

## *Teachers' Responses to Teacher Images in Picture Books*

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### *Abstract*

Many studies look into the responses to literature of students and how these responses may affect their identities. However, rarely do studies look into teachers' responses to literature especially as far as their teacher identities are concerned. This study focuses on a pre-service and beginning teachers' responses to select children's picture books and how their responses reflect their current school contexts and experiences, their emerging teacher identities, and the beliefs they hold in teaching.

### *Introduction*

We, as many other Children's Literature teachers, utilize the Reader Response approach (Rosenblatt, 1978) in encouraging students to make personal meaning out of reading literature. Even at the university level, whenever we read aloud *Chrysanthemum* (Henkes, 1991) to our pre-service teachers, we also utilize Reader Response to model the process of responding to texts and underline the value of personal meaning-making during reading in elementary language arts classrooms. Surprisingly, we noticed a common response pattern from pre-service teachers. They mostly made connections with the character of Chrysanthemum, the student in the story, rather than the character of Mrs. Twinkle, the teacher in the story. While a student's response to one character over another is neither right nor wrong, this became a puzzle in the back of our minds. Since they were studying to become teachers in the near future, should they not respond more readily to Mrs. Twinkle, the teacher in the story? This puzzle eventually led us to revisit Reader Response within the context of teacher education. It was not long before we noticed a strong symmetry between the journey of becoming a teacher and response—as both look at the active role of the learner/ reader in making meaning out of texts (whether texts are the material or experiences in the classroom involved in learning to teach or texts as in pieces of literature). However, the issue is that just as New Critics in literary criticism choose to solely focus on the form and exclude the reader in making meaning out of the text (Rosenblatt, 2003; Ryan, 1999), some teacher education program curriculum designers approach teacher education “as no more than an adaptation of the expectations and directives of others and the acquisition of predetermined skills” (Britzman, 2003, p. 46). As such, conformity, imitation, recitation and assimilation prevail, implying a failure to consider what students bring to the table—their individual backgrounds, prior experiences, interests and motivations—as part of the process of learning to teach. Holt-Reynolds' (1992) asserted that students come to the program with schema about teaching and learning, enough for them “to make sense out of the subject matter of teaching” (p. 327) but do we as teacher educators view pre-service teachers as capable of constructing knowledge themselves based on their earlier life experiences and their current contexts within the teacher education program?

As we investigated the topic of teacher identity more deeply, we discovered the many approaches available in the study of teacher identity. For example, some studies explored teacher identity through D/discourse (Assaf, 2005; Larson, 2008; Phillips, 2010); using Situated Learning (Horn, Nolen, Ward, & Campbell, 2008; Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004; Timostsuk & Ugaste, 2010); looking into Life Histories (Furlong, 2013; Phillips, 2010; Rodriguez & Cho, 2011); and examining Possible Selves (Hamman, Gosselin, Romano, & Bunuan, 2010). These studies are legitimate approaches but are limited because they tend to focus on one aspect of identity. For example, D/discourse and Situated Learning heavily focuses on contexts while Life Histories focus on the background or past experiences of the individual and Possible Selves focuses on the personal and psychological aspects of identity. However, given the complexity of identity based on a teacher's experiences, the internal and external dimensions of learning to teach, and the cognitive as well as the affective dimensions of becoming a teacher, a more multi-dimensional approach that looks at the different aspects of identity is more necessary.

This paper turns to the use of children's literature and Reader Response in understanding the emerging identities of teachers (pre-service and beginning). In this study, we first provide some background on *teacher images* (defined as representations or portrayals of teachers in books), specifically in children's literature, and then we focus primarily on the responses teachers make towards these teacher images in picture books. Teachers are consumers of literature but there is rarely an examination of the way literature influences them, especially in regard to their response to these teacher images and its relationship with their own educator identities, contexts, and beliefs. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to explore the use of Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1965) as a multi-dimensional approach for gaining insights into pre-service and beginning teachers' emergent teacher identities via their responses to the teacher images found in select children's literature. Simultaneously, the study aims to uncover some of the teaching beliefs and teaching practices situated within different classroom contexts as they are embedded in teachers' responses.

### *Research Questions*

This study is framed by the following research questions: *What insights can be gleaned from pre-service and beginning teachers' responses to teacher images found in children's literature regarding how these images may reflect their present school contexts /experiences and teaching beliefs? In what ways do pre-service and beginning teachers' responses to teacher images in children's literature inform their emerging teacher identities?*

This research is based on the assumption that aside from educational values, personal benefit are derived from reading literature. For example, Kiefer (2010) talked about how children's books are able to give insight into human behavior and render coherence to our experiences. To deliver this point clearer, literature scholars have also employed the *windows* and *mirrors* metaphor (Bishop, 1990; Cox & Galda, 1990; Moller, 2014) to describe the impact of books on readers' selves. Accordingly, books may act like *windows*, offering readers insights and deeper understandings of different experiences and life in general through the story character, not directly but vicariously, as lived by the reader. At times, books may also act like *mirrors*, enabling readers to see themselves in the story, "reflecting back to (them) portions of their identities, cultures, experiences" (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014, p. 29). The reading then becomes an opportunity to know more about oneself.

