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Toward a Culturally Inclusive Canon of Multimodal Picture Books:

Developing Multiliteracies Practices and Assessments for Ontario's Classrooms

By

Arwa Jammali

A Major Research Paper

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

through the Faculty of Education

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Master of Education

at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2020

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Toward a Culturally Inclusive Canon of Multimodal Picture Books:

Developing Multiliteracies Practices and Assessments for Ontario's Classrooms

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June 29, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Multimodal picture books are a critical component of children's literacy development, and in a multicultural province such as Ontario, it is vital that literacy development include cultural literacy. The demographics of the province's classrooms are increasingly diverse; however, minoritized cultures are underrepresented among teachers, and there are sparse training mandates related to cultural inclusion. Thus, Ontario's culturally diverse student body is encountering a number of barriers related to gender, ethnicity, perceived race, sexual identity, ability, class, and other social markers. To provide teachers with the tools needed to support their students, the current study utilizes a theoretical framework derived from anti-oppressive practices to identify where students encounter barriers. The work examines the strengths and limitations of the traditional canon of children's multimodal picture books and explores the ways in which more inclusive works can support a culturally inclusive learning environment. Based on this, a culturally responsive selection process is outlined. The study employs a multiliteracies framework to propose classroom activities and assessment models that promote and assess literacy development. Transformative teaching approaches are also recommended to help teachers broaden their understanding of culture. Additionally, recommendations are made regarding mandated cultural training for pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as curriculum reform.

Keywords: multimodal picture books, culturally inclusive/responsive teaching, funds of knowledge, multiliteracies, transformative learning, anti-oppressive practices

DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to

my parents,

my husband,

my children,

my sisters, and

my past and future students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing this degree has been one of the most rewarding and fulfilling accomplishments to date. A special feeling of gratitude to my family and friends whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity still echo in my ears. First, and foremost I would like to wholeheartedly thank my loving mother. When I was unsure about where my career would take me, my mother encouraged and motivated me to complete my master's degree, and throughout the process, she has provided endless support, from making me coffee when I'm tired, to watching my children when I needed to study or go to class, and listening to me when I needed somebody to talk to. I would not be the person I am today if it was not for her endless guidance and support. I likewise want to thank my husband, whose hard work and endless love and support have instilled me with the confidence and the foundation needed to complete this part of my journey. To my three loving boys, who were patient when I had to go to school for a few hours or lock myself in my bedroom at home for a couple of hours to work on my paper. Their smiles and love kept me going throughout this process and motivated me to finish this work. I hope this shows them that hard work pays off and that they will understand why I had to sometimes work on the computer instead of spending more time with them. I also want to thank my father and my amazing sisters for believing in me and supporting me every step of the way. Thank you all for your love, trust, and encouragement. You were the motivation to this accomplishment, and I hope that I make you all proud!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the 1998 classic popular romantic comedy, *You've Got Mail*, protagonist Kathleen Kelly, owner of a children's bookstore in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, underscores the importance of the books that she sells: "When you read a book as a child, it becomes a part of your identity in a way that no other reading in your whole life does" (Ephron, 1998, 27:44). This is consistent with Piaget's findings, which suggest that, between the ages of two and seven, children develop the ability to think symbolically, express and understand concepts, and formulate complex abstract thought (Lilienfeld et al., 2020). This highlights how multimodal picture books have the potential to play an important role in children's development, and this was certainly true for me. For example, when my first-grade teacher read Shel Silverstein's (1962) *The Giving Tree* to the class, it was the first time I had ever cried when reading a book. I was introduced to this multimodal picture book at a time when I was forming my core values and identity, and I was deeply touched as I listened and watched as the tree withered away to a neglected stump while continuing to offer all it had to the small boy it loved. Silverstein's work not only told a story through simple vocabulary words that were accessible to me but also conveyed nuanced feelings through the illustrations that accompanied the text. Afterwards we had a class discussion about what the tree represented. For some, the tree represented nature, for others, it represented a father figure. For me, the tree reminded me of my mother, and this transformed the way I viewed my relationship with my mother and my conception of motherhood in general.

This experience helped to foster my love of reading. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I poured through book upon book. After graduating from E. B. White's

(1999) *Charlotte's Web* and Roald Dahl's (1988) *Matilda*, I read books series such as David A. Adler's (1980, 1982, 2000) *Cam Jansen* anthology and Ann M. Martin's (1986, 1987, 1988) *The Baby-Sitters Club* series. However, while growing up in Ontario, it was difficult to find novels with female protagonists, and as an Arab, Muslim Canadian, I found no books that featured characters who shared my ethnicity. The bookshelves in my classrooms were stocked up with books by Dr. Seuss and Robert Munsch. Given how creative and engaging these works are, they have proven to be effective tools in literacy development in early childhood education (ECE). Hence, as a teacher, I understand the reasons why these books are so prominently featured in ECE. However, I did not have this hindsight when I was a child. Thus, in the context of Ontario's classrooms, I felt somehow excluded because the homogenous characters were overwhelmingly Caucasian/white and male. As a result, students from marginalized, minoritized, and racialized populations often feel excluded when these are the only multimodal picture books they are exposed to. With no works that depicted characters who reflected the traits and features that I felt defined me as a person, I felt that I was somehow defective or less important than my peers. This was doubly problematic for me because, throughout grade school and high school, I did not encounter a single Middle Eastern or Muslim teacher. This cultural and religious disconnect was so extreme that I never had a teacher who pronounced my name the way my parents intended.

As a teacher, I decided that I would try to be the change I wanted to see. To this end, I have made sincere efforts to utilize children's literature and multimodal picture books that are inclusive to ensure my students see themselves reflected in the material. At the very least, I sought to avoid framing one culture as being the default or standard. For

example, I included works that had female protagonists, such as *Cam Jansen* (Adler, 1980, 1982, 2000), and *The Bag Paper Princess* (Munsch, 1980), though I found it difficult to find multimodal picture books with Arab characters. Likewise, as all students can project themselves onto animal characters, I have also included works that featured anthropomorphized animal characters. My hope with this choice was that students would not feel that their racial, cultural, or ethnic identities were subordinate to the dominant culture. However, upon enrolling in a Master of Education program, I quickly realized that, even while I was trying to be inclusive, I had much to learn. For instance, though using books with animals as the characters helped me avoid perpetuating cultural biases, it did not afford me the opportunity to introduce critical conversations about culture. Moreover, I was neglecting a number of different cultural identities. For example, I had not been making efforts to include racialized populations such as Pan-Africans, Hispanics, or Indigenous peoples. Likewise, I had not included students from the LGBTQ+ community or students with exceptionalities or varied abilities. One of the reasons I had not included these populations was because I have often struggled to determine whether the multimodal picture books that I had access to were appropriate. I was not sure, for instance, whether these books accurately represented the various cultures depicted in them or if they effectively created an inclusive environment. This is especially problematic as I have noticed that colleagues who are members of the dominant culture do not make a concerted effort to likewise utilize an inclusive canon and instead draw on the classic children's picture books that they grew up with.

Purpose of Study

Based on my experience, both as a student and as a teacher in Ontario, there are a number of barriers that prevent teachers from creating an inclusive canon of children's literature that is reflective of Canada's multicultural classrooms. Overcoming these barriers is critical given that Canada is becoming increasingly diverse, as is Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2018a). Thus, it is vital to ensure that educators throughout Canada and especially in Ontario have the necessary training and skills required to select inclusive material. Though this is important with respect to pre-service teaching, it is especially critical with regard to continual professional development as the definition for acceptable cultural practices is constantly shifting. Such training should help teachers determine how to select works that can promote cultural inclusivity while facilitating multiple forms of literacy. This includes conventional forms of literacy—such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking—as well as cultural, graphic, gestural, and critical literacy skills. Moreover, teachers must be able to implement classroom activities and assessments that support these learning objectives, which necessitates examining where the curriculum is currently at and how it can be improved. Examining, analyzing, and aggregating the findings of current literature can help to develop recommendations that can inform how educators select multimodal picture books and develop classroom activities and assessment. A literature review can likewise inform how curriculum can support a culturally inclusive learning environment. In addition, a review of current research can also help to identify gaps in the understanding that educators have of how multimodal picture books can promote cultural inclusivity in the classroom and thus provide a direction for future research.

To this end, the current research will be guided by five key research questions:

1. How do institutional structures—specifically those relating to administration, training, and curriculum—serve as barriers to creating culturally inclusive literacy practices?
2. How does the traditional canon of multimodal picture books serve to exclude students from marginalized communities and inhibit literacy development for all students?
3. How do culturally inclusive multimodal picture books support literacy development for all students in early childhood education?
4. How can educators assess multimodal picture books and develop teaching activities and assessments that promote cultural inclusivity and literacy development?
5. How can students contribute to the development of culturally inclusive classrooms, both with regard to selecting multimodal picture books and developing activities and assessment?

Before seeking answers to these questions, it is critical to develop an understanding of the background and current context of the education system with respect to multimodal picture books and define the key terms that will be used with the current discussion.

Background

When exploring the value of culturally inclusive multimodal picture books in Canada, it is necessary to understand their importance by situating them with changing

demographics of the country broadly speaking and Ontario specifically. Within this context, it is likewise important to consider how Canada's multicultural policies dictate the direction that classrooms should take to support these demographics, as well as the approaches that schools have been using.

Demographics

According to Statistics Canada, (2018-b), 6.6 million Canadians, equal to nearly 20% of the population, speak a language in addition to either of Canada's official languages, and this percentage is expected to increase to as much as 28% by 2036 (Statistics Canada, 2018-a). This is in part due to the increasing number of refugees entering the country. For example, Canada accepted over 3,000 refugees in 2013, a number that grew by over 800% by 2019, when Canada accepted over 25,000 refugees (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada [IRBC], 2020). Moreover, Canada has adopted an aggressive approach to immigration to address labour shortages and sustain its population amid dropping birth-rates among Canadian-born citizens (Dion et al., 2015). As a result, there is an increasing range of diverse cultures and languages in Canada, including 1.2 million Chinese language speakers, over 540,000 Punjab speakers, over 500,000 Tagalog speakers, nearly 500,000 Spanish speakers, and over 485,000 Arabic speakers (Statistics Canada, 2019). Moreover, these numbers only represent the largest language groups. This diversity demonstrates the shifting demographics in Canada and the need to support an increasingly diverse student body and their unique cultural needs.

Canada's Multicultural Policy

While some might argue that immigrant and refugee children entering Canada should ideally assimilate to Canadian culture in order to succeed, Canada adopted a

multicultural policy since 1971 (Government of Canada, 2012). The policy was legislated through the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985) with the goal of ensuring that all Canadians, regardless of culture or place of origin, were provided with an opportunity to integrate into Canadian society, not only politically, but culturally and economically as well (Government of Canada, 2012). Within this context, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985) states that Canada must “promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins,” as well as “preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada” (sec. 3). Eftekhari (2020) highlights both of these passages, arguing that, within the context of Canada’s education systems, this policy requires teachers and school boards to include and respect student’s cultural backgrounds and help them preserve their native languages and cultures.

Multiculturalism in the Classroom

With regard to multiculturalism in the classroom, there are two key factors that should be considered: the demographic composition of the teachers themselves, and the composition of the curriculum.

Demographic Composition of Teachers

In 1964, through the efforts of Ontario’s first Black member of parliament, Ontario abolished the *Separate Schools Act*, which had segregated schools based on colour (Csillag, 2018); however, teachers were still overwhelmingly Caucasian/white, a problem that persists today. For example, as of 2009, only 9.5% of teachers identified as members of minority groups, despite the fact that a reported 22.5% of Ontario residents at the time were visible minorities (Ryan et al., 2009). Six years later, in 2015, there was

little change: 9% of elementary school teachers in Ontario identified as a member of a minority, and this was true of only 10% of high school teachers (Turner Consulting Group [TCG], 2015). This is especially problematic as the number Ontario's residents who identified as visible minorities rose to over 25% (TCG, 2015), thus increasing the gap in representation. For example, in 2002, Indigenous peoples comprised 2.5% of Ontario's population but a meager 0.5% of teachers (Hoffman, 2004). Though efforts have been made to address this gap, namely through Aboriginal Teacher Education Programs (Hoffman, 2004), current initiatives focus on teacher development rather than recruiting Indigenous teachers (People for Education, 2017). This cultural diversity also includes socioeconomics. For example, Statistics Canada (2020) reports that there are approximately 3.2 million Canadians living in poverty, and this includes over half a million children. Given the lack of diversity that is present among Ontario's teachers, it is especially critical that the curriculum used in the province promotes cultural inclusivity and that the diverse students in Ontario's classrooms see themselves reflected in the works they read.

Current Curriculum

With regard to multiculturalism, Ontario's current curriculum does not clearly frame what approaches teachers should take. For example, the Ministry of Education has mandated equity and cultural inclusivity through several initiatives but makes no specific reference to how this can be shaped by the specific books that teachers include in the classroom. That said, there were some promising advances with regard to both Indigenous and LGBTQ+ students. However, following the 2018 provincial election, the new Progressive Conservative government, led by Premier Doug Ford, cancelled both the

Indigenous curriculum rewrite (M. Crawley, 2018) and the sex-ed curriculum (M. Crawley, 2019) while cutting funding to special education programs by nearly a quarter of a billion dollars (Tasker, 2019).

Equity and Inclusion. The Ontario Ministry of Education has prioritized cultural inclusivity through a variety of initiatives and programs. For example, they promote the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, which was launched in 2009 and in which they ask how “the voices, stories, cultures, and histories of” students are included in Ontario’s classrooms and learning materials (Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 2). Likewise, the strategy states that “Students should see themselves reflected in their curriculum” (Ministry of Education, n.d.-a, p. 2). These are commendable goals that are critical to students’ success and are consistent with Canada’s multicultural policy; however, the strategy does not provide concrete instruction as to how this can be achieved. Neither does it make any reference to the importance of inclusive literature, what constitutes inclusive literature, or what strategies teachers can use to ensure the books they select are inclusive. Thus, while it is clear that Ontario’s Ministry of Education has prioritized cultural inclusivity, it has not established clear and concrete guidelines with respect to how teachers can achieve this goal.

Indigenous Curriculum. In order to address concerns and recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), the Ontario government announced that it would implement an Indigenous training program as part of teachers’ education requirements, and that this program would include partners from TRC (Office of the Premier, 2016). This initiative was going to teach educators how to create interactive, culturally responsive activities that challenged stereotyping and

highlighted the impact of colonization while promoting effective communications between schools and the Indigenous community (Office of the Premier, 2016). For example, the curriculum was going to include lessons on Canada's infamous and tragic residential schools (Draaisma, 2016). All of this was initiated while Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne was still in power; however, when Ford won Ontario's general election in 2018, the Ontario Ministry of Education promptly cancelled the curriculum re-write, though Ford denied giving the instruction himself (M. Crawley, 2018). The provincial government likewise decided not to mandate courses on Canada's Indigenous history, instead leaving them as electives (The Canadian Press, 2019). Though there are classes available, they are not mandated, and the classes that were available were not introduced until high school. Thus, there is an overt gap in Ontario's curriculum with regard to Indigenous peoples.

Ontario Sex-Ed Curriculum. Just as former Premier Wynne's Ministry of Education created an initiative to promote cultural inclusivity for Indigenous students, the Ministry likewise created a more inclusive curriculum for LGBTQ+ students via its updated sex education curriculum. The proposed curriculum change, which was initially proposed in 2015, included lessons about homosexuality and gender identity, promoting tolerance and understanding (Levinson King, 2015). The details are not easily accessible because the page that hosted them as has since been taken down by the current administration (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b), and upon taking office, Ford scrapped the new sex education curriculum (M. Crawley, 2019) before eventually giving into pressure and releasing a sex education program that was similar to the version introduced under Wynne's government (A. Jones, 2019). Students in Ontario will now learn about

LGBTQ+ issues but will not be exposed to these concepts until grade eight (A. Jones, 2019); therefore, there is no mandate to include these issues in early years when students are formulating their conceptions of what constitutes ‘normal’ gender roles and behaviours.

Special Education. In addition to cancelling the Indigenous and sex education curriculums, Ford also cut \$234 million dollars from funding programs that supported students with special education needs (Tasker, 2019). With a focus on ‘fiscal responsibility,’ Ford has made it clear that reducing costs takes precedence over creating accessible and inclusive classrooms for students who face barriers in the classroom related to ability.

Definitions

In discourses relating to inclusivity, there is a broad lexicon of terms that are often used, and much of this vernacular can seem ambiguous or may easily be confused with more general uses outside the realm of education. Thus, it is important to clearly define these terms so as to clarify what they mean within the context of establishing a culturally responsive and inclusive canon of children’s literature to support multicultural classrooms.

