

# Understanding Diversity in a Global Context:

## Preservice Teachers' Encounters with Postcolonial Young Adult Literature

In my work with preservice teachers, I have struggled to find ways to engage global perspectives on diversity. Because I am a woman of color and an immigrant, my students and I have examined my experiences growing up in Haiti and moving to the US in order to explore a viewpoint on race and culture that differs from US constructs and considers the global context of migration and immigration. My experiences, while valuable in the classroom on many levels, also present a limited perspective on the issues. As a result, my courses now almost always include stories that feature young adults of color living outside the cultural context of the US. According to Cart (2010) and Koss and Teale (2009), such narratives are not only underrepresented in the young adult literature market—in stark contrast to an increasingly diverse student population—they also provide potential benefits for all students. As the editors assert in the call for this issue of *The ALAN Review*:

For all readers, exposure to a variety of ethnically unfamiliar literature can encourage critical reading of text and world, recognition of the limitations of depending upon mainstream depictions of people and their experiences, and the building of background knowledge and expansion of worldview.

In the current context of English Education, it seems particularly important to create multiple opportunities for preservice teachers to cultivate this expansive and critical worldview so that they may be better equipped to address the needs of the ethnically diverse students in their future classes.

In this article, I describe a conversation in which five preservice teachers discussed the novel *Now*

*Is the Time for Running* (Williams, 2011) as part of a research study involving a book club focused on postcolonial young adult literature. I argue that reading and discussing postcolonial literature in a book club—exploring cultures around the world that have been transformed by and have emerged from a state of colonial oppression—can provide valuable critical insights for future teachers as they reflect on similar local and national issues and as they prepare to teach in culturally diverse classrooms.

### Postcolonial Literature and Teacher Education

A review of research on multicultural education with preservice teachers reveals that although preservice teachers increasingly recognize the value of multiculturalism, they struggle to achieve a complex understanding of cultural issues and structures of inequity (Castro, 2010). Castro explains:

Preservice teachers may readily advocate and clamor for multicultural education that supports a tolerance approach to diversity without achieving the critical consciousness necessary to dismantle structural inequity and interrogate dominant cultural assumptions embedded in these structural arrangements. (p. 206)

As preservice teachers prepare to take on the roles of educators, they need to acquire more critical understandings of the ways in which inequities are maintained through institutions and sociocultural practices. Phillion and He (2004) suggest that using “memoirs, autobiographies, and novels that focus on the inti-

mate, daily experiences of diverse families, parents, students, and teachers” (p. 6) may be an effective way to engage preservice teachers in developing a sense of “world citizenship” through which “students learn to step out of their comfort zone, to challenge assumptions and question taken-for-granted truths, to experience differences, and to make connections between the worlds they live and the worlds of others” (p. 5).

Postcolonial literature provides numerous pedagogical opportunities for preservice teachers to develop such insights. Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) argue that education has struggled to address the social and cultural transformations of recent large-scale developments, such as globalization, migration, and new technologies, that have exploded the range of information, images, and identities available to people (p. 1). The authors suggest that because postcolonial arts—including literature—developed in response to colonization, they “speak to the complicated interrelations between the first world and the Third World” (p. 3) and offer unique insights and potential directions. Likewise, Tarc (2009) suggests that postcolonial literature engages in “ethico-aesthetic pedagogy” when it reconstructs traumatic colonial histories and depicts characters that transcend them, thus compelling readers “to think and act differently in the world with all sentient beings” (p. 196).

Educators who use postcolonial literature have noted both the possibilities and limitations of putting postcolonial theories to work in teacher education and secondary literature classrooms. For instance, students from immigrant and/or marginalized cultures have responded positively to reading postcolonial literature with characters that mirror their own experiences, struggles, and identities (Bean, 2004; Lucas, 1990; Willinsky, 2006). However, some students have resisted a curriculum that challenges their worldviews (Johnston, 2003), and preservice teachers and students from dominant cultures have struggled to engage with literature and pedagogical approaches that contest a traditional and Eurocentric curriculum (Asher, 2005; Goldblatt, 1998; Saldanha, 2000). Finally, teacher educators have pointed to the limits of using literary texts as “authentic” cultural representations when readers are outsiders to the culture depicted (Crocco, 2005; Mangat & Johnston, 2000; Freeman & Lehman, 2001). These limits indicate that students and teachers need to develop strategies

to read all texts critically (Freeman & Lehman, 2001; Mangat & Johnston, 2000).

