**Overview**

Representing diversity and inclusion in and through literature are clearly stated objectives in EDU 298, Children's Literature, EDU 325, Middle Grades Literacy, and EDU 365, Methods and Materials of TESL, courses that are requirements for various licensure programs in the School of Education. Recognizing that the national population of school-aged children is quickly shifting toward a majority of children of color, even as their teachers remain overwhelmingly white women, makes this an especially critical issue (Carter & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Elon’s School of Education (SoE) seeks to provide teacher candidates with the awareness and means to guide future teachers to provide experiences in literature that offer “windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors” (Bishop, 1990, p. ix) for every young learner. These aims are consistent with University priorities to “make Elon a more diverse, inclusive, and culturally skilled community” (Elon University, 2020)

We specifically aimed to make courses revisions through a systematic review of materials and resources in the use of children’s literature, updating and diversifying the literature offerings used in the courses, adding online resources in new literacies, as well as identifying pedagogical strategies and resources that support language and pragmatics for a growing number of language learners. Given unfolding events in the Black Lives Matter and antiracism movements, including the pandemic related anti-Asian racism over the last year, two additional components were identified as important to our work, including personal and professional education and reflection to regroup, re-gear, re-energize, and initiate change in how we think, act, and teach, toward antiracist practices in our courses and in teacher preparation.

**Our goals include:**

* Undertake personal professional development in culturally relevant, antiracist practice, particularly as connected to literacy, literature, teacher preparation, and in working with Latinx children.
* Refresh and extend our knowledge and understanding of best practices in culturally relevant, inclusive and antiracist content and pedagogical strategies in K-12 literacy instruction. This includes undertaking a review the current literature on current pedagogical theory and research to inform effective models and methods for developing literacy skills for diverse communities of students, including struggling and reluctant readers, English language learners, and gifted students
* Identify children’s texts (books, media, new literacy sources) and associated teaching resources that feature and focus on diverse learners, particularly Latinx populations, for use in these courses.
* Revise the curriculum and instruction for EDU 298, EDU 325 and EDU 365, to model and engage in teacher candidates in culturally responsive and antiracist instruction, with particular attention to Latinx populations represented in their practicums.
* Develop and implement a slate of revised classroom activities addressing culturally responsive teaching, literacy for diverse learners, and equity in literacy practice for use through the term.
* Identify sources that review and celebrate exceptional children’s literature for diverse learners produced annually, to efficiently update and review new materials in future years.
* Develop a strong professional network of colleagues to act as critical peers, resources, and supportive collaborators in antiracist work in teacher education.
* Question and revise course and practicum practices to address subtle and systemic issues of equity. These include addressing such elements as when tutoring is offered, communication arrangements with families, restructuring course syllabus to frontload culturally responsive teaching practice and so on.

The work done in these courses engages students in the School of Education majoring in Elementary or Middle Grades Education, as well as students in the TESOL and Teaching and Learning minors, as required courses for these programs. Ultimately, this work benefits the many thousands of children our teachers in training will engage with during their career in education.

**Action Plan**

Our process was informed by the general approach of qualitative, interpretive inquiry and action research, simultaneously undertaking research, taking action in practice, practicing critical reflection toward a goal of transformative change. To this end we approach this issue by delineating the critical issues in practice, followed by developing a stronger knowledge base in the key areas of educative experience of Latinx populations, children’s literature for diverse learners, and antiracist practice. This followed with a critical review of existing practice, and simultaneous consultation with professional colleagues to add to our growing understanding of best practices and existing resources. Revision of the courses followed through collaborative discussion, reflection, and ongoing adjustments to practice. Implementation was driven by our academic calendar, with data collection from ongoing field notes, monthly meetings, and surveys conducted at the end of the course terms. Adjustments to practice were made through the terms, as deemed necessary in keeping with responsive instructional practice. Analysis of data was conducted through spring, with a period of time given over to additional revision of the courses, as part of the ongoing inquiry cycle of teaching.