Multimodal Picture Books

There is a general sense of what constitutes a multimodal picture book; however, there is no clear definition. For example, most agree that multimodal picture books include images that supplement or complement the text on its corresponding page (Early & Yeung, 2009) or that they simply use multiple modes to convey meaning, including text and images, or even texture and sound (Lin, 2017; Tucker, 2015). Some might

equate multimodal picture books with the term ‘picture books’; however, the term ‘picture books’ is often applied to text-heavy works with occasional images, such as *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (Carrol, 1997), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Dahl, 1998), and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900). For the purposes of the current study, such works would not apply as their primary mode of meaning making is text. Multimodal picture books, within the context of the present research, refers to books that feature image as a central component of meaning making that is equal to or greater than the text in the book. This would include works such as *The Cat in the Hat* (Seuss, 1957), *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), and *Goodnight Moon* (M. W. Brown, 1947).

Traditional Canon (of Children’ Literature)

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term ‘canon’ was used to describe a “collection or list of books of the Bible accepted by the Christian Church as genuine”; however, in contemporary contexts, it is used to refer to the work of a “secular author accepted as authentic” or of high quality (“Canon,” n.d., para. 4). The Western literary canon, for example, feature classics such as Homer’s *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, as well as the works of English literary titans including Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne, and Dickens. Contemporary critics have often taken issue with this canon due to its gender and racial biases (Green, 2017; P. R. Jones, 2019) because most of those in the Canon are dysphemistically referred to as the ‘dead white men’. Parallel issues can be seen in children’s literature, notably in the works of Dr. Seuss, Robert Munsch, and other authors associated with classic children’s literature. Thus, for the purposes of the current study, the term ‘traditional canon’ will refer to classic works of children’s literature that have

been featured prominently in ECE contexts and that contain similar biases. These biases may include works that simply exclude various cultures or those that promote stereotypes. Though these works may be effective literacy tools from a pedagogical perspective, teachers must critically consider their broader social implications.

Culturally Inclusive Canon

In contrast to the traditional canon, the culturally inclusive canon refers to works that are more culturally inclusive and that feature prominent and meaningful representations of minoritized and marginalized populations. This would include equal gender representation and proportional representation of peoples from different ethnic and racialized groups, as well as characters with disabilities and/or who are from the LGBTQ+ community. Both Crisp et al. (2016) and Ostrosky et al. (2013) note that, though many books do feature peoples from these populations, these representations often depict harmful stereotypes and/or are examples of tokenism, meaning that the marginalized characters do not have significant roles. For instance, Ezra Jack Keats's (1962) *The Snowy Day* was a progressive work as it depicted a child of colour at a time when few children's books did so; however, it did not explore how the protagonist's racial identity shaped his experiences. This is not to suggest that all books must point to each character's social identity, but neither must they ignore it. Thus, to be considered part of the culturally inclusive canon, a work should ideally have a meaningful portrayal of a person from a marginalized or minoritized community whose cultural identity is a component of the narrative and who is not associated with harmful stereotypes. For example, Cheryl Kilodavis's (2009) *My Princess Boy* is a narrative about a gender fluid boy whose gender behaviour is the central component of the narrative. Authorship is

likewise a concern in this context. Though representations of marginalized and/or minoritized groups is critical, it is also important to have representation from authors who are from those communities. Keats offers an example of this: though the character in his beloved *The Snowy Day* is a child of colour, Keats himself was Caucasian/white. Thus, he may not be able to offer the kind of insights into the cultures being represented in his work as a person from that culture might be able to.

Cultural Diversity

Within the context of Canada's multicultural policy, culture seems to be a concept rooted in ethnicity and place of origin; however, for the purposes of the current study, the word culture, and by extension cultural diversity, has a broader meaning. For example, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985), focuses on the "equitable participation of individuals and communities of all *origins* [emphasis added]," as well as preserving "the use of *languages* [emphasis added] other than English and French" (sec. 3). The choice of words such as 'origins' and 'languages' seems to situate culture within the context of nationality and/or ethnicity. This is consistent with the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines culture as "customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period" ("Culture," n.d., para. 7). However, some social groups are not based strictly on nationality or place of origin, though these factors certainly have an influence on cultural identity. For example, there are subcultures with respect to sex and gender, as well as gender identity. Thus, women in general and men in general are socialized into different historical and cultural practices, as are members of the LGBTQ+ community. This is likewise true of students with varying abilities. For example, deaf people and those who are hard of hearing have their own language, which conforms to

elements of culture laid out by both the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* and the *Oxford English Dictionary*. This likewise extends to socioeconomic class. For instance, when the aristocracy found their affluent circles being infiltrated by the ‘*nouveau riche*,’ they sought to distinguish themselves culturally and out their new members by adhering to antiquated cultural rules, such as not wearing white after Labour Day (Fisher, 2019). Inversely, there are practices relating to language, fashion, food, and other customs that are unique to working classes. Given the plurality of cultures, the current study uses the term ‘culturally diversity’ to refer to each of these forms of culture and not simply to ethnicity, place of origin, religion, or perceived race. This broad spectrum of culture is consistent with the categories of students that Ontario’s Ministry of Education (n.d.-a, 2009) has identified as being at risk of lower levels of performance due to a lack of equity in classrooms. Thus, it is critical to identify how to support students who identify as members of any of these groups.

Cultural Literacy

According to Hirsch (1987), cultural literacy refers to one’s ability to engage with, understand, and interact with a culture or cultures other than their own. This may include familiarity with cultural practices, language, or arts. A culturally literate person should ideally recognize their own limited understanding of other culture and participate with other cultures while being respectful of differences and recognizing the value of different cultural perspectives.

LGBTQ+

When speaking of the multiplicity of sexual identities that exist outside of heteronormative standards, there are a variety of abbreviations that have been used.

While heteronormative standards frame heterosexual practices as ‘normal’ or the default/standard sexual orientation (Harris & White, 2018), there are a plurality of identities that exists outside of this standard. In the past, the initializations ‘LGBT’ or ‘GLBT’ were used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people; however, LGBTI was later adopted to include intersex people (Maurice & Bowman, 1999), and LGBTIQ or LGBTQ was likewise used to refer to ‘queer’ and/or questioning identities (Petro, 2014). LGBTQ2 has likewise been used, the cardinal number ‘2’ referring to the ‘two spirits’ or ‘twospirited’ gender identity within Indigenous communities, which is a third gender identity or gender variant (Estrada, 2011). LGBTQQIP2SAA is also used, with ‘2S’ equating twospirited, one ‘A’ for asexual, another for androgynous, and a ‘P’ for pansexual (Bloomington Pride, n.d.). In addition, LGBT+ and LGBTQ+ have both been used with increasing frequency, the plus symbol being representative of a broad spectrum of sexual identities (Vikhrov, 2019). However, current phrasing is limited to contemporary constructs of gender and sexual identity. Given that gender is an evolving phenomenon and that the plurality of sexual identities is in some respect unknowable, almost any term runs the risk of excluding identities that currently exist or may exist in the future. Thus, for the purposes of the current study, the term ‘LGBTQ+’ will be used. In this context, the ‘Q’ represents both ‘questioning’ and ‘queer,’ in reference to any sexual identity that diverges from heteronormative standards. The plus symbol represents any other sexual identities that members of the community may not feel are represented by ‘LGBTQ’ or any future identities that may emerge. This initialization is chosen with the intent to be as inclusive as possible to all current and future sexual identities but is as

limited as any potential initialization would be as it does give preference to the most common identities within the community.

Racial Categorizations

Racial categorization can be problematic for any number of reasons, not the least of which being that race is largely a fluid social construct. There are terms that are widely accepted for different racialized groups, such as Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern. Thus, these terms will be used for those respective groups. However, some terms are more problematic. For example, in the past, people who have ancestral roots in Africa have been categorized as ‘Negro,’ ‘Black,’ and ‘African American.’ Some terms have fallen out of use, namely ‘Negro.’ Some, such as ‘Black,’ are preferred by some and not others, and ‘African American’ is problematic because it is inclusive to Americans. In the context of the current study, the term ‘Pan African’ will be used in place of ‘Black’ for three reasons. First, it puts an emphasis on origin, like ‘Asian’ or ‘Middle Eastern.’ Second, ‘pan’ is inclusive to all people with African heritage throughout the world. Last, it avoids placing racial categorizations in opposing binaries, such as Black/White. For this reason, the term ‘Caucasian’ will be used as well. However, because the term ‘white’ is critical when discussing racial power structures, it will be paired with the word ‘white.’ Though ‘Caucasian’ is also a more formal and academic categorization and ‘white’ seen as more colloquial, it is important to underscoring racial power dynamics.

Equity and Equality

Within the context of education, equality and equity have different definitions. Where equality typically refers to students receiving the same resources, equity ensures students and schools that have specific needs receive the resources necessary to fulfill

those needs (Yamamoto, 2016). Within the context of the current study, this has several applications. With respect to culturally inclusive literature, it means that students who need to see their own cultural identity represented in course content should. This would require teachers to take the initiative to learn about their students' unique cultural needs and ensure they are fulfilled to the best of each teacher's ability. It likewise means that students who have different learning preferences should also have access to pedagogical activities that will support their learning. This applies specifically to multimodal learning, meaning that classroom readings should include multimodal picture books that may feature texture and sound in addition to images and text. It also means that classroom activities should be varied and include written activities, class discussions, group work, role play, and various modes of assessment when needed.

Summary

As a multicultural country whose population and student body are becoming increasingly diverse, there is a growing need to ensure that Canadian education systems, particularly those in diverse provinces such as Ontario, meet the needs of diverse students. Because early childhood education and literacy learning lay the foundation for all that follows, it is critical that teachers address the cultural needs of students from an early age. Culturally inclusive multimodal picture books can be an effective tool in helping to achieve this goal. However, the selection process is unclear, as are the ways in which a culturally inclusive canon of children's literature can be integrated with the traditional canon that has proven effective in supporting literacy development. The present study will therefore conduct an extensive survey of the current research on multimodal picture books with several key goals in mind. First, this study seeks to

determine how multimodal picture books can effectively support literacy development and foster a culturally inclusive environment. The study likewise aims to provide educators with recommended practices that can facilitate the selection process and help to establish classroom activities and assessment models that can support all students' traditional literacy skills and their critical and cultural literacy. Finally, as this is an exploratory study that seeks to identify current trends in the literature as well as gaps, future research will also be proposed.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to effectively analyze recent literature, understand its implications, and propose recommendations for both best practices and future research, it is important to establish a theoretical framework with which to analyze recent research on multimodal picture books. With that in mind, there are three theoretical frameworks that will provide an analytical perspective that can help to generate key insights into this issue. First, because the focus of the current study is multimodal picture books and cultural inclusivity, multiliteracies theory is ideal. According to the New London Group (1996, 2000), this theoretical approach looks at two key phenomena: the need for multimodal learning in response to the technological revolution, and the need for culturally inclusive teaching in response to globalization. Though understanding the mechanics of how multimodal and multicultural learning function is vital, it is also critical to identify where the barriers in the system are. To this end, the current study will also employ an anti-oppressive framework. This theory aims to identify the barriers that specific social groups experience at the individual, institutional, and cultural levels (Weber, 2010); thus, the current study will employ anti-oppressive practices to identify the barriers that students encounter with respect to their cultural identities. Lastly, because the cultural dynamics of the classroom are constantly changing, it is important that teachers engage in critical reflective practices and constantly evaluate and re-evaluate their teaching practices. To this end, using Mezirow's (1997, 2000) transformative learning theory would prove advantageous as it outlines how teachers can make meaningful changes in their teaching approaches by recognizing their own cultural biases, considering other perspectives, and then integrating these perspectives into new teaching practices before beginning the

process all over again. These three theories—multiliteracies, anti-oppressive practice, and transformative learning—have the potential to collectively provide critical insights into the processes that educators can use to create culturally inclusive classrooms through the use of multimodal picture books.

Multiliteracies

Since the 1970s, there has been a convergence of two key intersecting phenomena that have reshaped the way children learn: technology and globalization (New London Group, 1996, 2000). The technological revolution has introduced youth to multiple mediums, thereby transforming the ways that students engage with educational content. For example, in the 1970s, educational programs such as *Sesame Street* created new modes of learning among children (Fisch et al., 1999), and this shift was heightened by the introduction of computers and gaming systems in households (Gnambs et al., 2020). At the same time, the globalized world led to increasingly diverse classrooms. The New London Group (1996, 2000) contends that classrooms were not keeping up with these changes. Thus, they argue that, in order to effectively support students and maximize their literacy outcomes, educators need to create new pedagogical approaches that support the multiple modes of learning that children have become increasingly immersed in. They likewise note that these approaches need to address the cultural needs of students. Thus, multiliteracies can be broken down into two core components: multimodal learning and culturally responsive teaching.

Multimodal Learning

Traditional literacy is typically associated with four key skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. However, in the context of the technological revolution, there are

a multiplicity of other modes of literacy that students must develop. For example, in the digital age, images and videos are being increasingly integrated into the meaning making process (Lutkewitte, 2013), and this has expanded through the use of smartphones, texting, and social media (Selfe & Selfe, 2008). Increasingly diverse language systems require that students develop multiple modes of literacy in addition to traditional modes. This includes gestural, graphic, spatial, computer, and critical literacy skills. Therefore, given the proliferation of the internet, social media, and multimedia, Cope and Kalantzis (2009, 2015) argue that there is now a diverse range of modes through which people communicate, and this growing linguistic diversity necessitates that students develop the multimodal literacy skills needed to navigate this expanding linguistic culture.

Multiculturalism and Culturally Responsive Teaching

In addition to the changing landscape of communication, the New London Group (1996, 2000) and Cope and Kalantzis (2000, 2009, 2015) note that transnational migration and globalization have caused a variety of cultures to intersect, which has also led to change in the way people communicate and has increased the need for people to develop cultural literacy. For example, the New London Group (2000) notes that, because technology has mitigated many communication barriers, and globalization has made the global community smaller and more interconnected, intercultural communications have become a necessary part of daily life for many. This has introduced new cultures to the West and new languages to English and has consequently transformed Western culture, creating new dialects of English. Moreover, there are shifting concepts of citizenship and identity (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015) that can shape the engagement of culturally diverse students who populate classrooms. Thus, the pedagogical approaches teachers use should

be responsive to these students' unique cultural needs and the changing cultural needs of all students (Cope and Kalantzi, 2001). This is supported by Khalifa et al. (2016), who advocate for culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) and suggest that educators must be critically self-aware so as to address the challenges that students from marginalized/minoritized groups encounter in education. However, Khalifa et al. argue that these negative outcomes are not due to shortcomings inherent in students but rather the education systems' failure to incorporate CRSL. To address these issues, Khalifa et al. recommend practicing critical consciousness. This requires that education leaders engage in critical self-awareness, create "culturally responsive curricula," build "culturally responsive and inclusive school environments," and engage "students and parents in community contexts" (Khalifa et al., 2016, pp. 1280-1282). Thus, when analyzing multimodal picture books, placing them within the framework of culturally responsive teaching can help to assess whether they support the learning objectives set out by the Ontario's Ministry of Education (n.d.-a, 2009) through the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and Canada's multicultural policy.

Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Doors

Though multiliteracies outlines clear and advantageous goals with respect to the culturally responsive elements that should ideally be integrated into classroom instruction, Bishop (1990), outlines a metaphor that provides specific clarity to this goal: her metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding doors. Through this metaphor, Bishop details how the lack of diversity in children's literature impacts children from minoritized groups while emphasizing the benefits of incorporating inclusive children's literature in the classroom. She notes that when children do not see reflections of themselves in the

text they read, ‘mirrors,’ they develop a distorted view of the world in which they live and of themselves. As a result, they often see themselves and their culture as being devalued. She notes that these harmful effects extend to children who are members of dominant groups as they lack an understanding of or a ‘window’ into the diversity in which they exist and do not learn about social issues that define the lives of those around them. This might also give them an inflated sense of their own importance, making them less empathetic. When inclusive books are included, it teaches children from all cultures to appreciate and understand other cultures and draw parallels between others’ cultures and their own. In this way, Bishop (1990) suggests that the books can serve as sliding doors that facilitate empathy. Moreover, for children from minoritized groups, seeing themselves in children’s literature provides a way for them to learn about their history and folk tales, which helps them to preserve their cultural identity. Thus, when considering the culturally responsive elements that are central to multiliteracies, framing them within the context of Bishop’s (1990) mirrors, windows, and sliding doors can provide some critical insights.

The Four Pillars of Multiliteracies

In order to create multimodal approaches that are culturally inclusive and responsive, advocates of multiliteracies prescribe four key pillars that define the pedagogical approaches used in the instruction process: overt instruction, situated practice, critical framing, and transformed practice.

Overt Instruction

Within the context of a multiliteracies approach, the modes of literacy are built through overt instruction, which seeks to give students the ability to conceptualize

through theory and by naming: this is done through scaffolding (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2015). The use of scaffolding can be explained in part through Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, which uses scaffolding approaches to build on what students know and what they can achieve with the guidance of a teacher or 'more knowledgeable other' (Lilienfeld et al., 2020; Obukhova & Korepanova, 2009). In this context, young learners develop an understanding of symbols through which they are able to express and understand concepts and abstract thought, thus fulfilling the 'conceptualizing through theory' element of overt instruction. Within this context, Cope and Kalantzis (2000) argue that it is critical to develop students' metalanguage, which means teaching them the language needed to discuss the object language or symbolic systems. This allows students to discuss language in concrete terms, thereby allowing them to think abstractly about language. This fulfills the two key elements of overt instruction: allowing students to conceptualize the theory and then conceptualizing by naming through their meta language.

