Reading an Other People's Story

American Teacher Candidates Interpreting a Children's Story from Japan

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Introduction

It has become increasingly apparent that incorporating international stories into the classroom is beneficial for young students. The stories provide vicarious experiences from different countries that help nurture a more tolerant and accepting generation of students. Through reading these stories students gain empathy and understanding for other cultures.

International stories reflecting universal themes and experiences, such as the life cycle, fear, conflicts, and struggles, in particular, provide students with an opportunity to "discover similarities [between other cultures] and their own. Students begin to look beyond the differences and take a step toward appreciating the cultural connectedness of all humanity" (Landt, 2006, p. 692).

However, simply incorporating these texts into the classroom may not produce the level of cultural acceptance and understanding many teachers want their students to obtain. International literature necessarily involves cultural differences "ranging from illustration styles to how the various literary elements of the text is [*sic*] developed" (Yokota & Teale, 2017, p. 630). It is these cultural differences that present the primary value for students, as "they offer outside perspectives not available through the literature of their own country" (Yokota & Teale, 2017, p. 630).

However, readers may find these differences emotionally and/or intellectually inaccessible, particularly when they do not coincide with their previous background knowledge, causing them to misinterpret the moral or value of the stories. Worse, they may reject the stories when the perceived differences are overwhelmingly unfamiliar.

Soter (1997) called this type of rejection "aesthetic restriction," where readers "dismiss the work out of hand because of elements in the text that the reader finds unacceptable" (pp. 217–218). Rice (2005) reported that sixth graders displayed aesthetic restriction when they read Gary Soto's short stories based in Mexican-American *barrios* because the socioeconomic status and cultures presented in the stories were different from those of the students.

Even students in higher education might conclude that texts are unacceptable when the students cannot make personal connections with the events, characters, and/or illustrations included in the story. When the first author introduced a well-read children's story from Japan called *Faithful Elephants* in a course she taught—a story of elephants that were starved to death during World War II due to a lack of resources available in Japan throughout this time period—all the teacher candidates in the course felt that the story was nothing but horrible and bluntly rejected it (Amos, 2018). They could not identify with the protagonists' actions and feelings.

When aesthetic restriction occurs, readers are unable to connect themselves to the cultures depicted in the stories. Freeman and Lehman (2001) underlined this danger: "The clash of values between the culture of the book and the reader's culture may cause that reader to reject or react negatively to a literary work that may have nothing to do with the book's quality as literature" (p. 27). This directly conflicts with the primary goal of reading international literature, which is "to value the perspectives, information, and insights that we would not have experienced without it" (Yokota & Teale, 2017, p. 630).

A Needed Exploration

Much of the research on the use of multicultural/international literature has focused on the availability of texts pertaining to a given culture, authorial perspectives, the authenticity of cultural representation in texts, and the literary quality of texts (Rice, 2005). In comparison, only a few studies focused on the nature of student responses to multicultural/international literature and the effects of instructional strategies in teaching such literature (e.g., Louie, 2005, 2006; Rice, 2005; Thein, Beach, & Parks, 2007).

Among these few studies, studies that specifically investigated teacher candidates' responses to these texts are even fewer (e.g., Amos, 2018; Durriyah, 2018; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013; Macaluso, 2015). A critical investigation

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on how effective instructions of international literature enhance cultural acceptance and understanding is needed (Bishop, 1997; de Bruijn, 2017).

A majority of teachers and teacher candidates in the United States are White and "come into teacher preparation programs with culturally insular perspectives and do not experience the cognitive dissonance necessary to reexamine their cultural beliefs" (Brindley & Laframboise, 2002, p. 405). Their lack of experiences with diverse perspectives could make them vulnerable to aesthetic restriction. They may dismiss the literatures that could provide K–12 students with a reality that people in other cultures may have different perspectives but those perspectives are equally important to their own (Amos, 2016).

To materialize the assumed benefits of using international literature in classrooms, it is essential that teacher candidates develop skills to appropriately interpret stories that originate from countries in which the populations speak different languages, believe in different religions, and hold different values. Otherwise, they will miss the opportunity to engage young minds in the discourse of diversity (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014).