**Assessment**

During implementation, documented field notes were discussed at the completion of each new or revised course element (use of text, media, pedagogical strategy) and group meetings. Survey responses from students addressing the use of materials, resources and pedagogical practices included in the revisioning and implemented in the course were also garnered at the end of a teaching cycle. Additionally, key assignment artifacts were collected, reviewed, and analyzed. Analysis of the survey responses, consistent with interpretive, qualitative practices were triangulated with field notes and assignment samples in spring 2021, through constant comparative method (Olson, McAllister, Grinnell, Gehrke Walters, & Appunn, F. 2016).

**Timeline**

**Summer 2020** was spent in developing a foundation of knowledge and developing curriculum. This includes:

* Personal professional development through webinars and virtual conference presentations
* Completion of literature review
* Meeting monthly to review individual progress in professional development,
* Review materials and develop curriculum plans
* Research on best practices in teaching and learning in K-12 literature
* Curriculum development and revisions to course syllabi and schedules for EDU 325 and 365
* Consult with other professionals, including monthly meetings with ICMEE
* Coordinate practicum experiences with Latinx populations through the It Takes a Village program
* Obtaining materials and resources for use
* Begin catalog development for Curriculum Resource Center

**Fall and Winter 2020-2021 were focused on implementation of course changes and collection of data.** Implementation of course revisions

* Fall 2020 – Implementation of revisions in EDU 325 (Fall); EDU 365 (Fall and WT), EDU 298 (WT)
* CATL meetings (2)
* Continued Consultation (Team members, associate School of Education faculty, and International Consortium of Multilingual Excellence in Education members)
* Continued professional development participation

**Spring 2021**

* Analysis of data
* Further revisions to courses suggested for future iterations, including Summer I of EDU 298
* Assess and share in School of Education and CATL
* Sharing at annual ICMEE meeting, April, 2021

**Literature Review Findings**

A review of the literature was conducted for an understanding of the state of Children’s Literature in respect to diverse populations, generally, and specifically as this applies to Latinx learners. We utilized Google Scholar as a search engine for books, articles and reviews from 2015 to the present, keeping in mind that this five-year span would reasonably represent writing and research from the last decade, a period in which significant changes have been made in children’s literature. From the broad definition of “diverse” we narrowed our area of interest to minority populations in terms of race and ethnicity, in keeping with our particular interest in Latinx experience. *Diverse learners* is a term currently used to include differences as broad ranging as mental or physical abilities, gender and sexuality identification, or family structure, for example, that were beyond the current project.

From a review of this work we identified several broad issues of concern, as well as those elements that drove writing, publication and use of books in children’s literature used in K-12 schools in this period. First, we are in a period of historic demographics shift in this country, with children of color becoming the majority population in several geographic areas, with Latinx making up the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). This shift, while not surprising, is not equitably represented in the books and children’s literature that have historically filled K-8 school libraries until recent years. That is, the bulk of children’s literature has been traditionally overbalanced toward white, middle-class characters, settings, and life experiences. Multicultural literature (representing diverse populations found within our borders) and global or international (addressing populations beyond our national borders) have enjoyed a surge of interest by educators and publishers as attention to the demographic imperative has been increasingly underscored. Equity in this regard remains a goal rather than an achievement, however, with Latinx depiction still dismally under-represented (Clark, Flores, Smith, & González, 2015).

Second, with the wide-ranging implementation of Common Core (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices) beginning in 2010, a significant change in the need for informational texts in K-12 classrooms has transformed children’s literature. Prior to the introduction to Common Core, most teachers in elementary grades relied heavily – almost exclusively – on fiction or narrative texts, that presented learners with a sudden and problematic switch to a use of primarily nonfiction in middle and secondary grades. Common Core mandates included use of an equal balance of fiction and informational text beginning in Kindergarten, engendering the publication of an exciting wave of books in this broad category. This is an area of particular interest to our project as it is heavily reviewed in our courses. Whether and how race/ethnicity is included in informational texts remains a concern, for example in books focused in historical and contemporary innovators in the sciences, for example, as well as how the books visually represent the engagement of children of color in activities or narratives portraying learners in informational text.