Situated Practice

Situating practice is predicated on two elements: experiencing the new and experiencing the known (New London Group, 1996, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2009, 2015). Gee (2004) argues that the value of meaning is dependent on the context in which it is framed and that meaning is therefore generated "through the sets of relationships and contrasts" in which information is presented (p. 33). In the context of multiliteracies, it is critical to draw on students pre-existing knowledge, which is diverse and varied by nature, and give them the vocabulary with which to understand it. Based on this, students can then critically engage in new experiences and process them. This

process can involve discussing students' past experiences and relating it to new experiences to inform their understanding (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). However, it is critical that new experiences exist within what Cope and Kalantzis (2015) describe as the 'zone of intelligibility.' This means that student have enough of a frame of reference that they can at least engage with new ideas with the help of a more knowledgeable other. This, again, is consistent with Vygotsky's notion of scaffolding.

Critical Framing

Critical framing is comprised of two key processes: analyzing content critically and analyzing content functionally (New London Group, 1996, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2009, 2015). Mills (2009) notes that this requires that teachers and students alike be able to critically understand the cultural practices and heritage text and place both in a contemporary context. It likewise means "interrogating the interests of participants in the communication process" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, p. 4). This refers to understanding the biases of the authors of a text, as well as their intended audience and how a given text functions. Critically analyzing the function of content could also include giving consideration to the medium or mode of communication. Such an approach could prove particularly advantageous when comparing and contrasting the traditional and more culturally responsive multimodal pictures books.

Transformed Practice

Once students learn texts, they then have to apply them in real-world contexts; thus, transformed practice speaks to the process of applying lesson content creatively and appropriately (New London Group, 1996, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2009, 2015). According to Cope and Kalantzis (2015), this means drawing on what students have

learned to create text and employing their knowledge in communicative action. For example, students might learn new behaviours or modes of communication and then apply them in new social contexts (New London Group, 2000). In some respects, this parallels Mezirow's (1997, 2000) notion of transformative learning. When analyzing multimodal picture books, the notion of transformed practice can provide insights into two concerns. First, it can offer insights into how traditional texts might replicate conventional and even oppressive modes of communication and social interactions. Second, it can offer insights into how culturally responsive works can help to challenge these behaviours and facilitate a transformation in behaviour.

Anti-Oppressive Practices

Anti-oppressive practices (AOP) have traditionally been used in social work to identify how various social groups have experienced oppression. However, because both social work and education are helping professions that support diverse populations, AOP can be used within educational contexts to identify barriers and oppressive practices as well. Though a nuanced framework that can provide extensive critical insights, the model has a simple structure that examines three categories of barriers: individual/personal, institutional/structural, and cultural (Mullaly, 2010; Strier, 2007).

Individual/Personal Barriers

Within the context of AOP, individual and personal barriers refer to the beliefs and bias that individuals hold and put into practice that can create barriers for those around them and can influence interpersonal relationships (Scourfield, 2002). Dominelli (2009) notes that this can be particularly harmful in contexts where there is a hierarchal relationship between two parties. He argues that those in positions of power must

restructure their relationships with the aim of empowering those whom they are supposed to support (Dominelli, 2009). Within the context of education, this approach can provide insights into how teachers and educators' personal biases can introduce oppressive practices into the classroom.

Institutional/Structural Barriers

AOP also examines institutional and structural barriers. This can include a variety of modes of oppression, such as legislation or policy; however, these barriers can also be structural in nature (Dominelli, 2009). Within the context of education, the curriculum or education policy could serve to exclude certain populations by failing to incorporate inclusive works, while school structures can inhibit teacher-to-teacher, teacher-to-student, and student-to-student communication. AOP help to identify where such barriers exist so as to remove or modify them with the aim of empowering others and reducing the feelings of powerlessness among marginalized populations that result in learned helplessness (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 2014).

Cultural Barriers

Cultural barriers can take a multiplicity of forms, including language, customs, and behaviours (Thompson, 2016). Minoritized students often feel pressured to conform to cultural norms, thereby invalidating their own cultural identity and inhibiting their modes of self-expression. These cultural barriers can take nuanced and less obvious forms, such as unintentional exclusion. For example, Galloway et al. (2019) note that if teachers are not engaging in culturally responsive practices in the classroom, they could involuntarily exclude students from marginalized populations. To combat this, they recommend adopting anti-oppressive pedagogies that help to identify barriers and

develop actionable plans to address the power imbalance and give agency to all students, particularly those who experience feelings of powerlessness. Identifying the cultural representations present in multimodal picture books could help educators delineate between inclusive representations of various cultures in children's literature and harmful representations of marginalized populations. This could prove particularly advantageous for early childhood educators because it could help them avoid representations that reproduce stereotypes or oppressive cultural practices.

Transformative Learning

To maximize the benefits of multiliteracies approaches and AOP, teachers must have transformative experiences that lead to changes in behaviour. This is what Mezirow (1997, 2000) defines as transformative learning. To achieve transformative learning, Mezirow (1995) outlines a ten-step process. When placing this process within the context of creating culturally inclusive learning context, it is critical to consider the role that transformative learning can play in professional teacher development and the strategies that are typically used to achieve transformative professional development. This theory is especially applicable within the context of the current study as transformative learning has proven critical to the professional development of educators (Cranton, 1994; Lysaker & Furuness, 2011; Deng, 2019).

The Transformation Process

The transformative process is a complex series of developmental stages, each with their own unique elements. According to Kitchenham (2008), there are ten steps to this process:

1. Disorienting dilemma

2. Self-examination
3. Sense of alienation
4. Relating discontent to others
5. Explaining options of new behaviour
6. Building confidence in new ways
7. Planning a course of action
8. Knowledge to implement plans
9. Experimenting with new roles
10. Reintegration (p. 105).

Though there are ten steps to this process, it is important to recognize that transformative learning is a cyclical process (Mezirow, 2000), which means that once the process is complete, a new cycle would begin again. Teachers must perpetually be re-evaluating their own perspectives and teaching approaches as new generations of student with unique cultural needs are perpetually entering the school system.

Disorienting Dilemma

According to Mezirow (2012), the disorienting dilemma is the first phase of the transformative process. It involves a dramatic situation or crisis that requires critical analysis in order to be resolved. Mezirow (1981) notes that a transformation in perspective is most likely to occur in instances where external circumstances necessitate a re-evaluation of one's world view. However, Mezirow (1990) later adds that such transformation can also be the result of engaging in challenging discourses or being exposed to different world views through various mediums, such as a book. Therefore, a disorienting dilemma can be linked to more subtle scenarios. Whether dramatic or

subtle in nature, a disorientating dilemma causes a person to be open to changing their world view.

Self-Examination

Kerins et al. (2020) note that, in the self-examination process, the individual becomes aware of how they respond to a disorientating dilemma. They note that these feelings can include guilt, shame, anxiety, and frustration. When reflecting on these feelings, the individual critically assess their competence and abilities, identifying potential gaps or shortcomings (Kerins et al., 2020). This part of the process likewise involves an individual critically assessing the assumptions they have made in order to understand the limitations to their own thinking and frame of reference.

Sense of Alienation

Upon becoming critically aware of one's own limitation, an individual going through the transformative process may also experience a sense of alienation. According to Lange (2004), alienation in this context means becoming "detached or distanced from a part of one's life," which can include alienation from social groups, as well as from their work (p. 123). For example, a teacher may feel alienated from their work if they are compelled to teach a curriculum they had no part in creating, or if they feel the work they are doing is not achieving its intended purpose.

Relating Discontent to Others

Mezirow (2000) notes that the critically reflective process also involves relating discontent to others. This process necessitates that the individual going through the transformative process critically considers how their behaviour impacts others (Mezirow,

2000). For example, a teacher who realizes their pedagogical approach is not effectively incorporating all students must consider how the students who are being excluded are being impacted and how the students feel. This is critical to developing a new pedagogical approach and establishing new behaviours.

Explaining Options of New Behaviour

Because transformative learning is predicated not simply on changing one's perspective but also one's behaviour, Mezirow (2000) underscores the importance of exploring options for new behaviours. New proposed behaviours are based on the preceding steps and involve the individual considering how to address their own shortcomings and how a new behaviour would impact those around them (Mezirow, 2000). For instance, when students respond poorly to content or certain teaching approaches, teachers often expect students to put their issues aside and conform, even using discipline to enforce this. However, a teacher might instead consider asking probing questions to understand students' perspectives.

Building Confidence in New Ways

In order to overcome the dilemma, Mezirow (1981, 2000) argues that one must build confidence in new ways. This typically involves novel and innovative ways of engaging with one's environment. For example, Stansberry and Kymes (2007) found that learning about and engaging with technology gave teachers new forms of confidence when engaging with their students.

Planning a Course of Action

Mezirow (1981) goes on to underscore the importance of developing a new plan of action. Once a person recognizes that their behaviour is not achieving the goals they want and acknowledges the need to change their course of action, they must develop a new course of action that will conform to their new worldview and help them achieve their goals. For example, if a teacher did not include multimodal picture books that depicted the ethnic identities of the students whom the teacher provided instruction to, then the teacher would have to consider including other books, consider the selection process, and anticipate how students might respond to this new content.

Knowledge to Implement Plans

Once a plan is decided upon, it is vital that the individual identify the skills needed to fully realize their new course of action (Erickson, 2007; Mezirow, 1981, 2000). For example, if a teacher is planning on incorporating PowerPoint slides into their lectures, they must learn how to create effective and engaging slides. Likewise, if a teacher wants to include more culturally inclusive multimodal picture books and facilitate more culturally responsive class discussion, they must develop the skills required to assess books they might include and moderate class discussions on culture.

Experimenting with New Roles

Erickson (2007) and Mezirow (1981, 2000) likewise note the importance of experimenting with and experiencing new roles. In this process, a person going through the transformative process should try a new role and critically assess how they feel in this role while also soliciting and critically considering the feedback offered by those around them (Mezirow, 1981). This allows them to determine which behaviours and approaches

are effective so as to integrate them in a new behavioural model while eliminating or improving those elements that prove less effective.

Reintegration

As Coghlan and Gooch (2011) note, the final phase in the transformative process is reintegration. They note that, especially when navigating multiple contexts, those who have been through the transformative process must learn how to integrate their pre-existing skills and knowledge with their new knowledge and perspectives. For example, a teacher who has used traditional multimodal picture books might consider the elements of these works that made them effective and then integrate that into the new approaches associated with more culturally inclusive elements.

Summary

When considering how to create culturally responsive classrooms that feature inclusive multimodal picture books, there are a multiplicity of intersecting elements to consider. Thus, multiple theoretical frameworks are required. Because multimodal picture books are included in the classroom to promote literacy, multiliteracies approaches can provide practical guidelines that ensure the approaches teachers use are going to help them promote the literacy learning outcomes that are critical for young learners. Moreover, integrating Bishop's (1990) concept of mirrors, windows, and sliding doors into a multiliteracies perspective can provide insights that emphasize the culturally inclusive elements of multiliteracies approaches. With respect to understanding the potential barriers that students may experience, it is likewise important to use a theory that can identify and categorize these barriers; hence, AOP have the potential to serve as an insightful tool that allows teachers to identify the individual, institutional, and cultural

barriers that inhibit students' engagement in the classroom. Finally, teachers must be able to step outside of their own cultural context and consider the perspectives of students with life experiences that differ from their own. Hence, teachers must be able to critically reflect on their own worldview and performance in the classroom while considering perspectives that may be foreign to them. This critical reflection must lead to meaningful changes in behaviour. To this end, Mezirow's transformative learning model provides a step-by-step outline as to the nature of this very process. When used in conjunction, these three theoretical models have the potential to ensure teachers are able to identify the barriers that students encounter, reflect on and change their own behaviours, and implement new, culturally inclusive pedagogical models that effectively support students' literacy development.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

An overview of current literature on multimodal picture books outlines several key themes that can inform future practices. First, there is a plethora of literature that identifies how the traditional canon uses tools that can serve to promote literacy skills (Klingberg et al., 2006; Meganathan, 2019; Read & Regan, 2018). However, these works are likewise problematic for two reasons: they have the potential to replicate systems of oppression by failing to represent the experiences of those cultures outside the dominant culture (Ishizuka & Ramón, 2019), and they often promote stereotypical representations of minoritized and marginalized cultures (Crisp et al., 2016). There is likewise extensive literature that outlines the benefits and potential barriers to developing a more inclusive canon. Developing an inclusive canon is critical; however, it is vital to understand the process to selecting multimodal picture books that are culturally inclusive. Though the amount of current literature on this topic is limited, there are a number of studies that provide critical insight. Moreover, while creating an inclusive canon is important, it is likewise vital to develop effective pedagogical practices that can be used in conjunction with these multimodal picture books to promote the intended cultural literacy (Allen, 1997). This refers to both classroom activities and assessment.

The Traditional Canon

The traditional canon has proven effective for a number of reasons, primarily related to the pedagogical strategies that some of the most popular works include. However, their representations of marginalized and minoritized groups is typically scarce, and in instances where these groups are present, their representation is often problematic. That said, educators should not throw the proverbial baby out with the bath

water as many traditional works can still be included and offer a template of how multimodal picture books can promote traditional literacy skills. Thus, it is important to look at both the advantages and limitations of the traditional canon.

Effective Literacy Strategies in the Traditional Canon

Some of the most popular and endearing works from the traditional canon, such as the works of Dr. Seuss, have become standard works in ECE because they are not only engaging but also promote literacy development. A key element of multiliteracies practices is the multimodal elements, which can include images, as well as the use of rhyme and repetition.

Images

According to Yamagata (2018), the inclusion of images can help elucidate students' comprehension as they are able to use the images to link words and fill in the gaps in meaning that are the result of their limited vocabulary. It also allows them to build a semantic understanding of the words on the page. As Chesnov (1996) notes, using images alongside text helps children develop vocabulary and contextual understanding: by aligning the words they do know with the images in a picture book, children can then discern which other images correlate with the words they are not familiar with, thereby developing their contextual understanding. This is certainly true of the works of Dr. Seuss and Robert Munsch, both of which include colourful images that correspond to the text they accompany. In the case of Dr. Seuss, the works can help students develop contextual understanding. As he often uses invented words, such as 'Sneetches' (Seuss, 1960), students are forced to develop the meaning of new words through context. For

example, students can identify a noun in a text and then find the corresponding image. Once they have found correlations for most words and images, the remaining words and images that are not clearly correlated can then be matched, allowing students to discern meaning through context in conjunction with images. For instance, in *Sneetches and Other Stories*, Dr. Seuss (1960c) introduces fictional creatures known as Sneetches. In the work, Seuss writes that “the Star-Belly Sneetches/ Had bellies with stars/ The Plain-Belly Sneetches/ Had none upon thars” (p. 1). In the corresponding image, there are only two creatures with bellies. As long as the student knows what a belly is, they can discern both what a star is, and what a Sneetch is. They identify a belly with nothing on it and a second with an image, and they can then create a meaning for the word ‘star’ through this graphic representation. This process teaches students how to discern meaning through context, which is a critical literacy skill. As many works in the traditional canon use this multimodal approach, they serve as effective tools with respect to developing vocabulary and contextual understanding.

Rhyme and Repetition

Moreover, the use of rhyme, especially simple and repetitive vocabulary words, can help students learn the phonetic rules of language (Read & Regan, 2018) while facilitating learning motivation (Meganathan, 2019). This combination of inputs helps to create neurological cross-talk, which can in turn reinforce cognitive connections (Klingberg et al., 2006). In this context, the works of Dr. Seuss offer perhaps the most comprehensive array of rhyme, repetition, and images. For example, *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960a) and *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* (1960b) uses both repetition

and rhyme along with images. In *Green Eggs and Ham*, the phrase “I would not like them” is repeated as a refrain throughout the book (Seuss, 1960a, p. 16, 24, 34, 39), allowing children to easily read along and discern and focus on the new vocabulary words introduced in each new passage. A similar approach used in *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* as the word ‘fish’ is repeated throughout the book and paired with other words. This allows the children to identify which colour is associated with which word, and even facilitates numeracy skills (Seuss, 1960b). As Read and Regan (2018) note, repetition facilitates students’ understanding of phonetics as well. For instance, when Dr. Seuss (1960a) rhymes ‘am’ with ‘ham’ (p. 12), children can see the only difference between the two words is the letter ‘h’ and thereby associate that letter with the sound at the beginning of ‘ham.’ Likewise, when he rhymes ‘here’ and ‘there,’ the children can then use what they learned about the letter ‘h’ and recognizes that it changes when it is paired with the letter ‘t.’ In this way, the use of rhyme and repetition used in the traditional canon has proven to be an effective literacy tool that promotes students’ working knowledge of phonetics.

