Curriculum Curation
Centering *Mirrors and Windows* in an Inclusive Bookshelf Project

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> "Story creates culture. It teaches us to feel, think and behave in ways generally approved of by those around us. Story conditions us." (Griffith, 2018, n.p.)

AS AN AVID READER, a mother who carefully selected stories to share with my children, and a former secondary English teacher, I understand the power of stories to teach young people about themselves, our communities, and our world. As a curriculum studies scholar, I recognize that the stories we include and exclude from our classrooms convey our understanding of the knowledge and stories of most worth. As a teacher educator, I know that decades of research support the inclusion of literature featuring diverse characters. In fact, since the 1980s, scholars of children's literature have advocated a *mirrors and windows and sliding glass doors*[1] approach to literature selection, which posits that each student should read books that mirror their own "lives and experiences" and that provide windows into others' experiences (Bishop, 1990, p. ix). Organizations like the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the American Library Association (ALA), and the International Literacy Association (ILA) have all created resources to encourage teachers to include multicultural and inclusive collections of children's literature (see NCTE, 2015; also Crisp et al., 2016.) Yet, I also know that while the concept of a *mirrors and windows* approach to literature has been popular for decades, many classroom libraries have too few books by diverse authors and illustrators that feature diverse protagonists (Tschida et al., 2014, p. 28). Given the continued lack of diversity in school curriculum, there is growing recognition of the need for teachers to share books that help students "meet diverse characters" (Johnson et al., 2018, p. 570; see also Crisp et al., 2016). Teacher educators must encourage preservice teachers (PSTs) to develop critical literacy skills and curate inclusive and multicultural collections of texts.

As a curriculum studies scholar and teacher educator, I constantly strive to help preservice teachers learn specific knowledge and skills while also developing a commitment to deliberative, theory-informed decision-making in the classroom. In this article, I share the results of a year-long project designed to answer the following questions: How did participation in a course project influence preservice teachers' ideas about multicultural and inclusive literature? Did participation

in a course project influence preservice teachers' attitudes about curriculum curation? To answer these questions, I analyze PSTs' surveys and selected class work, reflect on my experience as the course instructor, and discuss implications for future practice. This project is significant because it illustrates an approach to praxis for future teachers, provides an example of *curriculum studies in education,* and supports more inclusive curriculum curation.

Literature Review

In this article, I join ongoing conversations about the importance of inclusive multicultural literature and teacher educators' role in preparing preservice teachers to promote critical literacies and curate multicultural and inclusive literature collections in their classrooms.

Expanding Notions of Mirrors and Windows

Many scholars have documented the need for literature that provides *mirrors and windows* within the context of race, ethnicity, culture, language, sexual identity and orientation, and disability (Bishop, 1990; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Christ & Sharma, 2018; Frey, 2017; Tschida et al., 2014). As Bishop (2012) explains, the concept of *mirrors and windows* is part of a larger multicultural education movement, which includes a focus on social justice and equity with a focus on including "the voices that had been underrepresented or misrepresented in the traditional canon" (p. 9). While Bishop initially utilized *mirrors and windows* to describe multicultural texts focused on characters from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, the term has been applied to many different forms of diversity. For example, McNair (2016) notes that "as there are multiple aspects to our identities, there are also a number of ways to see ourselves reflected" (p. 379). As such, books should represent cultural diversity, including "race, class, and disability," and cultural markers, "such as language, sexual orientation, and religion" (McNair, 2016, p. 375).

As argued by Buchanan et al. (2020), the avoidance of topics and stories that include a focus on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) characters "perpetuates the heteronormative view of family and marginalizes students whose families are 'othered'" (p. 179). Books with LGBTQ characters "disrupt heteronormativity," which could benefit not just students who are part of the LGBTQ community but also "heterosexual students who do not conform to gender norms and children of LGBTQ parents, particularly in the elementary setting" (Buchanan et al., 2020, p. 170; see also see Knoblauch, 2016; Smolkin & Young, 2011).

There is also a growing focus on including diverse representations of characters with disabilities (Doering, 2021; Pennell et al., 2018). Kleekamp and Zapata (2018) argue that inclusive stories that feature characters with disabilities can provide *mirrors and windows* for young readers while "challeng[ing] ableist discourses, or narratives that champion normative standards for the body and mind" (p.589. The need for authentic, empowering, and "humanizing" stories of young people with disabilities (see Kleekamp & Zapata, 2018) also includes a focus on disability as a part of a child's identity rather than a problem to overcome (see Emmerson et al. 2014, p. 13). Further, literature can talk back to stereotypes associated with disabilities (Dolmage, 2014; Dunn, 2010). By using "strength-based" stories, children's literature can "promote attitudes of acceptance and strengthen perceptions of self-worth among students with disabilities, as well as their typically-developing peers" (Hayden & Prince, 2020, p. 236).