In the current analysis, we reenact a scene where the second author, Tiffany (White female), carefully guided the teacher candidates in critical discussions of *Gon, the Little Fox*, a well-known children's story in Japan, as part of a multicultural/international literature course.

Theoretical Framework: Perspective Taking

We interpret stories based on our "identity kits" (Gee, 1996) constructed from our identities, such as race, class, and gender. When we read, we interpret, and our interpretations are socially constructed (Lemke, 1995). This makes our interpretations inherently subjective. Walker (2018) contended that it is readers who decide whether the text resonates, is believable, and connects to their imaginations, experiences, and views. In the end, readers' subjectivity is what creates the interpretation from what is presented (Walker, 2018).

A criticism of this reader-centered approach to literacy instruction lies in the fact that readers' subjective responses can be privileged when they ignore the sociocultural nature of their responses (Rice, 2005). Readers' subjective responses may not be an accurate reflection of what authors intended them to be. This mismatch becomes particularly significant when readers are not familiar with the stories' authentic representations of differences, whether those differences are related to cultures, religions, gender, or other factors. This is when aesthetic restriction occurs. Readers could accept or reject the text based on the subjectivities they bring to it. Or they could agree with the author while making biased, misrepresented, and stereotyped interpretations (Walker, 2018).

Therefore international literature instruction "must be about changing students' perspectives and helping students better understand their lives and the lives of those around them" (Thein et al., 2007, p. 54). To accomplish this, perspective taking—"the process of mind-reading, of trying to understand someone different from ourselves" (Macaluso, 2015, p. 2)—should be practiced in class. According to Scotland (1969), who pioneered research on empathy, perspective taking contains two modalities: "What is the target feeling in this moment? (imagined other) and how would I feel if I were the target in this moment? (imagined self)."

Although both may produce empathic concern, the two modalities carry different emotional consequences. The "imagined other" perspective stimulates other-oriented emotional responses and relatively pure empathic emotion, while the "imagined self" perspective may evoke a more complex mix of other-oriented empathy and self-oriented personal distress, which has been found to evoke egoistic motivation to relieve one's own distress (Batson, Ahmad, Lishner, & Tsang, 2002; Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997).

In the "imagined self" perspective, more direct feelings of discomfort and distress could be evoked by witnessing the state of the other. On the other hand, the "imagined other" perspective most likely produces nonegoistic empathic responses because it requires that "the observer possess the capacity to surrender his or her own personal opinion, philosophies, beliefs, and points of view to embrace those of the target" (Warren, 2014, p. 397). However, Batson et al. (1997) contended that when responding to a situation that is relatively unfamiliar and in which the other's feelings are not obvious, the "imagined self" perspective may become an important source of information about how the other feels, thus being a stepping-stone to empathy.

The ultimate purpose of perspective taking is not to change *what* readers believe. Rather, it is to have readers develop the capability to engage in and value perspective taking itself and understand "how their beliefs and values are formed and why other people think differently" (Thein et al., 2007, p. 55). Yokota and Teale (2017) summarized the process of perspective taking this way: "It's about rethinking the lens through which you select, read, and critique, and discuss books outside of what you know" (p. 633).

Rice (2005) recommended two steps to accomplish this. First, students should be given an opportunity to discuss these stories in peer-led discussion groups. This enables teachers to understand students' current positioning as reflected in their interpretations. Second, Rice asserted that teachers need to guide students to a deeper level of interpretation and provide opportunities to clarify misinterpretations.

For example, teachers can ask students to record their responses from both their outsider perspectives and the characters' insider perspectives (Soter, 1999) and foster clarifying discussions and redirect student responses (Maloch, 2002). To build the "right" types of situated meanings, experiences must be scaffolded by a more capable other (Gee, 2000; Yokota & Teale, 2017). Since our cultural identities, which involve our personal beliefs and attitudes toward particular groups, are unstable and always shifting (Ferdman, 1991), guided dialogue can make a difference in students' development of new analyses of the stories they read in and outside of class.

Background Information

Participants

Fifteen White female teacher candidates participated in the discussions of *Gon, the Little Fox* in a required literacy course whose focus was how to effectively use multicultural/international

children's literature in a teacher education program at Winforth University. Winforth University (a pseudonym) is predominantly White and located in a rural area in the United States.