The Cultural Limitations of the Traditional Canon

Classic children’s works by the likes of Dr. Seuss have proven to be both endearing and engaging; however, their ethnocentric bias can be limiting. In *The Cat in the Hat*, one of Dr. Seuss’s (1957) most iconic works, the narrator is a young, unnamed, Caucasian boy. Though there are two central figures, the boy and his sister Sally, it is the boy who is given the authority of the narrator. This is a pattern in a number of Dr. Seuss works that feature human protagonists, such as *To say that I saw it on Mulberry Street* (1937) and *Scrambled Eggs Super!* (1953). This is consistent with criticisms from

Ishizuka and Ramón (2019), who likewise express concerns that Dr. Seuss's works sometimes Orientalize or exoticize minoritized groups and can promote stereotypes. They argue that the messages conveyed by these characterizations unconsciously frame how young children perceive people of different races and the relationships shared between Caucasians and other racialized groups. They also note that long-lasting and subconscious impressions can be left with young children and that these impressions can shape how young learners make meaning in relations to themselves, others, and the world around them. Having a teacher endorse such portrayals gives further strength to them; therefore, it is critical that teachers be vigilant about identifying these potentially problematic portrayals and ensure they are not presented in the class. Dr. Seuss's works are a specific example that is emblematic of the traditional canon; however, this is a pervasive issue, and many of the potential issues can be manifested in subtle ways that can foster problematic perceptions and perspectives of culture. Though people often associate culture with perceived race or ethnicity, culture encapsulates a variety of social identities, such as gender, sexual identity, ability, and social class. Each of these categories represent key areas of concern within the traditional canon.

Race in the Traditional Canon

With respect to race, Crisp et al. (2016) found that depictions of people from minoritized cultures, particularly race, were problematic for two reasons: they were underrepresented and, when they were represented, they were typically framed within negative stereotypes. After coding 1,169 books from local schools, they found that only 5.7% of books featured a primary character who was a member of a parallel culture, most of whom (53.7%) were coded as African American. In addition, 71.4% of books

contained material they considered to be reflective of potentially damaging stereotypes or were limited in scope. This was likewise reported by Allen (1997). The participants he coded as Black students questioned why the characters whom they shared a racial identity with were typically represented as impoverished, highlighting the importance of including social class as a culture that warrants compassionate and thoughtful inclusion in children's picture books. Pan-African students are not the only racialized population to be maligned or underrepresented: Crisp et al. (2016) also report that Native Americans, who were only present in seven books of the nearly 1,200 books they surveyed, were framed in a historical context over 85% of the time. This was consistent with Dunn (2013), who found that 80% of the books she surveyed that included Indigenous peoples framed them in historical contexts, as far back as the 17th century, thus failing to demonstrate "signs of contemporary influence" (p. 86). To address this issue, it is critical to create an inclusive canon has more compassionate and accurate representations of racialized groups and consider how social class intersects with them.

Gender in the Traditional Canon

With respect to gender, Allen (1997), highlights several concerns based on his study of grade-two students' engagement with children's literature during the 1990s. For instance, he found that one of his female student participants felt the need to create a narrative that prominently featured female characters because there were so few female characters in the works that she read. This was a consistent problem throughout the 1990s, and underrepresentation was not the only problem. Kortenhaus and Demarest (1993) notes that gender stereotypes were also a problem. Though such issues have been widely recognized, the problem persists. Even when female characters are represented in

children's picture books, they remain underrepresented as the protagonists or titular characters, thereby framing their identities as subordinate (Lynch, 2016). Just as the issue with underrepresentation persist, so too does the issue with gender stereotypes. For example, Li-Chin (2016) found that children are exposed to a number of gender stereotypes in picture books, and though they respond in different ways, the stereotypes can shape how children see and perform gender. This is supported by Axell and Boström (2019), who found that picture books that feature STEM areas, such as mechanics, often use narratives with male characters, reinforcing stereotypes about gender and technology.

Sexual Identity in the Traditional Canon

Given that the traditional canon has issues with its representation of gender, it is not surprising that it is even more problematic with respect to sexual identities. S. A. Crawley (2018) notes that, as a youth who was aware that he was gay, he felt ashamed of his identity because it did not conform to the heteronormative depictions of people he saw represented in the works he read while in school. As a teacher, he did not include picture books that portrayed LGBTQ+ characters for fear of the response he would receive from peers and parents. This is consistent with the findings offered by Crisp et al. (2018), who found that the children's literature that was recognized by awards committees were universally heteronormative. They examined 143 books that were awarded prizes from Orbis Pictus Award Books and assessed the focal characters in each, meaning the characters through whom a narrative or work is focalized. They identified 91 human focal subjects and examined their sexual identity within the context of the works in which they appeared: nearly 65% were clearly framed in heteronormative terms, just over 35% were not given a frame that identified their sexuality, and 0% were depicted as

members of the LGBTQ+ community. Sullivan et al. (2017) offered similar findings with respect to transgendered persons as well; however, they likewise add that representations of transgendered characters that do exist are overwhelmingly Caucasian. This is a critical issue as the transgendered students who are also people of colour experience a layer and intersecting forms of exclusion. Smolkin and Young (2011) note that this is a concern because LGBTQ+ students do not see themselves or their families reflected in the text, and children outside of the community do not gain insights into this culture. This makes it difficult for them to understand and empathize with their LGBTQ+ peers and thereby silences the community. Based on a survey of current literature, it is clear that the traditional canon fails to offer adequate depictions of members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Ability in the Traditional Canon

In their review of nearly 1,200 picture books, Crisp et al. (2016) found that only 3.2% of books featured a primary character with a disability. Moreover, they found that the works that did feature students with disabilities typically had relatively mild disability, such as impaired vision, which was only alluded by the inclusion of reading glasses that were worn by some peripheral characters. However, even when disabilities were depicted, the barriers associated with them were seldom addressed or mentioned within the narrative (Crisp et al., 2016). This issue was likewise highlighted by Ostrosky et al. (2013), who note that inclusive literature should ideally teach students about disabilities and barriers and help to destigmatize disabilities, not simply depict a disability as an instance of tokenism. Price et al. (2015) examined picture books that specifically dealt with disability, and though most offered positive portrayals that sought

to both inform readers about and destigmatize disabilities, they also found that some of the insights were inaccurate or not fully formed. Ostrosky et al. (2013) found that some of the portrayals of disabilities were problematic for different reasons. For example, though some books are metaphoric and rely on anthropomorphized animal characters to convey human issues, this may put distance between the character and a child with a disability (Ostrosky et al., 2013). Based on readings of several popular picture books that depict disabilities, Aho and Alter (2018) found that disabilities were often framed as individualized issues from an ableist perspective that were best kept hidden. This can discourage children from recognizing or acknowledging the barriers they encounter. Kleekamp and Zapata (2019) suggest two additional issues that are common in the traditional canon: pity and exclusion. They found that, in traditional children's literature, children with disabilities were either seen with pity or the narrative focused on their social exclusion. Part of the issue with finding and including works that represent and generate meaningful conversations regarding student with disabilities is that many teachers lack the cultural awareness necessary to anticipate whether a work will promote or subvert inclusivity in the classroom, an issue that was outlined by Iwai (2012) in her survey of pre-service teachers.

Social Class in the Traditional Canon

Social class/socioeconomic status (SES) is also a culture whose representation in picture books, or lack thereof, is problematic, especially given that approximately 560,000 children in Canada are living in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2020). For example, Quast and Bazemore-Bertrand (2019) and Livingston (2020) note that children with low SES and those in poverty typically do not see themselves reflected in the picture books

that are included in most classrooms. As a result, stereotypes that people have of students who live in poverty remain unchallenged. Hughes-Hassell (2013), though, argues that picture books can offer counternarratives that provide context for poverty and can in turn combat harmful stereotypes associated with families with low SES status. In addition, this issue often intersects with other social markers. For example, Allen (1997) notes that his students observed how Pan-African characters were often depicted as living in poverty. Based on a review of the traditional canon, it is clear that the children's picture books that have typically been used on the classroom either do not represent families from lower SES contexts or do so in a way that promotes stereotypes.

Culturally Inclusive Literature

As Moll argues, “children quickly engage with curriculum that is meaningful and respectful of who they are” (as cited in Whitmore, 2018, p. 96), and this is supported by a broad range of research. In the context of a multicultural classroom, culturally inclusive works can help to normalize the experiences of minoritized and marginalized cultures, as Socolovsky (2018) demonstrates with respect to immigrant students. Thus, in order to address the shortcomings present in the traditional canon, classrooms need to include culturally inclusive picture books. Within this context, it is vital that these works address a wide range of social markers that represent the different cultures that may be present in a given classroom or that students in a classroom are likely to encounter in their lives. These social markers include but are not limited to nationality/heritage/ethnicity, perceived race, religion, gender, sexual identity, ability, and socioeconomic status.

Perceived Race and Ethnicity

Like the rest of Canada, Ontario is host to a variety of racialized and ethnic groups. In this context, it is critical to create a culturally inclusive canon with respect to perceived race and ethnicity. This includes supporting Indigenous students, as well as other racialized populations, such as Pan-Africans, among others.

Indigenous Students

Including picture books that include and reflect Indigenous identities has benefits for both Indigenous students and students outside of this cultural group. For example, Korteweg et al. (2010) found that including picture books that feature Indigenous worldviews help to not only legitimize Indigenous students' culture identity but also helped to decolonize readers' meaning making and promote all students' environmental consciousness. Thus, all students can become critically aware of how dominant ideas are perpetuated, making them more critical of their meaning making processes. This can help improve their critical literacy skills. Likewise, students developed a more meaningful awareness of the importance of the environment. This was underscored by Dunn (2013), who observed that multimodal picture books that included Indigenous knowledge highlighted the importance of including natural elements. For example, she notes that one book used mixed method materials that included "pine tree needles, birch bark, and other elements from the natural world," as well as earthy tones (Dunn, 2013 p. 99). These mixed materials, combined with images and text create multiple interfaces that have the potential to support visual and tactile learners, as well as auditory learners when the text is read aloud by teachers. Both Dunn (2013) and Korteweg et al. (2010) note that, in such contexts, it is critical that Indigenous peoples not be framed in strictly historical contexts

so that the currency of Indigenous cultures and their value to Canadian society be clear to all students. This was a concern that was likewise highlighted by Crisp et al. (2016), though Dunn (2013) notes that offering narratives of the historical importance of Indigenous culture is also critical. In this context, though, Dunn notes the importance of including works that are written by Indigenous authors. This is critical in multicultural learning environments, where Korteweg et al. (2010) note there is an absence of Indigenous authors, stories, people, and content.

Pan-African Students

As Allen (1997) notes, the traditional canon's portrayal of Pan-African characters is problematic for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the frequency with which Pan-African characters are depicted as impoverished. Thus, it is vital that an inclusive canon features a more nuanced representation of Pan African characters and all people of colour. Bishop (2007) argues that using works by Pan African authors that portray the histories and cultures of Pan African peoples can challenge dominant narratives. This is parallel to the ways in which works that include Indigenous perspectives challenge colonial thinking and could allow students from parallel cultures to connect and empathize with each other through a shared or parallel history. Likewise, Husband (2019) observes that teaching children about racism and social justice through picture books has several advantages. For instance, it can help to address the implicit biases that children learn and demonstrate at ages as early as three years of age (Dunham et al., as cited in Husband, 2019). This is advantageous because it encourages children from minoritized groups to understand the barriers they face while challenging children from the dominant group to recognize that their sense of importance may be inflated (Bishop, 1990).

Husband (2019) also notes that including picture books that depict racism and social justice can help student identify and critical assess stereotypes. This was echoed by Allen (1997), who achieved this by moderating critical class discussions about books depicting racialized characters. This, of course, not only applies to Pan-African students but all racialized students, such as Hispanic, Asian, and Middle Eastern students.

When seeking representations of Pan-African characters, it is important to consider how this social identity intersects with other issues, such as gender. For example, Heinecken (2019) notes that Caucasian women have often been seen as more suited to roles associated with beauty and elegance, such as ballet dancing. Therefore, including picture books that depict women of colour in contexts such as ballet can “challenge social constructions of black female embodiment” and promote affirmative portrayals of women of colour (Heinecken, 2019, p. 297). Though young women of colour may be familiar with celebrated female athletes of African descent, such as Venus and Serena Williams, others may be less familiar with ballerinas, such as Misty Copeland. Thus, such inclusion offers young women of colour a mirror that allows them to see themselves outside of pre-existing stereotypes. These kinds of body-positive depictions should not only be limited to Pan-Africa girls but all girls and boys of colour.

Nationality, Heritage, and Ethnicity

Given Canada’s increasing diversity—which is due in large part to its heavy reliance on immigration and increased support to refugees—it is vital to provide representation to students from immigrant and refugee populations. In this regard, it is critical to recognize their status as immigrants or refugees and the challenges associated with their acculturation process. In addition, because most are allophone speakers—

meaning that neither English nor French is their native language—it is also critical to offer depictions of their multilingual language environment.

Migrant, Immigrants, and Refugees

During the acculturation process, many young children may feel that they are struggling with problems that are unique to them. As a result, children of migrant, immigrant, or refugee families may struggle to develop a sense of national belonging in their new home. To help ease this process, teachers can introduce their students to multimodal picture books that address these issues.

Migrants. Socolovsky (2018) notes Chicana/o children of migrant workers may feel as though the process of crossing borders to be confusing. However, picture books can help to normalize this process by detailing the migration process through depictions of minoritized and/or racialized communities, such as the Hispanic community. In this context, it is critical to note that racial identities and immigrant status often intersect. Socolovsky goes onto note that these works could simultaneously teach children from the dominant culture to view migrant/immigrant students as a crucial part of their community.

Immigrants. Sembiente (2018) notes that this can help support the acculturation process for immigrants. Sembiente suggests that when critical literacy approaches are used in conjunction with systemic functional linguistics, students are able to build on their pre-existing knowledge to make meaning. Moreover, picture books whose protagonists' names and native languages varied allowed young readers of all backgrounds to develop an understanding of immigration and facilitated the acculturation process for immigrant children (Sembiente, 2018).

Refugees. Nath and Grote-Garcia (2017) note that the objectives of some refugee programs are to promote economic stability, community engagement, and integration. They add that multicultural literature, specifically multimodal picture books, can facilitate these goals when introduced to young learners. For example, they suggest that picture books that depict narratives focus on social inclusion can promote integration. This is supported by Berg et al. (2017), who add that picture books that involve refugee narratives can give all students a more global perspective. They likewise note that addressing the trauma that some refugees may have experienced can reassure young refugee students that they are not alone and help them cope with their trauma. As noted by Tweedie et al. (2017), the inclusion of trauma narratives can be helpful when supporting Canada's refugee students; however, it is critical that teachers make such inclusion judiciously and are familiar with trauma-informed teaching practices.

Multilingual Students

Likewise, as Canada has seen an increasing number of immigrants from other language groups, including multilingual picture books can facilitate learning in multilinguistic settings. For instance, in their mixed-method study, Gallagher and Bataineh (2019) found that bilingual picture books—Arabic and English—facilitated language skills and literacy development. They likewise conclude that the inclusion of bilingual books promoted identity development among emergent bilingual children and promoted their ability to proficiently use and express themselves in two languages. This applies to other language groups and multimodal approaches as well. For instance, Yeh et al. (2017) found that online applications that included bilingual picture books helped improve the literacy skills of Vietnamese students. Wang (2018) found similar results for

Chinese students learning English. However, Huang and Chen (2016) note that it is vital that bilingual text accurately reflect both languages depicted in a book as the works surveyed typically did not accurately reflect the heritage languages they featured. Each of these authors note how bilingual picture books can help preserve students' heritage language. This is consistent with the goals of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985), which seeks to “preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada” (sec. 3).

Gender

As noted, the gender representations in the traditional canon are problematic, both because female protagonists are few and far between and because those who do appear often perpetuate harmful stereotypes. This is especially true for girls of colour. Toliver (2018) notes that women of colour are often missing from children's picture books; however, when they are represented, “It ensures that Black girls are able to imagine what they want from the world and work to create new ways to make their dreams a reality” (p. 19). Such exclusion can limit opportunities girls believe they have access to. As Axell and Boström (2019) note, there is an absence of female protagonists in picture books, particularly with respect to girls who are engaged in STEM fields. It is critical to address this gap because, as Flint (2017) notes, when young girls see female protagonists in STEM roles, these characters can serve as role models that have the potential to inspire young girls to explore STEM fields.

These problems impact both girls and boys. For example, Berry and Wilkins (2017) note that even anthropomorphized characters based on inanimate objects reinforce

gender stereotypes. They note, for example, that items such as cars and trucks are typically depicted as male. This can restrict the ways in which boys construct and in turn perform masculinity, making them apprehensive about exploring interests that do not conform to such standards. This is supported by Gritter et al. (2017), who found that depictions of literacy and reading practices encouraged male students to see reading in pragmatic terms. This could explain why boys are less likely to read after graduating from high school than are girls (Newkirk, 2009). To address this, Martínez Lirola (2019) notes that picture books should depict men doing domestic chores and sharing in the responsibilities that have traditionally been associated with femininity. This, she notes, has the ability to have a positive impact on not only boys' education but also their socialization skills.

