

Article

# Literacy Teacher Educators Creating Space for Children's Literature

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**Abstract:** This paper reports on a qualitative research study that examined how 10 literacy teacher educators (LTEs) utilized children's literature to invite teacher trainees to critically engage with social issues, challenge their assumptions about literacy, and begin to develop the knowledge and dispositions to work alongside diverse learners (e.g., culturally, linguistically, socio-economically). The LTEs recognized that teacher trainees often entered their literacy courses with restricted conceptions of literacy and deficit assumptions about children from economically marginalized and/or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Within their courses, the LTEs positioned literacy as a multifaceted social practice, wherein access to a variety of representational resources facilitates the active construction of knowledge and identities. The LTEs modeled instructional strategies and designed assignments that encouraged teacher trainees to use children's literature as a means to connect with issues relevant to the lives of young learners within contemporary classrooms. This research will be of interest to LTEs who endeavor to use children's literature as a springboard to support teacher trainees to develop a self-reflective stance and a critical cultural consciousness.

**Keywords:** literacy teacher educators; children's literature; teacher education; responsive pedagogies

## 1. Introduction

Persistent attention has been directed towards a growing cultural gap that exists as the representation of culturally and linguistically diverse learners in contemporary classrooms steadily increases, while the demographic profile of teacher trainees remains fairly homogenous; that is, predominately white, female, and English monolingual [1–6]. This gap can make it difficult for teacher trainees to develop an approach toward teaching that foregrounds lived experiences and worldviews that may not align with their own [7,8]. Teacher education has a vital role to play in creating learning opportunities that intentionally guide and support teacher trainees to construct “the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to work confidently with culturally and linguistically diverse children and families” [9] (p. 7). However, the meaningful translation of this laudable goal into practice can represent a challenge.

Teacher trainees often enter teacher education with restricted conceptions of literacy and deficit assumptions about students from economically marginalized and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds [10–18]. These filters and beliefs can hinder their appreciation of literacy as a multifaceted and dynamic social practice. Cummins [19] notes that even when teachers are positively oriented to students' diverse languages and cultures, “there are few guidelines or curriculum expectations that specify how they might mobilize [this] diversity to advance students' overall academic development” (p. 459). An inclusive approach to literacy pedagogy recognizes that students draw upon historically

amassed and culturally informed bodies of knowledge to construct an understanding of their social worlds [20]. Literacy pedagogy that engages with the rich funds of knowledge learners bring to the classroom can foster meaningful connections between their lives inside and outside of school [21,22]. How might literacy teacher education offer teacher trainees learning opportunities that facilitate the development of an inclusive approach to literacy teaching and learning? Namely, a pedagogy of literacy teacher education that recognizes a multiplicity of linguistic resources, honors cultural and socio-economic differences, and responds to the varied literacy needs of diverse learners.

Gay and Kirkland argue [8] that “developing personal and professional critical consciousness about racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity should be a major component of preservice teacher education” (p.181). Literacy teacher preparation that seeks to be responsive to the complexities of our globalized society must advance a commitment to teaching for equity and diversity. Indeed, the *Children’s Right to Read* [23] campaign launched by the International Literacy Association (ILA) positions “literacy and access to quality literacy instruction and resources [as] an issue for equity and an issue of social justice” (p.3). Preparing beginning teachers for diverse classroom contexts necessitates the design of learning opportunities that actively engage with teacher trainees’ prior experiences, facilitate engagements with literacy as a multifaceted process, and scaffold the foundational knowledge and dispositions necessary for beginning teachers to build a comprehensive and inclusive approach to literacy teaching.

Literacy teacher educators play a critical role in the process; and as such, should advance a commitment to preparing teacher trainees to be responsive to the varied literacy needs of diverse learners, and to situate literacy pedagogy around issues relevant to the lives of learners and their communities. Goodwin and Kosnik [24] conclude that “simply put, it is reasonable to assume that quality teacher preparation depends on quality teacher educators;” yet, they also note that “few studies have looked at the professional experiences” of teacher educators (p. 334). There is a lack of in-depth and systematic research on the preparation, knowledge and practices of teacher educators [25–29]. More research is needed to understand how LTEs work with beginning teachers to construct an approach to literacy pedagogy that is responsive to the diverse cultures, lived experiences and perspectives of learners in contemporary classroom contexts.