## Research Design

The conversation I describe in this article is drawn from a larger research study that took place at a public university in the US South in the fall of 2011 (Durand, 2012). In the original study, two groups of preservice English teachers explored postcolonial texts in a book club setting. This article focuses on one group’s discussion of the young adult novel *Now Is the Time for Running* by Michael Williams (2011). In the following subsections, I provide details about the participants and the qualitative research methodology that guided the processes of data collection and analysis.

## Methodology

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) explain that a story is a “portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful”

(p. 375). This phenomenon of making meaning out of experience through story is central to the function of book clubs. For example, Kooy’s (2006) study of novice teachers in a book club reveals that “the book club allows them to read and use stories as heuristics and explanatory devices for making sense of their worlds in a social, relational, safe context” (p. 662). In the research study described in this article, participants encountered several stories: the narrative of the character in the novel, their own and their peers’ responses to the texts, their narratives of personal or teaching experiences, as well as my own responses (as the participant observer) to the texts and my relevant personal and teaching experiences. Thus, I looked to narrative inquiry—“the study of experience as story” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)—as the method through which I explored, analyzed, and represented the interplay of these narratives.

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## Participants

I recruited research participants from two courses required for the English Education program at the university. The research participants discussed in this article were five undergraduate students enrolled in

a young adult literature course with a service-learning component: Elnora, a Black female beginning her second year at the university; Joel, a White male in his third year; Lauren, a White female in her final year; Lexy, a White female in her final year; and Nick, a White male in his final year. Four of the participants were officially admitted to the program, and the fifth intended to apply. The professor of the course allowed these

students' participation in the study to count as their service-learning project. In all, the group held five book discussions on the university campus but met independently from the course. Prior to the first book club discussion, I held an hour-long information session during which participants reviewed and/or completed Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent forms and had the opportunity to choose pseudonyms for themselves.

This narrative study used a “conversational, interactive, [and] communicative model of inquiry” (Bochner, 2005, p. 66) in which the participants and the researcher take part in a collaborative relationship. As Bochner (2005) writes, “Instead of spectators, we [researchers] become agents and participants” (p. 66). Thus, as a participant observer, my role was to facilitate the discussions and provide insights on the postcolonial context of the books as needed. At the start of the first meeting, for example, I gave a brief orientation on relevant terms and issues in postcolonial literature (e.g., defining “colonial” and “postcolonial,” listing the countries involved, defining “postcolonial literature,” and reviewing themes in postcolonial literature, such as the relationships between colonizer and colonized, identity, and diaspora). I also recommended specific texts for their geographic diversity and rep-

resentations of nations with a history of colonization to ensure that postcolonial themes were prevalent in the stories. Likewise, participants volunteered several titles (many of which I had not previously read) that they thought fit the criteria for book selection or that addressed the interests of their particular group; group members voted on what to read at the next meeting.

Our group discussions were open-ended and informal, and participants generated discussion questions in addition to my own. This collaborative aspect of the study extended beyond our last meeting: participants had the opportunity to review the findings of the study in various stages of completion—transcriptions of group discussions, drafts of the findings, and the final report—to determine whether these were accurate representations of their experiences in the book club.

## Data Collection

Because readers make sense of their reading experiences at multiple stages, I collected data before, during, and after each of our meetings. Book discussions ranged from 60–90 minutes and were audiotaped and later transcribed. In the first session, participants turned in an initial questionnaire, which I provided prior to the meeting. It asked participants to share their reason(s) for joining the book club, to describe their personal and literary experiences with international cultures and issues, and to consider the role young adult literature might play in initiating conversations about these issues with their future students. The remaining sessions focused on discussing the texts selected.

