

Engaging Preservice Teachers in Reader's Theatre:  
Promoting Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching

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**Abstract**

The demographic landscape of the elementary classroom continues to grow more diverse. Due to this increasing diversity, it is important that all educators, no matter the level of experience, are prepared to support all students, especially those from unique or under represented backgrounds. One way to assist educators in meeting these needs is to provide them with educational resources and effective teaching strategies that are culturally and linguistically responsive. A possible resource and teaching strategy is the literacy tool, Reader's Theatre. Considering this, the two studies contained in this dissertation provide readers with a glimpse of how Reader's Theatre may be used as a valuable resource to foster culturally and linguistically responsive classrooms. A content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Northrop et al., 2019; White & Marsh, 2006) of 141 Reader's Theatre scripts contained in the Best Class Collection (Young, 2019) was conducted to assess the cultural and linguistic authenticity of those resources. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was carried out accessing preservice teachers' perceptions and understandings of Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy gauging the value of combining the two teaching strategies. Overall, the findings from these two studies may serve as starting points for future research in respect to the value of implementing Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy as discussions about culturally and linguistically responsive teaching remain prevalent in today's elementary school classrooms.

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**General Audience Abstract**

Students in today's elementary classrooms come from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and cultures. Due to this increasing diversity, teachers must be prepared to support these students in a variety of ways. One of the best ways to support these unique students is to use teaching strategies that are engaging and allow students to connect with what is being taught in the classroom. Reader's Theatre, normally used as a literacy strategy, could be used as a tool to address the different cultures and languages of students. In this dissertation, two research studies were conducted about the connection of Reader's Theatre and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. The first study looked at a group of Reader's Theatre scripts to see if they were appropriate to use in the classroom to support students from multicultural backgrounds. In the second study, preservice teachers, or student teachers, were interviewed to get their thoughts as to any possible value using Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. The preservice teachers expressed that there is value in combining the two strategies, but only when teachers plan carefully and use Reader's Theatre in a meaningful way. As elementary classroom populations continue to grow in the number of students from diverse backgrounds, the information from these two studies can provide teachers with an idea of what may be possible to support all students in being successful.

## Dedication

To my family and friends who kept me moving forward and believing in me even when the challenges that lay ahead seemed insurmountable, thank you. Through your encouragement, support, and love each step on this path became a little less daunting. A favorite mantra that I treasure from my grandmother, Ewilda Whitenack, was on her kitchen wall. It was never truer than during my journey over the last four years, *“Ain’t nothin’ gonna come up today that me and the Lord can’t handle!”*

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction to Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of two distinct studies both dealing with the use of Reader's Theatre (RT) as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. These studies provided valuable data as to the effectiveness of incorporating RT into daily classroom instruction to support the unique needs of all students especially those from diverse backgrounds. The first study was a content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Northrop et al., 2019; White & Marsh, 2006) of RT scripts assessing cultural and linguistic authenticity from an online collection (The Best Class, Young, 2019). The content analysis also addressed the need for all levels of educators, from preservice to veteran teachers, to have access to culturally authentic materials to benefit their students, as well as being accessible and affordable. The second study was a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of preservice teachers' (PST) understandings and perceptions of implementing RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. Following participation in culturally and linguistically responsive RT instruction, the PSTs shared their insights about the use of RT to foster a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching environment and the overall value of combining the two teaching practices. There is a lack of research available regarding the use of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy and the studies contained in this dissertation can mesh together to provide a jumping off point for future investigations as to how this traditional literacy and repeated reading strategy can evolve into something even more impactful as a tool to support students in culturally and linguistically authentic ways through its academic, social, and emotional benefits.

As RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching are at the heart of this study, a brief description of both will assist the readers of each manuscript before continuing with the

introduction. RT is a traditional literacy strategy that involves repeated reading of a given text or script to improve fluency and prosody, often times leading to gains in comprehension and overall reading achievement culminating with a final dramatic performance (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006; Worthy, 2005; Young et al., 2017). As the name suggests, students are not required to memorize the text as the focus is on improving fluency and expression. Studies have shown that RT can support students in not only reading achievement, but can positively impact students as a motivational device, as it leads to gains in confidence and engagement with reading as well (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006; Rasinski et al., 2017; Young et al., 2020). As Young, Mohr, and Landreth (2020) state, “Research on readers theatre has indicated that it can improve elementary students’ reading achievement and can be motivating, engaging and enjoyable, even for reluctant or struggling readers” (p. 347). Due to these beneficial characteristics, most all students will achieve some level of success with RT.

Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices involve concerted efforts to provide students with a learning environment that adhere to specific standards in support of students’ lived experiences, home cultures and languages so that they can be successful inside and outside of the classroom. The most common elements of a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom according to Villegas and Lucas (2007) are: (1) understanding how learners construct knowledge (2) meaningful knowledge of students and their lives, (3) supporting the development of a sociocultural consciousness, (4) affirmation of student diversity, (5) appropriate and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and (6) being an advocate for all students. Schools can “promote a more equitable and just society... [and] demonstrate that diversity is worthy of affirmation” (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 30) when these elements are in place.

## **The Cultural and Linguistic Authenticity of Reader's Theatre Scripts: A Content Analysis**

A central goal of teacher preparation programs and teacher professional development opportunities is to provide preservice teachers (PST) and veteran educators experiences with effective and meaningful teaching strategies. As classroom demographics continue to grow more and more diverse (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), these opportunities should also include experiences with teaching strategies that are culturally and linguistically responsive. One possible strategy that may accomplish both tasks is the literacy tool, Reader's Theatre (RT). However, a challenge to incorporating RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy is finding scripts to use that are culturally and linguistically authentic.

Reflecting upon this obstacle, the study conducted in the first manuscript attempts to make a determination of the cultural and linguistic authenticity of RT scripts housed within The Best Class (Young, 2019) website. Though The Best Class website collection of scripts is not labeled as culturally and linguistically responsive, this type of content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Northrop et al., 2019; White & Marsh, 2006) provides an example of the resources available to educators looking to add RT to their classroom instruction as well as using a strategy in a culturally responsive way. This specific collection of RT scripts was chosen to analyze because it is the online home of one of the foremost RT scholars, Dr. Chase Young.

Though there are over 200 readymade RT scripts in the collection, only 141 were selected for the analysis based upon the number of speaking parts applicable to small group reading instruction. Further, from the 141 scripts selected, 5 categories were employed in the analysis: (1) Protagonist or Main Character, (2) Culturally Identifiable Nationality or Ethnicity, (3) Year of Original Publication, (4) Author Attributes, and (5) Type of Script or Adaptation. Additionally, scripts were compared to certain objectives listed in two culturally and

linguistically responsive literature guides: (1) Hollie's Responsive Dots: Assessing Literature for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness (2018) and (2) Office of Head Start National Center Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Criteria (2020) to further ascertain the scripts authenticity. The analysis was designed to answer the overarching research question:

1. To what extent do Reader's Theatre scripts vary by the gender of the protagonist, nationality and ethnicity, author attributes, as well as source of the Reader's Theatre script, and year of publication to be considered culturally and linguistically authentic?

Though advances have been made within the realm of children's literature to include more diverse characters and provide authors of color greater opportunities to publish their work, there is still a need for children's literature that not only reflects or "mirrors" (Bishop, 1990; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Northrop et al., 2019) the experiences of diverse students, but provides "windows" (Bishop, 1990; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Northrop et al., 2019) for other students to experience the lives of their peers as well. An analysis such as this one, though only addressing a small element in the world of children's literature and reading instruction, can provide valuable information as to the tools and resources available for educators of all levels to employ when fostering a classroom environment that is culturally and linguistically responsive.

### **Reader's Theatre as a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching Strategy:**

#### **Preservice Teachers' Perceptions**

The study contained in the second manuscript continued the discussion of using RT in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner. The purpose of the study was to gauge the level of understanding that preservice teachers have regarding RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies, as well as their overall perceptions of combining the two to foster

a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom environment. Five research questions provided the foundation for the second study:

1. What are preservice teachers' understanding of Reader's Theatre?
2. What are preservice teachers' understanding of a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
3. What are preservice teachers' understanding of Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
4. What are preservice teachers' perceptions of implementing Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
5. What are preservice teachers' perceptions of the value of implementing Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?

To gain insight into the thoughts of the participants, each one completed two short reflections in the forms of entrance and exit slips as part of RT instruction which focused upon RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. Participants also took part in individual interviews following RT instruction to discuss their thoughts on using RT in a culturally responsive way. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to analyze the participants' interview transcripts and entrance/exit slips. The following significant themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Value and Versatility of Reader's Theatre, (2) Increased Awareness of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching, and (3) Instructional Intent of Reader's Theatre. Each theme contained several subthemes that further enhanced and clarified the thinking of the participants in how they viewed the combination of the two teaching strategies by exploring topics such as community, acceptance, representation, intent, implementation, and personal connections to literature.

The participants in the study provided valuable insight into the use of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. A key topic noted by participants for educators to consider when implementing RT in a culturally responsive way was the importance of intent and purposeful planning. Without these two elements, participants emphasize that the combination could prove to be a negative addition to classrooms instead of celebrating and affirming students' diversity. However, if careful planning and thoughtful intent is maintained, participants found the overall value of using RT in a culturally and linguistically responsive manner high.

Both manuscripts contained in this dissertation are starting points for educators of all levels to explore and begin research endeavors into the possible benefits that may arise from using RT to foster a classroom that is culturally and linguistically responsive. As classrooms continue to evolve demographically, inventive ways of reaching all students will become more important. The possible match of RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching may be one of those ways.



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## **Chapter 2**

### **The Cultural and Linguistic Authenticity of Reader's Theatre Scripts:**

#### **A Content Analysis**

##### **Abstract**

This study is a content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Northrop et al., 2019; White & Marsh, 2006) of 141 scripts from the Reader's Theatre Collection of The Best Class (Young, 2019) website. The purpose of the analysis was to determine the merits of the collection as culturally and linguistically authentic. The collection was amassed by a current Reader's Theatre scholar and university professor, Dr. Chase Young. Each of the 141 scripts was analyzed in terms of gender, nationality and ethnicity, information about the author, year of publication and source of the Reader's Theatre script. This resulted in a final conclusion of the level of cultural and linguistic authenticity. Providing students in today's diverse classrooms with authentic multicultural literature is crucial so that they feel seen and heard, as well as learn about the lived experiences of others. Educators need high-quality, culturally and linguistically responsive resources as well. This type of analysis can assist them in making that determination.

## Introduction

The traditional American classroom in public education is becoming increasingly more diverse with each passing year. The makeup of school populations is no longer overwhelmingly white. Of the projected 50.8 million enrolled students for the 2019 school year, 53.3 % of school populations are considered culturally and linguistically diverse (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). More specifically, Hispanic students represent nearly 27.4 % of the student population, while African Americans comprise 15.1 %. Asian American students claim 5.3% of the population and, last, 1 % of public-school students are American Indian (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019).

With these statistics in mind, public school educators must consider how they can best serve the students who enter their classrooms bringing with them a variety of cultural backgrounds and experiences. Students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds have been forced to “learn” from curriculum and texts that do not represent their own lived experiences, or worse, provided learning experiences within the classroom that incorporate token or generic multicultural opportunities. Considering this, educators must do everything they can to repay this long overdue educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Kibler & Chapman, 2018).

How then can educators address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations that may struggle to succeed. First, and perhaps, most importantly all teachers must acknowledge that “culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education” (Gay, 2018, p. 8). With this in mind, students must then be afforded educational opportunities within the classroom that are validating, affirming, and authentic. To do this, educators must strive to incorporate Culturally and Linguistically Responsive (CLR) Teaching as the model for their classroom instruction and environment. Such a classroom can benefit all students, but most

importantly it will benefit those who struggle most to succeed in traditional classrooms, “CLR benefits all students, but is most powerful with students who are traditionally underserved” (Hollie, 2018, p. 54).

A technique to consider to help foster a meaningful CLR classroom in which students feel they belong and are cared for is Reader’s Theatre (RT). Traditionally known as a literacy strategy to help improve fluency and reading achievement, RT can be used as a tool to support all students through motivation, by fostering a sense of caring and belonging through the recognition of their home language and culture. The desire to feel accepted, respected, and supported by members of the school community and how a student’s individuality is taken into account is paramount to student success, but even more so for those students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds (Dukyanaite & Dudaite, 2017).

The problem that arises when considering the implementation of RT as a culturally responsive tool is that resources are limited that are meaningfully and culturally authentic. Yes, there is a vast array of traditional lesson plans and scripts available to use RT in your classroom, but many have not been vetted as to their authenticity to be considered culturally responsive. Those that have been properly assessed may be far too expensive to have access to the materials unless a school system deems the use of RT is valuable. For example, the educational resource website, Benchmark Education (2020) supplies educators with RT resources in a variety of genres, content areas and reading levels. However, just one small collection of 12 scripts, in a limited number of reading levels costs \$49. To amass a complete collection that represents the needs of all students and subject areas, without the assistance of the school system, upwards of \$500 to nearly \$2000 would be the expense (Benchmark Education, 2020).

The purpose then of this article will be a content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Northrop et al., 2019; White & Marsh, 2006) of RT scripts to assess their cultural and linguistic authenticity for use in a CLR classroom. The work of Northrop, Borsheim-Black, and Kelly (2019) with eighth grade students guided my decision to conduct this type of content analysis of RT scripts. The collection for this analysis comes from The Best Class (Young, 2019) website, online home to Dr. Chase Young. Dr. Young is an Associate Professor at Sam Houston State University in the School of Teaching and Learning (and previously an elementary teacher). The website was chosen because Dr. Young compiled a list of 231 RT scripts as a means of supporting his research with struggling readers and fluency instruction (Young & Nageldinger, 2014; Young et al., 2015; Young & Rasinski, 2017). A great deal of his work incorporates the use of RT as an engaging literacy tool which has also been a central theme to many of his publications such as *Teaching Reading Skills: How to Implement Readers Theater* (Young, 2014). Because of Young's extensive research on using RT as an effective literacy tool, this website was determined to be a good basis for this research project due to the numerous RT scripts that are listed (The Best Class, 2019).

Using Hollie's CLR Dots (2018) (Appendix A) and the selection criteria from the Office of Head Start National Center on Cultural & Linguistic Responsiveness (2020) (Appendix B) as a guide, a final overall determination will be made regarding the collection of scripts. This analysis will shine further light on the type of resources available to classroom teachers who may be interested in implementing RT as a CLR tool and how educators can also assess the value of RT scripts before incorporating them into their RT instruction.

The central question of the analysis is:

1. To what extent do Reader's Theatre scripts vary by gender of the protagonist, nationality & ethnicity, authorship attributes, as well as source of Reader's Theatre script, and year of publication to be considered culturally and linguistically authentic?

### **Background on Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Reader's Theatre**

Before moving directly into the analysis of the RT Scripts, it is important to shed light on the history of culturally responsive teaching and what a culturally responsive classroom ideally looks like. A brief overview of RT will also be presented as to its background and effectiveness as both a literacy tool and motivational strategy. Further, a brief rationale as to the benefit of combining the two will be offered.

#### ***The Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Classroom***

For a classroom to be regarded as culturally and linguistically responsive (CLR), it must adhere to a prescribed set of standards that provide opportunities for students to be seen, accepted, and flourish by "taking into account cultural and linguistic factors in their worlds" (Hollie, 2018, p. 27). Cheesman and De Pry report that in non-CLR classrooms students of color are viewed much more negatively than their white counterparts which relates to students' poor self-image, lack of motivation, and behavior challenges. Which in turn leads to a learning environment that is unequal (Cheesman & De Pry, 2010) where attention is placed on what is not working instead of focusing on what is (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Considering this unequal environment causes detrimental effects on students, educators must draw from the work of Ladson-Billings (2004, 2008) to include the following standards in their classroom communities. First, a concerted effort toward student learning and academic achievement must occur through "a cultivation of students' minds and supporting their intellectual lives" (2008, p. 34). Second, cultural competence must be developed so that



“students recognize and honor their own cultural beliefs and practices while acquiring access to wider culture” (2008, p. 36). Last, students should gain a sociopolitical consciousness in how they make “use of skills they learn to better understand and critique their social position and context” (2008, p. 37). Ullucci sums up the nature of the culturally responsive classroom in that a CLR approach makes use of a student’s culture as an avenue for “academic success and critical consciousness” (2011, p. 390).

Along with the criteria developed by Ladson-Billings (2004, 2008), there are further aspects of teaching that should be employed to foster a culturally responsive classroom recommended by Toppel (2015). First, culturally appropriate and authentic texts should be made available to students. Second, students’ voices should be engaged through instruction. Last, students’ “funds of knowledge” or knowledge gained from cultural and family background must be incorporated (Toppel, 2015, p. 553).

In addition, the work of Gay (2002) highlights components that are crucial to fostering an environment founded upon the principles of validating and affirming students leading to a more culturally responsive classroom. Gay suggests designing a more culturally relevant curriculum, showing cultural caring, creation of a learning community, communication that crosses cultures, and development of knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity. Teachers who implement each of these criteria understand the vital nature of recognizing the impact of supporting students through “cultural values, traditions, communications, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns” (Gay, 2002, p. 107).

Further, the formation of a successful CLR classroom must move beyond a superficial awareness of diversity to a concrete base of knowledge that includes “detailed factual information about the cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups” (Gay, 2002, p. 107) so

that diverse students see more representation of their culture in their school experience. Gay simply states that there is so much more “to know, think, and do” as the impact of recognizing and affirming students’ culture (values, behaviors, and attitudes) can be profound (2002, p. 114). When a CLR classroom is fostered both meaningful learning and the creation of a true classroom community can be realized (Hollie, 2018; Worthy et al., 2012).

Culturally responsive teaching is not easy, but it is crucial. As educators we must strive to see the potential in every student, take time to truly learn about them and their families, inspire students to think critically, and most importantly, listen to them (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017).

### ***Reader’s Theatre***

From its suggested beginnings in ancient Greece, to New York City in the 1940s, to an eventual home in today’s classrooms, RT has evolved into a valuable educational resource (Eckersley, 2016). RT, the term many believe coined by American Professor Irene Coger in the 1940s (Eckersley, 2016), focuses primarily on use within the classroom as a literacy tool. Casey and Chamberlin explain that RT allows students to express meaning through a variety of scripts ranging from poetry and rhymes to adapted literature and dramatic scripts while focusing on fluency and prosody with simple and even minimal theatrical productions. These simple performances provide meaningful opportunities for students to practice reading, chances to be successful, and allow for level of confidence to increase through performance. The hope is that success with one RT opportunity will lead to future success with different texts (2006, p. 18).

Rasinski, Stokes, and Young (2017) take the benefits of RT even further and move beyond the purely academic, stating the influence this instructional tool can have socially. By implementing RT into instruction, students are given chances to both “share and interpret stories

with their peers” (2017, p. 174). This type of teamwork and social interaction can play an influential role in the success of a classroom community.

Perhaps, this same tool could be used as a means of promoting cultural responsiveness, which in turn would motivate students to learn about one another in a creative and engaging way. When students can share their cultures, they feel as though they are part of the classroom community. Through RT, community can be created as students share stories and cultural traditions. Even more impactful is the benefit of students seeing characters in literature that represent themselves and their peers. Weisenburger (2009) reports growth in students’ feeling of self-worth and relatedness to school when engaged with CLR RT while Liu (2000) states the power of RT as it provides chances “for students to understand one another’s perspectives through cooperative and supportive interactions” (p. 359).

There are several studies about the benefits of RT as simply an educational tool, but very rarely do these studies shed light on how this strategy can be used to foster understanding, belonging, and community to affirm the diversity which is the norm in most public schools. There are a variety of scripts available, many through online resources such as The Best Class (Young, 2019) website, though it can be difficult to locate those that represent diverse populations and those that do are not authentically written to celebrate the traditions and experiences of those students. To further compound the issue of using RT as a CLR tool, to this point, high-quality and current guides or lessons are not readily available for educators wanting to implement this engaging teaching tool.

