

JOURNAL OF LITERACY INNOVATION

RETHINKING LITERACY INSTRUCTION

**VOLUME SIX, ISSUE ONE
SPRING 2021**

**SPECIAL THEMED ISSUE ON DIVERSITY, LITERACY, & CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION
ISSUE CO-EDITORS: TIFFANY A. FLOWERS AND SEAN RUDAY**

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MISSING VOICES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM: CULTURAL IDENTITY, LEXICAL, AND AUTHENTICITY IN CAJUN, CREOLE, AND NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Abstract

It is important for all members of a culture or community (including school community) to “encourage children to understand cultural differences, to take pride in individual differences and use this understanding to develop uniqueness versus awkwardness in society” (Cox & Wallis, 1982, 264). If young children are supported within the visualization of how they reflectively see their fit within the world, there are possibilities to embrace the leadership benefits of heritage and belonging, and eventually gain the understanding of how to use their cultural authenticity as a strength of character development.

Authors explored regional libraries for diverse books, specifically for preservice teachers to use as an emerging model of English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies curriculum planning with children's literature. There was a lack of authentic cultural connections in these libraries to support multicultural populations in their historical and current diverse literature sections. The authors contend that developmentally, children must see themselves in picture books and other literature to make genuine connections for a cultural identity, language, and self-identification in children's literature. Portrayal of all cultures accurately is important to reduce bias and misconceptions of others who might be different than the reader. We uncovered missing voices in Cajun, Creole and Native American in children's literature.

Key terms: Diverse books, cultural identity, Cajun, Creole, Native American, multicultural literature, picture books, culturally responsive teaching.

Missing Voices Within the Classroom: Cultural Identity, Lexical, and Authenticity in Cajun, Creole, and Native American Children's Literature

Introduction & Background

Authenticity of Picture Books

Young children spend most of the time at school, growing in knowledge while learning in classrooms. Educators and preservice teachers are expected to have access to literature on various reading levels for use in their classroom instruction. This study began with two curriculum and instruction methodology faculty and their pre-service teachers who were struggling to find culturally relevant literature or diverse books to use in their early childhood education practicum experiences at their assigned public-school sites. Limitations were discovered when seeking quality diverse literature, in a state that has multiple cultures living in it. For such a diverse population this area lacks in diverse resources. There is a need to acknowledge and bridge the gap in the use and availability of diverse cultural resources, personal narratives, and folklife stories as ancillary materials for core curriculum to help children recognize how they fit into the world, which is an integral part of early development and self-identity.

Appropriate literature available on school site for the early grades that portray Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) are limited to a few biographies such as Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr, and Author Ashe (The story of Ruby Bridges is not allowed due to its references to prayer). It should be noted that early educators (preservice and in-service teachers) need to know how to use culturally relevant resources, such as diverse books as an extension of classroom knowledge. Powerful picture books are necessary for emergent literacy and can be used effectively as an introduction to a variety of content for young readers. These diverse literatures provide connections for young readers on how to self-identify within a cultural existence and educators become culturally responsive.

One purpose of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is to encourage educators to identify the importance of authentic cultural knowledge to a region (Williams Rucker, 2019). Regional cultural heritage is an important factor for early educators to plan for learning and developmental growth in all classrooms. Why the focus on culture rather than race? Culture is where one has an emotional and spiritual connection of belonging to a specific group (family) which goes deeper than race (skin tones and labels assigned by census takers). Multiple resources were found on three specific cultures the Cajun, Creole, and Native American, which supported a working model to distinguish multi-cultural research-based teaching practices. CRT anchors the study of these Louisiana cultures. This regionally prevalent example of Cajun (Acadian), Creole (see table 1), and Native American customs demonstrate the relevance of cultural authenticity (how people live) in children's literature. These three cultures had a small but available collection of books in area libraries compared to the other cultures and races of people living in this area. The researchers showcased the uniqueness of Louisiana within these three cultures, and found multiple cross-over *races*, thus making it a challenge to place members into an individual racial group.

The Power of Culture

According to Kathleen Tracy’s (2015) *Louisiana Creole & Cajun Cultures in Perspective*, Cajun culture resulted from the evolution of Acadians, French immigrants in Canada to their expulsion from Nova Scotia and nearby areas, to settling in Louisiana (16-17). Cajun culture and language are incredibly unique to the offspring of the Acadians’ despite their increasingly diverse bloodlines (21). There is a common ground for the people of this region that weaves the language and dialect used by each culture, which sounds similar when first heard by one who may not dwell in this region. A common interpretation of the language may include misunderstanding or need for further clarification of context.