Before each meeting, participants wrote a response to the focal text, detailing in writing their reactions, thoughts, feelings, and questions about the events and characters in the novels. I took notes during the meetings and wrote memos after each session to reflect on the group discussion, including the mood and tone of the conversation. After the final discussion session, I emailed participants a follow-up questionnaire asking them to reflect on their individual and group experiences of reading and discussing postcolonial young adult literature, to share what they learned through the novels, and to articulate the challenges and possibilities they could foresee in implementing book clubs and postcolonial young adult literature in their own teaching. In all, I collected five sets of data:

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1) an initial questionnaire, 2) participants' written responses to each novel, 3) transcriptions of five discussions, 4) notes taken during and reflective memos written after each discussion, and 5) a follow-up questionnaire. Participants' comments in this article are drawn from all of these data sets.

### Data Analysis

The following research questions guided the study: What stories, events, or issues emerge for preservice teachers as they read postcolonial narratives? In what ways do the novels serve as entry points into conversations about their own experiences and issues related to global, cultural, political, or historical events? How do preservice teachers connect the book club experience, their readings, and responses to their future teaching?

In order to begin deriving themes and categories from the data to answer these questions, I referred to Maykut and Morehouse's (1994) constant comparison method and Riessman's (2008) thematic analysis approach. The initial discovery process involved reading the data multiple times and generating a list of recurring concepts, phrases, topics, and patterns to create provisional categories. I organized the data, which I sectioned into "units of meaning" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 128), under these provisional categories and created new categories as needed. Because "[s]tories told in group settings . . . typically emerge in fragments, with each speaker adding a thread that expands (or corrects) what another member contributed" (Riessman, 2008, p. 123), some units of meaning included "extended stretches" of conversations with multiple speakers—those "instances in which different members explore a topic in some depth over an extended number of turns" (Beach & Yussen, 2011, p. 122).

In the next stage of analysis, I refined initial categories by writing propositional statements that served as rules for inclusion for each unit of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). For example, one participant's written response to *Now Is the Time for Running* (Williams, 2011) stated, "Since it's a fiction book, I thought the author exaggerated a lot of parts but I looked up the articles on Wikipedia about xenophobia in South Africa and the riots really were that bad." This response reflected the propositional statement, "Postcolonial stories are based on real historical

and contemporary events," in the category, "Postcolonial Realities," and was coded as such. A total of 11 categories were derived from the data collected in the larger study: "knowledge gaps and fragments," "learning through reading and inquiry," "addressing knowledge gaps as teachers," "revising assumptions through counter-narratives," "postcolonial realities," "cultural disconnect," "establishing connections," "relevance to students," "teaching approaches," "exploring prejudice," and "conceptualizing race, ethnicity, identity."

The final stage of data analysis involved reading and rereading the data, categories, and propositions to identify salient relationships across categories and how they addressed the research questions. For instance, it became clear that the three categories, "knowledge gaps and fragments," "learning through reading and inquiry," and "addressing knowledge gaps as teachers," explored different aspects of the same theme, so they were combined into a larger category, "expanding awareness of postcolonial issues." I combined and organized the coded data into three major themes: 1) expanding awareness of postcolonial issues, 2) establishing connections across difference, and 3) understanding postcolonial issues through stories. These themes guide the findings I discuss in the next three sections.

### Expanding Awareness of Postcolonial Issues

Most of the participants in this study indicated in their initial questionnaires and during our first meeting that they joined the book club in part because they were already interested in world cultures and wanted to learn more about postcolonial literature and young adult literature. As English Education undergraduate students, some were already familiar with global or postcolonial literature. For instance, two of the participants, Lexy and Lauren, had taken a college-level Modern Criticism course that was focused on postcolonial theory and literature. In addition, Lexy had taken a Caribbean studies course that included several novels and focused on the colonial and postcolonial

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## What stories, events, or issues emerge for preservice teachers as they read postcolonial narratives?

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history of the represented cultures. Other participants, like Joel and Elnora, recalled taking a World Literature course in high school, in which Joel remembered reading *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958) and *Cry, the Beloved Country* (Paton, 1948), and Elnora read stories about British colonialism in India. Elnora also shared that she had not been aware of the classification of postcolonial but had independently read several novels that would fit in that genre.

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Nick was the only participant in the group who indicated that few of the texts he read throughout his schooling had focused on global issues and cultures.

