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Mary Amanda Stewart, Patricia Flint & Mariannella Núñez

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PART I

Advancing the Conversation

Teachers and Diverse Students: A Knowledge-to-Action Reader Response Model to Promote Critical Consciousness

Mary Amanda Stewart and Patricia Flint
Texas Woman's University

Mariannella Núñez
University of the Incarnate Word

Anti-immigrant vitriol is growing, even disturbing our educational spaces. Teachers are also affected by the negative discourses around them and need to develop knowledge that shapes their attitudes and actions regarding immigrant youth. This article details a professional development with high school teachers that used reader response to develop critical consciousness, the ability to name, and then act on tensions and unjust practices. Specifically, the purpose was to develop knowledge that might affect teachers' attitudes and actions toward (im)migrant students in their classrooms and schools. The teacher educators engaged in a semester-long reader response initiative that consisted of reading and responding to a series of both informational and narrative texts about the (im)migrant and refugee experience. The high school teachers illustrated various levels of growth from gaining knowledge to engaging in action to better serve students at their schools, suggesting this reader-response model may be used to develop aspects of critical consciousness about other social justice issues in our society that affect teachers and the manner in which they engage with diverse students.

Correspondence should be sent to Mary Amanda Stewart, Department of Literacy and Learning, Texas Woman's University, P.O. Box 425769, Denton, TX 76204. E-mail: mstewart7@twu.edu
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Educators often have divergent lived experiences than their students since the majority of the teaching force is white (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017) while most students are racially minoritized (Federal Interagency Forum on Child & Family Statistics, 2017). Thus, there is a great need to cross the divides between teachers and racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students. Harnessing the power of story through a reader-response approach is a potential method to bridge this gap. Consequently, we created a graduate literacy course for high school teachers using reader

response to build their knowledge and affect their actions, specifically regarding (im)migrant youth.

We begin with an acknowledgment that language is powerful and carries great meaning that consciously or covertly affects our attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Therefore, we use the term *(im)migr*ant as opposed to *immigr*ant as an act of decolonization. Historically, migration is understood through colonial terms, yet we purposefully choose to construct a view of migration that considers the movement of people across borders as natural, rejecting the narrative that the land belongs primarily to colonizers, namely non-Indigenous groups (Arzubiaga et al., 2009).

> # We begin with an acknowledgment that language is powerful and carries great meaning that consciously or covertly affects our attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

In this graduate course, we focused on a sub-population of (im)migrant youth referred to as unaccompanied minors, young people who are under the age of 18 and come to the U.S. without an adult. In recent years, they have received more attention through Sonia Nazario's (2013) journalism that focuses on one young man's dangerous journey from Honduras to reunite with his mother in California. This migration phenomenon is often portrayed in the media as the sheer number of underage youth arriving at the border without parents cannot be ignored. For example, in 2016, U.S. immigration enforcement took into custody almost 60,000 unaccompanied minors along the U.S./Mexico border from Guatemala (32%), El Salvador (29%), Mexico (20%), and Honduras (18%) (United States Customs and Border Protection [USCBP], 2016). Many of these young people are eventually released from detention centers and take buses to places where they can find work or reunite with extended family, such as the city where the graduate course took place.

Yet while this student population grows, so does xenophobic vitriol. This creates educational ecologies that are often sites of tension, creating unsafe spaces and ineffective learning environments for students (Martinez et al., 2019). The fear-mongering anti-immigrant rhetoric over the past 5 years has greatly affected how students of (im)migrant backgrounds as well as Students of Color feel in their schools (López & Pérez, 2018; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). Teachers are also affected by the negative discourses around them and need to develop factual knowledge, an understanding of their students' lives, and even empathy that affects their actions toward (im)migrant youth (Christian et al., 2019). Thus, Martinez et al. (2019) call for teachers to enact transformative practices within their classrooms to counter negative discourses surrounding migration.

In order to develop innovative ways to do this, we developed a graduate course based on reader response to create change in two high schools. Our aim was to help teachers meet the needs of their unaccompanied minor and other (im)migrant students. The knowledge-to-action reader-response model we created illustrates how purposeful reading experiences can collectively build knowledge influence teacher actions—actions that provide more equitable spaces for marginalized students. Indeed, although our focus is (im)migrant youth, this reader-response model may be applicable in facilitating teachers understanding of the lived experiences of students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and other underserved and marginalized populations.

Theoretical Framework

Knowing the need to radicalize pedagogy in times of renewed acceptance of inequality and racism (Tienda, 2017), we focus on our roles in teacher education as agents of activism and love for marginalized communities (Haddix, 2019). Thus, we first draw from Freire's (1974) notion of critical consciousness and then connect it to reader response, an engagement with text that produces change in the reader.

Critical Consciousness

Possessing a critical consciousness involves two components: knowledge and action. The first factor is sophisticated knowledge that moves beyond mere facts to keenly discern and disentangle contradictions rooted in power relations (Freire, 1974). For teachers of marginalized youth, this knowledge encompasses awareness of their students' social contexts. Understanding that importance of this broad, holistic view, Freire and Macedo (1987) ask: "How can one develop critical consciousness without looking at the concept of the reality of social consciousness?" (p. 48). Disempowerment, systems of oppression, cyclical poverty, racism, sexism,

homophobia, Islamophobia, and xenophobia are some of society's ills that affect students. Further, many students experience interlocking systems of oppression and are multiply-minoritized.

