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## **A Need For Culturally Relevant Texts To Motivate K-2 Students In Reading**

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A NEED FOR CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEXTS TO MOTIVATE K-2 STUDENTS IN  
READING

Using a Culturally Relevant Text Set to Promote Students' Appreciation for Diversity  
through Interactive Read Alouds

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Literacy Education.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### Motivation to Read

One of the strongest motivations that drives students to read is dedication (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019, p. 53). Dedicated readers are willing to expand their efforts and have more persistence in reading because they feel it is personally meaningful to them. It is vital for students to intrinsically value their reading, cultures, and home experiences and see themselves as part of it.

As an elementary Vietnamese Language Arts, English Language Arts, homeroom, and reading intervention teacher, my goal is to find ways to increase my students' engagement in reading, to motivate them to read, to build a love for reading and to help them to become as proficient and critical readers as they can be. As a student and teacher of color, I often feel more motivated and attracted to reading materials and discussing topics that I can use my own cultural background knowledge to support me in attaining or teaching new content. I can create a personal connection with these because they reflect my identity, culture, and experiences. Thus, this empowers me to develop agency and an active role in the learning process. In this way, I have learned the importance of Culturally Relevant Texts (CRTs) through my own experience. It has shown me there is a need to "bring the students' home culture into the classroom" for all students to establish more equitable and inclusive learning climates (Martusewicz et al., 2021, p. 190). Also, in my school, my students are from

diverse backgrounds, cultures, and languages. Therefore, it is critical to implement CRTs to serve this population.

### **Culturally Relevant Texts**

Culturally relevant texts (CRTs) are texts that readers can relate to because they reflect their ethnicities, beliefs, values, languages, and backgrounds, which are mirrored by characters, plots, and language (Clark, 2017, p. 24). When readers have a sense of belonging in these texts and can make individual connections, they not only engage in reading and boost their learning outcomes but also get to learn about themselves, express themselves, think critically, and take action for positive change. Clark also highlights that CRTs are considered “mirrors” that provide opportunities for readers whose ethnicities, races, languages, and experiences “have traditionally been devalued or ignored” in literature to “see themselves and their lived experiences as part of the formal literacy” (p. 24). These reasons have led me to inquire: *How can K-2 teachers boost the motivation of students in reading by using culturally relevant text set through interactive read-aloud?*

The main goal of this capstone project is to elucidate the impact of CRTs and create a CRT text set to teach students an appreciation of cultural diversity through interactive read alouds in order to promote their motivation in reading in K-2 classrooms. This phase of the project and the remainder of Chapter One will delineate the theoretical framework of the need for implementing CRTs and the positive effects on learners’ academics. Finally, I will share my personal and professional impacts of utilizing CRTs in teaching and learning. These crucial components will serve as

foundational steps for my literacy review and provide a thorough clarification of my project plan.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Need for Implementing Culturally Relevant Texts**

Historically, many young learners from nondominant groups especially students of color, immigrant students, and ELLs have been educated in American schools having their backgrounds, languages, and cultures stereotyped, discriminated against, and subjected to racial bias (Lee & Walsh, 2017, p. 191). These children have frequently experienced assimilative curricula and approaches that postulate deficit thinking on their cultures and languages and have a negative impact on their academic and emotional growth. For example, the stereotype that African American students are less intelligent; this type of “stereotype threat” is embedded in White dominant narratives and also in “unconscious assumptions” (Martusewicz et al., 2021, p. 190). Another instance is that English language learners are often placed into instructional programs which only focus on foundational language skills rather than building content knowledge and critical literacy competencies. These students of color and English language learners have scored lower on standardized exams, graduated at lower rates, and been disproportionately pushed out of schools compared to White dominant groups (Lee & Walsh, 2017, p. 191). This leads to “cultural clash” or “cultural incompatibility” (Martusewicz et al., 2021, p. 190). These marginalized groups of students have challenges adapting to White dominant schools and often don’t achieve high academic outcomes because of the contrast in the school culture and home culture. Also, Emdin adds “[u]rban youth who enter schools seeing themselves as smart and capable are confronted by curriculum that is blind to their realities and school rules that seek to

erase their culture” (as cited in Hoy, 2019, p. 269). There, school policies, instructional approaches, curriculum, and resources are rooted in White culture and lack of cultural diversity. Hoy asserts that this leads to “cultural discontinuity” in educational settings where there is a disconnection between students’ diverse cultures and backgrounds and the school system (p. 269). When learners’ cultural identities and values are not addressed and integrated, they experience the sense of being invisible and dismissed in school settings. This causes a declined interest and motivation in the literacy learning process.

For that reason, CRTs play a crucial role in student learning. It is critical to integrate learners’ home culture into the classroom. Freeman and Freeman (n.d.) assert that readers who engage with culturally relevant texts are more likely to read more effectively and with more interest in reading. The more readers have opportunities to access texts that represent their own cultural experiences, the more their engagement and motivation in reading are increased.

### **Increase in Learners’ Academics**

CRTs have substantial importance in student learning (Paris & Alim, 2017). Integrating learners’ home culture into the classroom environment is a critical practice. Learners who engage with CRTs experience improved reading skills and heightened reading frequency. The profound benefits these texts bring forth encompass a wide spectrum of positive outcomes that extend well beyond the realm of reading comprehension. When students are exposed to texts that align with their cultural experiences, their engagement and motivation in reading are notably enhanced. Thus,



there is a need to consider CRTs and their representation so that all students have access and motivate them to read.

Research studies have consistently emphasized the comprehensive benefits gained from the integration of CRTs into educational settings, particularly for students of color (Schrodt et al., 2015). This integration serves as a stimulus for promoting student motivation to read and boost their literacy outcomes (Giroir et al., 2015). CRTs resonate with students' cultural backgrounds and experiences, increasing their motivation to read. When literature mirrors their lives, students are more likely to associate themselves with the texts they read. As a result, their engagement and interest grow (Giroir et al., 2015). It is important that a “teacher considers each family in the classroom, contemplates the cultures and values of each family, chooses culturally relevant and affirming literature, and connects students and families to these texts and invites collaborative journal responses” (Schrodt et al., 2015, p. 590). Teachers must recognize the importance of connecting real-life experiences to reading and acknowledging the societal difficulties non-dominant groups face due to differing languages, backgrounds, and cultures. Love’s (2019) findings also validate this, illustrating how African-American children's engagement surged when exposed to Hip Hop which is reflective of their communities and families. The students felt positive, proud, and confident about who they are and their culture. Honoring, asserting, and nourishing marginalized communities’ cultures, languages, and literacies is the fundamental focus of pedagogies to rectify educational disparity, malpractice, and historically exclusionary curricula (Paris and Alim, 2017, p. 249). This has helped to shift away from our hegemonic linguistic, cultural, and literate pedagogies and provided students with opportunities to “survive and thrive... and a love

that can work to keep them whole as they grow and expand who they are and can be through education.” (p. 14).

### **Personal and Professional Impacts of Using CRTs**

After delving into this research study, I learned and affirmed that using CRTs has had a greatly positive impact on me personally and professionally. To begin with, I often feel more motivated and attracted to texts that have topics and content relevant to my language, culture, identity, and history, especially those which connect with Vietnam, Asia, people of color, immigrants, and my teaching experience. Reading these texts not only provides me with mirrors so that I can see and reflect on myself, my language, culture, and background in the texts but also give me windows that carry me into other new realms where I can explore, comprehend the meaning of texts and critique dominant ideology and social construction. My earliest literacy memories were singing Vietnamese nursery songs, reciting poems, and reading Vietnamese folk tales at home and school. For me as a child, I had strong ties to my language and culture and I was interested in reading Vietnamese literature. Later, in secondary, my love for reading had grown. I felt more comfortable and connected to my language and culture when I read Vietnamese texts and books and wrote about them. In my early adult experiences with reading, one of my favorite books was *Endless Field (Canh Dong Bat Tan)* and other books from the same Vietnamese author, Nguyen Ngoc Tu (2005). I enjoyed reading her books more because I felt a connection with my Vietnamese culture. Her stories are mostly about the lives of the lowest-income, hardworking, and sincere countryside villagers, and they are often propelled to tackle the savage and erratic instability of life.