### *Theoretical Framework*

In the *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*, Rosenblatt (2003) provided a general overview of her Transactional Theory as situated in the bigger umbrella of Reader Response Theory. She explained that such category of theories was a reaction against the New Criticism which primarily valued an objective approach to literature. For the New Critics, a piece of literature is believed to have its own inherent meaning that could be studied and interpreted without looking at the author's background and the bigger societal context of which the piece is part. Furthermore, this view also disregards the reader and the subjective interpretations involved. On the other hand, the focus on the reader and his/her role in the meaning-making process was the commonality shared by all reader response theories. Rosenblatt noted the differences between the varieties of theories falling under the umbrella by sorting them according to their specific orientations. For example, there are the reader-oriented theories which make the reader the central part of the analysis and source of meaning; the text-oriented theories which look into the underlying syntactic and rhetorical conventions, rules, and codes of language in order to understand the meaning; and the reader-plus-text-oriented theories which acknowledge the roles of both reader and text, the reader-text relationship and contextual factors involved in the meaning-making process. Interestingly, all of these types of response theories have even finer distinctions, which are discussed further elsewhere.

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory falls under the reader-plus-text-oriented theories. This theory emphasizes the reciprocal relationship of reader and text, each influencing the other in the emergence of meaning. And while the bigger social and cultural context is important, language is also individually understood as the reader draws on linguistic and life experiences. Rosenblatt (1965) also purported that the transaction between reader and text has both cognitive and affective aspects, and a reader may assume a stance along the aesthetic-efferent continuum.

When readers derive meaning from a text, Rosenblatt (1965) explained that first we must understand what the words "text" and "meaning" mean. She defined "text" as "a set or series of signs interpretable as linguistic symbols" (p. 12); they are not just the ink marks on the page but they are the signs on the page that have the capacity to be interpreted for meaning. When the reader perceives the signs on the page, there is an activation of certain elements from his/her personal reservoir of experiences through association. A special meaning emerges as he takes in the symbols and these symbols get associated with certain words, concepts, ideas, sensations, images, objects, relationships, scenes, people, events, etc. from his/her past. The reader, at that moment of organizing the associations, also brings with him/her "personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood at the moment, and a particular physical condition" (1965, p. 30) which influences the emerging meaning of the text. The lived-through experience, the aesthetic evocation (which Rosenblatt termed as the "poem") is the process which involves the set of cues being "put together" by the reader, essentially selecting, and synthesizing the associations, (even modifying as new elements and associations get selected over others). It is described as a back-and-forth, spiraling relationship between reader and text influencing each other as meaning emerges. This relationship is not an *interaction* of two solid and static forces namely *reader* and *text*, but what she called a *transaction* as the reader too "shapes the work" during the process.

Rosenblatt (1965; 2005) also described two stances for reading that produce certain meanings for the reader. The two stances should be viewed as lying on a continuum (a reading is a mix of both stances) rather than seen as dichotomous. On one hand of the continuum is the *aesthetic stance*, where the reader focuses on the lived-through experience by turning his/ her

attention inward – focusing on the sensations, images, feelings, and ideas that are associated with the words from the text. On the other side of the continuum is the non-aesthetic stance, termed as *effferent stance*, where the reader focuses on what is to be extracted from the text after the reading event. From this stance, the reader concentrates on the words ignoring the personal associations. “Meaning results from...analytically structuring the ideas, information, directions, or conclusions to be retained, used, or acted on after the reading event” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. 11).

A reader, during the reading process, generates “a stream of responses”—reactions to (for instance, a general feeling of approval or disapproval) and transaction with the emerging meaning (Rosenblatt, 2005). In essence, the response is the “reflection on the meaning of even a simple text involving the recall ... of the process carried on during the reading” (p. 15). If viewed as a product, Rosenblatt wrote that the term response “should be understood to cover multiple activities” providing “indirect evidence about the student’s evocation, the work as experienced, and the reactions to it” (p. 32).

The centrality of the reader working on his past experiences and present preoccupations to enable him to evoke meaning out of a reading event is informative about how learning could be promoted. This suggests that when texts evoke or arouse a personal response within the learner, development may be fostered. Iser (1993) said that during and after reading, readers generate new understandings about themselves, knowledge that functions alongside already existing knowledge; such knowledge is used to initiate an ongoing process of reinterpretation of past events and projections of future events. There have been empirical studies conducted (see the Literature Review section for the studies conducted around Reader Response) involving the use of Reader Response in relation to cultivating a reader’s identity however, there have been no studies conducted that used Reader Response to study teachers’ identities and experiences in learning to teach.