Though there are a few roadblocks to adding RT to your classroom instruction, this should not dissuade educators from trying. Due to its open-ended nature and flexibility, RT can be used for a variety of purposes, not just achievement in reading (Clementi, 2010, p. 85). One of

these purposes or strategies could most definitely be creating a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom environment through RT.

### ***Why Should You Combine the Two?***

The benefits of incorporating RT to traditional literacy instruction can produce a variety of benefits. First, the use of RT results in increases in the areas of fluency and comprehension, “Research and practice indicate that the use of Readers Theatre has the potential to enhance both the fluency and the comprehension development of students, particularly those students who struggle to develop fluency and comprehension” (Mraz et al., 2013, p. 176). Second, teachers who add RT to their literacy instruction have seen impressive increases in student enthusiasm and motivation. In fact, a 2002 study conducted by Worthy and Prater resulted in this overwhelming endorsement of RT, “Time after time, teachers have reported that it is the single most motivating, effective reading activity they have used” (p. 295).

Finally, research has shown that RT can also be a bridge to building caring communities within classrooms as students are given multiple opportunities to work together with a sense of purpose and belonging. Clark, Morrison, and Wilcox reported in the 2009 study, “Feeling the sense of purpose that came from belonging to a readers’ theater group, Daniel’s engagement and participation in class noticeably improved” (p. 375). The focus of several studies conducted on RT as well as the participants come from a wide range of grade levels, ability levels, and cultural backgrounds (Clark et al., 2009; Clementi, 2010; Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Liu, 2000; Rasinski et al., 2017; Weisenburger, 2009; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young & Nageldinger, 2014).

Reflecting on the versatile nature of RT, it makes sense that this literacy tool can be used to foster a culturally responsive classroom as well where all students feel cared for and accepted.

Jones, through his work with the MUSIC Model of Motivation, explains the need for students to feel cared for to be successful within the classroom, “You need to ensure that students believe that others in the learning environment, such as you and other students, care about their learning and about them as a person...students should feel welcome and comfortable participating in the class” (2015, p. 91).

In Shevalier and McKenzie’s 2012 work they pull from the caring research of Noddings (2002) to state that for a student to be truly cared for within a classroom, they must encounter four distinct practices. The first component to address is modeling as teachers in a caring and culturally responsive classroom intentionally model the combination of effective teaching of “academic content, classroom behavior, and, more important, the personal standards caring individuals hold” (p. 1093). Second, competent teachers need to provide opportunities for dialog among students and, in turn, how to show attention to one another through that dialog, “When teachers engage in true dialog and attention, relationship building intertwines with opportunities for teachers to model “caring for” skills and for students to practice them” (p. 1094).

Third, is the aspect of practice. As any teacher knows, or should know, in order for students to become proficient in something, it takes practice, this is no different when considering caring in a CLR classroom. Noddings states, “To develop the capacity to care, one must engage in caregiving activities” (2002, p. 19). In short, students must be given meaningful opportunities to practice and live out what caring is and looks like. Confirmation is the final piece of the caring puzzle according to Noddings. Student behavior must be confirmed so that they recognize that they are both cared for and are themselves carers, “It is wonderfully reassuring to realize that another sees the better self that often struggles for recognition” (Noddings, 2002, p. 21).

The use of CLR RT fits in perfectly with the Noddings (2002) components of caring. When RT is implemented into daily classroom instruction, students have multiple opportunities to see modeling, but also engage in modeling for others. Students participate in dialog, having the chance to share their stories and learn from the stories of others. Practice is essential to the success of RT which relates to the third aspect of caring. Finally, through performance, no matter the audience, whether their own classmates, parents, or community members, students are confirmed, recognized, and validated.

Lastly, the implementation of RT to foster a successful CLR classroom benefits student both academically and socially. Feeling cared for, validated, and affirmed does make a difference in “terms of academic achievement but also in social and emotional growth and empowerment” (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012, p. 1102). Educators who desire to do more to foster an inclusive and caring classroom environment must consider the combination of RT and CLR to do just that. As Hollie, with an assist from Fred Rogers states:

This “more” is defined as outrageous love, which is cultural and linguistic responsiveness. For those of you in the classroom, you have a student right now who is looking at you, pleading for more love...there is something that you need to do to stretch your love. I never thought I would be quoting Fred Rogers of the renowned Mister Roger’s Neighborhood television show of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, but here I go: “Love isn’t a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like ‘struggle.’” To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way her or she is, right here, right now (Rogers 2003) (2018, pp. 199 – 200).

The marriage of RT and CLR has the possibility to do just that in any classroom as students, and teachers, work together to understand and learn from one another, leading to a caring community of learners.

### **The Study**

The purpose of this study was to analyze scripts contained in The Best Class (Young, 2019) RT collection to determine if they were culturally and linguistically authentic as titles should represent the diversity of today's public-school classrooms. The results of this study will be valuable to educators searching for a high-quality resource of materials to use in their classroom to implement RT and foster a CLR environment. Once again, the central question of the analysis was:

1. To what extent do Reader's Theatre scripts vary by the gender of the protagonist, nationality and ethnicity, author attributes, as well as source of the Reader's Theatre script, and year of publication to be considered culturally and linguistically authentic?

Prior to beginning the analysis phase, it was necessary to recognize my own personal bias when reading the RT scripts as a white American male. Though every effort was made to read the scripts without preconceived ideas, bias was certain to creep in, especially when reading RT scripts adapted from books that I may have used in my past personal or classroom experiences.

### **Analysis**

Locating authentic and high-quality RT scripts to use in a CLR classroom can be quite difficult. Though there are a high number of scripts available online (most of which are free and numerous collections of RT scripts available for purchase through educational websites and book suppliers) they are not always best-practice options to support diversity within the classroom. Though no current data is available as to cultural representation in RT scripts, it is helpful to look

at the current state of children's literature to develop a clearer picture of why it is difficult to find valuable RT resources.

### ***Diversity in Children's Literature***

The current state of diversity represented in high-quality authentic children's literature is still quite unbalanced. The most current data from the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison regarding this topic states that there has been improvement in cultural representation, but according to their 2018 infographic, "the image added cracks in the mirrors to illustrate the continued misrepresentation of the underrepresented communities" (CCBC, 2019). Though numbers of books have increased, that does not exactly correlate to quality, accuracy, or culturally diverse literature (CCBC, 2019).

As of the 2018 study from the CCBC, books depicting White characters still make-up 50% of the available children's literature. Even animals achieved a substantial amount of representation (27%). Compare that to the representation of African/African Americans (10%), Asian Pacific Islander/Asian Pacific Americans (7%), Latinx characters (5%), and American Indian/First Nations people (1%) who were much less visible in children's literature.

### ***Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Reader's Theatre Scripts***

To conduct this content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Northrop et al., 2019; White & Marsh, 2006) as to the CLR authenticity of RT scripts, data was collected from the website of one of the most current and relevant scholars in the field of RT, the aforementioned Young (The Best Class, 2019). The Best Class RT collection contains 231 scripts listed in alphabetical order with corresponding number of speaking parts for primary and elementary grades.

To begin the analysis, only scripts with between three to ten speaking parts were selected to be analyzed. This resulted in 141 scripts. The reasoning for selecting those scripts was formed



on the idea that that number of parts could be easily used in small group instruction, even breaking scripts with ten parts into groups of five. A complete list of the texts analyzed are included in the appendix (Appendix C).

### ***Categories***

The 141 originally selected scripts were analyzed and then coded with the following categories:

1. Protagonist or Main Character Attributes (male/female/animal)
2. Culturally Identifiable Nationality or Ethnicity
3. Year of Original Publication
4. Author Attributes
5. Type of Script or Adaptation (book, poem, fairy tale, folk tale, moral, fable, or original Reader's Theatre script)

Protagonist or Main Character Attributes: Merriam-Webster (2020) defines a protagonist as “the principal character in a literary work (such as a drama or story).” For the purposes of this analysis, the very simple goal was to see if the protagonist in the selected RT script was either male, female, animal, and some cases a “non-living” object such as a snowman or toy. For both the animal and non-living object categories, it was also noted as to whether those characters were identifiable as male or female as well. Further, even works of non-fiction were analyzed to see if there was a figure that was the main focus of the work, which was also counted in the final tally for protagonist.

Culturally Identifiable Nationality or Ethnicity: Each script was analyzed to find whether there was sufficient information, clues, or text features to make a determination of an identifiable culture or nationality. For example, after reading the script for *Gabriel's Horses* (2007/2013) written by Allison Hart and adapted by for RT by Dorcas Hand, there was sufficient evidence

from the script text alone to make a determination that this was an American story, specifically told from the point of view from an African American slave. Other scripts that were not identifiable to a specific culture or nationality, or generalizable across cultures were researched even further, going to the original text, most often in book form with corresponding illustrations. *Lawn Boy* (2007/2009) by Gary Paulsen and adapted by Dorcas Hand is a good example here. There were no specifically identifying features within the RT script that would categorize *Lawn Boy* in any particular fashion. The protagonist, protagonist family, friends, and story could come from many different cultures or nationalities. Referring then to the book itself with illustrations, as well as author and book notes, allowed me to at least deduce that the book was set in the United States and the cover art led to the deduction that the protagonist is White. Without those other sources of information, reading the RT script alone would not lead the reader in one direction or another or than the script was in one form of the English language.

The same method for discovering an identifiable nationality was also implemented when analyzing scripts for an identifiable ethnicity. First, the RT script was read from the link provided through Dr. Young's website *The Best Class* (2019). These scripts contain no illustrations and only some contain a brief introduction or background knowledge, especially those adapted from poems or books. Using the scripts alone led to very few concrete determinations as to an identifiable ethnicity. *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* (2007/2008) by Carmen Agra-Deedy and adapted by Dixie Allen is an example of a script containing enough information to make such a determination. From the very opening lines of the script, the reader is given information that the story is set in Havana. Terms such as abuela and senora are used throughout the script as well. From those features alone, the reader can make a safe determination that the RT script is set in Cuba and with a Latino ethnicity. To confirm these

findings, information regarding the author, as well as the cover of the book, and illustrations were analyzed.

In contrast, the famous story of *The Red Balloon* (1956/2016) by Albert Lamossire and adapted by Rudy Cremaschi, was easily identifiable as coming from France, with clues such as Paris and Eiffel Tower. However, no identifiable ethnicity can be derived from the RT script alone. The main character, a young boy, could easily be white or black. Not until further research was conducted with the cover art and author information, was it determined that the protagonist of the story is indeed a young white male.

Year of Original Publication: Each script was analyzed as to the year the original story and format were published. Though the purpose of the study is focused on the content of RT scripts, it was deemed important to note the publication year of books and poems, as well as the estimated date of origin of many fables, folktales, fairytales, morals, and legends. The majority of information regarding publication did not come from the adapted RT scripts, but publication information from the original text. The RT scripts analyzed ranged from more recent works, *How to Steal a Dog* (2007/2009) by Barbara O'Connor to the 17th Century and the estimated first publication of *Little Red Riding Hood* (Perrault, 1697/1996) made most famous by the Grimm Brothers of Germany in the 1800s (Best Book for Kids, 2018).

Author Attributes: The gender, culture, and ethnicity of the author of each original piece was considered valuable as to the analysis of scripts deemed culturally authentic. To gather this data, the author characteristics of the original source was considered for the majority of entries. If a script was adapted from an earlier source, the person responsible for the adaptation was not considered as relevant. Only in cases where the author information was unattainable was the information about the person credited with the adaptation included in the data. If the RT script

was an original piece, the information regarding that playwright was researched, however, many of the original RT scripts, other than those adapted by Young or Blau, for example, contained no identifiable author information.

Type of Script or Script Adaptation: Finally, each RT script was analyzed as to the source of the text. Other than an original RT script, the following are the categories contained in the 141 scripts from The Best Class (Young, 2019) collection. Children's literature, such as picture books like *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type* (1999/2016) by Doreen Cronin and chapter books like *A Little Excitement* (1989/2002) by Marc Harshman, is the first category. Poetry is the next category with entries such as Kenn Nesbitt's *The Aliens Have Landed* (2001/2010). Smaller categories, similar in style, come from the genres of fairy tales, folktales, fables, morals, and legends. Selections within these categories contain timeless favorites such as a fun and modern version of *The Three Little Pigs* titled *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (1989/2014) by Jon Scieszka.

Basic descriptive statistics were utilized to display the results of the analysis of all 141 RT scripts to demonstrate the frequency of the various criteria. The analysis provided evidence as to the nature of the collection of scripts and their level of cultural and linguistic authenticity.

## **Results**

### **Protagonist or Main Character Attributes**

Table 1 represents the first category of analysis, the protagonist or main character gender. Both human and animal characters are included in the results. Overall, human male protagonists or main characters resulted in majority of scripts analyzed with 24.1%. Works such as *Alvin Ho* (Look, 2009), *Gabriel's Horses* (Hart, 2007/2013), and *The Red Balloon* (Lamossire, 1956/2016) are just a few examples of scripts with male protagonists. The second largest

percentage belongs to human female characters. Human female protagonists made up 21.9% of the 141 scripts researched. Traditional tales such as *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*, along with more modern works like *How to Steal a Dog* by Barbara O'Connor (2007/2009) are included here. The third largest piece of the protagonist category is male animal as the main character. With titles such as *Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late* by Mo Willems (2006/2009) and *Moe the Dog in Tropical Paradise* by Diane Stanley (1992/1999), male animals make up 18.4% of the scripts with a male lead. Finally, female animals at 10.6% make up the smallest percentage. *Dog Breath* by Dave Pilkey (1994/2019) and four Kevin Henkes' titles, *Jessica* (1989/1998), *Sheila Rae the Brave* (1987/1996), *Weekend with Wendell* (1986/1995), and *Wemberly Worried* (2000/2010), are examples for female animal led scripts.

Human male protagonists rank number one within the collection, while human female protagonists were only 2.2% behind. The gap between male and female animals was a bit larger with male animals representing 8.7% more of main characters within the scripts analyzed. Overall, male characters in general represent 42.5 % of all protagonists with overall female representation making up 32.5% resulting in a 10% difference.

Scripts containing characters considered non-living or objects such as Bob from *Bob the Snowman* by Loretan and Lenica (1988) or the toys from *Toys Go Out* by Emily Jenkins (2006) resulted in very small percentages (2.83%). Likewise, for the sub-category of scripts where the human or animal protagonists were unidentifiable or equal in impact, they were quite small. Unidentifiable human protagonists resulted in 4.2% of the scripts analyzed and unidentifiable animal protagonists resulted in 2.83%.

Finally, non-fiction RT scripts without a main character or protagonist resulted in only 9 scripts with 6.38 % of the total number of pieces. *The Rain Forest* (Blau, 1994) is an example of

this style of RT Script. Poetry was also analyzed in this fashion and the result was five scripts or 3.54 %. A holiday poem by Phillip Brooks adapted into a RT Script, *Christmas Everywhere* (1903) is an example of a piece selected for this category. Last, a small number of scripts encompassing human, animal, non-fiction, and poetry resulted in no clear protagonist being determined at all. The numbers here were 6 scripts and a percentage of 4.96. *Where Once There Was a Wood* (1996), a beautiful picture book by Denise Fleming, fits this category well.

**Table 1**

*Protagonist/Main Character Attributes (Male/Female/Animal)*

Protagonist or Main Character	Total Percentage	Number of Scripts
Human Male	24.1 %	35
Human Female	21.9 %	31
Unidentifiable	4.2 %	6
Male Animal	18.4 %	26
Female Animal	10.6 %	16
Unidentifiable	2.83 %	4
Non-Living	2.83 %	4
Total Male Protagonist	42.5 %	61
Total Female Protagonist	32.5 %	47
Non-fiction without a Main Character	6.38 %	9
Poetry without a Main Character	3.54 %	5
Script with no clear Main Character	4.2 %	6

### **Culturally Identifiable Nationality or Ethnicity**

Table 2 displays data pertaining to scripts that contained enough information from the text or research from an additional source to identify a nationality or ethnicity, 79 (56%). This resulted in more than half of the 141 total scripts. For scripts that contained enough detail within

the text to identify a nationality from the US and around the world, the total was 41 (29.1%). The statistic for scripts requiring further analysis outside of the RT script came in at 38 out of 141 scripts (26.9%). Information about authors and origination of several pieces were also taken into consideration when conducting further research outside of the RT text itself. As the data shows in Table 2 the vast majority of scripts hail from the United States at 57 (40.4%), with only 22 scripts from other countries around the world (15.6%). Sixty-two scripts had contested origins or were unidentifiable or generalizable through further research. Many of these works came in the form of non-fiction pieces, original and often uncredited RT scripts, poems, and several fairy tales.

The aspect of ethnicity derived from an RT script was a far more challenging task. Only five scripts (3.54%) contained enough detail or information from further analysis to note them as coming from a specific ethnicity in the United States. Asian American (*Alvin Ho, Look, 2009*) represented one clearly identifiable script at 0.7% of the total number of RT scripts. American Indian (*Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom, Tingle, 2006/2008* and *The Three Little Javelinas, Lowell, 1992*) and African American (*Gabriel's Horses, Hart, 2007/2013* and *The Snowy Day, Keats, 1962/2016*) accounted for two scripts apiece. A group of 14 scripts were comprised of titles that had animals or non-living objects as the main characters or scripts that were too generalizable, even after further research, to appropriately name an ethnicity such as the urban legend *The Clown Statue* (n.d.) and the poem "New Year's Resolutions" (n.d.) by Francis B. Watts.

Ethnicity for the scripts outside of the United States was even more difficult. Only the scripts from Japan, South Africa, India, and Cuba had specific clues within the RT text to label them as Asian, African, Indian, or Latino, respectively. From Japan, the folktale of *The*

*Stonecutter* (n.d.) and the story *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (1999/2004) by Eleanor Coerr. Though Coerr is a Canadian author, she includes clues within the text, which make it quite clear that the story is part of Japanese history. From South Africa, the story of *The Elephant's Child* (1900/2005) by Rudyard Kipling was adapted. Though clues were present from the very start of that script, with a bit more digging, it was found to be set within the tribe of the Venda people. Later in the analysis, this story will be used as an example of the clues used to make its categorization along with the next story from Cuba. Carmen Agra-Deedy wrote the picture book, *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* (2007/2008), a Cuban tale with specific text referring to locations in Cuba allowing the reader to make the conclusion. *Birbal's Trip to Paradise* (n.d.) contained clues from the very beginning of the script noting it belonged to the Indian culture. As is displayed in Table 2, most of the remaining ethnicities would be considered White or Caucasian European with a few scripts employing animals as their main characters.

Following are examples of the analysis of the RT scripts themselves to make the first round of determinations. For a script to be categorized as coming from the United States in general, specific clues from the text needed to be present. *Bubba the Cowboy Prince* (1997) by Helen Ketterman, a retelling of Cinderella, contained such clues. One sentence in particular provided a location within the United States, "Narrator 2: Miz Lurleen decided to throw a ball. She sent invitations to all the ranchers in **Texas**." Texas, of course, is the text clue allowing for the determination.

*Alvin Ho* (2009) by Lenore Look is not just an example of an American RT script, but specifically Asian American. In the script, exact clues help the reader deduce the ethnicity of the protagonist of the story, "Alvin 2: In **China my ancient grandpas and grandmas and aunts and uncles** fought off leopards and tigers in their gardens the way Calvin and Anibelly and I



fought off mosquitoes when we were at Walden Pond.” The script also contained text clues allowing the reader to see that the main character Alvin’s family lives in the United States, “Alvin 2: I was practically born with gunpowder in my blood this in on account of I live in **Concord, Massachusetts.**” The text from the script supported equally well the determination that Alvin Ho was a story about an Asian American family.

An example of a RT script from outside the United States that was categorized based on the clues in the text comes from the previously mentioned adaptation of Rudyard Kipling’s *The Elephant’s Child* (1900/2005). From the very first lines of the script, the reader knows that the story is set on the continent of Africa, “Narrator 2: He lived in **Africa**, and he filled all **Africa** with his 'satiabable curiosities.” A concrete clue from the script, the setting of the Limpopo River, is also a clue to the reader of the setting of the story. However, further research was conducted to find that the Limpopo River is specifically in South Africa.