Reading her books gave me a lens of what it is like to be seen as a marginal group and experience class discrimination in Vietnamese society.

After graduation, I started to work as a teacher and I have begun to read more English books about education. Some of my favorite books are *Holler If You Hear Me*, *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, and *Why Are All Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*. I was hooked on these books because I found the topics interesting, and relevant to my passion and profession. Also, through my courses at Hamline, I was encouraged to further develop my interest in this research topic. In one course, I had an opportunity to delve into the book *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies* by Paris and Alim (2017) and explore approaches to integrating them into the curriculum. These approaches have resonated with me and made their way into my teaching setting incorporating CRTs to encourage learners to read. As a teacher, one of my objectives is to explore effective ways to engage students in texts and reading. Providing opportunities for readers to be exposed to CRTs is a powerful way to increase their engagement and boost their learning development. My colleagues and I continually seek to bring in books so that students can make connections between texts and their own life experiences. Thus this increases their engagement and motivation in reading.

From an educator's point of view, my experiences have taught me that incorporating CRTs in my classroom can motivate my students to read, improve their academic achievement, and critical consciousness for all my students by appealing to them with resources that connect directly to their life experience and prior knowledge. Recently, our school allowed students from multiple cultures to check out an additional

book that represents their own cultures or is written in their native languages each week. My colleagues and I introduced diverse racial and ethnic arrays of authors and illustrators. I learned this is really important because it is highlighting students' own cultures, building comfort and connections between early literacy skills and home. Their parents can read the book with them and that is a big part of being culturally responsive. It is honoring the students' families and cultures and who they are. Also, the pictures, the authors, and the illustrators are matching with what the students look like. It taught me that it is a great way to build connections and let kids see themselves in books and themselves as readers.

Despite establishing these foundations, it is quite difficult to make sure each child sees themselves through their own cultural lens because I have such a diverse population of students who speak many languages and are from a wide variety of countries. It remains challenging to meaningfully enhance my students' understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity and the need for more effective cultural diversity instruction persists. My students need opportunities to be exposed to more CRTs, engage in discussions with critical thinking skills, practice their empathy and appreciation of diverse cultures and perspectives, and spur their curiosity and motivation in reading.

My purpose through my study is to have a profound understanding of using CRTs to promote my students' appreciation of cultural diversity and how to effectively teach this in a daily classroom. I intend to create a CRT set to teach students an appreciation

of cultural diversity through interactive read alouds to increase their motivation in reading in K-2 classrooms.

Chapter One maps out my research question: *How can K-2 teachers boost the motivation of students in reading by using culturally relevant texts through interactive read-aloud?* This research topic is meaningful for me and my instruction because I have discovered there is a great need to implement CRTs in learning and teaching and how CRTs provide positive effects to increase learners' engagement, learning outcomes, and critical awareness. Also, reflecting on my personal and professional narratives has taught me that it is crucial for my students to connect with CRTs to explore their own cultures and others to show appreciation for diversity.

In Chapter Two, the literature review will provide an overview of the importance of teaching cultural diversity with CRTs. Student identity and cultural diversity will be defined in detail and the benefits of promoting student identity and cultural diversity with CRTs will be presented. The chapter will also provide a definition of interactive read alouds and explain why teaching and learning cultural diversity with CRTs through interactive read alouds is necessary to motivate students to read. Finally, the implementation of a text set which combines read alouds and CRTs will be described in Chapter Three.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

The intent of this capstone is to inquire into approaches that can boost learners' reading motivation in K-2 classrooms. Students who devote themselves to reading solely for the purpose of getting satisfaction from the process demonstrate internal or intrinsic motivation (McRae & Guthrie, 2009). It means these students have opportunities to participate in reading for their own enjoyment or to explore their own passions and develop a lasting love for continual reading. They are motivated by authentic interest, and better able to persist in the challenges and obstacles, resulting in increased learning outcomes. As discussed in Chapter One, for example, reading motivation improves when learners build a sense of connection with characters and texts. Culturally relevant texts are materials that provide opportunities for learners to reflect on their unique perspectives. Thus, this strengthens the connection, interests and motivation to read.

The literature review will begin with how motivation impacts student reading success. Next, it will discuss the impact of Culturally Relevant Texts (CRTs) and CRT sets in motivating readers. Developing student identity and promoting the appreciation of cultural diversity through CRTs will be characterized. Then, the chapter will focus on the definition of Interactive Read Alouds (IRAs) and the benefits of utilizing them through CRTs. These important components will drive the discussion and answer the research question: *How can K-2 teachers boost student motivation in reading through interactive read-alouds using culturally relevant texts?* These findings will provide a

profound understanding of the capstone project. At this point, reading motivation will be outlined and clarified in depth, establishing the groundwork for this capstone.

## **Reading Motivation**

Reading is critical because it broadens readers' understanding of the world and nurtures a mindset of curiosity and lifelong learning (Allyn & Morell, 2016). Reading is a complex activity that includes various components, including background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition to be able to make meaning from the text (Stahl et al., 2020). Proficient reading requires these abilities and “the only way to learn how to draw all these components together in the pursuit of meaning is to dig into the text and read-a lot-in school and out” (Allyn & Morell, 2016). Policymakers, educators, parents, and communities advocate to form effective approaches that foster effective literacy skills and improve literacy achievement for all students such as focusing on improving phonological awareness and reading comprehension skills (Burkins & Yates, 2021). Regardless of these attempts, 64% of fourth graders in the United States read below proficient levels (Castillo, 2023). A significant portion of students of color have been removed from the educational system primarily because of their academic challenges, specifically when it involves reading skills (Hammond, 2015). The educational system has centered around the White dominant group and is not adequately created to serve other diverse groups of students to meet their needs (Love, 2019). This non-dominant group of learners has a sense that they don't belong and are not valued. Thus, they find it difficult to engage and be motivated with their learning for example reading materials. Also, Wright (2019) highlights that “despite talk about high standards and accountability

and policies that claim to leave and make every student successful or make children college and career ready, there continues to be a wide gap in academic achievement between poor, minority and ELLs and middle -to upper-class white students” (pp. 13-15). This illustrates that there is a great need to take action to equip all learners with the support and resources they need to succeed.

Most educators and the International Literacy Association share the same goal to cultivate students’ lifelong passion for reading (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019, p. 56). The authors also argue that motivation is not only “a goal” but also “a means” to aid reading proficiency and encourage lifelong readers. Hoy (2019) defines motivation as “the internal state that stimulates, guides, and sustains behavior” (p. 486). It is driving factors that empower individuals to approach learning with enthusiasm, persevere the challenges, and show commitment to achieving continuous growth (Reading Rockets, 2023). In classrooms, when teachers nurture reading motivations, it results in consistent and significant reading proficiency improvement (McRae & Guthrie, 2009). Teachers strive to spark enthusiasm in readers with the goal to cultivate active engagement in reading activities. Readers’ main motivations to read derive from three powerful forces such as interests, confidence, and dedication (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019, p. 53).

First, interest plays a crucial role in motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation (McRae & Guthrie, 2009). Morrow & Gambrell (2019) explain intrinsic motivation refers to the internal desire and enjoyment that individuals encounter when engaging in an activity completely for its own sake, without external rewards or pressures. Interested readers engage in texts because they find enjoyment while reading. They feel thrilled by a personally important topic to them, excited about new content, and enjoy reading a



book from their favorite author (p. 53). When they consistently access texts due to their own individual interests, they are more likely to choose to read regularly and thrive to become higher-achieving readers. Morrow & Gambrell (2019) also suggest that providing choices is one of the best practices to motivate students in learning (p. 61). This approach not only aids young learners' enthusiasm to participate in reading activities but also gives them ownership of their learning. For example, students have options to decide on texts, topics that are interesting to them, or activities that are purposefully planned. This makes students stronger and more confident, particularly in making decisions to get focused and maintain concentration on learning tasks. Gambrell and Morrow emphasize "...mini-choices during literacy lessons...enable students to feel a stronger sense of investment and to commit larger amounts of effort to their reading work" (p. 62). Also, it is essential to give students at least one mini-choice, such as "select a story, select a page to read, select sentences to explain, identify a goal for the day, choose three of five questions to answer, write questions for a partner exchange" (pp. 62-63). Offering students choices throughout the reading class helps to build interest, agency, and persistence in their learning. By having choices during the lessons, students can build their interest, confidence, and responsibility for learning literacy skills.

