators who regularly observe teachers. One of those colleagues obtained her doctoral degree from Northeastern University. We met to discuss my instruments and to align them with my research questions.

Data Collection

As stated above, three types of data were collected: survey data, interview transcripts, and observation protocol notes. Survey data were collected by using Google Forms. This allowed me to maintain the anonymity of my participants and gave me access to the results in my Google Drive. The interviews took place over Google Meet. This allowed me to video and audio record

all of the interviews. Google Meet also has a transcription feature that was used to transcribe all

interviews. I printed the transcriptions and used the recorded interviews to check the accuracy of

the printed transcripts. I observed the interactive read-aloud lessons and recorded my

observations on the observation protocol form. I then typed up my observation notes to have a

digital record of them. All interview transcriptions and observation notes were shared and

discussed with the participants for reliability and methodological integrity. All data will be stored

on a personal storage device for five years before it is destroyed.

Data Analysis

I used the theoretical framework of critical literacy theory and its tenets to analyze my

data. The three tenets I chose to use were teaching multiple literacies, teaching continuous

inquiry, and teaching reflection. As noted previously, the tenets of critical literacy theory vary

amongst scholars. I focused on these three tenets, because they provided a foundation for

coaching teachers and building their capacity to instruct with inclusive picture books. I felt that

these tenets were a good starting point for teachers with less critical literacy experience. I used

the lens of teaching multiple literacies, teaching continuous inquiry, and teaching reflection to

conduct my data analysis by using those tenets as a priori codes.

The pre- and post-intervention survey data were analyzed for descriptive statistics and the

results informed my findings by gauging teachers' opinions about instructing with inclusive

books, measuring their comfort level about engaging students in critical conversations, and

reflecting on the effectiveness of my intervention. The median of the participants' responses was

calculated; a frequency distribution table was created to summarize the data. This allowed me to

compare the results of the pre and post surveys.

In terms of qualitative analysis, the transcripts of the first research cycle of pre-observation and post-observation semi-structured interviews were first analyzed using the a priori codes of teaching multiple literacies, teaching continuous inquiry, and teaching reflection. It was important to analyze the data through the lens of critical literacy theory since I was aiming to support the teachers in developing a critical literacy stance. During the analysis process I looked for evidence of teaching multiple literacies, teaching continuous inquiry, and teaching reflection through my observation notes. I also looked for that evidence through the interview transcripts to gauge the teachers' understanding of critical literacy practices.

Next, I used open coding to discover the themes that emerged under each category. The first cycle of observation notes were also analyzed using a priori codes and then open coding. I used a deductive thematic analysis approach (Peel, 2020). The reason for this was because I already have experience as an instructional coach. That experience combined with my review of the literature and my pedagogical stance informed my data analysis. The transcripts of the interviews and the observation notes from the second and third research cycles were analyzed using the codes that were determined during the first cycle. I then organized my codes into categories and arranged the data categories nominally, which means the categories have no ranking or order. The Atlas-ti analytical software was used to organize my data analysis. I wrote analytic memos after each interview and observation to summarize the data I collected. This allowed me to compare and contrast responses from my participants, summarize results, and describe the themes and patterns in my data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The research problem addressed in this study was the need to provide instructional support to teachers so that they can build the critical literacy skills necessary to engage their students in critical conversations that will build their social consciousness (Lewison et al., 2002; Norris et al., 2012). The purpose of this collaborative inquiry research was to explore how an instructional coach can support teachers planning for critical literacy instruction and help build their capacity for teaching with inclusive picture books. In addition to the goal of engaging students in critical conversations about inclusive texts, this study aimed to support teachers in developing their own critical literacy skills. The following research questions emerged from the need to develop a plan of action that will guide teachers in this work:

1. How can I as an instructional coach support elementary teachers in critically analyzing interactive read-aloud texts?

2. How can I as an instructional coach support elementary teachers in facilitating critical conversations with students about inclusive picture books?

As described in Chapter 3, the participants of this study were six classroom teachers in grades kindergarten through 5th grade from the same school district; I was a participant in the role of instructional coach. I worked with the classroom teachers through three research cycles during which I supported them in reflecting on their practice and setting goals to improve their practice.

This study involved the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. I administered two surveys, analyzed the data for descriptive statistics, and presented the findings in a frequency table. Interview transcripts and observation protocol notes were first analyzed using the tenets of

the theoretical framework, critical literacy theory. A second round of data analysis of these

transcripts revealed one major theme with corresponding subordinate themes. The major theme

was instructional support for teachers and the subordinate themes were questioning strategies,

student engagement, and text selection and analysis. These themes emerged with the assistance

of the teachers during post-observation interviews. They contributed to data analysis by

examining the demographics and needs of their students, as well as reflecting upon their

instructional needs. In addition, findings are presented about the critical conversations I had with

the teachers.

This chapter is organized into the following sections and subsections:

I.   Quantitative Results

    a.   Pre-Intervention Survey

    b.   Post-Intervention Survey

    c.   Descriptive Analysis

II. Qualitative Results

    a.   Critical Literacy Theory

        i.   Teaching Reflection

        ii.   Teaching Multiple Literacies

        iii. Teaching Continuous Inquiry

    b.   Instructional Support for Teachers

        i.   Questioning Strategies

        ii.   Student Engagement

        iii. Text Selection & Analysis

    c.   Critical Conversations with Teachers

The findings of this research must be interpreted through the lens of the chosen research method. I am an instructional coach in this district, and I have known my participants as colleagues for some time. It is important to understand that the findings presented in this chapter are context-bound to the existing and developing relationships I have with my participants. This is the nature of instructional coaching and collaborative inquiry.

Relevant to this research and as noted in Table 1 in Chapter 3, only one participating teacher besides me had prior experience with extensive DEIJ coursework and training. This is important to note because knowledge of DEIJ supports critical literacy skills and practices (Kelly et al., 2020; Lewison et al., 2002; Norris et al., 2012). This immediately created a power differential, because I came to the study with more knowledge about the research problem. Also, my pedagogical stance impacted my data analysis; I used a social justice-oriented lens to analyze teachers' responses. This speaks to my belief that research is not neutral and is influenced by the researcher's philosophical assumptions.

Quantitative Results

Quantitative data were collected using two surveys designed for the purposes of this research (see Appendices B and E). The surveys were completed as pre- and post-coaching data before the instructional coaching cycles began and after the cycles were completed. Findings from the quantitative analysis of each survey are described in the following subsections of this chapter.

Pre-Intervention Survey

The Pre-Intervention Survey was administered after the participant recruitment process and informed consent was obtained. The survey was sent via Google forms and email data were not collected. Item responses were measured using a Likert scale. The purpose of this survey was

to gauge teachers' perspectives about instructing with inclusive children's books and their level

of comfort. Five out of the six classroom teachers completed the survey. This survey was sent to

participating teachers several times; the survey is completely anonymous so there was no way to

know who chose not to respond. The results are displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Pre-Intervention Survey Results

How often do you conduct interactive read aloud lessons?
5 responses
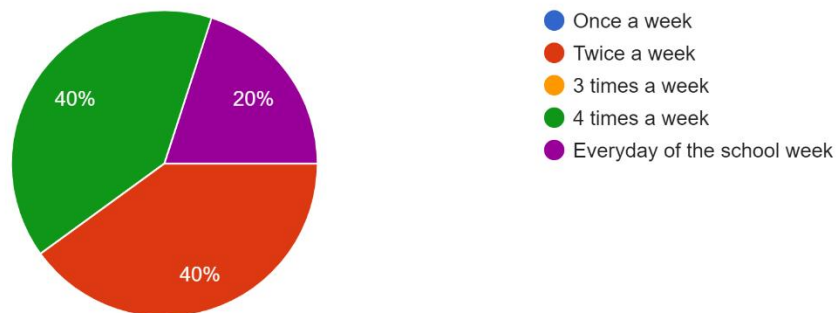
- Once a week
- Twice a week
- 3 times a week
- 4 times a week
- Everyday of the school week

40% 20%
40%

Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: The F & P IRA text sets offer a diverse range of inclusive picture books to share with students.
5 responses
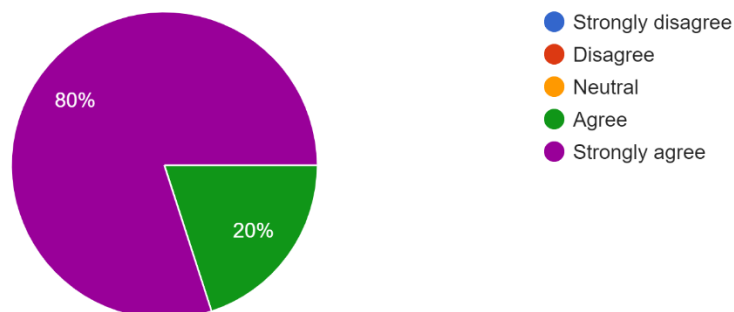
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

80%
20%

Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: I feel comfortable reading books to my students that present diverse cultures and identities.
5 responses
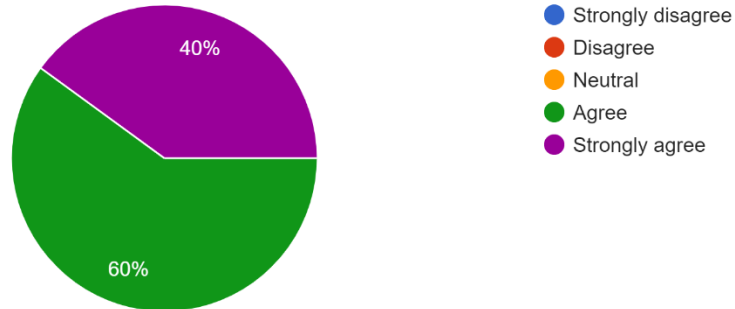
Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: I feel comfortable engaging my students in critical conversations about diverse and inclusive picture books.
5 responses
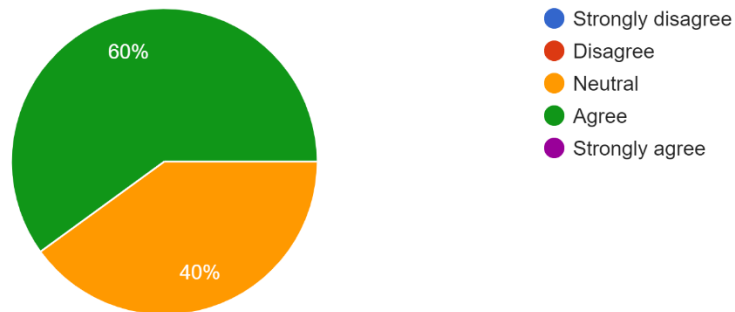
Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: Teachers need support in planning for critical conversations with elementary students about diverse and inclusive picture books.
5 responses

At the beginning of the study, the five participants who completed the survey all either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable instructing with inclusive picture books. Three out of five agreed that they felt comfortable engaging their students in conversations about these books, while two out of five responded as neutral. The final question, which asked about the extent to which teachers need support with this instruction, garnered mixed results. Four participants either strongly agreed or agreed that instructional support is needed. One participant disagreed with this statement. This survey was anonymous; therefore, it was not possible to determine which participant disagreed with the question about teachers' need for instructional support. I can only conjecture that the teacher who disagreed felt proficient with regard to planning for critical conversations with students about inclusive picture books. As is shown in the results for the post-intervention survey, this participant changed their response to this question to either agree or strongly agree at the end of the study.

Post-Intervention Survey

The Post-Intervention Survey was administered after the three collaborative inquiry research cycles were completed. Using a Likert scale sent through Google Forms, this survey invited participants to reflect on the coaching cycles that took place. Data from this survey also informed future coaching. The coaching cycles were comprised of pre-observation interviews during which the participants diagnosed the factors to be changed or interventions to be implemented; observations where the participants implemented the changes and interventions; and post-observations interviews where the participants measured their success and reflected on next steps. The post-intervention survey was also anonymous. The results are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Post-Intervention Survey Results

Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: I feel comfortable reading books to my students that present diverse cultures and identities.

6 responses
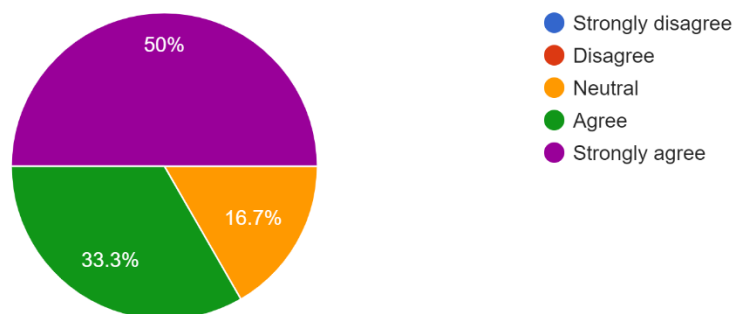
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
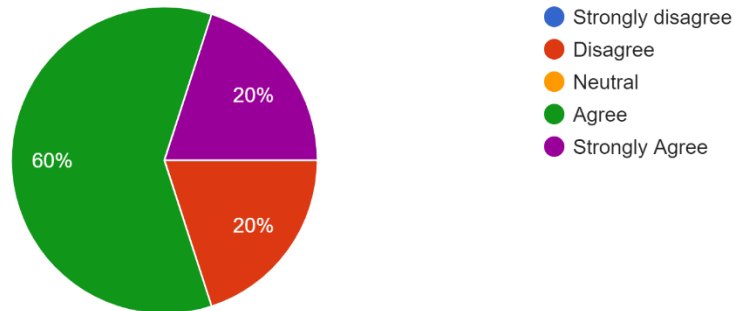- Strongly agree

50%

16.7%

33.3%

Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: I feel comfortable engaging my students in critical conversations about diverse and inclusive picture books.