Critical Literacy

There is a growing focus on the need to prepare readers to become skilled readers with critical literacy skills, which "encourages readers to question, explore, or challenge the power relationships that exist between authors and readers" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 59.) The implementation of critical literacy praxis is based on the practitioner's essential philosophical beliefs, students' experiences, and the context in which this interaction takes place (Vasquez, 2017). While there is not a "universal model of critical literacy," in this project, I have adopted the four common dimensions of critical literacy outlined by Lewison et al. (2002): "(1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice" (p. 382).

Engaging with the Literature

While multiple studies support the curation of multicultural and inclusive children's literature and the need to prepare teachers to develop critical literacy skills, this project explores a *curriculum studies in education* approach with a strong focus on what texts are selected and how and why they are selected. In this article, I do not seek to add to our notions of critical literacy or multicultural literature; instead, I strive to help PSTs use insight from this research to become curators of inclusive collections.

Theoretical Framework

While this project focuses on curating children's literature, it is, at its center, a curriculum studies project. By integrating curriculum studies with critical literacy, I seek to move the conversation to include what stories we are teaching and focus on the decisions by which we select stories, with a recognition of the political nature of such decisions. Within the multidisciplinary field of curriculum studies, "curriculum" is not merely the textbook, standards, or lesson plans; instead, curriculum is a broad contemplation of the knowledge of most worth. Curriculum studies scholars seek to understand curriculum by addressing the field's fundamental questions: What knowledge is of most worth? Who decides? Who benefits? (see Schubert, 1986). In this project, I draw from frameworks that focus on literature as curriculum studies, curriculum curation, curriculum studies *and* disability studies, and *curriculum studies in education*.

Literature as Curriculum Studies

Beyond selecting novels or texts as part of curriculum maps or scope and sequence charts, many curriculum studies scholars have written about literature as a site of curriculum theorizing. For example, curriculum studies luminary Maxine Greene (1995) exemplifies a tradition of aesthetic inquiry in which she draws upon literature to understand schooling, education, and imagination. More recently, Edward Podsiadlik (2021) posits that "understanding literature as

curriculum provides the means for individuals to continuously reflect, reconstruct, and reconceptualize their public and private life" (n.p.). Podsiadlik further argues that while literature as a subject matter "is generally regarded as a prescribed set of texts to be received, studied and assessed," literature as curriculum "embodies lived experience and provides the means for individuals to continuously reflect, reconstruct, and reconceptualize their public and private lives" (n.p.). In this project, preservice teachers learn from children's literature and think through key curricular studies questions by reflecting upon children's literature.

Curriculum Curation as Curriculum Studies

Drawing from the work of Huckaby and Ackels (2010), I embrace the notion that curriculum can serve as "a *mirror and window"* and that our curricular choices (as well as literature selection) are always in relationship with the "implicit curriculum, hidden curriculum, and null curriculum" (pp. 139–140). As such, curriculum curation focuses on the explicit curricular choices in determining which books will appear on their curated bookshelf. However, it also asks curators to consider how such explicit decisions contributed to an implicit curriculum and a null curriculum. Because there are too many stories to include in a library, teachers must continuously exercise their critical literacy skills and evaluate their choices to determine the curriculum/stories of most worth.

Within the framework of curriculum theorizing, I expand upon Eeds and Peterson's (1991) work on teachers-as-curators as a model for both theorizing and action. Eeds and Peterson argue that a teacher is similar to an art curator who "knows art, collects it, cares for it and delights in sharing it with others, helping them see it in ways they may not have discovered if left on their own" (p. 118). By positioning critical curation as an act of praxis, I highlight the "conceptual, pedagogical as well as political consequences" inherent in curation (Vella, 2018, p. 294). Within this project, I examine how selecting, organizing, and presenting stories and books to share with students can serve as a theoretically informed decision directly impacting students.

Curriculum Studies as Integrated with Disability Studies in Education

As part of curating multicultural and inclusive collections of children's literature, I intentionally asked PSTs to include characters with disabilities in our classroom libraries. This work is inspired by Disability Studies in Education (DSE) scholars, who embrace "intellectual and practical tools, forms of thought and action that nurture a deeper awareness among educators about disability rights, inclusive participation, and disability identity" (Danforth & Gabel, 2008, p. 2). Yet, DSE scholars also inform my theoretical framework as DSE is a field dedicated to "investigating *what disability means*; how it is interpreted, enacted, and resisted in the social practices of individuals, groups, organizations, and cultures" (Danforth & Gabel, 2008, p. 5). DSE draws theoretical inspiration from the larger field of Disability Studies but focuses on "translating theory into practice and, alternatively, allowing practice to inform theory," the field has been moving toward the ways that theorizing can impact practice in teacher education, curriculum theory, and policy (Danforth & Gabel, 2008, p. 6). Buffington-Adams and Vaughan (2019) have argued that there are many similarities between DSE and Curriculum Studies, including that each field "focused less on prescriptive solutions/treatments and more on understanding, theorizing, and

re-imagining personal, political, and social contexts of education" (p. 5). In this project, I take seriously the need for PSTs to engage with theories and practices to help curate more inclusive classroom libraries.