This paper reports on a qualitative research study, *Pedagogy of literacy teacher education: Meeting the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies*, that examined the backgrounds, pedagogies, and practices of literacy teacher educators (LTEs) in four countries: Canada, the United States, England and Australia. An overarching goal of the research is to inquire into how LTEs help teacher trainees develop an approach to literacy pedagogy that honors and builds on the linguistic and cultural diversity in contemporary classrooms. This paper focuses on 10 participating LTEs and considers how they used children’s literature to help teacher trainees unpack their initial conceptions of literacy and begin to develop dispositions to work alongside culturally and linguistically diverse communities. More specifically, the paper examines how these LTEs utilized children’s literature to invite teacher trainees to critically engage with complex social issues, to challenge their assumptions about literacy, and to begin to develop the knowledge to effectively meet the needs of diverse learners (e.g., culturally, linguistically, socio-economically).

The analysis of LTEs practices and pedagogies is informed by the culturally responsive teaching framework and techniques outlined by Gay and Kirkland [3,8]. The framework and techniques are intended to assist teacher educators’ efforts to support teacher trainees in developing a self-reflective stance and a critical cultural consciousness. The framework outlined by Gay and Kirkland [8] encourages teacher educators to integrate the following components into their practice: create learning expectations for criticalness, model culturally responsive teaching, provide opportunities for teacher trainees to practice critical consciousness and to translate the principles of multicultural critical consciousness into classroom contexts (p. 181). The potential of these techniques to help foster a critical cultural consciousness informs our analysis of the ways in which LTEs used children’s literature to create spaces of learning that encouraged teacher trainees to actively reflect upon their assumptions, broaden their conceptions of literacy, and inquire into issues of equity and diversity.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Shifting Landscape of Literacy*

Amidst a rapidly shifting landscape of literacy, wherein knowledge is constructed amid multiple communication channels and increasing linguistic and cultural diversity, beginning teachers should be prepared to embrace a broad definition of literacy, which recognizes a plurality of literacies. Over the last few decades, the field of literacy education has been significantly influenced by the work of multidisciplinary scholars who position literacy as an embedded social practice situated in time, place, and culture [30–35]. This socially situated approach to literacy recognizes that access to a variety of representational resources facilitates the active construction of knowledge and the enactment of identities. Street [35] suggests literacy “is always about knowledge, the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being” (p. 78). Literacy, in this sense, is not conceived as a static entity or a set of prescribed skills; rather, literacy is positioned as inherently embedded within socio-cultural contexts.

This framing of literacy marks a shift away from an autonomous model, which advances a decontextualized notion of literacy as a neutral set of skills that one acquires incrementally [36]. The autonomous model of literacy can be somewhat problematic, as it neglects to consider how literacy practices are embedded within culturally constructed systems of knowledge and structures of power, which often set the parameters for what counts as legitimate and influential literacies [22,32]. In contrast, a social practice perspective acknowledges a plurality of literacies and recognizes diverse ways of being literate. Conscious attention is focused on the ways in which people engage with culturally recognized literacy practices to communicate, negotiate, and construct meaning in different domains of life [30,37]. When literacy is viewed “as a dynamic, organic fluid phenomenon, constantly shaped and re-shaped by those who speak and write it every day in accordance with their needs and wishes, then the educational task becomes different” [38] (p. 151). When literacy pedagogy is viewed as a dynamic and collaborative space that values the expertise both teachers and students bring to the classroom, the process of learning becomes a more inclusive endeavor [31,34].

The need to prepare beginning teachers for the complexities of contemporary literacy classrooms has become an increasingly pressing concern [23,39]. Teacher trainees will likely be expected to conceptualize literacy and enact literacy pedagogy in ways they did not experience in their prior schooling. Teacher trainees’ previous years of schooling and lived experiences have been found to have a substantial impact on their teaching priorities [40–44]. The consideration of what beginning teachers need to know to enact a multifaceted approach to literacy teaching and learning raises some fundamental questions. For instance, how might literacy teacher education take into account the varied experiences with and perspectives on literacy that teacher trainees bring with them to their studies? What changes when LTEs encourage teacher trainees to consider literacy as a situated social practice? This paper considers how LTEs modeled instructional strategies and designed assignments, which invited teacher trainees to utilize children’s literature as a vehicle to meaningfully engage with complex social issues relevant to the lives of learners within contemporary classrooms.