6 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: Teachers need support in planning for critical conversations with elementary students about diverse and inclusive picture books.

6 responses

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: Having support from an instructional coach was beneficial to my teaching this year.

6 responses

The Post-Intervention Survey results revealed small changes in the teachers' positive perceptions of instructing with diverse texts and beliefs about instructional coaching. All of the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that teachers need support in planning for critical conversations with elementary students about inclusive and diverse picture books. However, one teacher offered a neutral response about instructional coaching being beneficial to their teaching in this study. Again, due to anonymity there is no way to know which teacher submitted the neutral response. Data suggest that this teacher was indifferent about the coaching that took place during this study. This could be because she did not feel the coaching helped her improve her professional practice, but also that it did not harm her practice either. In contrast, five teachers agreed or strongly agreed that instructional coaching did benefit their teaching.

In the next section, a descriptive analysis of the quantitative data is presented.

Descriptive Analysis

The pre- and post-coaching surveys had three questions in common. To demonstrate changes over time, it was useful to compare these items and examine them closely. In Table 3, the frequency of responses for the three common questions are presented.

Table 3

Survey Frequency Table

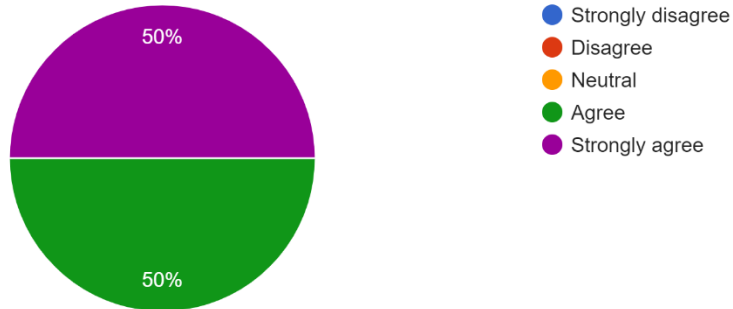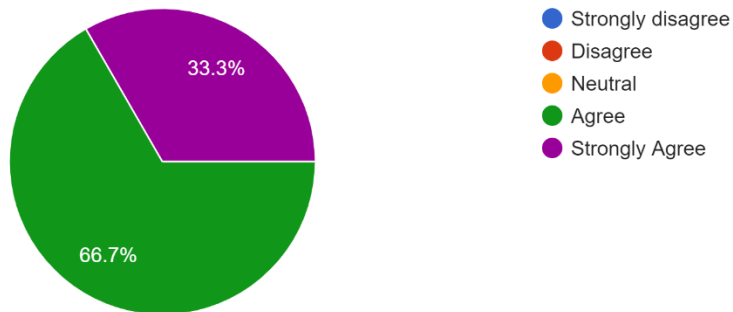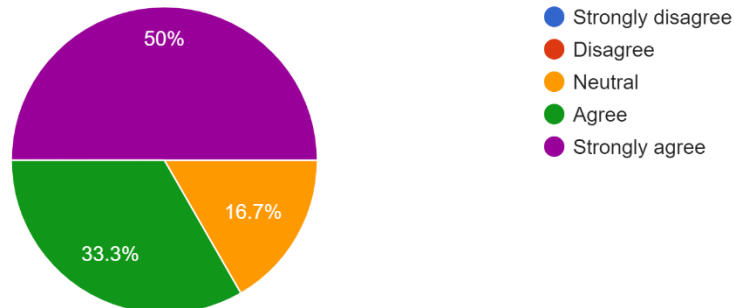| Pre-Intervention Survey		Post-Intervention Survey	
Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *I feel comfortable reading books to my students that present diverse cultures and identities.*		Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *I feel comfortable reading books to my students that present diverse cultures and identities.*	
Response	Frequency	Response	Frequency
Strongly disagree	0	Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	0	Disagree	0
Neutral	0	Neutral	1
Agree	3	Agree	3
Strongly agree	2	Strongly agree	2
Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *I feel comfortable engaging my students in critical conversations about diverse and inclusive picture books.*		Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *I feel comfortable engaging my students in critical conversations about diverse and inclusive picture books.*	
Response	Frequency	Response	Frequency
Strongly disagree	0	Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	0	Disagree	0
Neutral	2	Neutral	0
Agree	3	Agree	3
Strongly agree	0	Strongly agree	3
Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *Teachers need support in planning for critical conversations with elementary students about diverse and inclusive picture books.*		Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *Teachers need support in planning for critical conversations with elementary students about diverse and inclusive picture books.*	
Response	Frequency	Response	Frequency
Strongly disagree	0	Strongly disagree	0
Disagree	1	Disagree	0
Neutral	0	Neutral	0
Agree	3	Agree	4
Strongly agree	1	Strongly agree	2

It is important to note that the teachers who participated in this study reported that they felt more

comfortable engaging their students in critical conversations about diverse and inclusive picture

books after the collaborative inquiry research coaching cycles were completed. It is also

important to note that at the beginning of the study, one teacher felt instructional support was

unnecessary. However, by the end of the study, all of the teachers either agreed or strongly

agreed that teachers need support in planning for critical conversations with their students about

these texts. This pattern is evident in both quantitative and qualitative data. Data from post-

observation interviews revealed increasing comfort levels with regard to teaching with inclusive

texts as well as acknowledgement of the need for instructional support.

The next section of this chapter will present the qualitative data results.

Qualitative Results

As described in Chapter 3, three collaborative inquiry research cycles were conducted

with each participant. Each cycle consisted of a pre-observation interview, observation of an

interactive read-aloud lesson, and a post-observation interview. During the post-observation

interviews, the participants reflected on their read-aloud lessons by describing what went well

and what challenges they encountered. Together, we then set instructional goals for the next

cycle; these goals informed the coaching that I provided. Grounded in the needs teachers

identified in our discussions, coaching centered on skills such as searching for additional texts,

creating resources such as conversation guides and student engagement strategies documents,

and using the Literacy Continuum (Fountas & Pinnell, 2016) to set learning targets for their

lessons. These coaching moves were completed between cycles, allowing teachers time to plan

for their next observed lessons.

The iterative and recursive nature of the collaborative inquiry research method framed the

teaching and coaching cycles. During the next pre-observation interviews, the participants and I

revisited the challenges they discussed in the prior cycle as they reflected on the progress they

made. There was about a month between each cycle; therefore, the participants would often

discuss their unobserved interactive read-aloud lessons. This allowed me to adjust the coaching

based on the teachers' needs.

During post-observation interviews the teachers contributed to data analysis by

examining their students' responses to the texts and the questions they asked during the lessons.

Based on the students' responses, the teachers revealed their need for instructional support under

the subordinate theses of questioning strategies, student engagement, and text selection &

analysis.

Critical Literacy Theory

As this study was framed by the tenets of critical literacy theory, the first round of

analysis relied on a priori codes drawn from the theoretical framework. It is important to note

that the three codes, teaching reflection, teaching multiple literacies, and teaching continuous

inquiry, were selected because they provided a foundation of how I wanted the teachers to

instruct with inclusive picture books, particularly for teachers with less experience in critical

literacy practices. The use of these tenets as a priori codes ensured that the goals of the study

were addressed; specifically, to examine the development of critical literacy skills among

teachers in response to instructional coaching. Throughout the data analysis phase, I looked for

evidence of teaching reflection, teaching multiple literacies, and teaching continuous inquiry.

The following are illustrative examples.

Teaching Reflection. Evidence of deep reflection emerged as one of the most visible aspects of a

critical stance among the teachers who participated in the research. For example, after reading

Leo the Late Bloomer (Kraus, 1999) teacher #1 shared:

I think the conversation I wanted to have is more that he was different and then kind of attach it more to them because I do find them like "you can't do that? I can do that." So I kind of wanted to make more of that connection that you and your friends can't always do things at the same time. You might know how to read really well, but your other friend is working on reading. You might know how to color really well, but other friends are not ready for that. Yeah, because that's definitely a thing I see in kindergarten that when they can do something and their friends can't yet, it's hard for them to accept that it's okay. And so they're like "my gosh, you can't do it" and it's more like insulting. So we missed that message a little bit. I wanted to focus more on that.

She expressed awareness that her teaching needed to go further to ensure that her students gleaned deep understandings from the text.

Similarly, teacher #2 shared:

I think that even though they had a great conversation about being friends, I think they missed some of the nuances of Henry. I was hoping and I didn't want them to point out students in our class, but I was hoping that they would be able to say we've seen somebody get really angry about something that doesn't seem like something to be mad about, because it happens on a daily in here. So I don't think they identified with that as much as I would have liked and when I was writing my notes for this I toyed with trying to point that out, but I also didn't want the kids that do have those struggles to feel I was singling them out either. That's a hard one.

She reflected on her realization that the class did not connect with the main character as much as she expected they would. We then wondered together about the difference between the connections the students are internalizing versus the connections they express aloud.

Teacher #3 also engaged in reflective practice about her instruction:

I think I had trouble asking deeper questions. I feel like, I had asked a question I said, what's the problem with thinking something is normal or something's not normal and I felt like maybe I didn't word it in the best way. Maybe I could have guided them a little bit better at the end when I was kind of wrapping up our discussion. So I feel like maybe the way I worded some of the questions was a little confusing to them. So I thought I could do a better job at that and then I thought that they needed a little bit of a push at the end of the book. I feel like they kept kind of repeating what other students said and so maybe to have them have their own ideas or really use those symbols if they have something the same so that way they don't keep repeating the same things.

Through our conversation about her read-aloud in cycle 2, the teacher reflected on how to better formulate her questions and how to implement routines that will draw more independent thoughts from her students.

Overall, the post-observation interviews revealed that the teachers were engaged in continuous reflection about their lessons and seeking ways to improve engagement and critical conversations with students. They were candid about the challenges they faced with some of the inclusive texts and how students responded to those texts. It is important to note that a variety of strategies were used to encourage student reflection and engagement during read-aloud lessons.

As the instructional coach and a participant in this research, I also engaged in reflective practice. I reflected on the effectiveness of my coaching and adjusted my practice in response to conversations with the participants during the coaching cycles. For example, when teacher #4 asked for instructional strategies to increase student engagement and participation in her interactive read-aloud lessons, I suggested she use turn-and-talk strategies. Upon reflection, I realized she needed more specific support to implement these strategies. In response I provided the teacher with resources that prepared her to teach turn-and-talk routines to her students.

Teaching Multiple Literacies. The second tenet, teaching multiple literacies, was evident through different modes of meaning teachers integrated within their lessons (The New London Group, 1996, p. 83). Specifically, I noted the following elements during my observations: visual design, linguistic design, and gestural design.

Some teachers demonstrated more proficiency when teaching multiple literacies. For example, I observed teacher #6 consistently using technology to make the books accessible to every student by projecting them on a screen while reading aloud in all three cycles. In both cycles 2 and 3, the kindergarten teacher used a kinesthetic approach to help her students understand new vocabulary presented in the read-aloud text. She also used movement breaks to keep her students engaged and connected those breaks to the text she was reading. In cycle 3, teacher #3 read the English version of a dual-language book and then invited the English Language (EL) teacher to read the book again in Spanish. Table 4 presents evidence of teaching with multiple literacies gleaned from observations.

Table 4

Evidence of Multiple Literacies

Participants	Observation Notes
Teacher #1 (observation cycle 2)	*Have you heard that word blooming before?* (teacher compares it to a flower and has them use their hands to make a flower bloom and grow)
Teacher #1 (observation cycle 3)	Teacher gives the students a movement break and has them pretend to be tiny seeds that sprout and grow, connecting the text to their movement
Teacher #6 (observation cycle 3)	Teacher has map of North and South America projected on the screen, gives students context, has them point out where we live and then where Paraguay is (setting of story) Teacher projects the book on the screen and gives them the option to stay at their desk or sit on the rug–multimodal practices, giving students choice and also projecting the book so every student in her class has access to the text and illustrations
Participant	**Interview Quote**
Teacher #3 (post-observation interview cycle 3)	*Teacher #3: You weren't here for this part, but* (anonymous teacher) *came in and she actually read the story in Spanish.* *Susan Flis: Nice.* *Teacher #3: So it was really cool for the kids to see. They had read it in English and then they knew that the story was bilingual. So then* (anonymous teacher) *read it to them. They really enjoyed that. They saw how it would feel to be even* (anonymous student 1) *and* (anonymous student 2) *to learn in English rather than Spanish. So, I thought that was really cool. So even working more with the EL teachers. They come in and do some support in here, with* (anonymous student 1) *and* (anonymous student 2)*, so I thought it would be cool too if I did have books in different languages.*

Although some participants did not teach with multiple literacies in mind, for others it was either a natural teaching practice that they were already employing prior to the start of the study or something they added to their teaching repertoire after reflecting on their teaching. In the case of teacher #6, who employs visual design techniques for every read-aloud lesson, we discussed this strategy during our post-observation interview at the end of cycle 1. She explained that she likes to give her students a choice over where in the classroom they feel they will be the most engaged in the lesson. Some choose to sit near her on the rug, while others remain at their

desks. She said that projecting the text allows accessibility to the illustrations and the print for all of her students.

