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Teacher Candidates' Use of Critical Literacy to Shift Thinking About Texts and Social Justice

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Abstract

It is essential to support teacher candidates in becoming culturally responsive and learning about social justice in the classroom as schools across the country become more culturally and linguistically diverse. In this qualitative study, the author looked at children's literature as a way to support teacher candidates' learning about critical literacy and social justice. Teacher candidates constructed an annotated bibliography of children's texts centered around a topic of their choice. Findings suggest teachers increased their understanding and use of a critical literacy lens on the literature they selected and developed a deeper understanding of the potential connections between children's texts and social justice.

Keywords: *preservice teachers, social justice, critical literacy*

Teacher educators are challenged with preparing future teachers to be skilled in pedagogy, content area knowledge, and the multifaceted world of teaching in today's classrooms. Although classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse—culturally, racially, and linguistically—the majority of teacher candidates remain monolingual, White females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Because of this, it is imperative to support teacher candidates in becoming culturally responsive, using a critical literacy lens, and learning about social justice in the classroom (Janks, 2010; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008). Although there may be a mismatch between cultural backgrounds of the majority of teachers and the students they teach, this need not result in an educational predicament. If teachers embrace culturally relevant and social justice-oriented pedagogy, they can create a learning environment that is supportive and inclusive of all students (Han, Madhuri, & Scull, 2015). However, research suggests that many teacher candidates are not adequately prepared to introduce tenets of social justice into their overall teaching (Davila, 2011; Han, 2012; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002).

There are many approaches to incorporating social justice pedagogy and critical literacy into a teacher preparation program, but the focus of this article is the vehicle of children's literature, particularly through connections to critical literacy. The current study

examines these questions: How do teacher candidates use critical literacy when creating an annotated bibliography of children's texts? How does creating an annotated bibliography impact teacher candidates' understandings of social justice and children's literature? In the following sections, I share related literature and a theoretical framework for examining the data. Next, I present an overview of the study, followed by the relevant findings. I conclude with a discussion of the data and implications for teacher educators who are social justice minded.

Social Justice and Critical Literacy

Social justice can be defined in many ways in education, with some teacher education programs focusing on beliefs and dispositions, some on multicultural issues, and others on democracy (Cochran-Smith, 2010). Social justice is often an overarching term used to discuss work in classrooms that aims to prepare teachers to recognize and fight inequity in schools and society (Spalding, Klecka, Lin, Odell, & Wang, 2010). In recent years, research focused on issues of equity and social justice in education has increased (Bonner, Warren, & Jiang, 2018; Boylan & Woolsey, 2015; Enriquez, Clark, & Della Calce, 2017; Kaur, 2012; Zeichner, 2009), including literature on the notion that schools need to provide more equitable opportunities for all learners to be represented in increasingly diverse classrooms (Kaur, 2012).

According to Spalding et al. (2010), "Preparing predominantly White teacher candidates to teach an increasingly diverse student population involves more than simply equipping them with neutral pedagogical knowledge and skills" (p. 194). Additionally, Davila (2011) found that when investigating teacher candidates' understandings of social justice, their existing university coursework was not always sufficient in preparing them to guide discussions with others on race and other social issues. Although more recently there has been a trend toward more positive dispositions related to culturally relevant pedagogy (Bonner et al., 2018), more work needs to be done in supporting preservice teachers in developing a social justice mindset.

Social justice work, both inside and outside of schools, aligns closely with tenets of critical literacy (Burke & Collier, 2017). Critical literacy is a lens and a way of interacting with texts of all kinds (e.g., books, media, news sources, policy) to search for issues of power, privilege, and representation (Luke, 2007; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2010). This involves considering multiple perspectives on topics and problematizing texts that center dominant voices while silencing those from traditionally marginalized groups in order to move toward a more inclusive curriculum and text selection (Lewison et al., 2002). Teachers who use a critical literacy lens in their classroom decision making examine their own personal assumptions and biases as well as carefully examine texts they choose to ensure no stereotypes and inaccuracies are present (Burke & Collier, 2017). By including multiple perspectives and voices in their text selection, as well as incorporating texts focusing on sociopolitical issues, teachers can support students in taking action for justice (Cochran-Smith, 2010).