New literacies, which refers to text provided in online formats continue to emerge as increasingly important components of children’s literature as used in K-8 schools, as well (Vacca, Mraz, Vacca, 2017). The current pandemic environment promises to make these forms and processes ever more important as online learning continues to be utilized in many parts of the country. Like informational books, this is an evolving field that provides new opportunities for sharing quality children’s literature that is a qualitatively different literacy experience as compared to hardcopy texts. Rather than simply editing and attempting to duplicate existing children’s literature, new literacies offer exciting and new opportunities to enrich children’s literature, while using the format to reach and influence a generation of learners who should see themselves – whatever their race or ethnicity – in the apps, websites, and learning modules being developed. Given the current shift to online learning in the Covid-19 pandemic, these formats are receiving increasing use and attention.

Finally, in the evolving recognition of past limitations in representation of racially and ethnically diverse children in U.S. classrooms, critiques are moving from the question of whether children of color see themselves in children’s literature, to additionally questioning the context or setting of such books*,* as well as how and when these are books are used in K-8 classrooms. That is, offerings in children’s literature has made strides in books that represent key historical accounts (African American experience in the Civil Rights Era, for example) that are most often pulled from the library shelves during February, Black History Month. However, there is less attention and balance in publications that portray contributions of Black Americans in other periods or in STEM areas, for example. Frequent and regular use of these books hold the potential for further norming a more representative population to a generation of young learners, as “mirrors and windows and sliding glass doors” (Bishop, 2015) seeing themselves represented and providing images of others in literature.

In terms of Latinx representation in children’s literature the previously stated concerns were represented (general representation as valued and engaged citizenship; representation across genres and categories of children’s literature including nonfiction; representation in new literacies, and representation beyond a narrow scope of very select historical, cultural or biographical targets). In particular, however, we found that an additional and ongoing challenge is in literature that does not differentiate well among the vast array of national and ethnic differences among Latin and Caribbean countries in children’s literature (Acevedo, 2015). This is a particular concern in terms of identity and value of culture for Latinx populations across nations and ethnic identities (Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015).  Additionally, while there is currently a bourgeoning production of books that speak to the immigrant experience, these books threaten to overshadow use of existing books on the experience of Latinx people who have lived in portions of the U.S. for generations, even prior to European domination for example. As with other multicultural groups, the range and depth of publications representing Latinx children is lacking in all genres and categories (Gomm, Heath, & Mora, 2017; Martinez, Roser, Zapata, & Greeter, 2016)

Finally, we attended to literature concerning the preparation of teacher candidates and professional development of teachers in the area of children’s literature. Here we found that research – and particularly critical writing that speaks to the evolution of the Black Lives Matter movement – suggest three ways to approach improving their ability to assess books and pedagogical strategies used with children’s literature. These include assessing their own personal bias and developing an antiracist stance through self-questioning of self and practice; taking action to address existing shortcomings in their own classrooms; and taking action against systemic traditions that exist in literacy education.

In bringing together all of these factors, we came to the agreement that our work was best accomplished with a three-pronged attack. First, to begin our own passage toward antiracist teaching through professional development currently being offered and to bring this to our own classes. Second, to look with fresh eyes at what it means to include quality children’s literature that represents children of color, and especially underrepresented Latinx children who are in our local communities. This means questioning how to assess quality; how and when to reference reliable resources to find mentor books; and renewing pedagogical strategies to engage with these works with our teacher candidates. Finally, this project repeatedly brought us to reminders that we need to more genuinely address the systemic, underlying issues of why we find inequity and lack of representation in children’s literature and speak clearly and succinctly to how this can and must change. Most specifically, what are the structures and practices in our classrooms that we can implement, revise, highlight to press a new generation of teachers to engage more effectively with children of color and their families and to highlight their narrative in our nation.