At my suggestion, the participants picked *Now Is the Time for Running* (Williams, 2011) for our first

book club selection. This story takes place during the first decade of the new millennium. Fifteen-year-old Deo and his brother, Innocent, are the sole survivors of a brutal attack by soldiers on their hometown in Zimbabwe. After their narrow escape, they find the means to illegally cross the border into South Africa in search of their father. However, once in South Africa, they become targets of xenophobia—the fear and hatred of foreigners—because they are refugees. In the supplementary material at the end of the book, South African author Michael Williams reveals that the novel was inspired by the riots that took place in South Africa in 2008 when “[m]ore than sixty people, many of them migrants, were killed during attacks on foreigners throughout the country” (Williams, 2011, p. 232). A number of international newspapers covered the story, and one particularly graphic image was widely circulated as representing the extent of violence in the riots—a man set on fire (Underhill & Khumalo, 2010). Based on these incidents and on the author’s interviews with young refugees from Zimbabwe, the novel is a plausible representation of the social, political, and economic realities facing youth growing up “in the aftermath of colonialism” (Hickling-Hudson, Matthews, & Woods, 2004, p. 3).

None of the participants, myself included, had known about the riots prior to reading the novel. Upon learning that the story was inspired by actual

events, one participant took it upon herself to do additional research. In her written response to the story, Elnora stated, “Since it’s a fiction book, I thought the author exaggerated a lot of parts but I looked up the articles on Wikipedia about xenophobia in South Africa and the riots really were that bad.” In our meeting, when I asked Elnora what had inspired her to find out more information, she responded that she could not believe that people could be so cruel. She recounted her reaction after having researched these events: “I was just like, ‘Wow. This is really happening. And nobody seems to know about it.’” As the story blurred the lines between fact and fiction, Elnora identified other aspects of the story she wanted to investigate. She asked the group whether or not they had been aware of hyperinflation issues in Zimbabwe: “‘Cause, I really thought he [Deo] had a billion dollars. I was like, ‘Wait a minute!’” Here Elnora refers to a scene in which the main character, Deo, describes stuffing a billion dollars in his soccer ball:

I know where Amai [mom] hides our money. . . . I find several fifty million dollar notes, a few more hundred million dollars. There is no time to count it all. It’s not much, but it will buy us some food. . . . I stuff them into the leather pouch. The money fills out the ball nicely, and I find a piece of string and sew up the patch. I toss the ball into the air. Nobody will know I have a billion dollars in my soccer ball. (p. 32)

Elnora’s self-reflections describe her shift from reading the novel as fictional (“I really thought he had a billion dollars.”) to no longer being able to suspend her disbelief (“Wait a minute!”) about what seemed an excessive amount of money for a boy to have. In reconciling the fictional aspects of the story to the ones based on facts, hyperinflation did make it possible for Deo to be in possession of a billion dollars.

Similarly, Lauren made herself a note in her reading journal to look up the exchange rate to support the claims in this part of the story. In our discussion, she responded to Elnora: “I actually wrote down in my chapter-by-chapter thing—I’m like, ‘Need to look up exchange rate. Their dollar is obviously worth less.’” In these ways, the text selected for the study made it possible for participants to expand their awareness of regions of the world and contemporary events not typically explored in the curriculum, and it provided them with the impetus to do additional research about these events.

## Establishing Connections across Difference

The implied and sometimes graphic violence in the novel contrasted with the participants' desires for or expectations of young adult literature. For example, in our discussion of the novel, Lexy expressed that she felt "surprised at how depressing it [the story] was." She explained, "I guess just the beginning, you know—they're playing soccer. I'm thinking, 'Oh, this is going to be about kids playing soccer and whatever.' I just didn't think that any of it would get that real." Participants also discussed at length the ending of the novel, which they concluded is realistic but somewhat unresolved—a typical feature of postcolonial literature. Bradford, Mallan, Stephens, and McCallum (2008) explain that postcolonial narratives tend to "suggest transformative directions without proposing specific social and political orders" (p. 78). While the novel ends on a hopeful note, the fate of the main character remains uncertain, as it is dependent on larger sociopolitical changes.