The Cuban tale of *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* (2007/2008) by Carman Agra-Deedy is a nice example of a piece of literature not only from a specific culture, but written by a Latina author. Throughout the script, locations and language are used. Readers and audience members will have a clear picture of where the story takes place, “Narrator 2: She lived in a cozy street lamp in old **Havana** with her big, lovable family.” Agra-Deedy also incorporates Spanish within the text, “Narrator 2: But **Abuela**, her **Cuban** grandmother, gave her un **consejo increible**, some shocking advice.”

The remaining 38 pieces of literature were unable to be culturally identified with the RT script alone, but through the use of original sources such as picture and chapter books (cover art, illustrations, and more in-depth text) attributes were discovered. Internet sources such as Good Reads.com (2020) and Scholastic.com (2020), along with various author websites were valuable

tools in making the discoveries. Discovering the ethnicity and background of the author him or herself was a leading component of the analysis as well. Those specific statistics will be presented in full later in the results.

Again, the most common nationality discovered in the literature is American or work from the United States with several scripts needing additional sources to make determinations. With further research utilizing the above-mentioned sources the adapted book *Puppies for Sale* (1999) by Dan Clark, for example, was determined to be focused on a young white boy from the United States. Four scripts, though known to have animal characters, were found to also be set in the United States. *Arthur's Christmas* (1984/1985) by Marc Brown, for example, is one of the Arthur Adventure series and set in a fictional American town, Elwood City. Without further research on the Arthur Series, making a determination of any kind would have been nearly impossible.

In terms of multicultural works or at least works from different parts of the world, the story of *One Potato, Two Potato* (2006) by Cynthia DeFelice is a good example of using additional resources to locate the nationality and make a conclusion as to the ethnicity of the characters presented. Though, originally a Chinese folktale, DeFelice located this version in Ireland. Using clues from the script and then images from the children's book and information on the author's website (Cynthia DeFelice.com, 2020), this story is clearly an Irish tale with White or European Caucasian characters.

For the remaining 62 scripts that were not identifiable for both nationality and ethnicity, the scripts came from four main sources, either an original script for RT or a poem, book, or fairy tale adaptation. Seven specific examples are from non-fiction RT scripts most likely written as part of a unit or lesson plan. Scripts such as *The Rain Forest* by Lisa Blau (1994) contain

factual information to be shared with students through the performance. The classic tale *Cinderella*, though credited to Perrault (1697) as the first official publication, is a prime fairy tale example here as history shows that it could have first been written in China, Egypt, France, or Italy (Northrup, M. 2007).

A large chunk of scripts are poems or book adaptations with animals as main characters that did not show any identifiable nationality, even with further research. Titles like *The Fourth Little Pig* (1990) by Teresa Celsi and *Hey Little Ant* (1998) by Phillip and Hannah Hoose and scripted by Chase Young are examples of works with a lack of information. *The Fourth Little Pig*, though clearly written with a female animal protagonist contained no identifying information as to the nationality (setting) of the story and no ethnicity. This is in stark comparison to a book written by Laura Numeroff, *If You Give a Pig a Pancake* (1998) which clearly shows the main character, a female pig, living with a white family, most likely American. *Hey Little Ant* (Hoose & Hoose, 1998) is similar, although even the gender of the protagonist was not quite clear as neither of the pronouns “he or she” were ever used in the text, though the “villain”, a young white boy, was clearly evident.

Finally, several poems are included in the unidentifiable group. Most of these selections are quite silly and meant for purely entertainment and pleasure purposes. Though two of the poets are American (Kenn Nesbitt and Bruce Lansky) and one could argue their work has an American slant, nothing specific within scripts or text, nor illustrations that could be found within collections, lead to a definitive conclusion of one particular nationality or ethnicity, though some did have enough information regarding protagonist. *The Aliens Have Landed at Our School* (2001/2006), a collection of poems by Kenn Nesbitt, is just one of these fun and entertaining selections.

**Table 2**

*Culturally Identifiable Nationality (from Reader's Theatre script or analysis of original script source)*

<b>Nationality and Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Total Scripts</b>	<b>79 Total Scripts (56%)</b>
<b>American (United States)</b>	40.4%	57	**41 by RT Script ** 38 by research
- White American	- 25.5%	- 38	
- African American	- 1.42%	- 2	
- Asian American	- 0.7%	- 1	
- American Indian	- 1.42%	- 2	
- Animal	- 5.67%	- 8	
- Unidentifiable	- 2.83%	- 5	
- Non-living	- 0.7%	- 1	
<b>English</b>	3.54%	4	
- White European	- 2.12%	- 3	
- Animal	- 0.7%	- 1	
<b>French</b>	3.54%	4	
- White European	- 3.54%	- 4	
<b>German</b>	3.54%	4	
- White European	- 2.12%	- 3	
- Animal	- 0.7%	- 1	
<b>Irish</b>	1.41%	2	
- White European	- 1.41%	- 2	
<b>Japanese</b>	1.41%	2	
- Asian	- 1.41%	- 2	
<b>Cuban (Animal)</b>	0.7%	1	
<b>Greek (Animal)</b>	0.7%	1	
<b>Indian</b>	0.7%	1	
<b>Norwegian (Animal)</b>	0.7%	1	
<b>South African (Venda Tribe/Bantu)</b>	0.7%	1	
<b>Swedish (White European)</b>	0.7%	1	

### **Year of Original Publication**

Table 3 contains the data collected in terms of the year of publication of an original RT script or the date of publication of an original piece of literature adapted to an RT script. By six entries in the collection of scripts, the decade of the 2000s contains the largest percentage (29.1 %) and total number of scripts (41 Scripts) published with works from Doreen Cronin, *Duck for President* (2004/2010) and Jan Brett, *Hedgie's Surprise* (2000/2016). The 1990s is the decade

with the second largest amount of RT scripts listed in The Best Class (Young, 2019) collection, 35 scripts for a percentage of 24.8% including fan favorite, *Dog Breath* by Dave Pilkey (1994/2019). Finally, scripts where no date could be confirmed represents the third largest category with 20 scripts (14.2%). The majority of entries here were RT scripts prepared specifically for classroom use, though a few scary stories, such as *The Clown Statue* (n.d.) and *The Fifty Cent Piece* (n.d.), both without authors, are included here as well.

The most interesting aspect of the data contained in Table 3 is that new or current RT scripts have not been added to The Best Class (Young, 2019) collection deemed authentically culturally responsive, even though, no matter how small the increase, multicultural literature has made increases in publication. In fact, only two titles in total are included in the decade of the 2010s, Kenn Nesbitt's poem "Food Fight" from *When the Teacher isn't Looking and Other Funny Poems* (2010/2012) and Eric Litwin's *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* (2010).

**Table 3**

*Year of Publication of Original Story Adapted to an RT Script*

Decade (Year/s)	Percentage	Total Scripts
2010	1.42%	2
2000	29.1%	41
1990	24.8 %	35
1980	12.8 %	18
1970	2.12 %	3
1960	4.25 %	6
1950	0.71 %	1
1940	0.71 %	1
1900s	1.42&	2
1800s	4.26%	6
Prior to 1800s	4.26 %	6
No Date	14.2%	20

## Author Attributes

Table 4 contains data about those who are credited with writing an original RT script or the original source adapted to an RT script. White authors or authors of Caucasian/European heritage are overwhelmingly responsible for the majority of the scripts analyzed. In total, 130 of the 141 scripts are credited to a white author or script adapter (92.1%). Only three scripts belong to authors who are people of color at 2.12%. The ethnicities represented with the three scripts are American Indian (Tim Tingle – *Crossing Bok Chito: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom*, 2006/2008), Asian American (Lenore Look – *Alvin Ho*, 2009), and Latina American (Carmen Agra Deedy – *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach*, 2007/2008). The remaining eight scripts (5.67 %) have disputed authorship or unidentifiable authorship.

It was disheartening to see that such a vast collection contained within a website (The Best Class, Young, 2019) for a leading RT researcher and scholar has only three scripts written by people of color. There are a variety of other “cultures” represented, such as British, German, Canadian, and Australian. However, the majority of white authors diminishes the level of authenticity of The Best Class (Young, 2019) RT collection. Students from multicultural backgrounds need to see not just representation of characters like them in literature, but also recognize that the creators of that literature come from similar backgrounds.

A 2009 study conducted by Gray shares the thoughts of students in regards to African American authors and the need for those authors to be more visible, “White people probably want to be a writer. I guess that’s in their blood too. That’s why there are not many black people writing today” (p. 480). Gray continues to highlight the importance of African American visibility as she referred to *Writers Like Me* (2007) by Martha Southgate and the need for African American prominence in classroom literature. The producers of CLR children’s literature need to

be accurate and reliable (Hollie, 2018). White authors can be proven reliable and accurate with their writing, but authors who have comparable lived experiences to students can be even more impactful.

A positive outcome of the analysis is that there was gender equality in the 141 scripts researched for the study. Sixty-nine (69) scripts were written or adapted by men (48.9 %) and 64 scripts were credited to female authors or scripters (45.4 %). Unlike the lack of diversity in authorship, it is heartening to see gender equality displayed within the collection.

**Table 4**

*Author Attributes (Gender and Nationality)*

<b>Male Authorship</b>	<b>Female Authorship</b>	<b>Uncredited</b>
69 Scripts	64 Scripts	8 Scripts
- 68 Scripts by White or Caucasian Authors (48.2%)	- 62 Scripts by White or Caucasian Authors (43.9%)	- 5.67%
- 1 Script by American Indian Author (Choctaw) (0.7%)	- 1 Script by Chinese American (0.7%)	
- 1 Script by Australian Author (0.7 %)	- 1 Script by Latina Author (Cuban) (0.7%)	
- 1 Script by Hungarian American Author (0.7%)	- 1 Script by Australian Author (0.7%)	
- 1 Script by German Author (0.7 %)	- 2 Scripts by Canadian Authors (1.42 %)	
- 2 Scripts by British Authors (1.42 %)	- 1 Script by Canadian-American Author (0.7 %)	
- 1 Script by Canadian-American Author (0.7 %)		

### **Type of Script or Script Adaptation**

The last piece of analysis deals with the original source of each RT script or an original RT Script. As displayed in Table 5, 67.3% or 95 scripts were adapted from children's literature, either picture or chapter books. Several titles are classic children's works like *Goodnight Moon*

(1947/2007) by Margaret Wise Brown and *Miss Nelson is Missing* (1977/1985) by Harry Allard, along with some more recent adaptations from the work of Laura Numeroff and Kevin Henkes.

Original RT scripts comprise the next largest category of scripts with 19 (13.5%). Two authors or “playwrights” are credited with more than half of the original RT scripts, Lisa Blau and Chase Young. Upon further research, Ms. Blau, teacher and author, has developed a series of RT collections ranging from science to a specific book dedicated to folktales and fables designated as multicultural (*Favorite Folktales & Fabulous Fables*, 1997). Dr. Young is a current scholar specializing in the use of RT as a tool to promote reading achievement. As was mentioned previously, the collection of RT scripts analyzed for this study come from his website, *The Best Class* (2019).

The remaining categories combine for 17.71% of RT scripts sources. Of the 27 scripts, traditional stories make up the bulk of works, ranging from *Little Red Riding Hood* (Perrault, 1697) to *Jack & The Beanstalk* (Tabart, 1807). *Little Red Riding Hood* was first a French publication (Best Books for Kids, 2018) and *Jack and the Beanstalk*, an English publication (Quinn & Wild, n.d.). One script is taken from a traditional Indian moral (Dinu, 2012), *Birbal’s Trip to Paradise* (n.d.) while a single script is adapted from an American urban legend, *The Clown Statue* (n.d.). Neither work has a credited author that could be discovered.

**Table 5**

*Source of Script or Script Adaptation*

Source	Percentage	Total Number of Scripts
Book (Picture or Chapter)	67.3 %	95
Reader’s Theatre Script	13.5%	19
Fairy Tale Adaptation	6.38 %	9
Poem Adaptation	5.67 %	8



Folktale Adaptation	4.25 %	6
Fable Adaptation	1.41 %	2
Moral Adaptation	0.71 %	1
Urban Legend Adaptation	0.71 %	1

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

All students should be able to see themselves and experiences they can relate to in the literature utilized in their classrooms. In other words, students should have opportunities to listen to, read from, and participate with literature that is culturally meaningful and representative. Often the terms “mirrors” and “windows” are used as metaphors when discussing multicultural children’s literature (Bishop, 1990; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Northrop et al., 2019). A classroom should be full of “mirrors” or literature that reflects their culture and experiences (Northrop et al., 2019, p. 248). Likewise, “windows” or literature about the experiences and lives of others should be an important component of classrooms so that students can learn from one another (Northrop et al., 2019, p. 249). When these types of learning opportunities are present, students “perceive the classroom as being inclusive of and affirmative of students’ racial and cultural experiences” (Northrup et al., 2019, p. 248).

Taking “mirrors” and “windows” into account, RT that is culturally responsive can be a high-quality match for such an endeavor to fill a classroom with authentic and meaningful multicultural literature. The chance for students to engage in strategies, like RT, that bring to light their lived experiences and culture can be invaluable. Teaching that is culturally responsive and thoughtfully implemented provides such experiences leading to students having higher interest, seeing school as more meaningful, and regarding academic skills much more easily,

along with recognizing that education can and should be a part of their humanity and culture (Gay, 2018).

Standing on its own merits, RT has been proven to be a successful literacy tool as students show increases in competence, confidence, and motivation due to the very nature of the strategy. They are working alongside their peers to achieve a common goal, all the while growing in their own reading achievement (Young et al., 2017, p. 351). Imagine the possibilities of weaving together RT and CLR. The opportunities for students to stand with one another learning about and sharing new ideas, different cultures, experiences, and backgrounds (Cho, 2012; Gottfried, 2014) would be the kind of powerful moments that educators long for.

The challenge then (of which there are many) specifically in regards to this study comes in the form of literature that is not just available to implement, but meaningful and authentic. Unfortunately, this appears to be easier said than done. The results of this analysis demonstrate that even resources made available to teachers by well-intentioned fellow educators miss this mark in providing avenues to incorporate culturally authentic RT resources into a classroom.

The term authentic has been used frequently throughout this analysis. Authentic, as defined by Merriam-Webster (2020) is “something worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact.” The example the online dictionary provides states, “That something authentic paints an authentic picture of our society” (Merriam-Webster.com, 2020). That perfectly sums up the type of scripts and literature teachers should use when incorporating CLR RT into their instruction. The resources should without question paint an authentic picture for students of their own and other’s experiences.

By using the CLR Dots Assessment (Hollie, 2018) and the National OHS Evaluation Criteria (2020) as guides, The Best Class (Young, 2019) collection as a whole will be assessed as

to the level of cultural and linguistic authenticity. The following are the most relevant data in making that assessment.

After studying 141 scripts from *The Best Class* (2019), only three authors of the chosen literature analyzed contained in the collection included people of color (Lenore Look, Carmen Agra-Deedy, and Tim Tingle). Of the 141 scripts, it was determined through analysis of the RT script and additional resources, only a total of ten scripts were written with people of color as main characters (*Alvin Ho*, 2007/2009; *Birbal's Trip to Paradise*, n.d.; *Crossing Bok Chito: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom*, 2006/2008; *The Elephant's Child*, 1902; *Gabriel's Horses*, 2007/2013, *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach*, 2007/2008; *Sadako & The Thousand Paper Cranes*, 1999/2004; *Stonecutter*, n.d.; *The Snowy Day*, 1962/1976; *The Three Little Javelinas*, 1992/2009). Though only three of the ten selections were written by people of color, there is at least some representation of diversity within the collection, however small (7.09%). Nevertheless, depictions of people of color must be authentic and not merely a token inclusion, as many would say is the case in *The Snowy Day* (1962). The main character could be easily portrayed by any child or any race, which according to Hollie (2018) is a culturally generic text.

Folktales, fables, fairytales, and morals would be excellent sources of scripts to include in a classroom collection. Sharing stories from cultures around the world with classmates would be a wonderful way to share families, traditions, and heritages. A positive of the collection is that there are several traditional tales included, but most are claimed from White European or European Caucasian beginnings, such as *Little Red Riding Hood* (1697) estimated to have been originally published in the 17th century by Perrault and then attributed by the Grimm Brothers (Best Books for Kids, 2018). Even *One Potato, Two Potato* (2006) which is originally a Chinese folktale, is included as an Irish tale within this group of stories. There are however a small

number of stories, like *Birbal's Trip to Paradise* (n.d.) that provide an example of a moral based on a person of color from India and is adapted in an authentic manner (Dinu, 2012).

As literary works by and about people of color made small increases over the last few years, this collection did not show the same trend. In fact, even with the increase of titles written about and by multicultural authors, *The Best Class* (Young, 2019) only included two RT scripts from the last decade, "Food Fight" (2010/2012), a poem by Kenn Nesbitt in *When the Teacher Isn't Looking* (2010/2012) and *Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes* by Eric Litwin (2008/2010). The scripts of the 2000s make up the decade with the most titles, but to keep up with the demand that a CLR classroom requires, educators should have the most current and relevant literature to choose from.

Considering the criteria of Hollie's (2018) assessment and National Head Start Office, the collection of RT scripts from *The Best Class* (Young, 2019) website falls quite short in meeting a high level as an authentic resource for culturally responsive teaching. One of the most basic criteria of both assessments is that an educator's collection contains a variety of multicultural literature representing all cultures, languages, and ethnicities in a classroom. Focusing specifically on home language, criteria nine on Hollie's assessment, only *Alvin Ho* (Look, 2009), *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* (Agra-Deedy, 2007/2008), *Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom*, 2006/2008), and *The Three Little Javelinas* (Lowell, 1992/2009) even come close to meeting that standard.

The works should also include meaningful examples of people with disabilities and those identifying as part of the LGBTQ community. Gender stereotypes should be broken within the scripts included in a CLR RT collection, as well as including positive portrayals of often misrepresented or mis portrayed ethnicities. Even with the ten titles considered multicultural,

only three were written by people of color. The visibility of diverse authors is important to making a classroom collection of RT literature and scripts more meaningful to students who may not always have those literary role models to look up to. Simply, the minute number of diverse examples of scripts in The Best Class (Young, 2019) RT collection make it nearly impossible for it to be considered an authentic resource to use when searching for a valid tool to continue foster a CLR classroom.

### **Limitations**

From the information available on The Best Class website (Young, 2019), it is difficult to make a determination as to the criteria Dr. Young used to compile his list of RT scripts. Having that information would be valuable to see if the collection was created with cultural and linguistic responsiveness in mind. Further, it would be interesting to conduct a second analysis of the remaining 90 scripts to see if the percentages hold true and consistent with the 141 scripts analyzed for this study. Finally, due to the lack of information regarding the use of the scripts, not all of Hollie's CLR Dots assessment (2018) could be implemented. For example, criteria one requires more detail as to the literacy skills and assessments used with instruction and criteria three refers to the target audience or make-up of the classroom. Each of these items would make the analysis even more thorough and more useful.

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## Appendix A

### Responsive Dots: Assessing Literature for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

1. Text supports literacy skills and assessments for content being taught or introduced.
2. Characters are presented in the context of race and diversity, not tokenism.
3. Text is culturally authentic and relevant to the intended audience.
4. Some aspect of the rings of culture is included in the text.
5. The text recognizes and/or displays superficial cultural behaviors with purpose.
6. The text is from an author, publisher, or source that has proven reliable and accurate with cultural knowledge. The book has received awards indicating cultural relevance or validation.
7. The text recognizes or displays shallow and/or deep cultural behaviors with purpose.
8. The context is (setting, situation, and/or environment) authentically culturally based.
9. Home language is authentically represented in the text.
10. The text validates and affirms cultural and linguistic behaviors explicitly.

*Note.* Adapted from *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning: Classroom Practices for Student Success*, by S. Hollie, 2018, p. 237. Copyright 2018 by Shell Education.

*Note.* Criteria 1 and Criteria 3 were not applicable as there was not a specific audience or skill/content being addressed during this analysis.