Most Creole languages that developed in the colonies were typically based on English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, the languages of the superpowers of the time. However, there are also numerous Creoles based on other languages such as Arabic, Hindi, and Malay (World Languages). French Creole’s on the other hand, are ethnically diverse with racially charged origins defined as “slaves born in the colony” to “free people of color.” Spanish/French mixed whites were identified as French Creole and spoke Colonial French which became its own dialect. French, West African, African and Caribbean mixed peoples spoke Louisiana Creole French, which was considered a hybrid language developed from French-West Africans (25-26). French creole languages are mainly found in the Caribbean, in the U.S., and on several islands in the Indian Ocean. Table 1 illustrates the complexity of regional locations and origins of Louisiana’s French Creoles:

Table 1. French-based Creoles

Caribbean

<u>Haitian Creole</u>	7,389,066	<u>Haiti</u> , U.S.
<u>Guadeloupean Creole</u>	848,000	<u>Guadeloupe</u> , <u>Martinique</u>
<u>Louisiana Creole</u>	60,000-80,000	U.S.
<u>Guianese Creole</u>	50,000	<u>French Guiana</u>
<u>Amapár Creole</u>	25,000	<u>Brazil</u>

Indian Ocean

<u>Morisyen Creole</u>	604,000	<u>Mauritius</u>
<u>Réunion Creole</u>	600,000	<u>Réunion</u>
<u>Seychellois Creole</u>	72,7000	<u>Seychelles</u>

Retrieved on November 20, 2020 from

<http://aboutworldlanguages.com/creole-languages>.

Within Native American tribes there are dialectal differences due to geographic separation of tribes, as well as differences in orthographies adopted by different groups. For example, the [Cherokee](#) Nation has two well documented dialects, the form *Cherokee* came from the Eastern, while the form *Tsalagi* came from the Western dialect. Today, all Cherokee people refer to themselves as *tsa-la-gi*. Cherokee speakers constitute the seventh-largest group of speakers of native languages north of Mexican border. It is spoken by 15,000 to 22,500 people in eastern and northeastern Oklahoma, Cherokee Reservation; Great Smokey Mountains; and western North Carolina (<http://aboutworldlanguages.com>).

Picture books are powerful learning tools with the complexity of understanding regional, cultural differences. These stories help children embrace and enlighten differences, specifically when they picture self in the story.

For this early literature cultural model, or research-based teaching practice, there were limited selections of Cajun, Creole, and Native American children's literature available for teacher resources. Early educators seem to share whatever they find without evaluating the authenticity and culturally appropriateness of the literature. "The move toward teaching for multicultural understanding has made teachers more aware of the role of self-concept, language diversity, and background experience in education" (Cox, 263). Self-concept, language, diversity, and background experience are key elements in cultural identity. If a child can visualize his or her connection through a story, this notion would support authenticity in cultural identity. Below are some examples of prompts that can be used to facilitate student's making connections with literature, which should also lead to improved comprehension:

Text-to-self: What does this remind me of past or present? How is this character, or situation similar or different from me and in what way?

Text-to-text: Reminds me of another book I have read or heard?

Text-to-world: What or how does this remind me of an event or someone in the real world? (Harvey, S. & Goudvis, A., 2000).

It is important for authentic cultural knowledge to be available and valued for educational practice in literature. Local children's author, Dianne de las Casas (2013) explained while sharing her Cajun-flavored storytelling strategies with fourth graders, "I strive for my stories to connect across the curriculum", as de las Casas uses visual, tactile, and vocal lexicon strategies to enhance her stories for an authentic flair. De las Casas writes, *The Cajun Cornbread Boy*, (2013) to replicate the well-known *The Gingerbread Boy* tale when the story tells of a boy made of cornbread, who experiences many risk-taking adventures in the swamplands of Louisiana.

At first glance, most Cajun, Creole, and Native American children's stories appear to have built in components to support these cultures through characterization using specific lexicon, historical accuracy, and cultural authenticity within the texts. Those who are not familiar with these regional cultures within Louisiana may be more willing to accept these writings as authentic truths. Whereas, those who experience Cajun, Creole, and Native American cultures may quickly notice the blatant bias and errors within the writings and illustrations for authenticity.