Research in education indicates that social justice continues to be of high importance in teacher preparation programs, but more research is needed on what this looks like in practice (Mills & Ballantyne, 2016). When considering the role of social justice and critical literacy in teacher education, it in part requires teacher candidates to look critically at what is considered traditional, or acceptable, knowledge in schools (Cochran-Smith, 2010), including what classroom texts are considered valuable for children. The current study adds to the literature by examining ways that teacher candidates developed insight

into social justice in education through exploration of children's literature.

Children's Literature

One approach to building the knowledge and dispositions related to social justice with teacher candidates, as well as to interrupt assumptions and biases about traditionally marginalized groups, is to use diverse children's literature (Boyd, Causey, & Galda, 2015; Colby & Lyon, 2004; Crisp et al., 2016; Fox, 2006; Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009; Papola-Ellis & Heineke, 2019; Xu, 2000). Diverse and culturally relevant children's literature focuses on themes and characters that are often underrepresented or marginalized in children's texts (Boyd et al., 2015; Heineke, 2014). These texts typically focus on characteristics such as race, gender, culture, class, and language (Boyd et al., 2015); however, many other elements of an individual's culture and identity also need to be considered with representation in texts.

Using texts that represent different cultural and linguistic backgrounds can positively impact teachers' and students' knowledge and dispositions related to diversity (Burke & Collier, 2017; Colby & Lyon, 2004). These texts and related discussions also provide a medium to contemplate cultural issues in the classroom and serve as common ground to spark conversations about equity, interrupting prior assumptions and disrupting the status quo (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009). Additional connections between children's literature and other assignments or experiences can lead to broader knowledge surrounding cultural diversity as well. For example, Howrey and Whelan-Kim (2009) developed a project in a children's literacy course that asked candidates to engage with culturally diverse literature and interact with guest speakers from other cultures. They found that the teacher candidates grew, to varying degrees, in their knowledge about cultural diversity as a result of reading deeply about a culture other than their own.

Although focusing on diverse children's literature in the classroom is beneficial, in isolation it could sometimes play a limited role in shifting teacher candidates' understandings of other cultures and backgrounds, or of different viewpoints on topics related to social justice (Xu, 2000). Teacher candidates come into their programs with their own literacy histories, and need opportunities to explore new ideas interactively, with the support of teachers and peers in order to create shifts in their knowledge base and mindset (Ball, 2000). Participating in activities that allow them to apply what they are learning about culture, children, and sociopolitical issues, as well as collaborating with peers in different contexts, may allow for more growth in mindset.

The current study examines one of these activities that allowed teacher candidates to explore children's literature in connection to their developing understanding about social justice, seeking to understand how this impacted their knowledge about social justice and children's literature.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is framed by two theories rooted in critical theory: critical sociocultural theory (Moje & Lewis, 2007) and critical literacy (Giroux, 1997; Shor, 1999a). Both are concerned with understanding relationships between language and power, and social justice is an end goal. Critical sociocultural theory (Moje & Lewis, 2007) expands on sociocultural theory by investigating relationships between power, ideology, and schooling (Gutierrez & Larson, 1994). It involves looking at individuals' agency as the "strategic making and remaking of selves within structures of power" (Lewis, Enciso, &

Moje, 2007, p. 4). Critical sociocultural theory provides tools for examining how learning is both supported and constrained by power relations and structures in place.

Two of the overall objectives of the children's literature course that housed this assignment were the connecting children's literature to tenets of social justice and understanding how to disrupt the status quo through the use of texts with children. This stems from a critical literacy framework (Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe, 2008; Shor, 1999a). Critical literacy perspectives question the "social construction of the self" (Shor, 1999b, p. 282) and are concerned with analyzing relationships between language, social practice, and power. Engaging with critical literacy provides tools through which someone can learn about their own history and culture as well as those of others, particularly marginalized groups (Shannon, 1990).

