CONSTRUCTIONS OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS’ BIOGRAPHIES: MEDIATIONS OF A SOCIOPOLITICAL CHILDREN’S TEXT

DISSEPTION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School at the Ohio State University

By

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines five preservice teachers from a small, private Catholic university in the Midwest and their perceptions of a sociopolitical children’s text. This study was conducted through a critical/constructivist and feminist epistemology in which preservice teachers’ biographies, their views on education are examined, in addition to conducting an interview to discuss a sociopolitical event through a children’s text. The text, *Smoky night* by Eve Bunting depicts the Los Angeles Uprisings from a child’s point of view. The study examined two research questions, 1) How do preservice teachers’ biographies enable them to form perceptions about a sociopolitical event (the Los Angeles Uprisings)? and 2) How can a sociopolitical children’s text mediate and/or interrupt these perceptions based on the preservice teachers’ biographies? The questions were explored through biographical records and views on education written by five preservice teachers, and one-on-one interviews.

The data for each participant’s biography was represented in the form of poetry. Three research findings emerged from the data, 1) The participants’ biographies take precedence over the text and another person’s lived experiences, 2) biographical constructions shape and inform notions of humanity, and right and wrong behavior and finally 3) mediations between the biographies and the text were presented in responses of
denigration, empathy and future use of the text in the preservice teachers’ classroom. Discussion and implications of the research findings in the fields of qualitative literacy research, teacher education and multicultural children’s literature are discussed.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Cynthia and sisters, Amy and Liz. Most especially to Dr. David E. Wiggins, my dad, who although is no longer here with us, has continued to inspire and motivate me.
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This project would not have been possible without the constant support and assistance of my professors, colleagues, family, friends and students. I am most grateful to my advisor and friend, Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard, who showed me great support with her faith and guidance while working with me. Her prompt and thorough feedback enabled me to make strides in my growth as an academic, teacher, woman and global. She gave me confidence in my work when I needed it most. I am also sincerely grateful to Dr. Peter DeMerath for not only bolstering my interest in anthropology, but serving as a mentor and treating me like a colleague. His commitment to his students is unwavering and highly commendable. This dissertation would not be possible without his encouragement throughout my doctoral years. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Mollie Blackburn, who took time out of her busy schedule to mentor me with a conference paper. She also sat through the presentation at the NCTEAR conference, thus, providing me with a familiar face in the crowd. I would also like to thank other professors and supporters such as Dr. Barbara Lehman, Dr. Cynthia Tyson, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, Dr. Janet Hickman, and Dr. Pat Scharer. These professors always showed great interest and support in my academic work.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I am five years old, sitting on my Hollie Hobbie towel next to the pool at Indiana University, where my father is getting his doctorate. I am immersed in my normal routine of staring, or as my mother politely called it, observing people. This fascination with people as a young child was a precursor to my continued observation of people in my adult life. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to travel as a young child. I lived in Frankfurt, Germany from 1982-1984 while my father served in the military. I had the wonderful opportunity to observe many different cultures as we also traveled to East Germany, Holland, Austria, Spain, France, England, Italy, and Tunisia.

I was a quiet and thoughtful child. Sometimes, I felt misunderstood in school. First of all, my family’s religion was labeled as “strange.” Christian Science is a vastly misunderstood, prayer-based belief system founded in 1897 by a strong, New England woman, Mary Baker Eddy. I saw a certain strength that stemmed from this belief system in my mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. All three women showed me the power of the female voice. I believe that it was their Christian Science faith that instilled that strength in them. However, many times I was called upon to defend Christian Science and my family’s strong faith in the power of prayer over medical intervention.
Often, I was lost in thought and had a difficult time paying attention in school. My teachers consistently had to bring my attention back to the discussion or book at hand. Maybe I felt that since we moved every 2-3 years, it would not matter how much I understood; the next school would be teaching me something different. My love for books, art, and self-reflection would keep me going especially in the darkest of times. I found that journaling my reflections helped me grow emotionally, spiritually, and mentally.

Later as a teenager, I lived in an upper middle-class neighborhood in San Antonio, Texas, where my father finally retired from the military. My parents expected me to be a “young lady” and to uphold Christian Science virtues of “perfection.” Showing weakness, illness, and intense emotion was frowned upon, which I found difficult to live up to. I also rebelled against the Texas notion of always acting like “a lady”; nor could I accept the attitude that people of color were less than us white folks. I hated the hypocritical way of living a so-called “upright, Christian” life, while treating others as inferior. Later, at Texas Tech University, I realized the sorority I joined was racist. They made up stories about an African American girl just to make sure she wasn’t voted in during rush week. I looked at my sorority sisters, called them “racists,” and quit. I started an animal rights organization, pierced my nose, and told the Texans what I thought of them! When I left Texas after college, I vowed to never come back.

I moved to Arizona and then to Washington, became a hippie and talked to people from all walks of life. This experience was the most eye-opening and spiritually moving experience of my life. People on the streets and in books became my gateway to a world I had never known. I read The doors of perception by Aldous Huxley, The Temple of my
familiar by Alice Walker, Ishmael and The story of B by Daniel Quinn, The way of zen by Alan Watts, and books on Taoism, Zen Buddhism, Wicca, and Hinduism. These books changed my whole perception of reality, spirituality, and culture. Music also changed my ways of thinking. The Indigo Girls, Fela Kuti, John Coltrane, Ska music, Tibetan Buddhist monks, and the Putamayo series of musical compilations opened a world of melodic journeys. These experiences moved me to teach in China after obtaining my Master’s degree in literacy from Western Washington University.

My cultural reality changed greatly when I moved from Bellingham, Washington to the People’s Republic of China. For the first time, I realized what it meant to be on the margins, to feel completely out of sync with the surrounding cultural rules and mannerisms. At times, I felt isolated and angry at what I felt was culturally inappropriate. For example, spitting on the bus or urinating in the street in the middle of the afternoon. I was also told to stay in my apartment when the Chinese plane crashed with the American spy plane. I only heard the Chinese communist point of view and not the American. I heard a very different view when I came back to the United States.

At the same time, I developed an understanding of what it meant to be an American and the privileges and disadvantages that I had while living in a “developing,” communist country. Realizing that this experience completely changed my perspective of cultural reality, I began to understand the thought processes behind multicultural and anti-bias education more clearly. The premise behind these two concepts is to transcend cultural intolerance and injustice, one must realize that people all over the world come from a multitude of different political, social, and cultural belief systems. Lived experiences and interactions with others intersect with these belief systems and construct
one’s biography. In order for me to truly begin to become tolerant and understanding, I had to invest in this notion of cultural relativism. I had to begin to understand that my cultural resistance came from my lack of understanding this concept. I realized that I also had to critically deconstruct my own cultural, social, and political constructions.

After analyzing my own cultural resistance while in China, I returned to the United States and began my doctoral studies at The Ohio State University. Before then, I had a vague conception of white privilege, but never fully discussed it or theorized it the way I was required to do in my anthropology and diversity classes that first year. I felt a variety of feelings from shame and guilt to anger for being white, to finally a sense of understanding of what my life’s work would and should entail. I also started reading multicultural children’s books more and found that I entered worlds of experiences I never knew existed. I read Pam Munoz Ryan’s *Esperanza rising*, Joseph Bruchac’s *Heart of a chief*, Ruby Bridges’s autobiography *Through my eyes*, and Gary Soto’s *Buried onions*. These books provided perspectives that initiated a pivotal point in my research agenda.

As I began to teach children’s literature to preservice teachers and observe their resistance to some of the multicultural books, I remembered the days when I, too, would have been somewhat resistant to a gay or lesbian theme in a children’s book or a book about the Los Angeles “riots.” I knew that in order for these preservice teachers to be able to explore these concepts, they would need to do as I did and explore their own constructions first.

This next section is the bridge between my personal biography and the scholarship that led me to this study. This poem illustrates a glimpse of my biography and
situates myself as the researcher. The constant interaction between me and others allows my identity to be fluid and malleable. This understanding is essential for interpreting the participants in this study. The importance of displaying my identity allows the reader to read about my sociocultural world and how it shapes the interpretation of these participants at this time in their lives as well as in mine.

Joy’s Autobiography

I am not perfect
I make no claims of perfection
I do what I can
To make as informed decisions as I can

I am a white woman with openness to sexuality
That means I believe that love is love no matter
What packaging it comes in

I grew up in an upper middle class family
I was a military brat,
But I grew up with southern Texas values
This meant I was not to date a man of color
I was to be a lady
I was to be a “good Christian”
I was to obey my parents
This all proved to be very difficult for me

I struggled in school
I struggled to think the way people wanted me to
I was told education would be my path in college
I thought education was my only option
I have made the best of it and
Believe that it is my path after all

I am 30 years young,
Four years ago I chose
Diversity work as my core interest
In my academic life.
Not long for a girl who hadn’t thought
Of institutionalized privilege,
Until someone opened my eyes to it
Now, I teach diversity and equity issues
To budding preservice teachers
This is the legacy I want to leave

I am not perfect,
I do not claim to know it all
I do not claim to have all the answers

These are my experiences

I do not claim to speak for all white women

I do not claim a voice for that which is not my own

I can not,

I will not do that.

All I can tell you is my perception

Of the events that occurred at the time that I

Tried my hand at interpreting them

That has to be good enough

Because that is what I have

That is what I claim.

Rationale for the Study

As I started OSU, I began to read writings regarding schooling, education, and culture (Bourdieu, 1977; Cohen, 1998a, 1998b; Foucault, 1982; Levinson, Foley & Holland, 1996; Nader, 2001; Sanday, 1998). I became increasingly interested in cultural anthropology and the research changes that occurred in cultural anthropology and education in general. The concept of cultural relativism began to inform the way I envisioned my future research. Cultural anthropology is both “historical and comparative…and is the study of contemporary living societies and cultures” (Levinson, 2000, p. 3). Anthropological studies began to reconceptualize the way anthropologists
study culture. For instance, while lecturing at Columbia University in 1899, Franz Boas started to study race and racism. In 1948, he wrote “Race, Language and Culture” (1948). He believed (along with many other later anthropologists) that there were no differences between so called “primitives” and “Western, civilized” peoples. He believed in cultural relativism in which a culture is only relative to its social contexts. These contexts are different all over the world and cannot be lumped into one universal criterion to which we all are assigned (Levinson, 2000).

I also started reading critical legal studies and critical race theory. Critical race theory began its insurgence in the research arena around the 1930s when W.E.B. DuBois and Carter Woodson were examining critical theories at around the same time as Marx and Engels, though they were not recognized as some of the key contributors to critical theories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Both considered race as one of the “central constructs for understanding inequality” (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995, p. 50). Many critical race scholars have looked to DuBois and Woodson’s work as a foundation for their own.

Then, in the 1970s Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman began the instrumental building blocks for critical legal studies and critical race theory (Delgado & Stefánic, 2001). Multicultural education stems from these two approaches. Critical multicultural education centers on not only race and racism, but the “nature of truth and reality” (Ladson-Billings, 2000) and the ways in which knowledge is constructed and reconstructed through the socialization of schooling. I began to read scholars and researchers such as James Banks (2001), Cornel West (1994), Henry Louis Gates (1992), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), Henri Giroux (2001), and Lisa Delpit (1995), who have
paved the way for other critical educational research studies and more specifically the
analysis of multicultural teacher education.

At that point in my studies, I began to make linkages between anthropology,
critical race theory, and multicultural children’s literature. Multicultural children’s
literature creates a bridge between the goals of multicultural education and literary
theory. It provides a link to examining how the world is read through the word and how
the word reifies the world (Freire, 1970). Multicultural children’s literature is more than
just reading and discussing other cultures; it can be used as a “vehicle for cross-cultural
dialogue” (MacPhee, 1997). The goal of this dialogue is to develop a critical
consciousness that serves as a catalyst for social action. The notion that multicultural
literature should focus on people of color is one that is a salient feature in multicultural
education and critical race theory: “Thinking of race strictly as an ideological construct
denies the reality of a racialized society and its impact on “raced” people in their
everyday lives” (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995, p. 51). Including multicultural
children’s literature in a child’s life can promote understanding and social action through
dialogue; it mirrors our diverse and ever-changing world in a positive and more equitable
way, and it gives our children the important tools for maneuvering around our
increasingly global society (Barrera, Thompson, & Dressman, 1997).

Key scholars such as Violet Harris and Rudine Sims Bishop began to critically
interrogate the stereotypical images represented in children’s literature. They proposed
steps to become more critically aware of how racism, sexism, and more recently
homophobia are recreated in subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways in a text (Bishop,
1997; Harris, 1991). Currently, more scholars are researching the impact and use of
children’s literature in both the college (Dana & Lynch-Brown, 1992; Hade, 1997; Hart & Rowley, 1996; Mathis, 2001; Metcalf-Turner & Smith, 1999) and K-12 classroom settings (Copenhaver, 1999; Enciso, 1997; MacPhee, 1997; Sipe, 1999). In these studies, scholars are analyzing the ways in which preservice teachers and K-12 students respond to multicultural texts. Accordingly, the field of teacher education has increasingly focused on the ways in which preservice teachers are trained to implement the theoretical and practical approaches to education in a diverse K-12 classroom (Bennett, 1999; Sleeter, & Grant, 1999; Agbaw, 1997). Many researchers have focused on the ways in which we expound on these perspectives, experiences, and conversational spaces around education.

In a survey on teacher preparedness, teachers stated feeling “moderately” or “somewhat” prepared for most classroom activities and on classroom management techniques; however, 17% felt “not at all” prepared to teach students of limited English proficiency or who come from diverse cultural backgrounds (NCES, 1999). This in part stems from lack of exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences in preservice teacher education programs and professional development seminars.

The study of multiculturalism in a teacher education context allows critical inquiries around a teacher’s constructed biography and how those constructions affect the way a teacher conducts her classes. As I began to realize that classrooms are spaces of multiple realities constructed and reconstructed by teachers and learners alike, I began to devise a research study that could address these concerns.

As a children’s literature instructor, I have found that when I read a socially charged text to the students in my classes, they are able to see a perspective which they
might not otherwise encounter. Many times in my children’s literature classes, the preservice teachers come expecting to find “simple and cute” books or their old favorites. Instead, they find a whole new world of different cultures, family structures, and a multitude of experiences ranging from child abuse, homelessness, and racial intolerance to homosexuality. Many times, these issues are met with a gamut of responses from subtle hostility to confusion to open acceptance. With critically selective questions, these kinds of discussions can prompt an examination of the readers’ own culturally constructed realities in relation to these texts.

Currently, adequate research or documentation does not exist specifically regarding the mediation between preservice teachers’ cultural biographies and sociopolitical children’s literature. There are studies examining preservice or inservice teachers’ cultural identities and the importance of self-reflexivity (Branch, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Ndura, 2004; Phillion & He, 2004; Sleeter, 1993 and Wasonga & Piveral, 2004). My study aims to address these gaps in the research.

I started teaching at a private Catholic college in a Midwestern city in May 2003. As I taught Children’s Literature the first two semesters, I realized that I needed to discuss the concept of multicultural education, cultural relativism, and social justice with preservice teachers and I could do that at least partially through using children’s literature. The students in my children’s literature class formed a gamut of opinions on what kinds of books they would include in their classrooms. Statements such as “We shouldn’t teach values in schools: The parents should” to “I had never thought about how that would make a person feel” or even quite simply, “I’ve never thought about that
before” pervaded our classroom and prompted me to conduct a more formal study on how their cultural biographies shaped their response to a sociopolitical text.

I wanted to find out what experiences shaped how these future teachers perceived race and other cultural realities. I chose this setting and these students because after teaching there for two semesters, I found that this campus and most of my students were more diverse in race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, etc. This dissertation examines the connections between five preservice teachers’ biographies and their mediation of one sociopolitical children’s text, Smoky Night by Eve Bunting.

In the context of one-on-one interviews with five preservice teachers from my undergraduate children’s literature survey course, the following research questions were explored. These questions intend to build upon the multicultural education intent of self-reflexivity and critical inquiry.

Research Questions:

1. How do preservice teachers’ biographies enable them to form perceptions about a sociopolitical event (the Los Angeles Uprisings)? What sociocultural and political factors influenced this construction of their biographies?

2. How can a sociopolitical children’s text mediate and/or interrupt these perceptions based on the preservice teachers’ biographies?

The first research question seeks to unearth the multiple layers of experiences and personal stories that make up a person’s biography. When listening to my students, I
noticed that at first they began to examine the books in class from a technical, almost clinical standpoint. However, when I began to ask them about their personal connections to the text and how they related to the characters in the story significant and emotional stories began to emerge. I decided that I would like to speak with the students one-on-one and dig deeper into the origins of their responses. Who are these students? Where do they call home? How do they identify their cultural identities? How much would they be willing to share? What I “uncovered” was an amazing journey into the lives of five deeply complex, unique, and very interesting people. I began to understand the stories behind the faces. I was pleasantly surprised with how much the participants shared with me. I found our discussions to be insightful, deep, and for some, self-reflective.

I wanted to know what kinds of themes would emerge from these interviews. Would the participants reveal racist injustices inflicted on them or would they talk about their own privilege? Would they even recognize their own privilege or oppression as I had started to do while reading books and articles on these topics? I initially intended to interview only white participants because I wanted to unmask white privilege as I once had done. I also felt this was a topic I could explore later in another research study. I wanted to explore several kinds of responses first, because I felt that everyone has bias and I wanted to see in what ways these biases would manifest in the interviews.

I felt that the book Smoky night by Eve Bunting would be an excellent social and political site for exploring cultural identities. Because of its depth under the guise of simplicity, I felt that this book could evoke a wide range of responses—from personal connections to more critical, evaluative responses. The book takes a child’s point of view so that it seems less threatening, but is still a powerful testament to the intensity of racial
intolerance and the depth of oppression in not only this localized community, but on a national and worldwide scale. Literature can provide opportunities that delve into the lives of people we might not encounter or perhaps thought we would not want to encounter until we meet them through a book. I can think of many children’s books that allow a window into the experience of someone with deep emotions, fears, and fantasies that we might have thought ceased to exist for them. *Seedfolks* (1999) by Paul Fleischman is another book that I often read to my classes, one chapter every class session. In it are characters from diverse backgrounds that come together to build an urban community garden in a poorer part of Cleveland, Ohio. After reading the perspective of each character, the students are given the opportunity to write down how the character provided a mirror for them—in other words, in what ways this character reflects their experiences or feelings. Below their mirror, they write how the character provided a window into a life or experience that they had never before encountered. These interactions with literature provide avenues of growth and self-reflection when prompted in this way. These personal connections with literature engage readers and lift their eyes to the harsh, but truthful realities faced by many.

These pedagogical strategies for deconstructing oppressive practices in literature are only one piece of the marginalization and exclusion of disenfranchised peoples. Not only are they marginalized and stereotyped in life, but many times in literature, as well. Critical literary exploration and analysis provides communities of inquiry that develop a critical lens on the inequitable practices that shape our world.

With the second research question, my intention was to not only inquire into the biographies of my students, but also discover how those biographies shaped their
responses to a sociopolitical children’s text. Could the text help them renegotiate those cultural biographies? I found this to be a fascinating question from not only a literary and multicultural approach, but from an emancipatory approach, as well. Intensive engagement with multicultural children’s literature allows for critical analysis of the literary elements of a text such as setting, plot, position of characters, and authentic representation. I believe that by deconstructing notions of power through the literary canon, one might also deconstruct notions of oppression across other life experiences. I wanted to see if my students/participants could and would do just that. What in their biographies allowed them to do so? If they were able to deconstruct notions of power and privilege, what would they do with that information? That, I believe, is the next step in this journey of biographies, multicultural children’s literature, and social action.

I believe the stories of our lives are sometimes poetic tragedies and sometimes poetic bliss or sometimes a mixture of both. I could see the poetry coming from the mouths of my students: about their lives, their loves, their losses. I wanted to capture that and link those intimate moments with a character’s poetic story. What mediations of meaning would arise from those intimate interactions? Would my students link their lives to someone totally different from them, or would they disengage and resist those moments of connections? The second research question seeks to explore just those connections and mediations with the text, Smoky night.

Researcher’s Perspectives, Definitions, and Chapter Overviews

My research study is an example of constructivist, narrative research and (methodologically) mirrors the research projects of several teacher educators who have
conducted small-scale studies focusing on multiculturalism in the classroom (see LaFramboise & Griffith, 1997; Ndura, 2004; Phillion & He, 2004; Striedieck, for examples). Constructivist learning environments provide “multiple representations of reality, emphasize knowledge construction instead of knowledge reproduction, and encourage thoughtful reflection on experience” (Jonassen, 1994). Narrative research allows both researcher and participants to theorize themselves and get a glimpse of the real life of a researcher and participant (Sleeter, 2001). Data sources for this qualitative study include student reflective journals, interviews with students, and course papers. I relied mostly on student interviews and member checks. I also use the term “biographies” or “cultural biographies” to include the ever-changing, complex, and multiple layers of meaning surrounding a person’s identity.

In a qualitative, social constructivist paradigm, the researcher’s voice and subjectivities can surface in a variety of ways. Considering its inherently feminist theoretical approach, I intended this study to be personal, poetic, and transformative. This entire dissertation will reflect that tone. I believe that no matter how hard we try to leave parts of ourselves behind, when we enter certain life contexts, we invariably bring our whole self along. I am a researcher, teacher, and learner. With that understanding, however, I do not leave my whiteness, my femaleness, age, or sexual orientation at the door of this document; I bring all of me. I do not believe that anyone can try their hand at interpreting another, without bringing those aspects of oneself along. Although, I do not specifically analyze and interpret my own prejudice and pedagogical practices, I realize this is as much my responsibility as a teacher educator as it is my students. I plan to deconstruct my own prejudice and biases in future research studies.
When referring to the discourse of multicultural education, multicultural children’s literature, and concepts of identity/biographies, one must first define what is meant by these terms. Considering that the theories and pedagogical practices of multicultural education are constantly transforming, evolving, and refocusing, I will contextualize these terms as they are used in this study below.

The term biographies refers to the aspects of one’s life that reflect sociocultural categories such as race, class, sexual orientation, gender, age, and geographic location. It must be kept in mind that sociocultural categories are discursively placed due to the shifts in current societal discourses around interactive and fluid concepts such as race, sexual orientation, and class.

Cultural pluralism seeks unity in diversity and is based on “respect for all differences, and the right to participate actively in all aspects of society without having to give up one’s unique identity” (Sleeter, 1999, p. 153). Cultural relativism is an “anthropological approach which posits that all cultures are of equal value and need to be studied from a neutral point of view” (Glazer, 1994, p. 1). However, I realize that being neutral is near impossible and so I see cultural relativism as understanding the variety of perspectives and cultural influences that construct people’s biographies and experiences. This term is used to promote that understanding and utilize it when interacting within a diverse society. The term cultural realities stems from the concept of fluid, contextualized, and constantly transformative notions of how the world operates. Cultural reality provides a space in which one’s conceptions of one’s values and views shape the way one views others. For some people, the world operates in an absolute and rigid system, where for others the world operates in relative and contextual ways that allow
room for others to live the way they want to. For many people, their cultural reality lies somewhere in between these two approaches.

Multicultural children’s literature refers to literature that represents characters that have been marginalized, underrepresented, and disenfranchised both in society and in literature. This includes people of color, low socioeconomic status, gays, lesbians, transgendered people, the homeless, as well as disabled peoples. Authentic representation including authors from that culture, and non-stereotyped depictions of characters is also a salient feature in the critical inquiry of a multicultural children’s text. The term multicultural education is “a progressive approach to transforming pedagogical practices that reflect transforming education that holistically critiques and addresses current shortcomings, failings, and discriminatory practices in education. It is grounded in ideals of social justice, education equity, and a dedication to facilitating educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings locally, nationally, and globally” (Gorski, 2000, p.???). Response is used in this study in the ways that the participant expresses her meaning making and interpretations of the text. This is represented in the interviews discussing the book Smoky night by Eve Bunting. These “responses” came in the form of prose, poetry, quotes, utterances, and sometimes physical behaviors represented in the one-on-one interviews, as well as a survey describing their cultural biographies passed out to them at the beginning of the class.

The term riots was used by the media and many of the people in government at the time of the LA uprisings and the beating of Rodney King in 1992. To riot means to “incite unadulterated violence, unjustifiable rage and hapless looting” (Collins, 1999, p.
474). While this word was widely used in the media to describe the events after the beating of Rodney King, it also made those events sound like disorganized and misplaced rage. However, *riots* was the term I used when interviewing the participants, because it is the one used in the book. Also, my own bias is shown because after collecting data, I was told that “uprising” would be a better term. I suddenly realized my own prejudice coming through in the interviews. I believe the author, Eve Bunting, used this word because that was the term used at the time of the events. The word *riot* has been used to describe events like Watts, Detroit, Zoot suit, Chicago, Cincinnati and Los Angeles and it has mostly been used to describe the political and social revolutions of African Americans in the United States. However, from a critical multicultural and social justice perspective I do not believe it is the most accurate word to use (see the term *uprising* below). *Uprising* is used mostly to describe political unrest and social action like protesting. However, it has mostly been used to describe the political unrest in foreign countries like Poland, Iraq, Ireland, China, and Bolivia. In this document, I prefer to use this word instead of *riots* because the term *riots* gives the events after the beating of Rodney King and the other so-called “riots” a negative, violent tone. The word *uprising* maintains the power of political unrest that arises from centuries of oppression, often manifesting in waves of justified protest.

The chapters of this dissertation are formatted in traditional dissertation style. Chapter Two is a review of scholarly and research-based literature surrounding theories of culture, multiculturalism, teacher education, teacher identity, and reflexivity and multicultural children’s literature. In the first section, I review the theories and practice and current research on multiculturalism in both the K-12 setting and teacher education
programs. I include the historical implications of critical race theory on current critical multicultural practices. Next, I explore current and relevant research on teacher education programs and multiculturalism. I then examine the research on identity/biography and how it affects teacher practice, including aspects of race, sexuality, class, and gender. I also review the history, definitions, and current research on multicultural children’s literature. Finally, I explain how these particular approaches intersect in the current research conversation and the gaps that my study aims to fill.

Chapter Three is the methodology chapter. In this chapter I describe my epistemological considerations. This section includes anthropological, critical, and feminist epistemological approaches. I then describe the research design and methodology including the setting, course context, and a description of the five preservice teachers. The last section describes methods of data collection including the interview process and its relation to the course context and the manner in which I analyzed, interpreted, and wrote the data.

Chapter Four begins with a description of how I formatted the participants’ biographies. For each participant, I divided the responses into four narratives. The first narrative is in the form of a poem in which each of the five participants’ biographies is displayed. The second narrative displays the participants’ views on education from a questionnaire I passed out to them at the beginning of the course. The third narrative reflects a monologue from an interview discussing the children’s book, Smoky Night by Eve Bunting. The fourth narrative intends to incorporate the text, Smoky Night, the participants’ responses, and at times my own responses in order to illustrate the mediations made between myself, the participant, and the text.
I discuss three major findings synthesized from the participants’ interviews. The first finding explores how the participants’ biographies take precedence over any mediation that occurred with the sociopolitical text, *Smoky night* by Eve Bunting. In this finding, I discuss the meaning of biography and factors that contribute to its construction. I then discuss how the participants’ biographies shape the way they perceive sociopolitical incidents such as the Los Angeles Uprisings. The second finding discusses the ways in which the participants construct the notion of humanity in terms of right and wrong when discussing a variety of cultural perspectives such as the actions and behaviors of the participants in the Los Angeles Uprisings. Finally, the third finding discusses the participants’ engagement with the text and the ways in which a discussion surrounding a sociopolitical text can mediate their biographies. Further discussion is also centered on connections and disconnections (such as empathy and denigration) made through the text.

Finally, Chapter five concludes the study with how these findings contribute to the broader context of multicultural teacher education research and multicultural children’s literature. In this chapter, I discuss the implications to the research field and how preservice teachers’ responses to multicultural children’s literature are shaped by their cultural biographies. My hope for this study is to continue a research agenda that continues to focus on biography and the mediations that occur when reading not only a sociopolitical text, but any multicultural children’s book. I also look forward to future studies that can further examine the linkages between biographies, teacher education, and literary response.
Conclusion

One of the key scholars of literary theory is Louise Rosenblatt (1978) and her notion that transactions occur between the reader and a text. In her theory, readers are able to negotiate meaning from a personal stance based on their own cultural biographies and their perceptions of how the world operates. Rosenblatt describes reader response as having two stances, efferent and aesthetic. These stances are “reinforced with reading that propagate social change-readings that enable the reader to ask questions about situations and ideas they encounter within texts” (Yenika-Agbaw, 1997, p.447). When readers/preservice teachers begin to question their constructed cultural realities through their transaction with a text, my hope is that they will begin to deconstruct their own privileges and/or oppressive practices to work towards more just and equitable pedagogical practices. They can begin to contextualize others’ actions and understand them in new, meaningful ways. This study seeks to enhance this understanding of the transaction between experience and text in order to instigate transformative ways of knowing and relating to one another and the world. These understandings can be fostered through literary exploration, interpretation, and examination. As Freire (1970) states,

When people lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality. To truly know it, they would have to reverse their starting point: they would need to have a total vision of the context in order subsequently to separate and isolate its constituent elements and by means of this analysis achieve a clearer perception of the whole. (p. 104)
This kind of critical inquiry into children’s literature and biographies can foster active and intensive engagement in the multicultural classroom. This is the foundation for social change and justice. This kind of action begins in the classroom, and it begins with teachers.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

RESEARCH AND THEORY RELATED TO THE STUDY

Introduction

This review of literature explores theories and approaches to critical multiculturalism, identity, preservice teacher education as a liberatory practice, multicultural children’s literature, and literary theories of response and research. Throughout this paper, I will draw upon most of these scholars work to illustrate the continuous connections between race, society and inequity.

My sincere interest in anthropological education coincides with my interest and advocacy of multicultural education and literature. This introduction of culture, society and schooling provides a foundation for an understanding of culture and how it allows for inclusion and exclusionary practices. The need for multicultural education, multicultural children’s literature and social action is based on these oppressive practices that have been indoctrinated through culture and society. Thus, with the inclusion of multicultural education practices and literature, teacher educators can enable teachers to change culture and society.
Culture, Society and Schooling

According to Williams (2000) culture has two parts, “a) known meanings and
directions in which members are trained and b) new observations and meanings which
are offered and tested” (p.33). Past anthropologists have observed the reproduction of
culture in children by the modeling of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, linguistic
and symbolic patterns of communication and gendered roles designed for different ages.
Geertz (1973) explains that culture is actually a “set of control mechanisms-plans,
recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call “programs”) – for the governing
of behavior” (p.44). A child should be expected to do a certain chore or obtain a certain
skill by a certain age. This understanding of culture gives way to a set of shared symbolic
knowledge in which everyone shares culture through language, actions, experiences, and
meanings both implicit and explicit (Levinson, 2000).