To prepare ancillary materials for lesson planning for early educators, there was a need to visit children’s sections within several branches of the local libraries. After a brief discussion with a children’s librarian, it was noted that selections of children’s books in the stacks were limited in Cajun (Acadian), Creole, and Native American cultures, specifically. After a search through the catalogues and in the stacks, we agreed that appropriate selections were extremely limited. We found that there was not a way for young children to identify self (personal connections) within the limited selection of children’s literature for this regional area of Louisiana. Within the illustrations of the stories and limited selections, there were not many children seen within the books. What was not found lead to collecting Louisiana children’s books from the shelves following with this discovery.

Method of Evaluation

Abington-Pitre (2010) created a method for evaluation of multicultural children’s literature; each term is defined with examples for evaluator to determine if the book has merit (culturally appropriate & relevant). Each of the categories Table 2, below have three specific elements to “look for” specific to that category, like 7. *Other*.

Table 2: Categories to evaluate multicultural children’s literature

1. <u>Characterization</u> : A person marked by conspicuous, often peculiar traits.
2. <u>Stereotyping</u> : By assigning traditional and rigid roles or attributes to a group, instructional materials stereotype and limit the abilities and potential of that group.
3. <u>Language</u> : Form or style of verbal expression; the BIPOC’s (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) dialect cannot be presented as substandard English.
4. <u>Lexicon</u> : The vocabulary of a language, which is free from offensive or degrading vocabulary. Ex: Stunted, stultified = to make (someone) look foolish or stupid (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary).
5. <u>Historical accuracy</u> : Is there more than one interpretation of an issue, situation, or group of people, such as the Native perspective of history and their contemporary life experiences.
6. <u>Cultural authenticity</u> : Accurate portrayal of beliefs, characteristics, activities, fundamental values and behavior patterns unique to a particular group. Opinions are distinguished from facts and show the diversity of the BIPOC.
7. <u>Other</u> :
a. Were there other traits or values identified in the book, which were not among those specifically mentioned above? List them and page numbers
b. Will children be able to relate to the characters in the text and illustrations?
c. Would you recommend this book to a friend (child)? Explain

Analysis of Literature

The Power of Cultural Picture Books

It was discovered within the library stacks, that only eight selections were available resources for critical review of diverse literature. These books were analyzed for cultural identity, authenticity, and lexical components. Out of the eight selections, only two were written with children serving as main characters of the story. Those two stories were written as a retelling of a classic tale with the author using a “Cajun twist” to the original folk tale. There were no original stories about young children found in the Cajun and Creole literature at the main branch of the regional library. Native American stories were even more rare and typically categorized as “tall tales or myths”, which gives the perception these people are not real but made-up characters.

The first children’s literature selection, *Jacques et la Cann a Suere: A Cajun Jack and the Beanstalk* written by Sheila Hebert-Collins (2004) begins, “Once upon a time deep in the Louisiana bayou country, there lived a poor widow, Jacqueline Boudreaux and her son, Jacques. Jacqueline and Jacques lived in a houseboat right there on Vermillion Bayou” (1). While the classic tale has what Hebert-Collins regards as a Cajun twist, we argue that there is not enough evidence to show young Cajun or Creole children a reflection of their own lives. There are some authentic language pieces within the classic tale, however educators must recognize that authentic narratives, not just storytelling through a twist on classic tales, teach young children how to see themselves within the story (connecting text-to-self). Not every child in Louisiana lives in a swamp, or on a houseboat, nor do the family members speak Cajun English that has a lexicon particular to today’s contemporary Cajun dialect. There is a need to be more authentic, to retell stories to young children that are authentic, and relatable to real life—true stories of authentic tales that reflect how people of their culture live, how they might see themselves within that culture, specifically in this case, how Cajuns, Creoles, and Native Americans in this region live. Hebert-Collins also serves as the author of a series of Cajun children’s literature twists of classic tales such as, *Jean-Paul Hebert Was There; Blanchette et les Sept Petits Cajuns: A Cajun Snow White; ‘T Pousette et ‘T Poulette: A Cajun Hansel and Gretel; Cendrillon: A Cajun Cinderella; Jolie Blonde and the Three Heberts: A Cajun Twist to an Old Tale; Petite Rouge: A Cajun Twist to an Old Tale*. This series of classic tales with a Cajun twist, illustrates cultural identity historically, with some authenticity of language, lexical components.