### 2.2. *Engagement with Children’s Literature: An Integral Part of Literacy Teacher Education*

There is a growing appreciation of the role children’s literature can play in supporting teacher trainees to recognize a multiplicity of linguistic resources, acknowledge cultural and socioeconomic differences, and respond to the varied literacy needs of learners in classroom contexts [23,45,46]. Bishop’s [47,48] use of the mirrors and windows metaphor highlights the potential of children’s literature to serve as a powerful resource to teach about dimensions of diversity and cultural representation. Bishop [47] argued children’s literature can offer readers a mirror reflecting our experience “back to us and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (p.1). Correspondingly, literature also has the potential to serve as a window, particularly for those from majority social groups, into the “multicultural nature of the world” [48] (p. 9). The foregrounding

of children's literature in literacy teacher education can help broaden teacher trainees' sociocultural consciousness and deepen the knowledge and dispositions needed to foster meaningful relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Children's literature can offer an entry point into learning opportunities that have the potential to expose teacher trainees to diverse cultures and complex social issues relevant to both their local teaching context and the broader world. Luke [49] notes, "a recognition of cultural, class and gender differences can lead to a more inclusive literature and literacy curriculum, one which represents and offers far more diverse and challenging identities and voices, histories and experiences" (p. 68). Literacy teacher educators have an important role to play "in modeling what it means to talk, think, and learn with critical texts" [50] (p. 96). Within the context of this paper, critical texts refers to texts that actively take up issues of difference and dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender identity, class, or linguistic diversity. Relevant research reveals that LTEs have used children's literature to create spaces of learning, which encourage teacher trainees to consciously reflect upon categories of difference, to inquire into multiple perspectives, and to actively explore the relationship between language, culture and identity [45,51–57]. These spaces of learning can encourage teacher trainees to engage in conversations that centre marginalized voices and a range of lived experiences. In so doing, children's literature becomes a channel through which to disrupt some of the restricted conceptions of literacy and deficit assumptions teacher trainees sometimes hold about children and families from economically marginalized, and culturally and linguistically diverse, communities [53,58,59].

LTEs have also utilized children's literature within coursework to help foster teacher trainees' knowledge of how to select critical texts and to model literacy strategies teacher trainees can enact in the classroom to effectively engage with these texts [50,53,55,60,61]. Placing an emphasis on text selection can help stimulate conversations about the criteria used to select literature, and the potential consequences such selections can have for the reading practices privileged within the social world of the classroom. For as Luke [49] highlights, "what is included and excluded, valued and denigrated in literacy and literature is not arbitrary, random or a natural expression of quality or taste", but rather "it is tied up with questions about the power and status of particular representations of culture" (p. 43). Engaging with texts that render visible cultural, racial, and linguistic differences provides opportunities for teacher trainees to extend their sociocultural knowledge and to dialogue with one another about how to effectively work alongside diverse learners [45,46]. Inviting teacher trainees to actively engage with critical texts by participating in instructional strategies, such as literature circles, dialogue journals, drama, and story mapping, has been found to encourage conscious reflection and to facilitate conversations about diverse social issues [54,61,62]. In so doing, space is created for teacher trainees to consciously consider how these texts can be used to broaden the stories told, heard, and honored within the classroom.

### 3. Methods

This study utilized a qualitative approach; more specifically, a modest sample of LTEs was studied in depth, the interviews were semi-structured, and the themes emerged as the study progressed [63–65]. A qualitative design was employed as this research approach places emphasis on understanding the intricacies of participants' experiences, the social contexts in which these experiences are embedded, and the meaning participants assign to their lived experience [64]. Qualitative inquiry yields a "richly descriptive" interpretative analysis, which typically includes the "voices of participants" to convey the underlying mechanisms and complexities of the phenomenon under study [66]. A grounded theory approach was used, not beginning with a fixed theory but generating theory inductively from the data using a set of techniques and procedures for collection and analysis. In a grounded theory approach, conceptual patterns in the data are progressively identified and systematically compared to inductively generate a theory or elaborate upon existing theories [67,68].

The following steps were taken to invite the LTEs to participate in this study. Initially, invitations to participate in the study were sent to 15 LTEs. This led to "snowball sampling", whereby some LTEs

who had accepted the invitation then suggested a colleague who might be relevant for the study [64]. After reviewing the suggested individuals' faculty profiles on their university websites to ensure they were teaching literacy, they were invited to participate in the research. To make the sample consistent, only those who had a doctorate were invited. Efforts were made to ensure a range of experience (e.g., elementary/primary and secondary teaching) and a gender representation comparable to that in the profession as a whole.

In total, 30 literacy teacher educators (LTEs) working in four countries, Canada, the United States, England and Australia, were interviewed in 2019. The semi-structured interviews inquired into their background experiences, influences on their current practice, turning points in their careers, professional identities, goals for their literacy courses, and equity practices. The same questions were asked of all participants, but probe questions were also posed during the interviews to delve into relevant issues raised by the participants. Each semi-structured interview took approximately 60–90 min. In conjunction with the interviews a document analysis was also conducted of syllabi from the LTEs' literacy courses. The syllabi provided insight into the structure and content of each literacy course, topics prioritized, course readings, assignments, grading schemes, instructional strategies, and projected learning outcomes.