## Appendix B

### Office of Head Start National Center for Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Criteria

1. Books about people that represent all of the cultures, languages, and ethnicities in the program.
2. Books about children who are bicultural and/or show bicultural experiences.
3. Books about immigrant and refugee experiences.
4. Books that reflect a wide range of cultures and many books about each culture.
5. Books that positively show many different lifestyles (adoptive parents, single parent households, LGBT families, foster families, multigenerational families, grandparents raising grandchildren, etc.).
6. Books that portray children with disabilities positively and as active, capable main characters.
7. Books that show female characters in positive, active roles that break gender stereotypes.
8. Books that show male characters that break gender role stereotypes.
9. Books that feature men of color in positive roles and in roles as fathers.

*Note.* From *Selecting and Using Culturally Responsive Children's Books*. Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2020, p. 1. The Office of Head Start National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness. Public Domain  
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/selecting-culturally-appropriate-books.pdf>

### Appendix C

#### List of Reader's Theatre Scripts from *The Best Class*

\*An asterisk denotes first recognized or most well-known author of publication, but origin is contested.

<b>Title of Script</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Year</b>
A Little Excitement	Harshman, Marc	1989
The Aliens Have Landed	Nesbitt, Kenn	2001
Alvin Ho	Look, Lenore	2009
Animal Trainer	No Author	No Date
Ant & The Grasshopper	Aesop	6 <sup>th</sup> Century BC
Arthur's Christmas	Brown, Marc	1984
Arthur the Brave	Brown, Marc	2001
Atherton: The House of Power	Carman, Patrick	2007
Bear, Bears, Bears	Blau, Lisa	1994
Big Al	Clements, Andrew	1989
Birbal's Trip to Paradise	No Author	16 <sup>th</sup> Century
Blow Your Nose	Lansky, Bruce	1998
Bob the Snowman	Loretan, Sylvia	1988
Brave Irene	Steig, William	1986
The Bremen Town Musicians	Brothers Grimm*	1819
Bubba the Cowboy Prince	Ketterman, Helen	1997
Chicken Little	No Author	19 <sup>th</sup> Century
Christmas Everywhere	Brooks, Phillip	1903
Cinderella	Perrault, Charles*	1697
Clever Lucy	No Author	No Date
Click Clack Moo: Cows That Type	Cronin, Doreen	1999
The Clown Statue	No Author	No Date
The Crazy Critters	Walker, Lois	2007
Crossing Bok Chitto: A Choctaw Tale	Tingle, Tim	2006
Dog Breath	Pilkey, Dave	1994
Don't Let the Pigeon Stay up Late	Willems, Mo	2006
Dooby Dooby Moo	Cronin, Doreen	2006
Double Trouble in Walla Walla	Clements, Andrew	1997
Duck for President	Cronin, Doreen	2004
The Elephant's Child	Kipling, Rudyard	1900
Evil Lurks	No Author	No Date
Fanny	Hobbie, Holly	2008
Fifty Cent Piece	Schlosser, S.E.	No Date
The Fish Tank	No Author	No Date
Food Fight	Nesbitt, Kenn	2010
The Fourth Little Pig	Celsi, Teresa	1990
Frog or Toad	Lynch, Patricia	No Date
Gabriel's Horses	Hart, Alison	2007
The Gingerbread Boy	Galdone, Paul	1975
Girls are Red and Boys are Blue	Young, Chase	No Date

Go Exploring in Books	Blau, Lisa	1994
Goldilocks	Marshall, James*	1988
Goodnight Goon	Rex, Michael	2008
Goodnight Moon	Brown, Margaret W.	1947
Grandpa for Sale	Enderle, Dottie	2007
Green Kangaroo	Blume, Judy	1969
Gullible's Troubles	Shannon, Margaret	1988
Hansel & Gretel	Brothers Grimm*	1812
Happy National Pig Day	Blau, Lisa	1994
The Hat	Brett, Jan	1997
Hedgie's Surprise	Brett, Jan	2000
Helen Keller: A Remarkable Woman	Blau, Lisa	1994
Hey Little Ant	Hoose, Phillip/Hannah	1998
Hounds of Rowan	Neff, Henry	2007
How to Steal a Dog	O'Connor, Barbara	2007
I AM The Most Important	Bowden, Amy	No Date
I Before E Except After C	Pankey, Rachel	No Date
I Know an Old Teacher	Bowen, Anne	2008
Infantry	No Author	No Date
If You Give a Pig a Pancake	Numeroff, Laura	1998
If You Take a Mouse to School	Numeroff, Laura	2002
Is Your Mama a Llama	Guarino, Deborah	1998
Jack and The Beanstalk	Tabart, Benjamin	1807
Jessica	Henkes, Kevin	1989
Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key	Gantos, Jack	1998
Just Grace	Harper, Charise	2007
The King of the Wild Frontier	Young, Chase	No Date
The King's Wish	Elkin, Benjamin	1960
Lady Liberty: A Biography	Rappaport, Doreen	2008
Lawn Boy	Paulsen, Gary	2007
Listen Buddy	Lester, Helen	1995
The Little Red Hen	Dodge, Mary M.	1874
Little Red Riding Hood	Perrault, Charles*	1697
The Little Old Lady Who Wasn't Afraid of Anything	Williams, Linda	1986
The Magic Flamingo	No Author	No Date
The Magic Porridge Pot	Blau, Lisa	1994
Martina the Beautiful Cockroach	Agra-Deedy, Carman	2007
Maybelle in the Soup	Speck, Katie	2007
Me First	Lester, Helen	1992
Miss Nelson is Missing	Allard, Harry	1977
Moe the Tropical Dog in Paradise	Stanley, Diane	1992
Mrs. Toggle's Zipper	Pulver, Robin	1990
My Friend is Sad	Willems, Mo	2007
New Year's Resolutions	Watts, Francis B.	No Date
Night of the Blizzard	Andrews, Mary E.	No Date

No Bath Tonight	Yolen, Jane	1978
Nory Ryan's Song	Giff, Patricia Reilly	2000
One Handed Catch	Auch, M.J.	2006
One Potato, Two Potato	DeFelice, Cynthia	2006
Owen	Henkes, Kevin	1993
The Paper Bag Princess	Munsch, Robert	1980
Pale Male	Schulman, Janet	2008
The Penderwicks on Gardam Street	Birdsall, Jeanne	2008
Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes	Litwin, Eric	2010
Piper Reed Navy Brat	Holt, Kimberly W.	2007
The Polar Express	Van Alsbury, Chris	1985
Puppies for Sale	Clark, Dan	1999
The Rain Forest	Blau, Lisa	1994
The Really Ugly Duckling	Sciezka, Jon	1992
The Red Balloon	Lamossire, Albert	1956
Redhead Robbie's Christmas Story	Luttrell, Bill	2003
Riddles in the Dark	Tolkien, J.R.R.	1966
Roger and the Three Knocks	Young, Chase	No Date
Rumpelstiltskin	Fischart, Johann*	16 <sup>th</sup> Century
Rump and Ugly	No Author	No Date
The Runaway Snowman	Schaffer, Frank	1982
Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes	Coerr, Eleanor	1999
Sam Houston	Young, Chase	No Date
Sheila Rae the Brave	Henkes, Kevin	1996
Shoe Town	Stevens, Janet	1999
Skippyjon Jones	Schachner, Judy	2003
Sleeping Beauty	Perrault, Charles*	1697
Sleeping Ugly	Yolen, Jane	1981
Snowballs	Elhert, Lois	1995
Snowed in at Pokeweed Public School	Bianchi, John	1991
The Snowy Day	Keats, Ezra Jack	1962
Star Light, Star Bright	Lansky, Bruce	1996
Stone Soup	Hawes, Allison	2000
Stonecutter	No Author	No Date
Swimming Ool	Nesbitt, Kenn	2003
There's a Bird on Your Head	Willems, Mo	2007
The Three Billy Goats Gruff	Galdone, Paul	1981
The Three Little Javelinas	Lowell, Susan	1992
The Three Wishes	Blau, Lisa	1994
Today I Will Fly	Willems, Mo	2007
Toys Go Out	Jenkins, Emily	2006
The True Story of the Three Little Pigs	Sciezka, Jon	1989
Turkey Trotten	No Author	No Date
'Twas the Night Before Christmas	Moore, Clement, M.*	1823
The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Carle, Eric	1969
Weekend with Wendell	Henkes, Kevin	1986

Wemberly Worried	Henkes, Kevin	2000
Whales	Gibson, Gail	1991
What a Mighty Roar: Meet the Big Cats	Blau, Lisa	1994
What Do You Come For	Schwartz, Alvin	1981
What to Do About Alice	Kerley, Barbara	2008
What You Never Knew About Beds, Bedrooms, and Pajamas	Lauber, Patricia	2006
Where the Wild Things Are	Sendak, Maurice	1963
Where Once There Was a Wood	Fleming, Denise	1996
Wizard, The Fairy, and the Magic Chicken	Lester, Helen	1983
The Wolf Who Cried Boy	Hartman, Bob	2002

*Note.* Adapted from *Readers Theater: Alphabetical listing of Readers Theater scripts with number of parts*. The Best Class, by C. Young, 2019. <http://www.thebestclass.org/rtscripts.html>

### Chapter 3

#### Reader's Theatre as a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching Strategy:

#### Preservice Teachers' Perceptions

#### Abstract

This study is a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the understandings and perceptions of preservice teachers regarding the use of Reader's Theater as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. The purpose of this analysis was to gain the insights of preservice teachers in terms of their understanding of Reader's Theatre and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices individually and collectively. Overall, the study gleaned information as to the value of combining the two teaching practices as one avenue to help foster a culturally responsive learning environment. Through entrance and exit slips and participant interviews, Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (2006) was employed to analyze the data resulting in three main themes: (1) *Value and Versatility of Reader's*, (2) *Increased Awareness of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching*, and (3) *Instructional Intent of Reader's Theatre*. The participants' strongest opinions centered on the need for purposeful intent to incorporate Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. On its own merits, participants stressed that Reader's Theatre, though still a valuable teaching strategy with or without being culturally responsive, is not necessarily culturally and linguistically responsive and could even lead to negative results for students. This type of study can provide useful information to a variety of educators, especially those preparing preservice teachers to lead culturally and linguistically responsive classrooms.

## Introduction

Educators must rise to the challenge of meeting the needs of their students in the ever-changing cultural makeup of the classroom. Nearly 51 million students attended public K-12 schools during the 2019-2020 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Of that number, 27.1 million students (53%) were classified as students of color or of diverse backgrounds with Hispanic and Black students being responsible for the largest numbers, 13.9 million and 7.7 million, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Veteran, novice, and preservice teachers alike must be prepared to adapt their teaching to support diverse student populations (Barnes, 2006; Hollie, 2018; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Sirota & Bailey, 2009; Sleeter, 2001; Sleeter & Owuor, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). According to Villegas and Lucas (2007), educators must strive to adhere to a “new way of looking at teaching that is grounded in an understanding of the role of culture and language in learning” (p. 29).

Alongside veteran teachers, preservice teachers (PSTs) will be confronted with the challenges of a more diverse student population. Daniel (2016) states, “The demographic imperative in the United States demands that prospective elementary teachers learn to educate culturally and linguistically diverse students effectively” (p. 580). Meaningful relationships *must be formed*, and equitable practices should be embarked upon when supporting students from diverse backgrounds (Acquah & Szelei, 2020; Adams, 2016). For many PSTs, the problematic issues that arise are understanding how to implement strategies that can address the needs of the diverse learning community as well as being offered opportunities to engage in culturally responsive experiences (Daniel, 2016; Hollie, 2018; Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009; Sleeter, 2001; Ullucci, 2011).



One teaching strategy that has the potential to address cultural diversity during PST's student teaching placements is the literacy tool Reader's Theatre (RT). RT is a literacy strategy that incorporates repeated readings and an eventual performance of original or adapted simple dramatic works to foster growth in reading fluency and prosody. The use of RT has shown positive benefits in both the academic and social realms of the classroom (Cho, 2012; Clementi, 2010; Garrett & O'Connor, 2010; Liu, 2000; Rasinski et al., 2017; Weisenburger, 2009; Young et al., 2017). RT that is implemented with diverse representation at its core can provide all students the opportunity to share their culture, family stories and traditions, and lived experiences as well as listen to and learn from others as well as gain understanding from authentic multicultural texts used for RT scripts (Fredericks, 2011; Lengeling, 1995; Liu, 2000; Weisenburger, 2009; Zambo, 2011). Using RT as a tool to address the cultural and linguistic needs of students aligns with the work of Casey and Chamberlin (2006) who state that meaningful instruction through RT should be based on "specific student needs" (p. 24). Knowing students as individuals and meeting those individual needs is at the very heart of teaching in culturally responsive ways (Acquah & Szelei, 2020; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). The addition of RT to the elementary classrooms allows for a variety of benefits, most importantly opportunities for students to share culturally relevant experiences (Avi, 2009; Haag, 2018; Poe, 2010; Zambo, 2011). Haag (2018) states the importance of RT in that it allows for, "a wider lens of our human experience as it places us in different contexts" (p. 121).

### **Reader's Theatre and Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching**

Preservice teachers (PST) searching for tools and strategies to meet the needs of their students in today's multicultural classrooms can look to Reader's Theatre (RT) as a valuable and

effective literacy tool (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006; Mraz et al., 2013; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young, 2014). More often than not, RT is viewed as an avenue that leads to increases in reading achievement, specifically fluency with improvement in prosody and meaning, accuracy, and word recognition (Young & Rasinski, 2009). However, RT that is implemented in classrooms as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching tool has the possibility to lead to both academic and social gains (Cho, 2012; Clementi, 2010; Garrett & O'Connor, 2010; Gottfried, 2014; Liu, 2000; Rasinski et al., 2017; Weisenburger, 2009; Young et al., 2017).

Chances to engage with RT that are culturally responsive as an avenue to foster a learning community that inspires academic success as well as affirmation and validation of students' cultural heritages (Hollie, 2018) could prove beneficial to the PST experience. A classroom that embraces culturally responsive teaching practices, such as RT, makes use of students' cultures, heritages, frames of reference, and lived experiences, and teaching that is geared to the individual student (Acquah & Szelei, 2020; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009). By using a strategy like RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive tool, learning transitions from what does not work for students to what does (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Student experiences and traditions are celebrated, providing a means of representation for students often overlooked which allows students to become active participants in knowledge production, which leads to a more equitable learning environment (Acquah & Szelei, 2020; Freire, 2018; Gay, 2018; Hollie, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Smit, 2012).

### ***What is Reader's Theatre?***

Over time, the evolution of RT from a purely simple dramatic device of 1940's New York City transitioned to a valued educational tool in today's classrooms focusing on reading achievement (Eckersley, 2016). In the classroom, RT is a literacy strategy that makes use of

original or adapted simple dramatic works to help students improve fluency and prosody through repeated practice and performance. RT can be incorporated into daily reading instruction in place of other traditional fluency strategies culminating with a performance for peers or invited guests (Martinez et al., 1998; Worthy, 2005; Young et al., 2019; Young & Rasinski, 2009, 2017).

Worthy (2005) explains RT in this manner, “Readers Theater is an instructional approach in which students read a book (or hear a book read aloud) and then perform a play (the book written in script form) by reading the script aloud to an audience” (p. 12).

As Casey and Chamberlin (2006) describe, RT allows students to grow in their reading abilities through meaningful opportunities to engage in repeated practice and successfully perform a variety of simple dramatic scripts. Continuing, they highlight the success of using RT as students’ levels of confidence increase with each performance with the goal of repeating this success with different texts (p. 18). Because RT requires no memorization, costumes, props, or scenery and can be implemented based on both reading ability and areas of interest, it can be beneficial to a vast array of students from different backgrounds (Clark et al., 2009; Keehn, 2003; Rasinski et al., 2017; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young & Nageldinger, 2014). Fredericks (2011) elaborates further on the value of RT in this way, “In essence, readers theatre is an opportunity to share, a time to creatively interact with others, and a personal interpretation of what can be or could be” (p. 42).

This versatile literacy tool can positively impact students from a multitude of backgrounds. Research demonstrates that RT can be a motivational bridge connecting the academic and social worlds (Garrett & O’Connor, 2010; Rasinski et al., 2017) fostering not just growth in reading ability, but a sense of belonging in the academic world. Through the use of RT, it has been documented that students gain a feeling of empowerment in the classroom

community with opportunities to improve their reading and successfully perform scripts in front of peers, families, and guests (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006; Jeffries, 2014; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young & Rasinski, 2009). For many, RT provides the first chance for students to grow from a place of insecurity and exclusion to being recognized and accepted in an academic environment, “Readers Theatre had a profound positive effect on all readers and gave an opportunity for struggling readers to read fearlessly in the limelight” (Young & Rasinski, 2009, p. 13).

RT has the capacity to transform literacy instruction into an engaging learning experience, meeting the needs of students from a range of different academic and social backgrounds (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2014; Weisenburger, 2009; Zambo, 2011). Jeffries and Jeffries (2014), in their work with cultural signification, African American girls, and RT, describe the value of RT in this way, “The ability of reader’s theatre to transform children’s literature into active lessons where students read/recite lines from scripts transferred from an existing text or created scripts from their original stories is tremendous” (p. 205). Simply put, RT is “reading with a purpose and reading that is motivational and productive” (Fredericks, 2011, p. 43). Fredericks’ (2011), expressing enthusiasm for RT as a strategy to meet the needs of all students, states:

It is delightful and stimulating, encouraging and fascinating, relevant and personal. Indeed, try as I might, I have not been able to locate a single instance (or group of children) in which (or for whom) readers theatre would not be an appropriate learning activity. It is a strategy filled with a cornucopia of imaginative ventures. (p. 43)

RT is a proven literacy strategy that fosters increases in reading achievement and motivation to read in students of all backgrounds and abilities (Fredericks, 2011; Garrett & O’Connor, 2010;

Rasinski et al., 2017). A connection with culturally and linguistically responsive teaching may increase its value within the classroom even more.

### ***What is Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching?***

Educators who strive to foster culturally responsive classrooms and implement culturally and linguistically responsive teaching must embrace qualities set forth by scholars like Gay (2002), Hollie (2018), Ladson-Billings (2004, 2008), Toppel (2015), and Villegas and Lucas (2007) that promote opportunities for students to be seen, accepted, and represented in the classroom on a daily basis allowing them to not just to succeed, but flourish. Hollie (2018) stresses that for teachers to accomplish this the “cultural and linguistic factors in their worlds” must be taken into account (p. 27). By employing culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, educators engage students by way of family and community histories or experiences (Hammond, 2015). These tools, most often from oral traditions, enhance transfer of knowledge and opportunities for valuable meaning-making (Hammond, 2015).

When culturally and linguistically responsive teaching is absent in the classroom students from diverse backgrounds are negatively perceived and “all too frequently seen as deficient, deviant, defiant, disruptive, and disrespectful” (Hollie, 2018, p. 31). Hollie (2018) elaborates further on educators’ negative perceptions of traditionally underserved students stating, “What they bring to the classroom culturally and linguistically is not seen as an asset but as a liability” (p. 31). Inequitable academic environments, skewing overly positive toward one group while remaining overly negative towards another have been shown to result in challenging behaviors, students’ low self-images, and lack of motivation in diverse student populations and perpetuates teacher biases (Cheesman & De Pry, 2010). In fact, the work of Sirota and Bailey (2009) demonstrated that both veteran and novice teachers, African American and White, along with

PSTs, viewed students of color and students from low socio-economic backgrounds negatively. To combat this type of unbalanced learning environment, educators can employ certain objectives or standards into their teaching with the goal of fostering a learning community based on cultural and linguistic responsiveness (Gay, 2002; Hollie, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2008; Toppel, 2015; Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

There is a wealth of research as to what objectives or standards teachers should strive to implement for culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (Hollie, 2018; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). One conceptualization of six culturally responsive teaching practice goals was set forth by Villegas and Lucas (2007). First, educators should recognize that culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning is a co-constructed endeavor between teacher and students. Second, educators must develop meaningful relationships with their students by learning about the many layers of each student's life. Learning about family history, traditions, and even concerns regarding school are important to knowing students. Third, teachers should develop a deeper sociocultural consciousness. Villegas and Lucas stress the importance of understanding that individuals have different life stories and experiences that form from social and political influences. Fourth, teachers must have attitudes that are affirming, validating, and respectful of diversity both inside and outside of the learning environment. In doing so, students can recognize the confidence the teacher has in them as learners. Fifth, engagement of all students through meaningful and appropriate instructional strategies is key. Finally, sixth, being an advocate for students is crucial, "Teaching is an ethical activity, and teachers have an ethical obligation to help all students learn. To meet this obligation, teachers need to serve as advocates for their students, especially those students who have been traditionally marginalized in schools" (p. 32).