Within J.J. Reneaux’s (1995) book *Why Alligator Hates Dog: A Cajun Folktale*, Reneaux writes a personal note regarding Cajun dialect within the forward of the story. He states, “Reading and listening to folktales is a wonderful way for children to learn about the world. Not only do they teach us about our differences, they also remind us of our similarities” (x). Although one might agree with Reneaux, that folktales are one way of learning and teaching about culture and differences, there is a need to challenge the fact that children cannot see themselves in this story—there are limited illustrations of humans, and the tale is told for children to see themselves only within a metaphorical context. The only human in this story is what the author refers to as “man”. Man’s face appears Caucasian and is only pictured several times in the story. The

folktale is predominantly told with main characters of animals, an alligator, a dog, and a rabbit. The dog plays the trickster who befriends the alligator bully and uses the rabbit to outsmart the gator. Reneaux offers an end of story summary, which states, “I loved the story. I knew Dog and Alligator. They acted like the children at school. To this day, wherever I tell the story, children love it” (x). Reneaux continues to note that the story demonstrates the great struggles of childhood within the familiarity of the behavior of a bully. In the author’s endnotes, he encourages adults to swap stories with children as this act links in what he refers as a “timeless chain of humanity” (x). One question that comes to mind, is how might humanness be supported if we are telling stories with very few humans within the story itself? Are children supposed to relate to alligators, dogs, and rabbits? Some young children have never seen an alligator, or for that matter knows how dangerous this swamp animal can be. Besides, not all young children in Louisiana live near a swamp, and never have visited that type of environment.

Another Cajun children’s selection written by Jacklyn Sonnier Hirshberg (2001) is *Nicky the Swamp Dog: A True Story*. Sonnier Hirshburg is a native of Louisiana who returned to her beloved home within the swamplands, bayous, and sugarcane fields of where she grew up. For over two years Sonnier Hirshberg gained a deep appreciation for the Atchafalaya River Basin swamp as she became a tour guide, which influenced the development of the characters within the story, the swamp guide named Half Pint and Nicky the swamp dog. While this story reveals the authenticity of life in a Louisiana swamp, the main character is a small Rat Terrier dog. Human characters are revealed in Nicky the Swamp dog’s many adventures, however there are limited references to young children within the story. Specifically, in chapter three, “Nicky Goes to School,” the title refers to school, the school in the story is metaphorically the swamp. Normally, one might believe that children would be found in a school setting, however the absence of children is noted within this chapter. In chapter three, references how the dog learns lessons, how specific commands from Half Pint such as “bad baby” and “check it out” bring forth specific actions with the dog. While the story of *Nicky the Swamp Dog* is environmentally authentic to the Louisiana swamplands, there is only one photograph and reference to a child within the story found on page 37.

Sharon Doucet’s (1997) children’s book titled, *Why Lapin’s Ears are Long and Other Tales from the Louisiana Bayou*, portrays her lived experience within the heart of French Louisiana. A lifetime of experiences serve as a catalyst for writing this unique collection of African and European folktales dating back to 1700–1800’s. Doucet spent her time serving as a French teacher in elementary and post-secondary classrooms as she speaks to the “wacky humor, and down to earth wisdom of the joyful kinfolk” of Louisiana which inspired her to compile and preserve this rich collection of folktales. While the book is beautifully illustrated with the main character being Comp`ere Lapin (a rabbit), illustrations of children are not found within the stories. Lapin, a long-eared rabbit was a trickster who played pranks among what Doucet refers to as “Creoles, who are French speaking Blacks, and the Cajuns, descendants of French Acadians who had been exiled by the British from their Canadian homeland” (v).

A Creole version of Lapin, a Brer’ rabbit character is found in *Bouki’s Honey: Based on the Creole Folktales*, a children’s book written by Arthur “Roy” Williams (2008). Mr. Williams, a

retired educator writes these authentic Creole phrases within the text of the book, “*Comment ca va? Ca va bien, Oh mais yeah, Lapin, and Tout Fini*”, commonly used lexicon marking the authenticity of Creole dialect within the story. Lapin, the trickster rabbit and Bouki, a simple-minded donkey, are characters in many Creole folktales still spoken today within folklife and festivals. The only mention of children in this story is a baby who may have been baptized at the local church. This book is one of ten selections of Bouki and Lapin stories within this series of Creole children’s literature. An author’s note, after reading the series, children would be familiar with over one hundred Creole expressions. Implications of specific lexicon within the stories speaks to preserve the culture and authenticity of the Creole language.