### *Literature Review*

#### *Children’s Literature and Identity*

Since this study involves responding to children’s literature that contain teacher images, it may be worthwhile to first attend to how teachers are portrayed in children’s books. Trousdale (1992) reviewed 46 picture books published from 1960 and 1990 containing teacher images. Through a content analysis of the picture books, she reported that teachers were portrayed in multi-dimensional ways. Accordingly, several books portrayed teachers as sensitive, sympathetic, pleasant, and wise. Forty one out of the 47 books represented teachers as female while only six were male, represented as younger, more casually dressed and with positive characterizations. More importantly, the difference between male and female teacher portrayals was that the female teachers smiled constantly. Another interesting theme was the nameless teacher: 40 percent of the books with female characters had no names while all books with male teachers had names. Issues of power were also evident in the books, as many of the books portrayed the teacher as nurturing and protective like mothers. In addition, some teachers are portrayed as not having control of their classroom and pushover teachers while on the other side of the spectrum are those who are domineering and oppressive of students. Finally, only very few of the books contained African-American teachers (only two out of the thirty-six human teachers) and none are Hispanic or Asian-American. Many of the names of the teachers also suggest Anglo-Saxon heritage and very few suggest other ethnic descent. In total, the books failed to address the current predominantly white, female pattern in the teaching field.

Sandefur and Moore (2004) conducted an ethnographic content analysis of 96 teacher images in 62 picture books with teacher images published from 1965 to 2003. In their analysis, the authors examined the books in terms of the teacher's appearance (e.g., race, gender, age, clothing, weight), language (representative utterances), subject (what subject matter they taught), approach (teaching philosophy), and effectiveness (e.g., if children were learning from the teacher; children's responses to the teacher). Results of the study showed that teachers are portrayed in the literature in different (and in some contradictory), ways. For example, most of the teachers were portrayed as a white, non-Hispanic female. Only a few books portrayed teachers as sensitive, competent, and had effective classroom management, as most of the books revealed negative images of the teacher (dictatorial and harsh types). The teacher characters were also static, unchanging, and flat—usually portrayed as not able to move from less effective to more effective towards the end of the story. Furthermore, teachers were also represented unrealistically and in polarity: either good or horrid. Finally, many of the teachers in the books were not shown as having a substantial impact on students' learning and not able to inspire students to pursue critical inquiry. Only six out of the total sixty-two books present teachers as educated professionals and intellectually inspiring. The authors suggested that as we keep in mind the portrayals of teachers in children's books, children's literature could be used to provide professional enculturation for pre-service teachers and validation of practices and contributions for in-service teachers.

Some children's literature scholars talked about the values that can be derived from reading children's literature (Kiefer, 2010) as well as the potential to provide readers a chance to discover themselves through the story character/s and stimulate introspection over one's identity (Johnson, Giorgis, Colbert, Conner, King and Kulesza, 2000). This idea of introspection over one's identity through story characters may then be utilized by teachers as they themselves reflect on their identities. One such study was by Hammet and Bainbridge (2009), who did a qualitative study among pre-service teachers ( $n=10$ ) from six universities in Canada to explore how pre-service teachers inquire into their own personal, professional, and national identities through reading and response to Canadian multicultural picture books. Based on questionnaires, focus groups, lesson plans as artifacts, and interviews, the study showed discourses of racism and whiteness, with pre-service teachers being blind to the diversity around them. Lacking dispositions and knowledge of diversity in terms of cultural background, religious beliefs, ability, socio-economic status, language or family structure, the study implied that teachers may not be prepared to tackle multiculturalism in their own classrooms and use multicultural literature.

Labbo (2007) did a similar study to investigate approaches that may increase awareness of 24 pre-service teachers this time in terms of cultural identity and diversity. By implementing different assignments, one of which was to do a cultural analysis of autobiographies, biographies, and discussion of children's literature, pre-service teachers were challenged to find connections with the characters found in these different texts. The study revealed that the assignments allowed the pre-service teachers to flesh out their understandings of diverse cultures. It also showed that pre-service teachers' willingness to take the journey to explore the 'self-others' and by reading children's literature, opportunities to develop empathy through human-to-human connections arose.

#### *Response to Literature*

Still, it is not enough that we rely on the power of children's literature and its capacity to promote introspection and reflection over one's identity as the studies above had shown. Equally



important is the reader's response to literature, the reactions that are based on a reflection on the meaning of a text involving the recall of the meaning-making process during the reading (Rosenblatt, 2005).