It is important to note that simply including works with diverse representation of gender is not sufficient. Bartholomaeus (2016) reports that there are challenges for teachers when presenting works that might be written from feminist perspectives. For example, she notes that some students failed to pick up on the themes of gender, while others interpreted the works in such a way that they actually reinforced dominant gender norms. Thus, it is critical that teachers not simply include these works but also design lesson plans and discussions to encourage children to read them critically.

Sexual Identity

When discussing gender, it is important to recognize that it is not a simple binary construct. There are people who identify as being on a gender spectrum, as well as those whose sexual identity does not conform to heteronormative standards. Thus, it is important to be inclusive to these students as well. As S. A. Crawley (2018) observes, some teachers are reluctant to incorporate LGBTQ+ students in the picture books they

bring into the classroom because they are concerned that there will be a negative response from parents and peers. This was reinforced by Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2016), who found that LGBTQ+ teachers struggled to overcome “restrictive social systems governing thought regarding gendered and sexual regulatory norms” (p. 807). Morgan and Kelly-Ware (2016) identified similar concerns, noting that “risk aversion and discourses of innocence within a heteronormative climate often prevent teachers’ engagement with children and families over queer cultures” (p. 3). However, they also note that this exclusionary practice can render LGBTQ+ students invisible and fails to recognize that the same claims to ‘innocence’ can be applied to heteronormative sexuality. Thus, Morgan and Kelly-Ware (2016) argue that teachers can encourage social inclusion of LGBTQ+ students and families by including what they term “low-risk” picture books.

There are several benefits to including works that feature LGBTQ+ characters. This is supported by Paterson (2018), who used an anti-oppressive approach to teaching picture books that depicted characters who would typically be identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Following a critical discussion with students from a grade one/two class, she observed that inclusion of picture books with diverse representations of sexual identities allowed students to engage in critical thinking, ask questions about gender, and challenge existing heteronormative assumptions (Paterson, 2018). This also ensured that LGBTQ+ students or families were not made invisible in the classroom. With respect to transgendered students or students from families with transgendered members, Capuzza (2019) notes that the inclusion of books that offer positive portrayals of transgender characters has the potential to ensure they feel represented and included in

addition to destigmatizing their identities. It was likewise found to facilitate all children's imaginations, sense of self, awareness of social justice, compassion, and critical thinking skills (Capuzza, 2019). This can be achieved with books such as Cheryl Kilodavis's (2009) *My Princess Boy*, which offers a depiction of a young boy who enjoys wearing clothes conventionally seen as feminine, and whose family is supportive of such modes of expression.

Though benefits of including LGBTQ+ identities in multimodal picture books seems clear, the pedagogical models that should be used to introduce such topics is nuanced. For instance, though Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2016) found the scaffolding lesson was effective, not all teachers know which components should serve as the building blocks for later lessons. In their case study, Martino and Cumming-Potvin's participant was a member of and advocate for the LGBTQ+ community; thus, she likely had more insights into LGBTQ+ culture than heteronormative teachers. Thus, it is critical that pre-service teachers learn about these strategies and that school boards offer professional development workshops to help current teaching professionals learn how to effectively integrate such works into their classrooms.

Ability

Multimodal picture books are likewise increasingly offering depictions of students with varying abilities and who experience different barriers. Ostrosky et al. (2013) outline the ways in which inclusive literature can promote learning and the ways in which it can destigmatize and educate students about disabilities. Perhaps the most valuable element, though, is their outline of inclusion criteria when selecting appropriate books. With regard to the benefits of inclusive literature, Ostrosky et al. note that

children learn through observation and that their interactions with peers, family, and educators are crucial to their learning. Thus, teachers must use this influence to promote acceptance. This is further validated by Bianquin and Sacchi (2017), who note that picture books that depict students with disabilities raises awareness of the disability, helps to destigmatize it, promotes a general understanding of disabilities, and allows students to become accepting of disabilities. Ostrosky et al. (2013) go onto outline specific strategies, such as reading activities that are paired with question and discussion sessions about story content, all of which were echoed by Bianquin and Sacchi (2017). These approaches not only promote vocabulary acquisition and literacy and communication skills but also facilitate an awareness and greater understanding of disabilities among students. However, Ostrosky et al. (2013) observe that selecting appropriate works is a layered process. They note that teachers must acknowledge the complexity of disabilities when challenging and shaping attitudes and should consider how their formation of ideas come into being. This is critical as educators play a significant role with respect to mediating how students without disabilities view students with disabilities, as well as how students with disabilities view themselves.

Socioeconomic Status

Because socioeconomics intersects with other cultural identities, some may not recognize it as a culture in and of itself. However, it is also important that multimodal picture books be inclusive to challenges that are unique among people from various socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly students with low SES. This was perhaps most famously highlighted by Barbara Shook Hazen's (1979) beloved children's picture book, *Tight Times*, in which a child must navigate a world in which the food he eats is not as

nice as his peers, his father loses his job, and he is not allowed to have a pet dog because his parents cannot afford it. Quast and Bazemore-Bertrand (2019) notes that such economic diversity challenges the negative stereotypes associated with having lower SES so that students can reflect economic diversity and engage in critical conversations about economic inequity. Because socioeconomics often intersects with other identities, it is likewise important to consider how low SES impacts other cultural groups. For instance, Saltmarsh (2007) argues that, through their reading of picture books, children develop gendered notions of social class, while Allen's (1997) participants raised concerns that student of colour were associated with poverty. Thus, when incorporating picture books that depict SES and social class, teachers must consider how this social marker intersects with others and develop class discussions that examine these intersecting phenomena.

The Selection Process

Though the benefits of culturally inclusive picture books are clear, deciding on which works to include and how to select them is a complex process that requires teachers to consider and navigate a number of intersecting processes. For example, S. A. Crawley (2017) notes that including LGBTQ+ students can be challenging for two reasons: (1) it can be difficult to discern which representations of LGBTQ+ students are reflective of the community and (2) parents and colleagues may provide push back. Thus, it is vital to include the communities in which teachers work in such context. This is consistent with the findings of Khalifa et al. (2016), who underscore the importance of drawing on children and parents while considering their perspectives and needs. Though studying repertoire selection for music classes, Yang's (2018) qualitative study outlines several strategies that teachers can use to create culturally inclusive content. Based on

qualitative interviews with eight teachers, Yang found that student-centered approaches were critical to selecting multicultural content. This meant soliciting their diverse class members for input to help select works that would be reflective of the students.

This approach is consistent with Whitmore (2018) and Moll et al. (1992), who underscore how important it is for teachers to recognize students as funds of knowledge. However, Yang (2018), also found barriers to selecting multicultural works. For example, some teachers felt as if they were not qualified to teach multicultural material, some expressed concerns that their selection might promote stereotypes, and others struggled to find sheet music for multicultural works (Yang, 2018). This is echoed by Logan et al. (2016), who posit that it is critical for teachers to avoid tokenism and critically select texts that fairly depict members of a minoritized culture and promote literacy. Ostrosky et al. (2013) add that it is vital these portrayals do not depict harmful stereotypes either, a concern observed by Allen (1997), who notes that his Black students questioned why Black characters in picture books were often depicted as impoverished.

This selection process can be enhanced through cultural training for teachers and peer-to-peer engagement among teachers. Brinson (2012) notes that teachers often lack an understanding of cultural responsiveness and inclusiveness. Over twenty years ago, Trent and Artiles (1998) noted that this issue needed to be addressed by promoting cultural training. However, the issues persist as Khalifa et al. (2016) more recently noted that schools need to provide training to promote and enhance culturally responsive leadership. Moreover, Newkirk (2009) notes that one of the most underutilized resources in schools are the teachers themselves. He observes that while school boards do send teachers to conferences to learn, they seldom provide teachers with an opportunity to

learn from and observe their peers at their own schools. Thus, teachers often find themselves isolated from the colleagues they work with, and this division limits the flow of information between them. Thus, if teachers are afforded the opportunity to observe colleagues or engage in focus groups with them, these teachers could learn about the barriers and challenges that other teachers encounter and adjust their lesson plans and picture book selection accordingly. However, an additional issue is the limited representation of teachers in education. Tyler et al. (2004), for example, note that the lack of diversity among faculty members is a critical concern. Without perspectives from teachers who are members of the minoritized cultures, it will be difficult for other professionals to develop an authentic understanding of their students' experiences. Given these potential barriers to the selection process, it is critical that school boards and administrators take the initiative to provide teachers with training and opportunities to learn from their peers.

This selection process has unique barriers for each culture. For example, Zapata et al. (2019) offer several criteria that teachers should consider when including picture books that depict slavery. For example, even antislavery texts can propagate a White supremacist tone by framing slaves as victims or objects of pity and/or using a White savior to resolve a conflict. Some narratives may also avoid discourses regarding the “social, economic, [and] political” factors that define slavery. Zapata et al. also report that most such works omit the violence and malnourishment and undernourishment of enslaved people. Moreover, they note that works such as *A Birthday Cake for George Washington* (Ganeshram, 2016) tells the story of how an enslaved man of colour baked a cake but does so in a way that misrepresents the ways in which enslaved people were

treated (Zapata et al., 2019). With regard to ability, Pennell et al. (2018) outline a list of inclusion criteria for picture books that depict disabilities, noting that, in addition to being easy to read and not didactic, books should also feature interesting narratives and characters with depth. They go on to note that students with disabilities should be able to identify with the characters or narrative in a meaningful way. In addition, the works should use inclusive and respectful language while ensuring the characters who have disabilities are not strictly defined by their disabilities (Pennell et al., 2018). Though these criteria are applied specifically to ability in this context, the barriers and exclusion of children from other cultures and social groups experience are parallel in many respects. Thus, similar consideration should be given to all cultures during the selection process.

Pedagogical Practices

Though including culturally inclusive works can create a more inclusive classroom, simply reading them in a passive manner is not likely to ensure that teachers and students receive the maximum benefits that these works have to offer. This is supported by Serafini (2010), who notes that it is critical to bring analytical perspectives to these books. Likewise, Kirkland (2013) argues that traditional strategies to literacy have the potential to minimize or exclude the perspectives of some groups. For example, some teachers make sincere efforts to be inclusive by using what Husband (2019) refers to as colour-blind approaches. Though teachers may assume that avoids singling out racialized students, Husband argues that it silences their experiences. Thus, teachers must consider how to encourage students to engage with these books critically, both via classroom activities and assessment that includes conversations about culture.

Classroom Activities

Husband (2019) conducted a thorough study of the multiliteracies perspectives that can be utilized when creating classroom activities for multimodal picture books. Of the several options that she identified, four are options that have come up repeatedly in other studies: critical literacy writing assignments, critical inquiry/discussion, role play, and art projects.

Critical Literacy Writing Assignments

One of the most effective methods of critically engaging students is critical writing assignments. For example, Husband (2019) had children in her class write letters to characters, which encouraged them to consider why characters engaged in certain behaviours and how the characters felt about certain experiences. Such approaches encourage students to think critically and develop lines on inquiry. Likewise, Taylor Charland (2013) had students identify major events that characters in picture books experienced and asked them to deconstruct their history. Her students then were tasked with writing monologues from the character's perspective. This, she notes, promoted both critical thinking and empathy. She likewise had students create journals where they made connections between the fictional character and their own lives. Allen (1997) used similar approaches, having students re-write stories or create their own narratives in response to the picture books they read. These approaches are consistent with the multiliteracies approaches that encourage teachers to help students understand new ideas through their own experiences (New London Group, 1996, 2000).

Critical Inquiry/Discussion

Another central way to encourage students to think critically is to foster critical inquiry or discussion. For example, Husband's (2019) practice of having students write letters encouraged them to ask questions, but she likewise opened up class discussion by inviting students to ask questions. Upon hearing what one student asked, other students could develop their own questions. This was a strategy used by Allen (1997), who encouraged students to ask questions about race and how it was presented and created a space of open discussion where students could share what they thought about a narrative. Taylor Charland (2013) used a similar approach, creating classroom discussions where students were allowed to express their ideas. This approach was further validated by Esquivel (2019), who notes that it allowed students to explore and challenge stereotypes. Allowing students to dictate the direction of the conversation establishes a student-centered approach that validates students' perspectives, even when their cultural identity may not have been represented in the text being discussed.

Role Play

Because students' written and verbal responses may be limited in early education, role play can likewise be an effective approach to critical literacy development. Alley and King (2018) have found role play has proven helpful in literacy development, as has Sprenger (2008), and this is supported by Husband (2019). For example, Husband (2019) had students act out the roles of the characters in the picture books she discussed in class, which allowed students to project their own identities and perspectives onto the characters in the picture books while simultaneously encouraging them to understand and empathize with the characters.

Art Projects

Critical and responsive art exercises can also likewise encourage students to critically engage with texts. In one study, Esquivel (2019) had students draw narrative elements from the picture books used in class, which not only allowed student to develop language comprehension but also encouraged them to analyze stereotypes. This was a class activity that incorporated discussion and inquiry as students would share their ideas with other students and ask and answer questions. Taylor Charland (2013) used a similar approach, linking students' paintings together as part of a quilt project.

Assessment

Multimodal picture books offer a number of advantages and promote literacy in a variety of ways; however, the means of assessing its impact are challenging because the kind of learning they promote is not easily assessed through conventional standardized tests. With regard to literacy development, H. D. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) suggest that the evaluation methods typically used to assess students' reading and listening skills and spoken language require productive performance. In this context, teachers implicitly appraise students, whether formally or informally. Therefore, to ensure multimodal pictures books effectively promote literacy, it is critical to develop multi-assessment approaches that can promote and evaluate literacy development. Within this context, teachers should consider low-stakes-testing approaches that focus on formative assessment rather than summative assessment.

Formative Assessment

According to Dixson and Worrell (2016), formative assessment can be both spontaneous or planned; however, its central function is to help students improve by

providing constructive feedback. With respect to simple reading skills, they suggest that teachers can use tools such as flashcards and have students read words out loud while offering feedback on pronunciation. Within the context of multimodal picture books, teachers might use the books themselves in place of flash cards and ask students to read the words on the page. For example, Dr. Seuss's *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* and *Green Eggs and Ham* would prove to be ideal options. None of them have human characters, which therefore means they are generally free of any markers that would promote one ethnicity or culture over another; however, they have a number of simple vocabulary words. This is consistent with multiliteracies as the picture books typically feature images that correlate with the words on the page. This real-time feedback creates an opportunity for low-stakes assessment, which allows students to engage and learn without the pressure of a high-stakes test. This is consistent with Allen (1997), who simply had students discuss and code the books they read. If students do not observe a detail that was important, the instructor can guide them by asking leading questions, which will still allow teachers to the opportunity to observe students' critical thinking skills. Such approaches can also help teachers stay focused on immediate goals. Newkirk (2009) argues that establishing and monitoring short-term goals is essential to supporting student outcomes. As H. D. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) note, assessment is a constant process and effective teachers are always assessing students, even as they respond to questions or offer input. When promoting cultural inclusivity via multimodal picture books, it is important for teachers to adopt this approach so as to help students develop their visual, cultural, and critical literacy skills, in addition to their ability to read, write, and speak.

Summative Assessment

In an education context, Mousavi (2002) defines assessment as a mode of appraising a students' level of a given skill, and it is a perpetual process that involves a number of pedagogical approaches. Summative assessment is one mode of assessment that Dixson and Worrell (2016) observe is typically utilized to collect and analyze data. Because critical and cultural literacy skills are a little less objective than some skills, or at least more difficult to assess, pairing summative assessment with multimodal picture books can be difficult. However, there are some options. Teachers could, for example, offer simple comprehension questions, provide students with short-answer tests, or give students a list of vocabulary words to read. To incorporate multiliteracies approaches into the assessment, teachers could use matching questions where students are asked to pair a word with a corresponding image. That said, it would be difficult to measure cultural literacy or awareness in the same way. An obvious option would be to ask students to identify certain cultures in a text; however, that could be counterproductive as it promotes 'othering' groups. Within the context of multimodal picture books, it seems that summative assessment is best suited to measure comprehension, reading, and pronunciation skills almost exclusively. However, as Newkirk (2009) notes, focusing on long-term achievements can sometimes obfuscate the purpose of the lesson; therefore, teachers should focus on short-term goals.

