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## Building Understanding Among Students of Many Cultures: Story and Cultural Competence

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BUILDING UNDERSTANDING AMONG STUDENTS OF MANY CULTURES:  
STORY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

A MASTER'S THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY  
STEPHANIE HANSON

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION  
SEPTEMBER 2018

BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BUILDING UNDERSTANDING AMONG STUDENTS OF MANY CULTURES:  
STORY AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE

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September 2018

APPROVED

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## Abstract

Current events demonstrate a need for global society members who have understanding across cultural borders. Storytelling has long been considered universally human with the ability to build understanding in complex situations. This thesis explores the potential of storytelling to increase cultural competence in students. Current research on cultural understanding and story is organized into the three domains of cultural competence: cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and knowledge, and cultural competence. Research demonstrates that stories have the potential to increase understanding among students of many cultures. There is evidence that stories can effectively promote cultural competence in each of its three domains. In addition to increasing intercultural competence, story can also provides an opportunity for personal identity development in student. Stories are most effective when implemented in emotionally and culturally safe classroom environments by willing, culturally competent teachers. Limitations of the research are considered. Future research is needed in the areas of lasting effects of story on cultural competence, effectiveness in K-12 settings, and a comparison of storytelling methods. Several recommendations for professional application of the research are developed.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Importance of Cultural Competence

The study of understanding among people is not new. The field of intercultural communication stems from the work of Edward T. Hall at the Foreign Service Institute in the 1950's. The first publication on intercultural communication in 1955 catalyzed this field of study (Rogers, Hart & Miike, 2002). Despite the longevity of this field, it is an area that continues to have renewed, pressing importance in today's society (Pusch, 2004).

The United States has long had a legacy of an ethnically diverse population. However, in recent years, there has been a dramatic shift in population due to rapid migration. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that by 2043, the U.S. will become a "majority minority" country (Colby & Ortman, 2014). Although the non-Hispanic white population will still be the largest group, a single group will no longer make up the majority. More than 50 percent of the population will identify as belonging to an ethnic group other than non-Hispanic white (Colby & Ortman, 2014).

Despite a diverse population and the longevity of the field of intercultural communication, there are increasing issues surrounding cultural understanding. The FBI reported that over half of the hate crimes committed in 2016 were motivated by race, ethnicity, or ancestry bias. Another 21% of hate crimes were motivated by religious bias (*Hate crime statistics, 2016, 2017*). This is an increase since the 2014 report, which found that 48.3% of hate crimes were motivated by race, 18.6% were motivated by religious bias, and 11.9% were motivated by ethnicity bias (*Hate crime statistics, 2014, 2015*). In

both reports, hate crimes related to cultural diversity, race, religion, and ethnicity, accounted for the vast majority of all crimes committed.

At the same time, society has an increased awareness of the value of cultural competence. In today's globalized economy, there is more communication, and commerce among countries than ever before. Inevitably, cultural diversity has manifested within the global marketplace, making intercultural competence an extremely important skill to remain competitive and effective (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning recognizes social and cross-cultural skills, as well as global awareness as elements that are necessary for 21<sup>st</sup> century readiness (2015). Major companies such as the Walt Disney Company, Ford Motor Company, and Intel have identified these areas as highly valuable in employees (P21 framework definitions, 2015).

### **Definition of Terms**

There are numerous terms used in the exploration of understanding among cultures. For the sake of this literature review, specific elements of cultural competence will be defined in the following chapter. However, there are also certain terms that will be used throughout the paper.

The ability to comprehend cultural diversity depends on understanding the idea of culture itself. UNESCO (2013) defines culture as “ a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group, encompassing all the ways of being in that society” (p.10). Culture is commonly likened to an iceberg with elements visible to the observer, while the majority of the iceberg is unseen beneath the surface of the water (Condon & LaBrack, 2015). This refers to the differentiation between objective culture and subjective culture. Objective culture refers to institutions,



such as political or economic systems, and to products, such as music, art, cuisine, and so on (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Subjective culture can be described as the worldview of a society's people, which includes behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Condon & LaBrack, 2015). This is the element of culture that one must demonstrate appreciation and respect for to improve understanding between people. Using the subjective culture definition, diversity is the cultural differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors learned and shared by a group of interacting people (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; UNESCO, 2013).

### **Benefits of Story**

Story has long been considered a part of human nature. Humans have told, used, and relied on stories for over 100,000 years (Haven, 2007). It has been present as long as human history recalls. Storytelling is considered to be universally and intrinsically human; and while it is affected by culture, it is also present in every culture in the history of the planet (Baldasaro, Maldonado, & Baltes, 2014; Haven, 2007). Cultures teach which stories their members are to live by (Smith, 1990). Stories are able to convey culture beyond the surface level as they are suffused with the subjective elements of culture. They are the storehouse of knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, passions, dreams, imagination, and vision (Baldasaro et al., 2014; Haven, 2007). This makes them a primary candidate for building cultural awareness as they have the ability to give students an experience outside of themselves and to broaden one's perception of reality.

Not only is story culturally permeating, it is also brain appropriate. Decades of theory and research indicate that story is the main form in which the brain organizes thought. "Thought flows in terms of stories – stories about events, stories about people,

and stories about intention and achievements” (Smith, 1990, p.62). Bruner (1990) theorized that humans are preprogrammed to search and create meaning from story elements. He also states that fiction creates realities so compelling that they shape our experiences, which then alter our perception of the real world (Bruner, 2002; Bruner, 1987). Brockman (2013) also observed how the stories one tells oneself determine the individual’s perceived mental reality. Haven (2007) reviewed over 350 research studies that all demonstrate that stories are effective for teaching and motivating, as well as communicating concepts. Smith also agreed that people learn in the form of stories (1990).

### **Story to Promote Understanding**

Current events demonstrate a clear need for understanding between many cultures. The media is filled with images of violence, conflict, and dissonance that result from a lack of understanding among people. In an increasingly global world, there is an increasingly pressing need for students to engage with people whose cultural backgrounds differ. There is a parallel need for society members with the ability to think critically and resolve conflict among differing cultures.

Cultural awareness and cultural competence have their foundation in understanding. For thousands of years, humans have used stories to communicate mutual understanding. Stories often represent hidden aspects of culture, as well as demonstrating the values of the storyteller. Stories can also be personal and unique to an individual. They can be used in interpersonal relationships to gain insight when solving conflict. Stories have the ability to connect people. Our brains are designed to learn from stories. We organize our realities through story.

### **Research Question**

So, how does the practice of storytelling and the need for cultural competence transfer to a school setting? School is a place for students to be equipped to engage as competent members of a global society. This thesis will explore the three areas of cultural competence and how storytelling can facilitate these in students. Research will be analyzed to answer the question: How can stories facilitate understanding between students of many cultures?

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Literature Research Procedures**

To locate the literature for this thesis, searches of Educator's Reference Complete, Education Journals, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and EBSCO MegaFILE were conducted for publications from 1996-2018. This list was narrowed by only reviewing published empirical studies from peer-reviewed journals that focused on storytelling and its effects on understanding among students. The key words that were used in the searches included "personal narrative", "story", "storytelling", "narrative theory", and "multicultural literature" along with "cultural awareness", "empathy", "peace", "culturally relevant", and "cultural competency". The structure of this chapter is to review the literature on cultural understanding and story in three sections in this order: Cultural Awareness; Cultural Sensitivity and Cultural Knowledge; and Cultural Competence.

### **Cultural Awareness**

There is no dispute that intercultural competence is necessary for students to be successful in today's global society. It is a term that requires concrete definition. There is no single universal definition of cultural competence, but there is agreement that there must first be an awareness of culture (Hammer, 2015; Madden, 2015; UNESCO, 2013). An individual will be unable to identify similarities and differences between cultures and act according to these manifestations within intercultural contexts without awareness of the existence of culture. Self-awareness and cultural awareness are deeply related and often interrelated in the process of gaining awareness of culture. Often individuals gain awareness of these areas simultaneously as "there is no better way to discover the socially

constructed nature of one's own culture than to be faced with another culture having quite different assumptions" (UNESCO, 2013, p. 26). For the purpose of this review, the terms will be combined to the term *cultural awareness*. Cultural awareness is a person's conscious ability to critically view and understand the objective and subjective cultures to which the individual belongs, including awareness of one's own culture (Deardorff, 2006; Madden, 2015). There is a spectrum within cultural awareness as individuals gain awareness of objective culture, symbols, and artifacts, or outward ways of cultural expression; then awareness of cultural values, and assumptions. As stories often convey both outward and internal expressions of culture, this investigation will first determine if story helps students build cultural awareness.

### **Building Cultural Awareness**

Utilizing story to build cultural awareness is the foundational step in facilitating understanding among students of many cultures. There are numerous types of stories that have been applied to the study of cultural awareness. In this section, studies will be organized by the type of story used to increase students' cultural awareness.