The recommendations of Villegas and Lucas (2007) align nicely with the work of Ladson-Billings (2008) as she too stresses the importance of developing both cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness, as well supporting and cultivating students' minds. Likewise, Gay (2002) concurs with these objectives for educators creating a culturally and linguistically responsive environment while highlighting a specific focus on caring and communicating across cultures. One final recurring theme in work by Gay (2002), Ladson-Billings (2008), Toppel (2015), Ullucci (2011), and Villegas and Lucas (2007), is the need to provide access to culturally authentic, relevant, and appropriate curriculum, instruction, texts and resources. When these kinds of objectives are incorporated into the classroom, there is the possibility for "academic success and critical consciousness" (Ullucci, 2011, p. 390).

Finally, Souto-Manning and Martell (2017) echo the sentiments of the above scholars as they recommend four distinct goals for teachers to consider resulting from their work with a dual-language, second-grade classroom located in New York City. First, identify the potential in each student. In other words, "See all students as capable and worthy" (p. 255). Second, make a concerted effort to learn about and know your students, including families and communities. Souto-Manning and Martell (2017) state, "Develop relationships, value their knowledge, and incorporate this knowledge in your curriculum and teaching" (p. 255). Next, in short, listen. It is important for teachers to recognize both student interests and questions so that, "teachers can take them up and make authentic connections to curriculum and teaching" (p. 255). Last, support a development of a critical consciousness in students by having students question inequity, "Instead of accepting inequities in the world they live in, work with them to ask critical questions" (p. 255).

Without a culturally and linguistically responsive learning community, the risk is that educators will “ignore their students’ ethnic identities and their unique cultural beliefs, perceptions, and worldviews” (Irvine, 2003, p. xvii). Further, the lack of a supportive learning environment and minimal knowledge of effective culturally and linguistically responsive practices by educators can lead to negative experiences, reinforced prejudices, and, in the end, an impact on the academic success of students (Barnes, 2006; Delpit, 2006; Howard & del Rosario, 2000; Irvine, 2003; Sirota & Bailey, 2009). Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching combats all of this so that there is “*validation and affirmation* of indigenous (home) culture and language for the purpose of *building and bridging* the students to success in the culture and academia and in mainstream society” (Hollie, 2018, p. 27). Concurring, Barnes (2006) stresses the importance of incorporating culturally and linguistically responsive teaching because, “It requires teachers to create a learning environment where all students are welcomed, supported, and provided with the best opportunities to learn regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds” (p. 86). Simply, “all children can benefit from a diverse and inclusive curriculum” (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017, p. 252).

### ***Reader’s Theatre as an Effective Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Strategy***

The addition of RT to a classroom curriculum can benefit students in a variety of ways. First, for teachers who have experience implementing RT into their daily instruction, the prime benefit is that of increases in fluency and comprehension (Garrett & O’Connor, 2010; Keehn, 2003; Mraz et al., 2013; Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young & Nageldinger, 2014; Young & Rasinski, 2009; Young et al., 2016). According to Trainin and Andrzejczak (2006), following their analysis of three separate RT studies, RT was found to be an effective reading strategy to foster increased achievement in fluency and comprehension, “These



series of studies has shown that a carefully conducted Readers Theater component can increase student performance in both fluency and comprehension” (p. 6). Mraz et al. (2013) concur with those findings following their work with struggling third grade readers. They state that teachers should give serious thought to incorporating RT as a means of support for struggling readers. Results from their study showed increases in fluency and comprehension development, especially with, “those students who struggle to develop fluency and comprehension” (p. 176).

Second, multiple studies demonstrate that RT can have a motivational impact on all types of readers (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006; Garrett & O’Connor, 2010; Mraz et al., 2013; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young et al., 2017; Young & Rasinski, 2009). According to Worthy and Prater (2002), “Time after time, teachers have reported that it is the single most motivating, effective reading activity they have used” (p. 295). Young, Stokes, and Rasinski (2017) elaborate further on the motivational factors of RT as students are presented with opportunities to be successful in the classroom as they, “stand alongside their peers and read aloud with confidence and competence” (p. 351).

Next, the inclusion of RT in classrooms can be an avenue to foster caring learning communities. Clark et al. (2009) reported students gained feelings of purpose and belonging due to participation with RT. Learning communities making use of RT encompass a variety of cultural backgrounds, grade levels, and ability levels (Clark et al., 2009; Clementi, 2010; Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Liu, 2000; Rasinski et al., 2017; Weisenburger, 2009; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young & Nageldinger, 2014). Given that RT has been demonstrated to be a versatile teaching strategy, providing avenues of support, care, and acceptance, adapting it to be culturally and linguistically responsive may provide “for students to understand one another’s perspectives through cooperative and supportive interactions” (Liu, 2000, p. 359).

Noddings' (2002) work with the components of caring also provide evidence as to how RT employed as a culturally and linguistically responsive strategy in the classroom could be successful. Noddings states, "To develop the capacity to care, one must engage in caregiving activities" (p. 19). The four main components of caring align with the process of implementing RT in instruction. Students are given opportunities to see their teachers model caring behavior, as well as model caring behaviors themselves. Students participate in meaningful dialogue about caring and engage in meaningful and purposeful practices that promotes that caring. Finally, the students' caring behaviors are confirmed and validated. These four aspects of caring can be carried out with any RT implementation through modeling, repeated practice of scripts, and especially confirmation through the successful performance of RT.

Cueva et al. (2012) highlight the value of RT as a meaningful teaching strategy to support cultural responsiveness during their work with Alaska Native and American Indian communities when tackling tough issues and increasing knowledge. They state, "Readers' Theatre integrates oral tradition, language and culture into a dynamic story that engages participants in an active process of reading and listening" (Cueva et al., 2012, p. 282). When students from diverse backgrounds see themselves represented as part of weekly literacy instruction, a sense of inclusion and affirmation of their cultural experiences develops (Liu, 2000; Northrup, 2019; Rasinski et al., 2017; Weisenburger, 2009).

Ultimately, the use of RT allows stories to be shared in the classroom community for the benefit of everyone, "In becoming culturally responsive teachers, stories become a way of building relationships and community in acknowledging, recognizing, and validating students' funds of knowledge" (Vitali, 2016, p. 27). Through RT that is culturally and linguistically responsive, PSTs are armed with an instructional strategy that supports their students in "terms

of academic achievement but also in social and emotional growth and empowerment” (Shevalier & McKenzie, 2012, p. 1102).

***The Importance of Providing Preservice Teachers Opportunities to Experience Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies such as Reader’s Theatre***

According to Lucas and Villegas (2013), efforts to provide meaningful and authentic instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students must begin with PST preparation and continue for the duration of the teaching career. This preparation must address the needs of diverse students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through encouragement, support, and camaraderie, as well as curriculum that meets individual student needs (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2008). However, teacher education or preparation in the traditional sense has provided PSTs with opportunities to engage in multicultural courses and activities sometimes leading to a sanitized equal treatment of all students while minimizing differences (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2008). These kinds of teacher education efforts have minimally impacted culturally responsive teaching practices for PSTs and have not allowed PSTs to examine their own cultural backgrounds and develop a sociocultural consciousness (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2008). Instead, culturally and linguistically responsive opportunities offered during teacher preparation should lead to “an awareness of not only cultural similarities but a deeper understanding of the influence of cultural differences on teaching and learning” (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2008, p. 124). Thus, to avoid the trap of PSTs resorting to “generic good teaching practices,” (de Jong et al., 2013, p. 95) without knowing the diverse characteristics of their students, teacher preparation programs must prioritize efforts to “equip such teachers with the necessary attitudes, skills, and knowledge to enable them to teach students from different backgrounds” (Sleeter & Owuor, 2011, p. 534).

Further, as PSTs grow in their level of cultural awareness and competence during their teacher preparation, they must construct a foundation of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices to support the culture, language, experiences, and traditions of their students (Brooks, 2015; Daniel, 2016; Hollie, 2018; Howrey & Wehlan-Kim, 2009; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Villegas and Lucas (2007) state, “Teachers who lack sociocultural consciousness will unconsciously and inevitably rely on their own personal experiences to make sense of students’ lives – an unreflective habit that often results in misinterpretation of those students’ experiences and leads to miscommunication” (p. 31). With that impact in mind, student teachers must embark upon the task of laying a foundation of fostering a classroom where bridges are built that take into account their students’ cultural and linguistic experiences (Hollie, 2018) through purposeful, meaningful, representational, and authentic curriculum and teaching strategies leading to success in the classroom community.

In a study about culturally responsive pedagogy and elementary preservice teachers (Daniel, 2016), one PST gave a first-hand account of their perception of the role teacher education played in preparing them for work with diverse populations, “Kat stated that the diversity coursework helped her gain awareness, but not practical suggestions for supporting culturally and linguistically diverse learners,” (p. 588). With these issues in mind, opportunities should be afforded to PSTs during teacher preparation, programs and experiential practices, “that will help prospective teachers translate such new visions into actual teaching practice in schools” (Acquah & Szelei, 2020, p. 157-158). Culturally and linguistically responsive RT may be such an opportunity.

PSTs should be prepared to meet the challenge of the diverse classrooms they will enter by employing a well-rounded teacher education experience that addresses culturally responsive

curriculum, content knowledge, pedagogy, students' home cultures and students' funds of knowledge (Gay, 2010; Lucas et al., 2008; Toppel, 2015; Vitali, 2016; Williams et al., 2016). By allowing PSTs opportunities to explore teaching strategies like RT through a culturally and linguistically responsive lens, PSTs can begin to fill their instructional toolbox to purposefully and intentionally support their students (Hollie, 2018). As Daniel (2016) states in her work with culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and teacher candidates (TC), having resources to apply to daily instruction can allow PSTs to move from the theoretical to the practical:

Applying their growing knowledge base from multicultural coursework to specific instructional interactions can help TCs to connect theories and principles of CRP with their actual practice. In turn TCs could develop a stronger base of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to integrate expertise from both the university and school-based communities toward the aim of enacting CRP in daily instruction. (Daniel, 2016, p. 597)

PSTs do not always leave the student teaching experience feeling adequately prepared to meet the demands of culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms (Daniel, 2016; de Jong et al., 2013; Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Sirota & Bailey, 2009). However, research into the use of RT that is culturally and linguistically responsive may provide more insight into the types of teaching opportunities that may benefit future PSTs. Ultimately, according to Barnes (2006), it is the responsibility of teacher educators to provide high-quality culturally responsive teaching experiences for their students so that, "preservice teachers understand their role in the global education system by learning to create successful opportunities for all learners" (p. 93).

### **Purpose**

At the heart of this study were the understandings and perceptions of PSTs related to their experiences with RT that were culturally and linguistically responsive. By engaging in these

experiences, PSTs provided insight into the value of using RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive tool in the elementary classroom to support the diversity of today's PK - 6-student population. Further, PSTs offered insight as to the challenges one may face when implementing such a device. The following research questions provided the foundation for the study:

1. What are preservice teachers' understanding of Reader's Theatre?
2. What are preservice teachers' understanding of a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
3. What are preservice teachers' understanding of Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
4. What are preservice teachers' perceptions of implementing Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
5. What are preservice teachers' perceptions of the value of implementing Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?

### **Method**

All methodological processes and procedures were approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### **Participants**

Participants were PSTs currently enrolled at a tier 1 research university located in the southeastern United States and part of a graduate cohort seeking master's degrees in curriculum and instruction at the elementary level along with earning teacher licensure (Pre-K to 6). They were enrolled in a spring 2021 course addressing culturally responsive teaching in the elementary classroom.

During the course, participants took part in discussions and activities that allowed them to explore and reflect upon their own cultural values and beliefs, support inclusive approaches to implement culturally and linguistic responsive teaching and learning, and promote and implement advocacy and social justice for their students. The course was led by the two primary instructors of the elementary education program. The culturally and linguistically Reader's Theatre experience during the spring course was led by the researcher as a guest lecturer. Due to the 2021 COVID-19 Pandemic, the spring course and RT instruction were delivered virtually via Zoom. Additionally, participants' RT experiences differed during their student teaching placements. For example, two PSTs were able to utilize RT in the traditional academic sense. However, the participants were unable to implement RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy during their spring student teaching placement.

Students in the culturally and linguistically responsive teaching course were provided an opportunity to volunteer, via a recruitment email, to participate in the study following instruction on RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. Within the recruitment email, interested PSTs were given an informational handout detailing the purpose of the research study as well as the role of the participants and the time commitment for the study.

PSTs were made aware that participation in the study was not required and would not affect their grade for the spring courses (i.e., students received no course credit for participating in the study). PSTs were asked to respond to the recruitment email within two days stating their desire to participate. From those volunteers, a sample of four students was selected who were not assigned to the researcher as their university supervisor as an ethical consideration to avoid any power dynamic issues. Once the final selection of participants was made, a confirmation email was sent to those selected asking them to sign and return the informed consent document. In this

confirmation email, participants were notified that data gathering interviews (to be conducted via Zoom) would be scheduled the following week. The interview portion of the study was be conducted entirely through Zoom.

## **Procedures**

Approximately four weeks after the RT instruction, the data gathering interviews were conducted via Zoom and transcribed by a secure transcription service. Following interview transcription, two member checks were employed in this study to raise the level of credibility as participants had opportunities to: (1) review transcript accuracy and (2) discuss the themes and sub themes contained in the findings. Each participant was sent a copy of their individual transcript and a list of the final themes and subthemes for reference. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen as an effective approach for this research project due to its flexible nature in that it can be applied to a variety of qualitative endeavors. This style of analysis is adaptable and thus, researchers are not constrained to “prescriptive, linear and inflexible rules when analysing data” (jvrafricagroup.co.za, 2016). Further, thematic analysis is viewed as an effective technique for beginning researchers to use as its concepts can be more easily understood and applied in the studies. Finally, thematic analysis provides avenues for presenting rich and detailed data, a tool to examine the participants’ differing perspectives, and an effective means of reporting the findings of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2017; King, 2004; Nowell et al., 2017).

## ***Data Collection***

Data collection began following the RT instruction during the culturally and linguistically responsive course held the first week of the 2021 spring semester (January 2021). Along with gathering demographic information and data regarding participants educational backgrounds and



experiences, insights into participants' perceptions and understandings of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, RT as an effective teaching strategy, and the combination of the two as a teaching strategy was collected. All participant interviews were conducted and audio recorded through Zoom.

During this stage of the study, the researcher collected data regarding the PSTs' experiences with and understandings of culturally and linguistically RT practices. The data gathering interview sessions were audio recorded using Zoom and lasted no longer than 90 minutes. A standardized open-ended interview was employed making use of a combination of four different types of interview questions: experience, opinion/value, knowledge, and background/demographic (Patton, 2014; see Appendix A). The interview questions were open-ended and asked in the same order; each with a singular focus to ensure clarity and avoid confusion while also incorporating probes for deeper participant responses (Gall et al., 2003; Patton, 2014; Turner, 2010). A complete list of the data-gathering interview questions is contained in Appendix A. Interviews were transcribed by a secure transcription service.

### *Data Analysis*

The transcribed audio-recorded interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, 2017), thematic analysis is a flexible tool that not only provides rich data and insightful findings but is also an efficient and effective technique for beginning researchers. The following are the six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

**Table 1***Six Phases of Thematic Analysis*

Thematic Analysis Phases	Description
1. Familiarization with the data	The researcher will immerse himself in the data through repeated or active reading searching for meanings or patterns. The entire set of data will be read at least once before coding begins
2. Generating initial codes	The first step of identifying relevant features or patterns in the data in context of the research questions. This allows similar data segments to be grouped together.
3. Searching for themes	The researcher will group codes together to demonstrate key patterns in the data. This should not be viewed as a simple discovery.
4. Reviewing themes	Generation of themes will be paused to assess whether suggested themes have clear and distinct characteristics fitting with the data set. This may lead to changes, discarding of themes and a restart of the previous phase.
5. Defining and naming themes	A brief summary will be written for each final theme. This allows for an efficient presentation or write-up of the final study.
6. Producing the report	The researcher will produce an analytic narrative combined with compelling extracts of data. The analysis will be organized by themes, but conclusions will be drawn across all themes.

*Note.* Adapted from “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” by V. Braun and V. Clarke, 2006, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101 (doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a). Copyright 2006 Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd.

Through the use of the phases of thematic analysis, meaningful excerpts of text were identified, individual codes were extrapolated, and overall themes relevant to the research questions emerged. To achieve this type of thematic analysis, open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), through line-by-line analysis of text was employed to discover common themes from

participant interviews. Axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) followed to find relationships or connections from themes that emerged during the open coding phase. Inductive and deductive approaches were incorporated allowing themes to emerge until saturation was achieved and no new themes were generated (Giorgi, 1997; Smith & Suby-Long, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **Researcher Positionality**

As an educator in the elementary classroom, it was important to acknowledge my background as a white male from the rural south. My teaching experiences were in two diverse rural southwest Virginia school systems. For 15 years, I taught in primary and upper grade level classrooms where if someone was just using a mere visual assessment of the of the student population, the classroom could be considered either lacking in cultural diversity or overflowing with students of differing cultural backgrounds. My goal was to provide an equitable learning environment to students, by affirming their cultural experiences.

My current role as an elementary supervisor and graduate assistant, mentoring master's candidates seeking their teaching licenses in elementary education, provided me with valuable experiences in supporting and helping to prepare future teachers to enter today's diverse classrooms. One of my focus areas included implementing culturally and linguistically responsive strategies with PSTs.

My review of research focused on two main topics, RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. The research consistently supported the positive impacts of implementing RT into elementary classrooms as a way to motivate all types of learners. Taking these well-researched strategies into account, this further supports my belief that combining RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices are of high value and can be beneficial in today's diverse classrooms.

A reflexive journal was kept to ensure authentic bracketing of my assumptions about RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices. My goal was to diminish bias, refrain from imposing my own meanings, and engage with emerging insights of participants (Fischer, 2009). I evolved in my own understandings of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and reflected upon my own privileged position during my now nearly 18-year educational journey as I reviewed the data.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis can provide findings that are not only insightful, but findings that are trustworthy as well. However, compared to literature available for grounded theory, ethnographic, and phenomenological research, literature pertaining to thematic analysis and trustworthiness is lacking (Nowell et al., 2017). Considering this, the traditional evaluative criteria set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985) was employed to assure the trustworthiness of this study. Nowell et al. (2017) stressed that the use of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria are widely accepted and "are pragmatic choices for researchers concerned about the acceptability and usefulness of their research for a wide variety of stakeholders" (p. 3).

At the crux of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) traditional trustworthiness evaluative criteria is the goal of research findings being viewed as worthy of attention. The first criterion that was addressed is credibility or the need for the research findings to be believable. Through the use of member checks with the PTSs, via Zoom, findings and the interpretations of those findings were assessed as accurate. Second is the criterion of transferability. The findings of this study are applicable to other groups searching for research regarding the use of a teaching strategy, like RT, that can be implemented in classrooms to foster a culturally and linguistically responsive environment. For example, teacher education programs, classroom teachers, curriculum

supervisors, and teacher researchers may find this study useful. However, it is up to those individuals or groups to judge the level of transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

Dependability is the third trustworthiness criterion. The process of this study was documented through the use of an audit trail (Koch, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participant interviews were audio recorded using Zoom and then transcribed using a secure transcription service. Following the transcription of the interviews, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was applied to discover and organize meaningful excerpts, codes, and themes. The researcher also maintained a reflexive journal to address assumptions placed upon data during the analysis phase. Finally, once credibility, transferability, and dependability were achieved, the fourth criterion, confirmability, was established (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, Nowell et al., 2017). The findings from this study resulted directly from the data gathered. The above-mentioned audit trail (Koch, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), as well as researcher positionality and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tobin & Begley, 2004), supported the final criterion.