This paper reports on a subset of 10 LTEs who utilized children's literature in their courses to support teacher trainees in developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions to work alongside culturally and linguistically diverse learners. This purposeful sample was identified through an examination of the LTEs' interview transcripts, course objectives, course readings and assignments. Table 1 provides an overview of these participants.

**Table 1.** Overview of Participants.

Participant (Pseudonym)	Country	Years Working in Higher Education
Alicia	Australia	12
Philip	Australia	20
Madeleine	Canada	10
Rita	Canada	16
Tessa	Canada	6
Rosetta	UK	14
Ella	USA	5
Jeff	USA	1
Katreena	USA	8
Sonia	USA	29

The data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach, whereby open, axial and selective coding strategies, and the principle of constant comparison analysis, were applied to identify categories and themes until theoretical saturation occurred [67]. Identified commonalities and marked differences were used to generate, modify, and establish themes. Qualitative software NVivo 12 was used for data analysis. Queries were run to determine connections across LTEs' conceptualizations of literacy, pedagogical goals and approaches, and enactment of equity and diversity practices.

The first level of analysis, open coding, involved a close and detailed reading of the data (e.g., transcripts, syllabi), segmenting the data into conceptually related pieces, and applying codes to represent the concepts identified. Both descriptive codes and in vivo codes, that is codes that captured participants' words, were applied to the segmented data [67,69]. Approximately 164 codes and sub-codes were generated. For example, the pedagogy code had 23 sub-codes such as modeling, assignments, readings, use of children's literature, bridging theory and practice. During the next level of analysis, axial coding, the codes and categories generated through open coding were examined to

identify interrelationships between and within the data. As with open coding, the procedures of posing questions to the data and the constant comparison methods of analysis were used. However, during the axial stage of analysis these procedures were increasingly focused on relating substantive categories to make conceptual connections [67]. The properties and dimensions of codes and categories were examined to identify patterns and connections. As connections were identified the codes were grouped to form the main conceptual categories that cut across the data. During the selective coding level of analysis, categories were further refined and efforts were made to systematically relate core categories. Selective coding led to a fine-grained analysis, which exposed nuances in the data. This inductive process of analysis advanced our understanding of the practices of LTEs who endeavored to broaden teacher trainees' conceptions of literacy and to foster the development of critical cultural consciousness. In particular, the relationship between LTEs' efforts to facilitate learning opportunities that encouraged authentic reflection, fostered dialogue centered around critical texts, and modeled inclusive strategies. This paper focuses on 10 LTEs who utilized children's literature as a spring board to critically engage with complex social issues and to help teacher trainees develop dispositions to work alongside culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

There are certain limitations to this study. For instance, the size of the purposeful sample is small, however our intention was to examine in depth the LTEs' efforts to use children's literature to support teacher trainees to develop a self-reflective stance and critical cultural consciousness [3,8]. Another limitation of the study is the absence of observations of the LTEs' practices in their teacher education courses. Observations of the LTEs' instructional practices would have contributed to data collection, however, given the multiple contexts, this was not feasible due to distance and cost. An analysis of syllabi from the LTEs' literacy courses was conducted to gain insight into the course goals, topics prioritized, course readings and assignments. Lastly, the study included LTEs from predominately English-speaking countries. The inclusion of LTEs from countries where English is not the predominate language was not feasible due to cost (e.g., cost for translation); however, we recognize such research would make a valuable contribution to the teacher education literature.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The participating LTEs' course goals and instructional practices were directly informed by a commitment to using children's literature as a vehicle to support teacher trainees to unpack their initial conceptions of literacy and to enter into conversation with a broader framing of literacy, which recognizes and builds on the linguistic and cultural resources young learners bring to the classroom. The findings are representative of key themes and recurrent patterns identified in the data.

##### 4.1. Unpacking Conceptions about Literacy

Consistent with the relevant research literature, the LTEs recognized that teacher trainees often entered their literacy courses with restricted conceptions of literacy, due in large part to their prior school-based literacy experiences. The LTEs attempted to disrupt the restricted lens of teacher trainees' prior schooling, which often positioned literacy as a discreet set of autonomous skills detached from a student's social, cultural, and historical context. The LTEs endeavored to create spaces of learning that modeled expectations for self-reflection and critical consciousness as integral to the process of learning to teach [3,8]. Within their literacy courses, the LTEs provided space for teacher trainees to unpack their relationships to literacy and schooling, and to draw connections to their future teaching practice.