**Multicultural literature.** Literature has been used in classrooms to build student understanding for decades. With the rise of multicultural education, there is a growing awareness of the importance of multicultural literature and its potential to build bridges for students.

Wham, Barnhart, and Cook (1996) researched how students' attitudes towards multicultural diversity are enhanced by exposure to multicultural literature. They examined the effects of combining home and classroom reading experiences of multicultural storybooks on the awareness and attitudes of kindergarten, second-grade,

and fourth-grade students towards individuals representing other cultures, circumstances, or lifestyles. The study was conducted at a public elementary school in a small, Caucasian, middle-class Midwestern community. There were two classrooms at each grade level, one control group, and one Storybook Reading Group, or SRG. There were 35 kindergarten students, 45 second-grade students, and 48 fourth-grade students (Wham et al., 1996).

In September, all students were given a nine question survey to measure their attitudes towards multiple areas of diversity including hearing impaired, visually impaired, elderly, impoverished, divorced, physically disabled, race, and nationality. Daily multicultural storybooks were read to students in the SRG group at home and at school. Students in the control group were not read any specific multicultural storybooks. After seven months, the same survey was given to students again (Wham et al., 1996).

Results showed an overall increase in the frequency of positive responses to diversity from students in the SRG group. There was no change in positive responses for the kindergarten SRG. However, the control kindergarten group demonstrated a decrease of -5% in positive responses. There was an increase in positive responses for both second-grade and fourth-grade in the SRG of 14% and 3% respectively. The control groups at the same grades decreased their positive responses by -7% and -1%. Across the school year, students' attitudes towards diversity became more positive or remained steady in the Storybook Reading Group, and became more negative in the control groups (Wham et al., 1996).

Sarraj, Bene, and Burley (2015) examined multicultural education, a theoretical framework for multicultural education, and its effect on students' cultural awareness.

They wanted to specifically determine the effect of multicultural education on students' awareness of cultural attitudes and beliefs and students' knowledge of other cultures. The study was completed in a fifth grade enrichment classroom at an elementary school in West Texas. Seventeen 10-11 year old students participated in the study. Of the students, six girls and 11 boys participated. The students' ethnicities were white (76%), Hispanic (11%), and African American (11%). For two weeks in the fall semester, the students were exposed to multicultural stories (Sarraj et al., 2015).

The classroom teacher started each lesson with definitions of the main vocabulary. Then she introduced each culture through a multimedia clip and read a story out loud. Lastly, she asked comprehension questions about the story and students answered these questions as a group. Students wrote their responses to two open-ended questions, which evaluated students' higher order thinking skills and ability to apply main ideas from the stories to their lives. This process was repeated for three stories that promoted understanding towards three sub-cultural groups: Arab Americans, African Americans, and Latin Americans. Researchers analyzed students' open-ended responses to the stories, teachers' observations, and researcher's field notes of students' verbal and nonverbal reactions to the intervention (Sarraj et al., 2015).

Results showed four themes in students' thoughts and attitudes: curiosity, empathy, preconceptions, and bullying. Students demonstrated curiosity towards learning about various cultures and the traditions that are associated with those cultures. Specifically, they expressed interest in cultural music, dances, and traditional clothing. The researchers concluded that students found other cultures interesting because these cultures were different from their own. Students responded positively to the multimedia

clips and the multicultural stories. Multicultural stories can be successful in increasing awareness of other cultures. However, it must be implemented intentionally with other elements of teaching such as multimedia, classroom discussion, and opportunity for individual students' responses (Saraj et al., 2015)

Murray and Puchner (2012) implemented think-alouds to deepen students' understanding of district-prescribed literature and of sociocultural issues such as discrimination and prejudice. Their study was conducted at a Midwestern United States junior high school. Twenty-one 7<sup>th</sup> grade students were selected as members of the researcher's language arts class. Of the students, seven girls and 14 boys participated. The students' ethnicities were white (62%), African American (28%), Asian/Pacific Islander (5%), and Multiracial (5%). All but two students were academically performing on or above grade level. For three months, students were exposed to think-aloud interventions (Murray & Puchner, 2012).

The classroom teacher modeled think-alouds to identify the socio-cultural context of the literature, how she reacted to it, and connected to it. Appropriate dialogue for discussing culture and 'others' was introduced. Students then used graphic organizers to perform think-alouds in small groups, and then individually. The teacher's observation notes, reflective journal, and student work were collected as data (Murray & Puchner, 2012).

As the study was conducted as action research, adjustments were made throughout the intervention process. Teacher observations demonstrated a need to define 'culture' with students to support development of analysis of the literature. The class collaboratively created a concept web of culture that included abstract and concrete



elements of culture. Students then were assigned one concept to create a visual aid to represent. The teacher then posed two questions for students to respond to anonymously. The results showed that many students had little to no knowledge of culture or its importance. One thirds of students reported that they had never considered culture before and believed it would not affect them to learn about. Another third chose not to respond. One sixth of the class reported that culture was interesting to learn about. The last sixth felt that learning about culture would divide the class (Murray & Puchner, 2012).

After the three month intervention, Murray and Puchner found that students that student made gains in their ability to identify and articulate socio-cultural issues, specifically within the school. Discussions demonstrated that students were able to identify instances of discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping in the literature and then in the school context (Murray & Puchner, 2012).

While there is evidence on the importance of multicultural literature, Murray and Puchner found that the teacher's ability to provide a form for discussion and learning of socio-cultural issues led to increased student cultural awareness (2012). This suggests that story must be skillfully utilized by a knowledgeable educator for it to reach optimal effectiveness in increasing students' awareness.

Multicultural literature also has the potential to provide a setting for all students to understand their identities. Osorio (2018) explored how second grade emergent bilinguals discussed their own identity in relation to multicultural children's literature. The class was part of a bilingual program at a Midwestern elementary school with 62% of students eligible for subsidized lunch and 37% Latinos. Of the class, all 20 Spanish-speaking

students were second generation, born in the United States. There were 11 boys and nine girls in the class between seven and eight years old (Osorio, 2018).

The students read multicultural literature with themes of border crossing that applied to their cultural context. The students then discussed their thoughts in reading groups with the teacher. The teacher recorded all of the literature discussion conversations and took field notes about the students' engagement with the stories (Osorio, 2018).

Results showed an increase in students' self-awareness and affirmation of their cultural identities. As the students read about others who had similar experiences, they shared their own family stories with new openness. Students had increased engagement and emotional connection through sharing their lives with each other. By valuing all students' stories and reflecting those in the classroom, students gained greater self-awareness as a key component to building cultural awareness (Osorio, 2018).

Glenn (2012) explored the effects of reading and reflecting on counter-narrative novels on preservice teachers' understandings of race. Fourteen preservice English teachers were enrolled in a teacher preparation program in the northeastern United States. All students were born and raised in the United States and were monolingual English speakers. Of the students, 13 were female, and one male. One student identified as black, while the rest were white (Glenn, 2012).

During the course, students read and discussed two young adult novels that represented counter-narratives to dominant American culture. Students then created and presented three days of lesson plans to teach one of the titles. At the end of the project,

students completed a questionnaire of three open-ended questions to summarize their experience (Glenn, 2012).

Results showed an increase of cultural awareness among all of the students in three major themes. There was an overall increase in feeling connections across cultures. Students specifically cited the universality of the human condition and the empathetic power of literature as agents for changing feelings. The course also encouraged reconsideration of unfamiliar cultures. Students questioned societal and personal stereotypes after reading the counter-narrative novels. Lastly, the course encouraged students' consideration of their own whiteness. They reflected on their own racial and cultural identities and how this impacted their understanding of others (Glenn, 2012).

Porto (2014) explored how students access and understand the culture-specific dimensions of literary narrative texts. The processes, techniques, and behaviors that advanced English as a Foreign Language students used to comprehend cultural content in literary narrative was studied. Students were invited to participate in the study based on previous performance in language and literature courses at a university in Argentina. The 10 students were aged 18-22, and studied to become future teachers and/or translators of English. All students spoke Spanish as their first language and were in their third year of undergraduate studies. Of the 10 students, nine were female, and one was male (Porto, 2014).

Students read three literary texts about Christmas celebrations. One was in Spanish, and two were in English. Students engaged in various forms of individual reflection on the texts. They also completed an after reading response task and a visual representation task to be shared in class. Researchers collected a pre-questionnaire about

cultural content, students' literary texts with underlining, students' immediate written reflections, students' reading responses tasks, students' visual representation tasks, and a delayed interview after researcher analysis (Porto, 2014).

Results were inconclusive. In each task, students moved backwards and forwards on the continuum of cultural understanding. For example, in the first text, a student demonstrated high levels of cultural understanding. In the second text, the same student showed little cultural understanding. This indicates that cultural understanding is a fluid process on a continuum; it is not static or stagnant. Generally, students were interested in reading about other cultures, regardless of their familiarity or unfamiliarity with it. While cultural understanding is a non-linear process, story can assist in creating interest and openness to other cultural perspectives (Porto, 2014).