The ways teachers taught with multiple literacies varied in response to their students' needs and their goals for the lesson. For example, teacher #1 employed gestural design or kinesthetic modes of learning to maintain student engagement and make learning meaningful for her kindergartners. To support her dual-language classroom, it was teacher #3's idea to bring the EL teacher in to reread the dual-language book in Spanish during cycle 3; in this case, this reflective practice was a result of the coaching conversations we had. This excerpt came from our final post-observation interview:

> *Susan Flis: And so one final question, just looking to the future, is there any kind of future support that you think you would benefit from when instructing with these books?*
>
> *Teacher #3: I think that the resources that you've given me, the questions, I think just getting more comfortable with them. So I think I'd like to do them more often in the future and just keep incorporating books like these into the classroom…*

She went on to describe the experience of bringing the EL teacher in and how having these conversations with me helped her think about different ways to support all of her students.

Teaching Continuous Inquiry. Another finding that emerged from the data was that all participants in this study engaged their students in open-ended questions. Many of them used turn and talk techniques so all students had the opportunity to share their thoughts. They also encouraged students to extend their thinking by asking questions. This is tied to the subordinate

theme of student engagement that emerged under the superordinate theme of instructional

support. Table 5 demonstrates evidence from observations to support this claim.

Table 5

Evidence of Continuous Inquiry

Participants	Observation Notes
Teacher #5 (observation cycle 3)	*Turn and talk to someone next to you–do you think "that is how it is done" is a sufficient answer"—Turn and share, let's do a quick vote first, if you asked why and someone just said to you "that is how it is done", do you think that's a sufficient answer?*
Teacher #2 (observation cycle 2)	*I'm going to ask you to focus and think about this story as I read it to you. It's called A Day with No Words. What do you think that means?* *How would you feel if you couldn't talk but wanted people to understand what you have to say?*
Teacher #6 (observation cycle 2)	*Does anyone know what a refugee is?...Why did they have to move?*
Teacher #1 (observation cycle 1)	*Why do you think these people might be wearing these beautiful hats?* *Why do you think someone would want to wear a hat with gold on it?* *What did you notice about the people and the places in these photographs?*
Teacher #3 (observation cycle 3)	*Why do you think the author would include the same words but in Spanish? What do you think about the little girl in the story?*

Importantly, all of the teachers asked their students open-ended questions, yet some reflected on

challenges with supporting their students in understanding the theme or lesson of the text.

Several expressed concern that they lead the conversation too much. Teachers can mitigate this

concern by engaging students in continuous inquiry practices in all content areas on a daily basis.

To do this, teachers must not only ask open-ended questions throughout the day, but they must

also resist the urge to answer for the students.

Instructional Support for Teachers

Throughout the pre-observation and post-observation interviews the participants discussed using diverse and inclusive picture books to promote discussions on acceptance, diversity, and perseverance in the classroom. They shared feedback on book choices, engagement strategies such as turn-and-talk, and challenges faced when promoting diversity in a less diverse community. The importance of exposing students to different perspectives and experiences was highlighted, along with the benefits of teaching with inclusion in mind. Teachers also discussed student responses to themes of acceptance and perseverance in stories, as well as planning for future lessons that promote understanding of diverse identities and abilities.

The texts the participants selected for the instructional read-alouds addressed a variety of themes: unexpected friendship, self-identity, empathy, kindness, acceptance, autism, poverty, cultural diversity, racial diversity, and family (see Appendix F). Participants were candid and reflective as they shared their reactions to class discussions about these stories. Teachers emphasized the importance of diverse representation in children's literature and the challenges and benefits of discussing sensitive topics with their students. Many of the participants requested instructional support to plan and guide class conversations on complex themes and reflected on the need for additional support and resources in facilitating these critical conversations with students.

In one instance, teacher #2 grappled with determining when to end a conversation with students while discussing a story. In her final post-observation interview when asked what future instructional support she would benefit from she said:

> *Sometimes I feel like as I read them and as I've been a teacher for so long, I know*
>
> *how to get a conversation going, but sometimes I feel like I struggle with where*
>
> *do I stop and kind of get them thinking about this particular part of the story.*

In response to her comment, we discussed how she could focus on the goal or purpose for reading the particular text and plan instructional stopping points based on that purpose.

When discussing the benefits of instructing with inclusive picture books, teachers #1 and #6 reflected on the lack of diversity in the school district:

> *Susan Flis: What would you say are the benefits of instructing with inclusive*
>
> *picture books?*

> *Teacher #1: Especially this year, this is probably the most diverse class I've had*
>
> *in 19 years with students from just different ethnicities, different faiths, different*
>
> *skin color, so being able to see themselves in story books also for the students of*
>
> *Somerset who are mainly used to a certain ethnicity, a majority, having them be*
>
> *shown and exposed to different children, different clothing, different languages,*
>
> *different holidays, I think has been really beneficial in terms of accepting*
>
> *everybody that's in the classroom.*

Teacher #6 had a similar response to the same question:

> *Susan Flis: What would you say the benefits are of instructing with inclusive*
>
> *picture books?*
>
> *Teacher #6: Gosh, I feel like there's several benefits. I feel like for students who*
>
> *identify with those characters that may not see them as much I feel like that's a*
>
> *huge asset for them just to be able to identify and be like that, have that, I'm*
>
> *trying to think of the word but have that to them, have it be meaningful to them*

and see their representation with the characters. I think for our average Somerset

student, I feel like just knowing that is out there. It's not all about what I'm

thinking, how I do things, and how my family is but just showing that there are

different families and things, people do things differently and different holidays

and different traditions and nothing's right or wrong. It's just how we grow up

and what we're accustomed to, so kind of reaching the world beyond their little

town.

Both teachers and I discussed the identities of students in their classes and the need for diverse

representation through text for all identities.

Teachers shared other challenges, such as difficulty with discussing uncomfortable

topics, lack of student engagement, and time constraints in schedules that limit the rich

discussions they can have with their students about these texts. Some pointed to the need for

support in discussing diverse identities and using inclusive picture books to do so. One teacher in

particular was reluctant to discuss issues of social justice and was resistant to change. My

position as a coach and my stance as a social justice activist may have created a barrier for this

teacher. In spite of these challenges, all six teachers acknowledged that incorporating diverse

resources and discussions was beneficial for students.

Findings of this study also revealed that teachers understood the complexity of teaching

with inclusive texts. They reflected on the importance of providing background knowledge

before reading, celebrating diverse identities, ongoing professional development, fostering

discussions, and addressing challenges in teaching diverse texts. They discussed strategies for

engaging students, improving interactive read-aloud lessons, and enhancing learning experiences

through critical literacy. They also emphasized cultural diversity, integrating standards with

authentic experiences, and promoting inclusivity in classrooms.

Findings gleaned from analysis of post-observation interviews focused on reflecting on

lessons and planning improvements. These teachers sought support to enhance their teaching

practices and to create more inclusive learning environments using inclusive picture books,

including support to effectively incorporate diverse texts to foster empathy and acceptance

among students. In fact, the pre- and post-observation interviews provided a forum for me to

engage the teachers in critical conversations about their instruction with inclusive texts. Through

these conversations, I was able to collaborate with the teachers as we co-designed instruction and

reflected on teaching with inclusive texts. Particularly during post-observation interviews, the

teachers reflected on the demographics and identities of their students, as well as their students'

responses to their interactive read-aloud lessons. Their analysis of the data revealed the need for

instructional support for teachers and the type of instructional support they each required. Table

6 shows evidence of the instructional support that occurred during cycles one and two.

Table 6

Evidence of Instructional Support

Participants	Interview Quotes
Teacher #1 (post-observation interview cycle 1)	*I think it's the turning and talking and getting them to have a conversation. That was a little crazy for me and I've tried it a couple different ways because I want them to have time to turn and talk because I want them to get their thoughts out because it's tough with this group. Where if I only call on a few, and this is normal with kindergarten, but it's pretty prominent with this group. They want to be heard. So I want them to have those conversations when I stop, but the turn and talk was like a disaster. They don't have a designated partner, because I'm always changing spots but I think what I'd like to do differently is next time before we read saying "okay, when we turn and talk this is going to be your one partner and that's who you're gonna turn and talk to" and I think that can go a little bit*

	smoother. I think we're moving into some fiction stories and I think that's where *I'm gonna be like where does the inclusion necessarily come in with some of those books and how can I include inclusion in some books?*
Participants	Interview Quotes
Teacher #2 (post-observation cycle 1)	*I think maybe finding some books that can introduce topics that we don't typically introduce in our classrooms that, I shouldn't say typically. I mean, certainly we talk about it and I try to infuse it in conversation. I missed the boat on even Stellaluna that I mean, obviously it's kind of realistic, even though it's not realistic, but the animal behavior is realistic, right? So that they would only have a mother bird but that could have been a conversation like that. They just live with their mom, I mean sometimes we miss those opportunities, but I think maybe getting some more titles of books that introduce topics that kids aren't hearing as often.*
Teacher #3 (post-observation interview cycle 1)	*Our next cycle…I'm thinking definitely choosing books that are less humorous and more focused on inclusion. I know that this one touched on it, but also maybe it was good to start, but maybe I can pick a better book next time and then I think increasing their discussions about it. I think we did have a discussion about it, but I felt like it was kind of very guided. I would like them to kind of be able to talk with each other and kind of me let them discuss with each other rather than pulling things out of them. So maybe working on the questions that I ask them and leaving them more open-ended.*
Teacher #4 (post-observation interview cycle 2)	*Really getting them to, and I'm sure I got the idea I think from one of the papers you gave me or one of the emails you sent me, that they turn to somebody, they share something, and then they share out something that somebody told them. Not necessarily what's in your head, but really getting them to listen to what the person shared and share that perspective. So just sort of more practice with that sort of sharing.*
Teacher #5 (post-observation interview cycle 2)	*I appreciate you kind of looking through and giving me a different perspective on a written response to it. So that's always helpful because sometimes what they give you isn't always exactly what I want it to be. Maybe kind of looking at the book also in the eye of the Continuum and what is expected at this grade level for that discussion, and I know they do that pretty decently within the folder itself. But there were obviously things that weren't included that I kind of included because I knew it was topics that we know. We're currently working on figurative language, so I try to pull that out of anything we're reading. They're getting really good at noticing that so, but maybe some more analysis of a text beyond what they do provide.*

Participants	Interview Quotes
Teacher #6 (post-observation interview cycle 1)	*I feel like book titles or different book suggestions would be a place to start. I don't know. I feel like I don't know what I don't know…and even just how to make conversation about some of these difficult topics. I feel like I'm doing the best I can but again, white woman. Sometimes I'm okay, how do we feel? So I feel like I don't know, maybe, how to broach more sensitive topics, especially when they're included in your audience. That would be a place to start.*

The subordinate themes that emerged under the category of instructional support were questioning strategies, student engagement, and text selection & analysis. Participants sought guidance and opportunities for collaboration with an experienced colleague when planning for and conducting interactive read-aloud lessons. The following subsections will present evidence for each subordinate theme.

Questioning Strategies. Some of the ways the teachers sought instructional support can be categorized under the subordinate theme of questioning strategies. During interactive read-aloud lessons teachers stop and ask questions about the text and the theme or lessons the text presents. The district where the study was conducted uses the Fountas & Pinnell Interactive Read-Aloud text sets in grades K-5. Each read-aloud book in this series comes with a lesson plan that suggests teaching points and questions that support those targets. Some of the participants in this study used those lesson plans with fidelity. However, other participants sought guidance in developing questions that were more social justice-oriented. Some participants chose to read books outside of the district-purchased series; they requested instructional support specific to setting goals for their lessons and formulating questions to support their intended goals. Table 7 presents evidence of the questioning strategies sought and provided.

Table 7

Evidence of Questioning Strategies

Participants	Interview Quotes
Researcher & Teacher #6 (post-observation interview cycle 1)	*Susan Flis: We have to use certain materials and I do think that the text sets are good, but I think they could go further and I think the questioning could go further, like you're saying. So would you be open for some suggestions of different titles and like what you're saying, I can give you some questions to ask that wouldn't just be the same kind of mild questions?* *Teacher #6: I would love that because I feel like even with the IRAs, sometimes it kind of misses that point. They'll have another focus. I know it's still being read, but maybe their focus is different for that book. So yeah, I definitely think I don't know if there is such a thing, but questions would be really helpful.*
Researcher & Teacher #6 (post-observation interview cycle 2)	*Teacher #6: I guess just what I would like to focus on is just being more targeted in my questioning, being a little more focused and kind of maintaining maybe the same type of question throughout the whole thing. I don't know. I guess it's something that I struggle with because part of me is like I want them to understand the vocabulary and I want them to understand this, so I don't know maybe just piecing a part. Maybe just doing the questioning on the specific thing that I want them to understand and then maybe the next time we're looking at vocabulary. I don't know, maybe brainstorming how to break that apart a little better.* *Susan Flis: Okay, I think that one of the things you can do, I'm sure you have the Literacy Continuum in your classroom...* *Teacher #6: Yeah, yeah.* *Susan Flis: With your experience being a reading specialist, you know all this stuff but I think one of the things you can do is really just choose a targeted goal and all of your questions stem from that because there is so much to unpack in these texts. There is the vocabulary, there's so many different aspects that you could go into. This text in particular had the whole theme of family, but then the whole theme of refugees and what that is like and so there was definitely a lot in such a simple picture book, really there was a lot there.* *Teacher #6: Yeah.* *Susan Flis: But I think when you plan your lesson, if you say this is my target then all my questions stem from that and that's not to say that there's no responsiveness because sometimes they answer in certain ways that leads you somewhere else and that's okay too. But I understand what you mean because it's a lot to unpack.*

Participants	Interview Quotes
	Teacher #6: Yeah, I think that's a great suggestion and I guess for this I was kind of thinking of it as the multicultural piece focusing on that. But I hear what you're saying about looking at a targeted standard and you're bringing that in just authentically with the text, but then still focused on that.
Researcher & Teacher #3 (post-observation interview cycle 2)	*Susan Flis: So, what challenges do you think that you or your students had with this text?* *Teacher #3: I think I had trouble asking deeper questions. I feel like, I had asked a question I said, what's the problem with thinking something is normal or something's not normal and I felt like maybe I didn't word it in the best way. Maybe I could have guided them a little bit better at the end when I was kind of wrapping up our discussion. So I feel like maybe the way I worded some of the questions was a little confusing to them. So I thought I could do a better job at that and then I thought that they needed a little bit of a push at the end of the book. I feel like they kept kind of repeating what other students said and so maybe to have them have their own ideas or really use those symbols if they have something the same so that way they don't keep repeating the same things.* *Susan Flis: What additional support do you think you would benefit from when instructing with inclusive picture books?* *Teacher #3: Maybe, I know you gave those question sheets, which I thought were really helpful. I guess help with guiding the discussion. I don't always know. Sometimes I have trouble when they respond knowing what I should say back, if I should ask more questions about it. If I should just accept their answer and then move on, so I feel like that's always something that I am never quite sure if I should dive deeper into what they say or if I should just say okay and then move on to the next student, so I guess something like that.*

Participants who sought support with questioning strategies were responsive when we discussed

the use of conversation guides (see Appendix G).