Significantly, the text also revealed a tension between relational and differential experiences of adolescence for participants. On the one hand, the book depicts cultures, events, and places that fell outside of the participants' identities and sets of experiences and thus presented gaps or obstacles for establishing meaningful connections. On the other hand, the experience of coming of age was also familiar. During our conversation about the novel, Lexy touched upon this tension:

**Lexy:** [The novel] deals with things like none of us have ever experienced. But at the same time, there are those themes that we all know, like, you know, race hatred or like people, immigrants taking each other's, or taking jobs [. . .]. I think we all can like understand that, even though this person [Deo] has gone through really, really intense things.

**Sybil:** Good. So it's relatable is what you're saying. So, even though it's taking place outside of, I guess, *here*, you can still relate because it has similar . . .

**Lexy:** Right. And then you can't relate in some ways, which makes you, like, opens your eyes, I guess.

For Lexy, this novel contains elements that she could understand because of similar issues at play within the context of the US, such as racism and the ongoing national conversation about undocumented immigrants. However, there are also events with which she could not identify; while she does not name these events in this excerpt, Lexy does indicate that they were nevertheless eye-opening.

As the research participants had not had these experiences for themselves, they were sometimes unable to identify with characters or events in the stories we read. However, they used a variety of literacy skills to engage with the texts in meaningful ways. In this discussion, participants referred to videos and films they had seen about the region to help them make sense of the novel. For instance, Nick explained:

I couldn't really relate to this situation because obviously I've never been through anything that traumatic before, but I found myself thinking about movies set in similar situations, like *Hotel Rwanda* or *Blood Diamond*, like just about the corruption and the governments, how the people are so exploited. And that just kind of made it a little bit more real for me.

Nick also mentioned the science fiction thriller *District 9*, which is set in contemporary South Africa and also explores xenophobia:

I think it's similar to—I mean, it's a totally different storyline with aliens—but it's the exact same theme of xenophobia about two different cultures clashing, and they can't get along. One takes advantage of the other. And [it's] like, very, very depressing.

When I told him that I appreciated his references to films, Nick explained, "I just find that it's so easy to relate this to that," meaning relating the novels to the films or vice versa. Thus, Nick's experience with films that have depicted similar states of upheaval in various countries in Africa provided Nick with visual, geographical, and cultural references beyond his own lived experiences, ones he could draw upon to imagine and forge a connection to Deo's life.

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## Understanding Postcolonial Issues through Stories

One of the most significant findings of the study related to the way participants used an event in the stories as a “springboard” (Flood et al., 2008) for having complex conversations about salient postcolonial concerns such as identity, racism, xenophobia, refugee and immigrant issues, economics, and politics. In the following paragraphs, I examine an “extended stretch

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of conversation” (Beach & Yussen, 2011) in which participants articulated their understanding of these issues. Specifically, I look at the ways in which participants build on one another’s comments, starting with the novel and extending the discussion to ongoing US national issues.

During our conversation about films, I also mentioned the movie *Invictus*, which depicts how Nelson Mandela used rugby to begin to bridge racial and social divides in post-Apartheid South Africa. Williams (2011) uses a similar device in *Now Is the Time for Running*, where soccer has the potential to bring together people from diverse cultures

and nationalities. However, one participant challenged the film’s hopeful ending for improved race relations because the novel shows how issues of prejudice persist in South Africa today. Joel responded by making a distinction between institutionalized racism and xenophobia:

**Joel:** Well, [. . .] in some ways it is [. . .] but it’s not Apartheid. Now it’s xenophobia and it’s outsiders. It’s not the race that matters; it’s “You are not a part of *our* group,” which, I don’t know if that’s better or worse.

**Sybil:** Let’s talk about that.

**Lexy:** It’s essentially the same thing though, right?

**Joel:** It really is. It’s just, it’s more of a, I guess it’s more of a civilized prejudice.

Although I asked Joel to elaborate on the phrase “civilized prejudice,” the conversation moved on with Nick stating the similarities between racism and xenophobia:

**Nick:** It’s still a bias against a group of people that’s different than you, and that’s all it boils down to, I think.

**Lauren:** Yeah, that’s how I feel about it. It’s—prejudice is prejudice.

**Nick:** And if anything, I feel like these people have been taken advantage of so widely in each of these countries that it would make sense for them to come together. But instead, they just, they tear each other apart. And it’s . . .