It is important to note the difference between society and culture. Society is
sometimes a larger, more organized group in which people partake in the reproduction of
the status quo. For instance Cohen (1998a) states, “Societies are the organized groups of
people interacting; cultures are the sets of rules, formal and informal, spoken and
unspoken, that govern their behavior” (p.63). Cohen reiterates that loyalty sometimes
overrides any logical or rational thinking. Conformity to and cohesion of the system is
what matters most. An example of this is the United States in the era of McCarthyism or
during WWII paranoia ran so rampant that innocent Japanese Americans were interned.
Most of all, enslaving hundreds and thousands of African people and somehow justifying
these actions, are perfect examples of this type of conformity and loyalty no matter what
the cost. Culture, in turn, allows for the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups, thus
perpetuating society.

Prejudice and social injustice have been justified in many ways that perpetuate
this cycle of inclusion and exclusion. Cultural reproduction and transmission is the
human need for making meaning out of experience and sharing it with others. Many
times these prejudices are learned and modeled from parents or adults to children.
Children don’t always know why they feel a certain way about another child, but they
believe what their parents say and how their parents react to certain people.

The study of education through an anthropological lens has brought forth
fascinating theories of how society has enculturated its children through education.
Durkheim (2000), a sociologist from France, affirmed: “Historical investigation of the
formation and development of systems of education reveals that they depend upon
religion, political organization, the degree of development of science” (p. 58). For
example, children learn national identity from the morning ritual of the pledge of
allegiance to the theories of the most popular scientific discoveries of the time. These
discoveries are considered truth until another comes along and either supplements it or
negates it. Durkheim continues to state that, “society exists as an ongoing, organic
collectivity, created historically, and the individual can only be educated within the
parameters of this collective achievement” (p. 21). Knowledge circulated within a
society is then constrained through educational processes. Only when that knowledge is
challenged and critiqued can it change. Change can occur by working through teacher
educators and examining and deconstructing teachers’ biographies.
Understanding that racism is institutional is one component of American society that seems the hardest to illustrate to not only preservice teachers, but many white Americans as well. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) speaks of “class habitus” in which he states, “we are insisting, against all forms of the occasionalist illusion which consists in directly relating practices to properties inscribed in the situation, that “interpersonal” relations are never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships and that the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction” (p. 81). Many of preservice teachers do not believe that there is a hierarchal notion of racism in the United States anymore. They believe that it only resides in a few individual contacts with racists. Most do not see that there is, as stated by Michel Foucault, a “regime of truth” that indoctrinates our media, educational and social practices (Rabinow, 1984). Furthermore, most do not understand that without a complete upheaval of the current way we teach and learn, racism and oppression will continue to create binaries of intolerance between privilege and oppressed peoples.

Education, however, is not always the same as schooling, because it “occurs all around us, all the time, in a variety of sites that may or may not include schools” (Levinson, 2000c). Christianity was considered the underlying premise of education in the Middle Ages (Durkheim, 2000). It was through this indoctrination of religion that people were educated and their culture was reproduced. Education was all encompassing, in that everyone learned about this religion including villains, townsfolk and kings. It was the more formal schooling like reading and writing that were prohibited for some, especially women. It was not until the transmigration of different cultures around the world did this kind of monocultural education change.
Multiculturalism

There has been an increasing academic focus on multiculturalism. Multicultural education originated from the civil rights movement of the 1960’s and 70’s and critical legal studies. It seeks to subvert the legacy of patriarchal hegemony that undergirds our social, political, and economic system, and restructure it with “democratic ideals of the West as freedom, justice and equality” in addition to viewing “citizen action to improve society as an integral part of education in a democracy; it links knowledge, values, empowerment and action” (Banks, 1993, p.23). Education plays a crucial role; without naming and interrupting racism, the educational curriculum can perpetuate the cycle of oppression. Thus, multicultural education promotes both uncovering and transforming systems of power. In this sense, critical multiculturalism is a “systematic critique of the ideology of westernness…challenging the domination of assumptions held by Western culture” (Hade, 1997, p.116).

Critical legal studies, critical race, feminism and Continental social and political philosophy have all had influences on critical theory and multicultural education (Delgado, 1995). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995) notes the relationship of people’s perceptions between the law and reality,

Although society’s structures of thought have been constructed by elites out of a universe of possibilities, people reify these structures and clothe them with the illusion of necessity. Law is an essential feature in the illusion of necessity because it embodies and reinforces ideological assumptions about human relations which people accept as natural or even immutable (p. 108).
The law has governed what people think is right and wrong; laws then become issues of black and white and therein lies the absence of relativism, legal determinacy and historical inequality.

Although this study is informed mostly by critical theory, I also include some critical race and whiteness scholars in my findings to support my analysis and interpretation in my discussion of race. I include both critical race and whiteness scholars because, as a white scholar, I need to situate how both critical race and whiteness inform the way I examine, analyze and interpret this study regarding a sociopolitical event. This particular study’s charge is to enable preservice teachers to unmask inequities in their lives and teaching and as a teacher educator, I too must address these issues in my research and pedagogy.

One of the first three of the basic insights of critical theory is that prejudice and inequity are considered normal in American society, although there is the call for formal equalities within the law, every day occurrences and prejudices are still prevalent. Although companies may state that they are an equal opportunity employer that doesn’t necessarily mean that once a person is hired they are given equal opportunities to excel (Delgado, 1995).

The second insight is the power of storytelling. There is a story that is being told, one that enables the dominant group to construct one reality maintaining “stock explanations” and rationalizations for the status quo (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995, p. 58). In turn critical scholars hope to deconstruct and replace it with a new, more equitable and multi-voiced reality. We construct these realities with words in stories in addition to silence (Delgado, 1995). The use of storytelling can be a healing process; a
way to lift the monolithic weight of oppression and “allow one to stop inflicting mental
vigilance on oneself” (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995, p. 57). By communicating to
others the experiences and “stories” of oppression, justice becomes closer within our
grasp. I have noticed that many of these tales come in children’s trickster tales such as in
Virginia Hamilton’s (1993) book, Many Thousand Gone. Many times Brer Rabbit or
High John stories depicted the main character outwitting the master and then flying away.
In the children’s picture book, Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold (1991), Cassie flies away
from her home to free her father from the oppressive laws that prohibit him from
excelling in this job.

A third insight is the notion that white elites will only promote the advancement
of people of color if their own interests are to be served and paced at a rate that will only
somewhat satisfy those being benefited, but enough that they will not fight it. Delgado
(1995) questions if many civil rights laws have really been effective and progressive for
marginalized groups. Laws such as “federal Indian law, remedies for racist speech and
hate-motivated crime, and women’s reproductive liberty” (p. xiv) are all issues that have
somewhat helped these groups, but at the same time controlled and stifled their progress.

An additional insight noted by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), William Tate
(1995) and Derrick Bell (1995b) is the notion of property rights as another facet of
benefiting dominant groups. If we think about the Indian removal laws, Japanese
internment and the Chinese Exclusion laws where each one of these involved relocating
certain groups or prohibiting them from entering the country, one can see that property
rights reside in whiteness.
There are numerous models for the implementation of multicultural education in the K-12 and teacher education curriculum. Banks (2001) proposes elements such as content integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction and an empowering school culture and social structure (p.5). There are many terms used to describe this effort, such as cultural pluralism, cultural relativism, social reconstructionist, equity pedagogy, anti-bias and intercultural education. In addition, more recent approaches such as caring-centered, and culturally relevant pedagogy are described. I briefly describe each of these terms based on the works of several multicultural scholars.

Cultural pluralism is the development of democratic ideals concerning the maintenance of diversity, a respect for differences, and the right to participate actively in all aspects of society regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, age and ethnicity (Bennett, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 1999). Cultural relativism is an anthropological approach which posits that all cultures are of equal value and need to be studied from a neutral point of view… as the basis of cultural relativism is a scientific view of culture, it also rejects value judgments on cultures. There is, in this view, no single scale of values which holds true for all cultures and by which all culture can be judged. Beliefs, aesthetics, morals and other cultural items can only be judged through their relevance to a given culture. For example, good and bad in are culture specific and can not be imposed in cultural analysis (Glazer, 1996, p.1).

Social reconstructionist is a more socially, active critique of modern culture in that it “prepares future citizens to reconstruct society so that it better serves the interest of all groups of people and especially those who are of color, poor, female, gay, lesbian, transsexual, disabled, or any combination of these” (Sleeter & Grant, 1999, p.189).
Equity pedagogy is teacher centered by facilitating academic achievement by using a variety of teaching styles based on student learning styles (Banks, 2001, p.5).

Anti-bias education focuses on curriculum that “affirms and fosters children’s knowledge and pride, not superiority in their cultural identity” as well as their cultural awareness of differences, and the expansion of fairness and justice concepts (Pang, 2001, p.158). Intercultural education is mostly used in Europe by researchers and policy makers who contend that “intercultural implies an education that promotes interaction among different cultures, whereas multicultural does not,” (Banks, 2001, p.69). The caring-centered approach incorporates the trusting care between teachers and students that form the foundation for a strong democracy. Pang (2001) describes caring-centered as the, “integration of the ethic of care, sociocultural theory of learning, and education for democracy” (p.51).

Finally, culturally relevant teaching, most closely associated with the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings, aims at understanding and “mediating mismatches between students’ home culture and the culture of the school through teaching that has been labeled ‘culturally appropriate,’ ‘culturally congruent,’ ‘culturally compatible,’ or ‘culturally responsive”’ (Bennett, 1999, p.367). These terms and approaches are integral in understanding the complexities of multicultural teacher education, liberatory practice and revolutionary dialogue. Both Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) and Lisa Delpit (1995) have conducted extensive research studies on how to teach African American children. They have supported teachers of African American children who feel they know what is best for the children of their communities.
Teacher Education, Liberatory Practices and Revolutionary Dialogue

Critical theorists in teacher education contend that traditional education theory’s sole focus rests on the “management and administration of knowledge, as opposed to a critical concern with the historical and social determinants that govern the selection of such knowledge forms” (Giroux, p. 73). In an effort to infuse teacher education with liberatory practice, this section relies on critical pedagogy and revolutionary dialogue to create an enlightened, progressive view of teacher practices. Key critical scholars such as Henry Giroux, Paulo Freire, Gloria Ladson-Billings, James Banks, and Maxine Greene inform much of critical, liberatory pedagogy.

Critically examining the world in which we live provides avenues of growth and social activism. This is possible through authentic dialogue that reflects love, critical thinking, humility and hope. To socially act from the heart is to understand that, “it is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours” (Freire, 1970, p.96). Freire continues to note that one’s view of the world is “manifested variously in their action” thus it reflects their situation in the world (p.96).

Another approach to becoming critical and truly democratic is the notion of autonomy. To be autonomous is to understand your influence in the world and the constructions that compose the way you are categorized, “To be autonomous is to be self-directed and responsible; it is to be capable of acting in accord with internalized norms and principles; it is to be insightful enough to know and understand one’s impulses, one’s motives, and the influences of one’s past” (Greene, 1988, p.118). These characteristics are essential to knowing one’s place in the constructing of self and others.
Critically examining the reflection of society in the children’s literary canon provokes interrogation of other societal inequities presented through other institutions. Educators may unconsciously perpetuate the status quo if they are not provided the opportunity to take a critical lens to the ways in which society rejects true democracy and freedom by its very insurmountable dehumanization of others. Paulo Freire (1970), bell hooks (1994) and Thich Nhat Ninh (1992) approach knowledge construction in ways that students are active participants linking awareness with practice (hooks, 1994). Thich Nhat Ninh (1992) focuses on holistic approaches emphasizing, wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit. Knowing oneself in ways that reveal holistic, critical reflection and action is to understand one’s identity better.

Liberatory educational practice examines the notion of obtaining freedom through dialogue (Freire, 1970). To understand the power of the word, Paulo Freire (1970) emphasizes the impact the word has on the world and how it is intertwined and inherently connected to praxis through reflection and action. In order for praxis to have efficacy, it must be embedded in authentic dialogue. For Freire, dialogue is crucial to the subversion of the status quo and dominant practice of the oppressors. Dialogue must be accompanied with qualities of a true revolution. The truest revolutionary act is infused with love, hope, humility, having faith in humankind and critical thinking. Thus, these qualities bridge a “mutual trust between the dialoguers” (p. 91).

When teaching critical inquiry to preservice teachers, the professor must first do a thorough self-inquiry. There must be an understanding of your own philosophy that is clearly defined and implemented in your teaching and daily actions before teaching others. Becoming mindful of our own inconsistencies, perhaps in one instance someone is
preaching equality and the next they are making a racist remark or acting in a racist manner. It is this “capacity to embody multiple subjectivities, to continually reconstitute oneself within different discourses, and to borrow from one in order to nullify the insidious effects of the other that gives racist practices their affectivity” (Yon, 2000, p. 127). To critically examine and gain autonomy is not only observing your own thoughts and actions, but comprehending the social implications of the oppressive practices around you.

Dialogue that fosters terminology to incorporate white racial identity will better help students to conceptualize whiteness as a race instead of always discussing their relation to the “Other”. Whiteness as an invisible “norm” barricades the decontextualizing and interruption of cultural pluralism. Barnett (2000) clarifies this,

The most obvious result of such majority confirmation is to make standard rhetorical and grammatical norms appear ‘objectively’ correct and, ultimately, invisible; at the same time, such confirmation undermines the possibility that different forms of language and knowledge have value (p. 22).

Teacher educators can have students examine their words as constructions around the premise of dominance. Noticing the ways in which we categorize other people by race can hinder and enable stereotypes to continue to empower others.

Finally, we must not ask our students to do any self-examination without our own willingness to jump into that examination with them. Foucault (as stated in Rabinow, 1984) states that in changing society, “The problem is not changing consciousnesses-or what’s in their heads-but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of
truth” (p. 137). Digging deeper to the core of what makes this society inequitable and changing the institutions that inhabit the language and discourse of a racialized society is crucial to understanding cultural relativism, and seeking to reconstruct society.

Identity/Biographical Constructions

Human identity is shaped by a conglomerate of components imposed by not only outside forces, but how a person internalizes and makes sense of those outside forces. Individual identity is based on this internalization of the outside forces. The outside forces are those such as societal rules and expectations, cultural assumptions made by others, and degrees of oppressive practices inflicted upon certain groups. According to Ford and Dillard (1996), “Transactions with community, family, religion, gender expectations, and schooling experiences contribute to the construction of personal histories. Ethnic identities resulting from these transactions are socially constructed and in turn can be socially transformed” (p. 233). This developing self “serves as a private center of being or as an autonomous subject capable of excavating his or her own history in the service of transcending it” (Taubman, 1993, p.288). This understanding serves as a foundation for the purpose of social reconstructionism in multicultural teacher education.

Humans make sense out of these developing identities through signs and symbols in their environment that reify their sense of reality. Vygotsky (1978) notes that the “special feature of human perception…is the perception of real objects…I do not see the world simply in color and shape, but also as a world with sense and meaning” (p.33). Societal constructions can label, categorize and organize people in such a way that everyone serves a particular function and systems of power are sustained through this
organizational structure. These signs are used to conceptualize identity, “People learn to use these historically, first as parts of behavioral routines, then as signs meaningful to others, and finally signs for directing their own actions, managing their own feelings, and organizing their own thoughts” (Holland, 1998, p.281). These categories have a way of attaching to a person throughout their life and to try to shake them can sometimes seem impossible. After a person recognizes these patterns of categories they, “produce, reproduce, sustain, and transform a given ‘form of life’ or Discourse” (Gee, 1999). When two people meet they immediately start categorizing the other person according to the priorities of society. In the United States, one of the top priorities is race, then gender and class. After categorizing that person, a whole line of characteristics follow and a hypothesis is made about how that person may or may not behave.

However, for those on the political periphery, identity is all the more fractured, contextual and relative. DuBois’s notion of “double consciousness” entails a sense of two identities, one in which a person acts in the manner they please, called the “ideal self” (this is usually in their neighborhood and around close social interactions) and the other according to the dominant ideological constructions of the day, called the “alter ego self” (Lewis, 1993). This latter consciousness refers to marginalized groups where Standard English is normalized and expected, such as in businesses, schools and other dominant contexts.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) discusses alterity as an epistemic paradigm that allows people located in the margins to view mainstream culture from a wide-angle lens in which they are cast into a liminal position of understanding, but not participating in the mainstream culture. Ladson-Billings (2000) notes this as a “perspective advantage” in
which for some people this advantage is the result of, “the dialectical nature of
constructed otherness that prescribes the liminal status of people of color as beyond the
normative boundary of the conception of Self/Other” (p. 262). These people are fully
conscious that they have to subscribe to this alter ego self rather than the ideal self. Only
in pockets of time with people close to them (and possibly in the same position) are they
able to ascertain and actualize this ideal self.

It is important to note that certain marginalized groups have been constructed
differently at pivotal times in history, depending on the needs of the dominant group and
how they intend to racially construct these groups. Japanese Americans were interned
during WWII, while other marginalized groups were given opportunities to work. Then
during the Depression, Mexican agricultural workers were in demand while African
Americans were struggling for work. The United States has constructed identities and
racial characteristics during different periods in history. Identity is not a fixed,
essentialized concept but a “constructed and open-ended process” (Yon, 2000, p. 13). It
is as if the dominant culture is holding a prism and constantly turning each racial group’s
constructions to manipulate the political narrative of the day to suit their needs.

This is shown throughout education because, “schools distribute and validate
symbolic capital enabling dominant groups to maintain economic and political
advantage” (Bourdieu, 1977). For many of these marginalized groups they develop
coping mechanisms such as code-switching, and many times some individuals will
believe that they are completely assimilated only to find that not everyone treats them as
such. They are not always aware that they are still being constructed by the dominant
group, whereby maintaining these cultural differences. Schooling tends to be equated
with learning the culture and language of mainstream, white Americans (Ogbu, 2000, p. 197).

The shaping of culture informs and allows for inclusion and exclusion for certain groups of people depending on the cultural norms and political agenda of the time. Many of these groups have been treated this way due to economic, social and political hardships and oppressive practices inflicted by a dominant white, heterosexual, male society. For the Mexican Americans in agriculture, it was for cheap labor. For Asian Americans it has also been for cheap labor during the Railroad times, but as soon as they were no longer needed, laws were assembled to keep them out. For African Americans, it has been a constant battle to get their foot in the door in corporate America, universities and even through consumerism. For Native Americans, they would like to be able to educate their children and live the way they please without constant mainstream interruptions and inequitable regulations. For women, LGBTQ persons and lower-income families, there is much need for the inclusion, intervention and representation in the multicultural education conversation. Preservice teachers need to know the history of oppressive practices towards these groups. Without this knowledge, they cannot fully deconstruct and critically analyze the texts they encounter.

In the next section I discuss how white teachers can deconstruct their identities. Understanding that much of the teaching force is made up primarily of white females, I deem this an appropriate and much needed conversation.
White Privilege and the Unmasking of the Invisible

White privilege is the notion that throughout American history whites have dominated the social, political and economic spheres in which all “Others” (non-whites) have been marginalized in ways that prevented them from participating and actively creating this mainstream story. While whites are provided certain privileges and advantages based not on merit but on skin color, marginalized people are confronted with liabilities or detriments. In addition to these liabilities, we have expected non-whites to successfully merge into mainstream institutions while the same rules apply,

Liberal notions of legal access to historically white male institutions grow suspect under the scrutiny… Institutional transformation is as necessary as it is feared. Without it, institutions (and equity advocates) may be inviting white women and men and women of color into institutions that are ultimately damaging (if credentialing), while these institutions remain unchanged (Fine, 1997, p. 62). When previously marginalized people enter these institutions they are expected to blend in and play by the rules that had alienated them in the past.

White privilege has afforded its members many benefits; benefits that most whites have been unaware of and if asked could not tell you how “privilege” has given them a boost up the societal ladder. However, if whites look more closely they will find a filled “knapsack” of goodies that have helped them get in the front door in which marginalized people have had slammed in their face. Peggy McIntosh (1997) recognizes that being white has afforded her a certain invisible package, “like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks” (p. 291). This invisible knapsack is
one that whites are not always explicitly told about, but is a transparent bundle bestowed at birth. Marginalized peoples, however, have been given explicit (by family and friends) and implicit (mainstream society) instructions on how to get along in this white world.

In her analysis of white privilege, Mcintosh (1997) drafts forty-six conditions in which she is able to use her white skin privilege on a daily basis. McIntosh has listed this as not “white privilege” so much as “uneearned advantage”. She states that whites need to recognize the systems of dominance rather than thinking racism only exists on an individual level. We need down to earth writing that explains this unearned advantage, to understand that privilege is damaging to white people because it creates a false sense of merit, and is only perpetuated by making the subject taboo.

With this “uneearned advantage” many whites are able to ignore the privilege or advantages bestowed on them. They are allowed to turn their back because they live in an inequitable society where it condones unearned advantage. These diaphanous lines that encircle whites will remain there unless the veil is lifted and discussed. This notion of not naming privilege is at the root of a society full of injustice. When whites have come close to recognizing this privilege they shout out the old standby, “I am colorblind”. Not seeing differences is where they would like to reside. We are all people, right? We are people in the way that white mainstream America wants us to be people, according to white rules and white structures. When asked to describe yourself, many whites will say dependable, honest, hard working, but you hardly ever see “white”. Whites don’t seem themselves according to their race because they are the “norm”. After discussing our identities according to race, class and gender, one of my white male education students
said he identifies himself as a “laid-back and free-thinking individual” while other students of color and white women included their race and gender.

According to Gallagher (1997) “whites perceive themselves, according to one account, as being part of a distinctly different, colorblind, sympathetic generation that has learned to look beyond ‘the color of the skin’ to ‘the beauty within’” (p. 7). Gallagher delineates white racialization as being in an “ethnic vacuum”, where the decline in ethnicity has created this vacuum where identity is now grounded in race. With the mobilization of other races, whites are forced to identify with their own racial group. That is when the “colorblindness” fits in to maintain white privilege. The introduction of illegal discrimination was meant to allow everyone full citizenship, but now it homogenizes and silences those who still suffer prejudice and oppression.

The notion of reverse discrimination is made prevalent in the defense of whites. Whiteness is now seen as a social liability, which angers and infuriates most whites because they were under the false premise that the United States is now (after affirmative action) an egalitarian society where if everyone works hard they will succeed regardless of race, “This ostensibly non-racist “white” space that is being carved out of our cultural landscape allows whites to be presented like any other racial contender in the struggle over political and cultural resources and self-definition” (Gallagher, p.10). Whites are convinced that they are in the positions they are today due to merit and not because of skin color.

When whites want to cash in on their privilege, they only need their skin color. Working on the codes in which society has set for them through literature, media, popular culture and education, whites are able to fluidly move about with their invisible
knapsack. Pierre Bourdieu (1977), describes the dominant culture as, “The homogeneity of habitus is what-within the limits of the group of agents possessing the schemes (of production and interpretation) implied in their production- causes practices and works to be immediately intelligible and foreseeable, and hence taken for granted (p. 112).” Throughout these avenues in which people mirror the real world, literature has shown the duality of lightness and darkness, black vs. white. These codes of race delineate “white” as “orderliness, rationality, control, and dependence on institution” and “black” as “chaos, irrational violence, and total loss of control” (Barnett, 2000, p. 11).

Whites are able to maintain this picture of the two races by perpetuating the images in the media and popular culture. As whites dominate, they set the tone for what difference will look like, how it will be defined and denied based on its own terms and to its own advantage. Whites decide how far the “diversity” issue will be taken. bell hooks (1989) states, “Too often, it seems, the point is to promote the appearance of difference within intellectual discourse, a ‘celebration’ that fails to ask who’s sponsoring the party and who is extending the invitations. For who is controlling this discourse?” (p. 19).

In education, we tell the teachers to promote diversity, but who defines what diversity is and who is included? Many times teacher educators tell preservice teachers that you don’t just read African American books to African American children and white books to white children; you include a wide array of all different kinds of races and ethnicities no matter what the class population looks like. Cohen (1998a) states, “Diversity persists because cultures themselves often are resistant to such change or the inclusion of others and resistant even to the diffusion of some cultural elements” (p. 65).
Multicultural Education and literature have been met with a long list of arguments that claim that it would divide, rather than unite, people. Many whites (like in affirmative action arguments) feel left out and feel that they are being excluded. What they don’t seem to understand is that for many generations marginalized people were enslaved both literally and even after slavery ended, they were enslaved to an all white system where there was little hope for advancement. This is still an issue today and the notion that Affirmative Action is being resisted reifies that fact.

When recognizing white privilege many whites become paralyzed with guilt and shame. Or they ignore it because they can. Coming to the realization that are you part of a group that has caused others to be marginalized, belittled, felt inferior and unworthy, you feel that you might not know how to change that. In order to stop this unearned advantage, you must look within and analyze the ways in which you perpetuate this system. In addition to understanding how you benefit from it and how you can act to create a more equitable society. Rochman (1995) speaks of literature in this way, “If you read only what mirrors your view of yourself, you get locked in. It’s as if you’re in a stupor or under a spell. Buried” (p. 147). It’s important to understand that this process is a journey of self, one in which it can be ugly at times, but that self-forgiveness and the importance of justice for the future is the goal. You must thoroughly observe yourself and watch how you might stop this system in your own thoughts and actions.

When discussing white privilege it’s important to examine the language used in mainstream America in order to reconfigure the meanings of the words we use. As Wildman and Davis (1997) mentioned, we must look at the word “racism” and all the other “isms”. We must first name “whiteness” and the conditions and advantages from
which the white race has come to benefit from. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997) states the fear behind the paralysis,

Inability or unwillingness to ‘leave the field, or point out the contradiction.’ No-win relations to whiteness become double binds of whiteness when academics trying to produce antiracist scholarship fail to metacommunicate about how academic discourses and writing are themselves structured by racial relations” (p. 264). Discussions of positioning and racial ties within their group can be one step in untying the contradictions in which whites profess reverse discrimination and unfair affirmative action laws.

Deconstructing Teachers

Teachers, in turn, create classrooms that reflect their own socially constructed realities. A general understanding of the teaching force in 2005 is that most of the teachers are white females and “what they say, perceive, believe, and think can support or thwart students” (Van Hook, 2002, p.255). These kinds of classrooms provide a kind of cultural reproduction in which teachers transfer knowledge and certain cultural norms to students; whereby “subjectivities form and agency develops...for while the educated person is culturally produced in definite sites, the educated person also culturally produces cultural forms” (Levinson & Holland, 1996, p.14). Teachers and learners alike are co-creating this cultural production and it continues to grow and perpetuate cultural positionalities maintaining the societal status quo. Many scholars contend that critical inquiry and intellectual deconstruction of this production process can break down these
monolithic barriers of oppression and division between marginalized groups
(Frankenberg, 2001; Yon, 2000; Levinson & Holland, 1996).

With this understanding, one of the first steps in the deconstruction process is to examine and interrogate one’s own beliefs and biases, “It is this capacity to embody multiple subjectivities, to continually reconstitute oneself within different discourses, and to borrow from one in order to nullify the insidious effects of the other that gives racist practices affectivity” (Yon, 2000, p.127). To this effect, not only observing one’s thoughts, but also the oppressive practices inherent in educational settings and comprehending the social implications of these practices. Some research studies have effectively studied ways in which to exemplify this process with teachers.

Recent studies on teacher self-reflection and awareness of identity are becoming more apparent (Phillion & and He, 2004; Branch, 2004; Wasonga & Piveral 2004; Ndura, 2004). Teacher educators are finding key linkages between not only preservice teachers’ identities and their stance on diversity, but examination of their awareness of their cultural identities. For instance, Ndura (2004) found eight concepts associated with the participants’ characterization of their cultural identity, “a) a new discovery; b) a typical/normal and rather simplistic phenomenon; c) s source of pride, confidence and satisfaction; d)a shelter from the world of differences; e) a limitation of barrier that leads to conflicts with different cultures; f) a source of opportunity; g) an evolving phenomenon; and h) a reality that must be uncovered and confronted” (p. 12).

Sleeter (1993) conducted a study of thirty teachers in which she and a colleague coordinated a voluntary two-year staff development project on demographic changes, curriculum, working with parents, cooperative learning culture and learning style. Sleeter
focused part of her research on how the white teachers’ viewed race. In discussing racial inequities and white privilege, Sleeter noticed a trend in the reactions of most of the teachers, such as their claims of being color-blind to race and an avoidance of the subject of white superiority or privilege. A question that came to mind for her was, “What does it mean to construct an interpretation of race that denies it?” (p.161). A course of action in which Sleeter deems important for a white educator to overcome this avoidance is to, “spend a month in a minority community coupled with instruction about racism and the history and culture of that group, as well as the development of some emotional bonding with members of the group” (p.169).

Researcher and teacher educator, Smith (2002) takes her students (mostly white females) on a journey of looking within. Smith names her pre-service teachers “culturally disadvantaged”. She placed her students in literature discussion groups where they discussed “multicultural” books. Students were mostly amazed that children’s literature authors included such raw and racist experiences in their books for children. The teachers felt like outsiders when they read about people who have been traditionally marginalized. One student was amazed that history books “lied” to her. A critical question to pose at that point would be, “who has been writing these textbooks?” and “why would they lie?”. Many of the students later realized that it was important to include this kind of literature in their own future classroom. Smith generated a thought process of what it means to be white and exposed them to the reality of a racialized society in which many whites have been “colorblind”.

Titone (1998) outlines a way for teachers to create an appropriate classroom discourse in which students will benefit and develop their own social justice philosophy.
Students should be “cognizant of themselves in their relation to history and place”, be willing to “initiate discussions of racial issues and education” and be cognizant of the ways “curriculum and projects can be used to address students’ unarticulated beliefs about the connections between race and education, [and] aware of the opportunities for supporting students in their racial identity development” (p. 167). Critical to social understanding is creating and maintaining a classroom setting in which the discussions are open, honest and respectful, in addition to keeping the balance of listening and speaking for all students.

Delpit (1995) urges teachers to look within and without. She asks that teachers understand their own biases but also look into the communities that their students live in order to understand their culture better. She also requests that teachers examine the cultures of power that are enacted in their classrooms as a representation of broader, more institutionally delegated forms of power. Delpit explains that many white teachers try to allow student choice and independence in their learning but she believes that only choice will hamper the skills needed to further students’ education. Whereas, teachers of color believe that a combination of skills and critical thinking approaches are better, the white teachers try not to exert too much authority; thus, leaving the students in a maelstrom of inconsistencies.