The second key motivation to read is being confident or believing in oneself's ability to perform a particular task (McRae & Guthrie, 2009). When readers believe in their reading skills, they tend to engage in reading regularly. Their self-efficacy motivates them to actively engage in reading activities. "Conversely, students who struggle begin to doubt their abilities... and expect to do poorly in reading, writing and

talking about text” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019, p. 54). Holding negative beliefs about their abilities leads to a lack of motivation and effort and eventually results in underperformance and hinders improvement and success.

Lastly, dedication refers to “the students’ belief that reading is important, and the student’s persistence in reading, whatever the assignment” (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019, p. 54). This also aligns well with Stahl et al.’s emphasis on reading affective factors. They highlight that one of the most significant affective factors of students’ intrinsic motivations to read is reading value. This factor is a key role to ignite readers’ passion, providing their commitment and eagerness to take part in the reading (2020). For instance, reading value is “[an] individual’s beliefs about the extent to which reading is generally useful, enjoyable, or otherwise important” (p. 242). Each individual student possesses their own beliefs about whether reading “edifies, informs and entertains” (p. 243). Motivated readers recognize the significance of reading for example whether reading this text would provide them practical benefits, enjoyment, or insights. Readers who value their reading and acknowledge what is meaningful to them tend to become connected to that reading experience. Readers are motivated by their personal interests, self-confidence, and dedication to reading. These motivations impact their engagement, dedication, and interest, determining their path to becoming lifelong readers.

Culturally Relevant Texts (CRTs) and Interactive Read Alouds (IRAs) are ways to address student motivation to read. Alanis (2007) emphasizes that the utilization of CRTs enables learners from a wide range of backgrounds to build on their unique cultural knowledge, previous encounters, as well as learning styles to create a learning

environment that is both more relatable and effective for them. Also, Lenox (2013) highlights that the effective use of IRAs by teachers during the reading process has the potential to foster an atmosphere that promotes proactive participation, improved comprehension, and cognitive advancement in students. It is crucial to explore how CRTs and IRAs boost learners' engagement and motivation to read. In the following section, a description of CRTs and IRAs will be provided on how they benefit learners' reading motivation and outcomes.

### **Culturally Relevant Texts**

As previously stated, CRTs are texts that echo the backgrounds, identities, and experiences of students (Clark & Fleming, 2019). These texts include literature, articles, stories, and other content that reflect various cultures, perspectives, and histories. CRTs directly relate to students' lives, making the content more meaningful and relevant. When students see their own cultures and experiences represented, they are more likely to participate in the material. Research studies have found that the use of CRTs produces benefits for students of color, such as promoting their motivation to read, boosting their reading outcomes, and increasing their critical awareness (Clark & Fleming, 2019, p. 26; Ladson Billings, 2017, p. 142; Wood, 2020, pp. 13,14).

First, relating to motivation, Clark and Fleming (2019) asserted that the use of CRTs helped to connect students' home cultures, languages, and backgrounds with what they read (p. 27). When books, stories, and texts mirror children's lives, they are motivated to read more, but when they do not mirror readers' lives, they are more likely to not be interested in and read less. For example, in Marshall's findings (2011), the use

of a contemporary culturally relevant novel text increased interest in reading for students in Grade 5 compared to a control group without the use of them (p. 64). The author found the salience of bringing students' real life and experience into reading and providing opportunities for them to recognize that non-dominant groups often experience social obstacles on account of contrasting languages, backgrounds, and cultures. This aligned well with Clark's research (2017) that African American children enjoyed and connected with texts that reflect themselves, their families, and their communities (p. 4). The students were African American, so they were introduced to reading selections such as Scholastic's Just for You series and texts by African American authors and illustrators (pp. 11,12). The students became completely attached to the stories and felt the stories in the book were connected to their lived experiences and culture. Students' cultures, languages, and background knowledge played a vital role in students learning. Their rich home cultures, linguistics, identities, and backgrounds were able to contribute as foundational bridges from students' expertise to classroom literacy competency.

Next, CRTs were intrinsically linked with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) which enhanced students' reading comprehension and literacy learning outcomes (Clark & Fleming, 2019, p. 26; Ladson Billings, 2017, p. 142; Wood, 2020, pp. 13-14). Byrd (2016) elucidated that CRP increased learners' performance and enthusiasm in literacy learning (p. 1). For example, in kindergarten and grade one literacy classrooms, African American students were attracted to the early literacy learning process through Hip Hop, where teachers used songs as CRTs to help them understand rhyming concepts through reading, discussing, reciting, and listening activities (Meacham et al., 2019, p.

33). Students' background competencies in rhymes and poetry were helpful for them to relate these concepts. The children could explore and have deep learning through connections with their families, communities, and cultures in hip-hop reading and lyric composition (Meacham et al., 2019, p. 34).

Last, Alanís (2017) believed teachers' use of CRTs that reflect their students' diverse cultures, experiences, contributions, and perspectives could help learners increase their sense of belonging and identity and provide a critical link between cultural background knowledge and texts (p. 30). Wood (2020) added that culturally relevant texts help students understand who they are and where they come from because they connect to students' lives. Thus, these readers felt interested in reading texts, analyzing, questioning, and discussing the texts, which ignites their critical consciousness (p. 35). Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts that "Students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (p. 162). The ability to critically assess society is a crucial citizenship skill if education is to prepare students for engaged citizenship (p. 162). In one study, in second and third-grade reading buddy lessons, a teacher let her students and Spanish immigrant students read a book about César Chávez (a Mexican American labor advocate and champion of civil rights) and discussed how farmworkers did not receive fair pay, gave opportunities to make connections with their own family experiences, and helped them understand the content of the lesson vividly in personal connections (Ullucci, 2011, p. 394). Ullucci highlights that this is "an example of an age-appropriate way of fostering critical consciousness in its attention to issues of fairness and equity" (Ullucci, 2011, p. 395).

Throughout the discussion, the students not only acknowledged that it was unjust for farmworkers to get paid less but also started to sermonize inequitable, unjust, biased, and stereotyped issues in society.

### **Creating a Culturally Relevant Text Set**

A text set is described as “a collection of materials... composed of diverse resources on a specific subject matter, genre, or theme” (as cited in Tracy et al., 2017, p. 527). Instead of concentrating only on one particular book, they consist of a more comprehensive concept or theme (Benson, 2021). Text sets are named multimodal text sets when they aren't restricted to just written materials, they also comprise media such as videos, photos, and music (Pinkerton, 2019). They are carefully selected to efficiently convey information and meet the individual needs of learners (Lomen, 2018). This helps to facilitate a thorough exploration of a particular subject matter. Designing a culturally relevant text set refers to creating a collection of texts by utilizing multiple texts so that not only readers can have the opportunity to make connections between texts and their own experiences but also, they can interact with others who share differing perspectives and experiences (Lomen, 2018). For example, offering texts that represent a wide array of experiences allows readers to identify with the subject matter on a level that is relevant to them. This kind of representation has the potential to improve one's sense of interest, confidence, identity, and validation. Also, when individuals are exposed to narratives that differ from their own, they are more likely to develop a stronger connection, comprehension, and ability for compassion with others from diverse backgrounds. It expands the viewpoints of people and fosters inclusiveness. The utilization of text sets has shown an increase in frequency following the start of the

Common Core State Standards (Lomen, 2018). A culturally relevant text set provides students with an opportunity to delve into more profound levels of engagement, thus strengthening their ability to grasp the content they come across (Tracy et al., 2017). The incorporation of multiple text sets successfully appeals to an array of interests and backgrounds, resulting in expanding the attraction of the topic to readers. Increased levels of involvement result in increased comprehension. Using multimodal text sets has been shown to boost student engagement, as students tend to exhibit a preference for a variety of texts as opposed to traditional textbooks (Strachan, 2014). This facilitates a more comprehensive examination of a topic, alleviating anxiety and strengthening comprehension (Pinkerton, 2019). The use of several media formats serves to sustain student engagement and enhance their level of involvement with the topic.