To understand the nature of response, scholars have even created schemes to distinguish the differences in responses. For example, the earliest response category scheme was by Purves and Rippere (1968) where responses were classified according to the following: (a) Engagement-Involvement Responses which comprise of the reader's personal and emotional involvement with the work; (2) Perception Responses which comprise of descriptions of the work through story retellings and summaries; (3) Interpretation Responses which comprise of the explanations about the text as it connects to other issues; and (4) Evaluation Responses which comprise of judgment statements about the piece. Other response category schemes that were used in the literature following Purves and Rippere's work either echoed these existing categories (Odell & Cooper, 1976) or expanded the category schemes by further differentiating responses that may likely fall within these bigger categories (Hancock, 1993; Newell, 1989). In Hancock's (1993) work, for example, her scheme included eight response categories that were sorted in three major areas: (1) Personal Meaning Making; (2) Character and Plot Involvement; and (3) Literary Criticism. Hancock (2007) later revised this scheme to include nine response categories embedded within the following renamed three broad areas: (1) Immersion Responses consist of statements about understanding story and plot characteristics, character introspection, predicting what will happen later in the story, and questioning or confusions about the story; (2) Involvement Responses consist of statements about character identification, character assessment, and story involvement; and (3) Literary Connections consist of statements about connections such as text-to-self, text-to-world, or text-to-text, and literary evaluations. Probst (2003) noted that the different categories are not designed to be in hierarchical fashion. Categories are merely a way to describe the nature of the responses. Understanding their nature helps with instruction because it informs the teacher what kind of questions may be formulated to elicit certain responses. For instance, examining patterns of responses is also helpful as far as gauging the direction of literature teaching—whether towards text interpretation or towards reader response orientations. In the case of teacher education, determining and describing the nature of pre-service teachers' responses enables researchers to understand how teacher images elicit certain types of responses, and in turn how these responses relate to pre-service teacher identities.

#### *Response and Readers' Identities*

Grant (1984) echoed Harding's ideas of literary response as '*storying*', wherein when readers engage with literature through response, the reader not only is in a social relation with the story characters, with the author, and with fellow readers, but also "in reading he meets himself- *storying* his own story" (p. 13). Typically, response to literature in classrooms is facilitated when a teacher assigns a certain text for students to read. After reading, students are encouraged to 'respond' by verbally sharing what they think about the story. This enables them to openly share their connections with the story characters, their personal evocations with the story, and/ or focus on what they took away from the text. A few studies have been made showing the relationship of response to literature and readers' identities in the elementary classroom (Enciso, 1994; Rice, 2002) and only one study utilized response literature with pre-service teachers with regard to understanding their cultural identities are concerned (Varga-Dobai, 2014). The study found that pre-service teachers' responses to the multicultural books revealed that books served as invitations to readers to reflect on their own cultural experiences as

they are juxtaposed with what they read about. However, while cultural identity of teachers is a significant part of their overall identity, an investigation of identity that specifically focuses on the domain of teaching is as important for teachers.

### *Methodology*

This research study used a qualitative design and methodology because it allows for an interpretive approach to the world, studying phenomena in their natural settings and making sense of them in ways where people bring meaning to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A qualitative approach also allows the researcher to focus on only a few participants, and as such, results of qualitative studies are non-generalizable across different contexts but only tied to the specific context to which the research occurred (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

In selecting the picture books used for this study, the researchers considered different picture books which contained teacher images based on a public listing of 100 teachers images found in children's literature (Hahn, 2006). The four books used in the study were selected according to the following criteria: (1) books were written by well-published authors/ award-winning authors; (2) books represented female and male teachers, with a final equal number of two female and two male upon selection; and (3) books that characterized teachers in multi-dimensional ways rather than flat and static. The selection process resulted in the following set of teacher images: Ms. Frizzle from *The Magic School Bus Explores the Senses* (Cole, 1999); Mr. Slinger from *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* (Henkes, 1996); Arizona in *My Great Aunt Arizona* (Houston, 1992); and Mr. Falker in *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998).

This study is part of a larger study which was conducted in the summer of 2014 upon securing an approval to conduct research from the institutional review board. Participants were recruited through email to voluntarily participate in the research, outside of their semester classes in the case of the pre-service teachers, and outside of the school year in the case of the beginning teachers. The recruitment resulted in five volunteers (3 pre-service teachers and 2 beginning teachers). One of the pre-service teachers dropped out of the study due to schedule conflicts. The four participants who remained in the study were comprised of one female and three male. They were aged 20-23 years old at the time of the study and came from different ethnicities: one Anglo-American, one African-American, and two Mexican-American. All participants attended the same teacher education program in the Southwestern part of the United States.

The data collection phase involved three semi-structured interviews for each participant. Each interview lasted from a minimum of 30 minutes up to a maximum of 45 minutes. The first half of each interview focused on the teacher's general perceptions about the ideal teacher and his/her teacher identities. At the end of each interview session, a participant was given two picture books to take home and read. On the succeeding interview, it was the second half of the interview when the teachers shared his/her responses to the teacher images found in the books. As they shared what they thought about the teacher images, they still continued to describe their own teacher identities vis a vis the teacher characters in the picture books. Member checks were conducted by re-stating participants' responses during the interviews to clarify meanings that were being communicated. The interviews were later transcribed by the researcher for data analysis.