A study conducted by Foley (1996) followed the attitudes and perspectives of how Native American students interact with their white teachers. Foley noticed that the Mesquaki Indians of Iowa adhered to an identity of the “silent Indian” in which they rarely spoke in class and at times unnerved the white teachers. The teachers viewed this as low motivation, lack of competence in English or low cognitive ability. What the white
teachers didn’t know and/or perhaps didn’t bother to learn was that in this particular
culture an Indian child’s silence is due to their “distinct, learned linguistic and cultural
tradition” and “there may be objective speech style differences between whites and
Indians, but what interests cultural performance scholars is the way each ethnic group
uses discursive forms to produce a positive group image or identity” (p. 81). Foley noted
that the Mesquaki students at times would use this cultural characteristic strategically.
This also happens with other marginalized groups when interacting with whites. Unlike
other minorities few Mesquaki Indians have wanted to integrate with white society.

One student in Foley’s study said that the white students resented the Mesquaki
students because there was a double standard. The teachers would leave the Indians
alone and would call on the white students. The Indians regarded whites as loud,
insensitive, obnoxious and aggressive. In the beginning, the teachers would expect the
Mesquaki students to assimilate, but once they noticed that this wasn’t always going to
happen, they gave up, rather than learning more about why they were silent. Grasping
the enormous implications of how identity is socially and politically constructed plays a
pivotal part in deconstructing the marginalization of different cultural groups, privilege
and power and the perpetuation of these practices in schooling. Teacher educators and
preservice teachers alike need to be prepared to dismantle this process together in order
for an emancipatory, liberatory and revolutionary dialogue to occur. Multicultural
children’s literature is one avenue of potential discourse and interrogation of these
oppressive practices.
Multicultural Children’s Literature

In this section, I aim to discuss the fundamental components of multicultural children’s literature, literary and literacy theories and the research that reifies those theories. First, what do we mean when we say multicultural literature and who is included? For some, multicultural literature includes only people of color, for others it includes, “nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, family status, geographic difference, linguistic variation…” (Cai, 1998). There are three broad views of multicultural children’s literature that has led to its ambiguous definition. According to Cai (1998), the first category is multiple + cultures = multiculturalism which should include “as many cultures as possible with no distinction between the dominant and the dominated” (p. 313). The second view focuses on only racial and ethnic issues and the third view espouses that “every human being is multicultural and all literature is multicultural” (Cai, 1998).

One problematic issue with the first view is that the dominant culture (a Eurocentric male perspective in the United States) is included in this category and therefore the marginalized groups have to (once again) compete to be recognized. The suggestion that, “previously unrecognized groups may need to be given “unequal focus” during classroom discourse if the playing field is to be made level” is essential to understanding why these groups are give “unequal focus” (MacPhee, 1997, p. 33).

The second view of focusing on only race and ethnicity has raised issues in that some believe that it is essentializing color. However, this doesn’t necessarily mean that whites are not a part of the discussion of multiculturalism, “Books about people of color may not directly reflect the lives of White teachers and students, but they definitely
expose them to racial issues in the country which at some point in their lives they must inevitably confront” (Cai, 1998, p. 315).

The third view focuses on the notion that all literature is multicultural. This can be an important point to bring to all literature discussions. However, as the literary canon is still constrained in a world of all-white literature, we must maintain a separate category for marginalized cultures until they are statistically and substantially represented in the canon of children’s literature.

It is important for educators, parents and students to understand that multicultural literature is for everyone. Including it in a child’s life can promote understanding and social action through dialogue; it mirrors our diverse and ever-changing world in a positive and more equitable way, and it gives our children the important tools for maneuvering around our increasingly global society (R. Barrera, Thompson, & Dressman, 1997).

Many education scholars are continuing to engage in research, dialogue and debate about the importance of multicultural children’s literature in the mainstream university and K-12 curriculum (Bishop, 1997; Cai, 1998; Harris, 1991; and Ford et. al., 2000; Enciso, 1997; Metcalf-Turner and Smith, 1999; Hart and Rowley, 1996; Dana and Lynch-Brown, 1992; Mathis, 2001; Shannon, 1994; Hade, 1997). Debates continue around the definition and implementation of multicultural education. Shannon (1994) proposes that our society has always been multicultural before and after the European “discovery” of America. Regarding this notion, “school curriculums and organization have perpetuated a self-serving or enforced denial of multiculturalism” (p.1). Shannon’s
work with preservice teachers reiterates the impositions that these students feel when faced with implementing multicultural children’s literature.

Due to these kinds of debates, multicultural literature has, throughout its insemination, maintained a somewhat ambiguous and fractious history. Throughout the years, children’s literature has shaped and reshaped perceptions of “the other”. Distorted and stereotyped characters such as the “pickaninny” who was deemed ignorant and comical to its white audiences and the “savage” Indian emerging from their teepees adorned in “war paint” and feather headdresses have historically crossed the pages of children’s books (Hade, 1997). These images have not only embarrassed and shamed the groups they represent, but portrayed a fabricated image to the white children whose privilege has yet to be questioned (Harris, 1991; Sims, 1982; Morrison, 1992; Segrest, 1992).

While the representation is becoming more authentic, the quantity and quality of multicultural children’s literature is still under examination. There are more Mexican American, African American and Asian American books, but Native American books still remain quite low in production (Austin & Jenkins, 1983; Barrera and Cortes, 1997; Hade, 1997; Harada, 1995; Harris, 1991; Reese, 1997; Sims, 1982; Yamate, 1997).

Learning to reinterpret the images and representations in multicultural children’s literature is not only reading the word but the world (Freire, 1993). This is a critical process in which both teachers and students question the most fundamental aspects of literature, education and American society by creating a discourse that allows for the literary societal challenges and critiques.
Both Babb (1998) and Rosenblatt (1938) urged readers to carefully scrutinize the literature that readers have been exposed to for so many years. Rosenblatt (1938) argues, “The danger is that we may unquestioningly adopt the general attitudes toward human nature and conduct that permeate the very atmosphere in which we live…those ideas [from literature] that are taken most for granted are often the ones that merit the most skeptical scrutiny” (p. 19). The ways in which Americans choose to narrate socially constructed realities through the written word sustains the notion that we mirror our racialized understandings in the books we read and write. Watkins (1979) so eloquently states, “Literature is indispensable to the world…The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way a person looks at reality, then you can change it” (p.36-37).

By the 1980’s more societal and curricular reforms were joined by Mexican Americans/Chicano(a)s, Native Americans, Asian Americans, women, the disabled, gays and lesbians and the elderly (Bishop, 1997). In addition to these “new” representations, teachers need guidelines on how to select multicultural children’s literature. In selecting and evaluating multicultural literature we must keep in mind the goal of multicultural education and literature; to educate accurately and fairly as a catalyst for social action. Bishop (1997) places the selection and evaluation process in three overlapping categories: “literary, sociopolitical, and educational” (p. 15).

Literary quality has also been an overarching issue for multicultural literature. You want diverse cultures to be represented accurately free of bias but you also want them to be written in a thought provoking manner with rich details and intriguing characters. For groups that are often overlooked this might not always be possible.
Freeman and Lehman (2001) provide a few guidelines to evaluate the literary merit of a piece, “(1) a plot that is original, fresh, well-constructed, and credible; (2) a setting that contributes to a story’s mood and authenticity; (3) worthwhile themes that emerge naturally and subtly from the narrative; (4) characters who are convincing, consistent, and well-developed; (5) a style that is suited to the plot, theme, characters, and tone of the story; and (6) a clearly identifiable point of view that offers readers insight about their lives and world” (p. 36). I find this last guideline to be one of the most important for the social justice classroom. Consistency throughout the text is also crucial if this point of view is to be validated and strengthened in the students’ minds.

In order to provide the most positive and accurate images possible a teacher should analyze a few particular points. For one, the text must be consistent and portray positive images. Bishop (1997) notes in the book, Secret Valentine that the child’s hair looks very similar to the pickaninny image who has been a source of laughter and embarrassment for many African Americans. The characters must also have distinguishable characteristics that mark them as individuals rather than a group that all looks the same. This has been known to happen in many Asian and Asian American books.

Books in a particular locale need to portray, “the social and cultural realities of people living in those societies” (Bishop, 1997). For instance in the book Amazing Grace, Bishop (1997) notes that although it is a nice thought that everyone can achieve success if they just put their mind to it, this is not always a realistic depiction of the society in which the character lives. For Grace, being an African American female, even achieving the highest grades, the highest test scores and carrying out the best interview
does not necessarily mean that she will obtain the same desired job or opportunities as her white counterparts.

One of the most debated issues in evaluating multicultural literature is the insider/outsider perspective. Can a person that is part of a particular culture be the only one that can write about it? If this person is an outsider, are they essentializing the culture they are writing about? I have often asked my students if there was a particular culture other than their own that they would feel comfortable talking about or even writing about. If so, how long would they need to live within that culture or research it to become knowledgeable enough to successfully capture its true essence? This is problematic in many ways because one might think they have become immersed in a culture but do the insiders feel that the person is a part of their culture enough to speak for them. This is a noted problem among anthropologists for some time now. Making sure to purview the author’s introduction, research and experience is essential even if it is fiction (Bishop, 1997). This helps to ensure authenticity and accuracy.

Even if an outsider does write about another culture, can you still use it in the classroom? Bishop (1997) notes that you don’t have to take it off the shelf, you can critically analyze it with your students. In MacPhee’s (1997) study after reading Amazing Grace one first grade student said, “It doesn’t matter what color your skin is. You can do lots of things. My nanny is black, and she can do anything” (p. 38). This statement could be puzzled in many ways. First of all as noted above, we have to take into account the social realities of the day. I wonder also, if the nanny could truly be anything she wanted to be, would she be a nanny for a rich, white family? (MacPhee noted that her children are all white and come from very prosperous families). These critical discussions are
important and should be structured in an age appropriate way where the children can feel that they can take some kind of social action rather than leaving them feeling paralyzed with guilt.

Other considerations for evaluating books are to be aware that there is great diversity in every group so the books you choose should reflect that. Avoiding stereotypes in the literature you choose is crucial if you want to eradicate racist judgments. Freeman and Lehman (2001) use Bishop’s advice by learning about the various types of multicultural literature, “culturally specific books, culturally generic, and culturally neutral” (p. 35). Culturally specific books focus on an identifiable culture that is rich in cultural details. Culturally generic books, “portray characters of a cultural group but contain few details specific to that culture…while the setting serves as a backdrop for this story, specific cultural information is very limited” (p. 35). Culturally neutral books, “feature characters of a cultural group” but are actually about something else. The book is actually featuring another problem that happens to be going on in that culture.

Selecting and evaluating multicultural children’s literature is not always an easy task but it is essential to promote a healthy and factual depiction of not only your students’ cultures, but all cultures even if they are not represented in your classroom.

The Cognitive Skill of Perspective Taking

The goal of perspective-taking is that readers can be able to read all literature with a relativizing multicultural lens in which they engage in the capacity to read against the grain of the dominant narrative. Multicultural and global literature can bridge these gaps in our cultural understanding of others and how people operate within the realities
constructed by them and for them them. Having empathy alone cannot stop social injustice, but it can be an important first step to cultural understanding and social action.

Activities that elicit a new or different perspective can allow preservice teachers to, “weave their narratives together…which obscures the ways that racist domination impacts on the lives of marginalized groups” (Rosenberg, 1997, p. 83). Perspective taking activities such as role playing (Bigelow, 1994), characterization whereby readers examine the feelings, actions and words said by a character (Bluestein, 2002) and literature circles (Hill, Johnson and Noe, 1995; Daniels, 1994; Calkins, 1994) can invite readers to “enter the personas of contemporary or historical social groups to learn about issues in their characters’ lives from the inside out” (Bigelow, 1994, p.114). Readers are able to experience the challenges, injustices and discrimination of a variety of groups. This personal connection allows them to place their own subjectivities into the text and gain a new perspective.

The notion of empathy also stems from the ethic of caring multicultural approach. Maxine Greene (1995) emphasizes that “imagination is what above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empathy spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called ‘other’ over the years (p. 3). By empathizing with characters in a book or with people different from us, we can begin to open spaces of emotional rather than just theoretical and abstract constructs of oppressive practices and the ways in which they affect people. Empathy is a very powerful emotion and can enable preservice teachers to reach that “breaking point” (Phillion, & He, 2004). Empathy has been determined as describing,
An attempt to understand by imagining or comprehending the other’s perspective. Empathy is ethnorelative in that it demands a shift in frame of reference; it is based on an assumption of difference, and implies respect for that difference and a readiness to give up temporarily one’s own worldview in order to imaginatively participate in the other’s (Bennett, 1993, p. 53).

This kind of understanding of another’s experience is crucial in becoming a culturally relativistic thinker; however the process cannot stop there.

Teacher educators must instill the interrogation of the most fundamental aspects of education by creating classroom discourse to transform a socially ingrained narrative into a more realistic and equitable one. Empathy can also be problematic in many ways, “When empathy does not develop, students tend to revert to their stereotypical assumptions. Even when empathy does develop, it might be the kind that reinforces stereotypes” (Phillion, & He, 2004). Empathy, according to Rosenberg (1997) can, “create a false sense of involvement” thinking that one is involved, but merely just getting “started or diverted” (p. 83). Rosenberg also critiques empathy or sharing of victimization by, “weaving their narratives together…which obscures the ways that racist domination impacts on the lives of marginalized groups” (p. 83). Merely empathizing cannot be the end of the discussion, but understanding the hatred and pain that has kept our racialized society in shackles under the guise of meritocracy and democracy.

Resistance and disengagement are very common responses when asked to deconstruct notions of oppression and socialization patterns not only in children’s literature but in one’s lived experiences as well. Multicultural literature might face implicit resistance because, “Readers resist text and readings, as well as real and implied
authors, because of their cultural memberships and various identity positions: as female, as African American, as homosexual, as white students who resist challenges to their own privilege, or as Americans who cannot grasp the cultural meanings and values in stories of other countries” (Rogers & Soter, 1997). Denigration is also a defensive response to literature in which to, “counter the threat of difference is to evaluate it negatively…called ‘negative stereotyping’” (Bennett, 1993, p.35). Responses such as these are prevalent, especially in white teachers when race and privilege are challenged. Further need for social action in response to this resistance is necessary in dismantling the oppressive practices. The power of story needs to be recognized as a powerful agent to promote social understanding and change.

Another perspective-taking approach is the notion that literature can serve as both “mirrors and windows” (Galda, 1998; Sipe, 1999). For readers whose culture is represented in the text, the book acts as a mirror. When they see positive images and accurate portrayals of their culture they feel validated and proud of their heritage. For readers who are reading about a new culture different from their own, the book acts as a window. This enables the reader to see the experiences of the character, therefore gaining a more authentic insight into the nature of the cultural group represented.

Finally, these mirrors and windows elucidate an emphasis on self-examination, which is an important component in examining and interrogating multicultural children’s literature, and the reflections presented of American society. By reading multicultural children’s literature, readers are able to compare and contrast their own socially constructed realities with that of the characters, thus allowing them to see the barriers that still come between themselves and the characters they encounter. Seeking to understand
the meanings represented in literature is to interpret the signs and symbols that represent
difference in American society, “By denying that race, class and gender are not signs to
be interpreted, we also deny what is obvious; that literature is a cultural product and that
race, class, and gender do matter in our lives” (Hade, 1997, p. 116).

Multiliteracies and Critical Literacy

The Multiliteracy approach highlights cultural and linguistic diversity within both
national and global arenas. This approach was started by a gathering of ideas around
literacy teaching by a group now known as The New London Group. This group
examines the ways in which personal, public and working lives are changing and how
these changes transform our cultures and the way we communicate. The New London
Group (1996) states that in understanding local diversity and global connectedness,
students need to learn to dispose a set standard and “negotiate regional, ethnic, or class-
based dialects and variations in register that occur to social contexts” (p. 69). This again
centers on liberatory practice and revolutionary dialogue.

The significance of examining teacher identity and preparedness for diverse
classrooms is an integral component in this study. One such way to use this notion of
multiliteracies can be explored in two concepts: critical literacy and literary literacy.
These theorists all see meaning as residing in the reader (although they differ in the
degree of reader-text interaction), and regard readers as active constructors of meaning
with personal knowledge, beliefs, and histories that affect their responses and
interpretations, thus creating the potential for more than one "correct" interpretation.
From such perspectives, instruction focuses on arriving at defensible meanings and refining them as well as considering the validity of other responses (Langar, 1991).

For preservice teachers to obtain the skill to deconstruct notions of power through literature, especially children’s literature, they create a critical component in their classroom. Critical literacy is viewed as social transformation where one must understand and change the world (Manning, 2001). To use critical literacy, one must be able to decode and deconstruct ideological notions presented through text, institutions and social practices in order to move toward a more equitable society.

It’s imperative that students gain an understanding of critical literacy because, “when learners juxtapose different languages, discourses, styles, and approaches, they gain substantively in meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic abilities and in their ability to reflect critically on complex systems and their interactions” (The New London Group, 1996, p. 69). When preservice teachers engage in critically examining societal practices that affect all facets of human life, they begin to unmask the systematic oppressive ideologies, discourses and methods of the dominant members.

As important as cultural identity membership is; more importantly still is it’s portrayal in literature and other forms of media. Literary literacy is, “the ability to understand, interpret, and critique literature” (Cai, 1997, p.21). Images and representations come to mind every time someone reads words and these words can provoke a wide variety of associations, ideas and feelings causing interpretation of the work as the reader evokes it (p. 21). Cai states that it is important to note the difference between evocation and interpretation in literary literacy, “Evocation is primary, the basis
on which interpretation proceeds. Interpretation may happen after evocation or concurrently with it” (1997, p. 21). One way of thinking of this is that to evoke is to “read with” while interpret means to “read upon”.

For instance, a reader can simply read with (evoke) a text but never read upon (interpret) it. They may or may not critically analyze it and the images it provokes. Cai (1997) posits that by critically examining a text for the multiple layers of meaning that it represents can enhance student comprehension and engagement. Accordingly, it will also enhance the ability to critique literature. Attaching certain criteria to the variety of genres explored in children’s literature from poetry to historical fiction to contemporary realistic fiction to traditional literature; readers should have a foundation in which to critique the quality of that literature. In order to read the world through the word one must consider that the, “study of literary conventions should be anchored in personal experience of the literary text, which in turn reflects social and cultural experiences of the world” (Cai, 1997, p. 30). Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of “heteroglossia” is that which context is given predominance over text. Bakhtin states that heteroglossia occurs, “At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions-social, historical, meteorological, physiological-that will ensure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions” (p.428). Humans are constantly interacting and reenacting ourselves in new ways. By reading and engaging in dialogue around multicultural literature education students, teachers, and children are able to reconstruct that identity that society has imposed on them.
Research on Multicultural Children’s Literature and Preservice Teachers

There have been an increasing number of research studies and strategies for teaching multicultural children’s literature to preservice teachers (Dana and Lynch-Brown, 1992). They include having guest speakers from the community expressing diverse points of view, visiting schools in urban areas with a high minority population, as well as reading a wide variety of multicultural children’s fiction. Dana and Lynch-Brown (1992) suggest using multicultural children’s literature within a teacher education course to engender a variety of perspectives.

Another research team (Hart & Rowley, 1996) developed a reading packet that helped them examine and interpret preservice teachers’ choices for selection of multicultural children’s literature. They found that before introducing professional multicultural readings, the students would give responses that evoked personal connections to the text and how the literature could be implemented in the classroom. After intervening with the professional readings, the preservice teachers were more likely to give instructional reasons that promoted a variety of values which “they deemed to be socially beneficial in different contexts including the individual child, the classroom and the larger society” (p. 219). This illustrates that intervention with professional multicultural readings that address larger societal concerns enables students to see the significance of their literary choices.

One particular study examined teaching cases of preservice teachers in which they discussed and wrote about a series of children’s books (LaFramboise & Griffith, 1997). They foregrounded the study with the understanding that the purpose was to, “enable
students to view themselves as part of a culturally diverse society, confront their own subjectivity, and to examine critical issues related to children and schooling (p. 369).

After much analysis the research team explored cultural discontinuity portrayed both in the novel and the students’ ways of making meaning. Categories of cultural discontinuity (layers of cultural conflict) are gender issues, student to student, student to teacher, student to family and cultural community, and student to community outside the cultural community. Among these categories the researchers found a variety of meaning making categories such as paraphrasing, making connections to their own knowledge and experiences, comparing and contrasting, making inferences, critiquing and making connections to course content (LaFramboise & Griffith, 1997, p. 378).

What’s interesting about this study is the resistance of the students by stating and paraphrasing events in the book, but not challenging the cultural conflicts. Most of the time they stated the conflict, everyone agreed on how the situation could be perceived and they moved on. For further critical discussion to take place, they needed a challenger in which a student might “challenge ideas by demonstrating precision of vocabulary that helped clarify thinking…or help correct a misinterpretation of the text” (p. 379).

Finally, this research study showed that literature can engender connections between preservice teachers and the students they teach but that without accurate knowledge of the culture represented in the book the preservice teachers might misinterpret relationships among the characters. The researchers conclude that: 1) selection of the literature is essential, 2) discussions and other reflective assignments should provide ways for students to view multiple perspectives, 3) students should be given opportunities to make connections between story situations and practical
experiences, 4) Teachers need to be aware that students may have counterproductive ways of making meaning from texts, 5) discussion groups should be structured to include students who can challenge ideas and demand precision in thinking and 6) opportunities for reflection should occur in several different ways and over time (LaFramboise & Griffith, 1997).

Metcalf-Turner and Smith (1999), use the case study method to examine K-12 classroom teachers’ use of multicultural children’s literature “to construct their knowledge base for working effectively with children from diverse cultural, linguistic and/or socioeconomic backgrounds” (p.70). They used multicultural children’s literature to enable teachers to develop competence in teaching diverse students. They found that the teachers’ responses would sometimes focus on the secondary issues rather than on the cross-cultural conflict confronting the protagonist of the story. With appropriate, well-directed dialogue, children’s literature instructors can elucidate the misconceptions and concentration on the secondary issues, and help refocus students to the cross-cultural conflicts represented in the plot and theme of the story.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the breadth of theories and approaches to Multiculturalism, multiple notions of identity/biography constructions and fundamental components of and research on multicultural children’s literature and preservice teachers. Considering that this study focuses on how preservice teachers’ biographies are mediated through a sociopolitical children’s text, the bulk of the analysis focuses on identity/biography constructions and so too does the review of literature.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:
PROCEDURES AND PERSPECTIVES ON DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The intent of this study was to examine preservice teachers’ biographical constructions and mediations of a sociopolitical children’s text. Qualitative research is supported by interpretive and constructivist ways of knowing and relating to the world. In my interpretation and analysis, critical/constructivist and feminist epistemologies became a salient approach in this research study. I also utilize anthropological principles of research embedded in qualitative methods such as thick description and multiple interpretations. The anthropological concept of culture, society and schooling also inform the ways I analyze and theorize the data. Although much of educational research is ethnographic in nature, this study does not fit that description in that it is not a long-term and fully immersed engagement in the field. I began formulating my research questions with the notion that our personal stories and experiences shape the way we view others. This notion of self-identity constructing and reconstructing others comes from scholars such as Lisa Delpit (1995), Maxine Greene (1995), Cynthia B. Dillard (1996), and Christine Sleeter (1999). These scholars helped shape this study and inform
the direction of the questions. I wanted to see if and how a sociopolitical text mediates preservice teachers’ biographical constructions.

In order to accomplish the goals of this inquiry, I approached this study using narrative methods through a critical/constructivist paradigm informed by critical race, and feminist epistemologies. This chapter is comprised of two sections that discuss the epistemological considerations underlying this inquiry and the methodology used including the methods of data collection, analysis, and design of the research site.

Locating Self

As a white female scholar, discussing issues of race and racial tensions can oftentimes initiate scrutiny. Understanding this and embracing dialogue about these contentions allows a researcher to grow and become more aware of their own biases. I understand that as a white woman there are numerous ways in which my perception of a sociopolitical event or concept is informed by my own social constructions. However, I feel that if I expect my students to grow then I need to open a space for my own growth. This can be messy and often times uncomfortable, but necessary for social change. It is my quest in this study to be responsible when I discuss race, whereby I discuss and review not only key critical race scholars, but white scholars such as Christine Sleeter, Michelle Fine and Lois Weis. Fine et al (2000) discuss researcher subjectivity and hasten the call for researchers to carefully include their voices in addition to their participants: “In the hands of relatively privileged researchers studying those whose experiences have been marginalized, the reflexive mode’s potential to silence subjects is of particular concern” (p.109). As I was discussing the text with one of the African American
participants, I wondered what parts of her responses were censored because I was white. I also wondered if the white participants shared more with me because I was white and they assumed I would understand or share some of those same insights with them. Further in this chapter, I discuss those specific scholars and texts that most informed my understanding of white scholarship.

When selecting the text, *Smoky night*, I found that Bunting discussed the tensions of the LA Uprisings in a thoughtful and sensitive manner. Her subtle way of placing Daniel, the main character in the middle of frightening situation allowed the reader to certain insight that might not otherwise be encountered. Although Daniel didn’t understand the tensions around the Uprisings, he was still able to delineate a basic assumption about them in one statement, “Maybe they just didn’t know each other before”. He is speaking about the two cats in the book, but the human characters understand this to be the real cause of the uprisings. As a white women and reader of the text, I needed this mediation between the characters to be exposed and discussed. I felt that my students might need that same mediation. As a white researcher, I feel it is my responsibility to explore this kind of mediations and discuss the perceptions of myself and my students. I also justify my use for this particular sociopolitical text over others at the end of this chapter.

Epistemology

Epistemology is not only a way of knowing, but also a “system of knowing that has both an internal logic and external validity” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 257). Furthering this concept, Dillard (2000) states that there are patterns of epistemology, it is, “not a monolithic body, but is instead the ways in which reality is a deeply cultured
knowing that arises from and embodies the habits, wisdom, and patterns of its contexts of origin” (p. 679). This study is grounded in critical/constructivist epistemologies stemming from feminist principles of research.

This study falls under the critical/constructivist epistemologies because I background the study in “historical realism where social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender factors are crystallized (reified) into a series of structures that are now taken as ‘real,’ that is natural and immutable” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Critical theory’s epistemology is value mediated by interactively linking the values of the researcher and participant. These interactions influence the method, interpretation and analysis of the study. Critical theory also seeks to change the inequitable rules and practices in order to change the world (Sipe & Constable, 1996). In constructivism, realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible, mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions…constructions are alterable, as are their associate ‘realities’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110).

Constructivism fosters meaning-making activities of groups and individuals around certain phenomena and thus can shape social action. The preservice teachers and I created meanings based on the co-constructed nature of the interviews. I wanted the preservice teachers to take the interview in their own direction; at the same time I asked them questions that would prompt further critical thinking about the content of the event and the text.
Working from this epistemology has strong implications for the context and design of the research and the ways the data is displayed, analyzed and interpreted. In this section, I provide a brief overview of critical race, and feminist theories, the key scholars and how these theories frame the methods and design of this research study.

**Critical Theory**

As a researcher, teacher and learner, part of my epistemology resides in the critical theory paradigm. Key critical theorists such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1995), Gloria Ladson-Billings, (1994, 2000), and Cornel West (1994) believe that society is grounded by a series of political, social and cultural, “truths” that need deconstruction. One of the reasons for this research study is to dismantle these notions of truth in order to create more equitable teaching practices in American education.

Critical race theory’s underlying epistemology resides in the notion of multiple truths and that these truths are expressed in the reality of political and economic power (Sipe and Constable, 1996). Operating under the notion of subverting this political and economic power, the critical researcher often joins the researched in socially acting on the injustices that are prevalent in society (Sipe & Constable, 1996). Although this study eventually hopes preservice teachers will initiate social action; that is not the focus. This study first examines the biographical construction of the preservice teachers and how they operate from those constructions. Preservice teachers must first look within their constructions before acting.
This epistemology rests in seeking truth. The concept of race has been misconstrued, misrepresented and mistaken for something seen as biological fact, or truth. Seeking “truth”, is the ability to recognize the one who holds the power and subscribes to the consistent, coded narrative that reifies that “truth”. Truth can be viewed as, “the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true, it being understood it’s a matter not of a battle “on behalf: of the truth, but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 137). It can be represented as, “ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 137). This series of “statements” are expounded in ways that create and continue a story of retaining truth and power without the perpetrator being challenged on these statements. This study seeks to create a space for preservice teachers to begin to question the social and political inequities in society and education. The methods used in this study allowed for dialogue and a critical space in which to reflect and interrogate this notion of truth.

Challenging these series of statements lies in the notion of deconstructing prejudices such as race, which can be analyzed as a, “constellation of processes and practices rather than as a bounded entity” (Frankenberg, 2001, p. 73). Whiteness has pervaded the “race” radar by claiming invisibility. Therefore, in recent years, inquiry processes have emerged on whiteness and white privilege (Frankenberg, 2001; Gallagher, 1997; Fine, 1997; McIntosh, 1997; Sleeter, 1993; McCarthy & Babb, 1998; Wildman & Davis, 1997). These studies engage the notion of white privilege as a perpetuation of the status quo in which whites depend on maintaining that privilege through the false notion
of meritocracy. Four of the participants in this study are white and I wanted to see how much they engaged with their whiteness. Did they see themselves as privileged? Did they even claim a culture of whiteness or interrogate how white privilege relied on the oppressive practices prevalent in an event like the LA Uprisings? Did they see the LA Uprisings as racial prejudice and oppression in action? What must be noted as well is my use of whiteness scholars to inform my study as a white researcher.

White privilege is also maintained through educational processes. Relatedly, American literature replicates this symbolic capital in order to maintain western ideology. To remain silent and evasive to the literary construction of race has been the modus operandi of literary criticism whereby,

Evasion has fostered another, substitute language in which the issues are encoded, foreclosing open debate. The situation is aggravated by the tremor that breaks into discourse on race. This discourse is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture” (Morrison, 1992, p. 9).

To ignore racial and other differences is to be politically polite thereby allowing whites to slip under the racial radar unnoticed and unrecognized as the qualifying “norm”. Thus, these sociological categories that divide us based on race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation create structured biographies that are seemingly difficult to shed. My study hoped to uncover the complexities of privilege, oppression and its manifestation in the responses of preservice teachers. Interviewing each participant one-on-one allowed me to ask questions relevant to their experiences with the LA Uprisings and the way they perceived the characters in a book. When reading a book to the whole class, the teacher doesn’t always see how their students are interacting with the text. Are they connecting to
the characters? Do they relate to their own experiences in regards to race and discrimination? Are they questioning their social politics in a different way since reading the book? Are they questioning their biographies and lived experiences?

