

Exploring Critical Encounters with First Graders Through Picture Books

Abstract:

This qualitative study examines how a first grade teacher explores social justice concepts through picture books with young children during the Language Arts Block. As part of the year-long study, 15 in-class observations were conducted to gather data sources focused on how young children responded and discussed difficult topics concerning identity through illustrations and visual thinking strategies (VTS). Observations of the teacher sharing multimodal literature, interviews with students of varying racial and ethnic histories, socioeconomic status, and ability status were conducted and analyzed to better understand how VTS can scaffold young children's exploration of social justice concepts. The authors conducted a microanalysis of how the teacher and her students entered into social justice literature discussions through VTS. The book of focus, *Stella Brings the Family*, explored a student's perspective of navigating elementary school/Mother's Day with two dads. Findings illustrate how the teacher's critical use of VTS and reviewing the student's understanding of identities scaffolded students into discussing difficult topics. Findings also provide evidence for the value of diverse picture books in the classroom. The author concludes by stating the importance of inviting young students to discuss social justice concepts through multimodal literature in order to create a space that values critical conversations to embrace diversity.