Social justice sits at the heart of critical literacy, given that readers challenge the status quo and focus on sociopolitical issues (Comber, 2001; Lewison et al., 2002). Critical literacy involves recognizing oppression and biases in texts, with an ultimate goal of taking social action against injustices (Skerrett, 2010). Supporting teacher candidates in developing a critical stance involves engaging them in inquiry learning and a problem-posing style of teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Freire, 1970). Inviting students to be reflexive regarding their learning and to be actively involved in the learning process by co-constructing knowledge with peers can result in deeper understandings about the content. The participants in this study began to examine how language and texts could maintain or disrupt the status quo and how problematizing texts could lead them to greater understanding of social justice (Lewison et al., 2008).

Overview of the Study

In this case study (Stake, 1995) of participants in one children's literature course, I sought to investigate these questions: How do teacher candidates use critical literacy when creating an annotated bibliography of children's texts? How does creating an annotated bibliography impact teacher candidates' understandings of social justice and children's literature? Data were collected during one spring semester when I taught a children's literature course at a small midwestern U.S. university with a strong focus on social justice. The 26 participants were enrolled in a teacher preparation program, with all but two classified as second-semester freshmen. There were 24 female and two male participants, and all but four self-identified as White, with the remaining four self-identifying as Korean, African American, or Latinx.

At the start of the semester, I asked the teacher candidates to consider the texts they grew up with and remembered from their own childhood. As we started to discuss broader genres, I read aloud texts that frequently included characters from traditionally marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds. During class discussions, many candidates were surprised at the lack of diversity in their own collections of books as kids. Throughout the course, the teacher candidates read and listened to a range of required children's picture books and novels. They also read an article focused on diversity and representation in children's literature (Boyd et al., 2015), Rudine Sims Bishop's (1990) seminal piece on windows and mirrors in literature, and two articles explaining tenets of critical literacy (Bourke, 2008; Lewison et al., 2002). Assigned children's texts included *Wonder* (Palacio, 2012), *The Other Side* (Woodson, 2001), and *Inside Out and Back Again* (Lai, 2011). We also spent the first 6 weeks of the course having class discussions focused mainly on

concepts of representation, disrupting the status quo, multiple perspectives in literature, and connections between children's books and critical literacy.

Teacher candidates had several formal and informal assignments related to course readings and children's books throughout the semester. They completed reflections, literature response activities, and book talks. One of their main assignments for the course was the creation of an annotated bibliography that focused on a topic they associated with social justice. We connected ideas from our critical literacy readings to topics related to social justice in class discussion to support candidates in generating a topic. Candidates were allowed to choose any topic that interested them, as long as they could justify the connection to social justice and no more than one other classmate had selected the same topic. The course syllabus listed some possible topics for candidates who struggled to come up with something on their own. Approximately 75% of the candidates selected something from this list, with the remaining candidates choosing a topic independently. The topics included family structures, African American literature, Asian American literature, the environment, cultural celebrations, religion, poverty, homelessness, racism, civil rights, gender roles, LGBTQ representation, immigration, bullying, identity/being yourself, and special education.

For the final product, candidates were asked to find and read 12 children's books that spanned grade levels of their certification related to their topic. On their annotated bibliography, they listed bibliographic information, keywords, grade-level recommendations, genre, and a short paragraph about the content or plot of the book. They were required to have at least three genres and to include both fiction and nonfiction (though not required to have an equal balance of the two). After completing the bibliography, candidates posted the final product to a shared class website, where it became accessible to all other classmates. By doing this, each candidate left the course with 26 book lists on a variety of topics.

Data sources include the final annotated bibliographies, written reflections on the assignment after completion, postcourse written reflections, and field notes from class discussions related to the assignment. The written reflections included questions such as "What did you like or dislike about this assignment?" and "What did you learn from completing the annotated bibliography?" Candidates were told they could freely write anything they thought about the assignment in general or their overall learning from the course. I kept informal anecdotal field notes during class discussions, attempting to document when candidates expressed a disruption in their thinking about children's books, connections to social justice, or use of critical literacy. I recorded these as I listened to small-group conversations and further elaborated on these notes at the conclusion of each class.

For data analysis, I used an interpretive approach to qualitative data analysis (Erickson, 1986), aiming to determine themes that arose from the data and in response to the research questions. I began with several rereadings of the sources to become familiar with the data. I then used a round of open coding, noting the main idea or theme in each line or section of data. I did this with each of the reflections and with my own field notes on comments during class discussions that were related to the annotated bibliography. I then took the most common themes from all data sources and conducted a round of focused coding, using themes as specific codes (see Table 1). Finally, I used the annotated bibliography itself to cross-check the validity of participants' comments on their own reflections.