Student Engagement. Another subordinate theme that emerged from the data was student

engagement and strategies to increase student engagement. The teachers reported challenges with

timing, engagement, and managing student behaviors during interactive read-aloud lessons.

Some teachers also highlighted students' difficulties connecting with certain themes and texts. In

response, I suggested strategies such as turn-and-talk, adapting to student needs, and building

connections to maintain engagement. Table 8 presents evidence of the student engagement

strategies sought and provided.

Table 8

Evidence of Student Engagement

Participants	Interview Quotes
Researcher & Teacher #4 (pre-observation interview cycle 2)	*Teacher #4: We've also been practicing the turn and talk that you shared.* *Susan Flis: Okay. How's that going?* *Teacher #4: It's better, but they still want to share with me, just because they share with a friend, they still want to say it aloud.* *Susan Flis: Right* *Teacher #4: So we've kind of said that once you say it out loud you are sharing. It doesn't have to be with me. But better, it's my own management piece. I think I love them to be engaged. So when their hand comes up, I really want to encourage that. That's me, but we can't continue to spend 30 minutes every single day on the read-aloud just because we have to get into our reading groups and that whole bit so yes, it's helped but it's still something I'm practicing.* *Susan Flis: Okay, that's good because that was my final question I was going to ask you. That was one of the challenges that you had brought up about their engagement and sharing and sustaining that attention piece. So I'm glad that you're practicing it and it's getting better.* *Teacher #4: Yeah, and I think it was easier at the fourth-grade level. I don't want to say shut them down but to say okay, you've already shared today, gosh in third grade, they're still energetic about learning and it's hard to be like, I don't want to hear from you. And I know I don't say it like that, but that's sometimes how I feel like they're taking it. So we're doing it in number corner too. So I do think by the end of the day everybody's had a little bit more time to share with each other and then share out with the class. So it's a good tip. Thank you for it.*
Researcher & Teacher #4 (pre-observation interview cycle 3)	*Susan Flis: I wanted to mention that I had given you those accountable talk resources and you talked about practicing the turn and talk more. So how is that going?*

Participants	Interview Quotes
	Teacher #4: Okay, we're even doing it in science. For sure, yesterday we were doing a science lesson and it was working with partners and I don't know if you know Mystery Science, every few slides they have to turn and share so I had them turn and talk with their shoulder partner and it really is cutting down on some of the conversation but also making them feel like they're all sharing. Maybe not with the entire class but to be able to say something. So yes, that helped for sure.
Participants	Interview Quotes
Researcher & Teacher #1 (post-observation interview cycle 2)	*Susan Flis: Okay, what do you think went with the interactive read-aloud lesson?* *Teacher #1: Definitely much better turn and talk, much better control. It's like the last one we were just all over the place, but I've been trying to have them or give them their partner before the story starts so that we're not doing that in the middle of the story. And then it's like we've kind of lost what we're doing. So, I think that worked out good. We read a story the day before that was called It's Okay to Be Different and I think the conversations were better in that story than they were with this one. I think they got it. I expected more discussion from them, to say more but I'm so happy with how they understood it and how they followed along with the story and I think the turn and talk went much better.*
Teacher #6 (post-observation interview cycle 1)	*Teacher #6: Challenges, I do feel like I went too long. So I feel like, but I mean it's such a heavy topic, so it's hard to cut it short, but I'm just, my own time keeping. I feel like I definitely extended it longer than I would like so that was a challenge. But again, the topic was heavy, so I don't know. I'm trying to think of different parts. I feel like that's all I can't really think of. I do know what challenges in general though is getting, it's the same hands over and over. So I really try not to make them feel like I went to call on them and I always call on someone who raises their hand who is not the two girls that raise their hand every single time. So I hear their conversations when I walk around, but I feel like that's the challenge kind of throughout, is to make them feel like they can share their voice.*
Researcher & Teacher #4 (post-observation interview cycle 1)	*Teacher #4: So I kind of give everybody that wiggle room of find a place that you're comfortable, a place that you can listen, a place that somebody won't bug you. Then that means they're all gonna head to the back. So I have to kind of pick my battles and if they want to sit at the back they can sit at the back but then that means they can't see the pictures and answer the questions. How much in an interactive read aloud do I not make a fight, but I'm*

	saying it's not a period in the day where I want to argue. So how much do I demand that they come closer and…then what do I do about the timing if it goes over? Is it okay. Do I hard stop it at 20 minutes? *Susan Flis: So In terms of the timing I have to say interactive read aloud was always my favorite part of the day and I don't think you guys have enough time in your schedule to really delve into it, but if you feel like you're losing engagement and you really need to stop it, it's okay to leave them kind of hanging and continue it the next day.*

Strategies to increase student engagement were provided to participants who sought this type of instructional support (see Appendix H).

Text Selection & Analysis. The final subordinate theme that emerged from the data was text selection and analysis. This was the most frequently requested type of instructional support requested by the teachers. As discussed previously, the teachers often wanted help selecting texts outside of the district-purchased materials. These teachers wanted to extend their students' thinking about themes presented through their district read-aloud texts. They felt more exposure to the theme and deeper conversations about the theme would lead to better understanding.

To support teachers, I chose texts that reflected the instructional goals and themes to share with the teachers. Some of the texts I gave them came from my own library. They were books I read when I was a classroom teacher. Some of the texts I gave them came from conducting a search on sites like *We Need Diverse Books* ([We Need Diverse Books – diversebooks.org](diversebooks.org)). Before I shared the books with teachers, I conducted a critical analysis of the text first. I conducted background research into the author and illustrator and examined the language of the text. I wanted to ensure that the books met the teachers' learning targets and reflected multiple identities and perspectives. I offered each teacher multiple options to choose from, always making it clear that they were not required to read my texts during their research

cycles. We often discussed the texts I shared between data collection cycles and teachers reflected on which texts they felt best served their instructional needs.

Post-observation interview data revealed that instruction using these supplemental texts was successful. In fact, some teachers requested additional texts while others shared that they had begun searching for texts on their own. In some cases, teachers wanted different texts than the ones I provided. We discussed whether or not the text fit their instructional goals. If not, I continued my search for more texts. These conversations around texts informed my coaching moves for our next cycles. For example, teacher #2 reached out to me after I gave her several books that featured characters with autism. She let me know that she started following a woman on Instagram who shares examples of inclusive books based on different themes and identities. I found the blog (www.maistorybook.com/blog) and then shared it with the other teachers who asked for more texts. This collaboration allowed me to better support the teachers and increased my own knowledge of available resources. As mentioned previously, the list of picture books that the participants read throughout the three cycles can be found in Appendix F.

To illustrate the benefits of these text-selection discussions, I share an excerpt from post-observation interviews. In cycle 3, teacher #3 read a text that I shared with her (see evidence from Teaching Multiple Literacies section). The text was selected in response to her post-observation interview in cycle 2, when she expressed the desire to use a text that taught similar themes with human rather than personified animal characters. This teacher felt that such a text would allow her students to make stronger connections to the lesson themes of individuality and unique identities:

Susan Flis: What is something you would like to work on for our final cycle?

Teacher #3: Maybe I'd like to choose a book that shows differences. I know there

was one that you had given me and I think it's called Just Ask, so it talks about

students who are autistic and things like that. So I'd like to find a book like that

and see how they respond to something like that and get into those conversations

because we don't have those often. I know that we did Not Normal and we talked

about, or A Normal Pig, and the penguin but maybe with people this time rather

than animals. I could work on something like that and I think they might be able

to relate better to something like that.

The book I gave her is called *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* by Monica Brown (2011). This

is a dual-language book where the text is in English and in Spanish. The teacher read the book in

English and showed her students the Spanish text, because she does not speak Spanish. However,

she does have students in her class who are multilingual with Spanish as their first language.

During our post-observation interview she shared with me that she collaborated with the EL

teacher who is fluent in Spanish and had her read the book again to her class, this time only in

Spanish. This teacher utilized critical literacy by teaching multiliteracies to create an inclusive

learning community.

In another example, teacher #2 asked for more inclusive texts during our post-observation

interview in cycle 1. She shared her belief that the district-purchased materials are inclusive, but

they could go further and provide texts about identities that are not represented. In her class, this

teacher has several students who are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD); therefore,

she wanted texts with characters those students could relate to and that might help other students

understand their classmates better. The first book I recommended is called *A Day with No Words*

by Tiffany Hammond (2023). This book is written by an author who identifies as autistic; it is

about a boy who is non-verbal. Upon reflection during our post-observation interview, the

teacher felt that the students were not quite understanding the message in the text:

> *Susan Flis: What challenges did you or they have with the text?*
>
> *Teacher #2: I think that it was hard for them to understand because in the*
>
> *beginning of the text it talked about the mom and the dad's voice, but then you*
>
> *learn later that the mom doesn't verbally communicate with the little boy in the*
>
> *story and I think that it was something I had to point out to them. I don't think*
>
> *they really understood that when he was talking about her voice it was how he*
>
> *heard it in his head. Even if she wasn't verbally communicating with him. So I*
>
> *think some of those things went over their head a little bit and I think they still*
>
> *haven't been exposed to children quite like the little boy in this story where they*
>
> *kept trying to equate him with a little boy in my class who doesn't speak English*
>
> *as well and obviously the story was about a nonverbal child with autism, so it is a*
>
> *big difference because our student is able to verbally communicate just not*
>
> *always in English, whereas this story was more about learning to communicate in*
>
> *other ways and I think that's hard for them at this age. I think, especially because*
>
> *these kids have been so affected by Covid and the lack of social skills that they*
>
> *have because they weren't out in the world when they were three and we were*
>
> *wearing masks and we were behind closed doors all the time. So I think they still*
>
> *are learning nonverbal cues and everything. I think even my most socially mature*
>
> *students have a hard time sometimes understanding that. So I think that was a*
>
> *hard concept for them to learn without me really driving that conversation.*

She then asked for more texts with characters with ASD, so I shared several options. For cycle 3, she read *A Friend for Henry* by Jenn Bailey (2019). In this book the main character has ASD, but he is verbal. This character presented similarly to some students in her class, so there was rich discussion about the theme of making friends. Here are some examples of the questions the teacher planned and then asked in response to her students' answers:

> *Do you ever think that making friends is hard? Think about that for a minute, is it hard work? Do you have a reason why?...Can you tell us what makes you nervous?...Sometimes it's hard to keep a friend too. Does anyone else feel that making a friend can be hard sometimes?... Have you ever done something for a friend that you thought was kind but they got upset with you?... Do we all have things that we like about people that make them a good friend to us?...Does anyone want to share what they look for when making a friend?... Do you sometimes meet friends that may do things a different way than you?*

Upon reflection, the teacher mentioned the possibility of rereading the same text to focus on different parts.

In cycle 1, teacher #6 read *The Bracelet* by Yoshiko Uchida (1996). This is a story of a Japanese girl whose family gets moved to an internment camp during World War II. During our post-observation interview, she asked for book suggestions and support with text analysis. This example is mentioned previously in this chapter.

> *Susan Flis: So going forward with instructing with inclusive picture books. What kind of support do you think you could benefit from?*
>
> *Teacher #6: I feel like book titles or different book suggestions would be a place to start.*

> *Susan Flis: We have to use certain materials and I do think that the text sets are*
>
> *good, but I think they could go further and I think the questioning could go*
>
> *further, like you're saying. So would you be open to some suggestions of different*
>
> *titles? And like what you're saying, I can give you some questions to ask that*
>
> *wouldn't just be the same kind of vanilla.*
>
> *Teacher #6: I would love that because I feel like even with the IRAs, sometimes it*
>
> *kind of misses that point. They'll have another focus. I know it's still being read,*
>
> *but maybe their focus is different for that book. So yeah,…*
>
> *Susan Flis: Right*
>
> *Teacher #6: So I definitely think I don't know if there is such a thing, but*
>
> *questions would be really helpful.*
>
> *Susan Flis: Okay, absolutely. So that's what we can work on and I'll get that to*
>
> *you before you do your next cycle.*

I gave her the book *A Different Pond* by Bao Phi (2017). This is a story about a family who immigrated from Vietnam to the United States. In the story a boy goes fishing with his father to catch dinner for their family. Bao Phi identifies as Vietnamese American and is a spoken word artist, writer, and community activist. He wrote this book to highlight the lives of Southeast Asian refugees in America. In our post-observation interview she reflected on the challenges the students had with the text:

> *Teacher #6: I felt like they kind of had a hard time figuring out or connecting the*
>
> *piece about families being the same or some of them. They were so focused on the*
>
> *differences because it's so obvious that they were having a hard time seeing the*

love of a family is the same or the communication of the family is the same. I feel

like that was a piece that was a little more challenging for them to piece together.