In the previous two weeks, the teacher candidates had watched Disney's *Mulan*, a well-loved tale among the Chinese people, and read *Faithful Elephants*, a well-known children's story from Japan. Both times, the teacher candidates were encouraged to examine their own perspectives along with interpreting the stories from alternative perspectives.

In the consideration of *Mulan*, they discussed how Disney's movie version culturally appropriated the original storyline. For example, the teacher candidates debated whether some scenes in the movie were actually more aligned with Western customs than Chinese customs: the Emperor bowing to an ordinary female citizen and an unmarried female inviting a male to dinner without her parents' consent.

While discussing *Faithful Elephants*, the teacher candidates were given one question after another that went beyond factual information and challenged them to justify the zookeepers' actions in the attempt to see the world through the characters' perspectives (Louie, 2006). By the third week, when they were required to read *Gon, the Little Fox*, the importance of perspective taking was cognitively understood by the teacher candidates, but it was still an underdeveloped skill. All the teacher candidates' names used in this article are pseudonyms.

Synopsis of the Story

Gon, the Little Fox by Nankichi Niimi (2015) is a story from Japan. It received the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY) Outstanding International Book award in 2016.

The story begins when a mischievous and lonely fox without parents, Gon, releases all of the eels that a fisherman, Hyoju, had caught one day. Instead of getting angry and chasing after Gon, Hyoju begins to cry. He had been catching eels to help his sick mother, since eating eels is associated with regaining one's strength in Japan. A few days later, Gon finds out that Hyoju's mother had died. Gon realized that his actions of releasing the eels could have contributed to Hyoju's mother dying and Hyoju ending up being left alone, just like him.

Feeling immense remorse and simultaneously feeling empathetic about his loss and loneliness, Gon began collecting chestnuts and mushrooms every day to leave outside the front door of Hyoju's house, in the hope of compensating for the pain that Gon had inflicted upon Hyoju.

One day, Hyoju caught Gon coming toward the house. He remembered that Gon had been the one to release the eels. Outraged by seeing the ill-behaved fox, Hyoju assumed that Gon had come to trick him again. Hyoju raised his gun and fired a shot. It hit Gon in the leg. All Hyoju saw afterward was chestnuts and mushrooms scattered around on the floor alongside Gon. Hyoju immediately understood the situation. It was Gon who left the food for him every day. Gon's death is not presented by the word "death" in the text. Rather, it is implied by a smoke hovering over Gon, who lies still on the floor.

Gon, the Little Fox is often adopted in a school textbook and read to early-elementary children in Japan. It is about the fragility of human behaviors and their consequences. In the U.S., however, many readers pay the most attention to Gon's death because it is uncommon for American children's literature to include death in a story. Even when death and injury are present in American children's literature, as is the case in stories such as *Bambi* and *Cinderella*, the death or injury is usually implied rather than graphically displayed like the one in *Gon, the Little Fox.*

Perspective Taking in Action

This section reenacts a 60-minute classroom scene where the second author, Tiffany, carefully guided the teacher candidates to practice perspective taking in a literacy course.

Finding Discomfort in the "Imagine Self" Perspective

Tiffany began her lesson by asking the teacher candidates about a summary of *Gon, the Little Fox*. They were able to summarize the events of the story in a very linear, organized fashion, as is the custom in Western cultures. Their perfect summary highlights that the teacher candidates had had a factual comprehension of the story. However, Tiffany was careful: "Being able to summarize a story does not guarantee the 'right' interpretations."

After the events of the story were sufficiently explained and agreed upon by everyone, Tiffany simply asked, "What are your initial thoughts of this story?" At first no one spoke. Instead, a nervous tension filled the air. No one wanted to be the first to comment on the story. "To them, the story must be too controversial," Tiffany understood. After a long silence, Tiffany finally posted the questions below on the board and directed the teacher candidates' thoughts to some of the most significant elements of the story:

- What was the moral of the story?
- Did you connect with either of the characters?
- Was Gon justified in his actions? What about Hyoju?
- What would you have done differently if you were Gon? If you were Hyoju?