Rose Anne St. Romain (2003) author, of *Moon’s Cloud Blanket*, references Gray Hawk, a Houma-Choctaw friend, helped craft the story from his memory. *Moon’s Cloud Blanket* captures the folklife tale of a woman’s internal wisdom and faith as told by elders within the Houma-Choctaw tribe in Louisiana. The story tells of a woman’s strength to save her young children from the raging storm floodwaters that rose in the swamplands of Louisiana. This woman found strength to move above the rising waters into the strong branches of a cypress tree, which provided shelter from the storm. When the moon rose on the evening of the storm it was in the cypress tree where she found hope as she plead to the moon to keep her family safe. The story tells of a beautiful ending, how we all should find comfort in what nature provides to humans for safety and refuge. In the illustrations of this story, there are illustrations of young children who had dark hair, appear to be of Native American descent.

In the children’s story, *Ol’ Bloo’s Boogie-Woogie Band and Blues Ensemble*, Jan Huling (2010), writes the tale set in Louisiana of four main characters, a rooster, a cat, a dog, and a donkey, a band of misfits who collaborated to save the dear Ol’ Bloo Donkey from Farmer Brown’s plan of “putting the poor beast out of his misery” (3). The tale shows the reader how the four animal friends outsmarted some thieves and earned a spot to rest and retire, free and away from Ol’ Farmer Brown. While there are some human characters in the book, the main characters are animals.

Results

Picture Book Gallery

The first emerging theme found showed characters portrayed as animals with very few people actively engaged within the story. We can agree that stories hold the language and images for young children to see and hear how they fit into their world. We argue that it is important to visualize roles at a young age within classroom settings, family, community, and finally within a larger population.

Secondly, emerging inquiry evolved, we asked ourselves, “What do young Cajun, Creole and Native American children look like? Are there differences and similarities to be noted? Are the stories culturally accurate to what young Cajun, Creole, and Native American children know?” Limited copies of current selections of children’s literature were available for Cajun, Creole, and Native American cultures. This might make it difficult for children to see themselves in stories,

to relate real human life in the Cajun, Creole, and Native American children's literature, as there are more non-human characters than humans found.

Third, findings show that animal characters portray the lead roles in most children's stories. This shift makes it difficult to meet the text-to-self connection required in Reading/English Language Arts (ELA) academic standards for the state of Louisiana.

Lastly, there is lack of cultural authenticity with appropriate characterization of stereotypical themes that were found in selected children's literature. For example, "The teacher of the Cajun child, however, has had a difficult time locating literature in which to develop the child's cultural awareness and pride" (Cox, 263-264). There is an absence of children in Cajun, Creole, and Native American children's literature demonstrating authentic cultural identity. This is indeed an issue within itself.

All members of small learning communities must "encourage children to first understand cultural difference, to take pride in individual difference and use this understanding to develop uniqueness versus awkwardness in society" (Cox, 264). If young children can visualize how they fit into their world through cultural connection in literature, possibilities emerge as they embrace learning opportunities. Heritage and belonging helps young children gain understanding of how to use their cultural authenticity as a true strength of character development.

Initial findings lead to discovery of missing voices for young children within cultural identity, lexical, and authenticity in Cajun, Creole, and Native American cultures. There are very few illustrations to reflect self for young children (BIPOC or otherwise) to make a distinct identification of self within the specific cultural children's stories. Emergent themes show that the lack of visible representation of children within regional children's literature. In addition, authenticity of cultural connections shows limited examples of how children really live within this region. Lastly, an overwhelming majority of cultural children's literature features talking animals rewritten in folk tale and classic tales in the regional lexicons familiar to the region. Swamp creatures play the protagonists, which places self-identity and the voice of young children in an abstract context, which may lead to confusion with identity. A majority of selected children's literature is set in the swamplands, not perceived to a great majority of the regional population. There are specific regions of swampland within the state, however swamps are not found statewide despite stereotypical beliefs. Most children in the state do not live nor unlikely have visited any swampland areas at all.

For Early Teachers

The goal of rich experiential learning with authentic cultural resources begins with early educators and the Louisiana Believes State Content Standards. Content standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies to serve as a guiding source to drive instructional design, implementation, and assessment of data to support knowledge and to gain a deeper understanding of how pedagogical skills move early teachers to enrich learners with culturally relevant literature.