We then discussed how to decide what to focus on within a text, so that it is meaningful

for her students, and it pushes their thinking:

> *Susan Flis: Okay, I think that one of the things you can do, I'm sure you have the*
>
> *Literacy Continuum in your classroom…*
>
> *Teacher #6: Yeah, yeah.*
>
> *Susan Flis: I think one of the things you can do is really just choose a targeted*
>
> *goal and all of your questions stem from that because there is so much to unpack*
>
> *in these texts. There is the vocabulary, there's so many different aspects that you*
>
> *could go into. This text in particular had the whole theme of family, but then the*
>
> *whole theme of refugees and what that is like and so there was definitely a lot in*
>
> *such a simple picture book.*
>
> *Teacher #6: Yeah.*
>
> *Susan Flis: But I think when you plan your lesson, if you say this is my target then*
>
> *all my questions stem from that and that's not to say that there's no*
>
> *responsiveness because sometimes, they answer in certain ways that leads you*
>
> *somewhere else and that's okay too. But I understand what you mean because it's*
>
> *a lot to unpack.*
>
> *Teacher #6: Yeah, I think that's a great suggestion and I guess for this I was kind*
>
> *of thinking of it as the multicultural piece focusing on that. But I hear what you're*
>
> *saying about looking at a targeted standard and you're bringing that in just*
>
> *authentically with the text, but then still focused on that.*

Susan Flis: I think with these texts it's important to talk about the social justice

aspect, but I think what would be great is if we get to a point where it's not

abnormal for them to see different cultures and nationalities and all different

races and people and family structures in books all the time. That's the thing, so

then if we could ever get to that perfect place, then you can really focus more on

the other aspects of just, reading instruction, but it's hard because I think that we

want to drive home those themes at the same time as we're trying to teach them

how to be better readers.

Teacher #6: Okay, I feel like just having these conversations is helpful to just kind

of think it through because I get stuck in my head.

In our final pre-observation interview, I brought the previous conversation back to reflect on the

teacher's progress:

Susan Flis: Okay, so in our previous cycle you talked about using the Literacy

Continuum to make a more targeted goal because you felt like you were kind of

all over the place.

Teacher #6: Yeah. Yeah.

Susan Flis: How do you think that's going?

Teacher #6: I think it was good. I guess I was focusing on cultural diversity. I just

was like my head was stuck there and I was like, how can I pull out the cultural

diversity? But I didn't really think about I mean combining the two of course, I do

work with the books with the standards and such but just to kind of make it a little

more authentic or just blending it and not be like we have to focus on this only but

we can focus on a standard and notice this is a different setting than where we are

and this is a different culture than what they're going through. So I feel like it

helped my vision after having the conversation be like, I don't have to just be

cultural, but I can have a target and it just kind of goes seamlessly. Yeah.

Susan Flis: Yeah, absolutely. If we are really being culturally responsive then our

standards will have all of that embedded so it should not have to be separate

buckets, it should just all be together.

Teacher #6: Yeah.

Text selection and text analysis were the main type of instructional support sought by teacher #6.

Teacher #5 also asked for additional inclusive picture books. However, instead of reading them herself, she asked me to model interactive read-alouds for both of her classes after the PAR cycles were completed. My observations of this teacher took place in her 4th grade class, but she also teaches 5th grade. She asked me to read two of the texts I suggested. I recently read *We Are Still Here! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know* by Traci Sorell (2021) to her 4th graders and *Granddaddy's Turn: A Trip to the Ballot Box* by Michael S. Bandy and Eric Stein (2015) to her 5th graders. Both texts align with the standards she must teach in Social Studies for each grade. Although, this was not a part of my data collection, it is important to note that some participants are continuing to seek instructional support after the study was completed.

In addition to text selection, teachers also sought instructional support with text analysis. In cycle 3, teacher #1 was concerned about the text she was reading. It was *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle (1970). She was unsure of how to apply critical literacy to this text. When we met for the pre-observation interview, we discussed what it means to have a culturally responsive classroom. I supported her in understanding that being culturally responsive is knowing her

students, their backgrounds, and identities. I asked her how she could connect the text to her students' lives:

> *Susan Flis: How are diverse identities represented in the text?*
>
> *Teacher #1: So the only thing that I can kind of pull out of it is the book kind of follows the Tiny Seed in the story and how it's little and we don't know if it's gonna make it, like it's not growing as big as the other flowers but in the end, it does grow into this big beautiful flower. So it reminds me a little bit of Leo the Late Bloomer, which we did previously, that even though the seed is smaller it still is going to accomplish really great things. So, it was kind of hard, I mean, there's definitely a diverse person. Really, there's only a picture of one person and he's, oh there's just two, but there's a different ethnicity represented but besides that this is one of those tough ones where I said all right, if it's not clear where do we go?*
>
> *Susan Flis: So I was thinking about it after you said that this morning and what I would say is having a culturally responsive classroom means that you have a true understanding of your students, their backgrounds, and their identities. So I guess instead of thinking about how diverse identities are represented in that particular text, I would more think about how can you connect it to their lives? Because knowing your kids, really that's being culturally responsive regardless of our population.*
>
> *Teacher #1: So I think if we're looking at it that way, so I'm looking at it like my (*anonymous student 3) *or my (*anonymous student 4)*, my migrant students. We're working right now on planting and things. We are planting and growing and*

being that they have been kind of moved around a lot, I don't know that they

really have experience with that. So I think a lot of background knowledge,

building that up for them and explaining kind of why is this happening? This one's

getting too close to the sun and it's too hot and when it's too hot it's not going to

grow. So I think really kind of things that are inferred in the story, really talking

about them because they may not understand why those seeds are not growing or

why those seeds are no good anymore because they really haven't had exposure,

where other kids talking about their vegetable gardens and their flower gardens,

where they may never have so that's a very good point. So yeah, I definitely think

a lot of where things are implied in this story that needs to be more explicit

teaching for those students.

During the observation, the teacher continually connected the text to what the students were doing in the classroom. I observed frequent check-ins with all her students about what they already knew about seeds growing and about what they learned from the text. She also provided multiple turn-and-talk moments so students could learn from their peers. During these experiences, the teacher asked students open-ended questions about the text. For example, at one point during the read-aloud she stopped to ask: *Where do you think the seeds are going? Turn and tell a friend in your whisper voice.* Questions like this help to build critical thinking skills, because the students are using what they already know to construct knowledge. The teacher spoke about how the three students she had in her class from Haiti have different lived experiences than the majority of her class. This made it especially important for her to support all students in making connections with the text and where critical literacy skills came into play, because the teacher had to analyze the language of the text and how it played into the power

dynamic amongst her students. She then made instructional decisions, like focusing the students'
connections on the work they were doing in science, instead of pointing out differences in home
life experiences as a deficit.

Teacher #4 wanted to stay with the scope and sequence of her district-purchased read-
aloud text sets, but she struggled to find a diverse aspect of her scheduled text in cycle 3. During
our pre-observation interview I supported her in analyzing the text:

> *Teacher #4: It is called Baby Rattlesnake. It's about a rattlesnake who's born and*
> *does not have a rattle and he cries because his tail does not rattle. So his family*
> *decides to just give him a rattle and then it teaches that whole lesson of you have*
> *to earn things, not be given things. It's adorable. I don't know if I can find any*
> *diversity in that.*
>
> *Susan Flis: Baby Rattlesnake, does it say where it comes from? The original*
> *folktale, because a lot of these folktales come from different cultures and different*
> *countries.*
>
> *Teacher #4: This one does not, it's in the desert setting and then there's other*
> *different kinds of animals.*
>
> *Susan Flis: So I wonder if that is also something that I could help you with, do*
> *some research about the background.*
>
> *Teacher #4: Yes.*
>
> *Susan Flis: So, I just think that what we can do is, I'm already searching right*
> *now, is to see where this folktale comes from and maybe there is some diversity*
> *that way and I think that you go with your lesson plan.*
>
> *Teacher #4: Okay.*

>*Susan Flis: And see what comes up and if I have some background information,*
>
>*I'm happy to provide it for you. If you want to just talk to the students about that,*
>
>*even just folktales in general are a diverse genre because they're coming from a*
>
>*lot of oral storytelling that is from Indigenous people and Latinx people in South*
>
>*America, there was a lot of oral storytelling in those communities and then they*
>
>*got published as books later, but that is even a conversation to have with them*
>
>*about the text set in general.*
>
>*Teacher #4: Okay, at the very back cover it does say it's adapted from a Native*
>
>*American tale, this story. But it doesn't really come up in the story itself.*
>
>*Susan Flis: Perfect, but I think that even if it's a conversation about the genre.*
>
>*Teacher #4: The pictures definitely show some diversity there.*
>
>*Susan Flis: Yeah, absolutely.*
>
>*Teacher #4: Okay, so I will stick with this one. Perfect. Thank you for helping me*
>
>*figure that out.*

Text selection and text analysis emerged as the primary form of instructional support teachers needed throughout the duration of the research cycles.

Critical Conversations with Teachers

One surprising finding that emerged from data analysis was the critical nature of the coaching conversations and how these contributed to their learning. Given the power imbalance that can occur in the coaching relationship and the types of instructional support the teachers sought, data analysis revealed that critical conversations benefited all teachers. These critical conversations also revealed each teacher's capacity to build and apply critical literacy skills to their instruction. As shown in the interview transcripts included in this chapter, many of the

teachers engaged in reflective practice during the interviews. These interviews acted as a model

for critical conversations that teachers were then able to engage in with their students.

In the previous section, text selection and analysis, I included an interview excerpt that

illustrated my coaching move of guiding teacher #4 through a critical analysis of a text. After

that pre-observation interview, I conducted research on the folktale *Baby Rattlesnake* (Ata &

Moroney, 2006) and learned that the folktale originated from the Chickasaw tribe. Further

research revealed the location of the tribe and information about their storytelling tradition. I

created a short slide presentation of this research with visuals and a link to the official Chickasaw

Nation website and then shared it with teacher #4. She did not use this resource during the

observed read-aloud lesson. The following excerpt came from our post-observation interview:

Susan Flis: Okay, what do you think went well with the interactive read-aloud lesson?

Teacher #4: Very cute story, good engagement. I think they were able to determine the

theme and I felt like the sharing went better. They were able to share amongst themselves

and then come back together as a whole to share a couple.

Susan Flis: Good, what challenges did you think that they or you had with this text?

Teacher #4: I definitely had. We had kind of talked about bringing in that idea of diversity

and I still had trouble in the end. I don't know if you saw me kind of pause and bobble at

the end because I just felt like it was a little bit of a stretch.

Susan Flis: Okay.

Teacher #4: I didn't think I was going to get from them what I wanted. So I just ended it

and let them enjoy it as a read-aloud.

This example made me understand that adopting a critical literacy stance is complicated and that professional growth is not a linear process. In my first pre-observation interview with teacher #4, she spoke about her personal challenges instructing with inclusive picture books.

> *Susan Flis: So one more question: what challenges have you encountered when using inclusive picture books?*
>
> *Teacher #4: Yeah, so we were talking about this yesterday. Sometimes they're really difficult topics. They're sad. And I feel like I get the kids back from lunch and everybody's in a good mood and then I read a book about poverty to them and yesterday's book was about, it's called Struggling through Thursday because payday is tomorrow and the family doesn't have enough money and I think with all that kids are dealing with right now, do I really want to talk to them about not having enough money? But as I was reading it the kids were kind of nodding and leaning in and I think they are real topics that kids are talking about at home, topics that I probably would have sheltered my own child from so it brings up a lot of uncomfortable feelings on my end. Just things that I wouldn't necessarily talk to kids about that I'm now feeling like I have to.*

These examples support the finding that engaging teachers in critical conversations informs the instructional coach about the teachers' capacity to instruct with inclusive picture books. This information helps the instructional coach to plan their coaching moves with an individual teacher. These conversations also show that coaches must adjust their coaching moves when teachers are reluctant or resistant to change.

Conclusion

The quantitative data collected in this study was in the form of pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys. The purpose of this data was to gauge the participants' engagement and

comfort level with instructing with inclusive picture books, as well as to provide an opportunity to reflect upon the instructional coaching cycles. Overall, the findings revealed an increase in positive perceptions about instructing with inclusive picture books and the perceived need for instructional coaching.

The primary data collected in this study was qualitative and included interviews and observations. The a priori codes of teaching reflection, teaching multiple literacies, and teaching continuous inquiry were applied to the transcripts of the interviews and the observation notes. Evidence of all three codes was found amongst the teachers who participated in the study. Further deductive thematic analysis of the transcripts revealed the major theme of instructional coaching with the subordinate themes of questioning strategies, student engagement, and text selection & analysis. The findings revealed that instructional coaching can be provided in multiple ways depending on the needs of the teacher.