Given direct questions to grasp on to, the teacher candidates slowly began to open up. However, their comments were mostly fixated on Gon's death. At this stage, none of the teacher candidates expressed any connection to either of the protagonists. The material seemed so different from any of their own lives. Therefore it was difficult to imagine how they would feel if they had been a mischievous fox or a murderous, emotional fisherman. In other words, the teacher candidates lacked even the "imagine self" perspective at this time.

Tiffany knew that it is crucial that readers make connections to the story to begin building a bridge between their own culture and the culture of the story (Louie, 2006). In her attempt to introduce the "imagine self" perspective, Tiffany wanted the teacher candidates to have vicarious experiences with the protagonists in the story.

Because the story was from a foreign country to which the teacher candidates had never been and with which they were not so familiar, although they had studied two children's stories from the region for the previous two weeks, Tiffany focused on having the teacher candidates take the "imagine self"

perspective so that they would gather necessary information to imagine how the protagonists were feeling (Batson et al., 1997).

She posed the questions: "Has anyone ever made a decision that negatively impacted a friend or a sibling? Has anyone been negatively impacted by something that a friend or family member has done to you?" To these questions, she quickly received rigorous head nodding. Apparently, many teacher candidates had been in a similar situation to the two protagonists in the story.

Encouraged by the response, Tiffany pressed on to give an example from her own life that mirrored the character dynamics in the story. She hoped that the teacher candidates would continue to find similarities between themselves and the two protagonists. Tiffany shared,

> Growing up, I had two brothers. My older brother loved to steal the things I was playing with and would often snatch toys right out of my hands so that I would get mad and chase him around the house. When my mother would hear us shouting at each other and running around like crazy, we would both get into trouble.

Tiffany paused to let the story sink in. "Not exactly fair, was it? But, I'm sure that any person in this room who has a sibling understands my feeling," she spoke softly. Slow head nodding was the response.

Tiffany continued:

> I'm also certain that every person in this room has been the individual to take something from someone else, whether that be a toy from a sibling, an opportunity from a friend, or an eel from a fisherman. We have all been in situations where we have behaved like Gon or Hyoju.

Little by little, Tiffany could see connections being made in the teacher candidates' minds. However, Tiffany witnessed their scrunched faces of distaste at the thought of being connected to this story. Tiffany realized that aesthetic restriction had occurred among the teacher candidates.

Despite any connections that may have been established, many teacher candidates still expressed outrage at a gun and a bloody shooting scene within the story. The result of their imagining how they would feel in the protagonists' place was negative.

In other words, the "imagine self" perspective evoked emotional discomfort and yielded a self-oriented aversive response (Batson et al., 2002) in which the teacher candidates would rather not discuss the story at all. Indeed, the majority of the teacher candidates found the story to be questionable, if not entirely inappropriate to incorporate into a classroom.

The consensus was that young children should not be exposed to such material at a young age. Many expressed concerns and reservations about having to be the ones to teach their students about death and killing. As was predicted, death was an inhibiting factor. Jessica admitted, "When Gon is shot, there is a pool of blood beneath him. My future students would be upset by this depiction."

In response, Tiffany reminded them,

> Deer hunting season opened last weekend. In rural areas, such as where we live, children will be confronted with images similar to those presented in the story, whether it be in person or online when family members post pictures of their kills.

Vittrup (2016) concluded that "without explicit conversations . . . children are more susceptible to influences from other sources, such as peers and the media" (p. 37). Tiffany added,

> Students will be exposed to many difficult images, perspectives, and life lessons outside of the classroom. It's important that teachers prepare their students with the skills necessary to handle those misgivings or shocking life events while in a safe place. The classroom should be a safe environment where tough conversations, such as death, can be talked about in a sensible, empathetic, and accepting way so that students feel supported, as well as understand more about the world and people around them.

Nevertheless, the teacher candidates' faces suggested that they disliked Tiffany's effort to connect their lives to the unfamiliar and foreign story from Japan that involved death and stirred emotional discomfort.