Curriculum Studies in Education

In our 2023 edited book, Nuñez and I (2023) articulated a *Curriculum Studies in Education (CSE)* framework for curricular work. Influenced by the work of DSE scholars and the long tradition of praxis within the Curriculum Studies field, we conceptualize CSE as a framework of praxis that integrates curriculum theorizing and direct action/practice within schools and communities. Of course, this focus on praxis or the practical is not new (see Freire, 1968/1997; Schwab, 1969); in fact, this journal (*JCT*) and its sponsored Bergamo conference both seek to highlight intersections of curriculum theorizing and classroom practice (Miller, 2020, p. 1). Yet, despite the longstanding commitment to praxis within curriculum studies, the divide between theory and practice in recent decades seems to have grown wider, and the field of curriculum studies is often disconnected from practices in K12 schools (Vaughan & Nuñez, 2023).

Curriculum studies in education (CSE) work continues a line of inquiry on classroom practice by focusing on projects that enact theory in classrooms, not as a prescriptive approach but as a deliberative one. This call for a *re/turn to praxis* (Jupp, 2012, p. 76) is urgent—in fact, I agree strongly with Muhammad's (2020) assertion that "we live in a time where there's no time for 'urgent-free pedagogy'" (p. 54). This urgent re/turn to engage with classroom practices (both pedagogical and curricular) is not a call to re/turn to curriculum development but instead to use the robust theoretical tools from curriculum studies to create projects that help us critique existing practices and imagine new practices, engage dialectically with teachers, students, and communities, and focus on impacting change in places where teachers, students, and families spend time.

Figure 1

Representation of Curriculum Studies in Education in this Project

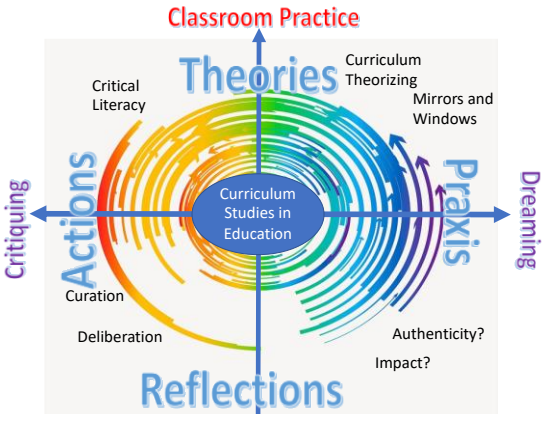

Figure 1 illustrates an approach to *curriculum studies in education*. At the center, CSE includes a cycle of praxis (theory, action, reflection). Each part of this cycle has multiple strands representing a variety of theories, actions, and reflections that impact practice. The cycle of praxis is informed by bidirectional exchanges between classroom instruction and university research, whereas theorizing and practicing influence each other. Similarly, there is a bidirectional relationship between critiquing existing policies and dreaming/imagining new ways of educating/being in community.

Methodology

In this study, I utilize both interpretive and critical paradigms (Glesne, 2011). As an interpretivist, I seek to understand how preservice teachers make curricular choices regarding the stories they include in their classroom libraries. Utilizing critical theory, I embrace my role to prepare preservice teachers to make transformative curricular choices and develop critical literacy skills for themselves and their future students. Specifically, I agree with Flores et al.'s (2019) observation that "in the field of literacy education, many teacher educators (TEs) work to prepare future teachers to be transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1985)—teachers who design curriculum and select resources that 'prepare learners to be active and critical citizens'" (p. 215). One of our central tasks as teacher educators is to remind PSTs that they are intellectuals and curriculum workers whose choices impact the students, schools, and communities.

Participants' Context

To understand the impact of our course project on both the selection of multicultural and inclusive texts and the deliberative curriculum curation process, I completed an instrumental case study with two undergraduate classes of preservice teachers (PSTs) in a public regional university in the Midwest in the 2019-2020 academic year (Creswell, 2007; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Stake, 1995). As this research focused on the impact of a pedagogical project, it was necessary to complete it in my courses with my students. I invited all students in two sections of a children's literature and media class in the 2019-2020 school year. In total, 36 students consented so that I could analyze course assignments. Participation was not required, and no additional work was required of those who participated. Participants' grades were not impacted by their decision to participate or not participate in the study. While I did not ask for demographic information in each class, the midwestern regional institution where this research took place had less than 10,000 students. Within the teacher preparation programs, more than 80% of students identify as White, and more than 80% identify as women.