**Lexy:** I feel like it makes sense for them to come together in their country groups because [. . .] they all deal with pretty much the same stuff [. . .]. And I mean, racism and all that, it’s pretty much based on putting someone down to make yourself feel better. So, “Well, at least I’m White; at least I’m not Black,” that whole mentality. So I think that’s playing into what’s going on there. It’s like, “Well, at least I’m South African, and I’m not from Zimbabwe.”

While participants acknowledged the distinction between Apartheid and xenophobia, between race-based prejudice and prejudice based on culture or nationality, they maintained that the underlying motivations of intolerance and discrimination are the same. Thus, talk about prejudice remained at the individual level—the racist mentality Lexy describes—and did not extend to the ways in which institutions establish and maintain inequity.

In the next segment of the conversation, however, Joel added yet another layer of complexity when he made a connection between prejudice and economics. He referred to a part of the story when the main character, Deo, and his brother find work picking tomatoes

on a farm located near the border. At first, Deo can't believe his luck:

When we first arrived at the Flying Tomato Farm, I had to pinch myself every morning to make sure that I wasn't dreaming. Innocent and I had beds to sleep in, with our own blankets and pillows. We had a roof over our heads, and we weren't running. We ate two meals a day, and at the end of the month, we got fifty South African rands—almost seven billion Zim dollars each, just for picking tomatoes! (Williams, 2011, p. 114)

Deo is aware of the difference between Zimbabwe and South African currency, but not necessarily the extent to which the Zim dollar is devalued, because he thinks he is making a lot of money. However, during a soccer match with the children in the neighboring village, Deo is met with animosity by the locals who are out of work. He learns that he and his brother were hired only because they accept working for so little money, which is not actually a living wage. Joel referred to this scene when he made the connection between prejudice and the fight over resources, compounded by people who see an opportunity for making a profit by exploiting undocumented immigrants who cannot go to the police for fear of being deported:

**Joel:** And on the same level, there is [. . .] the economic aspect, how, when he [Deo] goes into the village, he sees all these people who are hungry because they got laid off so that the guy could pay so much less for . . . so that he could exploit the immigrants.

**Sybil:** When he first crosses the border and the job he gets at the tomato farm? [. . .]

**Joel:** I thought that was interes[ting]. 'Cause he goes into the village, and all these people, they *can't* work anymore because the foreman won't hire *non-immigrants* 'cause he can pay all these people coming over from Zimbabwe so much less. I remember it's somewhere like—how many rand?

**Lexy:** 50 to 400.

**Joel:** Yeah, so it's eight times as—he gets to pay them an eighth of what he used to be paying the locals. And so you could see how that's hurting the people around them. And so I think it's interesting how

Deo sees, "Oh, well these people are completely screwed over because *I'm* getting something."

Joel's comment helped Nick to make his own connection between this scene and current immigration issues in the US:

**Nick:** It's the same thing that's going on in the Southwest right now [. . .] with people crossing the border and [serving as] cheap labor.

**Joel:** And so, as a result of that, there are a lot of people who can't get even low class labor jobs because those have been . . .

**Nick:** There's always going to be someone who's going to work . . .

**Joel:** For cheaper because they don't have to report them and stuff.

Joel and Nick took turns completing their narrative about immigration in the US in response to this event in the book. Lexy responded in kind and brought the conversation back to the issue of racism when she stated that where she is from, "People *hate* Hispanic people." However, she added, "It's not on this level. It's not violent." Here, Lexy refers to the scene later in the novel that is based on the 2008 riots in South Africa when tensions about refugees escalated to uprisings in which several were injured and one man was burned to death (Underhill & Khumalo, 2010). This part of the conversation concluded with participants acknowledging that immigration issues in the US also involve varied forms of violence and continued on to other topics such as the scale of violence around immigration in the US, the background on hyperinflation and the devaluation of Zimbabwe currency, and approaches to using this novel with high school students.

While they did not necessarily come to a consensus through this discussion, participants collectively acknowledged that racism and xenophobia are both forms of prejudice that stem from or are exacerbated by an economics system where the disadvantaged are exploited and pitted against each other. The group setting also contributed to a complex discussion as each participant built on the previous comment and added

a new element to the conversation, drawing from the novel, films, and their broader knowledge of social issues, resulting in a collective learning environment. This example illustrates the ways in which participants engaged with this postcolonial young adult novel and a variety of discourses in the space of the book club to articulate, revise, and complicate their understanding of these issues across literary, personal, national, and global contexts.