Table 1
Coding Scheme

Sample initial codes	Sample final codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments on locations (urban library, suburban library, bookstore) • Process of searching for texts • Representation and equity issues (gender, race, socioeconomic status) • Disrupting status quo • Surprise at availability of texts on their topic • Comparisons to texts they remember from childhood • Remarks related to their own learning • Social justice connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for the texts • Diversity in the texts • Other perspectives included • Connections to social justice

Findings

The teacher candidates in this study all wrote that the annotated bibliography assignment was their favorite, and they felt that it was beneficial for all future candidates to complete to help guide the way they viewed texts throughout the remainder of their program. In their reflections on the assignment, as well as in class discussions, several themes emerged that centered on the benefits of this work to the teacher candidates. These included valuing the actual search for texts, recognizing diversity in texts, the importance of multiple viewpoints, and the growth in understanding about social justice.

“The Hunt”

Half of the participants’ written reflections specifically included enjoying the actual physical search for the books. Many remarked that they had not been to a public library since they were children, and most also expressed enjoyment with hunting down the books themselves, rather than just on websites, as they typically did when searching for a book for themselves. The majority of the teacher candidates asserted that while searching for their own topic, they ended up finding books they could recommend to a classmate on other topics or finding additional books that did not fit with their assignment but that they wanted to read because they looked like high-quality and engaging texts. One candidate wrote that her “list of books to read over the summer tripled in size” because of the ones she “accidentally” found. For several weeks, at the onset of class sessions, I frequently observed the teacher candidates sharing book titles with each other with great excitement because they thought it would be a good fit for someone else’s list.

Several participants recognized that this assignment was about more than just

creating a book list. They noted that physically searching for the books gave them the opportunity to practically apply what they had been learning and to think about the books in a new way. Sandra wrote:

I really enjoyed this assignment. Looking for the books myself gave me the opportunity to synthesize and apply everything I have been learning about children's literature, like how to select quality literature, to look for multicultural texts, to find different topics.

Sandra recognized that it was important to take everything she had been learning about children's literature and use it in a new, meaningful way that would impact her future as a teacher. This assignment, for her, was a culmination of all she had learned and a chance to put the pieces together into a helpful resource for the classroom. Melinda echoed this sentiment about the extension of learning: "I really liked searching for the books. As I found them, I was able to think about how I would use each specific one in a classroom." These two participants, as well as others, could see beyond the basic requirements of a course assignment and view the bibliography as a chance to pull together their newly constructed knowledge about children's literature as a whole.

An additional benefit of preservice teachers getting out to look for books on their own was learning about resources in their communities. Jessica wrote:

I honestly loved this assignment. Not only was it fun to go on the hunt for books, but it was a great experience to visit the children's section in different libraries, which I haven't done in a long time. It brought back memories, but also introduced me to even more great books for kids!

Steven agreed with this revelation about the value of tapping into community resources:

I learned (or was reminded) of how awesome public libraries are. I went to one in [a different neighborhood] to find a lot of my books and it was my first time being there. We have valuable literacy resources all around the city that I plan to use again and when I teach!

For several of the participants, this assignment led them to begin to explore the city more and learn about a range of community resources that are beneficial to classroom teachers. Although an unintentional consequence of the assignment, this was a valuable outcome for the participants who were beginning to understand connections between schools and communities. Some participants spoke about this more in class and added their own evaluations of the texts that were made available to them at different locations. Several noted that when they went to larger bookstores or public libraries in some of the suburban locations, they had a harder time finding texts that represented a range of perspectives and cultures than what they were able to find in urban public libraries. In this way, they were able to start to question the relationships between power and representation (Lewison et al., 2008) because they saw different contexts maintaining and disrupting the status quo through books that were made readily available.

For these teacher candidates, being able to search for books that branched out beyond the scope of their own annotated bibliography was a highly impactful part of their learning in this project. They utilized a critical literacy lens on the texts they saw represented as mainstream in the different library locations, and they learned about the power of the local community to contribute to maintaining or disrupting the status quo by providing access to children's texts on various social justice issues.