Overview of Project & Pedagogical Practices

This project was completed in a children's media course for preservice teachers I was teaching for the first time. In this course, designed to support PSTs in studying and evaluating books and media sources for elementary classrooms, I developed a culminating project with two specific purposes. First, I wanted to encourage PSTs to think about the books in their classroom libraries as an act of curation and, in so doing, help illuminate the connection between theory and practice. Second, I sought to encourage preservice teachers to select diverse authors and books for their future classroom library. In week 2 of our 16-week semester, I introduced preservice teachers to their *inclusive bookshelf project*, which included the prompt: "Your central (and culminating) project in this class will be to create an inclusive bookshelf with texts appropriate for students in grades K-6 … [with books that] meet the personal and educational needs of students in elementary schools." Over the semester, PSTs completed a four-part final project: a list of 50 books or media sources representing a variety of genres, reading levels, and interests in ways that serve as *mirrors and windows*; an inclusive bookshelf checklist that they designed with 20-25 criteria used to

evaluate their collection; a reflective essay; and an individual or small group action project to bring inclusive literature to their communities. For this study, I analyzed only book selection as documented in participants' reflective essays and initial and mid-semester questionnaires.

During class meetings, I brought multicultural children's literature to model read-aloud strategies and discuss text selection (see Table 1 for some books we discussed in class.) Each week during the first half of the semester, I also asked students to bring in a picture that featured books that included diverse families and protagonists from a racial/cultural group different than their own, from the LGBTQ community, and with a disability. During the second half of the semester, PSTs read and presented multicultural nonfiction texts, poetry anthologies, and chapter books through book talks, multimodal presentations, and the creation of visual rating systems. While evaluating these books, we discussed the quality of the stories and illustrations and explored how race, culture, gender, and disability were represented within our collections. This means we spent time during almost every class adding to our book lists and criteria and providing time for students to deliberate about which books to include.

While reading new texts, PSTs evaluated existing checklists and developed their criteria. One existing tool used in class was the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL, 2006) *Checklist for Assessing Children's Literature* using the criteria to evaluate texts. In the introduction to the checklist, ADL (2006) writes that because of the lack of diverse texts, "it is extremely important that adults make every effort to ensure that high-quality children's literature by and about these groups is made available to children" (para. 5). PSTs evaluated their texts (and our library collection) using the ADL's checklist, including questions such as "Do characters reflect a variety of cultural groups? Are urban, suburban, and rural settings represented realistically? Are cultural settings represented realistically? Is there diversity represented within cultural groups? Do the illustrations avoid reinforcing societal stereotypes?" (ADL, 2006, n.p.) We also discussed book awards (and the criteria used in such awards) focused on multicultural texts. PSTs were then asked to create 20-25 criteria for evaluative checklists.

One helpful tool in evaluating stories with disabled characters was the "Fries Test, "which asks: "Does a work have more than one disabled character? Do the disabled characters have their own narrative purpose other than the education and profit of a nondisabled character? Is the character's disability not eradicated either by curing or killing?" (Fries, 2017, para. 9). As we read books featuring disabled characters, we used the questions from the Fries Test and the guiding questions from Kleekamp and Zapata (2018), which included,

> How is the life of the character with a disability presented as multidimensional?; Whose voice is represented and emphasized in the telling of the story?; How are readers positioned to think and feel about the character with a disability?; What steps has the author taken to create and present authentic relationships? (p. 591)

I also encouraged PSTs to review the award criteria from the Schneider Family Book Award and descriptions of stories on Disability in KidLit.

Table 1
Selected Texts Shared During Class

Picture Books	**Poetry Collection and Chapter Books**
Love by Matt de la Peña *Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman *Dreamers* by Yuri Morales *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parneff *Bee-Bim Bop!* by Linda Sue Park *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera B. Williams *Malala's Magic Pencil* by Malala Yousafzai	*Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems* by Francisco X. Alarcón *El Deafo* by Cece Bell *Hip Hop Speaks to Children* by Nikki Giovanni *Drama* by Raina Telgemeier *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan
Short Films *Float* by Bobby Rubio *Hair Love* by Matthew Cherry	**New Texts** (added during/after the project) *Milo's Museum* by Zetta Elliot *Fry Bread* by Kevin Noble Maillard *The Day You Begin* by Jacqueline Woodson *We Move Together* by Kelly Fritsch

Data Collection and Analysis

To explore the impact of participation in a course project on preservice teachers' ideas about inclusive literature and curriculum curation, I conducted a content analysis of three items: the initial questionnaire (week 2), the midterm questionnaire (weeks 7-8), and the final reflective essay. In the two questionnaires, PSTs were asked to describe their ideal bookshelf, list any titles they would include in their ideal bookshelf, and describe the tools they used to select texts. During the final week of class, preservice teachers were asked to consider the same topics in a reflective essay. I then organized data into multiple sections, including characteristics of an ideal bookshelf and specific titles identified as essential to include on their future bookshelf. I then coded the texts using pre-determined and in vivo codes directly from the participants and summary words. In tabulating multicultural texts, I relied upon the definition of multicultural literature developed by the International Literacy Association. I coded any text that featured BIPOC, immigrants, members of the LGBT+ community, and people with disabilities as main characters as multicultural. In-vivo codes reflected positive characteristics about books (award-winning books, feelings, diverse characters) and book collections (avoids single stories, multicultural, diverse characters, multiple genres, book for each student). As I read additional questionnaires, I placed checkmarks next to existing words or phrases and, when needed, added new words/phrases. After analyzing each document, I combined and synthesized codes, removed repeated words, and documented codes to represent critical themes related to diversity, inclusion, and representation. I did not attempt to measure the impact of instruction on particular students but rather on differences in response patterns.