## Implications and Conclusion

There is no single or simple method for preservice teachers to cultivate a complex understanding of social and systemic inequities in education. This chal-

lenge is exacerbated when preservice teachers are from privileged groups and have little experience with cultural and linguistic diversity (Castro, 2010; Philion & He, 2004). Postcolonial young adult literature marks a good starting place for preservice teachers to learn about and build upon experiences with diverse cultures in various socio-

historical contexts that may not be available to them otherwise (Tarc, 2009; Philion & He, 2004). Although the characters are fictional, postcolonial literature tends to draw on actual events, which invites readers to engage these narratives as both fictional and plausible. While classics also function in this way, postcolonial literature offers a glimpse into cultures that are not typically represented in the US secondary school curriculum. Lauren drew a similar conclusion in her follow-up questionnaire:

[T]here is a plethora of [postcolonial] texts available that teach the same themes and lessons as traditional canonical texts that can bring something else to the educational table. These texts have themes and messages that are central to any piece of literature one would want to teach in a classroom, but they also expand readers' understanding of the world around them and of different cultures that they would not otherwise have a way of experiencing.

Postcolonial stories prompt readers to reflect on established national narratives in more critical ways, as well as expand readers' knowledge of cultures

outside their own. Educators should therefore carefully select novels that resist dominant narratives of cultures around the world. Using such texts in teacher preparation courses might help preservice teachers envision teaching from global perspectives. For instance, Lauren referred to a Modern Criticism course she had taken and explained that, "Through this book club, I realized I could take that concept and apply it to a secondary education classroom." Thus, teacher educators might infuse the methods and young adult literature courses they teach with postcolonial texts.

It is, however, not sufficient to rely on postcolonial narratives for provoking these critical insights. Readers—preservice teachers especially—must do more than simply read such narratives and engage with the culture represented. As Freeman and Lehman (2001) posit, teachers also need to be able to evaluate these texts to consider issues of representation in the narratives and whether or not they, as readers, are engaging in "ethnocentric universalism" (Crocco, 2005) when they identify with certain themes in the stories over others. Teacher educators who use postcolonial young adult literature in their courses should consider pairing the novels with critical or theoretical essays, as well as explicitly discussing strategies for reading across cultures to mirror the language in the subsequent paragraph (Mangat & Johnston, 2000; Thier, 2013).

The research findings I discuss in this article have inspired several shifts in my own teaching. In addition to including postcolonial texts in my courses, I now also implement book clubs to encourage students to use stories as heuristics to make sense of their own lives in a social setting (Kooy, 2006). In my methods course, I discuss strategies for reading across cultures. Specifically, I draw on Mangat and Johnston's (2000) research with high school students—they developed prompts asking students to examine the language in an excerpt from an African young adult text to determine whether the author and intended audience were insiders or outsiders to the culture represented. I use similar prompts to encourage preservice teachers to consider how authors use language as a cultural mediator for readers who are positioned as cultural outsiders. Another approach I use for reading across cultures draws from Thier's (2013) "cultural awareness logs," a strategy he developed to help his high school students engage with international texts. Over

the course of reading a novel, students keep logs in which they make inferences about the culture represented and use quotes from the book as textual evidence. I have implemented Thier's (2013) approach in my courses to highlight reading strategies teachers can use to support students' engagement with multicultural and international perspectives in literature.

Finally, the participants' discussion on racism and xenophobia described in this article suggests that developing a critical and expansive worldview is a process; through reading and discussing a postcolonial text in the social and relational space of a book club, readers' understanding of these issues can deepen and become more complex. However, readers might not come to a consensus or revise their prior understanding immediately; rather, as their understanding becomes more complex, they will have more literary and cultural experiences on which to draw in their future conversations about global perspectives (Mosley, 2010). Together with a rigorous curriculum and critical texts that challenge dominant views, reading postcolonial literature in the social setting of book clubs holds promise for preservice teachers to expand their knowledge and explore new horizons in a global context.

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