When books are read orally, children who live in Louisiana and globally, hear familiar words to make connections to language and the imagery found in local author’s writing. This oral reading strategy makes authentic cultural connections for developing learners. According to Luttrell (2000) “collecting, interpreting, and narrating life stories is a common tool in the anthropological kit and has gained increasing prominence in the post-modern era since the oft-noted postmodern turn” (p. 503). When children are presented an oral reading of local language or read excerpts independently to respond in writing they gain a “sense of what life is like or what it means to be a member of a particular culture” (p. 503). Children can see themselves in the story, or even greater, to see themselves in the works of a published author from their own region. The authenticity of cultural language in a story, “is a way of knowing, making personal sense of the world, becoming conscious of oneself and a means of creating an identity (Lankiewicz, & Wąsikiewicz- Firlej, 2014, p. vii). For example, why not support your prescribed curriculum with the work of local authors? This method might serve as an exemplar to showcase a famous Louisiana author during February, Black History month in south Louisiana schools, or any other works that creates a deeper connection for young learners. For example, Louisiana state standards for K-12 English Language Arts requires each grade level to learn about diverse cultures in a variety of genres of literature (see Table 3).

Table 3. Louisiana Believes expectations for K-12 English Language Arts

Anchor Standard RL 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Grade 2 Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.
Grade 3 Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.
Texts are instructionally useful. • Texts build student knowledge about universal themes, diverse cultures, and other perspectives.
Texts are authentic. • They are written by a published author and/or are high-quality and contain accurate information as opposed to short passages expressly written for the purpose of teaching a discrete ELA skill, (https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/classroom-support/teacher-support-toolbox , 122-123).

We can teach what we are prescribed as teachers, however we can do so much more. We can do this by teaching children how to select and evaluate books that demonstrate cultural competency (see Table 2). Teachers should also research diverse websites (see Table 4) to find appropriate books and activities to share in their classrooms with their students in mind, not just looking at state standards.

Table 4: Suggested Websites for Diverse Resources

Website	URL	Benefits
Teach Thought: we grow teachers	https://www.teachthought.com/home/pedagogy	Education, teaching, strategies, workshops, videos and booklists
Here Wee Read	http://hereweeread.com/2019/11/the-2020-ultimate-list-of-diverse-childrens-books.html	Diverse & inclusive books, education products, podcasts, book reviews, read aloud strategies
Understood Team	https://www.understood.org/	Non-profit organization that provides support for families, educators, health care providers promoting diversity and inclusion.
We need diverse books	https://diversebooks.org/	<p>Recognizes all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities*, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities.</p> <p>Children can see themselves in books.</p> <p>Resources for race, equity and inclusion</p>

Conclusion

Teaching for Equity

Teaching for equity means early educators and young children need culturally relevant children’s literature in early grades to self-identify and understand their own voice within this developmental life stage. Teaching for equity means all children should have access to authentic literature that reflects their culture and ethnicity in age appropriate and global settings, to visualize self and to learn about others in these renderings.

To strengthen research into practice, early educators must question, how does the addition of self-concept, language, diversity, and background experience through cultural identity enhance

learning and enrich prescribed curriculum? One might agree that cultural identity is the piece that makes one human. As humans, we do have the choice to identify with a group, or not, to make a unique connection with what young children already know. Educators play an active role to secure this connection, by becoming the missing voice of advocacy for young children. The question arises, how might we utilize the most valuable resources to support all, to make these cultural connections in a school system?

To improve the practice within the field of education and human development, early educators can make connections available for young children by using a cultural viewpoint, what we know, how we know, and decision making based upon what and how we know (Bateson, 1979). If classroom teachers were provided with the whole picture of how one lives, learns, and grows, through cultural identity and have resources, would they feel more supported? How might these resources expand learning and growth for all? Future research will require investigation of other library's for diverse collections outside this parish for diverse children's literature.

Lastly, educators can support cultural equity for families and children through knowledge and understanding of how culture plays an important role in the holistic viewpoint of how a child responds to curriculum. Early educators must be prepared to view the authenticity of cultural identity as a positive resource for learning. CRT support resources for pre-prescribed curriculum need to be developed in a form of children's literature to support cultural authenticity. In addition to diverse books, oral histories and interpretive folklife stories are important to secure authenticity of self at an early age. Our future depends upon how early educators are culturally responsive in classrooms. Rich stories and language through the power of cultural picture books reflect life, authentically and support self-identity for young learners.

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