### **Developing Student Identity through Culturally Relevant Texts**

Many children of color experience the pressure to assimilate the beliefs, values, and of dominant White culture, including the idea of White superiority (Tatum, 2017). Therefore, they start to wonder about themselves regarding who I am, what their identities are, “what it means to be a young person of color” and how other people and the world think about me in terms of race. (p. 133). McRae & Guthrie (2009) draw attention to the importance of promoting student identity by making reading material relevant to students' experiences. This attempt has a significant impact on their development of identity as readers. Student identity is defined as a multifaceted and fluid concept that “is shaped by the economic, historical, political, and culture contexts in which [a learner] lives and learns” (Wright, 2019, pp. 17-18). Students' identities play important roles in their lives. They help learners identify themselves as who they are

and how they interact in situations they encounter and experiences they go through. Promoting identity through CRTs in young children can assist in boosting their sense of belonging, engagement and academic outcomes (Smith, 2014).

Developing student identity through CRTs increases their sense of belonging. "Literacy practices are one means through which identities are constructed" (McCarthy, 2001, p.125). Literacy practices can also facilitate identity transformation. Engaging with diverse texts and ideas can expand individuals' perspectives and challenge their preconceptions, leading to shifts in how they understand and express their identities. Engaging with texts that resonate with one's cultural background can affirm a person's sense of self. For example, Spycher et al (2020) highlight the salience of culturally sustaining pedagogy to students of nondominant groups, especially for recent immigrant students and Hmong-American students. Classrooms should be culturally and linguistically sustaining communities where they respect and maximize students' diversity and uniqueness (p. 93). Students have opportunities to engage and maintain their native languages, literacy, ethnicities, races, genders, and cultures in their school communities. This deepens their experiences, perspectives, and the uniqueness of their cultural identity. As individuals engage in literacy practices, they express and negotiate aspects of their identity. It is crucial to teach young learners "to love themselves, [their family, cultures, linguistics and backgrounds] at an early age because studies show that when people love themselves, they are less inclined to fear other people's differences" (Abdulatie, 2012, p. 4). Teachers must value their students' culture, honor their languages and accept their identities. Thus, students can identify who they are, be proud of that, construct positive rapport with others, and improve their academic



competencies. Literacy practices are tied to cultural identities (McCarthy, 2001). For example, reading literature from a particular culture can strengthen one's connection to that cultural identity. The language they use, the texts they read, and the narratives they connect with can all reflect and shape cultural connections.

Promoting identity through CRTs for readers can significantly impact their reading engagement and boost their academic outcomes. Smith (2014) argues students who have a positive reader identity tend to participate actively in reading and academic activities. On the other hand, a negative reader identity might lead to decreased engagement and interest in reading. Culturally relevant texts provide a compelling rationale for students to engage and persist in their reading tasks. Educators foster learners' engagement by ensuring that texts in the classroom remain relevant to students' home culture, linguistics, and backgrounds (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). This aligns well with "The Story of Their Lives" chapter of the book: *Holler If You Hear Me* by Gregory Michie (2009). From Michie's experiences in class and in graduate school, he learned that it is important to bring students' real life and experience into class and provide opportunities for them to recognize that non-dominant groups often experience social obstacles on account of contrasting languages, backgrounds, and cultures. His students were Mexican American, so he introduced them to Mexican American literature and authors. He let his students read, listen, record themselves, and make an audiobook of *The House on Mango Street* and Sandra Cisneros's. The students became completely attached to the stories and felt the stories in the book were connected to their lived experiences and culture. Seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum can boost students' confidence in their academic abilities. They begin to see

that their cultural knowledge is an asset that contributes to their learning. When students are engaged to read and comprehend, their literacy skills naturally develop. Also, Jennerjohn (2020) reveals the study of how an Elementary educator cocreated culturally sustaining texts with a first-grade emergent bilingualist's family to foster the learner's literacy and stimulate the teacher and family rapports. The writer emphasizes that it is crucial to fabricate a culturally sustaining narrative with the learner and their family by utilizing the student's photographs of their community and an engaging linguistic method. This approach ensures that the learning materials reflect the cultural backgrounds and experiences of emergent bilingual students. Creating "School-Family Partnerships for Culturally Sustaining Texts" gives rise to four essential outgrowths for educators and schools such as having a better understanding of students' home circumstances, boosting the family relationships for potential family collaboration, parents' frequent school visits with trust and knowledge, and obtaining a culturally sustaining text to support students' literacy study (Jennerjohn, 2020, p. 657). This recognition and integration of cultural diversity enhance students' sense of identity and belonging in the classroom. The provision of culturally sustaining texts benefits students' literacy development. Such texts are not only linguistically relevant but also emotionally resonant, enhancing students' engagement and comprehension. Moreover, exposure to narratives that mirror their own experiences can positively influence students' broader mindsets and worldviews. These findings affirm that acknowledging and valuing cultural diversity leads to a more effective approach to education. Students must be recognized not only as learners of academic subjects but also as individuals with cultural identities that shape their overall growth. In order to inspire learners to read, it is also vital to

develop an understanding of cultural diversity among students through the implementation of CRTs.

### **Promoting students' appreciation of cultural diversity through CRT**

Cultural diversity originates in the vast array of differences that are recognized within specific communities or within individuals (Martusewicz et al., 2021, p. 22). Every cultural group possesses its own characteristics such as beliefs, values, practices, behaviors, symbols, and attitudes that make them different. The influence of culture forms how individuals view the world (Freire, 1983). Creswell (2023) also emphasizes this in their constructivist worldview (p. 9). People's thinking and knowledge are structured and embedded through interacting with others, in their culture, personal and social experiences. Also, the American population and schools are becoming more diverse (Hoy, 2017, p. 5). For example, more than half of the U.S population will be represented in racial and ethnic minority groups by 2044 (p. 4). It is vital to acknowledge and honor cultural diversity by learning others' cultures to better understand different perceptions and experiences within the world we live in. "Teaching cultural diversity and multicultural issues in the education system helps provide positive opportunities from elementary to higher education to see the diversity surrounding our life" (as cited in Erbas, 2019. p. 404). This helps to increase learners' understanding of the world and its diverse region, establish a caring community and promote critical readers (Abdulatie, 2012, Clark & Fleming, 2019, Erbas, 2019, Ladson Billings, 2017; Wood, 2021).

Developing a comprehensive understanding of the world and its diverse regions through CRTs is a crucial aspect of education. Learning about diverse regions exposes

students to a variety of cultures, customs, and traditions. During this process, students make connections between what they learn and their own experiences. As learners learn about the world, they learn to appreciate cultural diversity. This helps to boost their engagement and motivation to read and explore more. This awareness fosters respect for differences and promotes a more inclusive worldview. Harris et al (2020) also highlight this in their research about “co-constructing culturally sustaining pedagogic practices with children and their families and communities” to promote young learners’ literacy in their native language and English in the Republic of the Fiji Island in the Pacific for three years. The authors assert that “dialogue” is a fundamental element of CSP, particularly “authentic dialogic encounters”. Students can actively come into contact with educational experiences in both their regional and worldwide cohorts to apply to their real lives. They also focus on securing “contextual relevance and responsiveness of pedagogic practices, co-constructing CSP practices with children and their families and communities, and documenting children’s learning and engagement through culturally inclusive means”. The value of culturally relevant pedagogy relates to co-constructing educational practices that sustain and celebrate the cultures of children, families, and communities (Harris et al., 2020). This method emphasizes that students’ native languages and backgrounds are integral to their learning journey. Authentic dialogues that reflect students’ cultural backgrounds construct a window for sharing perspectives, traditions, and stories. This leads to elevated cultural understanding and mutual respect among partners.