Fard, Nasarabadi, and Heidari (2016) analyzed the *Masnavi*, a collection of poems by the celebrated Persian Sufi poet, Rumi. In a study conducted by the University of Isafahan, they explored how these ancient stories reinforced philosophical thought in children. Three poems were analyzed using Lipman's "philosophical thinking components" three components of thinking: critical, creative, and caring. Within each major category, further subcategories were identified.

Results showed that critical thinking and caring thinking were present in all of the stories, while creative thinking was identified in two of the stories (Fard et al., 2016). The critical thinking component was consistently aligned to good judgment, as well as single instances of meta-cognition and sensitivity to context. The creative thinking component fostered imagination, holism, and expression. In each story, there was caring thinking of the normative nature. The stories promoted an understanding of cultural norms and

values such as avoiding arrogance, or avoiding superficial judgments. This suggests the cultured nature of traditional stories as well as their potential to transmit understanding of culture (Fard et al., 2016).

Tuncel (2017) explored how to ensure prospective teachers become culturally responsive individuals. Forty prospective social studies teachers enrolled in a communication and human relations course in their third year of undergraduate study. Of the 40 students, 21 were male, and 19 were female.

Course material prepared students to plan culturally responsive lessons using multicultural literature, film, and class discussions. Researchers collected a survey, in addition to class discussion recordings, and student assignments: story reviews, film analysis papers, and activity planning papers (Tuncel, 2017).

Results showed an increase in students' cultural awareness to cultural issues. After reading a story and responding to it, 87% of students clearly identified the importance of creating opportunities for students to share their cultures with each other. They were also gained awareness of the conditions that are necessary for different cultures to coexist. Further results also demonstrated students' increase in cultural sensitivity. This indicates that various types of stories can engage students in moving from cultural awareness to cultural sensitivity and competence (Tuncel, 2017).

**Personal stories.** Wood (2017) utilized personal narrative to improve effectiveness as a teacher in the area of First People's education. This critical self-reflective research was implemented using autoethnographic writing, as a representation of how a specific First Peoples student would have experienced interactions with the white, Australian teacher. The narrative was analyzed using Einser's four qualities:

perceptibility, noticeability, discerning featuring, and uniqueness. The researcher then applied a critical lens of whiteness to the narrative to reveal how the teacher's whiteness manifested in the classroom (Wood, 2017).

Results resulted in recognition of how events would have been perceived from the student's perspective, which meant understanding the First People's cultural lens and seeing one's own culture from the outside. It also increased the teacher's desire to challenge dominant thinking in education, referring to the whiteness of education in Australia. The teacher reported a greater understanding of the impacts of his white culture on his teaching and interactions with students. This awareness also led to a desire to increase personal cultural knowledge (Wood, 2017).

Self-reflection through narrative has the potential to extract oneself from a limited cultural understanding and increase awareness of other cultural perspectives. Further investigation would be needed to determine the effectiveness of this method with students (Wood, 2017).

Loebick (2016) examined pedagogical practices that foster cross-cultural, multi-leveled interaction. They investigated how students interacting in a community engagement experience identified and perceived the role and influence of culture, and tools to reflect on and build awareness of culture. Two distinct groups of undergraduate students participated in the study. Eleven students were traditional residential college (RC) and were all Caucasian, middle to upper class, and from suburban backgrounds. 27 students were part of the College Assistance Migrant Program, or CAMP, which is a federally funded program that provides first-year migrant and seasonal farmworker students access to higher education. Of the CAMP students, there were 25 bilingual in

Spanish and English, one monolingual English speaker, and one trilingual in English, Haitian Creole, and French (Loebick, 2016).

Students participated in class experiences and community engagement experiences. Class experiences were centered on introducing different storytelling practices and building classroom community through intercultural dialogue. The curriculum covered narrative theories, social themes, as well as activities that focused on culture and community engagement based storytelling. Students integrated these concepts into activities for meeting with their elementary partners. Undergraduate students were placed into groups with six to eight 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade students from a local elementary school for their community engagement experiences. Researchers collected baseline surveys, observations and field notes over two 14-week periods, student interviews, and group blog posts as data (Loebick, 2016).

Results showed that intentional pedagogical methods helped students establish connections and recognize border crossing. They showed greater awareness of crossing of social, personal, and cultural identity boundaries within their lives and within their communities. All students demonstrated and reported a deeper awareness and understanding of culture as fluid and relational. They also used intercultural dialogue to intentionally navigate cross-cultural border crossing (Loebick, 2016).

Hibbin (2016) examined the socio-emotional benefits of oral storytelling in English primary schools. A team of two oral storytellers, two creative agents, and three classroom teachers across two schools collaborated to create oral storytelling interventions. Both schools had some experience with oral storytelling pedagogies. Pre-existing traditional tales were modeled by the adult and retold by the children in various

ways to construct familiarity with ‘the world of story.’ Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the adults involved to measure the intervention’s effectiveness (Hibbin, 2016).

Results showed five findings that oral storytelling engaged children to: become more self-confident, represent and understand themselves, understand others through intra-psychological processes, understand others through inter-psychological process, and to work collaboratively with others. To represent and understanding oneself, there must be recognition of what is unique to the individual and an awareness of one’s own culture. This requires recognition of culture and that it is not uniform for all individuals. This demonstrates oral storytelling as a means of increasing awareness of one’s own culture and simultaneous understanding of the existence other cultures (Hibbin, 2016).

Woodrow (2017) explored the peace building potential of facilitated storytelling. The study specifically investigated ways to increase urban citizenry’s capacity to be good hosts to newcomers from refugee backgrounds through sharing and co-performing stories. Twenty young people participated in the Brave New Welcome project over several months co-creating and co-performing stories about home, belonging, and friendship. About half of the participants were born in Australia. Several participants had come to Australia with their families as infants or children seeking refuge years earlier. Six participants had recently arrived in Australia as unaccompanied minors seeking political asylum (Woodrow, 2017).

Researcher observation showed that storytelling created a space for cultural understanding. Participants demonstrated a new appreciation for the practice of cultural translation as they worked to capture each other’s stories authentically. Results also



showed that the interactions, stories, and reflections among the participants reflected the theme of the performances. This suggests that stories have the potential to deepen understanding among people of different cultures. Lastly, results showed that the creation of spaces and relationships that support storytelling are often just as, or more important than, the actual narratives. The relational space that facilitates storytelling is more important than the physical one, and may be what causes the greatest impact on participants' awareness and attitudes (Woodrow, 2017).

Balto and Ostmo (2012) examined the Advanced Multicultural Studies, or AMS program at Sami University College for its effectiveness and lasting student experiences from 1994 to 2002. The purpose of the program was “to rid oneself of narrow outlooks and become accustomed to examining personal ties and biases more critically” (p. 2). The program emphasized the understanding of the concept of cultural and enhancing intercultural communication skills through storytelling. Students enrolled in the AMS program from a range of Sami communities, both Sami and Sami-Norwegian, and in majority or minority situations. Researchers analyzed students' assignments, post-program stories and evaluations, and field notes (Balto & Ostmo, 2012).

Results showed that students gained broader outlooks and the ability to examine biases critically. Students demonstrated a deeper understanding of what it means to be Sami and how to explore their own cultural identity. Students reported that sharing stories and exchanging experiences and lessons was the most important part of the program and had lasting impact years after the program ended (Balto & Ostmo, 2012).

**Digital storytelling.** With a growing need for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in the classroom, digital storytelling is gaining recognition as a way to integrate literacy and technology skills. It also has the potential to increase student cultural awareness.

Anderson and Macleroy (2017) explored digital storytelling in multilingual settings. The Critical Connections project facilitated multilingual digital storytelling pedagogy involving 500 students and 50 teachers. They chose four vignettes from a range of schools to exemplify the effects of the program.

Researchers gathered video recording and photographs of many instances such as the making of digital stories in the schools, interviews with students, teachers, parents, and community members, and recordings of team meetings with researchers and teachers. They also collected documentary materials that were used in the process of filmmaking. Four vignettes were chosen from a range of schools that exemplified the potential of the program. The vignettes included: a mainstream secondary school in London taught in Greek and English, a group of middle school students at an Arabic complementary school in London, a class of 10 year olds at a mainstream French bilingual primary school in Oxfordshire, and a mainstream elementary school in Taiwan taught in Mandarin Chinese and English (Anderson & Macelroy, 2017).

Results showed an increase in students' self-awareness and cultural awareness. Digital storytelling allowed students to explore their sense of self, and gain a sense of shared social reality and intercultural identity. Students also demonstrated a resistance to monocultural view of citizenship and identity (Anderson & Macelroy, 2017).