Representation in Texts

Although there was a requirement to include three genres, there was not a requirement to consider diverse texts in the annotated bibliography. However, almost every participant actively sought diversity in their lists, in the form of culture, race, gender roles, or other areas depending on their topic. This was evidence of the candidates' use of critical literacy; they considered who was traditionally represented and "heard" in children's literature and whose perspectives were often missing or silenced.

Most of the participants wrote about exposure and acceptance as their motivation for including a range of cultures in their book lists. Although somewhat surface level, these remarks show consideration of the need for diversity and representation in the texts in classrooms. Maura thought broadly about diversity in her bibliography focused on the subject of family structures:

At first, I didn't really think I would find a lot of good books about family structures. I wasn't really sure what I would find! But once I started looking, I tried to cover different types of families: divorced families, adoption, death, same-sex parents. . . . Each book represented everyone fairly. I also tried to include different cultures. I was surprised that I never really thought about that before, and how many books show mostly White families. I was glad I found a lot of others for my future students.

This comment shows evidence that Maura's thinking about what family structures meant had expanded beyond the traditional family unit often portrayed in children's texts. She also included her analysis of texts, looking for ones that "represented everyone fairly" as opposed to reinforcement of negative stereotypes or underrepresentation of certain groups or individuals. Maura concluded by expressing her value of looking for books that disrupted the mainstream, White-dominant representation in books about family structures.

Many of the teacher candidates talked often during class discussions about this activity being the first time they had actively considered representation in texts. With the class predominantly self-identifying as White, most expressed that they had always "seen themselves" in books they read when they were younger and had not considered that some of their non-White peers may have felt differently. Jessica, who self-identified as Latinx, stated that she remembered as a child thinking that the characters in books did not seem to look like her, but she thought that was just "the way it was supposed to be." She remarked that she felt validated now in her questioning but wished she had had the tools when she was younger to push for wider representation at her school and community libraries. After participating in class discussions surrounding these annotated bibliographies and diverse texts, the teacher candidates showed shifts in their thinking about representation in texts.

Rebecca reflected on the diversity in texts she found for her list. She talked openly in class discussions about never having considered things like culture or representation in texts she read as a child. She had felt represented in the texts and assumed it was like that for everyone. Rebecca knew that she wanted to think differently about books for her future students, and was excited about the opportunity to find some through the annotated bibliography:

This assignment really helped me to search for and discover a wide range of texts about the same topic. I found different genres, different cultures represented—I would not have thought about those things before! I know I did not think about that with the books I had as a kid.

Her statement here, as well as those in class, showed a shift in her thinking and her consideration of the role of her own identity in choosing books for students. Rebecca seemed to recognize that she would have to continue to work hard to seek out texts that her students could see themselves in, even if it was different from her own experience as a reader.

While locating and reading books surrounding issues and topics that many candidates stated they had not realized would be represented in children's literature, candidates disrupted some of their prior thinking about children's texts. They explored texts that both maintained and interrupted the status quo while they tried to create a diverse and inclusive list of books for their bibliography. This disruption of the traditional norm in children's texts is a significant part of a critical literacy lens and can lead to more equity as a step toward social justice.

Multiple Perspectives

Throughout the semester, we talked about various tenets of critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2002) and how they related to children's literature, including disrupting the status quo, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and problematizing texts for power, privilege, and bias. Many of the participants embraced this lens and talked about finding texts that offered different perspectives on their topic. Maribeth, who focused on Asian American representation in children's literature, wrote:

This [assignment] made me realize that the books you choose for a classroom are crucial. They need to be fun but informative. Children need to see there are different ways of saying or doing something. They need to understand that their thoughts are different from someone else's.

Maribeth embraced the idea of multiple perspectives and spoke during class discussions about being able to use her texts as a supplement to social studies textbooks that she felt were still dominant in classrooms. She recognized that textbooks often focus on one mainstream perspective and planned to use text sets to offer a range of perspectives on different topics related to history.