The structured positionality of various sociocultural categories is designated to essentially divide and oppress based on race, gender, low socioeconomic status and sexual orientation. Davies (1992) states,

The various discourses in which one participates, or in terms of which one gains a voice or becomes a speaking subject, also are the means by which one is spoken into existence (even prior to one’s birth) as subject. These discourses subject each person to the limitations, the ideologies, and the positions made available within them (p. 64).

One of the aims of this research study is to allocate a space for deconstructing these notions of truth and oppressive practices by reflecting on personal biographies and their constructions. I hoped to allow a space in which the preservice teachers could question and problematize their social categories and the ways they described themselves. If given the space to do this, do they actually interrogate these social and political constructions? Critical/constructivist epistemologies and feminist principles of research can provide for discussions like this to occur.

**Feminism**

Feminist theories and pedagogies also influence and inform the epistemological and methodological approaches of this study by “exposing and exploring the political and social construction of all knowledge” (Maher & Tetreault, 2001, p.2). Feminism research
practices allows the methods and analysis to be relative, contextual, and rooted in the “doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the “right” or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge” (Richardson, 2000, p. 928).

As Maguire (1987) states, "Feminism is: (a) a belief that women universally face some form of oppression or exploitation; (b) a commitment to uncover and understand what causes and sustains oppression, in all its forms and (c) a commitment to work individually and collectively in everyday life to end all forms of oppression" (p. 79). Feminist writing and research has influenced this study in its analysis and interpretation. I consistently place myself in the research writing by comparing my experiences with empathy, resistance and right and wrong behavior to the participants. Richardson (2000) states that when women write about their own experiences they are “narrativizing their lives, (and that by) telling individual and collective stories (they) became understood as women theorizing their lives. The boundary between “narrative” and “analysis” dissolves” (p.927). Since I believe that life is poetic, I have represented the participants’ biographies as poetic. I continually place my feminist ideals of creativity and subjectivity in the nuances of this study.

Feminist methodology takes into account the varied complexities of location and the diversity that frame research situations (Olesen, 2000). Because of these varied locations and the complexities surrounding them, one cannot place one particular research method with feminist theory. As a white female researcher, I resonate with this theory by considering my own biography and how it affects this study. Calls for the transformation of the traditional, objective and “recipe-like” research reside in feminist
theory and further the notion of constantly deconstructing and reconstructing systems of knowing (Dillard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000). I position this study through the lens of critical/constructivist and feminist theories to substantiate multiple, blurred layers of meaning and perspective inherent in this kind of inquiry.

This study stems from a culturally relativist methodology and analysis that threads the concept of perspective taking throughout the document. Margaret Mead (1983) first addressed the notion of cultural relativism through her methods, allowing the reader to better understand the perspectives of her particular participants instead of making broad, uninformed judgments. The concept of cultural relativism plays a crucial part in this study. The participants’ biographies and perspectives (as well as my own) are shared so that both can better understand the perspectives of the participants both before we discuss the text and after. Such cultural relativism helps us to understand the historical significance and lived experiences that shape the participants’ biographies so that we can better understand their backgrounds and why they respond in a particular way. I believe then that one can broaden this notion by exploring another perspective such as the characters represented in the book, Smoky night. By discussing one’s own biography first and then that of another person’s or characters, one can then develop a more culturally relativistic understanding of why such events as the LA Uprisings can and do occur.

Methodology

Since preservice teachers’ biographies depends on the social construction of knowledge shaped by power relations and the cultural meanings they place upon such constructed knowledge, qualitative research methods support both the theoretical nature
of this inquiry and the research design. This section explores the methodological approaches within qualitative research. Qualitative research is an interpretive, multidimensional and multi-method approach to research in which the researcher may or may not also be an integral participant of the study. The research is set in naturalistic settings, and it attempts to “make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.3).

This study intends to explore patterns in participants’ biographies and responses and how these understandings evolve into richer, far-reaching implications for describing and interpreting preservice teachers’ cultural and social understandings about multicultural children’s literature. One way these patterns can be described and interpreted is through thick description. Geertz (1973) coined the phrase “thick description” when describing how a person writes about their observations, thus it is within this paradigm that the term ethnography most appropriately fits. More specifically, thick description means immersing yourself within the setting and the participants’ lives and trying to understand their point of view and why they see the world as they do (Levinson, 2000).

In the data collection, I used participant written biographies, written views on education and interviews. I used their lived experiences and in-depth interviews on their memories and current perspectives of the LA Uprisings. Tedlock (2000) states that overlap of life history and memoir was created when, “individuals attempted to portray accurately the subjects of biographies, but also to include their own experiences in their texts” (p.460).
Data Sources

Biographies

The biographies address questions like how do they identify themselves as far as ethnicity, race, gender and socioeconomic status. This was from a class activity where I shared a visual display of cultures and then asked the participants to place themselves in the social categories displayed (see Appendix A). Categories such as race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, age, religion, language etc. were displayed and discussed. We discussed how each category influences the others and the social, cultural, and political systems in place in U.S. society that manipulates these influences.

After the discussion on the multiple influences of culture I asked the students to answer a series of biographical questions and to write their views on education:

1. How do you identify yourself in terms of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, age, religion, language etc.?
2. What changes do you think need to be made in education or do you think it is fine the way it is?
3. Think back to your own education-what would you have liked to have seen?
4. Why do you want to be a teacher?
5. Do you think it’s a teacher’s job to instill certain values in children? Do teachers already do this? Why or why not?
6. What books would you have liked to have seen growing up? Any
issues that you think should have been dealt with that you didn’t see or did you feel that most books you came into contact with reflected your own experiences?

Preservice teacher interviews

I began the interviews by asking basic information such as their hometowns, their age, and what they are studying at this particular university. Then I asked them about their memories of the LA Riots. If the interviewee was too young to remember, then I asked them about their memories of other riots/uprisings like the Cincinnati riots/uprisings in 2001, Watts or any other riots/uprisings they had heard about. I then asked them why they thought the rioters felt the need to riot and what provoked this kind of action. Marshall and Rossman (1999) state the importance of systematic questioning in order to glean more information as well as understanding the purpose of the study is to “uncover and describe the participants’ perspectives on events- that is, the subjective view is what matters” (p. 110). In order to better understand “what mattered” to the students, I focused on questions such as their memories of the LA Riots/Uprisings, their thoughts on why this happened, how they addressed this issue in their home, in school and in their community. I also asked why they think people riot/uprise and did they think this could happen again in their current community. I also asked them what the media’s influence was on this issue and how that shapes the nation’s perceptions of what was happening. Questions were simultaneously asked while reading the book to the student (Appendix D).
The book I read is *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting (1994).¹ This story is about the LA Riots/Uprisings that occurred in 1992 after the police officers were acquitted for the beating of Rodney King and the riots/uprisings that ensued. I asked the students what they remembered about the LA Riots. During this time I audiotaped and observed students responses including tone of voice, gestures and facial expressions (Gee, 1999).

Phenomenology is one qualitative concept in which the researcher focuses on “how members of the social world apprehend and act upon the objects of their experience as if they are things separate and distinct from themselves” (Gubrium and Holstein, 2000, p. 488). The biographies and the interviews allowed me to see the participants’ worldview on race, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. This kind of interviewing is called “phenomenological interviewing” in which “phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a world view” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 112). Furthermore, this kind of interviewing allowed me to see how preservice teachers’ perspectives varied according to their biographies and lived experiences. The preservice teachers shared their worldview and their conceptions of right and wrong in relation to racial incidents such as the LA Uprisings.

The interview discussions allowed me to ask previous knowledge questions, probe for elaboration from their responses and ask for clarification. The interviews also enabled me to see the participants initial reactions to a text different from the ones typically used in class. Using the read aloud format, I started by asking their previous knowledge on the text’s subject, what they know about the particular situation and what their opinion is relating to the topic. Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that, “an

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¹ For a full text version of *Smoky night*, see Appendix E.
assumption fundamental to qualitative research is: The participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it” (p. 108). The open-ended question format allowed the participants to take their responses in the direction of their understanding. In many cases, they began to unravel notions of prejudice and discrimination as they talked through the text. Their perspectives pivoted in new directions throughout the interview, thus allowing new perspectives to emerge.

Qualitative interviewing allows the researcher to formulate questions to guide the study; however those questions are under constant revision. More specifically, in phenomenological interviewing, it is important for the researcher to examine their own views so as to apprehend and clarify any of their own misconceptions. One aspect that I noticed was that I was also influenced by the media and at the time of the LA Uprisings. I too was caught up in the sensationalism and wasn’t able to rifle through the negative images of African Americans. I was also 17 years old at the time. As a researcher, I tried to place myself in the shoes of my participants and thought about how I would have responded had I been asked the same question based on my memories. This study allowed me to question my preconceived notions of how race was portrayed by the media at the time of the uprisings, in addition to my changed perceptions after reading *Smoky night*. This pedagogical shift is explored in Chapter 5.

This data allowed me to make a connection between preservice teachers’ personal lives (autobiographies), views on education and their reaction to a multicultural text (interviews) and the ways in which their biographies are mediated through the text, *Smoky night* by Eve Bunting.
Representing the Data

The data representation takes on a critical/constructivist and feminist theoretical approach by exploring the multiple realities presented to me by the participants. By taking qualitative research in a different, more creative direction, I analyze the data using what Richardson (2000) terms “creative analytic practice”. More specifically, I have used poetic transcription/representation for participants’ responses. I use the term poetic transcription interchangeably with poetic representation given Corrine Glesne’s (1997) definition. Language is also a crucial aspect in analyzing participants’ responses through poetic transcription, Glesne (1997) states,

Poetic transcription approximates poetry through the concentrated language of data, shaped by the researcher to give pleasure and truth. But the truth may be a “small t” truth of description, re-presenting a perspective or experiences of the interviewee, filtered through the researcher... Poetic transcription disintegrates any notion of separation of observer and observed. These categories are conflated in an interpretative space (p.213, 215).

Poetic transcription should meet certain criteria to create a well-rounded representation of the participants’ responses. Glesne (1997) states, “Poetic transcription moves in the direction of poetry, but is not necessarily poetry. What poetry is in itself, however, is hard to define” (p.213). She continues that meaning is shaped by the organization of the poetry; it can “pull out meaning, moving into the interpretive realm where the writer (and reader) make leaps, while staying close to the data” (p. 215). Glesne (1997) constructed her own rules for poetic transcription, however these are not the only way, a) the words are the participants, not the researcher, b) the participants’ phrases can be pulled from anywhere in the transcript and could be juxtaposed, c) keep enough of the participants
words together to re-present their “speaking rhythm, (their) way of saying things” (p. 205). I transcribed my data in much the same way; however for some of the participants, I added words for clarity and poetic flow and cohesiveness.

I construct my interpretation of the participants’ responses through my cultural reality and interpretation of the world. I place myself in this research project because my analysis and interpretation of the data is based on my belief system and worldview. Richardson (2000) demands certain criteria be met when writing creative research by asking the following questions: 1) Does it add a substantive contribution to the field? 2) Does it have aesthetic merit? 3) Does this study impact readers to move, act or try new research practices? 4) Does the work seem to express reality, true lived experience and a “credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the “real”? (p. 937). Evocative representation suggests that emotional response comes from both the researcher and participants and “demands analysis of themselves as cultural products and as methods for rendering the social” (Richardson, 2000, p. 931).

Accordingly, in analyzing and representing this data, I took into consideration the semiotic, material, political and sociocultural aspects of the research setting (Gee, 1999). All these aspects give meaning to one another. To understand the responses of my students, I needed to understand and interpret to the best of my ability how these contextual aspects factor into their responses and discussions in the data. An example of this is my role as the teacher interviewing the student in my office where the power dynamics are definitely unequal.
The importance of voice and the multiplicity of voices that emerge in an interview for both the researcher and the participants can be a complex and delicate situation. As the researcher, I have to understand this complexity and realize that I cannot analyze and interpret the nuances of every response and iteration. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state, “Our silences, both those we choose and those of which we are unaware, are also considerations of voice in our research texts” (p.147). There are participant responses that were not interpreted, however that doesn’t mean they were not poignant. I chose to glean the most salient themes that could answer my questions.

Analyzing the Data

Qualitative data analysis has been described as, “a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data; it builds grounded theory…it is the search among data to identify content for ethnographies and for participants’ “truths” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). This study uses an interpretive approach in analyzing data, according to Erickson (1992) the term “interpretive” encompasses “a whole family of approaches to participant observational research…[its] central research interest [is] in human meaning in social life and in its elucidation and exposition by the researcher” (p.119).

While analyzing all of the data I used an inductive analysis process in which codes were followed by broader themes and codes arise from the data. Kvale (1996) has stated that when analyzing interviews, “what is not said may be just as important as what is said” (p. 278). When a participant does not critically analyze an event or does not seek to respond at all, it means something. What does it mean when a participant is silent?
What is the question that provoked this silence? For instance, in one of the interviews, one participant, John, changed the subject to discuss the text’s illustrations when I asked him about the characters in *Smoky night* and the diversity of the people in the neighborhood. This kind of response can be meaningful in a variety of ways. Tone of voice and physical behavior such as giggling (Linda) or moments of silence (Kelly, John)\(^2\) can be analyzed as nervousness, dissonance, resistance or even a moment in which the participant doesn’t know how to respond. Some of the participants explained that they didn’t know what to say because they had been sheltered and “it’s not that I don’t care, I have never thought about these things before” (Kelly). This could be categorized as lack of critical knowledge or even ignorance. This could be further interpreted as lack of diverse perspectives in the participants’ biographical constructions.

Kvale (1996) continues to note that there are five approaches to analyzing meaning from interviews; “meaning categorization, condensation, narrative structuring, deeper interpretations, and ad hoc tactics for the generation of meaning” (p. 279). I believed these to be valuable coding techniques to keep in mind while I analyzed the data. These codes are represented in two or three letters that I used to code the biographies, views on education and interview transcripts.

Accordingly, I used an “emic” approach by transcribing both participants’ autobiographies and interviews verbatim. However, once I analyzed them using poetic transcription/representation, some liberties were taken with repetition, omission and very few additions for consistency, clarity and flow (Pelto & Pelto, 1978, p.55). This approach also incorporated the concept of crystallization, whereby there is no central,

\(^2\) These responses will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 4.
fixed point rather there are multiple dimensions, transmutations and shapes of responses
and ways in which they can be analyzed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Richardson, 2000;
Janesick, 2000). Therefore the previous post-positivist practice of triangulation and the
concept of validity is transformed into a constructivist concept of prismatic, multiple
realities.

I constantly compared participants’ responses with one another to better saturate
categories until salient patterns and themes emerged. Data collection, analysis,
interpretation, and narrative writing happened simultaneously. After each interview I
wrote some patterns I saw occurring on a dry erase board. I listened to all 16 interviews
two times and then transcribed 10 most interesting ones. After that I narrowed it down to
tfive due to their age, gender, sexual orientation and race. I narrowed it down by the
patterns I saw emerging about human behavior, media influence, their memories of the
LA Uprisings and the details provided. While analyzing, examining patterns and
constructing codes, I used NUD*IST software to categorize and organize these patterns.
However, I found the essence of the participants’ voices being limited and found that by
using poetic transcription I was able to find a way to both analyze their responses and
allow them to tell their stories at the same time.

**Trustworthiness**

I understand that this research benefits not only my career, which entails financial
and prestigious gains, but also gives me the “authority” to write about other’s lives.
Understanding the psychological and personal states in myself before, during and after
the research also enabled me to discern these differences in the participants\(^3\). Lincoln (1995) discusses subjective reflexivity, “Such reflexivity or subjectivity enables the researcher to begin to uncover dialectic relationships, array and discuss contradictions within the stories being recorded, and move with research participants toward action” (p.283). I acknowledged these unconscious states throughout this study and their implications which will further improve my teaching practices. I also acknowledge ways in which I can instigate the participants toward developing critical consciousness and moves toward social action.

I realized that by asking my students to participate in this study it placed our relationship in a problematic power dynamic in which they may have felt as though they had to participate in order to get a good grade. Through my consent form, my presentation of the study and my actions, I illustrated to them that their grade would in no way be affected by their decision to participate in the study (see Appendix G). Also, the interviews allowed them to meet me outside of class where they could offer a different opinion under a different context than in the classroom.

I presented the study by telling the whole class that I was interested in examining preservice teachers’ responses to a multicultural children’s text. I explained that this study consisted of interviews and a response journal. I explained that I would not use their real names and would provide them with a pseudonym for confidentiality and anonymity. I gave them consent forms to sign the next class meeting so that they would have time to think about it. After that first introduction of the study, I did not mention the study again. I didn’t want the students that were not participating to feel coerced or left

\(^3\) I discuss some of these issues in Chapter 5, in which I consider the future changes in my pedagogical practices.
out and I also wanted to protect the confidentiality of interview process. The consent form discussed these issues of confidentiality in addition to the participants’ option to view the research document once finished.

After the interviews, I contacted the participants to consult member checks. I gave them a copy of the interview transcripts to peruse with specific questions for them to clarify. Three out of the five participants responded back with clarification. After the study, I contacted the participants again via email and asked more questions for clarification. All three women were happy to comply, but I did not hear from the two men. I had asked the two male participants to look over their interview transcripts and since they did not bring the transcripts back. I understand that a variety of reasons could be behind why they did not return the documents but two reasons might explain this action. First, they did not find any problems with the text, however and secondly, the participant, John seemed resistant to engage any longer with the study or to provide any more clarification.

I conducted member checks by discussing my transcriptions, reflections and interpretation of the participants’ autobiographies, interviews and views on education. I asked Sandy in particular about a space that she left in her biography, “I am a __________ woman.” I asked her what she meant by this space and she clarified that she is a “homosexual female“. One might argue that she had put the space there for fear of retaliation or further oppression from me. It seems that she possibly felt more comfortable sharing this information with me later after getting to know me better. This member check proved to be very insightful because it caused me to interpret her responses to the LA Uprisings with new understanding.
I also engaged in peer debriefing so that I could cross-analyze my findings with an interested colleague, Meche Proctor, Lydia Brauer and Stephanie Daza, who had similar theoretical interests. It was also valuable to have someone peruse this study’s findings who was not part of this particular research conversation in order to receive a different interpretation. My friend and Ph.D candidate in archaeology, Chet Walker, provided valuable epistemological and analytical insights. These kinds of member checks are crucial in ensuring the strength and depth of the interpretive process. This strengthens the trustworthiness aspects.

I considered multiple aspects to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of this study. Triangulation of data included the biographies, the interviews and the participants’ views on education. However, in mixed qualitative genres, triangulation is not enough; we must crystallize (Richardson, 2000). In order to create a more prismatic and multi-perspective approach, I used Richardson’s concept of crystallization. Richardson (2000) suggests,

Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of “validity” (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves), and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic (p. 934). This concept is especially appropriate for this study because it allows the voice of the participants and the fluidity and complexities of their identities to inform the findings of this study.

Essentially, I hope the discussions in the interviews and the self-reflective nature of the autobiographies allowed the participants to reevaluate and reconsider their perspectives on race in the United States. This is a kind of catalytic validity. Lather
(1991) describes catalytic validity as pointing to the degree to which research moves those it studies to understand the world and the way it is shaped in order for them to transform it. Furthermore, it hopes to direct the participants to gain self-understanding and self-direction and eventually to instigate social action.

Finally, my interpretations of these responses are affected by not only my ontology, but my epistemological lens of research and the way research could and should be conducted. Lather (1991) asserts that, writing your truth about others’ lives is an assertion of power and can violate earlier assertions about working ethically and sensitively with participants. I believe that by allowing participants’ voice and conducting member checks, one can reduce invalidity.

**Design of the Research**

I have outlined my research schedule below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of course, “Literature for Children and Young Adults”</th>
<th>June 9, 2003- July 30, 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews started</td>
<td>June 16, 2003-July 21, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis and writing</td>
<td>July 21, 2003-present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Research Schedule

This study was situated in a private Catholic liberal arts university located in the Midwest. I had been teaching children’s literature there for a year and was very familiar with the student population and learning objectives of the university. In this university,
there are a number of support systems in place to ensure students’ success. The students are given a warm, supportive community in which to learn through programs such as online tips for success, encouraged interaction with faculty and staff, and academic centers that have tutors and specialists available at convenient hours for students. The university is centered on working adults and returning students. One of the mission’s of the university states that it welcomes to its student body sincere seekers of truth whatever their age, gender, race, religious background, or ethnic and cultural heritage. All whose aspirations, maturity, and preparation draw them to pursuing a liberating education mutually enrich one another in the quest for truth in this small community of students, faculty, and staff, through curriculum, supporting services, and informal learning opportunities carried out in a climate of respect and freedom (University Diversity Statement).

The study was carried out in a course entitled, “Literature for Children and Young Adults,” offered by the Library and Information Sciences department. Students are required to take this course if they are education or library and media specialists. Most of my students are consistently white females, with a few female students of color and two or three white male students during any given semester.

At the time, I was teaching two classes of children’s literature in two locations: one at the large state university that I attended as a doctoral student, and one at this small Catholic university where I was working as an adjunct teacher. I chose the small Catholic University site because it provided a more diverse education student body than the larger state university.

As the title suggests, “Literature for Children and Young Adults,” can be described as, “an introductory study of children’s literature with emphasis on
appreciating, interpreting, selecting, and using quality literature with children from pre-
school through young adulthood” (Course Syllabus, 2003). The first class session of the
course starts with examining multicultural children’s literature and the ways in which we
can incorporate marginalized people’s experiences in our daily literary activities. I read
*The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson to the class and asked them where they see
barriers in their own lives between races, classes, ethnicity, gender and ability. I wanted
to start the class off with this activity to open the doors of understanding that
multicultural children’s literature will be an integral component of this class. I stated that
this kind of literature needs to be incorporated with all children’s literature.

The rest of the class that particular class period focused on a description of reader
response theory and literature circles. Most of the discussion activities in the course took
the format of literature circles. These are very similar to book clubs where four to five
students gather in a circle and discuss a common book based on its plot, theme,
characters, author’s intent, setting, point of view, mood, symbols, and metaphors central
to the story.

Each week consisted of two class meetings in which we focused on a genre of
children’s literature (Picture books, traditional literature, modern fantasy, poetry,
contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction and non-fiction such as biography). The
first class meeting of every week had a student group presentation describing the genre,
the books that fit that genre and an interactive activity for the rest of the class. I also
facilitated a variety of activities for each genre from literature circles to whole class
activities. These are described in the following sections for each genre.
Each student was required to write a weekly response journal in which they wrote about the assigned books they read for that week. They were also required to fill out an internet resource paper, respond to a professional article, conduct a read-aloud and present an author study with an informational flier. In addition to these individual assignments they were also expected to present a genre of children’s literature in a group. The final assignment was a survey or book collection of 25 books that they read with an annotated bibliography for each entry. These had to be compiled in an organized format of some kind.\(^4\)

The first genre, picture books, focused on evaluating picture books for quality and aesthetic purposes. The students were required to bring in five picture books by the same author. They could find references in the back of their book. In class, the students gathered in groups and evaluated their books based on the evaluative checklist listed in our book. At this time, they had one of their first individual assignments due in which they gathered internet websites that focused on children’s literature. They were to share their favorite websites with the class. I later compiled a list of everyone’s websites and copied them for the students.

The second genre, traditional literature, focused on the different kinds of traditional literature, and how to evaluate quality traditional tales. The students were required to bring in two versions of either a Cinderella tale or Grimm’s fairy tale. The students did not realize all the versions from Caribbean Cinderella to modern day urban Cinderella. In that class period, we discussed the sexism inherent in the traditional Cinderella tales and the emergence of new, modern and more gender conscious books.

\(^4\) A more detailed description of each assignment is listed in Appendix B.
One of their first response journals was due at this time. They were to write a one to two page description of both their personal and professional response to the book they read. They were to do this for modern fantasy, poetry, contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, non-fiction and biography.

The next week, their assignment was to read and write an analysis of a professional article focusing on children’s literature. I provided them with Mingshui Cai’s (1998) article, “Multiple definitions of multicultural literature: Is the debate really just "Ivory Tower" bickering?” This article focuses on the many definitions of multicultural children’s literature, the debates and major issues surrounding this type of literature. We held a discussion about what they thought multicultural children’s literature was and how they would use it in their classroom. This was an interesting discussion because the students began to realize the complexities involved in children’s literature.

The following week focused on modern fantasy in which the students were required to read either A stranger came ashore by Mollie Hunter or Tuck everlasting by Natalie Babbitt. They were to share their written responses in a literature circle with four or five other students. That was to be the class activity for that genre.

For poetry, the students were to bring in their favorite poem from one of two anthologies, Sing a song of popcorn by Beatrice de Regnier or Talking like the rain by X.J. and Dorothy Kennedy. The class activity was a poetry slam. To create the ambience of a coffee house, we brought in candles, biscotti, cookies, coffee, and other baked items. They were to gather in five groups and pick which poem they wanted to read to the class. The chose five from each group practiced their poem and performed it for the class. Then
we voted on the best poem and gave a “poetry slam certificate”. Some of the students had never heard of a poetry slam so this was an interesting activity for them.

For contemporary realistic fiction, the students were to read *Heart of a chief* by Joseph Bruchac or *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. They were to bring in their response journal and be ready to discuss it in a literature group. *Heart of a chief* is about a 13 year old Native American boy living on a reservation and his determination to stop their mascot name, the “Chiefs”. The book also discusses the degradation of reservation life brought by casinos and the hardships of reservation life. *Speak* is about a young 14 year old girl who is raped at a party and suffers through silence throughout the following school year. She finally breaks her silence and talks about what happened to her. This brought up interesting topics on the contemporary plight of Native Americans and the issue of rape in middle and high schools.

The next week they had an assignment in which they had to conduct a read-aloud to a small group of students. I had simultaneous groups in different areas of the room. The students had to preview and ask questions while reading their chosen picture book. They had to time themselves, ask poignant questions and be able to foster a discussion with their pretend students. This enabled them to have practice reading a book aloud.

For historical fiction, the students read *The Watson’s go to Birmingham-1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis and *Esperanza rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. We conducted a silent role-play where one group of students had to figure out what scene from one of the books another group was performing. They had to do this without talking.

For non-fiction they had to read and bring in a book by Frederick and Patricia McKissack. They were to discuss this book in a literature circle. For biography, the
students were to read and bring in a book by either Russell Freedman or David Adler (both of whom publish many biography books). The students then made brochures in class based on the person they read about and presented it to the class. The next two weeks focused on a Newbery and Caldecott award panel in which students brought in a Newbery and Caldecott award winning book. They gathered in groups in nominated books they thought should when the Newbery and Caldecott of the millennium award. After nominations were made to an award panel of volunteer students, they choose the winners. We also watched the movie based on the book *Roll of thunder, hear my cry* by Mildred Taylor. This movie focused on racial prejudice in the south in the 1950’s. This is a thought provoking movie and had moved many students to tears at the racial injustice and oppression represented in the movie at that time.

The final project was a book collection of 25 books that students had read throughout the quarter. This was intended for their future classroom library. This project had to focus on a theme and had to include at least one of a Newbery, Caldecott, and Coretta Scott King award. The last day of the semester, the students presented their book collections.

After months of listening to the tapes of all the participants, I narrowed the pool of participants to five people; one 24 year-old African American woman, two white women ages 45 and 50 years old, and two 25 and 32 year-old white men. I chose this pool based on their diverse responses in the interviews, autobiographies and views on education. Pelto and Pelto (1970) states the issue of representation can sometimes include the “exceptional rather than the representative” (p.75). I chose these participants based on their diverse perspectives on the LA Uprisings and why they believed those
uprisings were occurring. The criterion for selection was based on choosing participants that represented a variety of voices. Selecting a young African American woman, an older white woman, a homosexual white woman and two white males would provide an interesting combination of voices. I was interested in the common themes and patterns that would emerge. I also wanted to represent participants that remembered the LA Uprisings and had more detailed memories of them. Some of the other participants that I interviewed were either too young or didn’t remember their reactions to the LA Uprisings. I felt these participants were the most specific and provided the most poignant interviews.

The text, *Smoky night*

While, I have asserted that *Smoky night* is a sociopolitical text, my stance is that all literature is sociopolitical in that it reflects our society in political, ideological, and cultural ways. Who is represented and what power positions do they hold? Who has privilege in the book and who is subservient? Characters roles reflect their station in society and others socially constructed characteristics. Further, literature may not always be fair in its representation of the characters, but it reflects the times in which the text was written. In this study, I chose the book, *Smoky night* by Eve Bunting to raise issues around race and privilege with the participants. Understanding the importance of evaluating children’s literature through a critical lens, I chose this book because it discusses a highly political and socially volatile topic through a child’s point of view. Not only is this book of solid literary quality, but it’s thought provoking and candid use of illustration coupled with graceful and sensitive text can act as a catalyst to social
awareness and action. This points to it being a different kind of sociopolitical text in that her overt discussion of racially inequities may allow the reader to thoughtfully engage with the text in a way that other sociopolitical texts may not.

In terms of evaluating children’s literature, Eve Bunting is considered an outsider to the events she writes about in *Smoky Night* because she is neither Korean American nor African American, but Irish American. However, she has written several well-researched books and has steeped herself in the cultures in which she writes about. As an outsider, this is one response to the criteria for evaluation of quality multicultural children’s literature, in addition to the literary quality of a book. Bunting’s use of a specific contention between Korean American store owners and African Americans is insightful and subtly speaks to the concept of cultural relativism. She provides a variety of perspectives and immerses the reader in the local context surrounding the uprisings and the growing tension between the two groups. Taking the perspective of a small boy and placing him in the middle of the two groups allows the reader to understand both sides of the racially charged and highly volatile situation and historical emergence of the uprisings.

I will briefly summarize the text, *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting and illustrated by David Diaz. The illustrations are a mixture of acrylics with cut paper collage including photographs of cereal, shoe soles, wire hangers and glass. Each illustration represents what is happening in the text. For instance, when someone was depicted as stealing dry cleaning, the illustrations showed clothes wrapped in plastic with the hangers still holding them. The text begins with the main character, Daniel and his mother standing in front of
their apartment window watching the uprisers below. The text terms the actions of the people “rioting”.

Mama explains about rioting, “It can happen when people get angry. They want to smash and destroy. They don’t care anymore about what’s right and what’s wrong.”