Grant and Bolin (2016) studied the effectiveness of digital storytelling on student engagement and cultural competence. They specifically asked if digital storytelling

would assist students in building knowledge of diversity and sensitivity to cultural issues. Ninety-six undergraduate students participated in a diversity course at Wichita State University. The average age of the student was 27.7 years old. Of the students, 87.5% were female, while 12.5% were male. The majority of the students' ethnicities were Caucasian (77.2%), with African American (10.9%), Hispanic (8.9%), and Asian (1.1%) groups as well. At the beginning of the course, 68.4% of students reported that they had received no previous diversity or social justice training. The course included a semester long assignment, in which groups told a story of diversity that was supported by course content and textbooks (Grant & Bolin, 2016).

Researchers analyzed surveys to measure students' cultural competence as well as an open-ended response of their experience. The surveys included standard demographic questions, along with twelve original items to measure student's experiences in developing digital stories and cultural competence. Two items were included to test the reliability of participant answers (Grant & Bolin, 2016).

Results showed an overall increase in students' cultural competence due to the digital storytelling project. While the majority of students reported no previous diversity or social justice training, 92.7% of students felt the project broadened their understanding of diversity. This aligns with a reliability check item, in which 86.5% of students disagreed that "the digital storytelling project did not provide further understanding of diversity" (Grant & Bolin, 2016, p. 51). Both students who had previous training, as well as those who did not, equally felt they gained new knowledge from the project. Affectively students responded positively to the digital storytelling process. Eighty-four and two tenths percent felt that the project was important in changing views on diversity

in the community in which they live. All students reported that viewing the projects of their classmates sparked emotions or a call to action. This implies students not only gaining cultural awareness, but also moving towards cultural sensitivity and cultural competence (Grant & Bolin, 2016).

Ribiero (2016) explored digital storytelling as a means to foster intercultural awareness. The potential of digital storytelling as a means of increasing cultural awareness and preparing students for today's challenges was researched. One hundred and forty student questionnaires were randomly selected from the 240 in undergraduate business communications course at a Polytechnic School in Portugal. The questionnaires contained 12 open-ended questions regarding phases of a digital storytelling activity (Ribiero, 2016).

Students were divided into groups of two or three. They completed a worksheet on issues in intercultural communication. Then the groups created a two-minute digital story of the group's final reflection on issues in intercultural communication. The digital stories integrated the group's thoughts in a narrative form to present their findings (Ribiero, 2016).

Results showed a variety in students' affective reactions to the project. The method of digital storytelling was overall positive and an interesting activity for most students. A small percentage felt some reluctance as those students were unfamiliar with the technology or stressed about the limited amount of work time. More than half of the students already had experience working with video editing software, and the majority students felt that the activity had relevance for their future professional lives (Ribiero, 2016).

Results also showed that the assignment increased students' cultural awareness. All questioned students reported the digital stories prompted cultural self-reflection, and reinforced the need to respect other cultures. As one student said, "We are always building bridges of knowledge, using what we already know to construct our identity." (Ribero, 2016, p. 10). These results demonstrate the importance of pairing stories with transferrable skills, however these skills must be taught effectively for students to affectively engage with the cultural elements.

Theodore and Afoláyan (2010) explored the use of digital storytelling to help pre-service teachers become more culturally sensitive in urban classroom settings. Seventy-seven students enrolled in an undergraduate class on educational foundations and multicultural education. Of the students, most were members of 'mainstream American culture': white, mostly Christian, and working or middle class. Most students also grew up in areas close to the university with little cultural diversity (Theodore & Afoláyan, 2010).

The study was conducted over two semesters. In both semesters, each student created a digital story about their own culture and presented it to the class. At the end of the semester, students responded in writing about what they learned about culture by creating, viewing, and discussing the digital stories. Researchers collected the students' responses to two open-ended questions, and students' contributions to a discussion board (Theodore & Afoláyan, 2010).

Results showed that students reported growth in three themes. Many students reported an increased awareness of culture. In some cases, students realized for the first time that they had a culture and that their particular culture was distinct from others.

Students also became more aware of their cultural differences from others, even though they thought they were culturally the same. At the same time, students also gained awareness of the commonalities that connect all human beings (Theodore & Afoláyan, 2010).

McKnight, Hoban, and Nielsen (2011) explored methods to bridge awareness of Western ways of knowing and Aboriginal ways of knowing. They used animated storytelling as a way to develop preservice non-Aboriginal teacher's understanding of the Aboriginal "relatedness to country" and to apply this way of thinking in a personal slowmation representation. Students chose an elective course in the final year of a Bachelor of Education program for primary teachers at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Of the 15 enrolled, seven chose to participate in the data collection process.

The course material centered on engaging in and teaching Aboriginal perspectives from an understanding of and relationship with country and Aboriginal people. This included a field trip to a significant Aboriginal place, and learning about 'country' with an Elder. At the end of the course, students created a slowmation assignment that told a story of a 'special place' in their personal lives. Researchers conducted interviews at the beginning and the end of the course, as well as analyzing the slowmation assignments as data (McKnight et al., 2011).

Results showed an increase in students' understanding of 'relatedness of country.' Students developed a deeper understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing and demonstrated a more holistic sense of connections between people. All students commented on the cultural excursion with the Aboriginal Elder. They reported that listening to his stories had the greatest influential impact on their understanding of

Aboriginal ways of knowing. Students also reported that the slowmation assignments helped them to think about and reflect upon their new knowledge in a meaningful way. This suggests that both listening to and telling stories are important (McKnight et al., 2011).

### **Cultural Sensitivity and Cultural Knowledge**

On the continuum of cultural competence, a person must first develop cultural awareness, the conscious ability to critically view and understand the objective and subjective cultures to which others and the individual belongs (Deardorff, 2006; Madden, 2015). A greater consciousness of culture does not equate with cultural competence. Before an individual can engage effectively with people of other cultures, they must acquire the intellectual, and psychological capacity to do so. Bennett (1993) defines intercultural sensitivity as “the construction of reality as increasingly capable of accommodating cultural difference” (p. 24). Beyond merely being aware of the existence of culture, an individual’s perspectives must become increasingly complex surrounding how culture is experienced (Bennett & Paige, 2015). Cultural sensitivity is often built by recognizing similarities and differences between cultures beyond the visually identifiable. Perspective shifts are facilitated through purposeful engagement with cultural differences such as experiences, values, interpretations, judgments, and behaviors that differ between people and are learned and internalized from the groups to which one belongs (Hammer, 2015).

Cultural sensitivity often develops concurrently with cultural knowledge. As one psychologically develops capacity to think about culture, the individual gains deeper, culture-specific knowledge about other cultures. This includes underlying cultural values,

attitudes, and the ways in which members of other cultural groups have been culturally conditioned. Language and historical context play an integral part in culture, which is why knowledge of other languages and history are also often included in developing cultural knowledge (Deardorff, 2015). Without appropriate cultural knowledge, an individual will not move forward on their journey towards cultural competence.

Therefore, the next section of this investigation will examine ways in which story assists students in gaining cultural sensitivity and cultural knowledge.

### **Understanding the ‘Other’**

Cultural sensitivity is founded on the individual’s ability to fluidly adjust their perception to understand the ‘other.’ The ‘other’ merely refers to the ideas, values, or attitudes that are outside one’s cultural group and oneself. The ability to shift perspective so that this ‘other’ can be understood is necessary for students to become culturally competent individuals. Story, with its unique ability to convey ‘otherness’ in permeating ways, can facilitate cultural sensitivity in students.

Siddall (1999) explored multiple ways of interacting with literature verbally and nonverbally to improve understanding. The study specifically investigated the effects of dramatizations on students’ understanding of a piece of literature. The research partnered with a class of 25 fifth grade students from a Midwestern public elementary school. The class mirrored the racial identity of the school with 85% White, and 15% Hispanic, Asian, Native American, or African American. Students represented all socioeconomic levels and a mixture of academic abilities.

Class reading activities were planned by the teacher and the researcher. All the stories contained themes of multiculturalism, immigration, prejudice, and social injustice.



The students chose how their group of five would read and respond to the book over 15-20 school days. One group was chosen as a typical representation of fifth grade students. In the group, the five students read a fictional novel about the Atlantic slave trade. Collaboratively, they created and performed a dramatized news program of the novel. The researcher analyzed videotapes of the performances, student work samples, field notes, journal entries, and student interviews (Siddall, 1999).

Results showed that students had enhanced understanding of the story. The dramatization demonstrated students' rich thinking and interpretation of the book beyond the literal story elements. Students made inferences about the text in multiple perspectives that showed their emotional connections to the characters. The process of dramatization aided them to "see life through the eyes and emotions of the characters," which offer a different cultural perspective with which students were familiar (Siddall, 1999, p. 28).

Idrus (2014) explored culturally responsive teaching and teachers' and students' reactions to analyzing a culturally sensitive text in the literature classroom. The study examined the effectiveness of these activities in initiating the construction of shared identity among the students. The researcher, funded by the International Islamic University Malaysia, was interested in how culturally responsive teaching would effect the dynamic between the diverse cultures of the participants. The study was conducted in partnership with nine English language teachers in six different secondary schools around Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Of the teachers' ethnic backgrounds, four were Malay, three were Indian, and two were Chinese. In six of the schools, one group of six students was

chosen for data collection. The students were between 15-16 years old. In each group of students, Malay, Indian, and Chinese cultures were equally represented (Idrus, 2014).