Reading through transcripts of the teachers' responses, two types of analyses were conducted: first was a content analysis of each teacher's responses to the different teacher images using response categories which clearly corresponded to the nature of their responses (see Table 1, Response Category Schemes); and second was an application of open coding procedures

(Charmaz, 2006) for meaningful units, which further led to themes emerging from the portion of the interview that focused on their perceptions of an ideal teacher and their own teacher identities. Both the direct responses to the teacher images and emergent themes were organized into a table for further interpretation and triangulation in relation to participants' underlying beliefs and teacher identities. For this paper, the common open codes were merged into bigger themes and these themes were: *'teachers are happy and nice,' 'teachers must foster positive student-teacher relationships in the classroom,' 'teachers do not know all the answers to questions,'* and *'teachers must find their own teacher identity.'*

Table 1

*Response Category Schemes*

<b>Purves and Rippere's Scheme (1968)</b>	<b>Hancock's Scheme (2007)</b>
<b>Engagement-Involvement Responses</b> comprise of student's involvement in the work, personal and emotional impact and interest arousal levels in himself/herself	<b>Immersion Responses</b> 1. Understanding- statements about the understanding of story characteristics and plot 2. Character Introspection- statements where students share insights about the character's feelings and motives 3. Predicting- statements where students speculate what will happen later in the story 4. Questioning- statements involving wonderings and confusions about the story
<b>Perception Responses</b> comprise of descriptions of the work through story retellings, content summaries, and formal and historical elements related to the work.	
<b>Interpretation Responses</b> comprise of explanations about the text involving other issues.	<b>Involvement Responses</b> 5. Character Identification- statements that express sympathy, sharing of related experiences from own lives, or giving advice to the story character 6. Character Assessment- statements where students judges a character's actions 7. Story Involvement- statements that reveal involvement/engagement using words to express satisfaction with story
<b>Evaluation Responses</b> comprise of judgment statements about the piece based on identified criteria.	<b>Literary Connections</b> 8. Connections- statements involving text-to-self-, text-to-world, or text-to-text references 9. Literary evaluation- statements that evaluate part of or all of the book

*Findings*

In order to go deeper into the responses and related identities of the teachers in this study, we conducted a focused analysis of a subset of the data. This subset concentrated on one pre-service teacher's and one beginning teacher's interview data to offer a level of variation in terms



of responses and classroom experiences. By focusing on just these two teachers, we believe we are able to still capture the essence of response in relation to one's experiences and contexts while addressing space limitations of this paper. These findings are presented by first giving a description of each teacher's brief background and context. This is followed by an analysis of the types of responses each teacher made to the teacher images found in the books. After this, a description of the teacher's perceptions of the ideal teacher and his/her teacher identity are provided while representing the themes mentioned above.

#### *Emma*

Emma is a 21-year-old, of Anglo-American descent, pre-service teacher who completed half of her year-long student teaching in a 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade classroom of an elementary school in a large urban school district. At the time of the study, she was one semester away from graduating from the program. Surrounded by teachers in her own family (i.e., mother and aunts), she has been exposed to the culture of school early on in her life. Based upon her own life experiences, she shared her perception of a teacher being someone who teaches content but at the same time also helps children find out who they are and what they like to do. She also emphasized her value for positive teacher-student relationship, as she recalled having a positive caring relationship with her first grade teacher who gave her own favorite doll to Emma. For Emma, this act of kindness was a symbol of care that teacher had for her.

*Emma's Responses to the Teacher Images.* Results of the coding showed Emma's responses to the teacher images were of the engagement-involvement type of responses (Hancock, 1993 & 2007; Purves & Rippere, 1968). She engaged with the character of Arizona from the book *My Great Aunt Arizona* (Houston, 1992) by expressing her appreciation for the story. When asked what she thought of the book and the teacher in the story, she said,

"I really liked it. She's (Arizona) one of those typical teachers you picture in your mind in a children's book who's always happy and always being there for the students. And it's not about her. She didn't take the time off to travel to those places but she helped the kids learn about them, told them they're always there in my mind. So they always remember even long years later that they remember her, she left an impact on them and a lasting story. So I think that's kind of what a good teacher I want to be like."

In the same manner, she also expressed her positive evaluation of Mrs. Twinkle from the book *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* (Henkes, 1996) by saying, "She's (Mrs. Twinkle) always great because she's encouraging them to like—they loved her that first day and they kind of wanted to be like her."

Aside from being engaged with the teacher images in the books, Emma also made introspection and identification responses (Hancock, 2007) with the teacher characters. For example, in her third interview, she shared her insights about Ms. Frizzle from *The Magic School Bus Explores the Senses* (Cole, 1999) and then identified with Ms. Frizzle's character by talking about her own beliefs about teaching.