Modes of Assessment

With respect to the specific modes of assessment, Callow (2008) developed a model he refers to as the 'show me' model. This model is consistent with recommendations from other researchers (A. H. Paris & S.G. Paris, 2003; Roy, 2018) and

conforms to the pedagogical activities recommended by Husband (2019) and Taylor Charland (2013). It likewise conforms to many of the goals of inclusive learning models. Though Callow (2008) notes that the model looks at both summative and formative assessment, the focus does seem to be on summative elements. Callow (2008) outlines several preconditions to the modes of assessment that he recommends. First and foremost, Callow (2008, 2020) asserts that assessment should allow students to demonstrate their understanding, which necessitates a variety of assessment options that allow students with different modes of expression an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding. This is supported by Botelho et al. (2014) and conforms to the multimodal elements of multiliteracies that are outlined by the New London Group (1996, 2000) and Cope and Kalantzis (2000, 2009, 2015). Callow also notes that the assessment should integrate metalinguistic elements so that students can develop the vocabulary surrounding abstract linguistic concepts so that they can break down and understand language. Roy (2018) adds that assessments should be focused on students' interest to facilitate intrinsic motivation and that assessments for multimodal picture books are most effective when they are teacher created. This is critical for two reasons: the teachers have chosen the books and know what goals they hope to achieve, and the teachers best know how to read the unique learning needs and progress of their own students. The different modes of assessment include read-alouds (Roy, 2018), critical composition, responses to open-ended questions that are asked both before and after the reading of a picture books (Callow, 2008; A. H. Paris & S. G. Paris, 2003), and drawing/painting exercises (Callow, 2008, 2020). This conforms to the multimodal elements of multiliteracies that are

outlined by the New London Group (1996, 2000) and Cope and Kalantzis (2000, 2009, 2015).

Read-Alouds. Roy (2018) notes that, in terms of practical literacy development, read-alouds can help teachers assess where students are at, particularly with respect to their phonetic awareness of the alphabet. Moreover, it allows teachers to assess students' knowledge of the topics being discussed. Though this may seem to be a more conventional mode of literacy assessment, Roy notes that having students read aloud also transforms the reading process into a social experience, rather than an isolated experience. This can cause students from dominant groups to interrogate their assumptions and understanding when reading about the experiences of other groups in a social context. This is an echo of sentiments expressed by Newkirk (2009), who notes that encouraging students to break out of isolated reading can foster a love of literacy.

Critical Composition. Callow (2008) suggests that teachers can engage in summative assessment when listening to students discuss a work, examining their framing of images by using metalinguistic terms, though he stresses the importance of ensuring teachers are familiar with these concepts so that they can discern them when students are speaking. He likewise notes that teachers can use this summative assessment when listening to students explain or summarize content, though there are specific things teachers should look for depending on the student's age. For instance, Callow notes that younger students might make comments relating to the level of detail in an image or colour, while older students are more likely to address "how an image positions the viewer to think or feel a particular way" (p. 618). This is consistent with A. H. Paris and S. G. Paris (2003), who recommend Narrative Comprehension of Picture Books tasks

(NC tasks) that require students to make inferences about the narrative of wordless picture books. This can help teachers assess students' graphic literacy.

Open-Ended, Before/After Questions. To promote more critical engagement Callow (2008) prescribes using open-ended questions both before and after a reading to assess how students examined their own assumptions. Again, in this context, Callow notes that assessment will vary depending on the students age and cognitive development. For example, students in kindergarten through to grade two might pick and discuss their favorite elements of a story, while students in grades three and four would justify or explain their rationale. Likewise, students in kindergarten through to grade two might simply recount a narrative or plot point, whereas the older students should be able to interpret actions characters' actions and motivations. Such discussions are consistent with the modes of assessment outlined by Roy (2018), who underscores the importance of using teacher-created assessment that is rooted in the interests and passions of students. To achieve this, Roy suggests that teachers might solicit students for a list of questions they have so as to connect lesson content to their lived realities. This, Roy suggests, can help to facilitate learning motivation. This is consistent with Mills (2009) and the New London Group (1996), who note that multiliteracies approaches allow students to build on their pre-existing knowledge to form new knowledge.

Art Expression. In order to allow all students the opportunity to express their understanding of content, Callow (2008, 2020) also suggests using artistic modes of expression, such as drawing and painting, to assess students' comprehension and critical engagement. Not all students are as vocal as others, either due to shyness or a lack of vocabulary. However, this does not mean they are not processing and understanding the

multimodal picture books they are engaged with. Allowing such students to engage through art can offer critical insights into their level of comprehension.

Collecting Assessment Data. Drawing on research outlined by other academics, Callow (2020) outlines a number of ways that teachers can practically track these more subjective modes of summative assessment. For example, Clay (2000) and S. G. Paris and Hoffman (2004) note that teachers can take anecdotal notes or keep a more formal record of students' comments, written work, or art. In this context, it is ideal that teachers have a list of goals in mind so that they can be more easily tracked when students demonstrate them, hence the importance of teachers being familiar with metalinguistic concepts (Callow, 2008). Having clear goals and markers, as well as a consistent manner of recording student engagement, will allow for a more objective and consistent mode of assessment, which is vital when assessing cognitive development that is, in many respects, more subjective by nature.

Chapter Summary

Based on a review of the current literature, there are several key trends that are critical to take into consideration when developing a culturally inclusive approach to using multimodal picture books. First, the traditional canon has proven effective because some of the most often used works, such as those by Dr. Seuss, have integrated effective multimodal elements; however, they are limited and even problematic with respect to their presentation of culture. Thus, culturally inclusive picture books must also be introduced so as to include students of all cultures, be these cultures be related to perceived race, ethnicity, nationality, language, gender/sex, sexual identity, ability, class, or any other social markers. However, the selection process can often be problematic;

thus, teachers require training and must critically assess the works they are considering for inclusion. Moreover, it is vital that teachers not use a colour-blind approach, as noted by Husband (2019), and instead develop classroom activities that highlight culture and promote critical and cultural literacy. This likewise necessitates developing modes of assessment that work in concert with the goals of an inclusive classroom and the activities that are designed to promote the multiplicity of literacy skills that are central to students' development in a diverse classroom and multicultural social context.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

When discussing the trends present in current literature and outlining recommendations for practice and future research within the context of Ontario, it is critical to first establish the goal that Ontario's Ministry of Education has established. In 2009, the Ministry released Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, the goal of which was to address the lack of equity in Ontario's schools and address the achievement gap that existed between students from the dominant culture and those from marginalized or minoritized cultures. The policy outlined several key goals: ensure all "students, parents, and other community members of the school are welcomed and respected," to create a supportive school environment that adopts and provides equitable and inclusive education, and ensures all students feel a sense of belonging (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 10). In this context, the Ministry emphasized including the broader community and multiple cultures using a constructivist approach through which educators develop a deep and meaningful understanding of their students' lives and identities so that they can "build upon the varied lived experiences of all students in order to bring the curriculum to life" (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5).

To achieve this, one of the most critical courses of action is identifying the barriers within the school system (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2015). For example, the Ministry of Education (2015) notes that educators must identify if there are barriers with respect to their attitudes, the practices that teachers and schools engage in, and the physical space in which students learn. Once these barriers are identified, teachers must consider how to eliminate discrimination removing bias and barriers. This requires,

critical, reflective practices (Ministry of Education, 2014). To this end, the Ministry of Education (2013) outlines three dimensions of potential barriers that can inhibit culturally responsive pedagogical teaching: institutional barriers, personal barriers, and instructional barriers. Because these categories mirror the barriers outlined in anti-oppressive practices—institutional/structural, individual/personal, and cultural—it is perhaps most effective to frame a discussion based on these three barriers. Within the context of the barriers, it is then possible to demonstrate how a transformative learning model can help teachers challenge their preconceptions and develop a more culturally inclusive canon of multimodal picture books and develop culturally inclusive pedagogical strategies and assessments that are enhanced by utilizing multiliteracies approaches.

Institutional/Structural Barriers

With respect to institutional and structural barriers, there are three key considerations. The first is curriculum, specifically with respect to the books that are included on teacher's reading lists and those that they have easy access to. In addition, it is important to consider the training that teachers receive. It is likewise critical to consider the hiring practices that the schools engage with, particularly as it concerns the underrepresentation of teachers from diverse backgrounds.

Curriculum

Teachers are often restricted with respect to what they can do in the class because they are compelled to work within the confines of the curriculum. For example, Crisp et al. (2016) found that the books schools made available to students featured protagonists who were predominantly white and male, while minoritized groups were often depicted in potentially damaging ways. This institutional barrier is problematic because, if schools

do not offer inclusive books, the options teachers have available to them will be limited. The New London Group (1996) notes that a multiliteracies approach would support the cultural diversity of schools in a globalized world. Thus, given Canada's increasing diversity, policy makers who decide what goes into the curriculum should ensure that the works teachers have access to are reflective of the students whom they teach. This course of actions is critical for two reasons. First, it is consistent with the mandate of Canada's multicultural policy, which prescribes that "individuals and communities of all origins" should have access to equitable participation (*Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, 1985, sec. 3), as well as Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2009). Second, such approaches can help to promote unity in Canada by providing what Bishop (1990) refers to as mirrors, windows, and sliding doors. If the curriculum does not provide minoritized Canadians with reflections of themselves, then the curriculum functions as a mode of colonialism and encourages these students to question their value. Likewise, if Canadians from the dominant culture do not have a window into other cultures, it could increase their sense of self-importance and dull their ability to empathize with others. This combination is likely to create conflicts between the dominant culture and minoritized groups. To ensure teachers have the tools to create inclusive classrooms, it is important for the curriculum to provide them with the tools they need to achieve this goal.

This seems like a broad and ambiguous goal, but it can be achieved. For example, a commission could be created that includes education administrators and community leaders. The commission could begin by reviewing the books that are currently available to students to identify any problematic works. Once this is established, the commission

could review works for inclusion. Community leaders and education administrators might make recommendations. In this context, it is critical to not only consider the cultural representations of the characters depicted in the multimodal picture books, but also authorship. This is critical because, while diverse depictions of characters from other cultures can be beneficial regardless of authorship, it is important to give members of those cultures an opportunity for their voices to be heard. Such a process would no doubt face barriers. For example, some administrators, community leaders, and parents, may not feel comfortable with having religious representations in the classroom, while others may feel uncomfortable with having LGBTQ+ characters represented in children's multimodal picture books. However, this process could still prove beneficial and ensure that a broad range of perspectives are included when deciding upon which books are included in the curriculum.

Training

When considering training, it is vital to consider two elements: the classes that pre-service teachers are required to take, and workshop and continued education opportunities that are required of or offered to current teachers in the spirit of continued, professional development.

Pre-Service Teachers

Within this context, the curriculum within teacher education is also vital. When Crisp et al. (2016) interviewed teachers, they found that most struggled to name culturally inclusive works, and this was consistent with the findings offered by Brinson (2012). However, to support culturally diverse students, a multiliteracies approach would suggest that teachers be able to understand the variety of cultural perspectives that are

present in their classrooms. This gap in knowledge not only suggests that the works in the current curriculum are limited but also that the teaching curriculum is failing to provide teachers with the tools needed to support a culturally diverse student body. Moreover, given that the teachers themselves failed to take the initiative to create inclusive content, it seems clear that they were unable to anticipate how this would impact their minoritized students. This suggests that they lack the level of empathy required to understand their students, underscoring the importance of providing windows into these cultures so that those in the dominant culture, teachers most especially, do not have an overinflated sense of their own importance. To remedy this issue, teacher curriculum should include effective training that gives teachers the analytical skills needed to critically assess books and identify any potentially problematic elements that are present in picture books.

Developing new course requirements for teacher education programs in post-secondary institutions may seem daunting, but it is a model that has already been used in certain programs. For example, the School of Law at the University of Windsor requires that all students complete a course on Indigenous law (CBC News, 2018). Given that Ontario has already extended the requirements from a bachelor's in education from one year to two (Bradshaw, 2018), pre-service teachers now have ample time to complete at least one course on culturally responsive teaching and multiculturalism: It is simply a matter of the Ministry making such a course mandatory.

Professional Development

Continued professional development is required to develop, support, and maintain a culturally responsive classroom because culture is a dynamic and organic phenomenon that is perpetually changing. Thus, it is critical that teachers do not rely strictly on

information they learned during their pre-service training as this information might become outdated. For example, some of the terms that are used to describe a certain population in one generation are not seen as acceptable by the next. For example, the term 'Negro' was used to describe Pan African people. As a racial categorization, this put a focus on race. Later, the term 'African American' was used to put a focus on heritage and nationality. Such changes in language are especially important with respect to accessibilities and abilities. There is a phenomenon known as the 'dysphemism treadmill' in which a medical term used to categorize a group eventually becomes associated with pejorative terms and is viewed as a dysphemism. For example, people with mobility issues were referred to as 'handicapped,' but this term took on a negative connotation as it was later replaced with 'disabled' (Disability Resources & Educational Services, n.d.). Thus, it is important that teachers continue their cultural education to familiarize themselves with the ways in which culture changes over time.

This is consistent with Khalifa et al. (2016), who note that schools should provide ongoing training that develops culturally responsive leadership. As observed by Newkirk (2009), this can be enhanced by creating spaces in which teachers can discuss the barriers and challenges they encounter and the effectiveness of the strategies they use to overcome them. However, Newkirk also notes that the structures of schools often segregate teachers from their colleagues, creating barriers between teachers who are potential resources to their peers. He observes that schools are quick to send teachers off to conferences but seldom create spaces for teachers to learn from their peers at their own school. Thus, spaces, both temporal and physical, need to be created to address these institutional and structural barriers.

To this end, several initiatives should be implemented. First and foremost, teachers should have access to and be required to complete continued educational development workshops on culture. This will ensure they remain current on cultural expectations. In addition, schools should create opportunities for teachers to learn from their peers. For example, schools can host roundtable meetings where teachers can discuss some of the barriers they have encountered and the solutions that have proven effective. Likewise, schools might allow teachers to have professional development days where they can observe their peers and learn from them. Newkirk (2009) notes that this can change the learning environment and put pressure on instructors, who may feel they are being evaluated; thus, schools might ask that teachers volunteer for such sessions. Such approaches would help ensure that teachers have the foundational knowledge needed to support a diverse range of students upon entering the profession and the continuing educational opportunities needed to stay current with regard to their culturally shifting classroom contexts.

Hiring Practices

In addition to developing pre-service programs and continuing education opportunities to ensure that teachers are aware of and responsive to cultural barriers, it is also critical that schools make an effort to ensure the faculty they hire is reflective of the students whom they support. Bishop (1990) notes that it is important for students to have mirrors in the works they read so that they can see reflections of themselves; however, it is equally important that they see themselves reflected in the teachers who support them. This is supported by Tyler et al. (2004), who note that, in special education specifically, there is a lack of adequate representation of teachers with culturally and/or linguistically

diverse (CLD) backgrounds. TCG (2015) notes that this is a problem in broader educational contexts as well, and though both sources collected data from America, these concerns are present in Canada as well. For instance, Turner (2014) notes that while 26% of Ontario's population is racialized, only 10% of teachers identify as such. From an AOP perspective, one might suggest that the lack of diversity among teachers creates individual barriers, and this is certainly true. However, the root of the issue is a system problem as the school boards are responsible for hiring; thus, their hiring practices need to be addressed.

Developing effective solutions to addressing this can be problematic for a number of reasons. First, the most obvious solution would be adopting an affirmative action policy, and that would likely not be received well politically for a number of reasons. For example, many oppose affirmative action because they believe employment should be based on merits and not perceived race (Ng, 2016), and this is true of some minoritized/racialized people as well, for varying reasons (Navarrette, 2014).

The second solution is to create a hiring process that recognizes the life experiences of people from different cultures. The issue with this is that it is difficult to get information on the exact hiring practices and policies that the school boards in Ontario use when hiring teachers. However, it is relatively easy to imagine what kind of broad, open-ended questions could be asked to allow teacher candidates to explain how their life experiences have made them uniquely qualified to support Ontario's diverse students body. For example, they could be asked about unique cultural barriers that they had to overcome throughout their respective academic careers. That said, there may be potential ethical or legal issues with such questions. Thus, these questions could be

phrased in a more ambiguous manner. For example, candidates could be asked about unique challenges they had to overcome or how their past experiences have prepared them to support a culturally diverse student body. If such questions are more overt, ethical issues could be averted by letting candidates know that they can decline to answer any questions. Candidates might likewise be asked about cultural barriers they experienced in academia and how these barriers have informed their own teaching approaches. They might also be asked how they feel the cultural barriers they experienced parallel the experiences of peoples from different cultures. Such questions should ideally allow teachers to draw on their racial, ethnic, sexual, and socioeconomic identities as well as other social markers, such as ability.

In this way, the hiring process would allow teachers from diverse cultures to demonstrate the value of their experiences. It would also encourage hiring committees to re-evaluate how they determine what constitutes ‘ideal’ qualifications. For instance, in a conventional context, when two teacher candidates are being considered for a position and they have the same degree from the same school, the hiring committee may look at their grade point average (GPA) to make a decision. However, if they look at other factors, they may identify characteristics that are culturally rooted and were not always appraised in the past. For example, the student with the higher GPA may have come from an affluent family and may not have had to work while going to school in order to pay for tuition. This allowed that candidate to focus on their studies and maximize their grades. The other candidate, though, may have come from a family whose SES was such that it necessitated the candidate take on a full-time job while studying. The time they needed to invest in their full-time position would explain their lower GPA. However, the time

management skills and resiliency that was required to complete their education was something that the other candidate may not have demonstrated in their life experience and that could inhibit their transition and eventually success in education.