Providing opportunities for young learners to expose to diverse cultures helps them develop a “positive attitude toward the society and the world around them... [in

order to] cross the bridge of their cultural diversity with activities that will help them collaborate, interact and explore” (Abdulatie, 2012, p. 40). For example, experiencing diverse cultural narratives assists students in trying to understand a situation or experience from the characters’ perspectives. This nurtures empathy, broadens their views, and fosters a multi-layered understanding of the individuals’ experience.

Culturally relevant texts serve as bridges that connect students from various backgrounds. Through discussions and shared readings, students form connections as they engage with the texts together. This shared experience contributes to the creation of a caring community. Culturally relevant texts confirm that diverse perspectives are valued and important. This reinforces the idea that every individual's experiences impact the foundations of the community. As readers engage with culturally relevant texts, the classroom becomes an inclusive climate where different voices and backgrounds are celebrated and respected (Gay, 2000).

Culturally relevant texts can be chosen for authenticity and chosen to assist in the critical literacy process (Hollie, 2019). As Hollie asserts “... the more authentic the texts, the more equitable and culturally responsive they will be for not only students of color but also all students” (p. 31). Educators must expose students to diverse cultures through culturally relevant texts in which they can reflect on themselves, their families, their cultures, or their experiences. They deliberately choose materials that allow learners to make meaningful connections between texts and their own cultural identities, values and backgrounds. This helps to develop awareness, acceptance and gratitude toward themselves, others and the world. Deakins (2009) adds “[enduring] appreciation of cultural diversity issues was achieved via deep styles of teaching and learning that

raised awareness, changed attitudes and behavior, and ultimately impacted classroom culture” (p. 209). This empowers students to embrace their own cultures while appreciating the diversity present in their local and global educational communities. It's associated with their real lives, making learning more meaningful and relatable.

### **Interactive Read Alouds**

IRAs are defined as a highly effective approach to reading instruction where learners are read to and have fluency modeled with a text (Mikul, 2015). IRAs are a dynamic tool for nurturing various reading-related skills among beginning readers through teacher and peer modeling, thoughtful discussions, and active engagement (Pinkerton, 2019). When teachers engage in read-aloud sessions with their students, they're potentially offering a unique experience for some of their students (Oczkus, 2012). In the process, instructors also grant them the gift of valued moments spent with captivating books (Mikul, 2015). This helps to foster a lifelong appreciation for reading and creating treasured memories through the exploration of wonderful literary works. Thus, students not only develop reading skills but also cultivate a deeper appreciation for literature and learning. The goal of using IRAs is to offer chances for children to interact with texts through listening and conversation to foster a profound understanding of the meaning of texts (Mikul, 2015). Also, Giroir et al. (2015) argue that enhancing and refining read-aloud practices can offer significant benefits to English Language Learners' (ELLs)' literacy development and acquisition of academic language skills. Through IRAs, an adult purposefully poses questions and encourages students to get involved in discussing and scrutinizing text to boost their engagement and motivation, along with reading skills.

**Boosting students' engagement and motivation in reading.** According to Scarborough's Reading Rope, developing learners' skilled reading is a multifaceted process with many strands that are woven together to promote reading comprehension skills for all learners, especially striving readers (International Dyslexia Association, 2018). Building learners' background knowledge is critical to support them with language comprehension. Using IRAs can effectively engage students in a reading activity by accessing their background experience (Mikul, 2015). When students are motivated to read and are encouraged to use their past experiences, it increases engagement. By fostering relationships between the text and their own experiences and the world, students are encouraged to use and practice the newly learned language skills (Giroir et al., 2015). This facilitates both a deeper comprehension of the language itself and a more profound understanding of the concepts being delivered. Also, Giroir et al. (2015) emphasize that IRAs provide opportunities for kids to enjoy reading, and encourage their love of reading, especially ELLs. ELLs often have a feeling of stress and pressure in class more than their English-speaking peers because they are learning a new language. Read-aloud time definitely brings the feeling of comfort from listening to stories, while exposing them to language. Wiseman (2011) highlights the significance of choosing texts that align with learners' expertise in ways that are both important and captivating. The process of increasing learning outcomes is fully tied to the activation and development of students' existing background knowledge (Ruddell & Unrau, 1997). This helps to establish connections between students' lives and their engagement (Lenox, 2013). Readers are more likely to actively participate in an activity if they find it personally meaningful. Wiseman (2011) resonates with this response, highlighting that

as students respond to texts, they do so through the lens of their own experiences, contributing their unique ideas to the classroom's collective knowledge. Through IRAs, instructors can connect this principle, allowing students to connect their past experiences with the content of the text. This not only fosters a stronger engagement with the reading material but also facilitates a richer understanding and construction of knowledge within the classroom setting.

**Increase students' reading skills.** Participating in IRAs provides more than just an enjoyable and engaging experience but also has a significant impact on oral language development (Lenox, 2013). Through exposure to new vocabulary and sentence structures that diverge from daily conversation, IRAs enrich learners' linguistic skills (Mikul, 2015). This practice increases engaging in extended conversations, broadening language usage for various purposes, and expanding conceptual understanding.

Moreover, IRAs serve as a supportive tool for fostering foundational skills in early reading, such as print awareness, phonological awareness, and alphabet knowledge, all of which are nurtured within a context that holds meaning and relevance (Oczkus, 2012). IRA sessions contribute to language growth by introducing language patterns, fostering conversational engagement, and promoting foundational reading skills. The context of shared stories not only fascinates learners' attention but also cultivates a strong foundation for language development and early literacy skills. When learners are exposed to new vocabulary within a context, they gain access to various contextual cues that facilitate more profound connections between the new content and its meaning (Giroir et al., 2015). IRAs bring many opportunities and benefits for young



children's literacy growth (Oczkus, 2012). IRAs are active platforms where teachers demonstrate the art of reading and thinking critically about texts, fostering students' growth as proficient readers and thinkers. It is vital to model for students to see how good readers construct meaning and their understanding of the text. IRAs offer learners opportunities to see a think-aloud in process by observing how effective readers ask questions to clarify what they read and pause when needed to discuss (Mikul, 2015). In this, teachers engage students with physical actions of acting out emotions to teach vocabulary and boost their understanding of the connection with characters in the story. This assists learners' comprehension such as building their background knowledge, making predictions, and visualizing the meaning or events from stories. Thus, students can implement it individually or with peers. It boosts students' vocabulary, gives background knowledge in content areas, and models reading strategies. It also increases engagement with reading and helps students build a love for reading. It is critical to model for students so that they can see how good readers construct meaning and their understanding of the text.

In conclusion, binding the power of CRTs and IRAs is an effective strategy to stir and persist reader motivation to read. These two approaches create a vibrant and engaging learning environment that bridges the gap between literature and learners' diverse backgrounds. By choosing texts that resonate with students' identities, cultures, and experiences, educators provide authenticity and connections to their reading journey (Giroir et al., 2015). These deep connections enrich their comprehension, increase curiosity, and foster a sense of belonging that propels their motivation to engage with the material. IRAs serve as a means for active participation, as readers

participate in discussions, share perceptions, and exchange views (Mikul, 2015). The interactive nature of these lessons not only deepens their understanding but also supports foundational literacy skills and critical thinking abilities.