Jasmine also found herself considering multiple perspectives on her topic, which was immigration:

I really liked this assignment because it helped me see immigration in different ways. I was mostly focused on first generation immigrants' stories like mine but came to find many stories that were unexpected such as war refugees, stories about second or third generations listening to their grandparents' stories, informational books, etc. Knowing that it broadened my knowledge about immigration, I'm sure it will do the same for kids.

Jasmine's annotated bibliography ended up serving as a significant opportunity for her to learn about immigration and the different ways to view the topic. In turn, she made immediate plans to approach topics in this manner with future students.

Being able to consider multiple perspectives is an important part of navigating a critical literacy stance on texts, language, and schooling. The participants embraced this as part of their work on the annotated bibliography and showed enthusiasm about using this as part of their instruction in the future. This expansion in perspectives on texts and topics leads to a greater range of representation of voices in the classroom.

Social Justice

Another outcome of the annotated bibliography assignment was that participants expressed deeper understanding (or grappling with understanding) of what social justice means, especially as it relates to children's literature. At an institution that values social justice, all of the courses students take include social justice elements to varying degrees. Many of the freshmen come in to the university unsure of how to begin to define social justice or its role in their future as teachers. However, in completing the annotated bibliography on a social justice-oriented topic, they began to develop layers of new knowledge around this topic.

Karen, who focused on the environment for her assignment, felt she was beginning to develop an understanding of what social justice meant for her and how it connected to children's books in general:

I found that a lot of children's literature actually deals with social justice since it is so important. I don't think I understood social justice as well, and the books helped me get a better understanding for myself.

Karen further explained in class that she was coming to see many different topics that could be under the larger umbrella of social justice, particularly when discussing them with students. She admitted she had a lot to learn but felt that reading different children's books, hearing her classmates' topics and lists, and having conversations with her peers helped her develop a stronger understanding of what social justice was or could be. These social co-constructions of knowledge—those between peers as well as those between candidate and the instructor—were essential for furthering their understandings of social justice in the classroom.

Serena chose to explore family structures for her annotated bibliography. At the start, she was not sure how that connected to social justice because she did not know what she was going to find in her search. However, once she began interacting with numerous texts, she began to see relationships and the need to disrupt the status quo:

The connections I was able to make between family and social justice was equality and acceptance among several groups, like the book with a gay character, or one where the family adopted a child of a different race. It was a surprise to me to be able to make this connection.

Serena admitted that including texts on these topics had not occurred to her before working on her bibliography, but she was so glad she realized the need to include them in the classroom. She wrote about wanting to be sure all students felt "represented and included" in her choice of texts and curriculum, and that starting with family was a great connection to students' lives.

Melissa expressed that reading a range of texts, discussing different books and topics with her peers in class, and constructing the list of texts on her topic (gender stereotypes) helped her understand social justice more broadly and what it meant to her in terms of her future classroom:

Children's literature can really open up an entire world of social justice to children. Topics that may have been hard to explain or teach before [I knew about the books] can now be taught in a kid friendly way. Children need to learn about what is happening in the world around them.

Melissa showed an increased understanding of the role of children's literature in classrooms that aim for social justice. She noted the impact some texts could have on her students and the importance of including texts focused on a range of topics and including multiple perspectives in her future classroom.

The candidates embraced the critical literacy tenets of disrupting the status quo and focusing on sociopolitical issues (Lewison et al., 2002) in the creation of their bibliographies. This focus led to an increased early understanding of social justice. Candidates noted numerous times how valuable it was to seek out texts that disrupted the status quo or were different from texts they remembered reading in their own childhood and schooling. Each participant reflected on the positive impact of being asked to search for texts that purposefully considered a topic or representation of a group that was traditionally underrepresented in mainstream children's literature.

Discussion and Implications

In this study, I sought to answer two questions: How do teacher candidates use critical literacy when creating an annotated bibliography of children's texts? How does creating an annotated bibliography impact teacher candidates' understandings of social justice and children's literature? There were numerous benefits to the teacher candidates who created the annotated bibliography. Some of these were intentional, and others were unplanned consequences, but all resulted in broader understanding of the connections between diversity, critical literacy, and social justice as related to children's literature.