In terms of the research questions that drove this study, the findings revealed that instructional coaches can support elementary teachers in critically analyzing interactive read-aloud texts through reflective and collaborative conversations. During pre-observation interviews, we discussed the texts the teachers would read for their observed lesson. I coached them in analyzing the texts by discussing how diverse identities were represented and the power dynamic present in the text. These reflective and critical conversations supported teachers in building their capacity for critical literacy skills. Also, instructional coaches can support elementary teachers in facilitating critical conversations with students about inclusive picture books by providing guidance with questioning strategies, student engagement, and text selection.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL

REFLECTIONS

Overview

The purpose of this collaborative inquiry research was to explore how instructional

coaching can support teachers planning for critical literacy instruction with inclusive picture

books. In addition to the goal of engaging students in critical conversations about picture books,

this study aimed to support teachers in developing their own critical literacy skills. As the

instructional coach and primary researcher, I found multiple ways to support teachers with this

instruction. The instructional support was dependent upon collaboration between the teachers

and me. I also found that engaging teachers in reflective conversations helped them to build

capacity with critical literacy skills. This chapter is organized into the following sections and

subsections:

I.   Summary of Findings

II. Discussion

     a.   Discussion of Major Findings

     b.   Discussion in Relation to the Review of Literature

III. Implications

IV. Suggestions for Future Research

V. Limitations of Study

VI. Final Reflections

Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings of this study illustrated the benefit of instructional coaching to

support teachers in engaging students in critical conversations about inclusive children's books.

Instructional coaching is a way to support teachers in building critical literacy skills and in framing their instruction with a critical literacy perspective (Rogers, 2014). It is important to note that instructional coaching can come in various forms depending on the needs of the teacher (Aguilar, 2013, 2016, 2020). The different ways I provided instructional support to my participants throughout this study included: selecting texts, analyzing texts, suggesting student engagement strategies, creating conversation guides, providing additional resources like social identity activities, and engaging participants in reflective and collaborative conversations about their instruction.

The foundation of this instructional support was the individual relationships I was able to build with each participant. Building relational trust is paramount to successful coaching (Aguilar, 2013). My relationships with my participants were facilitated by the fact that they are also my colleagues. Throughout this study instructional coaching informed teacher instruction in various ways. For example, during post-observation interviews participants reflected on resources I provided for them including additional inclusive picture books and conversation guides that facilitated their class discussions. These reflective moments were at the heart of the relational trust built between my participants and myself during this study.

Discussion

The following subsections present the discussion of the findings of this study. The discussion of the major findings is described first, followed by the discussion of the findings in relation to the review of literature.

Discussion of Major Findings

Instructional support was the first major theme that emerged from thematic data analysis. The collaborative work done in this study grew organically with many of the participants. As we

continually discussed and analyzed the texts they read, they became more comfortable taking risks in the discussions they had with students about the texts. I found that my instructional support varied depending on the teacher. This is true for the kind of support I gave as well as the amount of support. For example, some teachers wanted additional resources and others focused more on the structure of their read-aloud lessons. Importantly, some teachers wanted to extend the work beyond the scope of this study, while others did not. This is similar to findings shared by Aguilar (2013, 2016, 2020). Her work illustrates the need for coaches to set individualized goals with the teachers they support.

It is important to note that some teachers were more open to receiving instructional support than others. For many teachers, coaching can be a vulnerable and uncomfortable experience. Some of the participants were enthusiastic and ready to engage in this work, while others consented out of a district obligation to participate in a coaching cycle. Data revealed that teachers who spoke openly about the lack of diversity in the district and the importance of instructing with inclusive picture books were more likely to ask questions and request additional titles for their classrooms. They were the teachers who asked for book suggestions and who read books to their classes outside of the district-purchased literature. With teachers who were more reluctant to change their instructional practices, coaching was a much bigger challenge. In these cases, I had to find another way to affect positive change. What I learned was that I could still apply my critical literacy stance to the goals the teachers set, even if their goals were not directly related to the content of the texts they read. For example, when teacher #4 asked for help with increasing student engagement, I gave her accountable talk resources with discussion prompts and sentence stems for the students to use in their peer discussions. The prompts and stems

allowed the students to confirm, challenge, and extend each other's thinking about the read-aloud texts, which is a critical literacy practice.

All six of the teachers did set goals to improve their interactive read-aloud instruction. Goal setting became a common thread amongst the teachers. Some teachers maintained the same goal throughout the three cycles, like improving student engagement and participation in class discussions (teacher #4). Some teachers set different goals throughout the cycles. For example, teacher #3 first expressed the desire to choose books to read to her students that are more focused on inclusion. In the next cycle, she wanted support with guiding the conversations she has with students and increasing her comfort level with engaging students in uncomfortable conversations. Teacher #6 set the goal of planning questions that would extend her students' thinking further during the post-observation interview in cycle 1. At the end of cycle 2, she went deeper into that goal. She wanted her questions to be more targeted and to combine her reading learning objectives with the aim of building her students' social consciousness. In the final cycle, she expressed the desire to continue this work through common planning and professional development. She felt the coaching conversations we had pushed and extended her thinking about the texts. Similarly, teachers #1, #2, and #5 all set goals during each cycle that facilitated reflective practice. Although the teachers set different goals, goal setting was a shared practice throughout the three collaborative inquiry research cycles. Moreover, it is a critical component to effective teacher development (Aguilar, 2013, 2016, 2020).

The following subsections present the interpretation of the findings to answer each of my research questions.

How can I as an instructional coach support elementary teachers in critically analyzing interactive read-aloud texts? The study revealed that instructional coaches can

support elementary teachers in critically analyzing interactive read-aloud texts through reflective and collaborative conversations. During each pre-observation interview, I asked my participants about the text they planned to read in the lesson and how diverse identities were represented in the text. This allowed teachers to think more deeply about the texts they read to their students and to plan for critical conversations with their students. In fact, at the end of the first cycle, it appeared that teachers were developing stronger reflective stances when discussing instructional texts. They requested additional inclusive texts to use in their lessons as well as examples of questions they could ask their students about the texts. Similar to Enriquez (2021) and Botelho (2021), these findings suggest that preparing teachers to think critically about text selection and modeling text analysis supports teachers' instructional planning and reflection.

Findings of this study also support instructional approaches forwarded by Enriquez (2021) and Botelho (2021), both of whom extended Bishop's (1990) metaphor of books as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. For example, teacher #3 first read a book about a character with a unique personality. During our post-observation interview we discussed the concept of "normal". When she asked for more books on this theme, I gave her several options to read during cycle 2. She chose to read *A Normal Pig* (Steele, 2019), which is a story about Pip, a pig with spots who grows up in an all-pink pig town. Pip thinks she is like everyone else until another character tells her that she is not normal. During our post-observation interview the teacher and I discussed how the students responded to the text. I pointed out the similarities between the setting of the story and the mostly White town where her students live. This was a detail the teacher did not think of when planning her instruction. We then discussed how she could support her students in making a connection like that with a text. Upon reflection, the teacher mentioned that both texts she read for the first two cycles had animals for characters. She

then asked me for another book with the theme of "what is normal?", with human characters. She

wanted her students to connect better to the story and to internalize the lesson. Through critical

text analysis she realized that the texts with animal characters were not allowing students to see

themselves or to empathize with classmates. This illustrates the need for teachers to understand

their students and to select texts based on that understanding.

Conversations with teachers varied; sometimes they would express concern that their

read-aloud text did not have diverse representation. In those cases, our conversation guided them

to see the text through a social justice lens. For example, in cycle 2 teacher #4 read *The Sunsets

of Miss Olivia Wiggins* by Lester Laminack (2018). This is the story of a great-grandmother with

Alzheimer's. The teacher was concerned about the lack of diversity in this text; we discussed

neurodiversity as a diverse identity and the fact that some of her students could relate to this text

because of similar experiences with elderly relatives. In cycle 3, this same teacher did not realize

the diverse nature of a traditional Indigenous folktale she planned to read. In our coaching

meeting, we researched the history of the folktale and the tribe it came from. In another example,

teacher #1 read *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle (1970) during cycle 3. She expressed concern about

drawing any kind of diversity from this text. We then discussed what it means to have a

culturally responsive and sustaining classroom. I helped her to see the text through a different

lens in which she could connect it to her students' lives or build enough background to make it

meaningful for all students. This process is similar to that described by Muhammed (2020) and

Parker (2022). Both Muhammed and Parker wrote about achieving educational equity by

celebrating the individual identities of your students. In this study, coaching conversations

guided these teachers to view each text through a social justice lens, which allowed them to

explore ways to make texts meaningful for students and connect those texts to their students'

lives.

Findings of this study also suggest that reflective conversations prepare teachers to build

their capacity for analyzing interactive read-aloud texts. The teachers in this study noticed the

identities of characters and power structures within the texts. Most of them wanted more

inclusive texts so that they could go deeper into the themes with their students. Similar to the

argument posed by Botelho and Rudman (2009), this ability to critically analyze texts is an

essential critical literacy skill for all teachers, because teachers must be aware of the power

dynamic and language structures in the texts they use in their classrooms.

This is true for instructional coaches as well. When the teachers asked me for additional

titles to share with their students, I needed to conduct my own critical text analysis. I wanted to

ensure that the books I gave them embodied the themes the teachers requested and that they

would challenge dominant culture thinking. To conduct my analysis, I would read the text and

ask myself these questions:

- How are non-dominant identities represented in this text?

- Is there an intersection of identities present?

- How do the characters or the message of the text challenge dominant culture thinking?

- Who is the author/illustrator? How do they identify themselves? What other texts have

  they written/illustrated? What is their purpose for writing/illustrating this text?

The texts I ultimately shared with the teachers challenged the status quo and embraced all

identities. They also presented an intersection of identity, which is important because we all

identify in multiple ways. For example, *A Day with No Words* (Hammond, 2023) is a story of a

boy who is non-verbal, Autistic, and Black. It was written by Tiffany Hammond, who is also

Autistic and Black and has two Autistic sons. She is a disability justice activist. I learned all of this information before sharing the book with teacher #2 who requested more texts with Autistic characters. In another example, *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* (Brown, 2011) is a dual-language text (Spanish and English) about a girl who identifies as Peruvian-Scottish-American and the theme of the text is individuality/non-conformist thinking. The author, Monica Brown, identifies as Jewish-Peruvian-American. I gave this book to teacher #3 when she requested a story with human characters that questioned the concept of normal. When I conducted my critical analysis of these books, I found them to be complex, rich texts that provided the teachers with multiple opportunities to push and extend their students' thinking. Something I learned from this study was that this deeper analysis of the texts would be beneficial to do collaboratively, coach and teacher together. That would make the learning more meaningful for the teachers.

How can I as an instructional coach support elementary teachers in facilitating critical conversations with students about inclusive picture books? In this study, findings suggest that instructional coaches can support elementary teachers in facilitating critical conversations with students about inclusive picture books through reflective conversations about their lessons and by providing teachers with additional resources. During each post-observation interview, participants reflected on what went well with their lessons and what challenges they or their students had with the text. All of the participants discussed ways to improve their instruction during the next read-aloud. The themes that emerged here were their questioning strategies and student engagement.

The study revealed that one way to provide instructional support for teachers who are planning interactive read-aloud lessons with inclusive picture books is through the questions they choose to ask students. Some of the participants only read texts from the district-purchased

materials while one of the participants did not veer from the prescribed lesson plans for those

texts. Importantly, five participants asked for support with formulating questions and probes for

books from their text sets, suggesting that they were aware that critical conversations will extend

their students' thinking (Lewison et al., 2002; Kesler et al., 2020). The teachers who chose to

read the books I provided for them also utilized instructional support when planning their

questions and stopping points, including conversation guides and questions to ask about different

social identities (see Appendix G). I observed those teachers using the questions I provided

during their lessons and many of them reported that they referred to the guides while they

planned other interactive read-alouds. It is important to keep in mind that the guides I created are

not intended to be used with fidelity. They are a starting point for teachers and coaches exploring

critical literacy practices. The ultimate goal is for teachers to be responsive to their students

when planning and conducting interactive read-aloud lessons.

Coaching also yielded opportunities to support teachers in the use of inclusive picture

books to increase and improve student engagement during their lessons. Cunningham and

Enriquez (2013) and other scholars argue that interactive read-aloud is an immersive social and

community building experience that engages students in discourse that extends their thinking.

Findings from this study illustrate this argument. For example, in cycle 1 teacher #4 asked about

her students' behavior during the lesson and reflected that only a few of them participated in the

discussion. This was a teacher who was more resistant to coaching. Her desire to increase student

engagement was an opportunity for me to show her the benefits of instructional coaching. I

created a document for her with a few different student engagement strategies and some

accountable talk strategies (see Appendix H). During our pre-observation interview in cycle 2

she reflected that student engagement increased, but she felt they needed more practice with the

strategy. I then gave her a resource that provided accountable talk routines, sentence stems, and even bookmarks for her students to help them frame their sharing and peer discussion. During my observation, I noticed her providing turn-and-talk opportunities for her students. She later commented that she is trying turn and talk strategies in other content areas like science and math. She reflected that making her read-aloud a more interactive, social experience for her students resulted in increased participation and engagement during the lesson. This was a moment to celebrate, because progress was made with a reluctant participant.

Similarly, teacher #1 asked for support with turn and talk strategies for her kindergarten students. She wanted her students to be able to share, but she also needed to manage the sharing in a way where they all felt heard, and her lesson stayed within her time constraints. She told me that she tried different things but was not finding it easy to manage with kindergartners. I created a slideshow for her with tips and tricks to implementing turn and talk in kindergarten. It had example anchor charts to teach the routines as well as simple sentence stems her students could use. I also provided her with hand signal posters so she could teach the students nonverbal response cues. During my next observation it was evident that this teacher taught the students the routines. She utilized several of the tips I provided, and her students were more engaged and on task during the lesson. Later she told me that her read-aloud discussions were going more smoothly, and she was able to have richer discussions with her students about the themes in the texts because of the increase in engagement and participation.

Through reflective conversations and additional resources, I supported elementary teachers in facilitating critical conversations with their students about inclusive picture books. This included strategies for questioning and student engagement.