The text continues with Daniel and his mother watching the uprisers stealing a TV, shoes, cartons of cereal and sacks of rice from Mrs. Kim’s market while she is yelling at them in words Daniel can’t understand. The uprisers are also stealing dry cleaning and smashing street lights. After Daniel’s mother tries to get him to fall asleep, they are awakened by the smell of smoke. While they are trying to escape the fiery building, Daniel tries to find his cat, Jasmine. Apparently Jasmine and Mrs. Kim’s cat fight all the time and neither one of them are to be found at this time. Daniel tries to have the firefighter go find her. As Daniel, his mother, Mrs. Kim and some others from the building walk down the street to the local shelter, Daniel sees a mannequin that looks like a dead body, crumpled street signs, broken glass, and empty cartons. Once they get to the shelter the local people gather around and talk about this sad night.

Finally, the fire fighter who was at Daniel’s building comes in the door with both cats and the residents realize that although the cats used to hate each other, in a time of crisis they were still together under the stairs in the fiery apartment building. After Daniel’s mother states that she thought the cats didn’t like each other, Daniel states, “They probably didn’t know each other before, now they do”. This statement causes everyone at the shelter to realize that they didn’t really know Mrs. Kim and that the real
value lies in the notion that people should try to get along despite their nationality or cultural background.

Conclusion

This study’s foundation lies in a critical/constructivist and feminist epistemology with qualitative methods of collection and analysis. The design of the research site considers the multi-faceted manner in which the research was collected, analyzed, interpreted and written. Chapter 4 explores the findings of this study and seeks to answer the research questions.
CHAPTER 4

DATA REPRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

To constantly remind ourselves that our students are unique and can each bring a different perspective to the practical and theoretical space of pedagogy and practice is essential in analyzing preservice teachers responses to any kind of text. In this chapter, I analyze and interpret the ways in which the participants’ examine their multiple constructions of reality, their sense of right and wrong and the ways in which they perceive others that operate in different cultural realities. This chapter analyzes the ways in which the preservice teachers mediate these constructed biographies with one sociopolitical text, *Smoky night* by Eve Bunting.

In this section, I will share the findings of this study in relation to the two research questions guiding it. Those questions are listed below.

1. How do the preservice teachers’ biographies enable them to form perceptions about sociopolitical event (the Los Angeles Uprisings)? What sociocultural and political factors influenced this construction of their biographies?

2. How can a sociopolitical children’s text mediate and/or interrupt these perceptions based on the preservice teachers’ biographies?
I aim to explore these questions in which I discuss three major findings after the participants’ biographical narratives.

Data Presentation

For each participant, I divide their responses into four narratives. The first narrative is in the form of a poem in which each of the five participants’ biographies is displayed. This reflective data source came from an activity on multicultural children’s literature presented on the third class period. I discussed the many influences of one’s culture. I first discussed my sociocultural categories as a white, female, heterosexual, 29 year-old graduate student. I then asked the class to think about their sociocultural categories and then turn it in. The second narrative displays the participant’s views on education from a questionnaire I passed out to them at the beginning of the course. The third narrative is a monologue from an interview discussing the children’s book, Smoky night by Eve Bunting. I set the context for the interview in italics before each participant’s response. The fourth narrative incorporates the text of the book, Smoky night, the participant’s response, and at times my own responses in order to illustrate the mediations made between myself, the participant and the text. The format will take the form of a dialogue in which the reader can see the different voices represented. I chose to format the narratives in this way to better clarify the poetic nature of their biographies.

Introducing the participants and their broad sociocultural categories:

Participant One- Name:       Kelly
                               Ethnicity:          African American
Education: Bachelor’s in African American studies and sociology
Age/Gender: 24 year old female
Occupation: Student
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual
Hometown: Cleveland, Ohio.

Participant Two- Name: Linda
Ethnicity: White
Education: Bachelor’s degree in Secondary Education
Age/Gender: 50 year-old female
Occupation: Customer Service
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual
Hometown: Tiffin, Ohio.

Participant Three- Name: John
Ethnicity: White
Education: Bachelor’s in Musical Theatre
Age/Gender: 25 year-old male
Occupation: Student
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual
Hometown: Atlanta, Georgia.
Participant Four- Name: Sandy
Ethnicity: White
Education: Bachelor’s in Criminal Justice Education
Age/Gender: 43 year-old female
Occupation: Police Officer for many years, but now a student
Sexual Orientation: Homosexual
Hometown: Newark, Ohio.

Participant Five- Name: Steve
Ethnicity: White
Education: Currently obtaining Bachelor’s degree in Middle Childhood Education,
Age/Gender: 32 year-old male
Occupation: Coach,
Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual
Hometown: Columbus, Ohio.

Participant One- Kelly

The first participant, Kelly, was one of the first participants that I interviewed. In narrative one, Kelly outlines her sociocultural categories. In narrative two, she discusses what she would like to have seen in her own education. In narrative three, we begin the
interview portion of the data collection reflecting on her thoughts about the LA Riots/Uprisings. In narrative four, the conversation turns to the book *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting. I have created a short dialogue intertwining Kelly’s responses, my questions and the text. At the end of this dialogue I have included how Kelly intends to use this book in her future classroom in prose format.

**Narrative One: Kelly’s Biography**

My heart beats  
As an African American  
Straight, 24 year-old  
Female  

My mind is open  
To educating myself  
About my culture.  

My hands have toiled  
In the fields of sociology and  
African American studies.  
I continue to persevere toward  
Educating others  

With the Baptist faith, my spirit soars  
My feet are planted in Cleveland, Ohio  
My roots spread across the city  
With my eyes, I see my grandmother’s house  
Her neighborhood is very different from mine.  

My world was perfect.  
You see, I was very sheltered  
I didn’t really get an opportunity to see a lot of things  
Until I got a little bit older.

**Narrative Two: Kelly’s Views on Education**

What happened to the teachers  
that incorporate fun into learning?
What happened to the teachers
that can be kids and adults all at the same time?
What happened to these types of teachers that made me want to learn.
I would have liked to have seen
more personal time in my education.
I would have liked to have more teachers
who took the time to do things
I would have liked tutoring after school or
Participation in school plays or recess.

I want to teach so that I can
Show kids it’s fun to learn.
I want to be that teacher
that parents are begging for
I am going to be that teacher that
participates in activities that are important
I will be that teacher that instills trust and respect

What happened to the teachers
that incorporate fun into learning?

Narrative Three: Kelly’s Interview on LA Riots/Uprisings

(Kelly meets me at my office door in the basement of the library as I pull my cart full of children’s books along behind me. I motion for Kelly to sit down in one of the chairs sitting across from another chair. The office is very impersonal and filled with extra supplies and files that no one has any more room for in their office. I share this office with three other adjunct colleagues that I have never met. Kelly and I sit across from each other with a tape recorder sitting on the table in between us. I ask permission to tape record and she lets out a little laugh as she says, “Sure”. It’s before our class that evening and we only have about 45 minutes. I then describe the book “Smoky Night” by Eve Bunting to her and ask her to think back to her memories of the LA Riots. This is what she tells me. I have only included her responses because my questions are reiterated in her answers.)
My memories of the LA Riots were mostly the media pictures. I’m a very visual person but I was fourteen or fifteen at the time so I can’t really remember what was being said and I don’t think I was really paying attention. But I do remember thinking, “Wow, I can’t believe this is really happening”. Maybe because I was 14 it wasn’t really personal at that point. I saw it like, “Oh my gosh, I can’t believe this is happening okay let me go outside and play”. I don’t ever remember it being discussed at all in school. But I remember that my parents were talking about the video of Rodney King getting beaten. We saw it more from Rodney King’s point of view saying to each other, “Oh my gosh did you see what they did to that black man?” So I remember that more than anything else. I remember we were all saying that “it was horrible, and how could they do that?” and “he’s going to get a lot of money”.

When the police officers were found not guilty we thought it was crazy and that it was racist. I have always been skeptical of the media. Back then I don’t know how I really felt but now looking back on it I think I’m kind of leery I don’t want to say “yay” or “nay”, whose side I agree with just because I would have to pay more attention or go back and look at some things, but at that point I don’t think I was thinking much. Remember I was very sheltered so a lot of the times when you’re asking me something, it’s the first time I really thought about it. It’s not that I don’t care. I’m very, very interested in a lot of African American issues and things like that but it’s really my first time thinking about the riots.

I think that the rioters were rioting because they actually believed in their cause. They actually felt it was right and then there are some people who were rioting because
other people were rioting and they have an opportunity to loot or do things like that. I don’t know why they were rioting but that’s no justification for a person to riot because it just doesn’t make sense to me because you are rioting in your own community. Once it’s over then what do you have, what have you really proven?

I think if this happened again there might be a different outcome and the media’s role would impact it. The media is pretty one-sided, and not really honest in what they are portraying and I don’t know the verdict may be different given the fact that it’s already occurred once if it’s the same scenario they may have to rule another way because it’s crazy if they don’t. I don’t think there would be really much difference in terms of the reaction of the verdict or anything like that. I think this could probably happen in my city because it is full of a lot of different cultures and belief systems. I definitely think there’s potential. I think there’s potential everywhere but I think race heightens it.

Narrative Four: Kelly’s Response to *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting

**Text:** Mama explains about rioting. “It can happen when people Get angry. They want to smash and destroy. They don’t care Anymore what’s right and what’s wrong.”
Below us they are smashing everything. Windows, cars, streetlights.
“After a while it’s like a game,” Mama says.
Two boys are carrying a TV from Morton’s Appliances. It’s hard for them because the TV is so heavy.
“Are they stealing it?” I ask.
Mama nods.
Joy: Why do you think that Daniel sees that they look happy but they look angry too?

Kelly: they’re taking the TV so they’re probably seeing two different sides, them bashing the window to get the TV, then happy because they have gotten the TV out.

Text: Someone breaks the window of Fashion Shoes. Two women And a man climb through the broken glass. They toss out Shoes like they’re throwing footballs. I’ve never heard anybody Laugh the way they laugh.

Joy: what does that laugh sound like?

Kelly: Evil (says this quickly)

Text: My mama and I don’t go in Mrs. Kim’s market even though it’s close. Mama says it’s better if we buy from out own people.

Joy: So why do you think Mama says that it’s better if we buy from our own people? Why do you think she says that?

Kelly: to support her community

Joy: Ok do you think that maybe the Korean Americans do the same?

Kelly: yeah

Text: Some of the streetlights have been smashed. We walk along The sidewalk, which sparkle with broken glass. There are Empty cartons everywhere. A street sign lies crumpled in the Gutter/ I grab hold of Mama because I think I see a dead man With no arms lying there, too. But it’s just one of those plastic People that show off clothes in department stores.

Joy: How do you think Daniel felt when he thought he saw a dead man lying there?
**Kelly:** very overwhelmed, very terrified,  
Everything’s magnified probably for him well obviously  
it really is so he’s a little nervous  
Would I use this book in my classroom?

I liked Smoky Night, it was good. I liked the message behind it and the  
illustrations are really good too. I would read this to my classroom. I don’t think it calls  
for a certain situation in order to read the book. I would ask the kids if they have ever  
been in a situation with a riot but most of them probably haven’t seen a riot but maybe in  
their own society. They (teachers) try to get them to know that everybody’s different that  
you can still be friends despite those differences. I think even if kids don’t see it in their  
communities they should still know about it. I never saw this kind of violence in my  
neighborhood but I did see it when I went to my grandmother’s house. Kids that haven’t  
grown up in this kind of environment would still benefit from this kind of literature  
because then they would not be so surprised if they enter an environment that is different  
from theirs.

**Participant Two- Linda**

Narrative one is Linda’s biography taken from her journal activity from one of the  
classes on multicultural children’s literature. Narrative two reflects her views on  
education. Narrative three provides the context of the interview on Linda’s views on the  
LA Riots/Uprisings. Narrative four is formatted that illustrates Linda’s interaction with  
the text and myself. I have created a short story intertwining Linda’s responses and the
text. After this dialogue, I include how she intends to use this book in her future classroom.

Narrative One: Linda’s Biography

You want to know about me
(Laughs nervously)
Well, gosh
I am a 50 year old, White female
I am a Heterosexual,
I am a Christian
I am from the middle-class
I speak English and some German

So many years in Tiffin, Ohio
A small Catholic High School in a
Predominantly white town.
So small.
Where can you see other cultures and religions
in a place like that?

Most all books I saw
Showed people just like me,
Reflecting
my experiences.
My life.
Me.

I wasn’t around anybody
That wasn’t white like me.
After high school
I left for the south at 18

A private Catholic college in
Louisville, Kentucky.
Clutching a Bachelor’s degree
in Secondary Education
I never did teach but
Substituted one year.

Then,
A budding family
Later, I started working in customer service
Now,
Widowed with 3 kids
Now I am going back to that dream of teaching
Gosh, I guess I want
To teach German or English
In middle school

I suppose I could go
On
And
On
But that’s me, pretty simple stuff.

Narrative Two: Linda’s Views on Education

Too much is offered,
Eliminate some specialty areas
Make teachers more accountable
Reward them or
Demote them
Based on performance.

It’s not the teacher’s job
To instill values

BUT

Teachers can lead by example
And a positive attitude.

Good teachers
Do instill values

By treating others with respect,
By setting good examples
In speech and behavior.

I love teenagers…
Their struggles…
They feel
Confused,
Not adult,
Not childlike.

They need someone to teach
And guide them
In their learning,
And to assure them that it’s
“OK” to be and act
Their own age.

Education just needs
to get back to basics
Eliminate the unnecessary.
Narrative Three: Linda’s Interview on LA Riots/Uprisings

(After a 3 hour class, Linda and I walk into my small, shared office in the basement of the
library. She tells me that she has been looking forward to this interview because she
wants to know what we will be talking about. Before class that day I interviewed Kelly.
Since we are both tired from the three hour class, we are anxious to get started. I ask
Linda if I can tape record her. I notice that she lets out a nervous laugh as I push record.
This nervous laugh is a running byline in the plot of our interview. After asking her a few
questions about her age, hometown and what she hopes to teach, I begin to ask about her
memories of the LA Riots)

Boy, I just remember a lot of really gruesome pictures on TV. It seemed pretty
senseless and almost surreal, it seemed like there was nothing that could be done to stop it. People were just kind of out of control. Having been raised in Tiffin, Ohio with not a
person of color in the entire city, I have no clue why something like this would happen. I
mean when I went to college it was the first time I had ever seen a black person and I
walked in and I had a roommate who was African American (nervous laughter) and it
was fine, everything was fine, but I just had no exposure. So I couldn’t understand these
riots at all. I had no clue why they were going on. I just mostly remember the TV coverage.

I’ve just always been one to think that violence isn’t the answer to anything. I’m pro-life but I don’t agree with the violence against the abortion people, the abortion doctors or anything. I can’t justify violence for anything. So I was just astounded. I really had no background growing up to learn about why these kinds of things develop. I mean we learned about civil rights and how there weren’t any, *(laughs nervously)* in this country for a long time. It just never hit me because I wasn’t around anybody that wasn’t white like me.

In thinking back to the riots, I think that I have never been pushed that far that I might do something like that. But now knowing if I had been in the situation like they were in for as long as they’ve been in, I may have acted the same way, I don’t know. I would like to think that I wouldn’t because I’m not violent at all, but I can’t really judge someone until I have been in their shoes. So, I don’t know I might have been … I have never been discriminated against, I guess, at least as a white person. Maybe my age or being a woman, I maybe have, I think I have *(laughs).* But the violence I probably still wouldn’t have gone along with.

I guess I saw gruesome images of the police spraying things with their …I’m trying to remember now it’s been a while. The rioters were breaking windows, turning cars over and starting fires and that sort of thing. The police seemed so animalistic not even like human beings, black or white. I felt pretty strongly about the Rodney King
incident. I thought it was totally, totally out of line (*giggles nervously*) with the police, but you see a lot of that now.

I guess I wish I could have understood why any of them were behaving that way, the police, or the rioters. Then there was the incident where the white gentleman was pulled out of the truck and beaten up. Reginald Denny, that’s his name. That was ridiculous too, I mean it’s like you can’t fight fire with fire. And again back to the abortion thing you can’t fight what you think is murder with murder. It’s not right.

I think there is potential for this kind of rioting in our city. My son goes to a local suburban high school and he will come home every now and then and say we had an African American assembly today or it was another different culture assembly. Then he asks me why can they have special assemblies for minorities, but they don’t have special ones for white kids. I don’t fully understand it either, because I’ve never personally mistreated people or personally felt superior so I have a hard time understanding why people have to pay a price for something that they didn’t really have a part in. Like me and my kids or my husband, we totally are not prejudiced at all but I can see it and I get tired of the implication that everybody is and I don’t think we are at all.

When I was in college in the 70’s, they started to focus on African American issues. You could be white, you could be Hispanic or you could be anything else but that wasn’t the focus. I didn’t get it, I didn’t understand, I just felt like, Why am I being punished when I didn’t do anything wrong. I could feel the hostility and I didn’t understand why they would take it personally on me, but that’s pretty naïve to think they wouldn’t. I mean I would probably do the same.
I will tell you I have been enlightened more, about fifteen years ago we lived in Atlanta for five years. I was a customer service manager there and everybody who worked for me was African American and I learned more about African American people at that time then I ever had. You know their struggles, the different cultures within that culture how some of them were so highly educated and some of them were just so poor and uneducated and I just my eyes were totally opened and my children’s too. They were just so surprised at the differences in them. You know you tend to just group people together. And they come from totally different cultures some of them they’re not at all alike, they’re not at all so that’s pretty much when I figured it out.

I think that sometimes you get the impression from minorities that they feel and some of them do feel that all whites are prejudiced and I’m sure that a lot of whites think that all African Americans are prejudiced. I don’t believe that either. I just think that it’s a shame I think people just clump together because of their race and that shouldn’t be. Yes, maybe your right it is a system of oppression but it’s not a racial thing, its white males that has to do with white women and women of color and every other group other than white males and don’t you think that it’s leaning the other way now it’s starting to be a little more um I think (pauses) I don’t want to say discriminated against but I think right now the University of Michigan ruling was probably pretty fair. I really had a problem with test scores and giving points because of your race. I think that’s insulting to black people. If I was a black person and they said I’m going to give you twenty extra points because your black or you’re a female. That is insulting. And I think and I hope that the
black race is coming to that conclusion. Don’t patronize me, don’t treat me like I am less
than you because I’m not and I think that’s what we have been doing.

I just wish I hadn’t been so sheltered growing up because I just can’t get it in my
mind how all this happened. I mean I read American history and I know I have heard my
parents talk about it and saying that it was really wrong, but then I think how easy it was
for them to be so tolerant. They lived in a tiny little town where they didn’t have to really
experience anything else. I’m glad they were so tolerant. They taught it to me and the
rest of my family.

Narrative Four:
Linda’s Response to Smoky night by Eve Bunting

Text: Mama explains about rioting. “It can happen when people
Get angry. They want to smash and destroy. They don’t care
Anymore what’s right and what’s wrong.”
Below us they are smashing everything. Windows, cars,
streetlights.
“After a while it’s like a game,” Mama says.

Linda: I bet this is a really confusing time for Daniel as to how they (the rioters) can be
angry and happy at the same time. But they’re probably happy because they’re finally
getting some satisfaction or they’re probably feeling like they’re getting their due or
getting back at someone who has hurt them.

Text: Someone breaks the window of Fashion Shoes. Two women
And a man climb through the broken glass. They toss out
Shoes like they’re throwing footballs. I’ve never heard anybody
Laugh the way they laugh.
Smoke drifts, light as fog. I see the distant flicker of flames.

Linda: Daniel has got to be terribly confused and probably pretty scared. I bet the rioters’
laughs sound very dangerous, probably not a light hearted laugh, but more possessed or
just really angry. Just thinking about how angry people must be, taking things that they have absolutely no use for, just to vent evidently. I just can’t even imagine being that angry.

**Text:** Across the street from us people are dragging cartons of cereal and sacks of rice from Kim’s Market. My mama and I don’t go in Mrs. Kim’s market even though it’s close. Mama says it’s better if we buy from our own people.

**Linda:** I think the mother feels that for safety issues they should buy from their own people. Maybe she also feels that her own people need their financial support and they probably do. Maybe she is fearful that they don’t know anything about the Koreans or whatever they’re talking about so they’re afraid of them.

*Would I use this book in my future classroom?*

If I were in the urban city school district, I would use this book maybe even in my little town. The message is so simplistic. The animals can be together and then the child sees it and takes that position and you are taught by children sometimes. You might be able to use this in a history type time frame where you’re studying something like this in history. I don’t know if you just present it out of the blue. I suppose if the classroom community is having problems you could use it.

In one of my town’s schools there were a couple of kids in school that a gang threatened to come to school with guns. It was several people and I don’t think that it was a race thing it was just a gang thing. Certainly if you are having problems in the classroom or in the school or in the neighborhood, this book would be perfect.

I think that you could read that book to suburban kids, because it presents it from a child’s point of view, like which emotions you are able to accept and it doesn’t pick
sides. I don’t think it would really make anybody angry and it might be a nice peaceful way to present a problem that had happened. As far as what it might be like for a child to go through that, I don’t know we have been really fortunate. We’ve always been able to be in a pretty safe neighborhood and even though it’s not a lot of money we’ve been safe. I find that it’s really unfortunate that kids really have to wake up under difficult circumstances and a lot of them do. So, probably it would probably be in places I think more people are in difficult circumstances in the urban public schools than we think.

Participant Three-John

Narrative one is John’s biography in which he discusses not only his sociocultural categories, but his home life as well. At first, John wrote a very short narrative on his biography and then asked if he could work on it at home. The next class period, he wrote a more extensive narrative that I formatted into a poem. Narrative two is his views on education, but is much shorter because that is all he wrote. Narrative three is John’s interview responding to his views on the LA Riots/Urisings. This is presented in monologue form. I have explained the context of the interview in italics at the beginning. Narrative four is John’s dialogue with the text, Smoky night and I.

Narrative One: John’s Biography

You ask me to describe myself?
I am 25 year old
I am a White male
I am Christian
I have a disability

Home
Out in the suburbs of Atlanta
I was raised with two sisters
and a brother.
I was a minister’s son…
Then my father retired

Music
I am not sure why, but music was
Always important to my family.
We drew to it naturally.
Lulled to sleep each night
With my father’s singing
My sisters, brother and I were
Cozy, warm and comforted.
At age 8
I joined the Atlanta Boys Choir
At age 11
I was in my first musical.
After that theatre was the most
Important thing for me.

Surgery…
Life changing…
I was only a freshman…
My major was musical theatre
I continued my degree in theatre
But knew I could never do it
Professionally due to this damn handicap.

I was confused
What do I do now?
The school counselor
Looking straight into my eyes
Said teach.
Teach.
She said you are wonderful with kids
So teach.
I did not want to teach because
Of the old joke in theatre,
That bad actors teach.
I knew that was not true
Nor relevant
But it still bothered me.
I graduated Cum Laude with a BS
In musical theatre, and
For a few years just worked to pay off loans.
I decided that maybe I belonged
In the teaching profession.
Many friends and family
Kept pushing me in that area,
So I started at this university.

Narrative Two: John’s Views on Education

Many changes are needed.
I would have liked to have seen
More understanding and insight from my teachers

I would like to teach because I want to
Influence others in a positive way.
I think teachers instill values whether
Or not they want to

I wish I would have seen more books
About other countries and customs.

Narrative Three: John’s Interview on the LA Riots/Uprisings

*The next section is John’s responses and memories of the LA Riots/Uprisings. I interviewed John after having a class discussion on traditional literature that night. This was the second week of classes but the fourth class session. We had previously discussed picture books and multicultural children’s literature.*

I remember the LA Riots. They were in 1992. I was about 13 or 14. I remember how violent they got. I’m trying to remember what sparked them, but they were just very violent. There was a lot of smashing windows in cars and trucks. I remember that day very well. We were staying after one afternoon for a school play and my teacher didn’t want to stay because she lived on the north side of Atlanta and she said downtown
Atlanta was horrible. She actually left almost an hour before school ended so she didn’t have to stay in traffic. They were starting to come on the highway and scaring people. So I remember it very vividly.

I thought it was because of the trial of what’s his name, Rodney King, yeah. He was guilty so everybody went berserk. The police officers were found not guilty. I was really confused at the time because from the stories I heard, he had actually attacked two cops before they finally got him down. He actually had a lady police officer in a choke hold. So I can understand how you’d want to get him off of her. That’s what I was told and that’s what we heard on WGM news. Me and my Dad went there the day of the trial and then later on he hit that truck driver with that stone, that big heavy block and it really messed him up and they had that on camera and you could vividly see them and they were found not guilty? This guy committed a crime and you guys were in the right (the police officers) and yet these guys (the rioters) are very, very guilty, one hundred percent. Those two black guys smashing that white dude’s head! You could see them cutting out the stone in this poor guy’s head. They’re not guilty? So, that pissed me off a lot. I was very confused. I understand that cop being not-guilty because they were trying to save that poor girl’s life, that lady cop. Because you could see Rodney King had her in the choke hold and so they’d try to get him off any way they could. I’m not saying it’s the right way, but you’d almost think that it was okay, but then the other guy (the rioter) he was just, just crazy. That’s just hate.

I guess you could say they were doing it because of racial oppression in some ways. I don’t know. I couldn’t see it. For the longest time I still don’t. In my mind, Rodney King was guilty, you know. I think those cops had every right to – I didn’t think
they should have hit him that many times. It could have been, oh that guy is and you could see her getting red and they were still going at it and so in a way I think yeah they could have stopped any minute now but I think they were upset at that but not to that point of extremity. Not to turn this into a race war. When OJ was found not guilty, you didn’t see a bunch of white people going out in the street and just trashing everything. I mean in a lot of ways it's a matter of class. You see it a lot; people who uphold themselves and obey the law to a degree. Then there are people who were just trashing the stores just to get TVs and they call it rioting. But I think that’s not really what they were doing. I can’t even see where. They’re burning stuff up. I think they took the TVs and VCRs and they were selling them to Bob down the street here, Bob’s pawn shop and so I think there’s no respect for law and for other people and humanity in general.

Narrative Four:
Responses to Smoky night by Eve Bunting

**Text:** Someone breaks the window of Fashion Shoes. Two women And a man climb through the broken glass. They toss out Shoes like they’re throwing footballs. I’ve never heard anybody laugh the way they laugh. Smoke drifts, light as fog. I see the distant flicker of flames.

**Joy:** There’s two things I want you to look at. It says they look angry but they look happy too. And it says I’ve never heard anybody laugh the way they laugh. What do you think that means?

**John:** Uh - you’d almost think its joy, but I don’t see how it could be. I have no idea.
Text: Across the street from us people
are dragging cartons of cereal and sacks
of rice from Kim’s Market.
My mama and I don’t go in Mrs. Kim’s market
even though it’s close. Mama says it’s
better if we buy from our own people.
Mrs. Kim’s cat and my cat fight all the time, and
Mrs. Kim yells at Jasmine in words I can’t understand.
She’s yelling the same kind of words now at the
people who are stealing her stuff.
They pay no attention.

Joy: Where do you think Mrs. Kim is from?

John: Your immediate response is to think that she might be oriental because
of Kim. Then there’s the connection of the cats.

Joy: The cats?

John: Most oriental people have several cats. I do.
(John is not Asian or Asian American)

Joy: I’ve never heard that before.

John: Just like one of my associations with them.
I would think that yeah maybe an oriental lady.

Text: We rush down the stairs.
Others crowd around us. The
smoke makes me cough. Mr. Ramirez is in front
of us carrying Lissa and the baby, who are both howling.
“Those people are hooligans,” he shouts over his shoulder.
“Hooligans!”

Joy: Is there something to Mr. Ramirez.
What do you think?

John: I think he’s upset.

Joy: Why is he upset?

John: It’s his house, his home that’s his stuff.

Joy: So they live in the same neighborhood.
Where these people are rioting.

**John:** I like the use of the fire (he’s looking at the illustrations) with the matches.

**Text:** Some of the streetlights have been smashed.
We walk along the sidewalk, which sparkles with broken glass. There are empty cartons everywhere.
A street sign lies crumpled in the gutter.
I grab hold of Mama because I think I see a dead man
With no arms lying there, too. But it’s just one of those plastic
People that show off clothes in department stores.

**Joy:** Can you imagine if you are a child and you think you see a dead man after all that other stuff that you saw.

**John:** Very scared too.

**Joy:** Do you think that this is a reality for some children?

**John:** For some people, yeah.
This is a reality of every day life.
Guns and drugs. I definitely think it’s a reality for them.

**Would I use this book in my future classroom?**

I would use this book in my classroom. I don’t think you need a special occasion to use it. I plan on teaching early childhood. I would ask them what kind of neighborhood they live in. Do they see a lot of crime? Does it relate to them? Do they know their neighbors well? We never knew our neighbors we saw them every now and then but we don’t even know their name. We lived in rural Atlanta, southern Atlanta. It’s just something that’s not done. You’d be surprised. Just talk about, just the different effects and how he felt about his cat and maybe talk about pets for a while.

Wow, if I witnessed or was around something like that. I think it would have been weird. We didn’t go downtown a lot. We just didn’t. I think it would have been weird that all these people lived in the same building. We were pretty much sheltered from life. All
these people live in the same building, that’s cool I thought it was an office. I think I like it because he got his cat back. Yeah, I would have definitely been affected by that. I would have liked it.

Yeah, I think a child that didn’t grow up this way would have benefited from this book. Like a suburban kid. Or country kid. It lets them know that there are places like this and that you have neighbors that go nuts; you have to be mindful of it. I know if I saw that I would probably keep going down the street myself and get out of it. There are places that exist like this. There are all these people in that building and there’s people that loot the stores and steal. I would have definitely wondered why they were doing that. You would think it would be far more than just petty. Deep down inside I know you are angry about these guys getting off but it doesn’t give you an excuse to steal cereal boxes or TV’s or anything. I don’t understand these riots. I just know they exist.

I think it’s interesting that the illustrator made the store owner (Mrs. Kim) green like a dollar bill. I don’t know if he did that on purpose. She’s almost worried more about the store and the profit than herself. I would leave my store during those riots. There’s no way. I remember my mom calling off like 2, 3 days in a row from work. I think that’s kind of funny and I don’t know if the author did that on purpose or not. But you could almost see the one on all of those dollar bills. That’s the first thing I noticed, like that’s all she cares about and she was in the store trying to protect it.

Participant Four- Sandy

Sandy’s narrative one is her biography describing her identity. On her paper, she left a blank in front of female and later in an email clarified the space by indicating she
was homosexual. Narrative two describes Sandy’s views on education and what changes she thinks need to made. Narrative three is Sandy’s monologue responding to the LA Riots/Uprisings. Narrative four is Sandy’s dialogue with the text, *Smoky night* and I.