"She's there to support her kids as they learn. It's not just about reading the books. It's about experiencing them. You have to make experiences. That's how I want my classroom to be. It's not just reading from books and learning from that but actually touching and feeling things, and learning from inquiry lessons."

She also noted that Ms. Frizzle had that happiness in her that her own students felt as they worked over the projects in the classroom.

Finally, Emma made story involvement (Hancock, 2007) responses by emphasizing how much she liked the hands-on nature of Ms. Frizzle's way of teaching. By saying so, she again started to talk about how her own teaching beliefs and practices.

"Well I just like the hands-on thing, that's really important. And it's neat that she does that because not everyone does that especially with science. This one was science-based. I think you can't learn science unless you're doing it. I mean you can but you're not really understanding. Me especially, I'm really a hands-on learner. So, I think that helps me a little bit in preparing lessons. Some kids can just read it and know it, (but) I'm not like that."

In this quote, as well as the other quotes, it is notable that her initial responses to the teacher images in the books was followed by descriptions of her own teaching beliefs, practices, and the kind of teacher she wanted to be.

*Emma's Perceptions of the Ideal Teacher and Her Teacher Identity.* Outside of her direct responses to the teacher images in the books, Emma also shared her own perceptions of what an ideal teacher is. In the first interview, she said that a teacher is someone who helps children grow academically as well as personally. For her, this meant teaching not just content but being there to help the students find out who they are and find out what they want to do. She said that this perception was based on her own experiences as a student because she had several teachers earlier in school who helped her determine what she wanted to do in life. She emphasized how important this meant to her during those times, therefore, she wanted to do the same for her own students.

Emma also believed that an ideal teacher must be responsible, self-less and particularly happy. She explained that if a teacher is not happy in the classroom, students will not be happy and they will not want to or cannot learn from that teacher. In relation, she observed how other teachers are bogged down with the numerous tasks involved in teaching, which could easily come out on the students and make it difficult to teach. However, for her, she expressed awareness that the sheer volume of tasks is not the students' concern. It is on the teacher to take a step back and remind oneself that it is not about the tasks but about teaching students. Having articulated this, we inferred that Emma believed that a teacher must be able to do her job while focusing on teaching students and maintaining a happy disposition.

Furthermore, Emma asserted that an ideal teacher must be encouraging. This was based on her thinking that a teacher would sometimes have students who are very involved in their learning and those who are not as involved in their learning. She said, "...there's always that one kid that's, 'No!' so you need to encourage (him/ her) a little bit, to take chances and make mistakes." Related to this, she did mention in her first interview that the teacher must also be comfortable with the thought that teachers may not always know the answers to certain questions, and therefore, must constantly learn. This said, she believed that the teacher and her students must learn together and grow together because that builds a positive student-teacher relationship in the classroom.

Finally, it should be noted that when prompted about her ideas of an ideal teacher, she frequently said that she felt she was repeating her ideas (i.e., a teacher must be happy, a teacher must constantly grow and learn new things; a teacher must be encouraging). Even the way she described her teacher identity was in terms of a future self based on her beliefs of what a teacher must be. And, in her last interview, she stated many times that every teacher is unique with his/ her own identity; that there is no "recipe for a perfect teacher"; and it is important to "figure out" one's identity in order to play one's strengths.

## Ricky

Ricky is a 23-year-old beginning teacher of Mexican-American descent. He completed his first year of teaching in a kindergarten classroom from an elementary school in a large urban school district. He shared that when his mother passed away while he was still very young, he considered his second grade teacher to be that person who made him desire to be a teacher. Accordingly, this teacher was always there for him and went above and beyond to care and comfort him during those times. Because of this significant influence early on his life, he wanted to be that same kind of caring teacher to his students.

*Ricky's Responses to the Teacher Images.* Ricky's responses to the teacher images in the texts were also of the engagement-involvement type of responses (Hancock, 2007; Purves & Rippere, 1968). Among the four books, he first identified with the teacher in the book, *My Great Aunt Arizona* (Houston, 1992) and made introspection responses (Hancock, 2007) as he saw many commonalities between Arizona and himself. For example, he stated that he was like her because he always wanted to be a teacher ever since he was little just like Arizona did. His response also embodied personal emotional impact as he expressed his fear about Arizona's life.

"The teacher-- she went to the school, grew up in that school, went to school, came back, and taught in the school until she was old. That just freaked me out, and I think that has a lot to do with me wanting to move and expand my horizons... because I can very easily see myself doing that (growing old in the same school). That's why I want to know if I'm going to move, I need to do it now!"

Still showing introspection, Ricky further shared that just as Arizona wanted to live through her students, he felt this was something he also did with his own students--imparting his own life lessons on them (e.g., being a light in the world; be good and not just intelligent individuals) and wishing for his students to be able to go to different places.