**Plan Implementation**

**Course adjustments**

A. Readings for the courses were adjusted in two respects. First, a change was made in textbooks for EDU 365 and EDU 325 in favor of those who presented a framework that spiraled issues of identity and social justice in education, as well as including a wide range of examples and approaches in teaching and learning with racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse K-12 learners. These textbooks are chosen with the expectation that teacher candidates will return to them as resources as they develop their own learning modules in their own classrooms. Secondly, a number of readings, journal articles, chapter selections and the like, replaced from previous offerings, updating the information. These selections were chosen to highlight best practices, current examples in texts, up-to-date use of technologies, and take an antiracist stance.

**Examples include selections from:**

Beach, R., Johnston, A., & Thein, A. H. (2015). *Identity-focused ELA teaching: A curriculum framework for diverse*

*learners and contexts*. Routledge.

Martinez, M., Roser, N. L., Zapata, A., & Greeter, E. (2016). Latino children’s literature in picture book format. *Multicultural literature for Latino bilingual children: Their words, their worlds*, 223-240.

B. Inclusion of a wider range of multicultural, international, and global literature across the P-12 levels, adding key mentor books and authors from recently published children’s literature. Examples of additions to mentor texts include (but not limited to):

**Early Childhood through Elementary**

*Islandborn* by Junot Díaz

*Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales

Drum Dream Girl by Margarita Engle

*Family Pictures/Cuadros de Familia* by Carmen Lomas Garza

*Imagine!* By Raúl Colón

*Lucha Libre* by Xavier Garcia

*My Papi has a Motorcycle* by Isabel Quintero

*Binny’s Divali* by Thrity Umrigar

*Crown* by Derrick Barnes

*A Big Mooncake for Little Star* by Grace Lin

*Kitchen Dance* by Maurie Manning

**Upper Elementary through Middle Grades**

*Look Both Ways* by Jason Reynolds

*Refugee* by Alan Gratz

*Merci Suárez Changes Gears* by Meg Medina

*When You Trap a Tiger* by Tae Keller

*Booked* by Kwame Alexander

*The Night Diary* by Veera Hiranandan

*The First Rule of Punk* by Celia Pérez

C. Introduced development and use of evaluation scales for multicultural/international/global literature

D. Learning unit dedicated to identity and representation in children’s literature

E. Development of assignments highlighting best practices in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. A few examples are noted below

1. Menu board for Reading Response

This activity is models and acts as an opportunity for developing student choice activities to improve a particular literacy function (comprehension, summarizing, vocabulary, fluency, literary devices, and the like). Candidates develop a menu chart of option choices for students to use as literacy responses across a unit of study. The menu should include a minimum of nine options with a range of response modes (writing, speaking, video). Choice options have been found to be a best practice in working with young learners, but especially with language learners.

2. Playlist assignment

An arts connection assignment that incorporates Funds of Knowledge, this activity asks students to develop a playlist of 3-5 songs to be shared around a chosen piece of literature or author.

3. Using text-to-self/world/text connections as mirror/windows activity

Making these connections is a fundamental best practice in improving literacy comprehension. Here the focus has been realigned so that K-8 student diversity in the teacher candidates’ current placement are the highlighted, as a more traditional stance/bias is challenged.

4. Funds of Knowledge self-discovery sheet

A preliminary exploration of Funds of Knowledge to aid in better understanding the concept and then brainstorming for additional connections to be made in internship experiences. This is a flipped activity, expanded on in online discussion.

5. Social Inventory activity

This activity requires teacher candidates to assess their own place in community and culture, exploring their various roles, intersectionality, and potential bias. Focus will be on seeing where they can make connections and need to build knowledge to work with diverse learners more effectively.

6. Culture and community K-8 teaching packet as mentor activity

In this activity a five-lesson packet that targets culture and identity will be used as a jumping off point for exploring local community perspectives and potential Funds of Knowledge. This

activity follows the social inventory exercise, modeling a developmentally appropriate adaptation to K-8 classroom.