### **Importance of the Study**

The practice of teaching and the education of beginning teachers continues to evolve to meet the needs of diverse student populations. The findings of this study in the use of RT to foster a learning environment that is culturally and linguistically responsive, in conjunction with PSTs awareness of this effective teaching strategy, may be beneficial to all students. PSTs, both novice and veteran teachers, teacher educators, and teacher researchers may be able to use the information from this study to further inform their practice.

Often PSTs complete their teacher education programs not fully confident in their abilities to put theory into practice, especially in terms of supporting students from diverse

backgrounds. Similarly, many teachers already in the classroom struggle to engage and support students as classroom populations grow more diverse and require more validating and affirming teaching. The PST perceptions contained in this research endeavor shed light on the possible value of an effective literacy strategy that may also be beneficial in creating a learning environment that empowers and motivates students from all walks of life.

### **Findings**

Findings from this study highlighted the perceptions of preservice teachers (PST) when considering the potential use of Reader's Theatre (RT) as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. Reflecting back to the five research questions, PSTs shared their past understandings of RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching as well as an increase in knowledge of using both following teacher preparation course work and RT Instruction. Considering this, the following themes emerged from the data analyzed:

1. *Value and Versatility of Reader's Theatre* regarding the academic, social, and emotional benefits of the teaching strategy.
2. *Increased Awareness of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching*, which highlights the current understandings of PSTs in adding this strategy to a classroom.
3. *Instructional Intent of Reader's Theatre* where participants share their thoughts as to the purposeful implementation of RT to be culturally and linguistically responsive as, on its own merits, it is not.

Before moving ahead to the first theme (i.e., Value and Versatility of Reader's Theatre) resulting from the study, the following is a brief glimpse of experiences of the participants with RT. An overall lack of personal experience with RT as a primary, elementary, or secondary student was common among all participants and none of the PSTs offered remembrances of

meaningful experiences. Two participants, “Amelia” and “Lin”, shared memories of participating in general theatre activities, either as part of school performances for parents or as 4H activities. “Monica” stated she had no prior experience with RT or theatre in any form only remembering reading texts aloud in class. Last, “Theresa” did have a vague memory of RT participation in her third-grade year of elementary school, but nothing profound. Professionally, all four participants expressed that the bulk of their knowledge regarding RT has come from RT instruction offered through their teacher preparation fall seminar course and spring culturally and linguistically responsive teaching course.

Participants described RT as a purposeful strategy that can engage all students with text through performance, drama, or acting out. Participants shared their thoughts on the ways RT is part of literacy instruction as it is used to foster increases in fluency, comprehension, oral speaking, and overall reading achievement. According to Lin, “They can practice their actual reading skills, as well as their oral reading skills, their comprehension skills, and then also their presentation performance skills.” PSTs placed an emphasis on the dual benefits of RT by way of academic achievement leading to personal accomplishment as “everyone has a part and everyone has a voice with the goal of reading fluency and reading comprehension” (Amelia). Monica noted that RT provides practice to gain increases in fluency, which, due to the purposeful practice, “gives them the confidence and practice they need to read out loud.”

Participants continued to call attention to the aspect of RT that allows teachers to help their students bring literature alive rather than just practicing and regurgitating the basic elements of the text, “I guess another benefit is just allowing the students to have creative expression in reading rather than just reading something and regurgitating what happened” (Theresa). Likewise, while elaborating on RT’s impact on reading and oral skills, Lin noted how the

teaching strategy allows for, “reenacting and bringing to life a text that doesn’t always happen when you just read through it once or twice.”

No matter the varied RT experience level of the participants, each has formed an opinion as to the use of the strategy in classrooms including possible benefits. As the interviews continued, the PSTs reflected on the benefits they see arising from the use of RT in the classroom on an individual or group basis as a purely instructional tool or one that can be used to foster a culturally responsive environment. The following subthemes are elaborated upon within the first theme, The Value and Versatility of Reader’s Theatre: (a) development of community, (b) personal connections to literature, (c) active engagement, and (d) the overall versatility of RT.

### **Theme 1: The Value and Versatility of Reader’s Theatre**

Most often, RT is viewed as a literacy strategy that supports students in improving fluency through repeated practice leading to gains in comprehension (Garrett & O’Connor, 2010; Keehn, 2003; Mraz et al., 2013; Tranin & Andrzejczak, 2006; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young & Nageldinger, 2014; Young & Rasinski, 2009; Young et al., 2016). However, the results from this study paint a different picture. Along with the impact RT implementation can make regarding reading achievement, the participants shared their thoughts on other ways RT can be impactful in the classroom. Along with potential impact on literacy skills, PSTs expressed their perceptions of RT as a way to meet social and emotional student needs too. Considering this multi-faceted instructional tool, participants elaborated as to the overall value of making RT a part of classroom instruction due to its versatile nature leading to (a) development of community, (b) personal connections to literature, (c) active engagement, and (d) overall value of RT as a teaching strategy.



### *Community*

Community is an aspect of RT that all four participants discussed. Pinpointing the collaborative nature of RT, PSTs elaborated further on how participation with RT can foster a strong classroom community that thrives on collaboration, relationships, and acceptance as students work together to practice and perform scripts. Lin and Theresa both noted the positive impact of students working together in groups and partners with RT to foster community, “I absolutely see myself using RT to foster an inclusive classroom community...and collaborate with their peers to produce something they are proud of” (Lin).

RT as a means of building community through the bonds and connections formed as a result of its collaborative nature was specifically noted by the participants. Amelia shared her understanding of this type of bond as observed with her elementary students, “And my kids really loved it too. It helped me bond with them, helped me get to know them better. I think it helped them get to know each other better because they still reference it too.” In sum, “communal” was a term used by Lin to describe the support and group effort that can arise when RT is part of a classroom leading to community.

### *Personal Connection*

All participants expressed that RT allows students to derive a variety of personal benefits from participation with the strategy. Participants stressed that RT provides an avenue for students to make personal connections to the literacy and instruction presented in classrooms. These personal connections directly relate to the choice of literature used with RT as well as students sharing and writing their own scripts. RT, as further explained by participants, can be a powerful strategy that allows students to choose to practice and perform, “something that is personal to them or about their culture, something they identify with...it feels meaningful” (Lin).

Elaborating further on the personal connections RT may afford students, Lin shared that as a resource, RT has the capability to “make a child to feel seen and heard” (Lin).

Similarly, the impact of students writing not only original stories, but personal RT scripts and sharing their experiences in that way, was viewed as a meaningful aspect to the participants as well, “Week two, we perform our stories. And that builds an even more personal connection because it’s their story” (Theresa). Amelia had the opportunity to implement RT in her field experience placement and shared how a simple RT script on the topic of field day allowed students from a variety of backgrounds, including English language learners, to share their own connections with many of the simple experiences within the text, “So, it worked great for that because then it was hands [up] all the way across the board just telling me things they went through.”

### ***Active Engagement***

In a variety of ways, each participant reflected upon the motivational factors of the active engagement of RT. Through the participatory, engaging, and emotionally impactful nature of RT, participants noted that the literacy strategy could foster new levels of curiosity in the classroom that would not only help motivate students to read, but learn about each other as well.

The engaging aspect of RT can be used to meet the needs of students who may struggle with traditional literacy methods:

And I think engaging’s a big piece of it. It’s not just textual – if students are struggling with either the listening aspect or the reading aspect. It incorporates so many different senses, essentially, which I think is really powerful (Lin).

Concurring, but going a step further following the culturally and linguistically responsive RT session, Amelia noted that RT can be employed to move beyond just reading achievement to

engaging students in a variety of conversations, “Reader’s Theatre is a way to introduce conversations in an engaging or perhaps a light-hearted way.” RT allows students to connect with the text and language through its participatory and interactive qualities rather than just listening and answering questions:

But having them get the chance to read the content and perform it in front of the class I think really hits at the linguistic piece of just being able to make students aware of the many different languages and just like the dialects and ways people communicate.

(Monica)

Participants shared that employing RT in the classroom increases the level of active engagement for their students not simply because it is a fun and exciting teaching tool, but that the strategy positively impacts their learning and emotions. Amelia recalled an experience with RT during her field placement, “Watching my students, they were so excited, and they gave themselves applause. So, kind of seeing their personalities come out for it was so, so fun!” Similarly, RT can be incorporated into the classroom as an alternative to normal reading instruction allowing the students to see the high level of engagement and enjoyment of the instructor leading to a kind of emotional contagion (Burgess et al., 2018; Frenzel et al., 2009; Houser & Waldbuesser, 2017; Radcliff et al., 2010) as the level of engagement, motivation, and enthusiasm of the teacher impacts their students:

A lot of times, just normal reading instruction can seem kind of boring or whatever. So, I would definitely want students to kind of buy into the whole idea and get excited about playing a part and getting to practice their lines...Also, it’s like I can be fun with you.

(Monica)

The role RT can play in a classroom encompasses so many instructional and social aspects, all the while allowing students to, “produce something they are proud of and have fun while doing so” (Lin).

### ***Versatility***

Finally, participants elaborated upon the versatility of RT as the strategy can be implemented and used in a variety of ways. Participants expressed that whether the strategy is used for purely academic purposes to support students in making fluency or comprehension gains or teachers implementing the instructional tool to foster community or actively engage the class, RT has the potential to address a wide range of educational elements. For that reason alone, the participants shared their insights on the flexible and versatile nature of RT.

Lin expressed the value of RT’s versatility by saying, “But, absolutely! I think it’s; I mean, I think it’s everything we talked about. It can be utilized in so many ways.” In her exit slip from the culturally and linguistically responsive RT instruction, Lin noted, “I absolutely see myself using RT to foster an inclusive classroom community because it’s a way for students to engage in an activity, take ownership over their character, learn about essentially anything (the books and pieces are unlimited) and collaborate with their peers.”

PSTs noted that the versatility value of RT is that it can be an instructional tool that covers many different bases in the classroom and allows teachers to be more efficient with their time:

I think having one activity that covers all those areas makes it extremely valuable because you only have so much time. And so, it’s one of those two birds with one stone kind of a thing, but it’s like a really special important stone that can be used. (Theresa)

Monica echoed those same sentiments when completing her exit slip and during the interview portion of the study. From the exit slip, Monica emphasized how RT addresses many different aspects such as collaboration, reading, and oral speaking, not to mention being adaptable to a number of topics. She went on to confirm her feelings about the versatile characteristics of RT during the interview when she expressed, “You can integrate so many things into it and hit so many content areas...I think it’s a really cool way for students to be able to or for you to integrate lots of content into something that also is really engaging for students.”

### **Summary: Theme 1**

The participants’ insights on the first theme, Value and Versatility of Reader’s Theatre, directly relate to several research questions from the study. For example, preservice teachers’ understanding of Reader’s Theatre (RQ 1) included descriptions of the strategy as a dramatic, participatory, and performance activity of chosen scripts or texts used in place of more traditional repeated reading strategies. PSTs also noted the literacy benefits of participating in RT such as increases in fluency and comprehension, as well as oral speaking skills.

Further, participants shared how RT allows teachers to help bring literature to life; differing from more conventional literacy practices. RT is more likely to foster an environment where students are actively engaged with literature as they are “reenacting and bringing to life a text” (Lin). PSTs understanding of RT also included the positive aspects of using the literacy tool as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy (RQ 3); specifically sharing their thoughts on the collaborative nature of RT leading to a sense of community and the way in which RT can provide opportunities for students to make personal connections to literature through the choice of text used. Monica emphasized this importance through her own experience with RT and how she plans to do the same for her students, “I have that strong memory of those

things. And just so me having that personal connection, I know I can help build those personal connections with my students.”

Finally, it was clear through PSTs understandings and expressions related to RT being culturally and linguistically relevant, that PSTs valued RT as a learning strategy (RQ 5). As the strategy encompasses a wide range of benefits, participants expressed how RT’s versatility meets a wide range of needs for both students and teachers, “It can be utilized in so many ways and it really builds. I think that’s the biggest thing. It builds confidence in students...in not only their ability to read but also who they are and their backgrounds” (Lin). By sharing their thoughts on RT, PSTs acknowledged the overall value the teaching strategy can have as an addition to classroom instruction through (a) development of community, (b) personal connections to literature, (c) active engagement, and (d) versatility.

## **Theme 2: Increased Awareness of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching**

After participating in the culturally responsive teaching and classroom management spring course, which included instruction on using RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy, all participants demonstrated an increase in their awareness of that concept. The PSTs shared that they all had a basic level of knowledge regarding culturally responsive teaching practices prior to those experiences. Participants expressed prior knowledge of culturally and linguistically responsive practices as an overall inclusive practice or a need to be culturally aware. As one participant stated, “It was just more so about including people and letting their sort of stories be shared. And I think in class we’ve learned it’s a lot more than that” (Amelia).

Following are subthemes that emerged after the analysis of RT instruction entrance and exit slips and participant interviews. The subthemes encompassed in the overall theme (Increased

Awareness of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching) are: (a) genuine acceptance, (b) validating and affirming identity, (c) building bridges, (d) supporting different languages, and (e) representation through instruction, content, and materials.

### ***Genuine Acceptance***

Within this first subtheme, participants specifically expressed the importance of students being recognized for who they authentically are or in other words, a level of genuine acceptance of who they are and the experiences they bring with them. The PSTs noted the critical function of acceptance as it allows “students to be their true selves” (Amelia) in the classroom. Going deeper, participants explained the need to meet students where they are as part of genuine acceptance:

I think the basis of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching is genuine acceptance, meeting students at their level, understanding, taking the time to understand their behaviors and their actions, and then better-set expectations within the classroom that are realistic expectations in order to set them up for success and kind of help them flourish and grow in a way that essentially meets them where they are. (Lin)

Finally, Monica expressed the importance of research in the process of fostering an atmosphere of acceptance in a classroom. She stressed that it is much more than just a simple knowing of students, “I would say it’s really accepting students...and taking time to ask students about what their home life is like, or what maybe their home culture is like, and then doing the research yourself as well.”

### ***VABBing***

Culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices are built around the process of VABBing. According to Hollie (2018), this means “the validation and affirmation of indigenous

(home) culture and language for the purpose of building and bridging the students to success in the culture of academia and in mainstream society” (p. 27). The participants felt strongly that the validation and affirmation of students’ identities were central to a culturally responsive environment so that their experiences could be bridged with what they experience in school and beyond, “I loved learning about the VABB strategy because I think it helps bring about a more well-rounded learning experience... [and we] help the student belong and help the class better as a whole” (Amelia).

**Validating and Affirming Identity.** When providing insights about the importance of affirming a student’s identity, participants acknowledged that identity should be a factor in the overall feel of a learning environment, “The identities in your classroom should influence what your classroom looks like and how it acts in a way...I would give my students time to showcase something about their identity” (Theresa). Amelia stressed the importance of the effort a teacher must put forth to learn about all the identities in a classroom, “An educator tries their best to just learn the different identities of their students and how to create a classroom environment that is respectful and safe of all those in mind.”

According to Lin, the norms that are established in American schools can be difficult to overcome for students whose identities are shaped from culturally diverse backgrounds which is why, to her, “it’s the biggest thing, is just meeting them where they are...for students that come from homes with completely different norms.” A culturally and linguistically responsive environment must move beyond simple recognition of a student’s identity to become, “a space where each individual is affirmed and validated in who they are in every sense” (Lin).

**Building Bridges.** The concept of building bridges as part of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching was evident among all participants’ understandings. Participants described



their understanding of bridge building in the classroom in a variety of ways. Building bridges is the culminating factor of “VABBing” (Hollie, 2018) that follows the validation and affirmation of students’ experiences and identities as teachers, “implement bridges...to help the student belong and help the class better as a whole” (Amelia). Following the same train of thought, Lin expressed the value of validation and affirmation in the classroom, but noted that building bridges leads to success in the learning environment and the community, “This helps facilitate the building and bridging of students to success in the classroom and their community.” Finally, Monica spoke to the importance of incorporating relevant content in the classroom noting that, “bridging a child’s culture with the content they are learning in school” as a means of “celebrating our differences instead of seeing them as problems.” Though different in expression, participants shared the importance of building bridges as part of a successful culturally and linguistically responsive classroom.

### ***Supporting Different Languages***

Participants recognized that their understanding of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies, prior to their course work, was missing the element of language, “I definitely didn’t really learn about the linguistic piece. That was never as big of an emphasis until the spring course” (Monica). With that in mind, the PSTs shared their thoughts on the importance of supporting students through the recognition and inclusion of their home language in the classroom.

In order to create an authentic culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy or environment, participants expressed the need for students to have opportunities to connect their home languages to the academic language in the classroom. When sharing her experiences with a

family involvement project, Theresa highlighted the value of recognizing the home language of English language learners:

For my family involvement project, we did a reading calendar for March...And one of our weeks is inclusiveness and I'm pretty sure one of our books we chose is a bilingual book...So that not only brings in the Hispanic culture and character identities, but also the language.

The effects of excluding a student's home language in the classroom was noted in that it could become a hindrance to a student's success. Referring back to the text written by Hollie, *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching and Learning: Classroom Practices for Student Success* (2018), Monica shared her insights on the different ways that students may speak English and that teachers should affirm that, "There's no wrong way to speak English and how students speak many different languages at home. And it's communication. That's just what it is...And not letting language become something that also hinders students in their learning."

Finally, Amelia described the need for students from an English as a second language background to have supports in place to help them be successful in the learning community by including their language in instruction. As part of cultural and linguistic responsiveness, she stated, "I think responsiveness would be if I have students who are English language learners, they might not know the unit that material is out of... Just being mindful that you have to have different structures in place for different students."

### ***Representation through Instruction, Content, and Materials***

The final subtheme deals with the use of instruction, content, and materials that are culturally authentic and relevant to students in the classroom. Participants emphasized the need

for cultural and linguistic responsiveness to be a part of a learning community and included in every aspect of the classroom:

As a teacher, I want to definitely bring that [cultural and linguistic responsiveness] in, whether it's décor on the wall, whether it's what we're talking about, what we're reading, what we're watching, things like that...I don't want that to be a foreign concept for them.

(Lin)

In fact, participants stressed that without the type of focused effort to create an educational environment that embraces culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices, students may be negatively impacted on their path to success. Whether this lack of representation is missing from a classroom library or materials used in instruction, according to the participants, the task of teachers is, “ensuring that our content and our instruction isn't in any way, I think, hindering their culture or making that become a negative thing in the classroom when it should be a positive thing” (Monica).

Representation of all students was a key issue discussed by participants:

I have learned that it is not only including texts that represent everyone in my classroom.

It is a lot more. As a teacher you must embrace every student's culture, traditions, values, etc. and weave them into your lessons and daily routine. (Theresa)

They stressed that it is much more than just merely having books or texts to meet that need. PSTs' understanding of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices grew to a recognition that it is part of every aspect of daily instruction.

### **Summary: Theme 2**

Participants shared their understandings of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (RQ 2) which demonstrated a growth in their awareness of those teaching practices.

First, PSTs indicated that for a teacher to foster a culturally and linguistically responsive environment, she/he must offer genuine acceptance of who their students are and the experiences they bring to the classroom as educators “let them be who they are in our rooms” (Amelia). Next, combined under the umbrella of Hollie’s VABBing (2018), the participants expressed the need for educators to validate and affirm student identities leading to bridges being built connecting their life experiences to the classroom and the community.

Further, PSTs expressed the importance of supporting their students through recognition and inclusion of “different languages and different forms of reading” (Amelia) as well as different ways of speaking in the learning environment in order for them to be successful. Last, representation of students through the instruction designed and implemented and the content and materials used was a key element shared by participants. As was stated earlier, participants stressed this was more than one book or one poster, but it is “how you speak, like in your words, not only speaking, but also in the print you use, the text you use...how you write as well. All of that is important” (Theresa).