Further, Ricky also made involvement responses (Hancock, 2007) with Mr. Slinger from *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* (Henkes, 1996). Aside from mentioning that they shared similar characteristics, he also assessed the character of Mr. Slinger by saying,

"Because he was very fun, he was very caring, just a genuinely nice person. And I feel like that's how the kids view me, and they constantly want to be just like me. And that's how Lilly was—she wanted to be just like the teacher until the teacher did one thing—took her purse--and she got so mad at him. And I feel like that happens with my kids all the time. They love me or I do something and they hate me...."

Finally, Ricky made further story involvement responses (Hancock, 2007) by expressing his own wishes of becoming more like Mr. Slinger—*having energy and more fun with kids*—instead of being too serious at times as he perceived himself to be.

*Ricky's Perceptions of the Ideal Teacher and His Teacher Identity.* Apart from his responses to the teacher images in the books, Ricky also discussed his teacher identity *vis a vis* his descriptions of an ideal teacher—someone who is caring, has great strategies to teach content and someone who makes learning fun.

He also more particularly emphasized that "one of the big personality traits of a good teacher—one that (he does) not possess—is they're always nice." He added that though this is how his professional colleagues perceived him, he viewed himself as short-tempered, impatient, picky, and stressed with the students at times. This self-perception can also be connected with his additional comments about the typical perception of male teachers as being that "tough teacher,"

which he also connected with Mr. Ratburn in Marc Brown's Arthur books, the teacher whom many students feared. Nevertheless, Ricky acknowledged that Mr. Ratburn's character was actually the caring and kind type, something that one would not be able to infer from just one reading episode.

In his second interview, Ricky also specifically mentioned the importance of teachers having strong content knowledge, but at the same time emphasized that the teacher is not that all-knowing person in the classroom. Relatedly, Ricky expressed his desire to be more student-centered through an inquiry-oriented classroom. He stated that he wants students to discover things for themselves by letting them experiment with materials on their own instead of him lecturing in front of the students. He said that the teacher's role is to guide the learning instead of lecturing in front of the class. Aside from this role, he also shared his other ideal that teachers must expose students to many different places through books and a variety of texts as many students (in the city where he currently taught) have limited exposure to books in the home environment and come from less advantaged backgrounds who afford to travel to other places.

Ricky also noted that it was difficult for him to be the only male on a team of female kindergarten teachers because he did not identify with certain "cute" activities that the other teachers designed. In those cases, he had to tweak the activities to turn them into something that was more "him". Still related to identity, he also metaphorically compared a teacher to a chameleon, because a teacher is not just one person but has multiple selves in the classroom—one has to be a teacher, a parent, a counselor, even a psychiatrist at times. He also identified the need to treat students uniquely for who they are because students are persons with their own personalities, possessing likes and dislikes, and deserving respect. He further noted that there is no "cookie cut teacher" and that students also mold their teacher, as one's identity in general is constructed based on things that happened in one's life. In relation to his identity, he shared that he sometimes experienced anxiety over his quest for his identity as an individual and as an educator because they sometimes are in conflict with each other. For example, he knew that he was still a twenty-three year old who still wanted to create wacky videos online but at the same time desired to be a professional educator.

It should be noted that both Emma and Ricky did not respond to the teacher character 'Mr. Falker' from the book *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (Polacco, 1998).

### *Discussion*

Drawing from the findings of the two teachers in this study, we found that their responses to teacher images found in children's literature reflected their own school contexts / experiences. For example, as Emma responded to Ms. Frizzle's hands-on teaching practices, she also reflected her own teaching practice of planning for more hands-on learning, based on her student teaching experience. Ricky's responses to Arizona and Mr. Slinger were directly tied to his experiences within the school where he taught. This was evidenced by his examples and direct references to his students and classroom experiences (e.g., students hating him when he did something to enact some classroom management as what happened to Mr. Slinger; how he was perceived by colleagues versus how he viewed himself as the Mr. Ratburn whom students feared). This finding is supported by the idea that readers make meaningful transactions with the text by activating certain elements from one's personal reservoir of experiences through the process of association (Rosenblatt, 1965). What was further found was that since the reservoir of teaching experiences differed from one teacher to the other, that difference also accounted for the quality of their responses. For example, since Ricky's responses to the teacher images were tied to actual

teaching experiences (e.g., him wanting to move to another place to teach in order to expand his horizons instead of being like Arizona who taught in the same school for a long time) and his teacher identity (e.g., how his students viewed him as a nice teacher whom students wanted to emulate). On the other hand, Emma's responses were focused on the events in the story (e.g., how Arizona had a happy disposition and was there for her students) and/or a description of her future self (e.g., wanting to be more experiential and hands-on). This may be due to the fact that Emma has only one year of student teaching experience. All of this suggests that the more teaching experiences the teachers have, the richer and stronger their responses (i.e., identifications and introspections) were to the teacher images in the books. Finally, it may be speculated that both teachers' reservoir of experiences did not relate with Mr. Falker's teacher image, and as a result, may not have facilitated any type of response from either teacher's side.