To understand PSTs' ideas about their ideal classroom libraries (and their selection process), I primarily evaluated three items: initial questionnaire (week 2), midterm questionnaire (week 7-8), and final reflective essay. In the two questionnaires, PSTs were asked to describe their ideal bookshelf; identify the tools (checklists, rubrics, awards, etc.) they would use to decide what books to include; and list any specific titles they would want to include in their ideal bookshelves.

During the final week of class, preservice teachers were asked to complete a final reflective essay that asked them to reflect upon the same topics. In their essay, PSTs had more time to write their thoughts, additional questions, and a rubric that may have influenced answers. Answers may be different because of the format change noted in the analysis. To analyze data, I read each document and took notes on a series of matrices. For example, as I read the first PSTs' initial questionnaire, I entered words and phrases (some directly from the words of participants and some summary words. As I read additional questionnaires, I placed checkmarks next to existing words or phrases and, when needed, added new words/phrases. Once I finished note-taking all entries, I combined and synthesized codes and removed repeated words. I repeated this process six times (once each semester for each of the three documents) and shared observations about changes in the most frequently reported answers. I did not attempt to measure the impact of instruction on particular students but rather on differences in response patterns. Also, I do not seek to create causal claims—instead, I note that the conditions in class (selecting and reading high-quality literature) provided an opportunity for students to reflect upon the value of diverse literature and text selection.

Researcher Positionality

I am not a neutral researcher. I embrace the concept of "strong objectivity" and am explicit about my relationship to the research (Banks, 2006). I am a former high school English and US History teacher, a teacher educator, and a curriculum studies scholar who works at the intersections of curriculum studies and disability studies in education. I am a White, nondisabled, cisgender woman committed to preparing teachers to advocate for children and contribute to contesting racist, sexist, heterosexist, and ableist systems.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to the study. First, the sample size is small, and I would need to repeat the work with additional preservice teachers to see if the class patterns remained consistent. Second, this project was completed with two classes of PSTs, one that met in the Fall of 2019 and the other that met in the Spring of 2020. For the Spring class, the instruction was impacted by a shift to online learning due to Covid-19. While we continued to meet virtually, the PSTs taking the course had a different experience than those taking the course person-to-person. Third, and most significantly, I recognize that the preservice teachers were all students in my classes. As they completed course assignments, they were asked to infuse course content, which I was designing. A follow-up study that included interviews after the preservice teachers in my class graduated and were working in schools would be helpful in seeing if changes persisted outside of my class. Despite these limitations, there is value in this work in terms of thinking about projects that infuse theory and practice.

Findings

A few key themes emerged by analyzing PSTs' questionnaires and reflective essays.

Finding One: Greater Commitment to Multicultural and Inclusive Texts

Throughout this project, PSTs expressed a more significant commitment to including multicultural and inclusive texts in their classroom library**.**

Increased Exposure to Multicultural Texts Disrupts the Status Quo

Within the conceptualization of literature as curriculum studies, Podsiadlik (2021) notes that literature invites the reader to "reflect, reconstruct, and reconceptualize their public and private life" (n.p.). In this project, many preservice teachers discovered or reaffirmed their love for literature and/or belief in its power**.** For example, one PST commented: "This class helped me take that love for books and think about what I can do to give that love to my students ... . Books have the power to reach students in ways nothing else can." Other preservice teachers discussed how books can "empower" readers and address "serious topics and social issues." For other preservice teachers, this class helped them discover a new appreciation for reading. A PST wrote:

> As a child, I never read many books because I did not have an interest in reading … During this course, I have learned to love literature. … I feel ready to teach my students the love of literature that I now feel.

While it is unsurprising that PSTs in a children's literature and media course would develop an appreciation of children's literature, the selection of texts shared with PSTs also influenced their perceptions of literature. Even though most of the PSTs in this course would have been in elementary school well after the concept of *mirrors and windows* was prevalent in teacher education and literacy education, not all students had access to multicultural texts. As one PST explained,

> I've been a reader my entire life thanks to my mother who encouraged me to read every day. However, it never occurred to me that I was missing something. The books I was reading were mostly windows into other cultures, countries, and genders; very few of the books I was reading were mirrors into my own culture or my own life.

In their final reflection, this PST included more books representing diverse cultural and linguistic communities. PSTs also discussed their exposure to books they "wouldn't have otherwise read." For example, after reading *Love* by Matt de la Pena, one PST commented, "As a twenty-one-year-old college student, I want to read more texts like that."