Throughout Chapter Two, a broad explanation of reading motivation was discussed and how three critical forces such as interests, confidence, and dedication drive readers to engage themselves in the world of literature. Recognizing and nurturing these motivations not only deepens the reading experience but also empowers individuals to forge enduring connections with literature. Next, the impact of incorporating CRTs was presented as a compelling method for increasing students' motivation to read. By resonating with their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, these texts boost a sense of belonging that draws students into the world of literature with genuine enthusiasm. Moreover, the influence of CRTs rises above the boundaries of the reading process, showing in advanced reading outcomes. The alignment of texts with students' cultural identities equips them with a deeper understanding of content, bolstering their comprehension and fluency, and ultimately propelling their overall reading achievements. Then, the integration of CRTs was explored as a vigorous approach that boosts the goals of promoting a more comprehensive global understanding, developing a caring community, and fostering critical readers. Lastly, active participation and interactive engagement within IRAs were shown to have great impacts on student motivation. This not only boosts their desire to explore, comprehend, and connect with the material on a profound level but also enriches readers' educational experiences. These important topics helped to find the answer to the research question: *How can K-2 teachers boost student motivation in reading through interactive*

*read-alouds using culturally relevant texts?* Chapter Three will reveal to present a comprehensive outline of the carefully crafted text set design project.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

The importance of creating a text set incorporating culturally relevant texts within an interactive read-aloud approach for my capstone project not only aligns with learning goals to promote students' motivation to read but also serves as an essential component in promoting student identity and cultural diversity. In Chapter Two, I have studied the definitions of reading motivation, Culturally Relevant Texts, creating a Culturally Relevant Text set, developing student identity, promoting students' appreciation of cultural diversity, and Interactive Read Alouds. This helped me to develop the research question: *How can K-2 teachers boost student motivation in reading through interactive read-alouds using culturally relevant texts?* Throughout Chapter Three, my capstone project is depicted in detail. The project framework is also introduced. The intended participants, setting, timeline, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the capstone project are reviewed.

### Overview

As an elementary teacher for 15 years, I have seen many students confronting motivational challenges such as not wanting to be involved in reading, not being motivated to read, and avoiding and struggling to read texts. Culturally Relevant Texts (CRTs) and Interactive Read-Alouds (IRAs) are impactful approaches that effectively promote readers' motivation (Giroir et al., 2015 & Lenox, 2013). Incorporating CRTs and IRAs has become my passion as I have recognized that many students are not engaged and motivated to read. This leads to negative impacts on their literacy

progress. To recap, CRTs involve the pedagogical method that asserts that when academic knowledge and competencies are integrated into the lived experiences and perspectives of students, they become more intrinsically engaging, making the curriculum meaningful and relevant to them (Schrodt et al., 2015). Also, IRAs are described as when “a teacher poses questions throughout the reading that enhance meaning construction and also show how one makes sense of text” (as cited in Mikul, 2015). I have learned that it is critical to capture students' participation and enthusiasm and provide them opportunities to connect with materials that reflect their cultures or linguistic experiences. Also, it is important to offer them lessons to model critical thinking through think-alouds, learn how to use background knowledge to boost their understanding, and engage in discussion to promote their interest and understanding of the connection with characters in the story. My experiences and challenges have driven me to investigate the research question: *How can K-2 teachers boost student motivation in reading through interactive read-alouds using culturally relevant texts?*

## **Project Design**

In my capstone project, I intended to create a text set incorporating interactive read-alouds (IRAs) and culturally relevant texts (CRTs) to increase students' reading motivation in K-2 classrooms. Its main objective is to engage students in participating in a set of CRTs and spur their interest in reading. The curriculum will contain a text set unit comprising eight multimodal culturally relevant texts and corresponding lesson plans. The text set unit theme is “We are all different and that’s beautiful” which is named after one of Karen Salmansohn’s quotes (NotSalmon, n.d.). These texts will highlight the significance of taking pride in learners’ identity and culture, as well as

exposing them to diverse cultures. The theme of this unit was chosen to explore student identity and promote the appreciation of cultural diversity. This unit helps to engage readers with CRTs when they reflect on themselves and their culture and co-create a caring and inclusive learning climate. It is essential for students to make connections and discover their own identity and culture and learn the benefit of respecting and sympathizing with others who are different from them. This boosts their enthusiasm and interest in reading. Each lesson plan includes instructions for teachers on how to use IRAs or other proposed interactive activities to enhance the text. This makes it easier to captivate and motivate students to engage and read a diverse set of culturally relevant texts and develop a genuine respect for cultural diversity.

The lessons are created utilizing the "Understanding by Design" (UbD) lesson plan model by Wiggins and McTighe (2011). The lesson plan format was altered to accommodate the specific requirements of early-grade K-2 elementary students and was adjusted into a mini-lesson that is suitable for this age group. Also, Wiggins & McTighe emphasize the effectiveness of the process of the three stages of backward design in UbD (pp. 7-8). When designing a unit, in the first stage, it is important to identify the learning outcomes and what learners can do with them and how at the end of each lesson. According to the instructional framework, this element was referred to as the "Learning Target". As Pinkerton (2019) suggests the learning objective should be framed using child-appropriate terminology "I can..." to help the learners' ability to explain and retain the information they had learned. In the second stage, after each lesson, evaluating whether the results of student performance and understanding match the goals is addressed. Each lesson has set benchmarks that align with the student's

achievements. To gauge student progress, specific performance activities were designed for each lesson. Self-assessments were incorporated to let learners reflect on their personal learning journey and improvement. Providing an emphasis on developing learner identity and the appreciation of cultural diversity throughout the CRT set enables students to learn and sharpen these concepts until they achieve them. In the third stage, activities and lessons are identified that will support students achieving the learning goals and performing appropriately in evaluations. It is crucial to ensure that the learning plan aids in the transfer of knowledge, understanding, and skill acquisition, ultimately fostering students' independence. For example, this plan features an Interactive Read Aloud (IRA) of a text called *Drawn Together* by Minh Lê. Specific moments for "turn and talk" are incorporated into the IRA to facilitate class discussion and emphasize key learning points (Pinkerton, 2019). During a "turn and talk", the teacher briefly halts the session to pose a question or stimulate thought such as "What do you notice about the grandfather's feelings?" or "Talk about ways families can support one another". Students then discuss their ideas with a partner. After the discussion, the class gathers together to share their perspectives. This assists educators in determining students' grasp of the material and altering instructional practices to serve the diverse needs of all learners. These three stages prioritize learner inquiry and understanding and provide a solid foundation for their holistic growth.

### **Project Framework**

Creswell & Creswell (2023) emphasize that "[i]n planning a study, researchers need to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions that they bring to the study, the research design that is related to this worldview, and the specific methods or

procedures of research that translate the approach into practice” (p. 6). The worldview that directed my capstone project is a constructivist worldview which allows individuals to gain an expanded awareness of the world they reside in and actively engage in it (p.9). It empowers them to construct their own meanings of their learning experiences and they tend to be intrinsically motivated. In my project, incorporating CRTs provides opportunities for readers with different backgrounds to explore and see their experiences, beliefs, and cultures mirrored by what they read. This can increase meaningful relationships to the text and lead to learning experiences more relevant to their lives and more engaging in their reading. Thus, learners develop a thorough understanding of their “personal, cultural, and historical experiences” and the world, appreciating its diversity by seeking “to make sense of...the meanings others have about the world” (p. 9). For that reason, I chose the constructivist worldview as a North Star for my project to create a CRT text set to promote my students’ reading motivation by giving them opportunities to read texts that connect them to their background and the world that they live in. When students can relate to the content, see themselves in the texts, and understand the connections of what they’re reading to their own cultures and experiences, they become more enthusiastic and motivated to explore and read more. Guthrie and Barber highlight that “the power of motivation and engagement” is essential in literacy instruction and learning because it is a vehicle to promote students’ interest and love for literacy and promote their persistence, confidence, and growth mindset (as cited in Morrow and Gambrell, 2019, pp. 55-57). Learning is more effective when students are actively involved in their own educational process.