Discussion in Relation to the Review of Literature

This research was framed by critical literacy theory (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1987; hooks, 2010; Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Macedo, 1987; Shor, 1999; Vasquez, 2014) and its tenets. When teachers are supported in using critical literacy theory as a lens for planning and implementing instruction, they can engage in reflection and inquiry that allows them to plan and facilitate these experiences for students (Rogers, 2014). I designed critical text analysis questions for the interviews I conducted. I wanted the teachers to unpack the texts they were reading to reveal their complexity by thinking about representation, power structures, and language. Upon reflection, I realize more work needs to be done for the teachers to build their capacity for critical text analysis. Each participant brought different levels of experience with critical literacy practices to this study. Their experience or inexperience impacted their confidence with the topics we discussed (Hamre & Oyler, 2004). Overall, the participants in this study did not allow inexperience to stop them from reflecting and improving their practice.

A multiple literacies perspective also framed this study. It is an inclusive practice that allows teachers to design instruction that fosters inclusivity and a sense of belonging in the classroom (New London Group, 1996). Chafel and Neitzel (2012) and others have argued that engaging students in critical literacy practices builds their social consciousness and their ability to examine the dynamics of language and power structures within texts (Hawkins, 2014; Leland et al., 2005; Vasquez, 2014).

Throughout data analysis, strong connections emerged between identity and positionality and the participants' capacity to understand critical literacies. Although all six teachers and I identify as White women, we hold other contrasting identities, and our different experiences have influenced our positionalities. Several scholars have argued that critical literacy skills are influenced by a teacher's identity and disposition (Janks, 2018; Vasquez et al., 2019). This was

evident in the findings of this study as well. Some of the teachers collaboratively analyzed texts with me, looked beyond the surface to find deeper meaning, and made critical connections to support their students' understanding. Interestingly, teacher #4 was either unwilling or unable to engage in critical reflection. She refused to go beyond the prescribed lesson plan and was focused primarily on meeting reading standards rather than examining issues of social justice and how texts and curriculum could address these issues. In fact, the only support she asked for was related to increasing student engagement and participation. Upon reflection, I am left wondering how I could have better used her identity and positionality to help her build her capacity for critical literacy skills and positive perceptions regarding the value of inclusive texts.

As the primary researcher and a participant in this research, I employed critical literacy theory when analyzing the content of my study and framed my coaching with a critical literacies' lens. I engaged participants in cycles of continuous inquiry by asking open-ended questions. I used language that facilitated reflection and supported participants in constructing knowledge. Importantly, I found that instructional coaching must be responsive to the individual teacher the coach supports, as Roger (2014) argues. Findings of this study extend the literature on critical literacy theory by applying it to practical applications in the classroom.

This study supports the argument that teaching with diverse literature is critical for children of all identities. When children see themselves represented in the texts they read and have examples of cultures other than the dominant culture, they are better able to make critical connections with texts (Bishop, 1982, 1990, 2016; Parker, 2022). Not only must children see themselves through the books they read, but they must also see everyone else. This broadens their perspectives and builds empathy (Bennett et al., 2018; Dadds et al., 2008; Husband, 2019).

When children of the dominant culture read only about characters that reflect their own

privileged identities, they develop a false sense of superiority that fosters bias (Bishop, 2016).

The importance of instruction with inclusive picture books was clear during post-

observation interviews when the teachers reflected upon their read-aloud lessons and their

students' responses to the texts. They reported that their students became outraged at injustice in

texts like *The Bracelet* (Uchida, 1996) and *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendes & Her*

Family's Fight for Desegregation (Tonatiuh, 2014). Several teachers commented on the lack of

diversity in the town. They presented this as a challenge to instructing with inclusive picture

books. However, they also gave the lack of diversity as a reason why using inclusive books is so

beneficial for their students. Overall, the participants value diversity and inclusion in the texts

they read to their students and sought more texts that included more identities.

Similar to findings gleaned from this study, Botelho (2021) and others argue that teachers

must think critically about their text selection and about the questions they ask students to

engage them in critical conversations about inclusive children's books. In cycle 3, I supported

teacher #4 in applying a critical lens to the book *Baby Rattlesnake* (Ata & Moroney, 2006). She

was having trouble seeing how she would draw diversity from this text. During our pre-

observation interview it was revealed that the book came from an Indigenous folktale. I provided

her with some research on the background, like which tribe the story came from and where that

tribe is located. We discussed talking to the students about the folktale genre and how those

stories came from different cultures with oral storytelling as a tradition. When I observed the

lesson, the teacher only asked questions from the prescribed lesson plan and did not discuss the

genre or the culture the story came from. It was obvious to me that she was uncomfortable going

in this direction with the lesson. This highlights the importance of thinking critically about the

texts teachers choose to read and the questions they choose to ask. This felt like a missed

opportunity for the teacher and her students. This example also illustrates the tensions that can

exist between instructional coaches and the teachers they support. When educational

philosophies differ between the two professionals, finding common ground can be challenging.

The data for this teacher shows that she would benefit from additional coaching cycles. If I had

that opportunity, it would be my job to reflect upon my coaching and adjust my practice to better

support her.

This study further supports literature discussing the benefits of instructional coaching.

For example, Aguilar (2013) and Haneda and colleagues (2017) argue that coaching can be an

effective tool to support teachers in reflective practice. Through the trusting relationships built

between instructional coaches and teachers, teachers can grapple with problems of practice and

express their views in safe spaces as they work with more experienced colleagues to improve

their instruction. Findings from this study supported this argument and also extended the

research on the benefits of instructional coaching. Specifically, there is a need to support pre-

service and in-service teachers in developing critical literacy skills (Kelly, Laminack, & Gould,

2020; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe, 2012; Ticknor, Overstreet,

& Howard, 2020). The findings of this study revealed a practical application for that argument.

Through critical conversations with teachers about their instruction, I facilitated their reflective

practice. These critical conversations acted as a model for the level of discussion and reflection

teachers can engage in with their students.

Finally, this study supports the literature reviewed that found that instructional coaching

must be responsive to the individual teacher the coach supports (Rogers, 2014). The teachers in

this study started the coaching cycles at different places in their understanding of critical

literacies. It was my job to meet them each where they were at by tailoring my coaching to meet their individual needs. Critical literacy is a way of being (Janks, 2018; Vasquez et al., 2019), not just a belief about education. It is important for instructional coaches, who are also critical literacy practitioners, to understand that not all teachers have adopted this way of being and some will never. This was a key lesson learned in my study that warrants further exploration.

Implications

Instructional coaching increases teacher capacity for critical literacy skills and positive perceptions regarding engaging students in critical conversations about race, class, ability, and identity. There are implications for that conclusion for instructional coaches, teachers, and school administrators.

The lessons learned from this study can guide instructional coaches in how they support their colleagues in building critical literacy skills in themselves and in their students. The most important thing for instructional coaches to understand is that building trusting relationships with the teachers they coach is paramount to their success (Aguilar, 2013). Coaches must create safe and judgement-free spaces so teachers will be reflective. It is also essential that coaches engage in reflection themselves. Coaches and teachers should work collaboratively to improve instruction.

Another lesson learned from this study and previously reviewed literature (Rogers, 2014) is that instructional support should be differentiated to meet the individual needs of the teacher. It is important to note that my positionality, identities, and philosophical assumptions played a significant role in this study. The lessons gleaned from this study might be different for other instructional coaches.

Teachers can use this study to guide their own professional development in critical

literacy and instructing with diverse texts. Many districts do not provide instructional coaches for

their teachers. Extant literature and findings of this research may provide teachers with a purpose

and rationale for enacting critical literacy theory in their classrooms. Moreover, teachers may

find the resources provided through this study helpful as they plan instruction with inclusive

picture books.

Administrators can use this study as a guide when creating school improvement plans,

making curriculum decisions, and purchasing classroom resources. Administrators should use

critical literacy and culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy as lenses when evaluating

curricular materials. In addition, this study highlights the importance of instructional coaching

and instructional support for their teachers. If administrators want their teachers to engage in

reflective practice, they must provide the time and space necessary for that work. Instructional

coaches can facilitate that reflection which will lead to instructional improvement.

Suggestions for Future Research

Given the limitations of this study and the importance of the findings, there is a need for

further research aimed at investigating the effectiveness of instructional coaching to support

teachers' use of diverse texts. Specifically, it is important to replicate this study with a larger

sample size and to expand the study beyond three research cycles. The following subsections

provide suggestions for future research within the realms of K-12 instruction, teacher education,

and the literacy field at large.

Research to Support K-12 Instruction

More research should be conducted on adopting critical literacy pedagogy in K-12

classrooms. The study should be expanded beyond interactive read-aloud lessons, since this is

not the only time during the school day that students interact with texts. Research could be conducted on how elementary teachers apply critical literacy and culturally and linguistically sustaining literacy practices to guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, and also writing instruction. It would also be interesting to replicate this study in diverse school settings. This research took place in a suburban district where the population is predominantly White. Critical literacy research should also be conducted in school districts where the communities are more racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse.

Research to Support Teacher Education

Going beyond the parameters of this study, I am also left wondering how we can further support teachers in developing critical literacy skills. Specifically, how can instructional coaches engage reluctant and resistant teachers in this work? Future research could be conducted on teacher professional development and how to make those opportunities reflective of culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy. This same lens could be applied to teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities. The courses that preservice teachers are required to take should be reviewed, analyzed, and possibly restructured with the tenets of critical literacy in mind.

Research to Support the Field of Literacy

Future research that would benefit the field of literacy would be to use the aims and objectives of this study with a different research method. Collaborative inquiry aligned with my research questions. However, we could look at building teacher capacity for critical literacy skills through a phenomenological study. This study would examine teachers' positionalities and lived experiences and how they impact their understanding of critical literacy and their ability to apply critical literacy to their instruction. This study could also be replicated through PAR. This would

involve having the participants become co-researchers as they design the study and analyze the data collaboratively.

Limitations of Study

A limitation of my study is the sample size. While there were clear lessons learned from the six participants, the scope of those lessons is limited due to the small sample size. Also, the demographics of the participants is a limitation. All six participants identify as White women. Their positionalities and perspectives could have impacted how they responded and their willingness to engage students in critical conversations about social justice issues. Another limitation is the participants' lack of experience with DEIJ work. I asked each participant at the beginning of the study if they ever participated in coursework or professional development focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice. Only one participant had extensive experience with DEIJ courses. This same participant previously taught in urban and more diverse districts. The other five participants either reported no experience with DEIJ work or very limited experience. This lack of foundational knowledge could limit the participants' ability to critically analyze texts.

The final limitation is the method of study I chose. Collaborative research can be seen as a limitation because the researcher has a previously established relationship with the participants. This may make it difficult to apply the lessons learned from this study to other teachers and in other districts. Without the relationships I had with my participants, I feel that the results of the study would be very different. My participants already knew me. Five out of six of them have worked with me for many years. Teacher #3 is a new classroom teacher as she is only in her second year of teaching. However, I coached her for a cycle the previous year. Therefore, the

existing relationships between myself and my participants facilitated our conversations and reflections.

Final Reflections

I argue that all children need access to diverse and inclusive picture books. Stories are powerful and they are a vehicle for children to see beyond their own worlds. Also, children of all identities need to see themselves in books, so they know they are not alone. This helps them to feel valued and to develop the literacy skills necessary to succeed in society. This contributes to our society as a whole. Instead of being a segregated society that maintains systems of oppression, we could be a diverse and inclusive society that values equity and justice. I believe that this would make us stronger and more globally competitive, because we would stop holding people down and start building people up.

However, filling our bookshelves with inclusive picture books is not enough. Teachers must learn to critically select and analyze the texts they use in instruction, so they can engage their students in critical conversations that will build their social consciousness. Teachers can certainly do this work on their own, but the demands on classroom teachers are greater than ever. Instructional coaches can work collaboratively with teachers to facilitate reflection and instructional improvement. However, it is important to note that instructional coaching is not a cure-all. I can guide and support teachers, but in the end, they need to do the work. Things will never get better if they don't look inward. Doing self-identity and anti-racist work will make them more comfortable having critical conversations about social justice with their students. They will still make mistakes along the way, but they'll be able to reflect on those mistakes and correct their course. If districts provide instructional coaches, or at least instructional support in some form, teachers can engage in reflective practice more effectively.

Reflective practice is also essential for the instructional coach (Aguilar, 2013, 2016, 2020). Instructional coaches may have more experience with the instruction they are seeking to support; however, it would be unwise for a coach to think they know better than the classroom teacher. Just as teachers must engage in reflective practice and adjust their instruction based on the needs of their students (Schön, 1984) instructional coaches must reflect and adjust their practice based on the needs of the adults they support (Aguilar, 2013, 2016, 2020). As evidenced in my study, some teachers will resist coaching and change. In these cases, the coach must find a way to build trust and maintain a healthy relationship with the teacher. In my district, coaching was mandated this past school year. This worked for some teachers, because they were already engaging in reflective practice. However, for other teachers, it immediately caused a sense of distrust. I believe that coaching must be built into the culture of the school to be fully effective, and that is something that takes time.

The same is true for social justice and anti-racist teaching. One way I tried to mitigate the participants' lack of experience with DEIJ work was to provide social identity activities and resources. These resources were helpful to me when I was starting to do this work. However, this takes a commitment on the part of the teachers and the understanding that it is a lifelong journey. I must also recognize that not all instructional coaches and teachers will share my philosophical assumptions. As is evidenced in this study, some teachers wish to maintain the status quo. I am unsure if the work I did will have a lasting impact on teachers who are reluctant to change or resistant to instructional coaching. However, the lessons learned from this study do have implications for coaches and teachers who want to be change agents and disrupt systems of oppression and exclusion. There were successes and reasons to celebrate throughout this study. I witnessed moments of gradual release as teachers shared inclusive books they found on their

own with me or when they shared stories of how they collaborated with colleagues. Multiple

teachers told me that just participating in the interviews broadened their perspectives on how to

teach with inclusive books. The collaborative and reflective nature of this study led to

instructional improvement.