The examination of LTEs' practices contributes to our understanding of how literacy teacher education can provide opportunities for teacher trainees to develop a self-reflective stance [8], and to engage with literacy as a social practice that is deeply embedded in the construction of knowledge and identity [35,36]. Jeff, for example, asked teacher trainees in his literacy course to reflect upon and critically examine "eight moments when [they] felt like they joined the literacy club [saw themselves as readers and writers]." LTEs often modeled unpacking by sharing their own stories. Jeff drew on his experience as an elementary student to provide direction for the teacher trainees. During his schooling

he had a rather apprehensive relationship with reading, largely due to the sense of disconnect he felt from the prescribed-levelled readers privileged within the classroom. As a consequence, he “stopped reading for pleasure;” so while he “ended up being a successful student it was at the expense of being a reader.” Jeff noted that he drew on this experience to invite teacher trainees to “think critically about the ways we make kids do school.” In so doing, he called into question the ways in which school-based literacy practices, such as text selection, can operate to nourish some young learners’ identities as readers, and simultaneously deprive others [49].

Each of the LTEs emphasized the importance of supporting teacher trainees to develop and extend their knowledge of children’s books and young adult literature (YAL). Their efforts complement previous research [50,53,55,60] by demonstrating how children’s literature can be used to help teacher trainees recognize a plurality of literacies and foster meaningful connections between learners’ lives inside and outside of school [30,34]. For instance, Rita noted “when we’re sharing children’s literature there’s a lot of folks who have not read a young adult novel or a piece of children’s literature since they were children themselves.” Rita consciously utilized children’s literature in her literacy course to both introduce teacher trainees to a range of texts and authors, and to model how literature can be used to connect with learners’ interests and experiences. She explained by “bringing in books [I’m] trying to connect it out to their experiences. I guess it’s also relational. I try to actually model for them how do you connect and learn from your students.” Rita further explained that the framing of literacy as multiple and socio-culturally situated afforded opportunities for teacher trainees to reflect upon critical questions such as, “Who are the children that are in front of us? What are the communities they come from?” which in turn encouraged teacher trainees to center literacy pedagogy on children’s lived experiences [19,20,30,49]. Likewise, Tessa echoed this sentiment; as she noted, the integration of children’s literature into her courses was meant to help “center children and children’s lives.” She often utilized children’s literature that focused on the experiences of Indigenous communities, such as the book *My Name Is Sapeetza* [70], based on the author’s experience in a residential school. Tessa explained that through the reading of these texts teacher trainees come “to know those characters and they fall in love with those characters and that’s as close as you can get to actually having them live through it.” As the course unfolds, she continually reminds teacher trainees to keep the experiences of the characters they have read about at the front of their mind as they work through the complexities of literacy teaching and learning.

The LTEs were committed to inviting teacher trainees to expand their initial conceptions of literacy and to engage with reading as an active process whereby people use multiple forms of representation to make meaning [32]. Within their courses, the LTEs positioned literacy as a multifaceted social practice, wherein access to a variety of representational resources facilitates the active construction of knowledge and identities [31,34]. This framing of literacy informed the learning objectives and goals for their courses. Rita explained that engaging with “multiliteracies is very helpful to destabilize this idea that there’s one way to be literate.” Rita emphasized the multimodal nature of literacy in her courses in an effort to help complicate teacher trainees conceptions of what it means to be literate. She stressed that by working with the concept of “multimodality we can expand people’s literacy and identity options by providing them with many different semiotic options.” Children’s literature provided a means to help teacher trainees explore multimodal ways of knowing and communicating [34,38]. As Rosetta highlighted, “children’s literature forms the basis of our courses” and “we’re working to help them [teacher trainees] understand that children’s literature includes film, multimodal text, it’s a very broad conception.” The foregrounding of children’s literature in the LTEs’ courses was central to supporting teacher trainees in broadening their conceptions of literacy.

#### 4.2. Taking on Complex Issues

Gay and Kirkland [3,8] remind us that teacher education has a vital role to play in guiding and supporting teacher trainees to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to work alongside culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Correspondingly, the LTEs recognized that

teacher trainees often entered their teacher education studies with deficit assumptions about children and families from economically marginalized and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, based, in part, on a lack of sustained interactions with individuals whose lived realities are different than their own. This finding is consistent with previous research [10–18]. Sonia, for instance, actively considered the potential influence teacher trainees' lived experience may have on their ability to foster meaningful relationships with young learners and their families. She said many of the teacher trainees she works with

“come from rural communities, very Christian communities and they have not had any authentic relationships with people of colour before they come to university. They've done some mission work maybe. But, they have to first recognize that they breathe the smog that has racism in it and that they are racist people, and then dealing with that.”