Creating a hiring process that recognizes these differences would allow school boards to identify how teachers from diverse cultural backgrounds possess unique qualifications that make them equally or more ideal teacher candidates, even if their GPA happens to be a little lower. Addressing this systemic barrier would help ensure that Ontario's diverse student body would see themselves reflected in the faculty who support them and thereby reduce potential individual barriers.

Individual/Personal Barriers

The individual barriers that students encounter in the classroom is typically associated with the choices that teachers make. To this end there are several things to consider. A primary concern is how teachers select the multimodal picture books that they bring into the classroom. To ensure the choices teachers make can support their students, it is critical that teachers reach out to students, their families, and the broader community to ensure they incorporate as many perspectives as possible.

Selection Process

When selecting the multimodal picture books that will be included for classroom instruction, teachers have two key considerations. The first is which works from the traditional canon can be carried over. Though many books are problematic, there are some which utilize extremely effective pedagogical approaches that can promote literacy skills. Thus, it is important that teachers be able to discern which can be included.

Likewise, teachers must consider which inclusive works can facilitate literacy and cultural inclusivity. Within this context, teachers must consider whether the works present a problematic colour-blind approach, engage in tokenism, or promote potentially harmful stereotypes.

Teacher Selection: The Traditional Canon

A key element of multiliteracies practices is the multimodal element. According to Yamagata (2018), the inclusion of images can help elucidate students' comprehension as they are able to use the images to link words and fill in the gaps in meaning that are the result of their limited vocabulary. It also allows them to build a semantic understanding of the words on the page. Moreover, the use of rhyme, especially simple and repetitive vocabulary words, can help students learn the phonetic rules of language (Read & Regan, 2018) while facilitating learning motivation (Meganathan, 2019). This combination of inputs helps to create neurological cross-talk, which can in turn reinforce cognitive connections (Klingberg et al., 2006). In this context, the works of Dr. Seuss offer perhaps the most comprehensive array of rhyme, repetition, and images. To maximize the benefits of these effective approaches while ensuring the content is culturally inclusive, teachers could exclude the homogenous representations of the dominant culture depicted in some of Dr. Seuss's works in favour of works that rely on anthropomorphized animals or imagined creatures. For example, instead of using Dr. Seuss's *Cat in the Hat*, which features a white male protagonist, teachers can choose books like *Horton Hears a Who* or *The Sneetches and Other Stories*. These works use anthropomorphized animals to discuss social issues, such as respecting minoritized voices and the fallacy of judging others

based on their appearances. Likewise, when drawing on traditional works, teachers could focus on those that do not promote gender biases. In this context, they might use books such as *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1999), *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Baum, 1900), and, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (Carroll, 1997), which each feature female protagonists. This opens the door to critical discussion on gender as well. Though there are potential biases in the traditional canon, teachers should critically assess which traditional works would be best suited to promote critical discussion on cultural inclusivity.

Such approaches conform to the pedagogical models outlined in multiliteracies practices, but they also require teachers to reflect on their own potential biases and consider the perspectives of others, namely their students. Mezirow (1997, 2000) notes that transformative learning requires ones to challenge their own preconceptions. For example, though one may have fond memories of the works of Dr. Seuss and see them as innocent and fun works, they should consider that others might not hold the same view. They might, for instance, ask themselves how students of colour feel when they are not represented in the works. They might likewise consider how children with varying abilities or those who are from a family with low SES relate or do not relate to the experiences depicted in the works that feature able-bodied and affluent characters. However, simply challenging one's own views is not enough: one must also engage in discourses with others. In this context, teachers would ideally have discourses with their students which can be incorporated as part of class discussion. The transformative process is cyclical in nature, though, so once the new paradigm has created new behavioural practice, the teacher must start the process over again.

Teacher Selection: The Culturally Inclusive Works

There is a multiplicity of factors teachers must consider when selecting texts with the aim of being culturally inclusive. Newkirk (2009) argues that, in order to facilitate students' love of reading, teachers must select text that connect with students. This might mean finding ways to relate classic texts to contemporary life or selecting more current text. Within this context, students can serve as a potential resource, but teachers must take initiative on their own as well. As Crisp et al. (2016) note, teachers must ensure that representations of minoritized students must not simply be examples of tokenism, nor should they promote negative stereotypes. As noted by Allen (1997), one of his student participants questioned why Black characters were always framed as being impoverished. Yang (2018) notes that teachers can call on colleagues to learn about more culturally representative works, or simply do research online. This is consistent with Newkirk (2009) as well, who argues that teachers themselves are an important resource and that schools should allow teachers the opportunity to build on each other's knowledge base. What is most central in this context is that teachers critically appraise work before including it, and even if they think a work is appropriate, they should be sensitive to student feedback that diverges from their own perspective. This likewise reflects one of Newkirk's (2009) views on education. He argues that teachers must be willing to learn from failure; thus, if students respond negatively to a given selection, teachers must be willing to accept that feedback and use it to enhance their pedagogical model.

Therefore, when teachers are considering which culturally inclusive works they are going to include, they should ask critical questions about the nature of representations

in the books. Based on the key issues raised by Newkirk (2009), Allen (1997), and Crisp et al. (2016) there are several questions that might prove effective to start with:

1. Does the work include characters from cultures represented among the students they teach?
2. Do the cultural identities represented play a role in the narrative?
3. Do the cultural identities represented in the works challenge or conform to stereotypes, either positive or negative?

The first question is relatively basic; however, this can be problematic as it is not always easy to identify some cultures. That said, there are cultures that are more visible, and these should be relatively easy to identify. Teachers should likewise question the role a cultural identity plays in a narrative if any. If the identity represented does not play a part in the narrative, then this may be an instance of tokenism. For example, if a student in a wheelchair does not encounter any barriers, then students may not be exposed to a meaningful depiction of students who experience accessibility barriers. Likewise, if a narrative, such as Keats's *The Snowy Day* portrays a character who is assumed to be Pan African but does not detail experiences unique to that culture's experiences, the work may need supplementary class exercises to encourage students to think critically about race. Teachers should also seek to identify whether stereotypes are being promoted. For example, Allen's (1997) students observed that the Pan African characters portrayed in books were often depicted as impoverished. This fosters negative stereotypes about this population. However, teachers must be cautious of all stereotypes, both negative and positive. For instance, if Asian characters are always depicted as being good at math, it may make students from this group feel that they are restricted to interests related to such

stereotypes while simultaneously affirming the belief that, just as some ‘races’ are good at math, others are inherently bad at it. There will always be potential readings that teachers have not considered, but so long as they make a sincere effort to critically analyze the representations of various cultures in multimodal picture books before introducing them to their classes, they can reduce problematic portrayals and set a positive tone. That said, it will be important to teachers to listen to and critically consider students perspectives when they introduce such works in their classrooms and allow such feedback to shape whether and how they present a given work to future students. This would require teachers to go through the same transformative process that they would go through when examining works from the traditional canon.

These questions are subjective to a degree; however, Derman-Sparks (2013) outlines a practical list of items that can be easily formatted into a checklist that teachers can use (Table 1). This checklist, the Picture Books Anti-Bias Checklists (ABCs), can be used as a guide. Teachers can identify whether the characters depicted in the book demonstrate potentially harmful stereotypes by highlighting or circling those stereotypes that are present. If the characters are absent altogether or simply used in an instance of tokenism, those options can be circled/highlighted as well. From there, teachers can determine whether the work will be conducive to fostering a culturally inclusive classroom that allow Ontario’s diverse ranges of student to see themselves reflected in the works while providing windows into other cultures, as per Bishop’s (1990) mirrors, windows, and sliding doors.

Table 1: Picture Books Anti-Bias Checklists (ABCs)

Groups	Stereotypes/Absence
Girls/Women	Submissive, emotional
Independent Girls	Masculine, invisible
Boys/Men	Strong, lead characters, athletic
Intellectual/Non-Athletic Boys/Men	Effeminate, passive, quiet, invisible
Boys/People of Colour	Accents, laziness, gang affiliation, ethnic garb/housing, partially nude, oversexed, substance use, unemployed, terrorists, invisible/tokenism
Girls/People of Colour	Subservient, domestics, oversexed, ethnic garb/housing, independent, single mothers, social assistance, passive, substance use, partially nude, invisible/tokenism
LGBTQ+ Peoples	Sexually promiscuous, substance use, predatory, invisible/tokenism
People with Disabilities	Dependent, submissive, pitied, invisible/tokenism
People with low SES Status	In need of assistance, lazy, dependent, substance use, invisible/ tokenism

Soliciting Student, Family, and Community Input

When creating a culturally responsive and inclusive learning environment, students, family, and communities play a central role. Moll, for example, notes that

teachers must reject the assumption that they are the authority and recognize that the views that “families and children bring to school” (Moll, as cited in Whitmore, 2018, p. 95). For example, Moll states that teachers must work to validate “children’s rich existing knowledge and used it to teach the unknown” (as cited in Whitmore, 2018, p. 95). This is consistent with Mills (2009) and the New London Group (1996), who note that multiliteracies approaches allow students to build on their pre-existing knowledge to form new knowledge. Recognizing that students are funds of knowledge and a unique cultural resource can help teachers increase students’ learning motivation and enhance learning outcomes (Moll, as cited in Whitmore, 2018, p. 93). Yang’s (2018) research offers similar findings as her participants reported that including elements of students’ cultural identity empowered students, filled them with a sense of pride, and promoted learning outcomes. Such approaches also conform to multiliteracies practices as they are student-centered approaches that address the cultural diversity (Mills, 2009). It likewise helps to fulfill the ‘mirrors’ component of Bishop’s (1990) mirrors, windows, and sliding doors as it empowers students from minoritized communities by recognizing the value of their experience. It also provides them with mirrors in the classroom, through which they can see their own identity. Utilizing students’ funds of knowledge is an effective strategy that can be realized through several methods, such as soliciting students input for class content (Yang, 2018), visiting families in their homes (Moll, as cited in Whitmore, 2018), or hosting community meetings where teachers and parents can exchange ideas (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Though soliciting input from students, families, and the broader community about culture is clearly advantageous, this process can prove challenging. However, there are

concrete strategies that teachers can use to achieve this goal. For example, they can have students complete a survey to identify what they would like to learn about in class and what elements of their culture they would like their classmates to learn about. They could send similar surveys home to their students' parents. Teachers might also try building a meaningful rapport with parents during parent-teacher interviews and invite them into class to share short lessons about their culture. For instance, students who use sign language and/or their parents might also teach students in the class alphabet and some core vocabulary words. Likewise, a Chinese parent might come visit the class to teach students some basic forms of Chinese calligraphy or offer a lesson on how to cook dumplings. Promoting heritage languages and cultures would be consistent with the goals outlined by both *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985) and Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2009). Moreover, Indigenous parents could attend read-alouds for books relating to Indigenous culture so as to help explain their cultural relevance, both historically and within a contemporary context. Such engagement could extend to community events as well. For instance, teachers might tie lesson content to special holidays, such as Cinco De Mayo, or events, such Carousal of Nations. These could be accompanied with a calendar that features local events so as to encourage students and their families to explore the other cultures in their community.

Cultural Barriers

With regard to cultural barriers, there are a number of things to consider, specifically with respect to the culture of the classroom. This in turn shapes both classroom activities and assessment.

Classroom Culture

With respect to cultural barriers, there are two elements that are perhaps most significant with regard to children from minoritized cultures: language and the classroom culture. With regard to language, it is critical for teachers to recognize the value of all languages present in Canadian society. With respect to classroom culture, teachers need to recognize the way they create space for engagement and assessment. This might mean pushing further away from teacher-centered models and adopting more student-centered and democratized approaches.

Language

Language is another central element to creating an inclusive classroom. Though it is certainly true that language barriers can inhibit student outcomes, this is not the only concern. Many students from diverse backgrounds often lose touch with their heritage languages because they do not see the value of them in Canadian society. For example, Chhuon (2011) found that children who immigrated at a young age or were born to immigrant parents favoured English over their heritage language and thus lose their heritage language proficiency. As a result, the heritage language of many immigrants is often lost over as few as two generations (Chhuon, 2011; Law, 2014). Such trends work in opposition to the goals of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1985), which seeks to “preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada” (sec. 3). Thus, to address both the need of English additional language learners and those whose heritage cultures are at risk of being lost, teachers must make an effort to preserve heritage languages while promoting English language proficiency.

One effective approach to this could be the inclusion of bilingual books. For example, teachers might include picture books that feature both English/Arabic words, or English/Vietnamese, or English and other languages, depending on which language groups are represented in their classrooms. Such books can facilitate language skills and literacy development and promote identity development among emergent bilingual children (Gallagher & Bataineh, 2019; Yeh et al., 2017; Wang, 2018). This can be beneficial in a number of ways. For those students who are developing their English proficiency, such books will allow them to build on their pre-existing knowledge of their native language to learn English. This is consistent with multiliteracies approaches, namely the practice of allowing students to experience the new through the known (New London Group, 1996, 2000). For those who are native English speakers but who are not proficient in their heritage language, this approach allows them to see the value of their heritage language and recognize the value of working toward maintaining it. Including these bilingual works is also critical to developing the cultural awareness of students from the dominant group and may spark their interest in learning languages outside of English.

In addition to including bilingual picture books, teachers might also include some cursory additional language learning opportunities by allowing students to share their knowledge of their respective heritage languages. For example, if a teacher has a Chinese student in the classroom, they might designate one day each week to learning a Chinese word and offer similar opportunities to students who are familiar with other languages. Students who use sign language might also be allowed to share their language with students. These micro language lessons have the potential to create and foster a

social inclusive space as the students are allowed to see the value of their heritage language because it is integrated into the class, and their peers will hopefully recognize these students' knowledge, giving them social currency among their peers. Such lessons could be turned into tactile activities, with students practicing sign or writing Chinese or Arabic characters. Teachers might also consider integrating this into show-and-tell activities where students can bring artifacts from their daily life that are culturally unique and introduce vocabulary words associated with the artifact in both English and their heritage language. By recognizing these other languages and creating a space in the classroom where they are valued, teachers can help change the linguistic culture of the classroom, thereby making it more inclusive.

Classroom Culture

Though Western academic systems have embraced more student-centered approaches, it cannot be denied that teachers are still the center of the classroom, especially given the increase in standardized testing practices. To create an inclusive space in diverse classrooms, teachers must use a more democratic approach. Given that Ontario's Ministry of Education (2009) has underscored the need to ensure that all "students, parents, and other community members of the school are welcomed and respected" in schools (p. 10), a democratic approach might include reaching out to students, parents, and appropriate community organizations to discuss what they would like to see in the classrooms or what they might be able to contribute. This might include, as previously noted, soliciting students for input as to which picture books should be included, but it would also require teachers to consider how to facilitate participation in an inclusive manner. For example, students who are shy or reluctant to participate for

cultural reasons should be afforded other means of participating. This might include journal entries, artwork, or potentially online engagement if possible. Teachers might also forward reading lists to parents to let them know what their children will be reading. It is critical in this context that teachers be receptive to the input from students and parents alike, and when students offer divergent feedback, teachers must recognize its merits. This requires thanking the student for their contributions, giving the comments careful consideration, and integrating them into the classroom in instances where it can contribute to inclusivity of the classroom. In this way, educators can develop a deep and meaningful understanding of their students' lives and identities so that they can "build upon the varied lived experiences of all students in order to bring the curriculum to life" (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5). Such an approach would require that teachers engage in the transformative processes outlined by Mezirow (1997, 2000) by challenging their own preconceptions and considering the perspectives of others—namely students and parents—and then integrate the new understanding derived from this process into action

Developing Classroom Activities

When creating lessons plans and classroom activities, it is important for teachers to design activities that promote the goals of a culturally inclusive classroom. For instance, one strategy could include critical group discussions led by students, which has the potential to promote critical thinking and engagement. Students might, for example, reexamine a text with a white, able-bodied, male protagonist and consider how the narrative would differ were the character to experience different barriers. Mills (2009) also suggests that role play can be advantageous as it can help students develop their gestural literacy. Therefore, teachers might also encourage students to role play scenarios

depicted in picture books to improve their gestural literacy and reframe the stories in different cultural contexts that are unique to the students in the class.

Moreover, students might be asked to put themselves in the place of the protagonist and detail how the narrative would change as a result of this exchange. The methods to these kinds of strategies are outlined by Allen (1997), who notes that he asked student participants to consider critical questions on race, class, and gender while reading books. Based on this, student participants created lists of what groups were included and excluded, and how each group was represented. This fostered critical thinking by encouraging students to ask ‘why’ questions as well (Allen, 1997). Ostrosky et al. (2013) recommend similar methods when discussing disabilities, such as reading activities that are paired with question and discussion sessions about story content. This approach conforms to multiliteracies approaches for two reasons. First, it utilizes the group work prescribed by Mills (2009). Second, it includes the cultural identities of students while encouraging them to draw on their pre-existing knowledge to answer questions using analytical thinking. As Cope and Kalantzis (2005) note, such practices can promote critical literacy. These strategies are especially useful when drawing on works from the traditional canon as it allows students to critically engage with and identify the biases in such works, and skill that is vital in the context of 21st century literacy.

