

Alred, Byram and Fleming (2002) argue that being intercultural involves “the awareness of experiencing otherness and the ability to analyze the experience and act upon the insights into self and other which the analysis brings” (p. 4). Scholars have highlighted the importance of fostering teacher candidates’ cross-cultural competence and note that literary texts can help students see both the commonality and the diversity of global cultures. However, few research studies have combined these perspectives by investigating the role children’s literature plays in supporting pre-service teachers’ knowledge and appreciation of cultural diversity. This presentation is an attempt to fill this scholarly gap by describing a research study documenting the development of teacher candidates’ sociocultural awareness as they read and responded to children’s books as part of an undergraduate course on exploring sociocultural perspectives in education. Pre-service education students at a small liberal arts college in the Southeastern United States read a variety of children’s books exemplifying various themes covered in the course and completed two pre- and post-study questionnaires measuring their personal and professional beliefs about diversity (Pohan & Aguilar, 2001). Data from the study demonstrate that the children’s books contributed to students’ sociocultural awareness by deepening their understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity while also strengthening their desire to value and honor their future students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The results of the study suggest that children’s literature can strengthen and support the development of pre-service teachers’ intercultural understanding.