## **Setting and Intended Participants**

When the project concluded, I was switching roles from a kindergarten reading intervention teacher to a first-grade homeroom teacher in a Northern suburb of the Twin Cities area in Minnesota. This school district spreads across three cities and comprises one high school, one middle school, four elementary schools, one gifted school, one online school, and an early learning school. As per the district's online data for the 2022-2023 academic period, around 6,200 students from kindergarten to twelfth grade were enrolled. The student demographic included 53.6% White, 13.1% Black, 15.9% Hispanic, 8.7% Asian, with the remainder distributed across multiple categories. Based on state exam results, 49% of students have achieved proficiency in reading, 41% in math and 40% qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch.

The setting for my new first-grade role was in an elementary building. During the 2023-2024 academic year, the school had 12 sections for K-2, each accommodating 22-24 students, and 16 sections for grades 3-4 students, each accommodating 24-26 students. Based on state exam results, 27% of students had achieved proficiency in reading, 37% in math and 57% qualified for Free or Reduced Lunch. The school had 23.8% minority enrollment. The school staff comprised 39 teachers with advanced degrees and 11 other teachers who assist in meeting the need of individual students.

The project is primarily aimed at the K-2 elementary teachers with whom I work. The team consists of twelve homeroom teachers, four in each grade. Most teachers are white with two teachers of color. In the K-2 grades, the student body is 250 individuals from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, languages, and cultures. The selected texts suit

learners from kindergarten to second grade. To integrate this new "We Are All Different and That's Beautiful" text set unit, educators will need to adapt their existing IRA teaching methods. With the unit plan for the "We Are All Different and That's Beautiful" Text Set, our school's educators can easily utilize the texts and printed resources. Other teachers can also access these resources via Google Drive. The overarching aim of this endeavor is to make a positive difference in students' classroom experiences.

### **Applicable State Standard Requirements**

Throughout this unit of study, K-2 Minnesota English Language Arts Standards such as 0.1.2.2, 1.1.2.3, and 2.1.2.3 will be addressed. For example, kindergarten learners will be able to "choose and read texts that explore personal identity and interests, with prompting and support" and first and second-grade learners will be able to "express curiosity about a topic and choose and read texts for personal interest and enjoyment". (MN ELA Standards K-12, 2020). Each of the above standards will be measured during the unit's summative evaluation as well as through the unit's instructions and tasks.

In Chapter Three, I delved into the core of the capstone project, addressing the central research question: *How can K-2 teachers boost student motivation in reading through interactive read-alouds using culturally relevant texts?* Seeing many of my students' challenges with reading motivation attracted me to incorporating CRTs in my classroom. I recognized the importance of having a comprehensive CRT framework to boost learner reading motivation, especially for young readers from K-2. The "We Are All Different and That's Beautiful" Text Set Unit offers an opportunity to promote student identity and the appreciation of cultural diversity, seamlessly integrating CRT and IRA.

Chapter Three particularly mapped out the project overview, description, framework, intended participants, setting, timeline, and assessment of the project's effectiveness. Chapter Four overviews the story and process behind my crafting the "We Are All Different and That's Beautiful" Text Set Unit. It reflects upon the literature review and curation of the text set, relating critical insights gained. The potential applications of the "We Are All Different and That's Beautiful" Text Set Unit will be elucidated. I will extend by exploring the broader impact of my research and text set unit on the educational community. Potential challenges and limitations of the project will also be scrutinized.

### **Timeline**

My capstone project started in June 2023 and centered around the research question: *How can K-2 teachers boost student motivation in reading through interactive read-alouds using culturally relevant texts?* The first three chapters were drafted from June to August, with Chapter Two demanding the most time. Throughout more than ten weeks of gathering, exploring, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing information from multiple resources for five sub-topics, comprehensive knowledge of the Literature Chapter was assembled. More than sixty resources were gathered and explored through physical texts and online materials such as article databases, videos and eBooks, and Refworks. Also, getting feedback from the Research Design Course professor and content expert, the three chapters were completed near the end of August. Ultimately, the twelve diverse texts of "We Are All Different and That's Beautiful" Text Set Unit were chosen and their annotated bibliography was constructed in October 2023. The associated lesson plans were drafted, and their complementary Google Slides were also designed in November. By December 2023, Chapter Four was written,

revised, and edited with the assistance of Course GED 8490's instructor and classmates. By December 9, 2023, all materials were organized in a Google Drive folder. The comprehensive text set focusing on developing student identity and appreciation of cultural diversity is prepared for use with students in the upcoming 2024-2025 school year.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Reflection

#### Introduction

Being a teacher of color who is also a student, I find that reading and having conversations about topics and books where I can use my cultural background to aid me in learning or teaching new materials often inspires and motivates me more. They are a reflection of my identity, culture, and experiences, so I can relate to them. As a result, I gain more agency and an active role in the process of learning. Throughout my fifteen years of working with diverse elementary students in varied school settings, I have witnessed a significant number of my students encounter a lack of motivation to read. It is vital to engage students in reading, to get them excited about it, to develop a passion for it, and to guide them in becoming the most competent and critical readers they can be. My own personal and professional experiences as well as the literacy knowledge I have gained from the Master's in Literacy Education program at Hamline University have brought me to my project research question: *How can K-2 teachers boost student motivation in reading through interactive read-alouds using culturally relevant texts?*

Chapter One introduced the research question and the personal and professional rationale for it. A detailed literature review was developed in Chapter Two through the review and analysis. Chapter Three provided a thorough description of the "We Are All Different and That's Beautiful" Text Set Unit which promotes students' appreciation of cultural diversity by incorporating CRTs and IRAs. Additionally, the project framework,

intended audience, context, schedule, and effectiveness assessment of the capstone project were scrutinized in this chapter. In Chapter Four, the main learning points of the research findings from Chapter Three will be elucidated. The overview of the project and future implementation are also presented, along with an explanation of how these lesson plans will contribute to the educational profession and potential implications. The project's limitations will then be investigated. Chapter Four ends with future research actions and conclusion of this capstone

### **Main learning points**

In the Literature Review Chapter, I explored six important focuses that were connected to my main research question, "*How can K-2 teachers boost student motivation in reading through interactive read-alouds using culturally relevant texts?*". I delved into research about reading motivation, Culturally Relevant Texts, creating a Culturally Relevant Text set, developing student identity, promoting students' appreciation of cultural diversity, and Interactive Read Alouds. After researching and synthesizing all these main components, several significant findings were revealed.

The first topic that I researched was reading motivation. This taught me that according to Castillo (2023), 64% of fourth graders in the US read below proficient levels. Many young readers struggle to be interested in and motivated by reading materials. Instead of fulfilling the needs of diverse student groups, the educational system has been designed inadequately and has been centered around the White dominant group (Love, 2019). These non-dominant populations of students feel undervalued and like they don't belong. As a result, these individuals struggle to

participate in and remain motivated by their education, such as reading materials. Additionally, many students of color are expelled from the educational system (Hammond, 2015). For that reason, teachers must foster reading motivation in their classrooms to improve reading proficiency (McRae & Guthrie, 2009). I learned that interests, confidence, and dedication are key motivators for readers (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019, p. 53). Morrow & Gambrell also emphasized that these three powerful motivations are intrinsic because they are the desire and enjoyment people have when they do something just for enjoyment, without any pressure or rewards from outside sources. This affirmed to me that readers enjoy reading, and are interested in reading when they interact with texts. They love reading a book written by their favorite author, are thrilled about new content, and are thrilled about a topic that is personally important to them (p. 53).

The second research topic was culturally relevant texts. I discovered that there is an urgent role for CRTs in teaching and learning because they help marginalized groups of students, including ELLs, to increase their learning outcomes, enhance their connections to their home cultures, languages, backgrounds, and boost their critical consciousness. As a teacher working with students from these populations, I strongly see the need for CRTs in schools, where students are becoming more diverse. In my school, the student body has many students of color, many ELLs, and the languages that the students speak are expanding and diversified such as Arabic, Somali, Hmong, Chinese, and Vietnamese. It is critical to implement these approaches to serve this population.