We also know that too often, preservice teachers are taught about literacy instruction "in connection with what is called 'quality' children's and young adult literature, which too often privileges literature by and about White people" (Gangi, 2008, p. 30; see also Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). In this project and throughout the course, the example of "quality" literature that

featured characters from many different cultures, identities, and experiences was important in disrupting the status quo and helping PSTs apply critical literacy skills to analyze the books we read.

Book Lists Include More Diverse Characters

It is important to note that as part of their 50 texts project, every PST had multicultural texts in their curated lists (per assignment guidelines). However, it is noteworthy that in their questionnaires and final essay, I also asked PSTs to identify any "specific titles you know that you would want to include in your bookshelf." As I explained to PSTs, this list should include those important stories that would always be included in classroom collections.

As seen in Table two, in the initial questionnaire, 26 PSTs identified (one to eight) specific books they wanted to include on their bookshelf. 73% did not place any multicultural texts on their lists. Only one student had identified a majority of multicultural texts. By the end of the semester, only 16% of students did not include multicultural books, and 65.6% of students identified more than half of their texts as multicultural texts. Also, only one PST mentioned a text featuring a main character with a disability in their initial lists; however, more than half of the PSTs included at least one book featuring characters with disabilities by the semester's end.

Table 2
Inclusion of Multicultural Texts

	Initial Questionnaire (n = 26)	**Midterm Questionnaire (n= 30)**	**Reflective Paper(n= 32)**
No multicultural texts	73.1%	26.7%	15.6%
At least one multicultural text	26.9%	73.3%	84.4%
Majority of multicultural texts	3.8%	40.0%	65.6%

PSTs Expanded Their Characteristics Of An "Ideal Bookshelf"

When PSTs were asked to identify characteristics of an "ideal bookshelf" or "classroom library," they identified a variety of genres, books that featured diverse protagonists, and books that appealed to different student interests in all three assignments. However, by the end of the semester, there was more specificity about what each of these criteria meant. In their final essays, PSTs were asked to describe their ideal collection of books and explain how their bookshelf represented a *mirrors and windows* approach to curation. As such, it is unsurprising that 85% of PSTs mentioned mirrors and windows as important in their future classrooms. However, PSTs also identified the importance of including characters from various backgrounds/identities, including characters with diverse disabilities, racial identities, sexual orientations, family structures, countries of origin, social classes, and languages. In their final papers, more than 20% of PSTs also noted a variety of genres, a balance between insider and outsider perspectives, texts that

appealed to multiple interests/topics, books at a variety of reading levels, relevant/relatable texts, books that teach values or life lessons, and books that are "fun" or that would bring the child enjoyment. Finally, multiple PSTs focused more on finding at least one text that was a mirror for each of their future students.

More Inclusive Book Selection Tools Were Represented

As McNair (2016) argues, two ways to maintain a diverse library are to "consider where your books are purchased" and "learn about awards," including those based upon cultural diversity or other elements of diversity (pp. 380–381; see also Adukia et al., 2021). In this project, preservice teachers were asked what tools they would utilize to select texts for their classroom libraries. Of the 34 preservice teachers who completed the initial questionnaire, the most frequently mentioned tools were personal characteristics/checklist criteria (59%), award-winning books (41%), educational sources/blogs (11%), and reviews and ratings (11%). By the end of the semester, PSTs identified award winners (50%) most frequently, with book publishers and personal characteristics/checklist criteria at the same rate (41%). While the book selection tools did not change much during the semester, by the end of the semester, PSTs had accumulated several specific websites, publishers, and awards that would help them build multicultural and inclusive libraries. For example, in their final papers, many PSTs mentioned specific book awards that would influence their text selection, including the Caldecott Medal, Schneider Family Book Award, Coretta Scott King Book Award, Newberry Medal, and recommendations by the American Library Association. The diversity of awards notes is crucial because an overreliance on a few mainstream awards could lead to an overrepresentation of books by White authors. As Gangi (2008) asserts, many of the more popular book awards are decided by "librarians who, like teachers, are mostly Whites and middle class," which can influence text selection (p. 31). By utilizing a greater variety of book awards, PSTs could move closer to the goal of "honor[ing] all children by equitably providing both mirror and windows books for all" (Gangi, 2008, p. 34).

Finding Two: Curriculum Curation as Praxis

As discussed earlier in this article, a key focus of this project was to make explicit the curriculum curation project. I analyzed PSTs' assignments to understand their views on curriculum curation and how they could infuse curriculum theorizing into their classroom practices. Throughout the project, PSTs expressed growing awareness that curating a classroom library should combine theory and practice.