Prior to collecting data, the teachers attended a one-day workshop to build awareness and reflection around practices that promote cultural awareness among students, develop the notion of shared Malaysian identity, and reduce ethnic bias among students. Over three months, data was collected while the teachers taught English short stories with their students to meet these goals. The researcher collected interviews with teachers, group interviews with students, and conducted classroom observations (Idrus, 2014).

Results showed that the culturally responsive teaching methods, specifically narratives, promoted construction of a shared Malaysian identity among students. Students reported that Malaysians should take care to be “open-minded and not judgmental, and not start something that could provoke a sense of distrust” among fellow Malays from different ethnic backgrounds (Idrus, 2014, p. 60). Students also reported an increased awareness of stereotypes and how they impacted relationships. They engaged in discussions on bias and prejudice. They articulated the importance of critically examining one’s own basic assumptions, which can often be grounded in taken-for-granted stereotypes. This demonstrates the students’ increasing ability to separate from their own cultural perspective and to understand other attitudes and values (Idrus, 2014).

Al-Jafar and Buzzelli (2004) explored the use of fairytales and storytelling to promote cultural understanding and peace education among young children. They specifically investigated how students at a rural school in America would understand a Kuwaiti fairytale with the goal of increasing understanding and appreciation of other

cultures. The study was conducted in Midwestern United States with seven to eight year old students (Al-Jafar & Buzzelli, 2004).

The researchers presented students pictures of various versions of the Cinderella story and discussed them with the students. The students were told the Kuwaiti version of Cinderella. Students discussed similarities and differences to the Kuwaiti version and the story that they knew. Students then worked in groups to write their own versions of Cinderella to fit their cultural context. The researchers collected interviews, documents (student stories), and observed the students during discussion and worktime (Al-Jafar & Buzzelli, 2004).

Results showed that fairytales enabled students to explore other cultures through direct engagement with underlying values, images, and stories of other cultures. The students were able to realize the similarities and differences from familiar and unfamiliar stories. This discussion space allowed for the stories to become a starting point for a dialogue across cultural differences. The stories altered the students' perspectives to allow broader cultural consciousness (Al-Jafar & Buzzelli, 2004).

Enciso (2011) explored immigrant and non-immigrant students' storytelling practices and cultural knowledge. The study focused on how to adapt these practices for academic literary study in ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous middle-grade classrooms. The study was conducted in two 6<sup>th</sup> grade language arts classrooms that were taught by the same teacher. One class was specifically for English learners. Of the 11 students in the ESL class, eight were males, and three were females from Cambodia, Somalia, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. The other class contained

five males, two African American and three white Appalachian. Both classes were small in size due to specific needs identified in each group (Enciso, 2011).

Over the course of three months, both classrooms read three novels about immigration with themes of bigotry and advocacy. Classroom activities were targeted to help students analyze deeper themes within the texts such as contradictions, and assumptions. Visual art, drama, storytelling, and discussion were used to support the literary reading. Six to eight students from both classrooms voluntarily participated in an informal, weekly story club. The club's purpose was to explore new forms of relationship and meaning through individual and joint storytelling. The researcher collected field notes from primary observation, audio and video recordings, story club discussion, and student's oral stories (Enciso, 2011).

Results demonstrated high levels of student engagement in classroom discussions surrounding bigotry and hatred. After reading the immigration stories, students were able to realize their mutual humanity. Students in the story club also exhibited engagement and respect when listening to their peers' stories. They gained greater understanding of their similarities and differences from one another as they were exposed to other personal and cultural realities. Students from both classrooms successfully collaborated to write a poem to stand against bigoted, anti-immigrant rhetoric that had been experienced personally or in literary form. Overall, the various forms of story developed students' sensitivity to their peers and the 'other' (Enciso, 2011).

Bar-On (2010) explored the use of storytelling and multiple narratives to promote peace in conflict situations. Descendants of Holocaust survivors and descendants of Nazi perpetrators were brought together to study if story could bridge the chasm and schism

still apparent between the Germans and Jews. The TRT or 'To Reflect and Trust' group was formed after multiple years of interviews of choose the members of the group. There were 17 members in the group, eight descendants of Holocaust perpetrators, and five American and four Israeli descendants of Holocaust survivors. Over six years, the researcher arranged six meetings for between four to five days each time. The meeting's location was alternated among Germany, Israel, and the United States.

The first meeting was dedicated sharing familial and individual stories, which continued into subsequent meetings. The group constructed a common and conceptual language to discuss these stories and their underlying themes that diverged from the separate languages from their communities of origin. This brought a complex problem, as the members felt forced to choose between their membership to their cultural communities and the TRT group. They struggled between isolation from their cultural communities, as these communities were not ready to cope with their new understandings, or removing themselves from the group (Bar-On, 2010).

Interestingly, the group chose neither and instead forged a new path. This resulted in a unique new "space" that was created by and within the group. As the group continued, deep feelings of mutual respect and trust for one another developed. In the end, the group relied primarily on each other for support as they continued to hope for reconciliation between their respective communities. Despite such a stark chasm, stories unified this diverse group across differences that seemed insurmountable. While this community developed over multiple years, it indicates that the power of story to unite across differences should not be underestimated (Bar-On, 2010).

Bal (2013) explored effects of the experience of fiction on empathy. Researchers have long questioned if fiction truly leads to higher empathy, or if highly empathetic people tend to read more fiction. The researcher predicted that fiction reading is positively related to empathy across time, but only when the reader is emotionally transported into the story. The researcher conducted two studies.

In the first study, 66 Dutch students participated in the study for university credits. Of the students, 52% were female, and 48% were male. The average age was 26 years old. Students spent an average of 3.32 hours reading fiction books weekly. The second study included 97 Dutch undergraduate students. Of the students, 74% were female, and 26% were male. The average age was 24 years old (Bal, 2013).

The students were randomly assigned to either the fiction, or the control group. Students completed questionnaires, and read the stories online from home. In the first study, the control group read Dutch newspaper articles on the riots in Libya and the nuclear disaster in Japan from March 2011. The fiction group read a chapter from *The Adventure of the Six Napoleons* by Arthur Conan Doyle. In the second study, the control group read newspaper articles on the riots in Greece and liberation day celebrations in the Netherlands. The fiction group read *Blindness* by Jose Saramago. In both studies, to ensure that the students had read the stories carefully, they were required to provide a summary of what they had read. A week after reading, all students filled out a digital questionnaire, which included the empathy scale and irrelevant scales to avoid demand characteristics (Bal, 2013).

Results showed that the interaction between emotional transportation and condition was related to empathy. In one study, the emotional transportation with

empathy was not significant for the control condition. In the other study, the effect was negative when students became more transported. In both studies, lowly transported fiction reader becomes less empathetic over time. The relationship between emotional transportation and empathy over time was significant and positive for fiction readers. In all cases, the fiction stories were not Dutch, meaning that they conveyed different cultural values, assumptions, and ideas. Despite cultural differences, fiction reading was still positively related to empathy across time, meaning that the stories altered the readers' emotional perspective (Bal, 2013).

DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) explored how literature discussion groups help students access cultural and linguistic resources to build collective understandings of multicultural literature. They collaborated with a 4<sup>th</sup> grade English language arts classroom in a bilingual elementary school located in a large Midwestern town with a growing Latina/o community. In the classroom, students were in the process of transitioning from Spanish to English reading and students were not easily forming relationships across languages.

The researchers implemented literature circles to support the concerns within the classroom. Specific discussion roles were taught and implemented to scaffold the literature circles. Quality multicultural literature and options for reading the text were provided, but selection and discussion were student-led. Data was collected over the course of the semester in the forms of field notes, interviews, audio and video recordings, and student produced artifacts (student role sheets, evaluation, and written responses) (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006).

Results showed that the multicultural literature discussion circles altered students' perspectives. Students reported, "they had changed" as a result of their participation in the literature circles (p. 167). While students' understandings of themselves as group members and individuals changed, they also gained greater appreciation for their classmates' knowledge and abilities across linguistic and cultural differences. The multicultural literature provided students with multiple opportunities to explore societal issues and to understand diverse perspectives. Students demonstrated increase sensitivity towards the 'other' in the literature and in their classmates. This suggests that authentic, respectful discussion surrounding story contributes to cultural sensitivity in students (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006).

Landa and Stephens (2017) examined ways to build cultural competence in preservice teachers. They specifically explore how content and pedagogy in a children's literature class impacted one student's development and how that student expressed her cultural competence. After completing a teacher preparation program, one elementary education preservice teacher was selected for this case study. The student had previously been registered in the researcher's class on children's literature. The student was female, white, and English speaking. She grew up in a pre-dominantly white area, but had an interest in teaching low-income children from marginalized communities (Landa & Stephens, 2017).