The PSTs’ insights regarding understanding of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching through (a) genuine acceptance, (b) validating and affirming identity, (c) building bridges, (d) supporting different languages, and (e) representation through instruction, content, and materials, along with the participants’ insights about RT, helped to construct a path leading to the final theme which ultimately connects Theme 1 and Theme 2.

### **Theme 3: Instructional Intent of Reader’s Theatre**

The final theme, Instructional Intent of RT, centers around the purpose for implementing RT in the classroom. According to participants, RT has the capability to be a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching tool, but only with purposeful implementation. On its own

merits, participants stressed it is not culturally and linguistically responsive, “So, you have to have the intent of using it as a tool to be a culturally and linguistically responsive teacher because I wouldn’t say in and of itself it is” (Monica).

Within the theme of Instructional Intent of RT, six meaningful subthemes emerged from the thoughts of the participants: (a) the intent to use RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy, (b) implementing RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy, (c) the choice of text used with RT to be culturally and linguistically responsive, (d) implementation of RT can expose students to different worlds, (e) RT as a tool to discuss difficult topics, and (f) negative impact of implementing RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive strategy.

### ***Intent to Use Reader’s Theatre as a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching Strategy***

The strongest opinions of the participants regarding RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy were made in regards to the intent in which RT is used. As was stated in the introduction to the third theme, participants expressed that on its own merits RT is not culturally and linguistically responsive, “I think it [RT] can be when you have the intent” (Monica). Monica, recalled her first experience with RT instruction and how this informed her understanding of RT as a culturally responsive tool:

I think about earlier when we did it the first time when we read our story. I think the one with eating the fried worms or something. I wouldn’t necessarily say that’s very culturally responsive teaching because the intent isn’t to either. (Monica)

Participants also referenced an earlier theme, versatility, when discussing the issue of intent. According to the participants, because RT can be used in so many different ways, teachers

must have a clear focus for the strategy as a means to foster cultural and linguistic responsiveness or opportunities may be missed, “If you went into it and you just wanted to build fluency, then you didn’t give them an opportunity to talk through some of those culturally responsive things. Then you kind of missed an opportunity to do that” (Amelia). Agreeing, but going further, Lin noted that because it “can be utilized in so many different ways” RT may be a negative if the intent is not clear and no thorough planning has been done resulting in the use of texts that are “biased.” Concluding her thoughts Lin expressed her feeling about the intent of educators using RT simply, “I think there are ways that obviously it can be done that would not be very culturally and linguistically responsive.”

From participants insights regarding RT, the intent in which it is used is crucial as to its role as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. Theresa summed up the understandings of her fellow PSTs noting that “it depends on the situation” and “some teachers may not choose to use that avenue to be culturally responsive.” However, while considering choice and purpose, she still viewed RT as a valuable tool to foster cultural and linguistic responsiveness, “I think 100% Reader’s Theater can be used or can be culturally and linguistically responsive...it absolutely can be.”

### ***Implementing Reader’s Theatre as a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching Strategy***

The implementation of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive practice was foremost on the minds of participants. Chief among the participant insights was the need for RT to be implemented gradually, taking “baby steps” (Lin) with ample amounts of scaffolding particularly when being used as a culturally and linguistically responsive tool:

I would want to do it regularly, maybe not every week, but sprinkle it in. I would try to start with something more light and then build up to those bigger conversations. Just so they are comfortable with the, I guess, steps in what the whole week looks like. (Theresa)

The need for gradual implementation of RT as expressed by the participants included thoughts pertaining to introducing the strategy as something fun and non-stressful so that students become comfortable building a foundation for deeper topics, “I would introduce it as...a no pressure situation. Like, ‘This is fun. We’re doing this for each other and we’re going to have fun doing it’” (Amelia).

Along with participants’ thoughts on the importance of scaffolding the implementation of RT, they also stressed the need for teachers to know their students well before transitioning RT into a culturally and linguistically responsive device. According to the PSTs, some students may not be comfortable in participating with this type of participatory and cultural activity, “If you have a student that already feels insecure about maybe being from a different culture, then maybe you don’t choose something that will single them out” (Monica). However, Monica noted that if an educator truly knows their students, the use of RT may be appropriate and meaningful, “But, if you know them well enough to know that no, they’re really proud of where they come from and would want to talk about it, then choose that” (Monica).

### ***Choice of Text used with Reader’s Theatre to be Culturally and Linguistically Responsive***

Choice of text was one way that participants noted that RT could be used as a strategy to promote a culturally and linguistically responsive environment. By using different stories and texts about different cultures, participants felt RT could provide a way for students to be recognized for what they bring to the classroom, “The first most obvious thing I think is using culturally responsive texts in Reader’s Theater and just using Reader’s Theater as a way to

integrate different stories, different texts about different cultures...making everyone feel seen and known” (Lin). According to participants, RT can be a way of highlighting identities both inside the classroom and outside as “you can use them [scripts] to reflect your classroom identity, but you can also use the text to showcase an identity that may not be in the classroom. That is really important” (Theresa).

Participants also referenced the element of authenticity when selecting RT scripts to promote a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom in two ways. First, using texts or scripts authored by those who share similar cultural backgrounds to your students bring with them a sense of authenticity and are “qualified to educate and speak on the topic” (Lin). However, participants noted that finding such authentic literature and especially authentic RT literature is a challenge “if you’re trying to tie in a specific culture that may not be easy to find” (Theresa). Specifically, Theresa referenced locating materials for RT in regards to a particular student, as it would be a “challenging time, including him, including his identity into our Reader’s Theater currently.”

With or without the difficulties in locating authentic and meaningful literature to use RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy, participants shared their thoughts as to the choice of text overall. Teachers can be more purposeful in the literature they choose to be culturally responsive versus “random stories” (Monica). Through the attribute of choice with RT, educators can help students increase their cultural awareness of others, “But it is a great opportunity to choose stories where children can be educated on other cultures... [and] you could help students become more aware” (Monica).



### ***Implementation of Reader's Theatre Can Expose Students to Different Worlds***

Through the purposeful use of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy, participants shared how they felt the instructional tool could “open doors” (Monica) and help students learn more about different cultures, traditions, and languages. First, participants identified the introduction to different languages and vocabulary as an important element of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. When Amelia shared her RT instruction experience with a Reader’s Theatre adaptation of the book *Lailah’s Lunchbox: A Ramadan Story* (Faruqi, 2015) she related it to how her future students could benefit by making connections to new traditions and terms. For example, they would benefit if they were exposed to “new vocabulary surrounding it [Ramadan]... and learned about the traditions behind their meaning.” Theresa made a similar connection when she stated, “I think it was vocabulary and then maybe just highlighting certain terms in the Reader’s Theater...because not only are you expanding their overall knowledge, but then you’re also bringing in that inclusive culturally responsive part to it as well.”

Advancing the idea of opening doors and providing opportunities for students to learn about different worlds, Monica also noted that RT could possibly foster a sense of curiosity about different cultures leading students to be comfortable “asking a lot of questions maybe about a culture that they’re not familiar with because kids don’t know. They only know what they’ve grown up with.” Participants considered the benefit of using RT with their students as a means to build cultural awareness for those represented both inside and outside of the classroom as well, “I can still use Reader’s Theater to explore cultures that are not represented in my classroom, but are in the community so that my students can learn more about those they may interact with in the community” (Theresa).

### ***Reader's Theatre as a Tool to Discuss Difficult Topics***

Participants identified a crucial element in that RT may contribute to a classroom community that is striving to be culturally and linguistically responsive. RT can be a means of introducing, discussing, and engaging with topics or conversations that may be difficult in nature. According to the PSTs, though teachers may have the desire to create a culturally responsive classroom, they may not always “feel fully qualified to speak on” (Lin) these difficult topics and RT could be an avenue to beginning those conversations. Monica used the term “weird” when referencing these types of moments in a culturally responsive classroom and expressed how RT could be used to build empathy and “help students become more just, globally and culturally aware.”

Considering those difficult conversations, participants expressed that educators, through the creative aspect of RT, can allow students to experience “different perspectives and sometimes difficult topics in a way that is less serious than having a big conversation” (Theresa). Whether aiding the teacher or student, participants felt that RT could be employed as a means of taking those difficult moments and “introduce conversations in an engaging or perhaps a light-hearted way” (Amelia). With purposeful intent, teachers can use RT as a starting point for building their own cultural competence in order to foster a more culturally responsive classroom environment.

### ***Negative Impact of Implementing Reader's Theatre as a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching Strategy***

Participants noted the possible negative impact implementing RT as a culturally responsive practice could have on students without proper intent and purposeful planning. Participants recognized the hurdles that may come along with using RT as a culturally and

linguistically responsive teaching strategy and how a clear focus is vital to its success, “Obviously, you have to think very carefully about it [RT] not being a negative, where it’s inappropriate” (Monica).

Participants agreed that without careful planning and meaningful intent, the use of RT might result in negative impacts on students, especially those who may be in the minority in a classroom community. For example, Monica referenced RT instruction on RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy and the use of one children’s book that was about a student with a speech impediment, as “it could become a thing that’s more harmful than it is good...if you’re not very strategic I think in how you play it out.” Monica’s concern was that without proper intent and planning the strategy could result in “singling kids out for a difference that they have.” In fact, Amelia specifically addressed how she would feel if given a role to perform and had not been properly prepared, “I think it would be embarrassing for me I was given a role I wasn’t comfortable in and then had to do it over and over again”.

Participants agreed that intent is key to RT being a successful tool to promote a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom community; however, even with the effort given to ensure proper intent, teachers must realize that even then “for some students it [RT] may not be something that they thrive with” (Amelia).

### **Summary: Theme 3**

Participants acknowledged the complicated relationship that RT and cultural and linguistic responsive practices share as expressed in the final theme, which directly addresses several research questions. First, preservice teachers’ understanding of Reader’s Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy (RQ 3) focused heavily on the intent in which RT is used. Participants stressed that only with purposeful intent would RT be a culturally

and linguistically responsive teaching device. As Lin stated, for RT to be culturally and linguistically responsive it is “based on what you use and how you use it [RT].”

Lin’s comment leads directly into the aspect of choice in how RT is used to be culturally and linguistically responsive. The participants own experiences with RT during RT instruction highlight the impact of choice. Amelia recognized how the children’s book titled *Lailah’s Lunch Box: A Ramadan Story* (Faruqi, 2015) would be an excellent choice when adapting a piece of literature to use as a culturally and linguistically responsive RT script fostering a sense of curiosity about another culture and its traditions. On the other hand, Monica realized that, though “beneficial for oral speaking, fluency, or whatever” the use of *How to Eat Fried Worms* (Rockwell, 1973) misses the mark as a culturally responsive RT piece.

PSTs also noted the positive aspects of using RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy, which connected to the third research question and their perception of the value of incorporating RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy (RQ 5). Participants shared their thoughts as to how RT can be one tool in a teacher’s “toolbox of things” (Monica) to facilitate culturally and linguistically responsive experiences that can be difficult at times. As Theresa noted, some topics may be “a little heavy” but that RT is a way to foster awareness and bring many topics “into the present” and be a type of “showcase.”

An additional value of implementing RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy according to the perceptions of PSTs in this study was the way in which RT can support students’ different ways of speaking and the languages they use. Amelia discussed what a natural fit the support of language is with RT, “I think Reader’s Theater does that so well. And that’s a big highlight for me. That’s a natural way to do that.” Next, participants expressed how RT can expose students to different worlds. Theresa used the metaphors of mirrors and

windows (Bishop, 1990; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Northrop et al., 2019) when discussing the capability of RT in doing this. According to Theresa, through culturally and linguistically responsive RT, students can see themselves reflected in the texts used as well as “looking through a window and seeing what we don’t have in our classroom.”

Finally, participants discussed preservice teachers’ perceptions of implementing Reader’s Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy (RQ 4). First, the overall implementation of the teaching tool must be methodical and scaffolded. Lin shared that RT as a culturally responsive activity may be “hard to start” and that teachers must allow a “transitional period” to help alleviate any nerves or anxiety. Theresa expressed the same thoughts as incorporating RT in this manner should be a “building” process allowing students to be “comfortable” especially when moving toward “heavy” or “bigger conversations.” Participants made clear that methodical and purposeful implementation was necessary so that RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy would not become a negative experience for students. Amelia’s thoughts on RT implementation synthesizes the thoughts of her peers noting “without proper planning and proper comfort level, it [RT] might not be a great idea.”

The perceptions and understandings of the participants included in the final theme regarding (a) the intent to use RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy, (b) implementing RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy, (c) the choice of text used with RT to be culturally and linguistically responsive, (d) implementation of RT can expose students to different worlds, (e) RT as a tool to discuss difficult topics, and (f) negative impact of implementing RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy help provide further insight into the complicated connection RT and culturally and

linguistically responsive teaching share as their combination can provide positive benefits if there is proper intent and purposeful implementation.

### **Discussion**

Preparing preservice teachers (PST) to successfully lead their own classrooms of unique learners must be of utmost importance for teacher educators as they look to “transform prospective teachers personally and professionally, and help them become compassionate, successful teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students” (Acquah & Szelei, 2020, p. 172). One element of this successful preparation will come in the opportunities and experiences afforded to PSTs to explore cultural and linguistic responsiveness that will allow them to view their students’ diversity “as an asset, a capability, and an element that can be built upon” (Hollie, 2018, p. 35) and can lead to “instructional experiences for students that validates, affirms, illuminates, inspires, and motivates them” (Hollie, 2018, p. 69).

Considering the objective above for teacher educators, the findings from this study provided insights into how PSTs view such an experience. Specific to this research endeavor, PSTs were given the opportunity to explore the use of Reader’s Theatre (RT) as a culturally and linguistically responsive strategy. Along the way, PSTs increased their understanding of RT as a teaching strategy (RQ 1), as well as increasing their awareness of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies (RQ 2). Overall, the PSTs viewed RT as a beneficial and versatile teaching tool, capable of fostering community through collaboration, allowing students to make connections that are more meaningful to literature, and ensure students are actively engaged with literacy instruction. In terms of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies, the PSTs’ awareness of the concept grew as they learned it is much more than just a general attempt to make students feel included in the classroom. Participants elaborated upon the need to provide

genuine acceptance to all students through validation and affirmation of their individual identities; connect home, classroom, and community; and ensure that students' culture and language were meaningfully represented through instruction, content, and educational resources. Finally, the PSTs shared their thoughts as to the use of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy (RQ 3 & RQ 5). The intent in which RT is used was foremost on the participants' minds as well as the purposeful implementation for the literacy strategy to be considered as an effective culturally and linguistically responsive strategy (RQ 4). According to participants, with purposeful intent and effective implementation, RT could open windows (Bishop, 1990) to new cultures and traditions. Additionally, it could also provide a safe and engaging way to begin discussions of difficult topics. Without those two crucial elements, the PSTs noted that RT would not be a meaningful culturally and linguistically responsive strategy and in fact, without purposeful planning, could hinder a student's learning and success in the classroom.

### **Reader's Theatre and Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching: Understandings of the Individual Teaching Strategies**

Following the PSTs' description of RT as a teaching strategy traditionally used to help students increase their fluency and comprehension; they elaborated upon additional benefits that may arise from participation (RQ 1). The participants noted how the incorporation of RT into literacy instruction could foster a sense of community in the classroom due to its collaborative nature. The sense of community remarked upon by the participants provided new evidence relating to previous research on RT that noted a sense of belonging and caring that accompanied the encouragement from and collaboration with peers (Casey & Chamberlin, 2006; Clark et al., 2009; Young & Rasinski, 2009; Zambo, 2011). In a 2009 study conducted by Clark et al. (2009),

not only was a sense of community and belonging fostered through the use of RT, individual students became classroom helpers and even developed leaderships skills as part of the collaborative nature of the strategy. Being part of a Reader's Theatre community can benefit a variety of students as "even the shyest one in the class, loves performing for their peers" (Clementi, 2010, p. 88) and the activity itself "created a comfortable supportive environment of trust" (Cueva et al., 2011, p. 285).

Further, because the choice of text is a key component when implementing RT effectively, PSTs remarked that through relevant choices and literature selected to meet students' interests and cultural experiences, personal and empathetic connections can form with reading instruction. These insights support the findings of studies like one conducted by Jeffries and Jeffries (2014) where they investigated how African American girls were able to explore and make connections to literature due to "opportunities such as reader's theatre" (p. 215). Likewise, Weisenburger (2009) expressed the importance of selecting meaningful RT scripts. She states, "To make stories more meaningful for my students, I use multi-cultural literature as the focus of our Readers' Theatre" (p. 56).

Due to the performative and participatory nature of RT, study participants expressed how the use of RT in classrooms could lead to active engagement of students. The findings from this study validate previous research noting the engaging qualities of RT. Fredericks (2011) asserts that, "Students are provided with engaging opportunities to enhance their fluency" (p. 44) while Clark et al. (2009) highlighted how RT not only benefited struggling readers, but also "engaged the higher-level readers" (p. 380). Participants from this study and researchers from past RT work arrived at the same conclusion. Students are not only excited about



participating in RT, but remain engaged with this literacy instruction when given meaningful opportunities to actively participate (Clementi, 2011; Flynn, 2004).

Finally, PSTs were impressed by the overall versatility of the instructional tool as one of its most valuable assets noting it can be employed in a variety of ways and used to accomplish several curriculum goals. Rasinski et al. (2017) synthesizes the versatile nature of RT by simply stating, “Reader’s Theater is a diverse tool that benefits students across content areas” (p. 168). These perceptions align with the findings of previous research on RT noting the variety of benefits that can arise from the academic, social, and emotional characteristics of the literacy strategy (Cho, 2012; Clementi, 2010; Garrett & O’Connor, 2010; Gottfried, 2014; Liu, 2000; Rasinski et al., 2017; Weisenburger, 2009; Young et al., 2017).

Just as the participants’ insights from this study affirm previous research about RT, their understandings of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching also support and align nicely with the previous work of scholars such as Hollie (2018), Gay (2018), Ladson-Billings (2008), Souto-Manning and Martell (2017), and Villegas and Lucas (2007). Collectively, these scholars focus their attention around objectives set-forth by Ladson-Billings and Gay that promote academic achievement, cultural competence, socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2008), and caring and communicating across cultures (Gay, 2018). As Souto-Manning and Martell (2017) state, “This kind of teaching takes time as well as purposeful commitment to culturally relevant teaching, critical consciousness, and educational justice” (p. 255) and Ullucci (2011) reminds educators to “adjust schooling to fit the child, rather than the child to fit the school” (p. 402). With the added emphasis of Hollie (2018) and his concept of VABBing (Validation, Affirmation, & Bridge Building), along with the culturally and linguistically

responsive criteria of Villegas and Lucas (2007) participants recognized the need for relevant and representational curriculum and instruction for all students.

Participants in this study shared their newfound understandings of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching (RQ 2) following their experiences with the topic. Though, they did not specifically mention every objective listed above, they did connect with many of them. For example, the participants supported the culturally and linguistically responsive teaching objective of representation through instruction, curriculum, and educational resources. PSTs used terms like “mindful” (Amelia) and “hindering” (Monica) when discussing the instruction and educational resources used in classrooms. As Villegas and Lucas (2007) state, “Teachers can embed new ideas and skills in projects that are meaningful...engaging all students in learning for understanding” (p. 32). Participants shared that teachers must know what their students need and have the resources to support that so that they do not create obstacles that impede student success.

Another aspect of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching that resonated with the participants was the need for teachers to meaningfully know their students and transition to a genuine acceptance of who those students are and where they come from. According to Lin, educators must fashion this genuine acceptance by “taking the time to understand their cultural and linguistic backgrounds...in order to set them up for success and kind of help them flourish.” This is indeed central to the traditional goals of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. Villegas and Lucas (2007) stress that “teachers need to know about their students’ lives...something about their students’ family makeup, immigration history, favorite activities, concerns, and strengths” (p. 30). In fact, Souto-Manning and Martell (2017) challenge educators to make a commitment to knowing their students so that they can, “Develop relationships, value

their knowledge, and incorporate this knowledge in your curriculum and teaching” (p. 255). The understandings of the PSTs in this study correlate with much of the available literature on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and the need for genuine acceptance of students in classrooms.