Emergence of the "Imagine Other" Perspective

Realizing that the teacher candidates adhered to their own negative responses in the attempt to escape from their feelings of discomfort, Tiffany decided to launch another attempt. She split the class in half randomly. One group would look at the story through a lens in which they would be expected to assess various aspects of the story from their own conventional perspectives. The other group would assess the story through an alternative lens. This group would be challenged to discover the values of the story no matter how much they were against the story.

At first, the alternative lens group was clearly intimidated when it came to completing their task. Tiffany overheard a member whispering to another, "How could we possibly find values in this story?" Both groups were given the same list of questions to answer about the story in their two separate groups. Tiffany told the teacher candidates that they would be given about 7–10 minutes to discuss the list of questions about *Gon, the Little Fox* in their prospective groups before having an opportunity to share what their groups had come up with.

The questions that the groups were asked to answer included the following:

- Is it appropriate for students to be read a story about death? Will it affect the students positively or negatively? How so?
- What is the purpose of introducing this story into the classroom? Is there one?
- Should teachers be allowed to rewrite or alter a story to make it better fit the classroom norm?
- Can a main character die in a story? Why or why not?
- Should every story read in a classroom have a happy ending? Explain your thinking.

During the activity period, Tiffany roamed around the classroom to keep track of the two groups' responses to the questions and to get a general feel for how well the teacher candidates were fulfilling the roles they had been given. Every time she floated to the side of the

room that housed those taking the conventional lens approach, Tiffany caught them making some negative comment about the story. Voices were slightly raised. Nancy had her fists clenched. Everyone's face was formed into an unhappy or uncomfortable expression throughout the activity. At one point, Nancy declared with an air of finality, "The book was disturbing and completely inappropriate for children!" After this declaration, many of her group members nodded in agreement.

Jessica, for example, stated that she, as a teacher, was "uncomfortable reading the book," so, she reasoned, "Why would I ever read something to my students that I was uncomfortable reading myself?" This is not an uncommon theme when it comes to reading multicultural/international literature. Vittrup (2016), for instance, found that many teachers in her study chose not to breech the complicated discussions that are often associated with multicultural/international literature because "they are simply uncomfortable with the topic and do not know how to approach it" (p. 39).

The first author, observing the teacher candidates silently throughout the activity, also noticed the heated discussion in this group. Their reactions did not seem to be born from a given role. Rather, the responses were their genuine reservations about teaching this particular story to young children.

On the other side of the classroom was the group which was attempting to approach the story using an alternative lens. The group members stood relaxed in a circle, talking quietly about the story. The first few times when Tiffany had walked past this group, they had been smiling and laughing, clearly less worked-up than their counterparts. At the beginning of the discussion period, Tiffany caught this group contemplating how to go about seeing *Gon, the Little Fox* from alternative perspectives.

Suddenly, Amy looked around and softly asked the rest of her group with timidity, "What if the story isn't about the death at all?" For a moment, the rest of the group simply stared at her. Sally finally broke the silence and asked what everyone in the group must have been thinking: "What do you mean?" Looking at the other members of her group, Amy explained,

> I was trying to imagine how Gon and Hyoju were really feeling instead of how I would feel if I were them. If I were them, I would feel awful. That's all. So, instead, I decided to think how Gon and Hyoju felt. I was going through their emotions such as frustration, sadness, anger, and despair. Then, all of sudden, it dawned on me. I don't think the moral of the story has anything to do with Gon's death. But with making choices that cause people to feel remorse, such as the actions of Gon and Hyoju.

The group began chatting excitedly about the story with this new insight in mind and quickly made their way through each of the discussion questions. They conversed about how remorse was a general theme throughout the story: Gon and Hyoju displayed this emotion in separate parts of the tale. The group applied this theme to their own lives.

They went on to reason that the author had written the book to convey an important message to the reader rather than exposing the reader to death and blood, as was the common assumption at the beginning of the lesson. By providing her students with the opportunity to discover the values within the story they had originally found disliking, Tiffany created an environment in which the teacher candidates in the alternative lens group not only stumbled upon the "imagine other" perspective but eventually adopted it once the perspective was discovered.

In the time given, Mandy expressed her opinion: "I believe we tend to get misled by the death and violence in the story and actually miss out on the benefits that the tale could have if used correctly in their classrooms." Sally pondered, "Why do Japanese people want to read this story to their children? It must be because there is a powerful moral we had missed upon first reading the story."