7. Critical pedagogy activity: assessing the options in Scholastic Book Clubs for K-8 students

In this activity students are guided through an analysis (qualitative and quantitative factors) of book choices in Scholastic’s monthly book club offerings for the grade level in which they are currently interning.

**Professional Development and Actionable Engagement beyond the Classroom**

Participation in external online Webinars and Conferences, including but not limited to:

1. ICMEE Book Club. *The Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism and Engage in Collective Healin*g, by Anneliese A. Singh (June – July, 2020)
2. CREDE at Elon University webinar *Systemic Racism* (Jul 9, 2020)
3. Ibram X. Kendi webinar on *How to Be an Antiracist (July 20, 2020) archived at* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9MlCTYpqrQ>
4. Sonny Kelly *Teaching Hard History: From 1770 To 2020: Race, Revolt And Resistance* webinar series Hosted by Carolina K-12 and the NC Museum of History (Jul 30, 2020)
5. NABA Webinar: Culturally & Linguistically Sustaining Instruction through My Name, My Identity (August 13, 2020)
6. Latinx KidLit Book Festival (December 4-5, 2020) archived materials at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmywyoJl05eI-mmE5syafnw>
7. Debbie Reese *Representation Matters: American Indians in Children’s Literature* webinar (Jan 19, 2021)
8. Children's Literature Symposium Professional Development Workshop: Meg Medina (Mar 24, 2021)
9. Children's Literature Symposium Professional Development Workshop: Lauren Castillo (Mar 31, 2021).
10. American Educational Research Association annual conference (held remotely April, 2021)

**Scholarly Work Undertaken**

1. Facilitated a community of learning around the book *Look Both Ways* by Jason Reynolds, as a way for local educators to explore issues of identity as they related to text selections, pedagogical decisions, and interactions with their students. Over 80 educators joined with over 50 participating regularly in the bi-weekly meetings.
2. Created a Resource Guide linked on the Curriculum Resources Center (CRC) webpage highlighting literature elevating authentic Latinx voices and experiences. As collection development continues with a focus on improving the diversity of the CRC resources, the guide will be updated and enhanced.
3. Both members of DIG team also mentored students in undergraduate research projects during this period with a specific focus on representation of minoritized populations in children’s literature. These experienced provided additional and ongoing opportunities to explore the literature, read and evaluate a wide range of children’s literature from across the last two decades, and consider current practices through the eyes of our teacher candidate researchers.

**Pandemic Adjustments**

The Covid-19 Pandemic required a number of adjustments to practice and the project that should be noted. The courses that were targeted were conducted in a variety of formats, rather than in the expected traditional face-to-face classroom experiences. EDU 365 and EDU 325 were taught both remotely on Zoom, and in person in

socially distanced classrooms, with half of the classroom time assigned to each format. Practicum experiences with teacher candidates tutoring small group and individual students in the It Takes a Village program were conducted remotely, online through Zoom. The Winter term courses, EDU 298 and EDU 365 were fully remote experiences. These unexpected and necessary adjustments likely influenced learning outcomes, generally, but also offered opportunities in unexpected ways. The use of technology and new literacies were enhanced, and a plethora of new resources and apps were made available for use. Assignments had to be altered in accordance with the format, and small group interactions with young children were more difficult to implement.

**Action Research Findings**

Analysis of field notes, student responses and sample assignments offered the following findings:

**A. Student Outcomes**

1. Students indicated an increased awareness of the importance of multicultural literature in the P-12 classroom as an issue of identity, culture, and literacy. All respondents indicated that they Agreed or Strongly Agreed to items:

“This course increased my awareness of the importance of using multicultural and international/global text in the P-12 literacy experience” and

“This course provided me with example texts, resources, and pedagogical strategies for addressing the needs of a diverse P-12 classroom population”

While similar level of responses had been garnered in previous iterations of the course, student comments specifically mentioned awareness of the importance across a wider range of life experiences in their responses with more differentiation among groups (African American, Caribbean, Latinx, Asian). Our efforts in widening and deepening the offerings, particularly in Latinx texts, could be counted as successful in this respect.