**Narrative One: Sandy’s Biography**

I am all British and
A little Dutch
I am blond and blue, A WASP
I am upper low class,
I am common,
But not trash.
I am a homosexual female

I am very independent and capable of
Accomplishing anything
I set my mind to.

I am Protestant/Episcopal.
I only speak English

I am 43.
I am fairly happy with myself.

I am from Newark, Ohio
I am a university graduate
I have a criminal justice education
I worked in the marines
I worked in a juvenile camp
Later I became a police officer.

Now, I want to be an intervention specialist
I am Sandy.

**Narrative Two: Sandy’s Views on Education**

Changes need to be made in education
Middle school and high school students
Need to be challenged more.
Teachers need to appeal to
Student interests more.

I would have liked to have seen teachers
With less attitude, like Victorian attitudes.
I want to be a teacher because who knows,
I might reach someone.

Everyone imparts their values
By their very presence.
It’s not a teacher’s job
To instill values in the children,
It is the parent’s job to “teach” values.
But, I can provide an example of my own.

I guess I don’t care to deal with “issues” and
I like tales from a historical perspective.
Yeah, changes need to be made in education.

Narrative Three: Sandy’s Interview regarding LA Riots/Urisings

(I walk up to Sandy after class to see if she still would like to meet for the interview. She said, “Oh yeah, I forgot about that, yes definitely”. She starts to explain some work she is doing on her house. As I start packing up my books to go into my office, she helps me carry the massive collection I always bring to class every session. Sandy struck me as very intelligent and able to decipher repeated negative images of mainstream American media. Thus, I was looking forward to this interview. I also knew that she had previously been a police officer and wanted to hear her opinion on the Rodney King incident. We walked into my office, laid my books down on the floor and to the side and started the tape recorder.)

One thing that I remember about the riots is “can’t we all just get along?” Rodney King – I remember the filming of the beating. This had major repercussions for law enforcement and I was a police officer at the time. So we had to review. We had the
debriefing training and we had to review what happened to Rodney King and I have to agree what happened to Rodney King should not have happened. You do not take a night stick and beat somebody who is handcuffed like they did.

There’s got to be other ways to bring someone down but then again if you’re handcuffed and the cops are telling you to lie down then perhaps you should just lie down. But I could see where those police officers were totally over reacting to him. Plus we reviewed some other incidents too. There was an incident that had happened in Philadelphia about that time where two officers actually shot an unarmed man because he just would not bring his hands out of his pockets and show his hands and actually they shot him and in this case it was a black officer who shot a white man. But the white man was refusing to cooperate with the police. He was refusing to show his hands and I’m not saying the officer wasn’t justified in shooting him. At what point do you draw the line and say this is justifiable? He shot him. You’re trained to shoot to kill.

I think the rioters were rioting because they brought it down to a race issue and I think the LAPD do have major problems with racism and again that comes back to everything starts at the top and rolls downhill. And that was Chief David Gates at the time. I think there was even a study right after those riots about racism on LA PD. And right after that we had the OJ Simpson trial and of course the racism of LAPD came out in the trial. The OJ Simpson trial is about 4 major issues: domestic violence, race, celebrity status and media control. And the same thing with the LA Riots. Four major issues and those are four major issues for society in general. They had existed since Thomas Aquinas and before. So we are not going to be able to erase it.
I think the whole nation, both the African American and the white population, brought a good many of us back to the 60’s and the riots in the south. We have to face ourselves in law enforcement. Take an introspective view but looking at the nation as a whole, I don’t think those riots changed anything. I think basically white people looked at it and said well they used this as an excuse to pillage; they used this as an excuse for violence. Does violence ever get us anywhere? And I did recognize the black culture as an oppressed culture and I do see that the male white population as the oppressor. But yet I don’t see where in any other country anyone has more freedom and I think because of that freedom, there were alternatives to violence but can the riots make the same statements?

I think they attacked because of centuries of anger. Centuries of oppression, centuries of anger. It still comes down to just what Martin Luther King said, there are ways to overcome this oppression but violence isn’t it. And so I think it is that they (the rioters) hurt themselves. When they rioted they attacked their own. They attacked where they lived. They didn’t attack Beverly Hills.

I think racism is still going on between African Americans and whites because we have to change our attitudes individually and some people aren’t willing to do that. But, it’s deep seated values that people were taught at one time. And it just gets passed on and some people are just too blind or ignorant to change. Some people just don’t want to change. But the injustice is going to continue just like the discrimination between men and women. It’s always going to be there because of society. That’s how it is.

I think the societal system contributes in many ways. I think we’ve seen a lot of things happening over the past 3 decades that have improved the status. Because you see
a lot more comedic shows and movies with black heroes. You see a lot more of that now than we used to. And children they learn more from the television media than they do anywhere else I think. I don’t think a lot of those feelings are as strong as they used to be and in the numbers they used to be. But it’s always going to be there. Sure I can hope in the next hundred years that these things don’t exist but they probably will for somebody else if not for the blacks and whites. They’re still going to exist for somebody.

I think it’s just human. I think if you study the small tribes you see a lot of, “He has the most horses, so he’s a better warrior”. We still have that. Who’s the prettier woman and so we still have this artificial thing. Christ came into the world with a message of love and jealousy got in the way and then he was crucified by the Romans. But yet he had a message of love. I see a progressive change happening. It’s a slow progression and even if in the future, it doesn’t exist specifically between blacks and whites. There would be another sub-group. It’s as though man has to have someone to stand on.

I also faced a lot of discrimination and I have a legal matter coming up finally against the police department in the small town that I worked in, it’s been going on for six years. I was in the military at O’Hara National Guard for 12 years. I was a mechanic. At that time in the 80’s they were actually trying to recruit women in the male dominated fields and I was recruited. I didn’t realize I could have had so many opportunities. I wish I had realized that at the time. When I was recruited, I faced those issues from time to time, but not the magnitude as I did with the men on the police department. I guess you’ve got to think about this when getting into law enforcement. And hindsight is 20/20. The personality that’s attracted to the badge, to be a police officer you only have
to have a high school diploma, you take a test. However, you rank on the test ‘til you get hired. They like military people, especially Army and the attitude; it’s a good ole’ boy mentality.

So, as you can see I definitely have a lot of opinions about the riots. I don’t think they needed to resort to violence to make the same statement and they turned on their own people and I think if it had been more organized and thought out they could have captured Beverly Hills.

Narrative Four: Sandy’s Response to “Smoky Night” By Eve Bunting

**Text:** Mama explains about rioting.
“It can happen when people
Get angry. They want to smash and destroy. They don’t care anymore
what’s right and what’s wrong.”
Below us they are smashing everything.
Windows, cars, streetlights.
“After a while it’s like a game,” Mama says.

**Sandy:** I think the rioters in the book look both angry and happy at the same time because maybe it’s grabbing time. They’re grabbing up what they can and they feel they have this legal right to. They didn’t do that before because I think there were too many constraints. Now there’s so much chaos in the streets nobody is going to care about two men carrying off a TV, especially a heavy one whereas if the streets were all calm it would be too obvious. They’re releasing their anger and there has got to be a relief to that and maybe they’re enjoying the smashing and the destroying.

**Text:** Someone breaks the window
of Fashion Shoes. Two women
And a man climb through the broken glass. They toss out
Shoes like they’re throwing footballs. I’ve never heard anybody
Laugh the way they laugh.
Smoke drifts, light as fog. I see the distant flicker of flames.

**Sandy:** Their laughing sounds like, “I’m getting even at the system laugh”.
Finally oppressed people are often poor people and they’re finally
getting some things that maybe they’ve wanted for a long time. Getting the shoes. Thinking maybe they have always wanted it, so just get it, because it was never available before.

**Text:** Across the street from us people are dragging cartons of cereal and sacks of rice from Kim’s Market. My mama and I don’t go in Mrs. Kim’s market even though it’s close. Mama says it’s better if we buy from out own people. Mrs. Kim’s cat and my cat fight all the time, and Mrs. Kim Yells at Jasmine in words I can’t understand. She’s yelling the Same kind of words now at the people who are stealing her Stuff. They pay no attention.

**Sandy:** I also think that the mother tells Daniel that they should buy from their own people because you should support your own people, keeping your own people working.

**Text:** Some of the streetlights have been smashed. We walk along The sidewalk, which sparkles with broken glass. There are Empty cartons everywhere. A street sign lies crumpled in the Gutter/ I grab hold of Mama because I think I see a dead man With no arms lying there, too. But it’s just one of those plastic People that show off clothes in department stores.

**Sandy:** When Daniel thinks he sees a dead man lying in the street. It’s got to be very frightening. It would be a horrifying experience and also a relief to recognize it’s just a dummy. I think the mother is doing good. She’s remaining calm and she’s giving just enough information, at least she’s not frightening him.

*Would I use this book in my future classroom?*

I suppose there’s a lesson going on here. The cats get along, the mutual struggle between the people and bringing them together. Would I use this book in my classroom? Perhaps. I would probably want leading discussions and have a discussion afterwards. A good many children today haven’t experienced rioting. I remember in the 60’s once seeing rioting on TV. Vietnam and the riots in the south and stuff and then Robert Kennedy was my hero. I would use this as a book to talk about Martin Luther King’s
message of peaceful resistance. Violence seems to be such an attraction for kids. What adults tend to do is avoid those topics. The kids might know more than they do. But again, gang violence or gang acceptance is a topic that really needs to be discussed, especially when you’re asked to join in an initiation that might be contrary to your values.

I don’t think it’s the teacher’s job to instill the values in the children. I think it’s the parent’s job. Many parents just don’t do it and I think the best way to convey a message of values is by your own personal example. Teachers should present themselves appropriately by being a professional in your appearance. Certainly if I went in to school to teach with a thousand gold chains and a doo-rag on my head and large baggy pants or an opposite extreme, an extreme mini-skirt and a tight top and Dolly Parton hair and makeup, I am not presenting an appropriate appearance. Those aren’t the messages to convey. The students come into the classroom and it’s time for me to teach you. You need to be quiet. You need to listen and you need to reply in a respectful way. I think that we convey all those things in the classroom in many ways. This is the way to bring about orderliness in things that we offer in our classroom.

Participant Five-Steve

In narrative one, Steve remembers his early twenties compared to the present. He has been through a lot of changes and expresses those in his biography. Narrative two reflects his views on education and the gray area in student expectations. Narrative three is the monologue reflecting Steve’s interview regarding the LA Riots/Uprisings. Narrative four is a short dialogue intertwining Steve’s responses, the text, *Smoky night*
and myself. At the end of this dialogue is Steve’s reaction to the way he would use this book in his future classroom.

Narrative One: Steve’s Biography

Fourteen years ago…
I sat in a university classroom
For one year.
Now fourteen years later,
At 32 years old
I am starting again.

Fourteen years later…
I am getting my degree in
Middle Childhood education
I want to be an intervention specialist
It’s kind of bad to say but…
Their behavior affects their learning

Fourteen years later…
Here I am
A heterosexual male
Divorced with two children
Boys, 10 and 7

Fourteen years later…
I consider myself
Lower middle-class
I only speak English
And my religion is
Non-denominational Christian

Fourteen years later…
I coach ages 5 and up
I want to continue coaching
I really enjoy it.

Fourteen years from now?
Hopefully, teaching, coaching, still enjoying my kids
Narrative Two: Steve’s Views on Education

In my own education
I would have liked
To have been pushed a little more
Outgoing kids seemed to excel easier,
But try to teach the introverts
To be outgoing.

There is too much gray area
In teaching
Right or Wrong
Black and white
Pass or fail is too much
Too strict
But so much gray area
Is being incorporated too much
Trying hard is great,
But to base a child’s pass or fail status
To move on to the next grade
Is a bit much.

Teachers do need to instill
Certain values
By setting an example.
For instance, hard work.
Expand on values that
Should have been taught
Already in the home.
Although some homes aren’t good
Breeding grounds
For values.
Every circumstance brings about
A different degree of attention
On a child to child basis.

I want to be a teacher
Because I would like
To affect children’s lives
In a positive way.
Narrative Three: Steve’s Interview regarding the LA Riots/Uprisings

The most I remember is the videos of the truck driver, the beatings and everybody just going nuts. I watched it a couple of times and it made me sick to my stomach. I quit watching it after that. I didn’t read about it too much.

All this stuff didn’t surprise me, the kind of attitude. I knew it was going to happen when I heard the verdict about the police officers. So I wasn’t surprised. But I kind of didn’t adhere myself to it, kind of like the OJ thing. A lot of people they watched it every day. I didn’t watch it. They watched the LA riots every day. I didn’t watch that stuff. I didn’t like watching it. You kind of knew it was going to happen. It’s happened in the past. So it was kind of racial profiling.

It confuses me because it’s their neighborhood. Well to put it in perspective in coaching. I graduated from a small school. The kids came in and vandalized everything even though they knew there was a camera there. They got caught but they came in and they were vandalizing their own stuff. A couple of them were football players and they’re tearing up their own football stuff. The equipment was thousands of dollars. Their parents had to pay for it. Why destroy your own things? I understand you’re angry. But why do it?

When we have videos here with the riots and then there are other videos with the police officers. I think it was one great big gray area. It’s like everybody thought they’re definitely going to have to convict these guys or we’re going to have some serious problems. You could see that tension building up in the media even if you weren’t keeping track of it because you’re still going to hear it. It’s still going to be on the radio and still going to be flashing on TV every 5 minutes and you could feel it building up and
it’s almost like they (the media) put it in their heads. What’s going to happen if we get a bad verdict? And then all of a sudden you see people start talking about. Well, apparently something bad is going to happen if we don’t get the verdict that we want.

I don’t know why they were found not guilty. Maybe the jurors were kind of pressured, even though they’re not supposed to be. Or maybe there just wasn’t enough. I’m starting to get confused. You’ve got the video on one hand and there was definitely too much action there. They did beat him really too much. Actually they beat him way too much. But on the other hand he was doing something wrong. So you’ve got one guy who is doing something wrong and then you’ve got an officer doing something wrong. But where do they draw a line. Maybe they thought if we don’t really show some kind of support for the law side of it then it might open the door for something worse to happen. People start getting away with more stuff. And then again you’ve got the argument on the other side too. If we do let them go then maybe more beatings might run up the shootings.

I guess they were rioting because I think they probably felt there was an injustice. They were angry. They obviously felt that the officers were guilty from the video. I feel that they were guilty of taking more justice into their own hands than what should have been done. So I think they were angry. But then why is everybody looting? Then you have people that are out there to protect their stores and it gets crazy. I’ve never been involved in anything like that. Not to say that I would like to be involved but if I ever was I think I’d have a whole different perspective. I don’t know.

The cops were supposed to be protecting the city. I would say they were kind of angry. They felt better by destroying. Heck, I go through that. I’ve broke things out of
anger. I was married for 12 years. We had a few fights and as far as violence I’ve never been a violent person so that’s kind of why I just wanted to turn the TV off. I mean you’ve got people that hit their wives on the head. I had a friend that did that and I didn’t associate myself with them because I didn’t want to be in the middle of it or have to be around it. I had people ask me, “How can you not beat your wife”? Me and my wife were very physical people, but I’ve never been violent. So that’s kind of why I disassociate myself with the TV part of it.

Narrative Four: Steve’s Response to *Smoky night* by Eve Bunting

**Text:** Mama explains about rioting.
“It can happen when people get angry.
They want to smash and destroy.
They don’t care anymore what’s right and what’s wrong.” Below as they are smashing everything. Windows, cars, streetlights. “They look angry.
But they are happy too,” I whisper. “After a while it’s like a game,” Mama says.
Two boys are carrying a TV from Morton’s Appliances. It’s hard for them because the TV is so heavy. “Are they stealing it?” I ask.

**Joy:** This is kind of the person that we touched on. They look angry but they look happy too. Why do you think they would be both?

**Steve:** Kind of like what you said, for the justification or gratification and they’re angry about what’s going on but after smashing something or getting that anger out – they feel like they’re vindicated by taking that TV. Because they had to destroy something and they’re kind of breaking the law at the same time.
**Text:** Someone breaks the window of Fashion Shoes. Two women and a man climb through the broken glass. They toss out shoes like they’re throwing footballs. I’ve never heard anybody laugh the way they laughed. Smoke drifts, light as fog. I see the distant flicker of flames.

**Joy:** What kind of laughter do you think fits here?

**Steve:** Probably kind of chaotic - not chaotic but, I think of hyenas laughing. Like drunk people or something. Another thing it kind of reminds me of when you’ve got women - you have all kinds of different people doing this stuff - people that wouldn’t normally do it under normal circumstances and they feel like they can kind of let go.

**Text:** Across the street from us people are dragging cartons of cereal and sacks of rice from Kim’s market. My mama and I don’t go to Mrs. Kim’s market even though it’s close. Mama says it’s better to buy from our own people. Mrs. Kim’s cat and my cat fight all the time and Mrs. Kim yells at Jasmine in words I can’t understand. She’s yelling the same kind of words now at the people who are stealing her stuff. They pay no attention.

**Steve:** It seems like to me she wants to keep her own but it’s keeping a layer between ‘em too. And they’re in their own neighborhood, that’s a racial thing. But that’s – just like the riots - you had the people like I don’t know if they’re Chinese, I mean they’re Asian, the people that own the stores. It’s just like in the old days when a black person moved in their neighborhood. A lot of the Asians they owned a lot of the stores, at least that’s what I remember from videos and all the coverage. Kind of like buying USA. On a bigger scale.

**Text:** Some of the street lights have been smashed. We walk along the sidewalk, which sparkles with broken glass. There are empty cartons everywhere. A street sign lies crumpled in the gutter.
I grab hold of mama because I think I see a
dead man with no arms lying there, too.
But it’s just of those plastic people that show off
clothes in department stores.

**Joy:** Can you imagine just being Daniel and
walking through and thinking he sees a
dead man and what that must be like for him.

**Steve:** And being scared enough for it to
even look like a dead man, even
if it might be in plain daylights.

**Joy:** Yes, and just knowing that
your house is on fire, there’s broken glass everywhere.

**Steve:** Of course everybody is kind of coming together too. Forcefully.

**Joy:** Forcefully coming together?

**Steve:** Not by choice

*Would I use this book in my future classroom?*

It was a pretty interesting book. It’s kind of from a different perspective as far as
the riots go. People are divided into their own ethnic groups. It taught a moral lesson
about two cats and a child. The adults were fighting. Then the child came in trying to tell
a lesson, I guess through the cats. He’s kind of in the middle - the cats at one end and the
adults at the other.

I think it would be a pretty good book because it’s very recent, very current and
the different perspectives shown. I think you know you’re going to have a lot of kids
have that perspective like my dad would say “those people”. I grew up in that too; kind
of a racial type, black and white situation. I went to a concert once with my family and
my sister pulled me to the side and she said “Get over here, there are black people”.
Although to put it in perspective on how people could change; my brother-in-law is
African American now. So of course I have got a mixed background niece and nephew. So that’s a pretty big change from what she used to say.

I think she changed by being exposed to it like when you start getting friends. The weird thing is the schools we went to is on the east side so it wasn’t like we were exposed to it when we were younger so that’s kind of weird in that fact that she was that way because all my friends were black. I had one white friend when I was growing up. So I was very surprised that she was that way.

Now, as far as where I grew up, I don’t know if it was my dad or my grandparents. I was surprised that my sister was trying to stay away from black people but maybe she shared their perspective. She was scared of black people, too. I wasn’t scared of black people. But she was like over-protective of me, her little brother which I don’t know why, we hated each other. But she pulled me aside at that concert and now she’s married to an African-American and of course my dad disowned her. Now he’s changed. He loves them all. He probably still thinks he’s better. It’s engraved in him. Not completely racial but he’s got that stigma. I wouldn’t have problems with them being black. I do hear it from other people too. Some of our family friends think it’s bad that she’s married to a black man. I think that if you treat her right, it will be okay.

I think before hand, you would definitely want to question the students on their viewpoints, like if they knew about any of the riots or if they’re old enough. I would want to get their perspective, racial perspective anyway because I’m not quite sure what kind of questions I’d ask. I would have to think about that in order to bring it up in class. To me it seems there’s so much political stuff going on. I’m not really a teacher yet but I
coach, I kind of see some things in the school administration that seemed kind of goofy in the past, like old-fashioned type behavior in the school so I would want to check with them before and after.

I’m not quite sure what kind of questions - or how I would ask them but I would definitely like to hear their views from that standpoint from that age perspective. I think kids are very candid at that age. When they start getting into middle school they’re a little more withdrawn as far as what they think they might want to say. Then you’ve got ones that blurt it out when they’re younger.

But I think I would want to have kind of a spectrum, something that’s not quite so graphic. Not that that’s a real graphic book, but it’s got the looting and the people carrying bathrooms. It’s got pictures of all that stuff but it’s very historical as far as non-fictional and truth and all that kind of stuff. I would want to have something a little less graphic because that would be kind of my middle book, one end or the other. There’s tragedy that kind of brought the Smoky Night characters together.

I thought it was a real neat book because of the perspective that it took. I’ve never been through anything like that. So not only just being an adult to be in that situation but to be a kid. I know my kids, when it is thundering and lightening. Here they come. They come and jump in the bed with me. I can imagine being in something like that. I wouldn’t never want them to go through something like that, not my kids. But there are a lot of kids that do.
Data Analysis

The participants revealed parts of themselves that spanned all areas of human emotion ranging from anger, sadness, indifference, curiosity, surprise, and a keen sense of right and wrong. I found their responses in my interviews with them to be insightful, rich, and surprisingly sincere. In this next section, an analysis of these narratives along with the exploration of the research questions concludes the chapter.

As the reader will remember, the research is driven by the following research questions:

3. How do preservice teachers’ biographies enable them to form perceptions about the Los Angeles Uprisings? What sociocultural and political factors influenced this construction of their biographies?

4. How can a sociopolitical text mediate and/or interrupt these perceptions based on the preservice teachers’ biographies?

These interviews held in the small confines of my office at the university allowed the participants to express their opinions privately, but also with the guidance of their teacher. As their teacher, I was able to ask pointed questions but still allow the participants to take the topic in a direction that felt “natural” to them. Pointed questioning allows for participants to further question and think about certain motivations behind either the uprisers, police officers, characters, or oppressive practices in a broader scope.

There are three major findings in this study. The first finding is that the participants’ cultural biographies are primary when mediating the text. This finding is threaded through and substantiates the second and third findings. The second finding
discusses the preservice teachers’ notion of right and wrong and the ways in which they construct “typical” human behavior. It also discusses the media’s influence on their biographical constructions. The third finding is concerned with the mediation between the preservice teachers’ biographies and the text. Expressions of denigration and empathy with another cultural perspective inform this finding. The preservice teachers’ future classroom use for this kind of text is also explored. These findings are interrelated and overlap; but for the sake of clarity, I will discuss each one individually. I have also included the codes used in the analytical codebook. These are indicated in parentheses after each of the quotes.

Finding #1: The participants’ biographies take precedence over the text and another person’s lived experiences.

The first finding of this study is that the preservice teachers’ biographies took precedence over the mediation with the text. Biographical constructions are fluid, contextual, and malleable. based on a variety of social, cultural, and professional interactions. Many kinds of interactions shape a person’s biography such as race, gender, community, geographic location, schooling, religion, sexual orientation, etc. The findings showed that these constructions take precedence when discussing other people’s experiences. Biographical considerations such as geographic location, race, and racism were referenced many times when the participants reflected on their memories of and thoughts about the LA Uprisings. In the following sections, I will focus on the participants’ biographical constructions, their geographic location, and how their race and racially charged experiences informed much of the findings of this study.
The participants would consistently reference their biographies and their lived experiences when asked about another’s experiences. For instance, when Kelly, John, Sandy, and Steve started discussing their reactions to the beating of Rodney King and the LA Uprisings, they referenced their lived experience and their geographic location at the time. Kelly discussed her family’s reaction as well as the difference between her sheltered neighborhood and her grandmother’s more violent neighborhood. She discussed her family’s reaction saying, “they thought it was crazy” and “how could they do that to that black man?” (LEP). Kelly continually discusses her neighborhood in Cleveland and how she was sheltered and hadn’t thought of these kinds of issues before. I began to realize that geographic location such as a middle class neighborhood provides a safe haven from low income neighborhoods.

When living under the concept of white privilege, many whites have been geographically separated from diversity due to historical and ancestral choices. These previous choices determined by others can sometimes unintentionally perpetuate continued separation and isolation. Linda brought up her isolation in a small, white town in Ohio. She stated that she had never really talked to a black person until she went to college in Kentucky: “I wasn’t around anybody that wasn’t white like me. After high school I left for the south at 18” (LEP, LEA). Linda also showed disbelief and lack of clear understanding as to why the uprisings were happening. She continued to reference her lived experiences with meeting black people for the first time in college. She continued to link these experiences and lack of interaction with black people in her hometown to understanding the uprisings. In this sense, Linda may not have made the choice to be separated from people of color in her hometown, but her inability to
critically deconstruct the racial tensions that pervaded these uprisings is perhaps one reason for the continued separation and lack of understanding in her adult life. Linda’s sheltered life enabled her to continue under the unquestioned, unnoticed umbrella of privilege.

John’s first memory of the Los Angeles Uprisings was Atlanta’s reaction to the beating of Rodney King and the verdict in his trial, rather than the Uprisings in Los Angeles. He discussed his teacher’s reaction and how she didn’t want to get on the highways in Atlanta, Georgia. He also discussed the reaction that he and his father had when they were watching the news. Rather than critically discussing why these uprisings were occurring, John referred back to his biography and lived experiences. Many times when the preservice teachers lack the capability to critically deconstruct notions of race and privilege, they hold fast to their lived experiences and biographical constructions. The racial incidents such as the beating of Rodney King and the uprisings are then relegated to a few “angry people,” rather than a whole revolutionary movement.

For John, the fact that uprisings happened in downtown Atlanta, thus affecting his life directly, may have caused him to harbor negative feelings toward the people who participated in the Los Angeles Uprisings and African Americans in general. John had very vivid recollections of the LA Uprisings and seemed to hold on to the notion of Rodney King’s guilt and the justification of his beating in accordance with his cultural reality. Understandably, geographic location holds great precedence in the maintenance of certain value and belief systems, thus shaping and sometimes sustaining the significance of biographical constructions. Many times misinformation fuels ignorance, therefore lacking the ability to help one move past one’s own subjectivities.
The participants’ racial identity served as one foundation for their perception of how the notion of race was implicated in the uprisings. Racial identity has influenced how the participants perceived the Rodney King/LA Uprisings: so many implications and judgments follow a person’s skin color that meritocracy remains relatively elusive. One can also stay relatively ethnocentric in diverse groups unless one is challenged to interrogate those human self-constructions on race. Many times one may decide to interact with another cultural group, but will focus mostly on the similarities one has with the group, rather than the differences. One might believe one will maintain harmonious interactions with the group members if one remains relatively simplistic in one’s understanding of that culture and just try to lump everyone together in one homogenous group. For instance, Steve stated that he went through similar feelings of anger: “I would say they were kind of angry. They felt better by destroying. Heck, I go through that. I’ve broke things out of anger” (CTCR). Sometimes Steve and the other participants focused on similarities rather than understanding, appreciating, and celebrating differences. In this instance, Steve did not note the vast differences between himself and the uprisers. Critical racial examination allows the uncovering of racist practices both implicit and explicit, thus creating a space for social discussion and change.

Kelly, who identified herself as African American and who had discussed with her family the violence against Rodney King and the verdict for the police officers, immediately felt that the verdict was racist. The other participants, who were white, discussed the possibility of racial tensions, but they remained vague about how race is directly involved. However, Sandy acknowledged “the black culture as an oppressed culture and [did see] the male white population as the oppressor” (IN and IG).
Linda recalled her college experience with what she termed “racism against whites.” She could feel the hostility and did not understand why there were racist attitudes aimed at her. At another time, she indicated just the opposite: “I have never been discriminated against, I guess, at least as a white person. Maybe my age or being a woman, I maybe have, I think I have” (LEP). Linda’s uncertainty at her own experiences of prejudice bounced back and forth between experiencing discrimination as a white person and as a woman. As she reflected now, confusion surfaced as to what experiences in her life were discriminatory and what were not. Linda also stated that she didn’t understand why they had African American assemblies and not white assemblies. To me, the researcher, this was evidence of her perception of being discriminated against as a white person, while she did not question her privilege. As she stated,

I’ve never personally mistreated people or personally felt superior so I have a hard time understanding why people have to pay a price for something that they didn’t really have a part in. Like me and my kids and my husband, we totally are not prejudiced at all but I can see it and I get tired of the implication that everybody is and I don’t think we are at all. (LEP)

This is a poignant testament to the notion of ignoring racial differences and oppression. This habit is common in the concept of white privilege. Not examining that everyone has prejudices negates the oppression of others. Linda continued to note that she felt punished for what her ancestors did, but did not see how her continued privilege had been perpetuated from these oppressive ancestral practices. If the participants could have reflected on a more critical level, they might have been able to examine their past experiences with prejudice and discrimination as both the oppressor and the oppressed.
Reactions to not only surfacing racial tensions, but the actual event of the Rodney King beating and the ways in which the participants’ families discussed the event also formed a primary aspect in obtaining perspective of the LA Uprisings. Kelly’s family discussed the injustice of the beating of Rodney King. Kelly stated that her family could see it more from Rodney King’s point of view: “Oh my gosh, did you see what they did to that black man? So I remember that more than anything else. I remember we were all saying that ‘it was horrible, and how could they do that?’ and ‘he’s going to get a lot of money.’” Kelly’s understanding of racial oppression is different from that of the white participants, in that she linked her childhood, her lived experiences, and her university education in African American studies and sociology to these incidents with a more cohesive and personal understanding.

Throughout the interviews the pattern of linking one’s biography to the participants’ rationalization or understanding of the beating and uprisings served as a salient aspect of this particular finding. These participants only referenced what they had experienced and their inability to let go of those constructions, making it difficult to reflect in a culturally relativistic way of looking at the world and the people who inhabit it. Thus, the second finding explicates how these biographical constructions shaped the participants’ construction of humanity and right and wrong behavior. This finding is threaded throughout the other two findings.

Finding #2: Biographical constructions shape and inform notions of humanity and right and wrong behavior.