The complexity of unpacking prior experiences and associated beliefs presents a challenge that both teacher trainees and teacher educators must face. Even when teacher trainees are positively oriented towards issues of diversity and difference, they “need guidance and support in critiquing and changing thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors related to them” [8] (p. 184). While it is important to create opportunities for self-reflection, it is also vital for teacher trainees to have opportunities to actively participate in “critical conversations with each other about racial and culturally diverse dilemmas in education” [8] (p. 184).

The LTEs used children's literature to invite teacher trainees to engage in critical conversations about the complex issues likely to be relevant to the lives of the young learners and families they will work alongside in school contexts. The examination of the LTEs' instructional practices provides insight into how children's literature can be utilized to consciously reflect upon and inquire into categories of difference [45,50–52]. Ella, for instance, believed that “children's literature is central to the whole course in terms of equity and having diverse representations of literature and giving teacher trainees suggestions of texts they can bring into their own classrooms that showcase linguistic or racial diversity.” Similarly, Katreena expressed a sense of urgency as she underscored the importance of “bringing in texts that kind of push the envelope in terms of showing different perspectives, critical content and incendiary texts that are really from a non-white perspective.” The LTEs use of children's literature that centers the voices and lived realities of marginalized communities provided an entry point to raise complex issues and to facilitate shared learning experiences. Alicia recounted her recent use of children's books in her course that confronted “challenging topics”, such as ethnic cleansing and the plight of refugees. She noted her use of titles such as *My Dog* [71], *The Little Refugee* [72], and *Ziba Came on a Boat* [73]. Her deliberate decision to integrate children's books that focused on complex topics enabled rich dialogue about “the challenging times teacher trainees will have in classrooms or perhaps the need to consider the refugee child who's only been [in country] for a month.” Furthermore, her use of literature circles as an instructional strategy enabled opportunities for teacher trainees to engage in deep conversations about “a novel and the ideologies and themes” explored within it.

Providing opportunities for critical conversations about issues of difference and inequity has the potential to help beginning teachers consider their own positionality within broader social systems and the implications for their future teaching practice. Rosetta intentionally selected “challenging texts” for her literacy courses to encourage talk and “to try to get teacher trainees to express their understanding” of issues of potential significance to the lives of their future students and their families. In so doing, she also modeled for teacher trainees how thoughtfully selected texts could serve as mirrors and windows for their future students [47,48,61]. She described her use of the children's picture book *Those Shoes* [74] to explore the intersections of race, poverty and class. The story, she explained,

is about a little boy, basically he wants the Nike trainers that everybody has but he can't afford it, and he lives with his grandma, and in the end he gets a pair from a charity shop but they're too small for him and he ends up giving them away to a boy who is even poorer than him.



Through class dialogue about the text, Rosetta encouraged teacher trainees to consider the complex positioning of the main character. While at the surface, his actions illustrate an act of kindness, it also points to deeper issues of inequity and socio-economic disparity. For instance, the inequity of a young child being in the position to have to make such a difficult choice. As teacher trainees engaged in dialogue about the complex issues raised in the text, Rosetta helped foster connections to their future practice as teachers by asking them “to think about the language they use, the kinds of resources and materials that they use with children that they’re working with.” Her use of “challenging texts” such as this one was motivated in part by a desire to “challenge teacher trainees’ middle class assumptions about what should go on in families”, and to encourage them “not to be making judgements about what other families do and what they believe families should be like.” The LTEs endeavored to foster learning opportunities that invited teacher trainees to engage with literacy as an embedded social practice, wherein issues of language, culture and identity are inextricably linked [51].