Curation Is Deliberative Action

Selecting books for inclusion in a library or classroom instruction is a curricular decision. When teachers spend time reading books to students or even when they include titles in their library, they communicate implicit curriculum—choices about which books and authors are most worthwhile. As many critical scholars remind us, there are no neutral choices, and all curricular decisions are political and reflect our understanding of the knowledge of and stories of most worth

(see Freire, 1968/1997; Huckaby & Ackels, 2010; Schubert, 1986). One PST reflected: "I have never thought in this much depth about what books I would have and why, because choosing to include a book is just as much of a stance as choosing not to include the book." By thinking intentionally about what books to include, PSTs recognized their power as curriculum workers. Another PST commented, "Had I never taken this course, I would have provided a classroom library that did not create a mirrors/ window approach. … I did not realize how easy it can be to leave someone out." In the comment above, it was clear that the preservice teachers were not looking for a simple list of what books should be included or excluded—instead, they discussed how they used a theory/concept to inform their thinking. This is also reflected in the comment of another PST:

> Often times, we hear teachers and schools preaching about diversity, but what does that really mean? Throughout this class I have discovered what it truly means to have a diverse bookshelf in regards to cultures, racial identity, genders, sexual orientations, disabilities, language, social classes, countries of origin, etc.

Another valuable element of this project focuses on critically evaluating texts for representation, power dynamics, and authenticity (see Morrell, 2002). In this way, teacher educators can help their PSTs develop the critical literacy skills needed to find and share stories that "disrupt the commonplace," include a multiplicity of voices, and promote more just classrooms and communities (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 382). First, PSTs focused on how characters were represented in stories and problematized the commonplace misrepresentations or omissions of diverse characters and/or characters with disabilities in any book collection. The project also focused on including diverse viewpoints, resisting single stories, and focusing on authenticity. Finally, while some PSTs still resisted efforts to address controversial topics in the classroom, many PSTs had texts that focused on current events, including racial justice, immigration reform, and expanded rights for LGBTQ people.

This project allowed students to combine theory and practice to make deliberative and intentional choices about classroom literature.

Curation Reflects Personal, Political, Professional, And Philosophical Beliefs

As our project progressed, PSTs realized they needed to focus on examining their collection of texts. We discussed Adichie's (2009) TED Talk, "The Danger of A Single Story," in which she warns that single stories are created when you "show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" (n.p.). This marked a fundamental shift in our class discussions—while a book could be valuable, not balancing stories could prove damaging. For example, one text I shared with PSTs was *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi. The main character recently immigrated from Korea and contemplated choosing a new name before embracing her Korean name. Many PSTs thought it was a good story; however, a student was concerned that the only story about a Korean family in the collection could reinforce a *single story* that all Korean Americans were immigrants. We discussed the power of supplementing *The Name Jar* with other books, such as *Bee-Bim Bop!* by Linda Sue Park, an illustrated book about a family preparing a Korean dinner together. This conversation was meaningful because we know that single stories can be dangerous (Adichie 2009) and that "misrepresentation (i.e., broken mirrors

and windows) and underrepresentation (i.e., missing mirrors and windows as well as closed doors)" can cause damage to readers (Botelho, 2021, p. 121).

In another class session, I asked PSTs to bring books about families. We discussed the range of families and moved beyond singular conceptions of a "normal" or "typical" family. After reading *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parneff, a nonfiction picture book about two male penguins in New York Central Park Zoo that raised a baby penguin together, I asked PSTs to justify the inclusion or exclusion of the text in their libraries. I then shared with PSTs that this book was, according to the American Library Association, one of the top ten challenged books in 2017 (see Gomez, 2018). Reflecting on our discussions of families, one PST commented,

> One of the biggest things I liked about the *mirrors and windows* approach is the diversity of families, and even though some parents might not agree; if it is inclusive to a student, then it should be in my library.

This finding is consistent with the work of Tschida et al. (2014), who note the importance of providing an "opportunity to consider, identify, and name those single stories of history or current cultural narratives … and helps them see the need for multiple and non-stereotypical stories" (p. 31).

Curation Is An Ongoing Process

I often told preservice teachers that the curated lists they develop in this class would always be in process. By the end of the semester, more than 20% of PSTs expressed a desire to find at least one text that would be a mirror for each student in their classroom. This is essential because it reflected a shift from a general belief in *mirrors and windows* to more specific realizations that future teachers must be responsive to the particular young people in their classes. One PST noted, "This book project will be with me for life throughout my career as a teacher, and I will be constantly updating it and transforming it in a way that will best suit my students."

Another PST addressed the need to change books to meet the needs of individual students. The PST noted, "The ideal bookshelf is ever-changing and dynamic for all students to come to find the book for them." In their final reflection, a third PT wrote: "I want my classroom library to be inclusive to every student." These conclusions affirm the work of curriculum curation as ongoing praxis.

Discussion

In the last decade, popular movements like #WeNeedMoreDiverseBooks have demonstrated the need for more diverse and authentic texts in our classrooms (see Schmitt, 2020; Crisp et al., 2020). Calls for teachers to include anti-racist books have also been more visible, as has the need to prepare preservice teachers to include anti-racist texts (Lazar & Offenberg, 2011). However, efforts to challenge books that include multicultural characters and perspectives have also been the focus of contested school board meetings and political debates (see recent stories featured by Kameetz, 2021; Nierenberg, 2021). Within this context, teacher educators can

encourage preservice teachers to embrace their role as curriculum specialists who curate collections of inclusive and multicultural stories to share with young people.