This section informs the first research question, “How do the preservice teachers’ biographies enable them to form perceptions of the Los Angeles Uprisings? What
sociocultural and political factors influenced this construction of their biographies?”
Many times, the participants used their biographies to make sense of another’s version of humanity and assumed that the constructed “other” also operated under that same version of humanity. In this section, I discuss the implications of these biographies on the development of what constitutes typical, appropriate human behavior. I also examine the media’s influence on this construction of typical, human behavior⁵. Even if two persons are in the same cultural group, one might still view culturally appropriate behavior differently, so that no two people are completely identical in their views on right and wrong. Not everyone is always functioning under the same constructions of reality even when they share the same racial, ethnic, gender, or socioeconomic group.

Fundamental notions of truth and cultural reality are derived from the roots of tradition and “values.” To adhere to one’s biography is like survival and to focus on self-preservation as a pathway to righteousness is consistently justified through our rationalization of “appropriate” human behavior. Preservice teachers construct their cultural reality based on this notion of self-preservation and ideologies conducive to their survival. For instance, the uprisers are defending their sense of survival based on their cultural reality. The mostly white population and others who cannot understand that sense of reality operate out of their own sense of survival by denying or denigrating upriser’s behavior. Therefore, their privilege is maintained by showing their lack of understanding as to how these events could occur.

Usually, the contextualized truth of the participants’ experiences holds more precedence than that of another person’s experience. They can empathize, but their life,

⁵ An even more problematic word would be “normal” but I decided to use typical and appropriate instead.
their daily reality, will sustain them. The constant interaction with others allows identity and biographies to be ever-changing and fluid. These biographies might sometimes be multiple and conflicting in different situations and in the behavior of the people involved. The participants constructed reality using a variety of references and value statements that place rules on what they considered “proper” human behavior.

John emphasized what Uprising participants were guilty and not guilty. He also referenced his perspectives during the OJ Simpson trial and who was found not guilty of murdering his wife, Nicole. John argued that white people didn’t go out and “trash everything” (IC and RN). He constructed his sense of dualism in his black and white rendering of who was guilty and not guilty in the beating of Rodney King and Reginald Denny. It was very clear to him that the “lady cop” was the victim and that Rodney King was the perpetrator, and thus was guilty. He went on to mention the O.J. Simpson trial:

When OJ was found not guilty and you didn’t see a bunch of white people going out in the street and just trashing everything. I mean in a lot of ways it’s a matter of class. You see it a lot. People who uphold themselves and obey the law to a degree. Then there are people who were just trashing the stores just to get TVs and they call it rioting…there’s no respect for law and humanity in general.

(COHR and COHW)

For John, to be human is to uphold yourself and obey the law even if that law is not only oppressing you economically, socially, and politically, but is physically abusive as well. John showed little evidence of deconstructing the images of oppression that were presented to him, and thus continued to believe that uprising is not “normal” human behavior. He was projecting his construction of right and wrong behavior onto others’
cultural realities without noting and appreciating the differences in their lived experiences.

The participants also brought up the concept of what it means to be human. Sandy believed that “it’s human nature to stand upon one another”. She says that, “there will always be oppression and if it’s not between white and black or women and men, it will be between other groups” (COH). So what does this mean for the future and teaching for equity and social justice if it is futile? Is this then a pessimistic or realistic perspective? How many preservice teachers feel this way and in what ways does this perspective emerge in the classroom? Sandy also discusses the concept of common sense in which she states, “There’s got to be other ways to bring someone down but then again if you’re handcuffed and the cops are telling you to lie down then perhaps you should just lie down” (MPB). What seems to be common sense to one person operating out of one sociocultural reality might be very different to someone else. This reminded me of a Norman Fairclough (1995) quote, “Common sense is common in the sense of power” (p.1). When power is wielded in power dynamic situations, such as that between the police and Rodney King, the more powerful expects the subordinate to yield. Sandy has been in this power position as a police officer and understands the perspective of this power dynamic. I wonder how this power dynamic could play out in a classroom considering the strong teacher/student power relations.

The participants also drew the distinction between animal and human behavior to distinguish between themselves and the constructed “other.” This allows one to denigrate another culture rather than note difference between cultural groups. Linda compared the police officers and uprisers to animals. She believed that “they weren’t even acting like
human beings, black or white.” She continued to state that you can’t “fight murder with murder, it’s not right.” In addition, when asked what the rioters’ laugh sounds like in the reading of *Smoky night*, many of the participants used words like “evil” (Kelly), “possessed” (Linda), invalid “joy” (John), and “hyenas laughing, like drunk people or something” (Steve). Sandy is the only participant who said the uprisers’ laugh in the book sounded like they were “finally getting back at the system kind of laugh.” She may have come to this conclusion because she had faced such blatant discrimination in her work as a police officer and as a homosexual female. The participants were very clear about their notions of right and wrong and “proper” human behavior.

To explain how some of the participants came to this understanding of “normal human behavior,” some of them mentioned that they had little or no knowledge of how or why these uprisings could occur. This lack of knowledge is foremost due to the little experience with any critical interrogation of racist, systematic, and subtle practices that undergird many of our nation’s social, economic, and political policies.

Even when questioned about a racial uprising through both an actual event and a text based on that actual event, the participants could not or did not interrogate or analyze the institutional ramifications that prompted these and previous uprisings. Both Kelly and Linda displayed their lack of knowledge in not taking the opportunity when asked in the interview to discuss why these events happened on a more national and global level. Sandy was the only participant who mentioned a “system” in which the uprisers could fight back. Because of her extensive knowledge of historical, social, and political unrest on both a national and global level, she pieced parts of these events into a more holistic
phenomenon. When preservice teachers are knowledgeable about historical practices of oppression, it seems more likely for them to see the extension of those practices today.

The media’s portrayal of an event can greatly inform how one perceives the history and implications of a racially charged event and the behavior of the people involved. The participants referenced the media images quite often in the beginning of the interview, thus showing how the influence of the media helps to construct their perceptions of sociopolitical events and thus, their biographies. All of the participants’ first responses to the uprisings showed how the media portrayed the events from the beating of Rodney King to the trial and finally the uprisings. The constant barrage of images of one cultural group, along with other media images on local and national news programs, helps to shape the participants’ perceptions of right and wrong behavior.

Linda discussed the gruesome images and her perception of the uncontrollable surreal and disjointed portrayal of the beating and the uprisings. Many of the other participants were also influenced greatly by the media’s portrayal and the gruesome images. Kelly stated that she was young and it wasn’t quite personal at that time, but she stated that the media pictures were the first thing she could remember. John also stated that he remembered how violent the uprisings became and discussed the “stories he had heard” about Rodney King and the police officers. He specifically recalled WGM news: “He (Rodney King) actually had a woman in a choke hold. A lady police officer. So I can understand how you’d want to get him off of her. That’s what I was told and that’s what we heard on WGM news” (MPB, MVI).

Since most of what the participants saw and heard was on TV, the perceived victims and justification for the uprisings also seemed filtered through the media’s
portrayal. John continually went back and forth in his opinions about who is guilty and not guilty. He also had very strong beliefs about who the victims were in this situation. From his perspective, the victims were all white people. Kelly, on the other hand, saw the incident very differently because she understood Rodney King’s perspective more, which seemed to be informed by her experiences as an African American and her family’s reaction. As for the justification of the beating of Rodney King, John was the only participant who felt that it was justified, even though maybe they went a little far: “they were just angry and trying to save the “lady cop” (SRRJ). This rendition of the media’s portrayal held significant weight in the construction of these events and the notion of right and wrong behavior.

Sandy stated very clearly that she did not think that the police officers should have beat [Rodney King] like they did; however, “if you’re handcuffed and the cops are telling you to lie down, then perhaps you should just lie down. But I could see where those police officers were totally overreacting to him” (MPI). The participants’ biographical constructions, coupled with the media’s visual and verbal portrayal of these events, seems to have shaped what the public deems significant and valuable. Even by using the term “beating,” they were placing value and judgment on whether or not they believed Rodney King was actually physically abused by the police officers or not. The term “riots” that was used in the media rather than “uprisings” also placed a value on the incidents and the people involved.

The media shapes the way we perceive an event. The way an event is reported and what information is shared are crucial to how one understands an actual event. Whether this information is accurate or not needs to be scrutinized. The media supposedly reflects
local, national, and global events from a mainstream perspective. It does not always
show these events in culturally relativistic ways. Many times, the media serves as a
rumor mill. In 1992 the video of Rodney King being beaten by the police officers was
shown over and over again and pervaded the 5, 6, and 10 o’clock news. There were
rumors and speculation that if the police officers were found not guilty, there might be a
riot. These kinds of rumors tend to fuel ignorance and can be a catalyst for violent
eruptions (Allport, 1958). I believe this is what happened when the participants watched
the news.

Finding #3: Mediations between the biographies and the text were presented in responses
of denigration, empathy, and future use in the preservice teachers’ classroom.

The third finding answers the second research question, “How can a sociopolitical
text mediate and/or interrupt these perceptions based on the preservice teachers’
biographies? Mediations between the biographies and the text were presented in
The concept of mirrors and windows is one way that the book, Smoky night, interrupted
and mediated some of these biographical constructions by allowing the participants to
read about a different perspective (Galda, 1998). The mirror connects to a character by
seeing a reflection of self in that character’s words or actions. A window allows the
reader to see a different perspective, one that s/he might not otherwise encounter.
However, that different perspective can elicit a variety of responses from denigration and
resistance to empathy.

John’s labeling Rodney King “what’s his name,” the female police officer the
“lady cop,” and generalizing Asians and Asian Americans as being consumed by money
are some examples of denigration. Some of the participants’ statements displayed not only a lack of knowledge, but also contained character disconnections such as denigration, resistance, and disengagement. These responses stem from the participants’ protection of their biographical ideologies. Resistance is demonstrated when a participant denigrates a person or that person’s experiences by negatively stereotyping him or her. When people feel a threat to their cultural reality, they defend it by focusing on specific cultural differences rather than general ones, because it allows a sense of justification for denigrating the person or character. Participants also resist when they are uncomfortable with outworn ways of thinking. Giving up these old ways can be jarring and emotionally traumatic, so they resist participating in the discussion.

Two clear examples of denigration are showcased in the story when Mrs. Kim, one of the characters in the book who is portrayed as Korean⁶⁷ is yelling at the main character’s cat in words that the main character can’t understand. Later in the book, Mrs. Kim is walking with the other people in the neighborhood because there was a fire in their building. They are all walking to a shelter and at that point in the story, the main character and Mrs. Kim’s cats are lost. When I asked John about what country Mrs. Kim might be from he said, “Your immediate response is to think that she might be Oriental because of [the name] Kim. Then there’s the connection of the cats… Most Oriental people have several cats.” This sweeping generalization reflects denigration by lumping all Asians and Asian Americans into one group that owns cats. Not only is this broad,

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⁶ While Mrs. Kim is not named as Korean, I assumed from the name, Kim and the context of contention between Korean storeowners and African Americans that she was of Korean descent. However, this points to the often unnamed denigration and racism present even in well written multicultural children’s literature. As a teacher and as a white researcher, I am still struggling with how to name and position myself and my students in relation to unnamed and liminal voices in multicultural children’s literature.
but it is also inaccurate. The second example is when he continued to talk about Mrs.
Kim’s dress being depicted as a dollar bill because she only cares about her store and the
money she is losing instead of her own safety. These kinds of negative stereotypes are
prevailent in his interview when discussing the uprisings and the people/characters
involved.

Disengagement and resistance is displayed when the participant changes the
subject or disengages from the political or social conversation. This type of
disengagement or resistance can be seen as a form of agency because resisting is claiming
power over one’s perspectives and option of engagement. John showed disengagement
by cutting the discussion short when I asked him why he thought the uprisers appeared to
be both happy and sad in the text. John stated, “You’d almost think it was joy, but I don’t
see how it could be. I have no idea.” He stopped short at this point and didn’t ponder
why they could express both emotions and what lay beneath these emotions. It seemed
that when John felt uncomfortable or did not want to engage in a discussion in which he
was asked to ponder another perspective, he began to shut down or denigrate the person
or character. This became a defense mechanism for him.

Silence is another way of disengaging. As a researcher and teacher, I needed to
realize that silence is not necessarily acquiescence. Just because a participant like John is
quiet doesn’t mean he is yielding to the issue under discussion, in this case why the
uprisers were reacting in this way. By being silent, John was asserting his sense of
agency. He wanted to take the interview in his own direction by discussing the
illustrations instead of the question asked.
Another instance of disengagement occurred when Steve discussed his unwillingness to watch the news about the uprisings. He watched the beginning of the media coverage but chose to turn off the TV after surmising that everyone was just going nuts, and it made him sick to his stomach. It has often seemed to me that the option of turning off the TV can be an instance of disengagement and even suggestive of white privilege. Because this did not really affect his life, his family, his neighborhood, or his race, Steve could turn off the TV as opposed to Kelly’s family, who watched it and understood “Rodney King’s point of view.” Because these participants’ biographies were intertwined with the ways in which they make sense of the LA Uprisings, the interruption and mediation of these biographies were not always possible.

On the other hand, connecting or relating to a character can be crucial in understanding another perspective. Through the text, Smoky night, the participants gained a perspective that they might not otherwise have encountered in their lifetime. These possible connections may have allowed them to see the many manifestations of oppressive practices from not only the Rodney King incident, but other more national and possibly global oppressive practices.

For some of the participants, there was a certain vindication for the uprisers in the text when I asked, “Why do you think the people were happy and angry at the same time?” Linda stated, “They’re probably happy because they’re finally getting some satisfaction or they’re probably feeling like they’re getting their due or getting back at someone who has hurt them” (CTCR). For Linda, the connection of other historical events such as the Japanese internment camps surfaced in the discussion. As we discussed the notion of history books displaying only one perspective of an historical
event, she indicated that she has never really discussed these topics in depth before. It seems that even though some of the participants might have had brief conversations about these events, they haven’t had the critical and self-reflective discussion of bringing all these historical events together and how they inform and perpetuate present day injustices and oppressive practices.

Throughout Sandy’s interview, references to racism, discrimination, and systematic oppression were present. Although Sandy had clearly thought about these concepts, the text served as a kind of mediation by portraying the personal lives of the people affected by these uprisings. Sandy stated, “Their laughing sounds like ‘I’m getting even at the system’ laugh. Finally, oppressed people are often poor people and they’re finally getting some things that maybe they’ve wanted for a long time. Getting the shoes. Thinking maybe they have always wanted it, so just get it, because it was never available before” (LTCR). Even as a police officer, Sandy did not take a defensive stance but tried to analyze both the situation and the participants in general. Perhaps since she had been on both sides of oppression, she could better relate to the characters and uprisers.

When Steve was asked how the uprisers could feel both happy and sad at the same time, he started thinking more about the personal justification for their actions. He was also wondering if he too might have acted the same way. All three of these participants expressed feelings of vindication, but did not critically deconstruct their own experiences of oppression in comparison to the uprisers. Had they done this more in depth, this might have allowed them to make stronger personal connections to the
uprisers, thus creating a more clear understanding of why the uprisings happened in the first place.

Again, the participants were trying to empathize, but by isolating the uprisings to the beating of Rodney King and the not-guilty verdict of the police officers, the participants were not linking this particular uprising to other African American protests of oppression. Steve stated, “I guess they were rioting because I think they probably felt there was an injustice. They were angry. They obviously felt the officers were guilty of taking more justice into their own hands than what should have been done.” Other participants like Kelly mentioned that the uprisers must have believed in their “cause,” but she never mentioned what that cause might be. This shows the beginning of empathy, but not a critical deconstruction of the uprisings as a social revolution based on a long history of discrimination and marginalization. John saw the connection with race, but viewed the black and white races as operating out of the same social/cultural reality. This was exemplified when he compared O.J. Simpson’s trial to the police officers’ trial. He stated that you didn’t see white people “trashing everything” (RR, NCTC). This misconception of equity between the races made it seem illogical that there would be such a reaction to the verdict. In other words, John seemed to feel that everyone operated out of the same cultural reality as he did and that they too must abide by the same rules that he did. To not abide by this same cultural reality made it seem that the uprisers were behaving in a totally irrational manner and their actions were not justified. This essentially denies any historical practice of oppression and prejudice that African Americans have faced.
Another instance of mediation between the preservice teachers’ biographies and the text was their intention to use the book. Most of the preservice teachers promoted the book and would use it in their classroom. However, future discussions around the book seemed to lack a critical discussion.

The participants, however, enjoyed the text and said they would use it in their own classroom; however, there were some reservations about how they would introduce and discuss it. Most of the participants believed the basic moral of the book was that children could bring adults together in ways that bridge cultural gaps. Kelly seemed to think the moral of the story was that people can still be friends despite differences. This statement indicated that differences are not necessarily a positive thing and that “despite” differences people can get along rather than embrace those differences. She also stated that people should know that “kids that haven’t grown up in this kind of environment would still benefit from this kind of literature, because then they would not be so surprised if they entered an environment that is different from theirs” (CUI and IL). This statement did not explore, however, why there is a difference in this kind of environment; it merely mentioned that kids wouldn’t be surprised. Beyond this, class and social distinction were not explored.

*Smoky night* could also be read to both urban and suburban children. One interesting response was John’s statement about reading it to suburban or rural children:

It lets them know there are places like this and that you have neighbors that go nuts; you have to be mindful of it. I know if I saw that I would probably keep going down the street myself and get out of it. There are places that exist like
this. There’s all these people in that building and there’s people that loot the
stores and steal. (CUI)

John seemed to indicate that only urban dwellers act in this manner and that rural or
suburban folks can gain a window into this kind of “city behavior.” The rural folk seem
to be absolved from this kind of behavior. This response maintained notions of white
privilege by placing the blame on the city folk rather than the system that perpetuates
these discrepancies between rural and urban populations. However, most of the
participants felt that children can lead adults in many ways and that this story shows an
example of how this can be done with racism in the United States.

The participants also discussed their own comfort and discomfort around
discussing this text with children. They emphasized discussing easier topics like pets,
neighborhoods, and getting along with people. These topics were comfortable for them.
However, they also acknowledged their discomfort in going to urban areas and discussing
their privilege and experiences with racial tensions. These tensions of comfort and
discomfort can be eased with pointed critical deconstructive questioning. The teacher
educator can provide a space for the preservice teacher to discuss how their biographies
affect the way they approach a sociopolitical text.

Linda stated that she could present this book from an historical perspective and
she did not think a teacher should just present it “out of the blue” (CUI). She also stated
that teachers could use the book if they were having problems with gangs in the school.
She thought that the message of the book was “simplistic …and wouldn’t really make
anybody angry and it might be a nice peaceful way to present a problem that had
happened” (CUI, IL). Discomfort seemed to be avoided; however, the notion that growth
comes from discomfort was not exemplified. Sandy seemed to link the text to broader social issues such as Vietnam and gang violence. She started making the connections to social deconstruction but stopped before making the linkage to the institutionalization of oppressive practices perpetuated in children’s literature.

The preservice teachers mostly felt that the books should relate to the reader’s own experiences, so if they lived in an urban setting, they might encounter these kinds of problems. However, this suggests that other students who don’t encounter these types of problems may not need to know about their existence. This also suggests that preservice teachers are not ready to critically examine racial tensions in a sociopolitical children’s text without further examining their own biographical constructions and the ways in which these were constructed by societal signs and symbols. Preservice teachers need to engage in these kinds of deconstructive practices in order to understand how to teach in culturally relevant ways that dismantle oppressive teaching practices.

The more the participants thought about the reasoning behind the Uprisings and the behavior of the people involved (citizens and police), the more interconnected and intertwined their biographies became. Sometimes the participants seemed deeply reflective and sometimes their responses seemed automatic and deprived of extensive thought. This could be because of a lack of appropriate ways in which to deconstruct these experiences of others, or because they lacked the capacity to empathize fully, and therefore did not want to engage in the deconstruction of a particular experience. When preservice teachers begin to deconstruct notions of oppression in this way and begin to think more deeply about this topic, they will have taken one step in the process of critical and culturally relativistic thinking.
Finally, a sociopolitical text can mediate some perceptions and understandings of cultural relativism; however, biographies and lived experiences will always take precedence over any of these new understandings. There is a sense of wonder and inclination toward cultural relativism and attempts of understanding; however, one’s biography still holds a power and virtue that stems from deep within one’s cultural reality.

Conclusion

The concept of the biographies truly taking precedence over the text is a significant finding in this study. Many of the participants’ biographies shaped how they viewed the notion of oppression in general, and how they viewed the beating of Rodney King and the verdict of not guilty in the trial of the police officers in Los Angeles. The more experience they had interacting in diverse settings, the more they seemed to critically analyze why these events might have occurred. For instance, Sandy has had more experience being discriminated against in a male-dominated work force in addition to being lesbian. She seemed to grasp the historical significance of why the Uprisings were occurring and how this event is related to other global contentions between groups. John and Linda’s relatively little diverse experiences inhibited their understanding of the LA Uprisings and their connections to other national and global histories and contemporary contentions. The act of trying to understand multiple perspectives can instigate further investigation into the deconstruction of oppressive practices, thus allowing the participant to gain a more multicultural perspective. However, deep critical self-examination and reflection is necessary before one can begin to explore the origin and ramifications of these practices.
Preservice teachers and other readers do not just leave their biographies behind when they read sociopolitical texts (or any text for that matter); they bring their biography with them and the text is one way to bring new perspective to a certain sociopolitical phenomenon. Understanding that the biographies, the text, and even the instructor can scaffold these perceptions in creating a new understanding of an event is one of the major goals of multicultural children’s literature.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

“I prefer the remembrance, the painful bitter recall. I know that I need a brother who shares this tender, taunting heritage. I desire a sister who is not in denial of our mutual past. Together, we may be able to plan a less painful future. Separate, we can only anticipate further ruptures and deeper loneliness”- Maya Angelou

Overview of Research Study

This quote from Maya Angelou is such a powerful, emotional and deeply personal vision of social justice. It calls for this intense desire to make collaborative efforts toward changing inequities in society on a local, national and global scale. This study aims to invest in this quest by examining our future teaching force and their pedagogical practices to create more critically conscious and culturally relativistic preservice teachers. This chapter’s goal is to discuss the research and pedagogical implications of these kinds of inquiries. This chapter begins with an overview of the research findings and other insights I had while conducting the study. Then, I discuss the implications of this study to the scholarship of qualitative inquiries, the field of teacher education and multicultural children’s literature. Finally, I discuss considerations for further research studies.
This inquiry was conducted through a critical/constructivist and feminist epistemology in which I examine preservice teachers’ biographies, their views on education, in addition to conducting an interview to discuss a sociopolitical event through a text. The children’s book, *Smoky night* by Eve Bunting depicts the LA Uprisings from a child’s point of view. The study examined two research questions, 1) How do preservice teachers’ biographies enable them to form perceptions about a sociopolitical event (the Los Angeles Uprisings)? What sociocultural and political factors influenced this construction of their biographies? and 2) How can a sociopolitical children’s text mediate and/or interrupt these perceptions based on the preservice teachers’ biographies? These questions stem from listening to preservice teachers in my children’s literature class and the variety of perspectives they held about what books are appropriate for children. As I listened to these perspectives, I wondered what else they would say and their reasoning behind such perspectives. Some students had very strong opinions about racism, sexism, and most especially using gay and lesbian children’s literature in the classroom. I wanted to explore these kinds of responses with one particular sociopolitical text, *Smoky night* by Eve Bunting.

As I began the summer semester of the course, “Literature for Children and Young Adults”, I observed the ways in which the students interacted with each other and the text. However, as I began to interview them one-on-one, I found their responses to be different from what I expected and more intriguing. I am not sure what I expected exactly, but they seemed to show more intense emotions. As we met throughout the semester, I began to see preservice teachers in a new way. I began to see their complex biographies and the intensity of their life experiences.
Through the plethora of data, themes began to emerge from their responses in the biographies, views on education and the interviews. Out of the data collection there were three findings, 1) The participants’ biographies take precedence over the text and another person’s lived experiences, 2) Biographical constructions shape and inform notions of humanity, and right and wrong behavior and 3) mediations between the biographies and the text were presented in responses of denigration, empathy and future use in the preservice teachers’ classroom.

The first finding shows that the participants would reference their biographies when trying to understand the perspective of the uprisers, the police or the characters in the text. The participants would continually look for ways to use their biographical constructions to make sense of these behaviors that seemed foreign to them. Geographic location and lived experiences with racial tensions surfaced more than any other construction. The responses prevalent in the interviews were living a sheltered life and reactions spanning from vindication to confusion as to why people would destroy their own community. This first finding informed much of the two subsequent findings.

The second finding shows that participants’ biographical constructions informed their perspective of right and wrong behavior and how people should act. The participants held strong beliefs based on their cultural realities. Many of the participants believed that the uprisers should also act according to this constructed cultural reality. They seemed to operate out of this notion that everyone should adhere to this cultural reality, however there were times when they empathized, stating things like “I have broken things out of anger” (Steve). This kind of mediation leads to the third finding.
The third finding shows that the text did mediate these biographical constructions at times but through notions of denigration, empathy and their use of the text in the future classroom. For instance, when John felt a threat to his cultural reality, he would denigrate one of the characters. He would also resist the text by either falling silent or disengage, thus giving him a sense of agency in which he chooses when to interact with the text. Empathy was expressed through Linda and Steve when they would indicate that they might behave the same way, but they don’t discuss exactly why the uprisers were so angry.

These findings were the most salient themes of this study. I believe this study to be a never-ending and complex series of statements that show teacher educators the complexities of the preservice teachers that sit in their classrooms. These stories of preservice teachers’ lives are significant on so many levels and can be analyzed in a variety of ways. Gay (2000) states, “The telling of one story is the genesis of yet other stories. The images, rhythms, and experiences it evokes ‘reverberate in the memories of audience members, who reconstruct the story with the stuff of their own thoughts and feelings” (p.3). That is what happened in this study. I wrote my own biography or story in the first chapter, and through that biography I told stories about the participants in this study. My analysis naturally reflects my story just as much as it does the participants. Telling stories about our lives is so important when attempting to become a more culturally tolerant society. This allows teachers to connect and grow with another person.

My research is different from others in this field because I bridge a sociopolitical children’s text with the way preservice teachers respond and intend to use this literature in their future classroom. I examine their constructed biographies and the way they view
one sociopolitical event through a children’s text. I have not seen this done in any other research study. I believe taking a racially charged event and examining preservice teachers’ responses with their own experiences and perceptions provides for intriguing implications to the way they view their future students and pedagogical practices. This particular research study adds to the existing research by coupling teacher education practices and theory of cultural development. In a culturally diverse world, educational research and practice needs to address how to teach in a pluralistic manner. This leads to the implications of this study in qualitative research inquiries and in the fields of teacher education and multicultural children’s literature.

Implications to Scholarship in Qualitative Literacy Research

This study provides implications to qualitative research because it opens doors to examining teacher biographies and how they shape and inform pedagogy. Narrative inquiry is a poignant method in which to work within teachers’ lives and the stories they tell. Kamil states, (2002) “Literacy researchers are also exploring a variety of narrative devices that have potential for opening up new ways of making visible to their reading audiences how the choices they make in collecting, analyzing and representing their data reflect the theoretical frameworks within which they work” (p. 51).

Examining the ways in which the researcher is inherently connected to the participants by placing the researcher in the text is a significant shift in qualitative research. I chose to reveal myself as a researcher and as a teacher, woman and perennial student. I am still learning and the power lies in learning from your students, just as much as they learn from you. I learned a great deal from these participants. I believe that as
researchers and teacher educators we can always learn from our students. An implication of this study rests in the way we examine how these students and preservice teachers perceive cultural and political events and the effect of this view on their life and teaching.

As I revealed myself as the researcher, I felt as if the wizard behind the curtain was emerging and my subjectivities surfaced throughout the study. At times, it can be difficult for the researcher to empathize with the participants; Richardson (1992) compares herself to her participant and the difficulty of being empathetic to someone who operates out of very different cultural circumstances. As a researcher, it is essential to realize those disconnections with our participants and examine the way we represent and interpret those disconnections. Qualitative literacy research is producing more studies that reflect life and biographies, thus finally investigating just who these teachers are and why they feel and act the way they do. We don’t have to be like them to understand them. One interesting note about my research is the differences between what I think the participants should say or feel and what they actually do say and feel. Qualitative research approaches uncover these nuances of life as story. This research study seeks to open more doors to studies that examine biographies and how those biographies can be mediated through children’s texts.

Implications to the Field of Teacher Education

The implications of this study pertain in many ways to teacher education by the very way we discuss multicultural issues within the university classroom. More specifically, the way we mediate multicultural texts in the university classroom and how that crosses over to the K-12 classroom. Some multicultural university curriculums only
reflect the experiences of the “other” and not always on critical self-reflection and/or white privilege. It is important for preservice teachers to critically analyze their role in perpetuating inequity through their own teaching.

My research study found that preservice teachers operate out of their cultural reality and might not always have a culturally relativistic view of others. This can be problematic in the classroom because they are teaching students from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences. It is important for teachers to understand that their students operate out of all kinds of social and cultural realities.

The purpose of a sociopolitical children’s text like Smoky night is to interrupt the dichotomy of how humanity is constructed into right and wrong situations and understand there are multiple realities in which people hold fast. Bennett (1993) states, “Intercultural sensitivity is not natural. It is not part of our primate past, nor has it characterized most of human history. Cross-cultural contact usually has been accompanied by bloodshed, oppression, or genocide” (p. 21). With this in mind, is this a socialized view of how human beings should act and where does this socialization ideal originate? Is Sandy right when she says that it is, “human nature to stand upon one another”. Sometimes a change in one’s perspective takes years and with the deconstruction of socialized understandings, critical discussion and diverse experiences; one can better understand the complexities and multiple layers of the way the system of oppression works.

When preservice teachers begin to analyze and deconstruct their biographical constructions, they begin to develop cultural understanding and a relativistic lens. Kolb (1983) states that,
Development proceeds from a state of embeddedness, defensiveness, dependence, and reaction to a state of self-actualization, independence, proaction and self-direction. This process is marked by increasing complexity and relativism in dealing with the world and one’s experience and by higher-level integrations of the dialectic conflicts among the four primary learning modes (p. 140).

By focusing on the differences rather than the similarities, one can start attaining intercultural sensitivity and relativism. Raising consciousness by focusing on difference and appreciating the relativity of other people’s realities and life paths enables one to not only tolerate, but appreciate another’s version of reality.

When exploring where these participants lie in the understanding of multicultural practices, it seems that many of them might engage in the text themselves but when bringing it to their classroom, they are skeptical as to its purpose or how to discuss it. It’s important for students to first begin critical self-reflection on past and present lived experiences to analyze how they have been socialized in their construction of self and others. They can then begin to analyze the historical and social implications surrounding racial tension as expressed in the LA Uprisings. Ford and Dillard (1996) state, “reconstruction begins when the individual acts from his or her own personal perspective, receives feedback from others, and changes consequent interactions based on the feedback” (p. 234). Through some of the questions I asked in the interview, I encouraged the participants to critically analyze not only why these events were occurring, but how their own perceptions of the events were shaped by the media, and their lived experiences.