#### 4.3. Creating Opportunities to Deepen Critical Consciousness

The LTEs also utilized children’s literature in their courses to model instructional strategies and to create assignments intended to help teacher trainees deepen their understanding of issues of power, representation, diversity, and difference. Through their intentional use of dialogue-rich instructional strategies and children’s literature that tackles complex issues, the LTEs modeled for teacher trainees “what it means to talk, think, and learn with critical texts” [50] (p.96). For example, Philip consciously selected children’s books that focused on “sensitive issues” to “explore the ways in which teacher trainees can use politically and culturally sensitive books in the classroom.” He recalled his use of the text *The Island* [75] to model the application of a critical lens and to illustrate how children’s books can be used to examine multiple and diverse perspectives [49]. He suggested that reading *The Island* [75] provided the opportunity to delve into issues of “identity, the process of othering, stigmatizing, stereotyping, and scapegoating.” Philip posed questions to stimulate discussion amongst teacher trainees and to foster a critical examination of how the text can be used to explore multiple perspectives. Dialogue is an integral part of the process of learning and cultivating a critical consciousness, for “teachers talking with each other about their individual and collective thoughts, insights and instructional actions is an essential part of being a reflective practitioner” [8] (p. 185). According to Philip, an instructional goal of the activity was to help teacher trainees recognize that “when they’re dealing with children’s literature they need to understand the different types of reader they have in the classroom.” Through the shared reading and discussion of *The Island*, he encouraged teacher trainees to consciously consider how a reader’s lived experience might inform their response to the text. He pointed out that when reading a text like *The Island* [75],

we may well have in our classroom children who’ve migrated, and sometimes they’ve migrated under very difficult circumstances, so those children are going to be bringing a very different perspective to the text from children who were born in the country, who had no knowledge of migration.

These types of learning opportunities encouraged teacher trainees to consciously reflect upon how they might use children’s books to acknowledge the multiple perspectives and diverse lived realities present within contemporary classrooms [46].

Katreena also emphasized the importance of modeling instructional strategies that explicitly demonstrate for teacher trainees the value of rich classroom dialogue centered around texts that meaningfully connect with learners. Her commitment to creating ample opportunity for students to be in conversation with one another informed the design of her literacy course. Throughout the course, she integrated instructional strategies that created space for teacher trainees to be in dialogue with one another, and to learn from and with each other, as they collaboratively inquired into texts that rendered visible a range of perspectives. Katreena strove to “live the strategies as a teacher that [she] wants [teacher trainees] to use in their own classrooms.” For instance, she highlighted her use of literature

circles to engage teacher trainees in the reading of children's literature focused on "themes related to immigration and migration." She noted, "when they do literature circles in class", it models for teacher trainees how to facilitate interactive response strategies "focused on attentive reading, co-constructing knowledge with others and co-constructing meaning about those texts."

The collaborative nature of the literature circle experience offered teacher trainees a chance to deepen their understanding of the issues of immigration and migration explored in the texts; for, as Katreena pointed out, "they're talking to different people and getting different perspectives." The selection of children's books focused on issues of immigration and migration also served to make explicit the power of utilizing literature that is relevant to the lives of learners within the classroom community. When selecting children's literature for her literacy course, Katreena endeavored to choose texts that "evoke a lot of personal emotion." She noted her use of the book *The Circuit* [76], the autobiographical account of Francisco Jimenez and his family's experience as migrant workers in California. Katreena felt the selection of texts focused on immigration and migration would resonate with several of the Latinx students in her course, particularly those with family members who have been migrant workers. She touched on the potential connections that can be fostered when texts mirror [47,48] aspects of a student's lived experience:

I've noticed, and this has happened in several semesters, is a student in the class will have an uncle or a grandfather or someone who was a migrant worker. Often times that student will have been a quieter Latino woman, but suddenly she takes on this expert stance drawing on that family knowledge about migration. I've been amazed and it's really powerful. So, I just think those kinds of text allow some of that to happen.

The foregrounding of texts that reflect the complex realities of learners' lives, particularly learners from historically marginalized communities, can create space for them to occupy positions within the classroom that draw on their experience as a valuable site of knowledge. Examples such as this illustrate how literacy instruction can be enacted through a culturally responsive and sustaining approach [6,8,58,62].

The LTEs also designed assignments that modeled responsive pedagogy and the meaningful integration of children's literature for literacy teaching and learning. Madeleine, for instance, recognized that "many students in her course and children in [the city] come from different cultures and speak many different languages." Accordingly, she intentionally designed assignments that used children's literature to build on the rich funds of knowledge learners bring into the classroom [20]. She described a dual language picture book assignment whereby the students in her class "choose a dual language picture book" and use it as a resource to "create a unit that will include and celebrate the language and cultures of the children in their classroom even if it is a language [they] don't speak." The assignment encouraged her students to include the "strategies of bringing parents in, strategies of bringing in older children who might be translators for creating the pretend play and the writing center to reflect the dual language." Madeleine found the assignment to be particularly rewarding because "students who are in the class who are English language learners suddenly become the experts because they have a second or a third language to bring." She further observed that "it kind of flips the tables on the power dynamic" within the classroom.