While multiple studies document the need for teachers to be intentional about including diverse collections of multicultural texts in classroom libraries (ADL, 2006; Crisp et al., 2016; Henderson et al., 2020; Howlett & Young, 2019), this study is significant because it provides a concrete example of ways to encourage praxis in our classrooms.

In this project, I sought to answer two questions: How did participation in a course project influence preservice teachers' ideas about multicultural and inclusive literature? Did participation in a course project influence preservice teachers' attitudes about curriculum curation? In designing my semester-long project in a teacher education course, I curated (academic) literature by drawing upon studies of multicultural and inclusive children's literature and critical literacy practices. I then infused curriculum studies theorizing in my practice and analysis, with particular attention to thinking about literature as curriculum studies, developing critical curation practices, working at the intersections of curriculum studies and disability studies in education, and developing a *curriculum studies in education* framework.

Impact on Preservice Teachers

While I recognize limitations in the study (including both the small sample size and my involvement as both the instructor and researcher), many PSTs did demonstrate increased commitment to creating inclusive and diverse classroom libraries, access to more tools to find inclusive books, and insight into curriculum curation as curriculum work. PSTs' responses indicate that they gained an appreciation that curating inclusive texts is not only about including texts with more diverse characters but also that the texts they selected must "counter stereotypes and deficit perspectives" (Buchanan & Fox, 2019, p. 193; see also Braden & Rodriquez, 2016). Yet, more than how their specific ideas evolved by engaging with literature, I saw growth in how preservice teachers infused theory into their decision-making. PSTs began to embrace themselves as curriculum specialists with the power and responsibility to curate a library of inclusive, multicultural, and affirming stories to share with young people.

Impact on My Practice as a Teacher Educator

Analyzing student work and writing this article has also provided an exercise in evaluating my practices. I found multiple things I will modify when I do this project again. First, while I discussed the need for authentic texts written from outsider perspectives, two students commented that they still had an overabundance of outsider perspectives in their curated lists. One PST reflected,

> I think in the future, I will check to see if an author represents the culture they are writing about *before* I add it to my bookshelf. It is okay to have both insider and outsider perspectives, but if our bookshelf is so diverse, I think our authors should represent that as well.

In future courses, I will reinforce the importance of diverse authors writing from insider perspectives. Specifically, I will focus on what Bishop (2012) identifies as "culturally conscious books," texts written primarily by Black authors, which

> reflect both the distinctiveness of African American cultural experience and the universality of human experience. These books are set in Black cultural environments, have Black major characters, are told from the perspective of those characters, and include some textual means of identifying the characters as Black, such as physical descriptors or distinctive cultural markers. (p. 7)

Inspired by Bishop's (2012) focus on culturally conscious books, I hope to extend this concept to other books about BIPOC characters, characters with disabilities, and/or LGBTQ characters. Second, in future classes, I will be more explicit about including anti-racist and anti-ableist children's literature and develop more specific models of anti-racist and anti-ableist criteria. As we discussed in the course, representation is essential, but not all representation is positive. By introducing clear criteria for work that challenges racism and ableism, PSTs can be more explicit about developing frameworks that challenge oppressive systems. Third, I will focus on the connections between curricular and pedagogical work. As Botelho (2021) explains, "teachers and teacher educators must attend to not just what to read but also how to read" (p. 123). While text selection is a component of critical literacy, I will be more explicit about how a mirrors and windows approach to literacy should complement culturally relevant pedagogy (see Ladson-Billings, 1994) and a theoretical/ideological commitment to anti-racist and anti-ableist practice.

Impact on the Field

By asking preservice teachers to make deliberative and ongoing curricular decisions about which texts to include in their classroom library, this project provides an example of *curriculum studies in education* (CSE) framework. In this CSE project, I sought to infuse theory into classroom practice by conceptualizing the role of a practitioner as "a good decision maker" whose deliberative choices are informed by theory and practice (Kelly, 1981, p. 350; see also Vaughan & Nuńez, 2023). PSTs grapple with which knowledge (and stories) are most worthwhile, critically analyze how books are selected, and recognize the work of text selection as curricular, pedagogical, and political. By centering the idea of curriculum curation to help PSTs contemplate and select the stories of most worth to their students, this work will provide a concrete example of ways to encourage praxis and engagement with curriculum studies in our classrooms. I hope that CSE can provide a framework for curriculum theorists to highlight the urgent curriculum work based on praxis and action in our schools and communities.

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Notes

1. This metaphor has been extended to include telescopes (Toliver, 2021), compasses and kaleidoscopes (Low & Torres, 2022), and a variety of other metaphors (see Dorr, 2022.)

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