2. More choice; wider opportunities wanted

Student comments also indicated that they would like more resources and examples for a wider range of diverse populations. That is, they recognized that similar efforts in conducting a similar study around Asian Americans (of varying nationalities), Native Americans (in diverse tribes and nations), and Muslims would improve the course.

3. Students prefer choice; but gravitate to literature that mirror their lives

Not surprisingly, students often noted a preference for having some control over the books they were asked to read and utilize in classroom assignments. Given full autonomy in choice, however, their author studies or read-alouds focused on their favorite childhood authors, reflecting representation of white middle-class experiences and biases in literature, for example. Looking forward, options in assignments might be offered among multicultural books for particular assignments, providing a balance of new experiences and exposure and options that reflect personal interests and preferences.

**B. New ways to think about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

We found that using available authentic voices was particularly useful, even as a plethora of new voices in webinars, podcasts, journal articles, and video were being made available. Additionally, using traditional literacy formats – book clubs, author interviews, mentor texts – with multicultural/international/global representation were seen as engaging and enriching formats. In particular, entry points through identity and culture studies were supported in the literature and in student responses.

**C. Technology, New Literacies and Learning**

Changes and increase in use of technology as a tool, format, and literacy source in the pandemic academic experience, prompted a call for added attention to online resources, apps and ebooks and pedagogies for and about minoritized populations, as this area explodes in the P-12 learning environment.

D. **Ongoing revision**

Course assessment and revision is an ongoing process, as is collection development in the CRC. Additional resources need to provide additional updates in offerings, provide wider representation and respond to the current classroom, national, and international population shifts. Specifically, as noted above, Asian American, Native American, and Muslim authors and narratives were particularly noted as in need of stronger representation.

**Dissemination**

Outcomes of the project have been shared within the department, with faculty teaching literacy courses, and externally through ICMEE meetings. A formal presentation of the project is planned as a “Lunch and Learn” hosted in the Curriculum Resources Center for teacher candidates and interested faculty. This work has a potential for interest externally as well, with potential for conference presentations in the future, to share more widely.

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**Helpful Resources:**

The following international peer-refereed journals publish articles on multilingual teaching and learning.

* Applied Linguistics
* Bilingual Research Journal. [www.brj.asu.org](http://www.brj.asu.org/)
* Canadian Modern Language Review
* Computer Assisted Language Learning
* ELT (English Language Teaching) Journal
* English Teaching Forum
* Internet TESL Journal
* Journal for English for Academic Purposes
* Journal of Second Language Writing
* Language Learning & Technology
* Language Teaching Research
* Modern Language Journal
* The Reading Matrix
* Reading in a Foreign Language
* Reading On-Line
* TESOL Quarterly

**Organizations:**

* American Association of Applied Linguistics: [www.aaal.org](http://www.aaal.org/)
* The British Council: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/>
* Center for multilingual, multicultural research: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/>
* Center for Applied Linguistics: <http://www.cal.org/>
* College Reading and Learning Association: <http://www.crla.net/>
* College Reading Association: <http://www.collegereadingassociation.org/>
* International Phonetic Association: <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/IPA/ipa.html>
* The international reading association: [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org/)
* National Association for Bilingual Education: <http://www.nabe.org/>
* National Center on Adult Literacy and International Literacy Institute: <http://www.literacyonline.org/>
* North Carolina DPI English Language Development Wiki: http://eldnces.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/
* The TESOL organization: [www.tesol.org](http://www.tesol.org/)
* U.S. Department of Education Office of English Language Acquisition: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/index.html?src=mr>

**Teacher Resource Sites:**

* [Brown University’s Education Alliance](https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/):
* [Colorín Colorado](http://www.colorincolorado.org/ell-strategies-best-practices)
* [Dave’s ESL Café](http://www.eslcafe.com/)
* [ELT Web](http://www.eltweb.com/)
* [Vanderbilt University IRIS](https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/ell/) learning modules

[American Library Association Awards Lists](http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/childrens-book-awards-other-organizations)