The case study was founded on data from the student's experience in a children's literature course. The children's literature course focused on building student's cultural and historical knowledge of six non-dominant culture groups in the United States. Literature, class discussions, and assignments all aligned with this focus. The student's



work from the children's literature course was collected. Any student work that incorporated children's literature from two subsequent years was collected. Lastly, the student's personal teaching journal was collected as data (Landa & Stephens, 2017).

Results showed three major themes in the student's cultural competence development that commenced with the children's literature class. First, the student conveyed anger and frustration about the social and cultural marginalization of children and families. The student also expressed empathy for the social and cultural marginalization of children and families. This demonstrates the cognitive and emotional shift in the student's perspective. Her strong emotional reaction demonstrates the psychological change in her perspective towards marginalized children and families. She was able to view reality from a new perspective, which concurrently elicited an emotional reaction. While this case study was retroactive, further research has the potential to reveal specific methods that can increase student's cultural sensitivity (Landa & Stephens, 2017).

There are numerous studies that demonstrate students gaining cultural awareness as well as cultural sensitivity. The following studies have been discussed previously in this chapter, yet they also contribute to an understanding of storytelling and cultural sensitivity.

Hibbin (2016) examined the socio-emotional benefits of oral storytelling in English primary schools and was previously reviewed in this chapter. However, this study also provided insight into the developing of understanding the 'other.' As previously stated, results showed five findings that oral storytelling engaged children to: become more self-confident, represent and understand themselves, understand others

through intra-psychological processes, understand others through inter-psychological process, and to work collaboratively with others. In intra-psychological processes, students became aware that other people have separate minds, thoughts, and ideas. This demonstrates a shift in perspective to see outside of oneself that aligns with the definition of cultural sensitivity (Hibbin, 2016).

Loebick (2016) investigated how students interacting a community engagement experienced identify and perceived the role and influence of culture, and tools to reflect on and build awareness of culture. Results showed that students moved beyond surface acknowledgment of the existence of culture. They cultivated sensitivity in the form of boarder crossing while also identifying these boarders personally, socially, and culturally (Loebick, 2016).

Balto and Ostmo (2012) examined Sami University College's program that aimed to increase students' outlooks and instill critical reflection of assumptions through storytelling. Results showed that students demonstrated deeper understanding of the nuances of cultural sensitivity. They learned to alter their perspective to include the 'other' narratives, specifically differing values and assumptions within the Sami cultural group.

Tuncel (2017) explored ways to instill cultural responsiveness in prospective teaching in a communication and human relations course. After watching a fiction film, the majority of students was able to identify problems that occur in the process of adapting to different cultures, and found solutions to overcome these problems. They demonstrated the ability to empathize with those who were unable to communicate easily

due to linguistic differences. Students were able to view reality from the perspective of the character to emotionally appreciate the difficulty they faced.

Anderson and Macleroy (2017) explored digital storytelling in diverse multilingual settings through the Critical Connections project. Students created bilingual films that dealt with immigration issues. Results showed that students exhibited empathy with the 'other' across ethnic, linguistic, and national borders. They were able to alter their perspectives to accommodate other points of view and to represent these faithfully in stories. They also internalized the emotions of the other and communicated them to others effectively.

**Seeing Commonalities.** Cultural sensitivity entails recognizing commonalities between cultures. As stories convey cultural values, attitudes, and ideas, they can create opportunities for students to see similarities between cultures.

Al-Jafar (2016) explored the potential of children's literature to promote cultural understanding. The study specifically examined the values and ideas that Kuwaiti students would gain from *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. The researcher was particularly interested in using the similarities between the events of August 1945 in Hiroshima and August 1990 in Kuwait to facilitate cultural understanding. Forty-five undergraduate students participated in a children's literature class at Kuwait University.

The class began by selecting the novel based on criteria for quality children's literature. Student then were exposed to the process of making paper cranes in their second language, English, as coursework. Students responded to the process prior to discussion about its historical significance in class. Student read the novel, viewed a film, and discussed similarities between the Kuwaiti prisoners of war and Sadako's paper

cranes. Written student interviews and observations of group discussion were collected as data (Al-Jafar, 2016).

Results showed an increase in students' sensitivity to the 'other.' Many students had little to no prior exposure to Japanese culture. After the activities, students had increased curiosity for Japanese culture. They had an appreciation and interest in how the Japanese perspective differed from their own. Students were also able to identify with the story, despite its unfamiliarity. They empathized with themes that were uniquely 'other' demonstrating the ability to shift cultural perspectives (Al-Jafar, 2016).

Stewart and Gachago (2016) investigated students' critical awareness and social consciousness regarding notions of 'self' and 'other' across continents. They explored the extent to which technology can become a bridge to understanding otherness on a global scale. They also explore how cross-cultural dialogue and digital story work reveal students' perceptions of what it means to be human today. Two university classes participated in the collaborative storytelling project. The United States and South Africa were chosen for their past and present traumas stemming from their racialized history. In the United States, 25 students were enrolled in a writing course at a university in the Detroit metro. There were five different first languages represented in the American class, and the class reflected the diverse area. In South America, 80 students were enrolled in a Professional Studies program at the University of Technology in Western Cape. The South African class was diverse in terms of gender, age, race, ethnicity, and language (Stewart & Gachago, 2016).

A shared eight-week curriculum was created to meet the unique and separate course requirements. Reading, TED Talks, and parallel lessons were presented in class to

provide students with information on the themes. Students participated in a closed Facebook page to facilitate cross-cultural exchange. Each week, a video was posted for student viewing and response. Student had freedom to post and share video content in the Facebook group. All American students participated in the Facebook group. However, approximately half of the South African students participated in the Facebook group. Student-driven texts, Facebook posts, and student-produced digital stories were collected from both classes. Facebook page writings, and a scholarly personal narrative were also collected from the American class. Student responses to a survey were collected from the South African class (Stewart & Gachago, 2016).

Results showed an increase in students' cultural sensitivity. Sharing stories as cultural and personal artifacts worked to "demystify notion of otherness in both local and global contexts" (Stewart & Gachago, 2016, p.1). Students' feeling towards their international colleagues changed through deconstruction of stereotypes through collaboration. When hearing stories from each other, the students identified that they were more alike than they were different. This acknowledgment of shared humanity assisted students in shifting perspectives to become more inclusive despite cultural and national borders (Stewart & Gachago, 2016).

**Recognizing Differences.** Cultural sensitivity involves appreciating differences between cultures. The cultural values, attitudes, and ideas within stories can be used to illuminate the cultural differences for students in easily accessible ways.

Guerrero Moya, Muñoz Ortiz, and Niño Díaz (2016) explore the effects of an intervention linking culture and citizenship in a 10<sup>th</sup> grade English language class. The study aimed at finding evidence of intercultural communication competence skills

through writing narrative texts in English. They determined that intercultural communication competence entailed the ability to see cultural differences as well as similarities. 75 tenth-grade students participated in the intervention across three different public high schools in Bogota, Colombia. The students' ages ranged from 14-17 years old (Guerro Moya et al., 2016).

The intervention and lesson planning were applied in three cycles. Each cycle consisted of orientation session, literature circles, and storytelling tools. Orientation sessions helped the students comprehend based cultural concepts, tolerance features, and conflict resolution strategies. The literature circles provided students to analyze, compare, contrast, and take a stance on topic that were introduced during the orientation sessions. The storytelling tools were taught to students for them to provide written evidence of their understanding of the concepts, while incorporating their own experiences. Instructional materials, observation logs, and a final questionnaire were collected as data. Additionally, 15 narrative stories were collected from five students from each school (Guerro Moya et al., 2016).

Results showed an increase in students' sensitivity to cultural differences. Students were able to identify differences between cultures. They also demonstrated depth in this area by identifying how these differences helped them to build identity personally and communally. This shows how narrative provided a space to develop students' ability to change their perspectives to include additional cultural viewpoints (Guerro Moya et al., 2016).

Baskerville (2011) explored developing cohesion and building positive relationships through storytelling in a culturally diverse classroom. The study was

designed to acknowledge student voices, and to investigate what students learned about themselves, others, and cultural perspectives when they told and listened to one another's personal stories. They also examined what processes were most effective in creating a classroom environment where such perspectives could be freely shared. The study was conducted in a year-ten drama class in a lower socio-economic area of the lower island of New Zealand. The 24 students in the class were between 13 to 14 years old. Of the 24 students, there were 11 males, and 13 females. There were six cultural ethnicities represented in the classroom: New Zealand European, Maori, Maori European, Samoan, Fijian-Indian, and German (Baskerville, 2011).

Four 45-minute storytelling workshops, run over two consecutive weeks, were designed to provide students with opportunities to listen to, and to tell personal stories. After each story was told, students had the chance to reflect in a journal. The first workshop focused primarily on establishing protocols, introductions, defining attentive listening skills, and the researcher's story. The second workshop contained the teacher's story and storytelling exercises to build confidence. The third and fourth workshops focused on student stories. In addition to researcher field notes, participant reflections in the forms of journal entries, focus group interviews, and individual interviews were collected as data (Baskerville, 2011).