Participants provided their insights into culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies as they expressed their deepest connections with the work of Hollie (2018) surrounding VABing. They shared a strong desire to become educators who validate and affirm their students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which can lead to building bridges between the academic world and the world beyond the classroom. The participants recognized the value of VABing in this process and expressed this with their understandings of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies. Overall, the participants recognized the value of implementing VABing as equally important as genuine acceptance, purposeful implementation and intent, and authentic representation when using culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies (RQ 2).

### **The Use of Reader’s Theatre as a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching Strategy**

Literature-based information regarding the specific implementation of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy is sparse. For example, two articles list RT as a high-quality strategy to *use* with culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, but the activity is merely listed among others without any further information on implementation or overall effectiveness (Toppel, 2015; Turner, 2007). However, participants had significant positions addressing the use of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy.

Participants were tasked with forming their own conclusions about RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive strategy (RQ 3) following instruction on using RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. Participants were engaged in discussions, small group activities, and moments of in-class reflection. However, participants were not assigned further reading about the topic, because there is very little research specifically geared to RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching device.

In contrast, there is an ample supply of literature about the benefits of using RT in the classroom in as well as the benefits of using culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies. In terms of RT, research shows that it leads to “a deeper understanding and appreciation of both the content and the language of the text at hand while simultaneously drawing upon their listening, speaking, and reading facilities” (Lengeling et al., 1995). As for a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy, RT may have the capacity to meet many of the objectives listed earlier in this study. It can also be an avenue for “students being able to see themselves in the curriculum” (Ullucci, 2011, p. 391) through its performative and collaborative nature. As Villegas and Lucas (2007) report, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices are best when incorporating “pertinent examples and analogies from students’ lives...that helps students build bridges to learning” (p. 30). Through drama, connections to curriculum *can* be made and discussions *can* be ignited through RT (Cueva et al., 2011).

Participants made note of these possibilities when they considered the use of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy as it could be, “a great way to express different perspectives and sometimes difficult topics...allowing students to explore how they learn about themselves and others through theater” (Theresa). This statement alone provides

evidence to how RT could meet many of the culturally and linguistically responsive objectives. RT can be used as a platform for allowing students to offer their cultural experiences to others through drama. Again, if implemented with a purposeful intent to support a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom, RT can be incorporated as an avenue to encourage students to develop their sociopolitical consciousness through sharing, as they learn more about themselves, and also begin to “step outside of themselves...I feel like students only can gain when they have an opportunity to do that...it’s just making them better citizens” (Monica).

Gay (2002) addressed the need for culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices to include the idea of building communities. Earlier in the study, the word “communal” was defined by Lin as she elaborated on RT as “students working in groups, working with partners either at grade level or somebody who can support them and vice versa.” This “communal” idea was shared by all participants and affirmed Gay’s work as she asserted that teachers must “understand how to design more communal learning environments” (Gay, 2002, p. 110). RT has the possibility to allow students to work towards a collective goal and, in fact, Rasinski, Stokes, and Young (2017) state “teamwork” (p. 174) as one of the many positive aspects of RT as students work together to successfully achieve their “grand performance” (p. 172). Though the connection between RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching is not pointedly addressed in current literature, participants’ understandings of the connections help provide new evidence of the possible pathways in which the two singularly effective practices could work in concert to benefit all students (RQ 3).

Similarly, literature-based information regarding the specific implementation of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy (RQ 4) is sparse. Much has been written about the implementation of RT in classrooms as a literacy strategy from scholars like Garrett

and O’Conner (2010), Kinniburgh and Shaw (2007), Moran (2006), Rasinski, Stokes, and Young (2017), Worthy (2005), and Young and Nageldinger (2014). For example, when discussing the implementation of RT into daily instruction, Rasinski, Stokes, and Young (2017) remind readers of the important role the teacher plays in purposeful and consistent planning when using RT.

In contrast to implementing RT as a traditional literacy strategy, the participants of this study specifically mentioned the importance of strategic scaffolds for implementation of RT for successful use as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. As Lin expressed, introducing and implementing RT, as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy will be “hard to start” and “overwhelming” for teachers even if students have already participated with RT in the traditional sense. Implementing culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies and RT comes a new set of challenges. For that reason, Lin cautioned educators to take “baby steps” as students are “just trying to get through, especially when they are maybe more nervous...So I think there’s definitely going to be a transitional period there.”

Amelia stressed the need for students, especially those who may have special needs, to be given “tons and tons of exposure” to scripts to build their comfort with culturally and linguistically responsive RT which allows students to “read through that, practice it, become familiar with, and then be able to perform that and showcase what they’ve done.” The participants’ thoughts about the gradual and purposeful implementation of culturally and linguistically responsive RT into the classroom echoed the guidance offered by Worthy (2005) when introducing RT for the first time. Worthy (2005) stressed the need for “demonstrating, explaining, and modeling” of RT going so far as to write, “Start by doing most of the work yourself” and provide ample support for the students to “try out the new activity” (p. 37).

Implementing RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive strategy must begin with a clear and focused goal letting students know that culturally responsive RT has equal footing with RT in the traditional literacy sense. “You just have to have your goal of students knowing more about a culture [and it] should be kind of almost equal with your goal of oral speaking and even reading” (Monica). Based on participants insights, implementation of RT must be clear and focused, providing ample time for students to build their comfort with the strategy when used in a culturally responsive way so that the experience doesn’t become “more harmful than it is good” (Monica). When combining that with the importance of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, the need for meticulous preparation is only magnified as this type of endeavor “requires consistent attention and a coherent commitment” (Ullucci, 2011, p. 402). Implementing new teaching strategies into a classroom must be done with care and purposeful planning (Hollie, 2018; Worthy, 2005), a sentiment that was also echoed repeatedly by the participants throughout the study.

Overwhelmingly, the participants of this study expressed that there is great value in using RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy (RQ 5) employing terms like “absolutely” (Lin) and “definitely” (Monica). One participant even went so far as to quantify the value of RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy at “100%” (Theresa) in its effectiveness as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy when effectively implemented. However, repeating the pattern above, there is a lack of current research assessing the value of using RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. Scholars have written about the benefits of RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching separately, but not in connection.

### **Limitations and Future Endeavors**

There are three limitations to consider for this study. First, increasing the number of participants in the study would be beneficial. By including more participants in studies of this type, additional insights into the use of Reader's Theatre (RT) as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy would provide further data to further inform the benefits of using this approach. Second, each study participant had a very basic level of experience with both RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. Future studies involving more participants with RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching experiences would be beneficial in making additional determinations as to their combined effectiveness for promoting a more culturally responsive classroom. Additionally, providing PSTs experiences to implement culturally and linguistically responsive RT with their own students would give them an opportunity to see the teaching strategy in action. Collecting data during those opportunities of implementation at the elementary level would provide more insights to the benefits of RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies.

These limitations can transition into future research endeavors as PSTs and/or veteran teachers specifically implementing RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy could provide valuable data as to the benefits of using this method to foster a culturally responsive learning environment in the public classroom. Combining these two strategies would be a valuable resource or tool in teacher preparation programs and teacher professional development activities.



## Conclusion

The continuing growth of diversity in public school classrooms makes it crucial for preservice teachers (PST) to be prepared to support the academic and cultural needs of their students. An important element to that preparation is providing PSTs opportunities to use strategies that they may be able to implement as a means of engaging their own students in culturally and linguistically responsive discussions and fostering a more inclusive learning environment. In this study, participants actively engaged with Reader's Theatre in a culturally and linguistically responsive context combining RT and culturally and linguistically responsive instruction.

The results from this study provide valuable insights that may be useful to teacher educators, practicing classroom teachers, and future preservice teachers. Overall, the participants found value in the use of Reader's Theatre in both the traditional sense and culturally and linguistically responsive format, "I can definitely see myself being able to use this [RT] not only to build literacy skills, but to help students be organically aware of different diversities in our classroom" (Amelia). The versatility of RT and the intent in which it is used was central to the perceptions of the participants when considering its use as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy.

Considering these thoughts, participants shared many ways in which RT can be culturally and linguistically responsive through community, personal connections, exposure to different traditions and cultures, and meaningful representation through instruction which align with objectives set by many culturally and linguistically responsive scholars (Gay, 2002; Hollie, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2008; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). However, participants cautioned that purposeful intent and careful implementation is a must when

incorporating RT into classroom instruction to foster cultural responsiveness because without “proper planning and proper comfort level, it might not be a great idea” (Amelia). Overall, the participants’ understanding of RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices increased and they offered their own endorsement of using the literacy strategy as a way to foster cultural responsiveness and sociocultural consciousness. The ultimate goal of this study was to provide a catalyst to explore the possible relationship between RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies to further support the need of today’s diverse classroom populations. Educators should provide opportunities for students to see themselves *meaningfully* represented in their classrooms.

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## Appendix A

### Reader's Theatre as a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Strategy Instruction

1. Entrance Slip:

What do you already know about culturally and linguistic responsive teaching? Describe a strategy you might be able to use that is culturally and linguistically responsive.

2. Read Aloud:

*Do I Look Odd to You?* (McDonald, 2015)  
Students will discuss/reflect using "Color Coded Hot Seat"

3. Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJn5neFlCq8&t=60s> My Culturally Responsive Classroom (Henley, 2016)

OR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYTtcLUWyCU&t=87s> Culturally Responsive Teaching – Listen to the Silence (Stanley, 2016)

4. Discuss video and elements of a culturally and linguistically responsive classroom they may have observed

6. Quick recall of the Fall Professional Development Session (RT and Motivation)

7. Villegas and Lucas' Six Objectives (2007)  
-Do the objectives connect to RT?

8. Divide into groups to practice scripts

\**Henry's Freedom Box* - Levine (African American)

\**Crossing Bok Chito* – Tingle (Cross Cultural – Native American and African American)

OR *Same, Same but Different* – Kostecki-Shaw (Cross Cultural – American and Indian)

\**Hooway for Wodney Wat* – Lester (Speech Disability)

\**How to Steal a Dog* – O'Connor (Socio-Economic)

\**One Handed Catch* - Auch (Physical Disability)

9. Performance

10. Discussion (relate back to six objectives)  
-Brain Bump or Turn and Talk

11. Discussion Board assignment/exit slip (non-graded)

What are two main takeaways from today's Reader's Theatre session? Do you see yourself being able to use Reader's Theatre not just as a literacy strategy, but as a means to foster an inclusive classroom community?



## Appendix B

### Reader's Theatre as a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching Strategy Interview Protocol

#### Research Questions

1. What are preservice teachers' understanding of Reader's Theatre?
2. What are preservice teachers' understanding of a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
3. What are preservice teachers' understanding of Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
4. What are preservice teachers' perceptions of implementing Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
5. What are preservice teachers' perceptions of the value of implementing Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?

#### Interview Questions

##### *Participants' Understanding of Reader's Theatre*

1. Prior to the spring course on culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, which included instruction addressing Reader's Theatre, were you familiar with Reader's Theatre? How?
2. What is Reader's Theatre? What is your understanding of it? How would you describe this teaching strategy?

##### *Participants' Understanding of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching*

3. Prior to the spring course addressing culturally and linguistically responsive teaching, were you familiar with it? How?
4. What is culturally and linguistically responsive teaching? What is your understanding of it? How would you describe this teaching strategy?

##### *Participants' Understanding and Implementation of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Reader's Theatre*

5. What do you see as the relationship between Reader's Theatre and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching?
6. Is Reader's Theatre a form of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching? How? Could it be? Why? Why not?
7. How might Reader's Theatre be used to inform/be a part of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching?
8. What might Reader's Theatre look like in a class in order to be a part of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching?

*Participants' Value of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Reader's Theatre*

9. What's the value of Reader's Theatre in the classroom? How might it be used?
10. Should Reader's Theatre be used to enhance culturally and linguistically responsive teaching? Why? Why not?
11. What have I not asked you regarding Reader's Theatre, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching or the combination of the two that you have not been able to share?

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion to Dissertation

Reader's Theatre (RT) and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies are valuable practices for today's elementary classroom based upon their own merits. As for RT, many studies have been conducted producing results highlighting the benefits of this traditional literacy strategy (Clementi, 2010; Mraz et al., 2013; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young et al., 2017). Similarly, numerous articles and research endeavors have been produced about the value of implementing culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices in classrooms to benefit all students (Hollie, 2018; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2007; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017). Considering their singular values, a logical next step would be combining the two practices in hopes of elevating their effectiveness in supporting students from all backgrounds. New research with respect to the combination of RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies would benefit preservice teachers (PST), classroom teachers, teacher educators, teacher researchers, and most importantly students. In light of this, the studies conducted for this dissertation provided a glimpse of what may be possible when RT is used as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy.

Educators must be made aware of the benefits, challenges, and the availability of resources prior to implementing any new teaching strategy. This may be especially true when using RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. First, knowledge of where to locate culturally authentic scripts for use within the classroom is one hurdle to overcome as teachers look for ways to combine these two strategies in their classrooms. A lack of RT scripts is not the issue as teachers can access online sites such as The Best Class (thebestclass.org, 2019), Aaron Shephard (aaronsherp.com, 2021), and Stories to Grow By

([storiestogrowby.org](http://storiestogrowby.org), 2021). However, though these sites provide interested educators with hundreds of free scripts, they may or may not be culturally and linguistically responsive. A resource or collection where RT scripts have been assessed as to their cultural and linguistic authenticity would be valuable to teachers hoping to implement an effective literacy strategy in a new and meaningful way.

With that in mind, the content analysis (Berelson, 1952; Northrop et al., 2019; White & Marsh, 2006) completed as part of manuscript one may serve as a guide in how to assess RT scripts and their cultural and linguistic authenticity. By looking at elements such as gender and ethnicity of main characters, author attributes (gender and ethnicity), and certain criteria from culturally and linguistically responsive literature assessments from Hollie (2018) and The Office of Head Start National Center (2020), the level of cultural and linguistic authenticity of RT scripts may be able to be assessed as it was for The Best Class (Young, 2019) collection.

As for The Best Class (Young, 2019) collection, and the 141 scripts analyzed in this study, the overall value as a resource containing culturally and linguistically responsive RT scripts was assessed as low when looking back to number of authors of color (3), protagonists of color (10), scripts with authentic text representation of diverse populations (9), and representation of those with disabilities or from lower socio-economic status (3). This analysis provided insight into the lone research question for the study:

1. To what extent do Reader's Theatre scripts vary by the gender of the protagonist, nationality and ethnicity, author attributes, as well as source of Reader's Theatre script, and year of publication to be considered culturally and linguistically authentic?

The Best Class (Young, 2019) collection is a valuable resource for teachers searching for scripts to incorporate RT in their classrooms in the traditional sense. With additions of more culturally

and linguistically authentic scripts to the collection, it could become even more valuable as a teaching resource for creating a culturally responsive environment for everyone.

The study in manuscript two dug deeper into the possible benefits of connecting RT and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies. In this study, data was collected about the perceptions and understandings of PSTs following instruction on using RT scripts adapted from culturally and linguistically responsive children's literature. During the session, the four participants were in groups that engaged with one of four children's books: *Lailah's Lunchbox: A Ramadan Story* (Faruqi, 2015), *How to Steal a Dog* (O'Connor, 2009), *Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story of the Underground Railroad* (Levine, 2007), and *Hooway for Wodney Wat* (Lester, 1999). These four children's works were chosen for RT instruction because they dealt with a wide range of culturally responsive topics: Middle Eastern culture, homelessness and socio-economic status, the African American historical experience, and a physical challenge in the form of a speech impediment (ableism).

The participants were able to use and discuss the importance of utilizing RT scripts in a culturally and linguistically responsive way with the rest of their peers. They all experienced new cultures and vocabulary, performed the scripts with and for their classmates, and then reflected upon the experience and strategy. The four participant PSTs then took this culturally and linguistically responsive RT experience and further shared their thoughts and ideas about the combination of these strategies. Along with their written reflections about the RT experience, participants engaged in individual interviews with the researcher about culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategies, RT, and the possible value of connecting both strategies. Each participant expressed a strong opinion that RT could be used as a strategy to bring cultural and linguistic responsiveness into a classroom due to its versatile nature through:

creation of community through collaboration, personal connections to literature, a means of introducing difficult topics and discussions, exposing students to different cultures, traditions, and languages, and serving as an avenue to authentically represent students in instruction and educational resources.

However, the PSTs also made clear how crucial the need for purposeful intent and meaningful implementation was to the success of using RT as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. Without these two elements, participants asserted that RT could be a hindrance to students and could become something viewed as negative instead of positive in terms of a culturally and linguistically responsive environment. Though RT's versatile nature makes it a prime candidate to be adapted into a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy, PSTs also stressed it is not culturally and linguistically responsive on its own and thus, without the proper intent and implementation, the use of RT could fail as a culturally responsive teaching method. Participant's understandings and perceptions in this study provided valuable data in respect to each of the research questions:

1. What are preservice teachers' understanding of Reader's Theatre?
2. What are preservice teachers' understanding of a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
3. What are preservice teachers' understanding of Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
4. What are preservice teachers' perceptions of implementing Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?
5. What are preservice teachers' perceptions of the value of implementing Reader's Theatre as a culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy?

With the correct intent and a clear and purposeful plan for implementation, the evidence in this study suggests that RT has the capacity to be a valuable culturally and linguistically responsive teaching strategy. Many of the elements of RT align with the overall goals of cultural and linguistic responsive practices. RT can be a means of building community through its collaborative nature as well as meeting individual student needs through personal connections to literature. Further, with the correct choice of literature, RT can be an effective strategy in not only authentically representing cultures and traditions in its performances, but it can also provide students experiences with new cultures, languages, and traditions they are not familiar with. The proper use of RT can provide educators with an effective teaching tool to begin difficult conversations about culture and language leading to more cultural awareness for their students. Last, RT has shown that it can actively engage most students, no matter ability or background through its motivational qualities.

As educators of all levels search for resources and strategies to meet the needs of the changing demographic makeup in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom, research regarding effective teaching strategies is an important way to support them. Within these two studies, teachers have been given a small glimpse as to resources available and the possible effectiveness of combining two traditionally separate teaching practices. With further research, new data can be collected and teachers can draw their own conclusions as to the value of using RT as an avenue to creating a classroom that exudes cultural and linguistic responsiveness to the benefit of all students. Educators that foster cultural responsiveness using these combined strategies might more effectively create environments where sociocultural consciousness naturally evolves because classrooms become mirrors and windows (Bishop, 1990) for all students.

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## Appendix A

### Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



**Division of Scholarly Integrity and  
Research Compliance**  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-3732  
irb@vt.edu  
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

#### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** February 8, 2021  
**TO:** Peter Doolittle, William Paul Scott  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)

**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Reader's Theatre as a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching Strategy: Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions

**IRB NUMBER:** 20-1049

Effective February 5, 2021, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (d) category(ies) 1,2(ii)

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

#### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 1,2(ii)**  
Protocol Determination Date: **February 5, 2021**

#### ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

*Invent the Future*

Virginia Tech Institutional Review

Board  
page 2 of 2

IRB Number 20-1049

Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

\* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the HRPP office (irb@vt.edu) immediately.

### **Summary**

The aim of the two studies contained within this dissertation was to provide insights into the possible relationship between two singularly valuable teaching strategies: Reader's Theatre and culturally and linguistically responsive teaching. Through the use of a content analysis and a thematic analysis, the possible value of combining the two teaching practices has become clearer. Educators must make informed determinations in order to use and assess the Reader's Theatre scripts available for use as culturally and linguistically authentic based on specific criteria available online or outlined in manuscript one. Similarly, with meaningful intention and purposeful planning, they can successfully implement Reader's Theatre as an engaging strategy to support the creation of a culturally and linguistically responsive learning environment. Through future research endeavors, more can be learned about the value of combining these two proven educational strategies to benefit students of all backgrounds.