Critical Literacy

An overall goal of the annotated bibliography assignment was to promote stronger awareness of critical literacy and social justice through the vehicle of children's literature. The hope was for the participants to branch out from the texts they were already familiar with and to challenge the status quo by looking for texts that represented traditionally marginalized groups or considered social issues from differing viewpoints. Children's literature that promotes disruption of the status quo and introduces children to multiple viewpoints is one way to enact critical literacy and increase understanding of social justice (O'Neil, 2010). The teacher candidates in this study brought their own knowledge of what a children's text was, and through their participation in the classroom community and assignment, as well as community contexts, they were able to begin disrupting their prior assumptions and become open to multiple viewpoints, leading many of them to begin to enact change for social justice.

Social Justice

The candidates strengthened their developing understanding of social justice by constructing their annotated bibliography assignment. They explored issues of equity and access as they compared the texts available at various local libraries and bookstores. They considered the imbalance of representation in texts they viewed as mainstream and the ones they sought out for this assignment. By creating their lists of texts, the teacher candidates were able to authentically and critically evaluate children's literature with social justice as an end goal.

Implications for the Field

This study has several implications. Despite the findings from these teacher candidates, issues regarding representation in texts available for students in schools persist.

There is growing diversity among students in schools, yet children's literature remains challenged in growing diversity among authors and characters (Huyck & Dahlen, 2019). Classroom libraries also often continue to lack diversity and representation (Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, & Petrone, 2014; Crisp et al., 2016). If classroom teachers are unaware of the importance of diverse texts, or are unsure of where to find these books, students certainly do not have adequate access either. As the participants in this study found, the availability of texts that are representative of many backgrounds varied greatly by community and by resource (e.g., public library, bookstore) and would vary by classroom depending on the knowledge and background of the teacher.

Supporting teachers in developing a diverse and inclusive curriculum and collection of children's texts should be a priority in professional development. Current classroom teachers need to be supported in learning about new children's texts that reflect their students' backgrounds as well as older texts that might be viewed as problematic when read critically. Administrators should consider ways to incorporate this into regular, ongoing professional development in their specific school contexts in order to ensure representation of the students in those school contexts, and they should ensure a range of texts to represent backgrounds that are different from the students in their classrooms. Additionally, numerous social media initiatives and organizations (e.g., We Need Diverse Books, #DisruptTexts) can support teachers in looking for culturally responsive new titles as well as groups and publishers like Lee and Low or the Cooperative Children's Book Center that focus on disrupting the White, middle-class, monolingual narrative that is dominant in children's books to instead center voices from traditionally marginalized populations.

The results of this investigation are also important for teacher educators to consider. Structured, authentic field experiences in classrooms with culturally, linguistically, and academically diverse learners are of utmost importance for preservice teachers to gain knowledge and dispositions needed for supporting all students (Goodlad, 1990). Additionally, more university teacher preparation programs need to prioritize supporting future teachers in finding texts that reflect the multifaceted and complex nature of identity, particularly texts that represent the identities of their students. Children's literature courses in teacher education programs are excellent places to begin this discussion with preservice teachers. By incorporating activities such as the annotated bibliography in this study into early coursework, programs can help teacher candidates begin to shift the way they think about texts before they are asked to create lessons using books or work directly with students whose backgrounds may differ from their own. Teacher candidates can also learn how to question existing power relations related to language, ideology, and schooling (Moje & Lewis, 2007) before they enter a range of classroom contexts, enabling them to be better prepared to search for social inequities that may be present.

Limitations

Some limitations to this study exist. First, I was the instructor for the course that contained the annotated bibliography assignment. It is possible the candidates shared remarks based on what they thought I might want to hear. However, I witnessed the consistent sentiments and remarks not only in their reflections, but also during conversations in class as well as in the overall reflection on their learning throughout the semester. Another limitation is that the majority of the participants were in their first year of the teacher education program. It would be beneficial to revisit the teacher candidates' thoughts and beliefs about children's literature, critical literacy, and social justice as they

progressed further in their program.

Teaching for social justice is not easy work, but with thoughtful and meaningful support, teachers can learn how to weave it into their everyday classroom experiences, interactions with students, and choices of texts (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Teaching our upcoming teachers ways to seek out texts that create inclusivity, support diversity, and align with social justice is one way we can support them in their path to becoming teachers who are ready to seek action in order to create equity in their classrooms.

About the Author

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