In particular, students might be asked to examine the experiences depicted in multimodal picture books and compare and contrast them to their own experiences. For example, they might consider whether the compositions of the nuclear families often seen in multimodal picture books reflect their own. Such portrayals may cause children from single-parent families or those with same-sex parents to feel as if their life experiences

are somehow stigmatized. Generating questions such as these would help to normalize the diverse family structures that are present in Canadian society. Likewise, children from low SES families might be afforded an opportunity to discuss and critically examine the affluent lives often depicted in picture books. Students may feel apprehensive about sharing such details in front of the class, so in addition to creating space for this through class discussion or role play, they might also offer journaling exercises where students might feel more comfortable sharing personal details. When teachers notice these experiences in journal activities, they then have a springboard from which to include analogous situations in class discussions to help normalize such experiences.

Such approaches are advantageous for a number of reasons. Firstly, it addresses the systemic and individual barriers that might inhibit student engagement. If the canon of works that are available are limited, students are given the opportunity to address those limits and share their perspectives. This fosters healthy teacher-student relationships, which are critical to support the development of students' social maturation and emotional intelligence, while providing sense of safety (Gonzalez, 2016). This is especially important among students from minoritized cultures who may feel threatened as a member of a minoritized population. This also facilitates a component of the transformative learning process. Mezirow (1997, 2000) notes that learners, in this case teachers, must engage in discourses and seek to understand perspectives other than their own. These classroom discussions would provide teachers with an opportunity to gain these insights.

Assessment

With respect to assessment, teachers should consider how to develop both formative and summative assessment approaches to augment the multimodal picture books that they select for classroom instruction.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is important because, as Newkirk (2009) argues, establishing and monitoring short-term goals is essential to supporting student outcomes. As H. D. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) note, assessment is a constant process and effective teachers are always assessing students, even as they respond to questions or offer input. When promoting cultural inclusivity via multimodal picture books, it is important for teachers to adopt this approach so as to help students develop their visual, cultural, and critical literacy skills, in addition to their ability to read, write, and speak. This can be achieved through a number of approaches. For example, Dixson and Worrell (2016) note that formative assessment can be both spontaneous or planned; however, its central function is to help students improve by providing constructive feedback. With respect to simple reading skills, they suggest that teachers can use tools such as flashcards and have students read words out loud while offering feedback on pronunciation. Within the context of multimodal picture books, teachers might use the books themselves in place of flash cards and ask students to read the words on the page. For example, Dr. Seuss's *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* and *Green Eggs and Ham* would prove to be ideal options. None of them have human characters, which therefore means they are generally free of any markers that would promote one ethnicity or culture over another; however, they have a number of simple vocabulary words. This

is consistent with multiliteracies as the picture books typically feature images that correlate with the words on the page. This real-time feedback creates an opportunity for low-stakes assessment, which allows students to engage and learn without the pressure of a high-stakes test. This is consistent with Allen (1997), who simply had students discuss and code the books they read. If students do not observe a detail that was important, the instructor can guide them by asking leading questions, which will still allow teachers the opportunity to observe students' critical thinking skills. Such approaches can also help teachers stay focused on immediate goals.

Thus, when using multimodal picture books, teachers should consider how supplementary tools and activities to engage in formative assessment. For example, after reading Dr. Seuss's *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* (1960) or *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960), teachers might use flash cards that feature certain colours, animals, and objects to determine whether or not students are able to identify new vocabulary words. They might also create the space for classroom discussions, during which teachers can observe whether students were able to identify important details in the works that were read in class by asking open-ended or direct questions. For example, after reading *The Giving Tree* (Silverstein, 1962), the teacher might ask what the tree represents to the students or how the students felt about the tree. These could help foster and develop critical thinking skills and allow the teacher to assess whether students were developing their ability to think abstractly. Similar questions can be applied to questions about constructs of gender upon a reading of Kilodavis's (2009). *My Princess Boy* or questions about how we construct race upon reading Keats's (1962) *The Snowy Day*. Though Keats takes a colour-blind approach to his work in that he does not single out issues pertaining

to race, teachings can bring a more nuanced reading to the class and use it to assess whether students are able to employ critical thinking to draw parallels with their own experiences and the experiences of people from other racialized groups. This would be consistent with Bishop's mirror and windows because it allows Pan African students to see themselves reflected in the content and provides children from other groups with a window into the experiences of their peers.

Summative Assessment

In an education context, Mousavi (2002) defines assessment as a mode of appraising a students' level of a given skill, and it is a perpetual process that involves a number of pedagogical approaches. Summative assessment is one mode of assessment that Dixson and Worrell (2016) observe is typically utilized to collect and analyze data. Because critical and cultural literacy skills are a little less objective than some skills, or at least more difficult to assess, pairing summative assessment with multimodal picture books can be difficult. However, there are some options. Teachers could, for example, offer simple comprehension questions, provide students with short-answer tests, or give students a list of vocabulary words to read. To incorporate multiliteracies approaches into the assessment, teachers could use matching questions where students are asked to pair a word with a corresponding image. That said, it would be difficult to measure cultural literacy or awareness in the same way. An obvious option would be to ask students to identify certain cultures in a text; however, that could be counterproductive as it promotes 'othering' groups. Within the context of multimodal picture books, it seems that summative assessment is best suited to measure comprehension, reading, and pronunciation skills almost exclusively. However, as Newkirk (2009) notes, focusing on

long-term achievements can sometimes obfuscate the purpose of the lesson; therefore, teachers should focus on short-term goals.

Future Research

Though the potential merits of a number of these approaches may seem obvious, and though they seem sensible, it is difficult to anticipate how they will be received in practice. Therefore, it is critical that future research investigate the effectiveness of such approaches and how they might be improved. In this regard, it is critical to develop research approaches that explore the institutional/structural, individual/personal, and cultural barriers.

Institutional/Structural

The institutional barriers identified in the literature review relate to three key elements: curriculum, training, and hiring practices.

Curriculum

With respect to curriculum, the most significant barrier may be the books that are made available to teachers. To ensure these works are culturally inclusive, future research may seek to complete a thorough survey of the books that are used and the content within these books. For example, a mixed method study could be done that involves a quantitative survey and a review of children's picture books. The first component of the study might include a quantitative survey to be completed by teachers in ECE and junior/primary education to see what multimodal picture books the teachers typically include in the classroom. Based on this, the second component might review the books with a measure that assesses whether the works offer inclusive portrayals of various

cultures, if they lack meaningfully diverse representations, or if they promote potentially harmful stereotypes. The measure used could be akin to that used by Crisp et al. (2016) or include the elements outlined by Derman-Sparks (2013). In this context, it would also be important to consider authorship. A similar review of works could be done with a broader spectrum of books that are available through the Ministry to determine which of those available are the most conducive to promoting culturally inclusive classroom engagement. This follows a sequential mixed-method model outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), which requires instrument build—in this case to be used to assess the multimodal picture books—and ultimately inform education policy.

Training

With respect to training, it seems that qualitative studies would be ideal and that such approaches might include both pre-test/post-test models, as well as longitudinal studies. To understand the potential merits of giving training programs or workshops, research might focus on comparing and contrasting teachers views on inclusivity before and after training. Whether with respect to pre-service or in-service teachers, though who undergo training could complete a survey before and following training to measure how or if training challenges their preconceptions. As noted by Salkind (2010), this model of research typically seeks to determine if a given approach achieves a desired outcome; however, the ultimate outcome is a change in classroom. Therefore, such an approach might best be paired with a longitudinal approach. Longitudinal studies can be used to observe and develop insights into the behaviors and thoughts of participants, which is common in sociological and education research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Researchers might follow up with teachers in the months and even years following

training to gain a deeper understanding of how and whether training on inclusive approaches did in fact shape their pedagogical practice. This could help to identify barriers teachers have encountered and solutions that they have employed. This might include surveys and/or in-class observations.

Hiring

With regard to understanding hiring practices and how they can be modified to recognize the unique qualifications of teacher candidates from diverse backgrounds, future research might include qualitative research and policy analyses. The qualitative research might include interviews with both human resource employees who conduct interviews and teacher candidates from diverse cultures in order to gain their insights. This research could serve two functions. First, it could develop a better understanding of the thought processes and priorities of those conducting interviews. Second, it could help identify whether candidates felt there were any culturally prejudicial components to the process and whether they had an opportunity to highlight the unique qualifications they had to offer that may be shaped by their cultural experiences. There is, of course, the potential that the self-reported data may not be as complete as one would hope. For example, it would be highly doubtful that a participant would be willing admit to discriminating against a specific group of people. Thus, this research could be paired with a policy analysis that examines the criteria that school boards and human resource departments use to assess teacher candidates. This could help to identify if the processes include questions that recognize the merits of unique cultural experiences and whether there are biases.

Individual/Personal

In addition to the pre-test/post-test model and longitudinal approaches used to assess training and its application in process, future research might also use narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is typically used to develop an understanding of the meaning that participants create based on their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Unlike conventional qualitative research that looks at one point in time, or longitudinal research that looks at a specific variable, narrative inquiries explores phenomena by examining participants' past, present, and future and frames their life experiences in their physical and social world (Xu & Connelly, 2009). Because narrative inquiry typically involves multiple streams of data collection—including interviews, artifacts, observation, and journals—and because it takes place over a period of time, it allows researchers to develop a deep rapport with participants, which can lead to more reliable and in-depth data (Xu & Connelly, 2009). This could give future researchers, educators, and administrators a clearer sense of nuances associated with implementing culturally inclusive practices in the classroom.

Cultural

The recommendations relating to culture are centered around including bilingual picture books and micro language lessons, which are aimed to promote literacy skills, preserve heritage languages, and foster a love of language among all students. To measure the potential success of these approaches, future research might include quasi-experimental research and longitudinal studies. First, to determine whether the inclusion of bilingual picture books and micro language lessons in additional languages does indeed promote literacy development in both languages, researchers might compare and

contrast the literacy test scores at schools who include such approaches with those that do not. This might use a pre-test/post-test model from the start of the school year to the end of the school year or simply draw on test results from EQAO exams. To determine if such approaches promoted the maintenance of heritage languages or fostered an interest in additional language learning among students, longitudinal studies might revisit students from both schools to determine if the students who were exposed to bilingual picture books and micro language lessons were more or less likely to maintain their heritage language or learn an additional language than students whose classrooms did not feature such initiatives.

Summary

Based on a review of the findings, it is clear that students whose cultural identity does not conform to that of the dominant culture may be experiencing barriers at three levels: institutional/structural, individual/personal, and cultural. To address these, school boards must address both the limitations in curriculum, training, and hiring practice. Making proactive changes to each can help ensure that the works students have access to reflects the diversity of the student body while ensuring that teachers understand the importance of culturally inclusive practices and are themselves culturally diverse and reflective of the student body. With respect to the individual/personal barriers, teachers must engage in transformative learning practices and re-center the classroom so that the students' perspectives become central. This means reflecting on the multimodal picture books that they have traditionally taught in class and assessing new books that they include. The aim of such assessment should be focused on the multimodal elements of the works that can promote multiliteracies development and cultural elements. To this

end, teachers must also re-examine classroom activities and assessment to ensure they help develop the multiple modes of literacy that students will need to navigate the increasingly globalized and technological world. To address cultural barriers, teachers must make an effort to reach out to students, parents, and the broader community to create a space for all cultures in the classroom. It is also critical to challenge language as a dominating cultural phenomenon by including bilingual picture books and even potentially offering micro additional language lessons and even allowing students to direct these. Though not comprehensive, these approaches and analogous teaching practices have the potential to create a more inclusive space for students by providing reflections of each student, windows into other cultures, and an opportunity to exchange cultural ideas and learn how to empathize with others. This, as Bishop (1990) notes, is critical to foster the success of all students.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Though Canada often likes to pride itself on being progressive and a beacon of human rights, it is vital that we not pat ourselves on back before our work is complete. The need for true reflect was underscored on June 2nd of 2020, when Ontario's Premier Doug Ford, who has the final say on matters of education, felt confident enough to say that Canada does not have "systemic, deep roots" of racism. This after shutting down an Indigenous curriculum (M. Crawley, 2018) that promoted Indigenous culture, cancelling a sex education curriculum (M. Crawley, 2019) that sought to destigmatize members of the LGBTQ+ community, and cutting nearly a quarter of a billion dollars in funding to special education (Tasker, 2019). Such comments utterly ignore the impact of Canada's tragic history with residential schools and the overtly genocidal intent of the policies behind those schools. They likewise ignore the barriers that racialized students and immigrant and refugee students encounter. Though there has been progress, the province currently appears to be backsliding with respect to its commitment to equitable education. There are barriers in every classroom, and they may very well be increasing.

As a teacher and former student who is a member of a minoritized culture, my views on teaching has been shaped by the experiences that I have had, and I understand the importance of recognizing barriers. It is for this reason that making my classrooms inclusive to all students is a defining element of my pedagogical model; however, I also know that regardless of how sincere my efforts might be, I will not always be able to anticipate the needs of each student or the barriers that they will encounter in the classroom. The current research is an exploratory work that seeks to identify the potential

barriers that students face and develop practices and recommendations for future research that will help to support Ontario's increasingly diverse student body.

Canada is host to 6.6 million people who speak a language in addition to the nation's two official languages (Statistics Canada, 2018-a). That means that one in five Canadians speak a language other than English or French, and this number is growing (Statistics Canada, 2018-a). Canada's multicultural policy, which was legislated through *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985), aims to provide all Canadians—irrespective of culture or place of origin—with the opportunity to integrate into Canadian society politically, culturally, and economically. The “full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins” (*Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, 1985, sec. 3). However, this cannot be achieved when the multimodal picture books and educators who teach them do not reflect the diversity of the students they support.

Current literature demonstrates that there are a number of limitations to the traditional canon of multimodal picture books that teachers have traditionally drawn on, even though these books often feature effective multimodal components that promote literacy development. It is also clear that, though there are many works that offer a diverse presentation of characters, not all books that feature diverse cultures do so in a manner that is conducive to a meaningfully inclusive classroom. Therefore, all teachers must learn how to discern whether the books they bring into the class and the activities and assessments that compliment them foster inclusivity. This means that teachers must not only identify populations that are minoritized based on perceived race, ethnicity, culture, or religion but also other social markers, such as ability, gender, sexual identity, and SES. This is no easy process for several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that

teachers must be hyperaware of their own personal cultural biases. Thus, to succeed, teachers need support in this process, which may be achieved by creating culturally responsive pre-service courses that are mandated in all Bachelor of Education programs, as well as continued, professional development opportunities.

The current lack of such support tools speaks to the systemic and structural barriers that are currently in place. Since there are so many complex and nuanced intersecting issues at play, it is vital that systemic and institutional barriers be addressed. This not only includes creating the aforementioned pre-service teacher programs and continued education opportunities but also transforming the curriculum to ensure that the books teachers have available in their classrooms will offer students a mirror in which they can see themselves, windows through which they can see and learn about other cultures, and sliding doors that allow students to exchange ideas and empathize with peers from other cultures (Bishop, 1990). It also means helping to establish in-class activities that do not focus exclusively on traditional literacy skills—such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking—but cultural and information literacy. This should be reflected in assessment models as well, which themselves should not be predicated on standardized tests, which are inherently culturally biased.

As a teacher and former student from a minoritized culture, I understand why it is so critical that all students see their cultures recognized and valued in the classroom. However, I am an underwhelming minority in a profession where 90% of teachers are members of the dominant culture (Turner, 2014). Moreover, the task of creating a culturally inclusive education environment is a heavy burden. It involves reaching out to students, parents/guardians, and community leaders. This is a responsibility that cannot

be carried by the 10% of teachers from minoritized cultures. All teachers must work in concert to achieve this goal. Because Ontario's teachers overwhelmingly come from the dominant culture, they are less likely to have direct personal experiences that underscore the urgency for creating a culturally inclusive learning environment. Therefore, it is critical that all teachers be instructed on the importance of inclusivity, be given the tools and opportunity to effectively work toward building an inclusive classroom. In this context, it is especially critical that teachers not only draw on multiliteracies practices but also engage in a continuous cycle of self-reflect using Mezirow's (1997, 2000) transformative learning practices.

This is a change that must start simultaneously from the top down and the bottom up. Administrators must work with principals, teachers, parents, and community leaders. Teachers must lean on their colleagues and draw on what Moll refers to as the funds of knowledge (as cited in Whitmore, 2018) that their students and students' parent offer. Only when working collaboratively and by listening to each other can teachers and schools ensure that they are able to support the equity goals outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education and provide the "full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins" promised by the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*, (1985, sec. 3) over 30 years ago. If Ontario's schools are going to overcome the deep roots of systemic exclusion in its school systems and provide equitable support to all students, it is critical that policymakers, administrators, principals, teachers, students, parents, and community leaders work in unison.

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