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Schachner, J. (2003). *Skippyjon Jones.* Dutton Juvenile.

Seuss, Dr. (1950, 1977). *If I ran the zoo.* Random House.

Steele, K-F. (2019). *A normal pig.* Balzer + Bray.

Tonatiuh, D. (2014). *Separate is never equal: Sylvia Mendes & her family's fight for
    desegregation.* Harry N. Abrams.

Uchida, Y. (1996). *The bracelet.* Puffin Books.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment and Informed Consent Form

Critical Conversations: Consent Form

Hi everyone! I am looking for 4-6 classroom teachers to participate in my dissertation study. Please read the description below and answer the question if you would like to participate. If more than 6 teachers want to participate the participants will be chosen at random. The typing of your name will be taken as informed consent. Thank you in advance!

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study: *Critical Conversations: Supporting Elementary Teachers in Instructing with Inclusive Children's Literature*. You are free to decline participation or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher or school district in which the study will take place.

The purpose of this action-based research is to explore how to support teachers in building critical literacy skills and how to guide them while they are planning for instruction with these materials. A goal of this study is to support teachers in engaging students in critical conversations about inclusive children's books.

This study will use a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, meaning the researcher will collaborate with the teachers. We will follow a logic model of Diagnose, Act, Measure, Reflect. Participants will be asked to complete a Google Form survey at the beginning of the study. Then they will participate in a pre-observation semi-structured interview over Google Meet. These interviews will be recorded and transcribed for the purpose of data collection. The researcher will then observe an interactive read-aloud lesson in each participant's classroom. The cycle will end with a post-observation semi-structured interview over Google Meet. This interview will also be recorded and transcribed. This cycle of pre-observation interview, observation, and post-observation interview will take place 3 times for each participant. At the end of the 3 cycles, the participants will be asked to complete another Google Form survey. The projected timeline of this study is January 2024 through May 2024. Each interview will be 10-15 minutes long and the observations will take place for the scheduled 20-25 minutes that teachers have for interactive read-aloud.

There are no known risks associated with this study. Both surveys will be completely anonymous unless you choose to identify yourself. All data will remain confidential. All recorded data will be downloaded to a personal storage device, will be kept confidential, and will be destroyed after 5 years. We will be utilizing district-purchased materials. The expected

benefits include instructional support and a deeper awareness of the values of equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice.

There is a Standing
Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which
complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be
reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu.

Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the
nature and purpose of this study. A copy of this form will be given to you to
keep.

December 2023

Signature of Participant:

_____

Susan Flis, M.Ed.

Instructional Coach

Somerset Public Schools

* Indicates required question

1. Would you like to participate in this study? *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Yes

    ◯ No

2. If you chose "yes", please type your full name below to indicate consent.

    _____

Appendix B

Pre-Intervention Survey

Pre-Intervention Survey: Instructing with Inclusive Picture Books

Greetings colleagues! Thank you all so much for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study. Please fill out this survey to get us started. This survey is completely anonymous and there are no identifying questions, so please feel comfortable responding honestly. Thanks again!

* Indicates required question

1. How often do you conduct interactive read aloud lessons? *

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Once a week

   ◯ Twice a week

   ◯ 3 times a week

   ◯ 4 times a week

   ◯ Everyday of the school week

2. Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *
   The F & P IRA text sets offer a diverse range of inclusive picture books to share with students.

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Strongly disagree

   ◯ Disagree

   ◯ Neutral

   ◯ Agree

   ◯ Strongly agree

3. Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *
I feel comfortable reading books to my students that present diverse cultures and identities.

Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Strongly disagree
- ⬭ Disagree
- ⬭ Neutral
- ⬭ Agree
- ⬭ Strongly agree

4. Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *
I feel comfortable engaging my students in critical conversations about diverse and inclusive picture books.

Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Strongly disagree
- ⬭ Disagree
- ⬭ Neutral
- ⬭ Agree
- ⬭ Strongly agree

5. Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement:
   Teachers need support in planning for critical conversations with elementary students about diverse and inclusive picture books.

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Strongly disagree

   ◯ Disagree

   ◯ Neutral

   ◯ Agree

   ◯ Strongly Agree

Appendix C

Pre- and Post-Observation Interview Questions

Pre-Observation Interview Questions
(First 5 questions will be asked during the first pre-observation interview only.)
1. Before we begin, can you please give me your preferred personal pronouns?
2. How many years have you been a classroom teacher?
3. Have you had any experience with instructional coaching?
4. Have you participated in any coursework or professional development focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, & justice?
5. What are the benefits of instructing with inclusive picture books?
6. What is the title of the book you will be reading for your observation?
7. How are diverse identities represented in this text?
    a. Follow up questions could be asked here depending upon participant response.
8. What do you want your students to think about or learn from this text?
9. What did you do to plan for your desired outcome?
10. What challenges have you encountered when using inclusive picture books? (1st cycle)—In cycle 1 you mentioned _____ as a challenge when using inclusive picture books, has this changed and how? (2nd cycle)—In cycle 2 you asked for support with _____, how is that going? (3rd cycle)
    a. Follow up questions could be asked here depending upon participant response.

Post-Observation Interview Questions:
1. What do you think went well with the interactive read-aloud lesson?
2. What challenges did you or your students have with the text?
3. What kind of support do you think you would benefit from when instructing with inclusive picture books?
    a. Follow up questions could be asked here depending upon participant response.
4. What do you do when you encounter a picture book that advances stereotypes about people from historically marginalized groups? (1st cycle only)
    a. Follow up questions could be asked here depending upon participant response.
5. What is something you would like to work on during our next coaching cycle? (This question will be asked for the first 2 cycles, not at the end of the final cycle.)

Appendix D

Observation Protocol

What you will observe (e.g. physical setting, events, someone's behaviors, your reactions, and emotions)	Why? Explain how the information you will gain help you answer your Research Questions.	Observations
Teacher's behaviors (questions teacher asks about text, how teacher responds to student responses)	This will tell me what level of support the teacher may need when instructing with diverse texts. It will also tell me the teacher's ability to be responsive to the students.	
My reactions, feelings, thoughts, and questions.	This will guide me in planning for my post-observation interview.	

Appendix E

Post-Intervention Survey

Post-Intervention Survey: Instructing with Inclusive Picture Books

Greetings colleagues! Thank you all so much for your help this year and your commitment to our students. The final task to complete is this survey. Once again, this survey is completely anonymous and there are no identfying questions, so please answer honestly. I look forward to sharing our results with you. Thank you again!

* Indicates required question

1. Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *
   I feel comfortable reading books to my students that present diverse cultures and identities.

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Strongly disagree

   ◯ Disagree

   ◯ Neutral

   ◯ Agree

   ◯ Strongly agree

2. Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *
   I feel comfortable engaging my students in critical conversations about diverse and inclusive picture books.

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Strongly disagree

   ◯ Disagree

   ◯ Neutral

   ◯ Agree

   ◯ Strongly agree

3. Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *

   Teachers need support in planning for critical conversations with elementary students about diverse and inclusive picture books.

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Strongly disagree

   ◯ Disagree

   ◯ Neutral

   ◯ Agree

   ◯ Strongly Agree

4. Mark the degree to which you agree with this statement: *

   Having support from an instructional coach was beneficial to my teaching this year.

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Strongly disagree

   ◯ Disagree

   ◯ Neutral

   ◯ Agree

   ◯ Strongly agree

Appendix F

Picture Books Read Throughout PAR Cycles

Books	Participants	PAR Cycle	District Purchased or Coach Suggested
Hats, Hats, Hats by Ann Morris	Teacher #1	1	District
Leo the Late Bloomer by Robert Kraus	Teacher #1	2	District
The Tiny Seed by Eric Carle	Teacher #1	3	District
Stellaluna by Janell Cannon	Teacher #2	1	District
A Day with No Words by Tiffany Hammond	Teacher #2	2	Coach
A Friend for Henry by Jenn Bailey	Teacher #2	3	Coach
Tacky the Penguin by Helen Lester	Teacher #3	1	District
A Normal Pig by K-Fai Steele	Teacher #3	2	Coach
Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match by Monica Brown	Teacher #3	3	Coach
Soccer Star by Mina Javaherbin	Teacher #4	1	District
The Sunsets of Miss Olivia Wiggins by Lester Laminack	Teacher #4	2	District
Baby Rattlesnake by Te Ata, adapted by Lynn Moroney	Teacher #4	3	District
The Bracelet by Yoshiko Uchida	Teacher #5	1	District
A Different Pond by Bao Phi	Teacher #5	2	Coach
Ada's Violin by Susan Hood	Teacher #5	3	District
Ada's Violin by Susan Hood	Teacher #6	1	District
Strong to the Hoop by John Coy	Teacher #6	2	District
Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendes & Her Family's Fight for Desegregation by Duncan Tonatiuh	Teacher #6	3	District

Appendix G

Conversation Guides

Questions to Build Critical Thinking and Critical Literacy Skills

- How do you know this?
- How would your perspective be different if you were on the opposing side?
- How would you solve this problem?
- Do you agree or disagree and why?
- How could we avoid this problem in the future?
- Why does it matter?
- What's another way to look at this issue?
- Can you give me an example?
- How could it have ended differently?
- How can we tell if the solution worked?
- Why did you ask that question?
- Who would be affected by this?
- What can this story teach us about our own lives?
- Why is this a problem?

Quick Guide to Having Critical Conversations with Students:

Shifting from Avoidance to Invitation

Talking to students about *race* through read-alouds:

- What do you notice about the characters? How would you describe them? Using words about skin color, race, gender, and age, how would you add to those descriptions?
- The character in this book was treated differently because of their race. What are some of the examples where the character was treated differently?
- What advantages or privileges did the characters hold? Which characters did not have advantages or privileges? What connections do you make between race and how characters were treated in this book?

Talking to students about *class* through read-alouds:

- How would you define home?
- Does a home have to be a house? What other kinds of homes do you know about?
- Describe the character's home in this book. What do you notice? How is this different from your home?

- How is the character's life different from yours? How is it the same?

Talking to students about *families* through read-alouds:

- What is a family? Tell me who is in your family.
- Are all families the same?
- How is the family in this book different from yours? How is it the same?
- What do you think is the most important thing about a family?

Talking to students about *gender* through read-alouds:

- What do you know about gender?
- Have you ever felt like you didn't fit in with other people your age? How did that make you feel?
- What are some things that make you different from your friends? What are things that make you the same?
- What is your favorite color? Why is it your favorite?
- How do you express your gender?
- What are ways we can change our language to be more inclusive? (ex: not saying boy/girl colors or clothes, teachers not addressing the class as "boys and girls", etc.)

Talking to students about *sexual orientation* through read-alouds:

- <u>What Do You Say to "That's So Gay"...</u>
- Most picture books that deal with sexual orientation will introduce it through the family lens. Refer back to questions about family structure.

Talking to students about *dis/ability* through read-alouds:

- What does it mean to be "normal"?
- Who is considered "normal'? Why?
- Who decides what "normal" is?
- What is the problem with thinking certain things are normal and other things are not normal?
- What makes it easier for you to learn?
- How can we celebrate all kinds of minds and ways of learning?
- How do you express yourself when you are feeling mad or angry? How can you help others understand your feelings?
- Think about our school. Do you think it is inclusive and accessible to everyone? What things should we change to make it more inclusive and accessible?
- How can you help make sure that every student in your classroom or at your school feels welcome and included?

Appendix H

Interactive Read Aloud Routines to Increase Student Engagement

Turn and Talk:

This strategy permits all students to participate in discussion, rather than only a few students participating in a class-wide discussion. All students are able to process new learning while engaging in meaningful conversation with a classmate.

Suggestions:

- Have students sit next to someone they want to share with when they come to the rug.
- Establish clock partners ahead of time and have them sit next to a certain clock partner at the beginning of a read aloud.

Think-Pair-Share:

Think-pair-share is a collaborative learning strategy where students work together to solve a problem or answer a question about an assigned reading. This strategy requires students to (1) think individually about a topic or answer to a question; and (2) share ideas with classmates. Discussing with a partner maximizes participation, focuses attention, and engages students in comprehending the reading material.

Graffiti Wall:

Set up a graffiti wall in your classroom where students can write down thoughts, questions, connections, etc. about the books you read aloud. They can write them on sticky notes, and you can use them as a focus of a class discussion. If they write their names, you could discuss their contribution during an individual reading conference or when you write to them in their Reading Notebooks. This can be prompted or open-ended. If you have a question you want them to think about and respond to and you're running short on time, have them respond on the graffiti wall.

Appendix I

Continuing the Conversation

This is a list of books that contain practical self-reflective and classroom activities that will further the work we did during these cycles. Thank you again for all of your hard work!

Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools and Beyond (3rd edition) by Glenn Singleton (2022)

Critical Comprehension: Lessons for Guiding Students to Deeper Meaning by Kaitie Kelly, Lester Laminack, & Vivian Vasquez (2023)

Rebellious Read Alouds by Vera Ahiyya (2022)

Teaching Children's Literature: It's Critical! By Christine Leland, Mitzi Lewison, & Jerome Harste

The Identity Conscious Educator: Building Habits & Skills for a More Inclusive School by Liza Talusan (2022)

This Book is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action, and Do the Work by Tiffany Jewell (2020)