Results showed that students fostered empathy, compassion, tolerance, and respect for differences through the storytelling workshops. Storytelling helped to create a culturally inclusive classroom. Storytelling developed a way of working that fostered a culture of listening and respect. It also connected students in deeper relationships by establishing a caring supportive environment. Personal stories also privileged student

voice. Students' perspectives were altered through personal stories as evidenced by their increased empathy, compassion, tolerance, and respect for one another across differences (Baskerville, 2011).

### **Building Knowledge**

In concurrence with cultural sensitivity, student's mental perspectives are changed while also gaining knowledge of other cultures' values, attitudes, and other unique aspects that affect cultural competence. Cultural knowledge is a necessary component for students to move towards cultural competency.

Fjällström and Kokkola (2015) examined the assumption that resisting to empathize with a single, focalized character is difficult for young readers. They studied how teenagers responded to a text, which was strongly focalized through a single character. They specifically examined if the students were capable of recognizing bias in the text by asking them to reformulate the content. 35 Swedish sixteen year olds were enrolled in two different English as a foreign language class.

The researchers selected a text that restricts the readers' view of events to that of a single character. The text was outside of the students' cultural context. "First Confession" is written in English and follows an Irish Catholic youth's first confession. After reading the text, students were asked to rewrite the narrative from the perspective of one of the non-focalized characters. The researchers collected students' rewritten narratives, and interviewed six students (Fjällström & Kokkola, 2015).

Results showed that students resisted focalization and demonstrated empathy towards the character's perspectives. Despite reading in a foreign language and with unfamiliar cultural content, nearly all the students were able to ascribe emotions to others



and generate plausible explanations for characters' behavior. Thirty students also demonstrated clear examples of insight into the emotions of the non-focalized character. Eight students also demonstrated mind reading or connecting their understanding of the character's thoughts with experiences or observations of behavior. Students also increased their knowledge about Irish Catholic culture and religious practices to the depth of understanding and empathy. The fictional story provided the opportunity for students to practice sensitivity to other cultural perspectives, while also gaining knowledge of another culture (Fjällström & Kokkola, 2015).

There are numerous studies that demonstrate students gaining cultural knowledge as well as cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness. The following studies have been discussed previously in this chapter, yet they also contribute to an understanding of story and cultural knowledge.

Fard, Nasarabadi, and Heidari (2016) analyzed the *Masnavi* poems using Lipman's "philosophical thinking components" three components of thinking: critical, creative, and caring. Results showed that caring thinking was present in all of the stories, specifically normative thinking. The stories promoted an understanding of cultural norms and values such as avoiding arrogance, or avoiding superficial judgments. Cultural norms, attitudes, and assumptions are part of unseen cultural characteristics included in cultural knowledge. Stories have the potential to present these characteristics to students in comprehensible ways (Fard et al., 2016).

Grant and Bolin (2016) studied the effectiveness of digital storytelling on student engagement and cultural competence. Students completed a semester long group assignment that told a story of diversity. Results showed an overall increase in students'

cultural competence due to the digital storytelling project. Both students who had previous training, as well as those who did not, equally felt they gained new knowledge from the project. In addition to changing views on diversity, students gained cultural knowledge from creating and viewing digital stories (Grant & Bolin, 2016).

McKnight, Hoban, and Nielsen (2011) explored methods to bridge awareness of Western ways of knowing and Aboriginal ways of knowing. Using classroom experiencing and animated storytelling, students developed understanding of the Aboriginal “relatedness to country.” Results showed that students gained knowledge of Aboriginal ways to knowing and storytelling practices. In addition to perspectival understanding, students gained knowledge of cultural attitudes and norms through listening to and creating stories (McKnight et al., 2011).

Landa and Stephens (2017) explored how content and pedagogy in a children’s literature class impacted one student’s development and how that student expressed her cultural competence. Results showed that the student gained cultural knowledge as a direct result of the children’s literature course. The student acquired knowledge and comprehension of non-dominant identity groups including American Indians, Asian Americans, Migrant Farm Workers, Individuals with Disabilities, and LGBT children and families. This knowledge informed the students behavior and communication with others, which indicates that the knowledge was beyond surface level and assisted in gaining cultural competence (Landa & Stephens, 2017).

### **Cultural Competence**

Cultural awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge are the foundations to cultural competence. There are copious models of cultural competence that have been developed

over the past five decades and are highly diverse in their disciplines, terminologies, and scholarly and practice objectives (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Most commonly, these models include lists of specific cognitive knowledge, behavioral skills, and affective attitudes that constitute cultural competence (Bennett, 1993; Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2015; Hammer, 2015; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009; UNESCO, 2013). Broadly and simply, cultural competence can be defined as communication and behavior that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions. It is applying an awareness and knowledge of culture in practical, real-life situations. It is external and visible in how individuals behave and interact, but comes from a culturally aware perspective and is informed by knowledge. For the sake of this review, studies will be examined for behavioral evidence of applied cultural awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge.

### **Evidence of Cultural Competence**

Epstein (2010) studied a multicultural education program that gathered White, Black, and Latino/a youth. The program's goal was to explore issues of discrimination and social justice, and develop leadership in students towards social change. The urban after school program included fourth and fifth grade students from three distinct and predominantly segregated urban neighborhoods.

Students met on Saturday afternoons or weekend long retreats once a month during the school year. The gatherings took place over the course of one full school year. The students were encouraged to build relationships across lines of difference, specifically race and class, to develop an understanding of how injustice has been perpetuated and resisted, and advocate for social change. The program activities included

various forms of storytelling such as fiction literature, narrative nonfiction, personal stories, and film. The researchers collected field notes, student interviews, facilitator and research assistant observation forms, and curriculum artifacts as data (Epstein, 2010).

Results showed an increase in students' cultural competence as well as their cultural sensitivity. Students' responses to the curriculum demonstrate their courage to question and act against discriminatory systems. They also built friendships across differences, which demonstrates their openness to diverse communities. This indicates that students' affective perspective led to a change in their visible behavior. At the same time, students occasionally distance themselves from the 'other' and retreated to the familiar, which hindered their abilities to fully embrace others' ways of knowing. This suggests that the path to cultural competence is not linear and does not have a singular destination. Further research over time could examine these paths more closely for patterns in students' development of cultural competency (Epstein, 2010).

With the close connections between cultural awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge, multiple studies have found evidence of cultural competence as well. The following studies have been discussed previously in this chapter, yet they also contribute to an understanding of story and cultural competence.

Guerrero Moya, Muñoz Ortiz, and Niño Díaz (2016) explored writing narrative texts as a means to facilitate intercultural communication competence skills in students. Results showed an increase in students' cultural competence as well as cultural sensitivity. Students not only identified differences between cultures, but also reported the importance of knowledge of that culture to be able to communicate effectively with others and respect them. This indicates the students' understanding that differences in

culture affect communication and effective intercultural communication integrates knowledge of that culture. This demonstrates their understanding and growth in competence skills (Guerro Moya et al., 2016).

Loebick (2016) investigated how students interacting a community engagement experienced identify and perceived the role and influence of culture, and tools to reflect on and build awareness of culture. Results showed that intentional pedagogical methods helped students establish connections and recognize border crossing. Students demonstrated using intercultural dialogue to intentionally navigate cross-cultural border crossing. This shows how they used cultural awareness and knowledge to assist them in communicating across cultures (Loebick, 2016).

Landa and Stephens (2017) explored how content and pedagogy in a children's literature class impacted one student's development and how that student expressed her cultural competence. Results showed that the student's knowledge, attitude, and skills were developed by the children's literature course. After completing the course, the student used children's literature as a foundation for actively advocating on behalf of socially and culturally marginalized children and families. Her ability to identify culture differences and teaching others about them shows a behavioral shift that demonstrates her developing cultural competence (Landa & Stephens, 2017).

Bar-On (2010) explored the use of storytelling and multiple narratives to bridge the chasm and schism between the descendants of Holocaust survivors and descendants of Nazi perpetrators. Results showed potent change as the group created its own unique space that transformed its members cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally. This

demonstrates the formative potential of stories to change the actions of individuals and groups to reflect cultural competency (Bar-On, 2010).

## CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

### Summary of Literature

Stories have the potential to increase understanding among students of many cultures. There is evidence that stories can effectively promote cultural competence in each of its three domains: attitude, knowledge, and skill. While each of these areas has its difficulties in fostering, attitude is arguably the most intangible. Story is an accessible and approachable method for increasing cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. Story provides a window and a mirror for students to build awareness of culture (Anderson & Macelroy, 2017; Balto & Ostmo, 2012; Fard et al., 2016; Glenn, 2012; Grant & Bolin, 2016; Hibbin, 2016; Loebick, 2016; McKnight et al., 2011; Murray & Puchner, 2012; Osorio, 2018; Porto, 2014; Riviero, 2016; Sarraj et al., 2015; Theodore & Afolayan, 2010; Tuncel, 2017; Wham et al., 1996; Wood, 2017; Woodrow, 2017). It can also increase students' flexibility in shifting cultural perspectives to understand the 'other' (Al-Jafar & Buzzelli, 2004; Bal, 2013; Bar-On, 2010; DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Enciso, 2011; Irdus, 2014; Landa & Stephens, 2017; Siddall, 1999). Stories are a mirror for commonalities between cultures (Al-Jafar, 2016; Stewart & Gachago, 2016) and a window into cultural differences (Baskerville, 2011; Moya et al., 2016). Of the domains of cultural competence, story has the potential to have the greatest impact of students' attitudes, cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity.

Stories can also facilitate acquisition of knowledge of other cultures. They are inherently cultured as stories contain beneath-the-surface aspects of the cultural iceberg (Fard et al., 2016). These cultural norms, attitudes, and ways of thinking are comprehensibly conveyed to students when integrated in story (Fard et al., 2016;

Fjällström & Kokkola, 2015; Grant & Bolin, 2016; Landa & Stephens, 2017; McKnight et al., 2011). Stories have the ability to teach the unseen elements of culture in addition to the visible.

Lastly, stories serve as a platform to propel students towards building culturally competent skills. Stories ignite the emotional motivation that students need to change their behaviors (Bar-On, 2010; Landa & Stephens, 2017). They can also model effective communication across cultural differences (Bar-On, 2010; Epstein, 2010; Guerro Moya et al., 2016; Landa & Stephens, 2017; Loebick, 2016).

In addition to moving students towards all domains cultural competence, stories provide the emotional space for students' personal identity development. Telling one's story, and hearing the stories of others creates an opportunity for students to gain awareness of their own culture (Al-Jafar & Buzzelli, 2004; Anderson & Macelroy, 2017; Bar-On, 2010; Baskerville, 2011; Enciso, 2011; Epstein, 2010; Hibbin, 2016; Idrus, 2014; Stewart & Gachago, 2016; Theodore & Aföláyan, 2010; Woodrow, 2017). Storytelling overlaps with multicultural education in welcoming, honoring, and validating the stories of culturally marginalized students (Balto & Ostmo, 2012; Bar-On, 2010; Enciso, 2011; Epstein, 2010; Loebick, 2016; Osorio, 2018; Woodrow, 2017). Furthermore, stories reveal whiteness and its privilege when engaged with honestly and humbly to create more aware students (Glenn, 2012; Landa & Stephens, 2017; McKnight et al., 2011; Wood, 2017).

While stories have positive potential for facilitating understanding among students, it is clear that there must be a space for storytelling to take place. Multiple studies demonstrated how the emotional and relational space affected student willingness



and comfort in sharing personal stories, and grappling with other perspectives (Baskerville, 2011; DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Enciso, 2011; Epstein, 2010; Idrus, 2014; Woodrow, 2017). At the same time, stories can help create this atmosphere as they knit the students closer together through shared experiences (Baskerville, 2011; Epstein, 2010; Idrus, 2014; Woodrow, 2017). Stories will be most effective and most transformative in an intentionally crafted space. This is highly dependent on the teacher.

The full effects of storytelling on students' cultural competence can only be realized when teacher engages. The teacher has great sway in determining the emotional climate of the classroom, which affects how students' affective development. Teachers who are culturally competent individuals are more comfortable in engaging in cultural discussion in the classroom (Idrus, 2014). Students also benefit when teachers are training in multicultural teaching that utilizes stories (Baskerville, 2011; Glenn, 2012; Idrus, 2014; Landa & Stephens, 2017; Murray & Puchner, 2012; Tuncel, 2017; Wood, 2017).

### **Limitations of the Research**

There is a limited amount of literature examining the effects of story in regard to cultural competence. For this reason, the research question was continuously widened to ensure ample literature to answer the question. Cultural competence was changed to understanding among students of many cultures. This includes cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, cultural knowledge, empathy, peace, and culturally relevant instruction. Multicultural literature and multicultural education that utilized stories to increase understanding among students were also included. Story is also a broad term that included personal narrative, storytelling, oral storytelling, and narrative theory.

Originally, the intent was to research the use of story specifically with elementary students. It became quickly evident that the question must be broadened to include students from pre-primary to the collegiate level to answer the research question.

The research is also limited as the literature contains more anecdotal than clearly measurable evidence relating to the effectiveness of the various uses of stories to increase understanding among students. Many of the studies measured students' cultural competency development using surveys, and researcher observation. There is a potential for bias in these methods, however, in most cases, measures were taken to reduce the presence of these biases in the results. While there is complexity in measuring the affective and cognitive development of students, the literature relating to the effectiveness of story on cultural competence is generally more descriptive and qualitative.

Another limitation of the research is the samples of the studies. The majority of the studies were conducted in one geographic location. While these studies were conducted in countries around the world, it is not clear if the specific interventions would be successful in a different setting. Generally, the sample sizes were also small, consisting of one or two classes during the same school year. It would be beneficial for educators to know if these practices would remain effective with many groups of students. This also eliminates the potential that a unique attribute of that group of students that made it possible for the stories to be successful.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Within the time frame of the studies, the majority of students showed an increase in cultural competence due to story, but it would be beneficial to know if students

maintain this growth over time. Therefore, more research should be done to measure the effectiveness of storytelling to create lasting understanding among students of many cultures. Few studies measured if story had an effect on students after the intervention had ended (Bal & Velkamp; 2013; Balto & Ostmo, 2012; Bar-On, 2010). While these studies showed some success, they were conducted with older learners. It would be beneficial for educators to see how K-12 students would retain cultural competency facilitated by stories over time.

There is also a need for more research at the K-12 level. The majority of the research in this review were conducted at the colligate level. There is a growing demand for culturally competent individuals in today's global society. It would be beneficial to measure the effectiveness of story in correlation the ages of the students. Is there an age that is ideal for facilitating lasting cultural competency development through story? This would provide educators, stakeholders, and families with valuable information on the best time to begin intentionally integrating cultural awareness into the classroom.

The last recommendation of further research would be a comparison of storytelling techniques. Which form of storytelling is most effective in facilitating understanding among students? This would assist educators in selecting storytelling forms that would instill the most cultural awareness in students.

### **Implications for Professional Application**

The professional literature is filled with the potential of story as a vehicle to increase understanding among students of many cultures. Perhaps most importantly, educators must cultivate their own cultural competence and seek multicultural teaching training. Students will learn the most from an educator who has first hand experience

with the journey of cultural awareness, and cultural competence. Cultural competence is also not a journey with an end destination. Teacher must be aware that cultural competence development should be consistently attended to; otherwise individuals risk reverting to limited awareness of culture and the inaccurate assumptions that go with it. As today's global society is rapidly changing, teachers should tend to their own cultural awareness to in step with the constantly shifting community.

It is also clear that not every story will suffice for teaching culture and presenting windows into the reality of the 'other.' Stories should be analyzed to determine if they have inherent cultural bias or misrepresentations. While these stories could be utilized in the classroom as a means of illuminating stereotypes and negative representations, teacher must carefully guide students in discovering these areas to avoid reinforcing negative perspectives. Teachers would benefit from education on how to analyze literature and stories for multicultural aspects, allowing the greatest yields for their work.

For story to have the greatest effect on students' cultural competence, the classroom environment must be intentionally crafted to facilitate deep student relationships. In many of the studies, explicit connections were drawn between the environment and its impact on student development. Students need a safe, inclusive environment to thrive academically, but this is particularly true for students' emotional and cultural competence development. If students are not willing to grapple with cultural assumptions, values, and norms than they will have difficulty in acquiring effective cultural communication skills that are necessary for functioning cultural competence. Teachers can do this by instilling classroom norms for effective discussion, and expectations for active listening. Additionally, practices that support a culturally

responsive classroom environment provide the foundation for stories to develop cultural competence.

Lastly, educators and stakeholders should make cultural competence development a priority. With the presence of high stakes testing and increased accountability stress on schools, educators often feel pressure to devote all instructional time to tested subjects. Yet, it is clear that workplaces desire students with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, which includes cultural competency. Story is an accessible way to integrate cultural competence development into an existing classroom practice. Storytelling, in some form, already exists in classrooms at every educational level. Teachers can smoothly integrate more intentional work towards cultural competence using storytelling practices that they currently use in the classroom. This will equip students with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed from culturally competent individuals in today's global society.

### **Conclusion**

Understanding among students of many cultures is important, relevant, and achievable. Cultural competence is necessary for students to become effective, engaged members of society. Stories with their transformative nature create opportunities for students to alter their perspectives and gain insight into another's reality. Our world is in desperate need of understanding individuals and story offers a way to build this invaluable ability in our students.

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