Both teachers also responded to the teacher images and revealed their own perceptions of the ideal teacher (e.g., Emma thought the ideal teacher is helpful, happy, and encouraging while Ricky thought the ideal teacher is nice, not the all-knowing adult in the classroom, and has multiple selves to adapt to students' needs and personalities). This process is also explained by what Rosenblatt (1965) said that during the response process, a reader brings in his/her "personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood at the moment, and a particular physical condition" (p. 30) which influences the emerging meaning of the text.

Furthermore, both teachers' responses to the teacher images also revealed their unique teaching beliefs. For example, Emma stated that a teacher must be happy—a quality she identified in Ms. Frizzle; Ricky stated that a teacher must be genuinely nice—a quality he identified in Mr. Slinger. While these two statements are related with regard to the theme '*teachers are happy and nice*,' their responses still showed unique differences. Rosenblatt (1978) describes this process as a unique transaction between the reader and the text. She explained, "Every individual experience of a *poem* contains something idiosyncratic and purely individual" (p. 105). As such, when each teacher read the picture books and responded to the teacher image found therein, each of them had to put together cues from the text, selecting and synthesizing which associations were most meaningful. Each went through her own back-and-forth spiraling transaction between herself and the text, influencing each other as meaning merged.

Finally, both teachers' responses to teacher images found in the picture books related to their emerging teacher identities. For example, Emma talked about Ms. Frizzle's experiential and hands-on approach in the classroom. From her response, we inferred the kind of teacher she wanted to be: A teacher who offers hands-on learning experiences. Ricky identified Mr. Slinger's nice and genuine qualities, which was supported by his description of how his students viewed him. This may imply that the teachers responded to the teacher images (i.e., identification of qualities) because they already had some of these qualities, interests, experiences, assumptions and expectations beforehand, enabling them to perceive those qualities of teachers in connection to elements in their teaching.

We contend that through both teachers' responses, the picture books appeared to have served as a *mirror*, to enable them to see by reflecting back portions of their identity as teachers (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014). Similarly, we argue that the books also functioned as a *window* into their idealisms of what it means to be a teacher. As a result, we believe that responses to the teacher images in the books aided both teachers in meeting themselves (Grant, 1984). In this ongoing process, we offer that the teachers' better knowledge of themselves as teachers would allow them to better deal with the external forces to which teachers are subject



(e.g., pressures associated with teaching, teacher-parent relationships, institutional socialization, etc.).

### *Limitations, Conclusions, and Implications*

Despite the limitations of a small data set, this study made us deeply aware of how picture books and response to literature could possibly impact teachers in terms of making meaning out of their teaching lives and developing teacher identities. Bishop (1990) said that through literature, readers could learn about “who and what society and culture values, what kinds of behaviors are acceptable and appropriate, and what it means to be a decent human being” (p. 561). In this study, children’s literature with teacher images served as a window and/or mirror for the teachers to see the contexts and school culture in which they live, construct their own understanding of what behaviors were professionally acceptable and appropriate, and what it meant to be an “ideal” teacher.

Although this paper provided data from two participants, findings strongly suggest that teachers might benefit if they developed a habit of responding to books that could speak to their own identities, as teachers and even as individuals. Responding to literature in this manner may inform their knowledge of the *self* as was the case was for the two participants. This could contribute to a stronger teacher identity associated with better professionalism. Teachers’ responses to teacher images in books pose the following specific implications:

1. Given that the teachers in this study made identifications and introspections with the teacher images found in the books, more studies that investigate teachers’ responses to literature containing teacher images are still needed. From such studies, children’s book authors and illustrators may gain insight into how to portray teachers in books. For example, authors and illustrators might first inquire about the current make-up of teachers in society while highlighting positive qualities (but not romanticized notions of teachers and teaching) to enable teachers to see themselves in the books in realistic ways. Authors and illustrators might also want to address the small number (or absence) of books containing teachers coming from minority ethnic groups by creating more books that reflect the lives of teachers of color. Authors and illustrators may also want to characterize teachers as more multi-dimensional (having multiple aspects to their personality and teaching) instead of portraying them as having static, unchanging, and flat traits (Sandefur & Moore, 2004) that remain the same throughout the story. This may give teacher-readers more points of association and connection that would allow for deeper and more varied points for introspection on their teacher identities.

2. Teacher educators might want to explore and incorporate response to literature activities in the classroom, not just part of literacy methods courses but even in foundations in teaching courses as an opportunity to develop teacher identities. Likewise, professional development programs aimed at supporting beginning teachers might consider the use of Children’s Literature and response to literature as a way to develop and strengthen beginning teachers’ identities.

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