Finally, Laura concluded, "Elementary-age children, though young, could not only handle reading the story, but also find the story to be enriching, relatable, and valuable within their own lives." Evidently, by adopting the "imagine other" perspective in perspective taking, these teacher candidates were able to find different ways of interpreting the story.

The alternative lens group was actually the first of the two groups to finish discussing all of the questions that Tiffany had presented, despite the fact they were the ones who needed to approach the story differently.

Power of Guided Peer Discussions

Next, both groups were asked to share what they had talked about in their groups. The groups were kept on their respective sides of the classroom, creating a large triangle between where Tiffany stood by the board and where the two groups were seated. Everyone in the room was able to see one another and easily participate in the whole-class discussion. Tiffany restated the question: *Is it appropriate for students to be read a story about death? Will it affect the students positively or negatively? How so?*

The conventional lens group quickly responded in chorus: "No, the story is not appropriate to be read aloud to students because of the gory scene of Gon being shot and then lying in a pool of blood." Courtney went on to explain, "I feel like some students may be negatively impacted by death being incorporated into a story because they may have never had to deal with death before."

Tiffany then turned to the alternative lens group. Kelly summarized their group's thought: "We think that the story is appropriate to be read to students." Refuting the counterparts' argument, Kelly continued: "Everyone will be exposed to death at some point in his/her lives." Kelly further posed the question: "Shouldn't we, as teachers, prepare our students for facing that event when it does happen to them and teach them how to move past death in a healthy way?" Her group members nodded in support of this statement.

Then Alyssa declared, "This story is not about Gon's death, it is about the choices that the characters made and the consequences that came from those choices." Meanwhile, the conventional lens group sat quietly. Rose, looking at those sitting next to her, whispered, "I have never thought about the story like this before."

Without responding in any way, Tiffany moved on to the next question: *What is the purpose of introducing this story into the classroom? Is there one?*

Nancy, in the conventional lens group, responded with the guess "To teach students about death?" to which the alternative lens group quickly responded by adding to what their group had mentioned earlier. Amy said, "Teachers can use this story to teach students that no one is perfect, that we all make quick decisions that might negatively impact someone else. We must prepare students to deal with the outcome of those choices." To this statement, their counterparts made no rebuttal. It is at this moment that the keen attention to death began to shift among the members of the conventional lens group.

The question *Should teachers be allowed to rewrite or alter a story to make it better fit the classroom norm?* was opposed by the alternative lens group. Laura was defiant: "I don't believe teachers have a right to rewrite or alter a story. It will be disrespectful to the author." The conventional lens group simply agreed with her stance.

Surprisingly, the conventional lens group also agreed with their counterparts' response to the last two discussion questions. The first was *Can a main character die in a story? Why or why not?* Both groups thought that a main character could die. Courtney, in the conventional lens group, argued, "In some cases, death can even enhance how powerful the story's overall message can be." She further gave examples of such instances: *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green and *Hamlet* by Shakespeare. Considering the conventional lens group's keen criticism of Gon's death, it is surprising that they decided to allow a children's story to include death.

The last question, *Should every story read in a classroom have a happy ending?*, had a class-wide consensus of "no, a story doesn't have to end happily." At this time, Mandy, in the alternative lens group, stated, "Students need to be exposed to stories that prepare them for life's challenges." She continued, "By incorporating stories that don't always end happily, teachers are able to create classrooms where difficult discussions can be conducted and students can be exposed to some of these challenges in a safe and comfortable environment."

To end the discussion, Tiffany posted the same four questions that she had used at the beginning of the lesson. Amy, who had participated in the alternative lens group, stated, "I now believe that the moral of *Gon, the Little Fox* is that a person should stop to think about how an action will affect someone else before carrying out that action." Alyssa, from the same group, asserted,

> The author's purpose of writing the story was to teach children that if they do not think before they act, like Gon and Hyoju both did in the story, then they might make a mistake and have to figure out how to live with that mistake.