Next, in my research on creating a culturally relevant text set, the key learning point that I took away was that creating a culturally relevant text set requires not only combining different texts but also allowing readers to engage with others who have different experiences and viewpoints and draw connections between the texts and their own experiences (Lomen, 2018). One way to help readers relate to the subject matter on a personal level is to provide texts that represent a diverse range of experiences. One's sense of interest, confidence, identity, and authenticity can all develop with this kind of representation. Also, people who are exposed to stories that are different from their own are likely to strengthen their empathy, understanding, and capacity for empathy toward people from different backgrounds. It encourages inclusivity and broadens learners' perspectives. It made me think that effectively by appealing to a variety of interests and backgrounds, the integration of multiple text sets broadens the topic's appeal to readers. Higher levels of engagement lead to higher levels of understanding.

Fourth, my research on developing student identity through CRTs taught me that encouraging readers to embrace their identities through CRTs can have an important effect on their reading engagement and improve their academic achievement. Culturally relevant texts help readers become more confident in their capacity for learning when they recognize themselves reflected in the curriculum. This provides them with a powerful means of motivation to get involved enthusiastically in their reading and develop as lifelong readers (Morrow & Gambrell, 2019). As an instructor, I must boost my students' engagement by exposing them to texts that are relevant to their backgrounds, languages, and home cultures.



Fifth, the topic of promoting students' appreciation of cultural diversity through CRTs helped me to realize that educators must provide readers with opportunities to involve themselves in an array of diverse cultures through culturally relevant texts. I must carefully select texts to ensure my students can make relationships between the texts and their own cultural identities, values, and backgrounds. This fosters confidence, trust, and appreciation toward oneself as well as other people, and the community at large.

Finally, on the topic of interactive read-alouds, I learned that IRAs are an effective approach to instruction in reading in which learners are read to and have a text serve as a model for fluency (Mikul, 2015). Through teacher and peer modeling, meaningful conversations, and active engagement, IRAs are a dynamic tool for developing a variety of reading-related skills in beginning readers (Pinkerton, 2019). Giroir et al. (2015) also affirm that IRAs support ELLs in learning a new language, as ELLs frequently experience higher levels of stress and pressure in the classroom than their peers who speak English. Reading aloud to children fosters a sense of comfort that comes from being exposed to language while they are being read stories. In these lessons, teachers facilitate students relating between the material of the text and their prior experiences. This benefits student engagement with what they are reading as it makes it simpler for knowledge to be constructed and grasped in the learning environment.

### **Overview of the Project and Future Implementation**

In the spring of 2023, I will start to implement the completed "We Are All Different and That's Beautiful" Text Set in my first-grade classroom. I intend to use these CRTs as

an extension of the IRA lessons I currently teach. All my school's elementary K-2 teachers will also be introduced and given access to the project. The text set unit with eight chosen culturally relevant texts and matching IRA lesson plans are included in the curriculum. The lesson plans with suggested IRA activities will boost students' interest in reading and get them involved in the reading process. Readers will reflect on themselves and their cultures while working together to create an inviting and caring learning environment, which will aid them in connecting with the texts. The CRTs expose students to a variety of cultures and help them feel proud of their identities and cultures. Students develop relationships with the texts, explore their own identities and cultures, and learn the value of understanding and appreciating those who are different from them. This also boosts their enthusiasm and curiosity in reading. The IRAs and other suggested interactive activities enhance students' understanding of the texts. For example, there are charts for making connections to how a text connects to their lives, another text they have read, or the world around them, and activities showing and modeling a think-aloud process to demonstrate how readers often consider elements of a story while reading to help them understand the text deeper. In addition, there are Google slides to preteach vocabulary in each text with visual pictures and definitions to support EL learners. These resources are located on Google Drive for instructors to access.

### **Benefits to the Educational Profession and Implications**

This research project has taught me that there is an urgent role for CRTs in teaching and learning because they help marginalized groups of students increase their learning outcomes, enhance their connections to their home cultures, languages, and

backgrounds, and boost their critical consciousness. In many schools, due to an increasing variety of the student body in terms of race and ethnicity, I firmly believe there is a necessity to implement lesson plans with CRTs to serve this population. My lesson plans of culturally relevant texts provide educators opportunities to utilize these texts and strategies in practice, helping introduce their students to CRTs and enabling them to draw on their background knowledge to engage in reading and boost their learning outcomes.

Also, my lesson plans with IRAs foster an atmosphere that promotes children's active engagement and increased comprehension. The strategies in the lessons involve modeling the think-aloud process, sharing opinions, and listening to others' points of view. The activities strengthen the link between text and thought while also enhancing engagement and learning outcomes. The lessons also offer the learners in teachers' classrooms extra support for learning vocabulary visually through picture slides. Sentence stems help these students to relate to the texts at a deeper level, and encourage them to become more interested in the topics they read about in the lessons.

In terms of overall implications, the combined effect of these CRT and IRA lesson plans will be to promote students' engagement in reading and boost their learning achievement. The unit will also improve students' relationships with their own cultures by establishing connections between literacy skills and their backgrounds. Learners will become more excited to embrace their uniqueness and individual experiences, and value these as strengths and assets. In the long run, these benefits will empower them to become agents for social change in issues that matter to them. The lessons develop

citizenship skills in learners that will enable them to tackle challenges and achieve success in all areas of their lives.

## **Limitations**

Several limitations were found during the literature review and the development of the "We are all different and that's beautiful" Text Set Unit. For instance, CRTs have often been centered on "homogeneous, and often predominantly Black, classrooms" (Byrd, 2016, p. 3). Byrd (2016) also emphasizes there is not enough research regarding the effectiveness of CRTs on other marginalized groups of students such as Latino, Asian American students, and other groups of students of color. Another limitation is that teachers may need additional instruction, support, and time to implement the CRAs that support these lessons effectively. Sometimes it is hard for teachers to find time to learn about these approaches and implement them successfully into their teaching, leading to "short-lived and conflicting interventions, prioritizing those that improve teaching and learning [based on personal judgment], and resisting those that do not" (Taylor, 2020, p. 26). Furthermore, many educators may also wonder if it is actually their duty or if it is essential enough to invest in this process (Taylor, 2020, p. 26). This could lead to resistance to employing these texts and approaches as some educators are not confident about "the validity and efficacy of culturally relevant teaching and often do not see it as valuable for academic success or rigorous student learning" (Taylor, 2020, p. 26).

## **Future research actions**

In the future, I hope to create a CRT set with IRA activities for upper-grade elementary students, since I strongly believe they would also benefit from being exposed to texts that reflect their cultures and backgrounds in the curriculum. To provide third to fifth grade students with an appreciation of cultural diversity and to boost their reading motivation, I plan to create a unit that includes interactive read-alouds of texts that are culturally relevant to the body of students where I work. The goal of my next project will be to teach students to value diversity, embrace their individuality, and recognize the benefits that people from different cultures can have on both individuals and communities. Additionally, I would like to add more texts in a wider range of genres and more diverse cultures to help students develop a strong understanding of others' cultures and boost their appreciation of cultural diversity and motivation to read. Every text will come with a comprehensive lesson plan that outlines both class activities and an interactive read-aloud or viewing of the text.

## **Conclusion**

To summarize, the capstone project provides an answer to my main research question: *How can K-2 teachers boost student motivation in reading through interactive read-alouds using culturally relevant texts?* Chapter Four focused on how I developed during the capstone project as a learner and teacher. First, my key learning points from the six topics from the Literature Review Chapter were discussed. I then provided a summary of my project and my future implementation schedule for the spring of 2023. Third, I elucidated the benefits to the teaching profession of these lesson plans with

CRTs and IRAs which support teachers with tools and strategies to use in their classrooms. Fourth, the limitations I encountered while working on my research and capstone were also reviewed. Lastly, the next steps for my future research project were presented.

My work on the text set makes me greatly proud. I'm self-assured now that I've gone through the capstone process that I can research, collect, and synthesize evidence-based findings for educational issues I come across in the future. The lesson plans for the "We Are All Different and That's Beautiful" Text Set created for this capstone project use recommended IRA activities. By implementing my work, I hope to significantly enhance learners' motivation and their love for reading as lifelong readers.

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