The LTEs also designed assignments that created opportunities for teacher trainees to actively engage with the local community and to situate their teaching practice around issues relevant to learners in those communities. For example, Sonia invited community-based members into her literacy course to share their experience. Sonia developed an "interactive read-aloud assignment where teacher trainees talked with children directly about race." Community members were invited to "listen to the read-alouds and provide feedback on the prompts and questions" posed by the teacher trainees. Sonia recounted that, "they learned things like not talking about skin as being darker, but being richer ... the community members also talked about experiences they had of being discriminated against." She described the assignment as a powerful "identity experience that they won't forget," as it helped

to “break down stereotypes of the community” that teacher trainees might hold. As noted in the literature review, research in teacher education has called attention to the importance of providing learning opportunities that support beginning teachers in constructing a teaching practice that is responsive to the needs of the communities in which they will work. Assignments such as the one Sonia designed respond to the call to facilitate learning opportunities within teacher education that foster a self-reflective stance and critical cultural consciousness. The assignment challenged the divide between academic instruction and the local community. Teacher trainees were encouraged to learn alongside local knowledge holders to help them gain valuable insight into the community, and to examine their own positionality in relation to race, ethnicity, and language.

## 5. Conclusions

Literacy education is a central component of teacher preparation for, as beginning teachers assume teaching positions at either the elementary, middle, or secondary grade level, they will be responsible for some aspect of literacy instruction. A pedagogy of literacy teacher education that strives to prepare teachers for the demands of contemporary literacy teaching should take into account the experiences with and perspectives on literacy that they bring with them [4,6,11–18,25]. Inquiring into the pedagogies and practices of LTEs can contribute to our understanding of the role literacy teacher education plays in the lives of beginning teachers. If literacy teacher educators hope to support teacher trainees in becoming reflective practitioners and critically conscious educators, then we must call into question the role our own professional and institutional practices play in helping to prepare teachers to meet students’ diverse literacy needs in contemporary classrooms. Directly engaging with the complexities of cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic and socio-economic diversity can present a risky proposition for educators, particularly for beginning teachers who may be troubled by the potential repercussions instigated by efforts to disrupt the values represented in a prescribed curriculum.

Participating LTEs recognized that these risks must be taken if, as educators, we are committed to contributing to the goal of creating more equitable and inclusive learning opportunities for all students. The goals the LTEs set for their literacy courses were thoughtfully determined and matched with appropriate pedagogies in order to help teacher trainees recognize and build on the multiplicity of cultural and linguistic resources learners bring to the classroom. Research in teacher education suggests there is a “growing recognition of the possibilities of children’s literature to serve as a tool for culturally responsive pedagogies [45] (p. 125). The LTEs understood that “stories are a way of knowing as well as a way of teaching” [48] (p. 12). The types of children’s literature LTEs select and share in their courses can help inform the texts teacher trainees will value and feel comfortable sharing in their future classrooms [23,52,53,55]. The LTEs utilized children’s literature, which foregrounded complex social issues and marginalized voices, as a vehicle to encourage teacher trainees to reflect upon their own assumptions about diversity, to expand their conceptions of literacy, and to create opportunities for them to apply this knowledge in the design of culturally responsive instructional strategies.

While the efforts of these LTEs will likely influence the views and practices of the teacher trainees they work with, institutional support is also needed. It can be challenging for a single course to expand teacher trainees’ entrenched views, and at times, deficit assumptions about learners from culturally and linguistically diverse communities [4]. Goodwin and Darity argue “the quality and the effectiveness of teacher education largely depends on the competence and expertise of teacher educators” [4] (p. 63). They urge the field of initial teacher education to ask itself “what do teacher educators need to know and do” in order to support teachers to construct a practice that respects and responds to the diversity represented in contemporary classrooms? [4] (p. 66). The commitment to providing beginning teachers with opportunities to engage in critical cultural consciousness and reflective practice must be advanced throughout their teacher education studies [3,6,7,9]. The LTEs in this study illustrate the importance of developing a pedagogy of literacy teacher education that facilitates teacher trainees engagement with literacy as a multifaceted process, and supports the situating of literacy pedagogy around the lived experiences of the children, families and local communities they will work alongside.

The examination of the LTEs' professional practices has brought to light some recommendations. Overall, the study illustrates that LTEs need to be intentional in their pedagogy to help teacher trainees develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work confidently alongside culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse learners. Using children's literature proved to be an effective pedagogical tool for critically engaging teacher trainees in complex social issues, and encouraging their development of a self-reflective stance. It is simply not adequate to implore teacher trainees to address diversity, as they need concrete examples and opportunities to unpack their own assumptions. The use of thoughtfully selected children's literature and instructional strategies that connect with learners' lived realities can help foster shared learning experiences, which can deepen teacher trainees' understanding of responsive pedagogies.

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