For some of these participants, I believe they are open to finding out about how these cultural tensions arise. I don’t know that they will fully understand the implications that the white dominant mainstream has had and could continue to have on marginalized
persons. I do believe that these participants have already participated in some forms of self-reflection and if encouraged and supported they could at some point engage in more critical reflection and social deconstruction. It is my hope that they will follow that deconstruction process and begin to act against these marginalization processes by actively stopping it in their individual interactions with family members, friends and future students.

The field of teacher education needs to not only mandate a multicultural curriculum that provides spaces for critical self-reflection, interrogation of institutionalized privileges and inequities, but also initiate ways in which preservice teachers can discuss the implications for the classroom in real, practical ways. I have heard this numerous times from preservice teachers that I have worked with. Further research needs to be conducted on the practical ways in which preservice teachers can openly discuss their socially constructed biographies.

This research study adds to the field of teacher education by showing ways in which teacher educators can instill critical self-reflection in their classrooms and how multicultural children’s literature can aid in that effort.

Implications to the Field of K-12 Education

This study can inform much of the pedagogical practices and literature used in K-12 education settings. Several participants note that they would have liked to have seen more books about different cultures and customs in their K-12 education. This has been a request long in the making from many multicultural education scholars, but still we find the same monocultural books in the classrooms. From my experience as a teacher using
multicultural children’s literature, I know that teachers can, even within own current test-driven movements, strategically supplement a variety of perspectives through children’s literature when teaching about a historical event or social issue. It is imperative that teachers learn how to use these books without conflicting with the school district’s policies. Teachers can still abide by the policies and objectives of their particular district while providing critical thinking skills to analyze and evaluate texts, and help to move children to social action.

One way to examine a variety of perspectives is for teachers to provide historical and government documentation in addition to multicultural children’s texts so students can compare and contrast the varied perspectives represented in both the text and documents. Examining media representations of an event like the LA Uprisings is another way to examine multiple perspectives and the significant influence that media has on representing social events. Role playing activities where a student can perform one perspective and justify that character’s actions with a partner (and then switch roles) can enhance culturally relativistic practices.

Using sociopolitical literature that initiates social awareness and action is crucial when students are learning about civil liberties and rights. Providing a variety of books on the same event increases student awareness and understanding of why certain events occur. Comparing historical fiction to contemporary texts on the same issue allows students to see the impact of laws and socially constructed roles for certain persons within society. When students are able to view a topic from a variety of perspectives using literature they are better able to use that skill in their own sociocultural interactions both in and out of school settings.
Implications to the Field of Multicultural Children’s Literature

By reflecting on a social/political event, and mediating that event through children’s literature, preservice teachers might have the opportunity to understand the impact of the media images and the perspective of a child as well as the other victims living through racial dissonance. It is my hope that multicultural children’s literature can dissipate these notions of abstract, right or wrong thinking and open a space for conversation around multiple ways of viewing the world and experiences of others. I have listed some of the ways I framed the mediations between the reader and the text, 1) Asking preservice teachers to write and reflect on their autobiographies, 2) Asking about their memories of a sociopolitical event, 3) Connections to the characters in the text, and any thoughts the participants had on the justification of the characters’ actions, 4) Any connections to the relevance of this text and the events portrayed in the United States today, and finally 5) How would they use this text in their future classroom? Many of these types of questions can provide a bridge between their biographies and their perceptions of a sociopolitical event or text. Studies like this are important and crucial for preservice teachers in order to examine and debunk oppressive practices and ways of thinking. Reading and examining multicultural children’s literature provides a window into another person’s experience that preservice teachers might not otherwise see. It is through multicultural children’s literature and the examination of our constructed biographies that make commitments to multicultural education possible.

The field of multicultural children’s literature can benefit from this type of research inquiry by using these kinds of texts in all kinds of teacher education courses
from methods courses whereby a text about a child learning English as a second language can aid in the understanding of the plights of ESL learners. This gives preservice teachers an understanding of how difficult this is for ESL students. A book on homelessness can allow preservice teachers to understand that not all their children have homes and how difficult it is for them to get to school. So many social factors come into the classroom that multicultural children’s literature can help alleviate some of the vague notions of how these social issues affect children and their schooling. Two books that really opened my eyes to the lives of migrant workers were *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan and *Migrant child* by Francisco Jimenez. If preservice teachers can start to realize the complex nature of marginalized children, then they can begin to effectively teach all kinds of students.

It is my impression from the responses of the preservice teachers in this study that they have not experienced much formal, structured and open engagement with sociopolitical children’s text in their higher education courses. It is my hope that preservice teachers and teacher preparation programs will begin to implement and/or continue to interrogate children’s texts as sociopolitical and cultural imperative worthy of further critique and inquiry. In this study, there is some evidence of critical analysis in some of the participants’ responses, especially Sandy, however, fostering text-based and experiential academic discussions and analysis is necessary to further these discussions into meaningful, long-term commitments to social inquiry and change.

I believe these preservice teachers enjoyed discussing a racially charged historical event and I asked them questions where they had strong opinions. Most of them had not discussed the linkages between the LA Uprisings, race and a children’s text in this way
before. In what ways can we as teacher educators instill civic courage and moral responsibility in relatively pluralistic ways? Reading a variety of children’s texts is one way to bring a face to these social issues.

Consideration for Further Research Studies

It is my hope that this study will resonate with other teacher educators and the ways in which they perceive the cultural complexities of the students in their classrooms. When I began to see the significance of the preservice teachers’ biographies over the understanding of another person’s perspective, I realized that it would take a lot more than one discussion and book to foster a culturally relativistic perspective. Accordingly, more long-term research is needed on how preservice teachers perceive multicultural children’s literature and their subsequent pedagogical intentions for their future classroom. If someone were to extend this study they could have a reflection dialogue with the participants and then examine if/how the participants would take this new critical consciousness and instigate social action. A reflection dialogue could be conducted in a group where discussion of privilege and oppression in one’s life has affected the way they see others today. The preservice teachers could also go out in the field and write their reflections on how a children’s text extended or changed their view of K-12 students.

Another way to extend this study is to follow the preservice teachers into their first year of teaching and examine how their pedagogy changes throughout that first year. Would those idealistic views of education change? How do they view cultural differences now that they have taught in a monocultural or multicultural classroom? These questions
are crucial if a teacher educator intends to address these first year changes in their coursework. The research questions for this kind of study would also change and focus more on the selection and use of multicultural children’s literature in the classroom. Would a teacher choose to include one kind of book and not another and what kind of discussion questions would they ask? The researcher would then shift their focus from the teachers’ response to the literature to how they use it in their classroom? If I were to have more time with these students, I would investigate and discuss with them how their cultural biographies shaped the way they viewed this text more extensively. I would also further investigate how these responses changed after our interviews in addition to how it would change after the first year of teaching.

How would this kind of study look if it were conducted with veteran teachers or first year teachers? One could do a comparison study on the two groups. How have veteran teachers worked with cultural differences through children’s literature in their classrooms? Have they used children’s literature as a vehicle for cross-cultural dialogue? How would this differ with first-year teachers? One could focus on the extent to which the coursework and discussions in the course manifests in current teaching practices for both the veteran and the first-year teachers.

How would the responses be different if one were to compare urban teachers with suburban teachers? Would the urban teachers respond with openness to the different perspectives of the LA Uprisings? Would they be able to relate some of their students’ experiences with that of Daniel, the main character? The suburban teachers might have a different perspective on the appropriateness of using this book in the classroom. Perhaps these two sets of teachers have used multicultural children’s literature but in very
different ways or even more interesting is how they are similar in the way they use this literature. There are many assumptions that a researcher can make about what these studies might look like, however a researcher is usually surprised in the diversity of the participants’ responses.

How would this study look if it were conducted with preservice teachers of one race or age group? Reading and discussing this particular book on the LA Uprisings would provide for an interesting study if focused on one race group. I wonder how these responses would differ between white and African American preservice teachers. Would the African American preservice teachers hold a more sympathetic view of Rodney King? I was surprised at Kim’s response when she stated that she hadn’t thought of looking at the LA Uprisings in this way before. This also showed me the danger of my own assumptions.

Accordingly, examining my own pedagogical stance would have been a very constructive component of this study. If I am to ask the participants to name themselves and reveal their biases, then I must be willing to do the same. A final consideration for further studies would be for the teacher educator to study their pedagogy while examining their participants. Examining the researcher’s preconceived assumptions, the wording of their questions, and framework for the course would provide a valuable component to this kind of study. This would have enhanced this study greatly, however the design of this particular research study focused outside the classroom and solely on the participants’ responses.

Finally, the strength of qualitative research lies in the myriad of ways in which one could conduct a research study that would not only extend to the current research, but
provide implications for other more specific research. After all, academic research
augments educational practices and the way we continue to tell stories of constructed
truth and reality. Simonson and Walker state (1988),

The language of the academic world, of government, of business, of mass media
so easily becomes abstract, distancing, manipulative. Such language cannot, with
its nervous speed, its strip-mined, approaching qualities, touch the deep, turned-
over ground of our culture. Such language can, and often does, seek to bury “it”
(p. xiii).
This quote gracefully extends to qualitative research studies and eloquently asks us to
challenge the way we tell stories and how those stories get told by a variety of speakers.
Research that unearths the very language used to tell these stories speaks to fields even
beyond education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has answered the call to the burgeoning research on
narrative-based and biographical inquiries. It is my hope that more studies start realizing
the power of a children’s text to increase critical consciousness so that we can reconceive
the constructed world around us. For as Freire (1973) says if we are, “unable to perceive
critically the themes of [our] time, and thus to intervene actively in reality, [we] are
carried along in the wake of change” (p.7). Blending the personal, cultural and
experiential with academic learning enables preservice teachers to better analyze,
deconstruct, and essentially empathize with people of different cultural groups. My hope
is that other teacher educators and teachers alike will answer this call and begin these
pedagogical shifts and life changes in their classrooms.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A
Multiple Influences of Culture

- Expansion of ideas from *Human Diversity in Education* (1996), Cushner, McClelland, & Saiford.
APPENDIX B
APPENDIX B
COURSE SYLLABUS AND CALENDAR

Literature for Children and Young Adults
Library Science 120
Summer Semester, 2003
Mondays and Wednesdays 6-9:30pm

Instructor: Joy Wiggins
Email: 
Phone: 
Mailbox: Hall 132

Course Description:
An introductory study of children’s literature with emphasis on appreciating, interpreting, selecting, and using quality literature with children from pre-school through young adulthood.

Instructional Objectives:
Knowledge

- Students will become familiar with and develop many uses of children’s literature in the early and middle school curriculum.
- Students will become familiar with several professional journals as well as Internet resources devoted to children’s literature.
- Students will become familiar with the guidelines for selecting and evaluating children’s literature within different genres.

Skills

- Students will be able to evaluate the artistic and literary merit of works of children’s literature.
- Students will develop strategies for bringing children and books together.
- Students will survey a variety of genres, authors, illustrators and poets in children’s literature.

Dispositions

- Students will gain an understanding of the importance of literacy in the lives of children by reflecting on the role of literature in their own lives.
- Students will display a commitment to use children’s literature in all areas of the curriculum.
- Students will develop a commitment to foster multicultural understanding through the inclusion of literature from diverse cultures.
• Students will appreciate children’s reading as a means to enjoyment and delight as well as a means by which they acquire information or reading skill.

Students with Learning Disabilities:

Students who have documented their disabilities with the director of the Academic Center are encouraged to meet privately with the instructor to discuss arrangements for their approved accommodations.

Course Guidelines and Expectations:

Students are expected to participate every class period in a meaningful way by asking questions, taking risks, and engaging in class and small group discussions. Students are expected to display a positive attitude toward learning, enthusiasm for reading and interest in the literature. Students are also expected to respect the opinions and experiences of all class members. This class will incorporate multicultural literature and sociopolitical aspects of children’s literature. Students are expected to read a wide array of books and genres. Students are expected to have all assigned reading done by the class period due as well as participate in related activities.

Attendance Policy: Please very carefully.

Attendance and class participation are required. If you are unable to attend class, you must contact me BEFORE the class to make me aware of the circumstances. If you miss a class you are expected to have ALL work made up as well as any additional assignments on the date the assignment is due. You are responsible for asking about any work you have missed. Tardiness will also negatively impact your performance in class. If you arrive late or leave class early this is considered a tardy. Two tardies will equal one absence. Please make every effort to be prompt. For every class missed you will lose 3 points and tardiness 1 point off your total grade. For example, if you are absent once and tardy twice you will lose 6 points. Due to the short summer semester this policy will be strictly enforced.

Text Selection:

Students are expected to bring additional texts (i.e. picture books, biographies, poetry etc.) to class each session indicated in the syllabus calendar to share with classmates as we explore genres and topics. For instance, if the Traditional literature group is presenting that period then you need to bring two picture books on traditional literature. It is important for you to go to your local library, ODU library and other resource locations to get your books. I would suggest getting all books right away or making sure you put them on reserve at the beginning of the term. I would also suggest getting books on tape or CD for those of you who do a lot of driving. It is imperative for you to be discriminating in your choices of books using the HHHK (your textbook) book as a guide.
Participation:
Participation is required in all class activities and assignments. Bringing books to class each week and completion of all class assignments is crucial to your participation grade. Examples of participation include taking notes, remaining alert and participating in all class activities with an open mind and enthusiasm. Your participation in class will affect your grade. I will assign a participation grade based on my observations in class. 15 points

Grading Scale:
Read Aloud 10 points
Professional Article Response 10 points
Internet Resources 5 points
Author Study with a flyer 5 points
Genre study 15 points
Response Journals 20 points
Survey 20 points
Participation 15 points

Total: 100 points

GRADING CRITERIA
For the Professional Article Response, Author Flier and Genre Study, look at the criteria sheet that should be attached to your assignment. All other assignments are listed below.

Response Journal
a. Quality and reflectiveness of responses/insights
b. Responses included for all required children’s books
c. Reflection rather than summary
d. When reflecting academically: arguments are critically analyzed and supported by evidence from the text and children’s readings.

Survey
a. Informativeness of introduction
b. Quality of books selected
c. Inclusion of Award winners and themes
d. All Bibliographic information provided
e. Books should be published no earlier than 1990 unless rationale is provided.

Text:
Assignments:
Please read carefully.

Response Journals: (20 points)
You will be required to turn in a 2 page journal response to the Genre readings. These responses should be reflective of your personal and academic interactions with the book. For instance, you can talk about your emotional reactions to the story as well as confronting the genres criteria for evaluation as mentioned in your textbook. This is part of your participation grade as well.
DUE: As indicated on the calendar

Internet Resources Paper: (5 points)
You will fill out a summary of a variety of Internet sites on children’s literature. Make sure to have all web addresses listed as well as a copy of your favorite site’s homepage.
DUE: June 16

Professional Article Response: (10 points)
You will be given a professional article pertaining to children’s literature. Examine the article by looking at its key characteristics such as: relevance to the children’s literature and other course material that you have already read and how you plan to use this article’s content in your own classroom. Also, examine how you feel about the significant ideas discussed in the article. Has this article changed your views in any way, and if so how?
DUE: June 23

Read Aloud: (10 points)
You will bring a book to class that you have practiced reading. Give a brief five-minute book talk summarizing the book and recommending it to your classmates. Then read the book aloud, making time for students to look at the illustrations. Make sure you enunciate and are using appropriate intonations. Have on hand other books that you recommend by this same author or in this same genre.
DUE: June 30 and July 21

Author Study with a flier: (5 points)
Create a one-page two-sided flier reflecting the results of your study of one children’s book author. Your flier should contain biographical information, some indication of the author’s style and topics of writing, a listing of some of their books (5-10). Be ready to email copies to the class or bring extra copies for those students who want one. You will then orally present this flier for FIVE MINUTES on a specific date in class. Your presentation must focus on the author’s work not just their biography. Have a selection of books ready to share with the class. Make sure to practice and time yourself!
Genre Study:  (15 points)
To be completed with a group. You should include criteria used for selecting books for this particular genre. In your study you should compile a packet with the necessary criteria for selection, three meaningful activities that could be used in an elementary or middle school classroom, and a 20-book annotated bibliography.
You will orally present this study to the class with your group members. Make sure everyone has a role in presenting. Include some kind of interactive activity for the class and handouts. Presentations should last about 25-30 minutes. Make sure to have your presentation approved by instructor the week before.

Survey:  (20 points)
This is a collection of 25 books. All listings of books must have an annotated bibliography of both YA and picture books. You choose the design of the collections. Make sure to include Award winners such as Coretta Scott King, Newbery, and Caldecott. You should have a wide variety of books from different genres and themes. Catalog the books according to themes/genres or both.
DUE: July 28
We will talk in-depth about each of these assignments in class.

CALENDAR
This is a tentative schedule. Please be prepared for changes and additions. You will regularly be required to read self-selected texts and bring supplemental books to class. The instructor reserves the right to assign additional readings. The assignments listed are due on that particular date.

Remember to keep looking over the syllabus- Everything in bold is your assignment. If it says “Read”, “Bring”, or “… due” then make sure to read it carefully.

June 9
Introduction to the course
What do you know about children’s literature?
Sign up for presentation dates

June 11
The Changing World of Children’s Books- brief lecture
Assignment:
Read Ch. 2 - Reader Response
Bring a book that inspired you as a child and be ready to discuss the values or themes that inspired you.

June 16
Author Fliers- Group 1
Picture Books Group presentation

Assignment:
Read Ch. 5

Read and bring 5 picture books. They should all be by the same author.

Internet resources project due. Bring a copy of the home page and web address.

June 18
Author Fliers- Group 2
Traditional Literature Group presentation

Assignment:
Read Ch. 6

Read 2 versions of Cinderella OR2 Grimm’s brothers tales and bring to class

June 23
Author Fliers- Group 3

Assignment:
Professional Article Analysis due.

June 25
Author Fliers- Group 4
Modern Fantasy Presentation

Assignment:
Read Ch. 7

Read A Stranger Came Ashore by Mollie Hunter OR Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt
June 30  Author Fliers- Group 5
Poetry Group Presentation
Assignment:
Read Ch. 8
Read and bring X.J. and Dorothy Kennedy’s Talking like the rain
OR Beatrice De Regnier’s Sing a song of popcorn
Bring your favorite children’s poem from one of these two anthologies

July 2  Author Fliers- Group 6
Contemporary Realistic Fiction Group Presentation
Assignment:
Read Ch. 9
Read Heart of a Chief by Joseph Bruchac or Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson

July 7  Assignment:
Read Aloud and Book Talks due (1st group)

July 9  Author Fliers- Group 7
Historical Fiction Group Presentation
Assignment:
Read Ch. 10
Read The Watson’s go to Birmingham-1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis OR Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan.
July 14
Author Fliers- Group 8
Non-Fiction Group Presentation
Assignment:
Read Ch. 11
Bring 2 Non-fiction books by Frederick and Patricia McKissack

July 16
Author Fliers
Biography presentation
Assignment:
Read Ch. 12
Bring a book by David Adler or Russell Freedman

July 21
Read Aloud and Book talks due (2nd group)

July 23
Author Fliers
Caldecott and Newbery Awards Panel
Assignment:
Bring one Caldecott and one Newbery Award book

July 28
“Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry” movie

July 30
Final Celebration of our Favorite Books this semester
Turn in survey
APPENDIX C
APPENDIX C

Biography Questions

1. How do you identify yourself in terms of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, age, religion, language etc.?

2. What changes do you think need to be made in education or do you think it is fine the way it is?

3. Think back to your own education-what would you have liked to have seen?

4. Why do you want to be a teacher?

5. Do you think it’s a teacher’s job to instill certain values in children? Do teachers already do this? Why or why not?

6. What books would you have liked to have seen growing up? Any issues that you think should have been dealt with that you didn’t see or did you feel that most books you came into contact with reflected your own experiences?
APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

Pre-reading questions:

1. What do you remember about the LA Riots/Uprisings in 1992?
2. Why do you think the riots/uprisings occurred? What started them?
3. Why do you think something like this happened?
4. Why do you think the police behaved the way they did? What about Rodney King? The rioter/uprisers?
5. What do you remember the most about these events?
6. Could something like this happen in your neighborhood or city?

Smoky night questions:

1. Why do you think Daniel thought the rioters looked both happy and angry at the same time? Answer in the form of literal and societal (Pg. 2)
2. How does their laughter sound? (The rioters) (Pg. 3)
3. Why does Momma say it’s better to “buy from our own people?” (Pg. 4)
4. Why would people take dry cleaning clothes? (Pg. 5)
5. How do you think Daniel felt when he thought he saw a dead man? (Pg. 9)
6. Did you like the book?
7. Would you read this in your classroom?
8. Does this call for a certain situation to read it in the classroom?
9. How can we discuss it with children?
10. How could this benefit children that don’t see this in the classroom?
Post-reading questions:

1. Would you use this book in your classroom? Why or why not?

2. What kind of students would you read this book to? In what kind of setting do you think this book would be appropriate?

3. How would you discuss this book?
APPENDIX E
APPENDIX E

Books/Readings for the Course,

“Literature for Children and Young Adults”

Picture Books

Bring five books by the same author

Traditional Literature

Read 2 versions of Cinderella OR 2 Grimm’s brothers tales

Modern Fantasy

Read A Stranger Came Ashore by Mollie Hunter OR Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt

Poetry

X.J. and Dorothy Kennedy’s Talking like the rain OR Beatrice De Regnier’s Sing a song of popcorn

Contemporary Realistic Fiction

Heart of a Chief by Joseph Bruchac or Speak by Laurie Halse Anderson

Historical Fiction

The Watson’s go to Birmingham-1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis

OR Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan

Non-Fiction

Two non-fiction books by Frederick and Patricia McKissack

Biography

A book by David Adler OR Russell Freedman
APPENDIX F

Transcript
Smoky night by Eve Bunting

Page 1
Mama and I stand well back from our window, looking down. I’m holding Jasmine, my cat. We don’t have our lights on. Through it’s almost dark. People are rioting in the street below.

Page 2
Mama explains about rioting. “It can happen when people get angry. They want to smash and destroy. They don’t care anymore what’s right and what’s wrong.” Below us they are smashing everything. Windows, cars, streetlights.


Two boys are carrying a TV from Morton’s Appliances. It’s hard for them because the TV is so heavy. “Are they stealing it?” I ask.

Mama nods.

Page 3
Someone breaks the window of Fashion Shoes. Two women and a man climb through the broken glass. They toss out shoes like they’re throwing footballs. I’ve never heard anybody laugh the way they laugh.

Smoke drifts, light as fog. I see the distant flicker of flames.

Page 4
Across the street from us people are dragging cartons of cereal and sacks of rice from Kim’s Market. My mama and I don’t go in Mrs. Kim’s market even though it’s close. Mama says it’s better if we buy from our own people.

Mrs. Kim’s cat and my cat fight all the time, and Mrs. Kim yells at Jasmine in words I can’t understand. She’s yelling the same kind of words now at the people who are stealing her stuff.

They pay no attention.

Page 5
I move behind Mama. “Will they come here?”

“There’s nothing for them here, Daniel. See? They’ve
finished with out street. They’re moving on.”
Our street is emptying. One last man is staggering under a
Pile of clothes he’s taken from our the dry cleaners. The plastic
Bags are still over them.

Page 6
“We’ll sleep together tonight,” Mama tells me.
She makes me wash my face and brush my teeth. I’m to take
Off my shoes but leave on my clothes.
She puts me next to the wall. I hold Jasmine.
“I can’t sleep,” I say.
“Shh!” Mama whispers. “Close your eyes.”
I do.
I guess I sleep.

Page 7
Next thing I know, Mama is shaking me.
“Quick, Daniel! Get up!”
There’s a terrible smell of smoke. Someone’s pounding on
Our apartment door. “Fire! Fire!”
I’m suddenly awake. “Where’s Jasmine?” I run to the closet.
Sometimes Jasmine sleeps on a shelf.
Mama’s screaming at me. “We can’t wait. Jasmine’s gone.
Put on your shoes. Hurry!”
We rush down the stairs. Others crowd around us. The
smoke makes me cough.
Mr. Ramirez is in front of us carrying Lissa and the baby,
Who are both howling.
“Those people are hooligans,” he shouts over his shoulder.
“Hooligans!”
Mrs. Ramirez is ahead of him. She’s holding the cage with
Loco, their parrot. Loco’s squawking something awful.
“Did you see Jasmine, Mr. Ramirez?” I shout.
He shakes his head, but I don’t think he even hears me.
“Don’t touch the railing,” he warns. “It’s hot.”

Page 8
Outside, the sky is hazy orange. Flames pounce up the side
Of our building.
Three fire engines scream to a stop. Fire fighters jump out,
Running, pulling hoses. I see our window where Mama and I
Had stood. The fire hasn’t reached it yet.
“Is everybody out?” one fire fighter yells.
“Far as we know,” another said.
“Did you see a cat?” I ask him. “She’s yellow. Maybe she’s
still in there.”
He glances down. “Probably not, son. Cats are plenty smart.
She’ll be long gone.”

Page 9
A lady comes up to us. “There’s a shelter you can come to,”
She says. “Everyone follow me.”
I’m crying because I’m not sure Jasmine is all that smart.
What if she’s still inside?
Some of the streetlights have been smashed. We walk along
The sidewalk, which sparkles with broken glass. There are
Empty cartons everywhere. A street sign lies crumpled in the
Gutter/ I grab hold of Mama because I think I see a dead man
With no arms lying there, too. But it’s just one of those plastic
People that show off clothes in department stores.
The lady looks back at Mrs. Kim, who is trailing along behind us. “are you all right?” she
calls.
Mrs. Kim nods.
“We’re almost at the shelter,” the lady tells her.

Page 10
The shelter is in a church hall. There are cots to sleep on and
A table with hot drinks. Two mean are making sandwiches. I’ve
Never seen a bigger jar of mayo.
We see people from our building. They’re talking about who
Did this. What will happen to us?
“it’s a sad, sad night,” Mr. Jackson says.
I ask him about Jasmine.
He says he’s pretty sure he saw her. “She got out, Daniel,”
He tells me. I hope he’s not just trying to make me feel better.
“Did you see my cat?” Mrs. Kim asks. “He is orange.”
“He’s the color of carrots,” I say, and I almost add, “and he’s
fat and mean.” But I don’t.
A girl give me a mug of hot chocolate. I wish it had more
Sugar. When I finish drinking it Mama says I should lie down.
She’s always making me lie down.
People keep coming. Some of them are crying. One woman
Screams and screams. I hide under my blanket.
Then Mama says, “Daniel! Look!”

Page 11
And there is the fire fighter who was at our building. He is
Standing in the open door, with the smoky night behind him,
And I see that he’s carrying a cat under each arm. That was
How Mr. Ramirez carried Lissa and the baby. The cats are howling, too.
“Jasmine!” The blanket’s caught on my foot and I’m tariling it. “Oh, thank you! Thank you for finding her!”
“The other cat is mine.” Mrs. Kim takes her big, fat, mean old orange cat and hold him close. I’m kissing Jasmine. She smells of smoke.

Page 12
“Where was she?” I ask the fire fighter.
The two of them aware under the stairs, yowling and screeching,” he says. He takes a mug of hot chocolate. I like him so much! I wish I had a whole barrel of sugar for his drink.
“The cats were together?” Mrs. Kim asks.
The fire fighter nods. “They were so scared they were Holding paws.”
I grin. “No, they weren’t!”
“What about our building?” Mr. Ramirez asks.
”The fire’s out. You’ll be able to go back in a day or two.”
A woman puts down a dish of milk. “here kitty, kitty,” she Calls.
Jasmine jumps out of my arms, and Mrs. Kim puts her Carrot-colored cat down, too. The cats drink from the same Dish. Milk isn’t that good for cats, but I don’t say that either.

Page 13
“Look at that!” Mama is all amazed. “I though those two didn’t like each other.”
“they probably didn’t know each other before,” I explain.
“now they do.”
Everyone looks at me, and it’s suddenly very quiet.
“Did I say something wrong?” I whisper to Mama.
“No, Daniel.” Mama’s tugging at her fingers the way she does when she’s nervous. “My name is Gena,” she tells Mrs. Kim. “Perhaps when things settle down you and your cat Will come over and share a dish of milk with us.”
I think that’s pretty funny, but nobody laughs.

Page 14
Mrs. Kim picks up her cat and strokes him. She’s staring at The wall. Maybe she’s not going to say anything.
But then she look across at Mama. “Thank you,” she says.
“We will come.”
Mama smiles.
I reach out and stroke Mrs. Kim’s big old orange cat, too.
“Can you hear him, Mrs. Kim?” I ask. “He’s purring!”
APPENDIX G
APPENDIX G

Participant Consent Form

I consent to participating in the research entitled: Education Students Perceptions of Multicultural Children’s Literature.

Joy Wiggins, the principal investigator has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: ____________________ Signed: ____________________

Signed: ____________________

(Co Investigator)

Witness: ____________________

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Dear Participant,

Hello and welcome to Literature for Children and Young Adults! As the instructor of this class and a doctoral student of OSU, I would like to enhance my teaching by better understanding your perceptions of multicultural literature and the implementation of that literature in the classroom.

In this study, you will have the opportunity to hold rich and engaging discussions with quality multicultural children’s literature with your classmates. As the co-investigator, I seek to enhance my teaching of multicultural literature that will foster a more open and conscientious environment in order to better understand the social issues conveyed in the literature.

This study will begin June 10, 2003 to July 31, 2003. As the co-investigator, I will collect and analyze participants’ journal entries to find common patterns among the responses. I will also interview individual participants on their perceptions and background knowledge on multicultural children’s literature. I might also ask participants for further elaboration or clarification on the questions already asked in the interview or in the journal entries. Oral responses will only be tape recorded with the oral permission of participants and pseudonyms will be used to protect the identities of participants.

Please feel free to withdraw from this study at any time with absolutely no penalty to your final grade or participation in the course. You may ask any questions at any time during the study to your complete satisfaction. I will be the only person that will be viewing your journal entries and the interview responses.
Finally, as the results of the study are completed, I will provide the director of Library Services with a copy that will be available to you at your request. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at (blocked out) or my home phone (blocked out).

If you agree to these terms, please sign the consent form on the next page.

Thank you for your participation,

______________________________
Joy L. Wiggins
Co-Investigator
Doctoral Student
Ohio State University
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LIST OF REFERENCES


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