Claire, in the conventional lens group, remarked, "I was surprised about how much the story had changed in meaning depending on the approach that the two groups had taken to analyze the story." Even Jessica, who had originally stated that the book was inappropriate to be taught in elementary classrooms, declared, "I now feel differently about incorporating the story into classrooms." She added, "If I had paused to think about how the protagonists were feeing before passing judgment on the book, then I could see myself using this book in classrooms as young as kindergarten and first grade."

Before fully ending the lesson, Tiffany asked the teacher candidates if they had any remaining comments. The only response she received was that a few of them genuinely liked how the activity allowed them to explore the story using two different lenses. In particular, Courtney was content: "It was fun to explore different perspectives from my own original responses."

Discussion

In the lesson, which aimed to practice perspective taking, the teacher candidates were given an opportunity to pause and analyze the Japanese children's story through an alternative lens rather than solidifying their opinions based solely on their own perspectives with which they first approached the story. Despite the two diverse conversations that had been conducted before the whole-class discussion, the two groups were able to come to the same conclusions about the last three discussion questions that Tiffany had presented them.

The air of finality about banning the book from American classrooms with which the teacher candidates had begun the lesson fell away to a group of young teacher candidates who, for the most part, left this lesson with the possibility of incorporating this story into their future classrooms. Through the use of open but guided dialogue, the teacher candidates practiced perspective taking and intentionally explored alternative perspectives to understand the story and, in particular, the moral of the story and the reason why the story has been enjoyed among Japanese people from generation to generation.

The pivotal moment in Tiffany's lesson seemed to be when the teacher candidates were able to focus on the death portrayed in the story. It is evident that death presented them with the most significant cultural difference in *Gon, the Little Fox*. In the U.S., death is indeed an uncommon topic in books for young children. The dominant folk theory dictates a view that "young children should be shielded from death because they lack the necessary affective and cognitive resources to cope with death" (Gutiérrez, Miller, Rosengren, & Schein, 2014, p. 60).

Middle-class parents from the dominant racial group tend to avoid reading stories that represent death, and only a small number of White parents endorse the theory that young children have the psychological resources to handle death (Gutiérrez et al., 2014). On the other hand, East Asian nations openly address death as a main theme (Lee, Kim, Choi, & Koo, 2014) in children's literature.

The teacher candidates cognitively understood that there are cultural differences between the U.S. and Japan with regard to the use of death in children's literature. However, at first they were not able to accept them. Acknowledging differences does not necessarily guarantee acceptance of such differences.

Fundamentally, the teacher candidates, at least initially, failed to suppress their own egoistic perspectives and entertain those of others. As long as the teacher candidates were resistant to accepting this particular cultural difference in *Gon, the Little Fox*, it was obvious that they would be unable to interpret the story from a different perspective.

Essentially, it was the open and guided dialogue that intentionally led the teacher candidates to use perspective taking, particularly the "imagine other" perspective, that transformed their resistance into acceptance.

Without much thinking during the structured and guided dialogue, their resistance could have remained as it was. This suggests that an attempt to read other people's stories without recognizing that our own perspectives will interfere must instead involve a highly advanced and sophisticated cognitive process.

As teachers and teacher candidates, we all must come to understand that the way a lesson is constructed around a piece of literature is just as impactful on what the students take away from the text as is the chosen text itself. Although some stories are sad and often frowned upon, introducing stories like *Gon the Little Fox* can open American students' eyes to what other cultures in the world find important enough to teach their children.

Creating meaningful lessons where students experience a highly sophisticated cognitive process through perspective taking is the key when attempting to create classrooms that empower our students to read international literature and open their minds to perspectives other than their own. The experiences that the students associate with a piece of literature will affect their attitude and overall view of the information presented in the story.

Literature that reflects diversity must be taught in such a way that students are pushed to examine the story through perspectives different from their own. If students are not guided to broaden their perspectives, they will apply the only lens available to them: their own. This situation can lead to misinterpretations of the story and, worse, misrepresentations of the culture in which the story was created, thereby defeating the purpose of reading such texts.

Introducing multicultural/international literature to children is important. However, more important is creating the kind of literary experiences in classrooms through which students will engage in critical thinking that requires them to expand their ways of thinking about and knowing the world. To provide such literary experiences to children in the classroom, teachers and teacher candidates need to be skillful in introducing and considering perspectives different from their own.

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