Thus, to develop critical consciousness, it is incumbent for educators to identify the social reality of their students, how they are marginalized by an unjust society. Through a raciolinguistics perspective (Rosa & Flores, 2017), we acknowledge how students' use of language is judged (e.g. as appropriate, academic, or marked by an accent [Flores, 2020]), is highly influenced by the bodies they inhabit and the perception of race the dominant class places on them. That is, although they may speak English in a similar way as a white monolingual English-speaker, their bodies signal a deficiency in their speech to the "white listening subject" (Rosa & Flores, 2017, p. 627). Acknowledging these tensions created by systemic and often invisible injustices in society is uncomfortable. Yet, wrestling with this information is crucial in order for societal change to occur, requiring teachers to challenge long-held and unquestioned assumptions in order to re-see some normative truths as myths (Stewart et al., 2021).

> The knowledge-to-action reader response model we created illustrates how purposeful reading experiences can collectively build knowledge influence teacher actions— actions that provide more equitable spaces for marginalized students.

However, critical consciousness cannot stop with knowledge, even deep, nuanced, and sophisticated knowledge that embraces tensions. The second component is how one acts on this knowledge (Freire, 1970). Thus, to possess critical consciousness, one must do more than learn and acknowledge, but also engage in action based on an understanding of the tensions they learn to name. Freire (2005) describes this an act of armed love for students—when teachers bravely acknowledge oppression and then work against it for and in solidarity *with* their students. Therefore, developing critically conscious teachers must be a priority in teacher education as week seek innovative ways to create a paradigm shift that may

lead to changes in educational practices (Arellano et al., 2016). We look to the field of literacy for potential innovations, understanding literacy, a critical understanding of how we send and receive meaning, has the potential to "break the chains of colonialism" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 56).

Reader Response

Thus, we draw from reader response in our teacher education practices aimed at developing critical consciousness. Reading is a complex process in which the reader negotiates and re-negotiates identities to discover new possibilities for themselves (Lewis & Dockter, 2011) while also developing intercultural understandings (Wang, 2019). This idea connects to critical consciousness as we purposefully read both word, the actual text, and the world, the sociocultural and political space where the text is situated (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Reader response is a particular area that focuses in how one interacts or transacts with any given text, noting that text may consist of print, images, movement, and sound. Through this view, a text, or story, has the unique power to effect change in the reader and collectively in the world. The field of reader response began with Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory which espouses that reading should result in a living through experience, where the reader is somehow impacted or even changed by the transaction that occurs during the reading event. The transaction is a unique and potentially powerful coming together of the reader, and all of their experiences, with the text, and all of the author's experiences. These two worlds influence one another, creating the reader's unique experience with the text, termed "the poem." Rosenblatt (1978) further explains there are various stances on a continuum that a reader might adopt, sometimes even simultaneously. One end of this continuum is titled efferent where the reader purposes to gain facts in order to recall them. The other side is esthetic, reading for an emotional experience. Understanding the role of both efferent and esthetic reading to develop critical consciousness, naming tensions, and responding to them in action, we purposefully included informational text and stories in the course.

We also ground this work in Koopman and Hakemulder (2015) Multi-factor Model of Literary Reading framework that connects reading literature to empathy and self-reflection. They assert that empathy, a feeling of similar emotions as a character in a text, can be gained from reading narratives. Their review of various studies illustrates the

powerful influence reading narrative texts, story, can have on one's knowledge that informs beliefs and actions. This occurs as the reader takes on the role of the character and then proceeds through defamiliarization, where the reader views familiar concepts (in this case migration unsanctioned by governments) in different ways previously not considered. This act of defamiliarization is essential when readers encounter deeply stereotyped people or ideas. Often, readers have various sociocultural influences that have worked in tandem for years in order to color their view of events or the actors in the events; therefore, empathy development is key.

Studies illustrate that reading stories can uniquely produce empathy in others. Boas (2012) used literature circles to produce empathy for refugees with students while Youngs (2012) used picture books of the Japanese American internment camps during World War II to develop critical understandings. A high school English teacher focused on nonfiction reading in an anti-bullying unit that resulted in students' desire to change their own behaviors (Ansbach, 2012). In differentiating cognitive empathy (social inferencing) and affective empathy (direct experience), Ansbach (2012) determined that offering first-person essays increased the probability of reaching the affective domain. A common thread through these studies is the opportunity readers had to respond to their experiences with the text. The opportunity to reflect and respond was necessary so that the experience did not just exist within itself, but that it expanded into the classroom and into current issues.

Methods

We framed this study as a formative design (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) to increase educators' knowledge and influence their actions regarding (im)migrant youth. A formative design entails the use of theory and past research to form instruction in order to meet a specific goal as instruction occurs in natural contexts and is redesigned through iterative cycles of data analysis. Specifically, the research questions were:

(1) How does purposeful reading affect teachers' knowledge about (im)migrant youth?
(2) How does reading affect their professional actions as teachers of (im)migrant youth?

The design included the selection of relevant texts and the construction of spaces for responding to those texts. We offered the 16-week graduate course at two high schools in a metropolitan area in Texas, in 2018 and 2019. Each course met three times during the semester accompanied by weekly discussions and ongoing engagement with one another, the instructor (Stewart), and the graduate assistants (Flint and Núñez). The 27 participants (Table 1) were teachers from various disciplines who committed to three university courses; this was the second in the series, with the other two courses focusing on language and diversity. This course was about literacy instruction for adolescents acquiring English. In both years, the courses occurred during times when immigration was a divisive topic and the schools were receiving more students from Migrant Caravans, notably unaccompanied minors, creating the stimulus for our text selection (Table 2).

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to reading, the teachers took a pre-survey with open-ended questions about their knowledge regarding unaccompanied minors, then, at the end of the course, they took a post-survey in order to

Table 1. Participants.

	High school 1	High school 2
School English learner population	9.5%	2.1%
Number of teacher participants	16	11
Teaching areas/roles	English, ESL, Math, Science, Library, Spanish, Latin, School Administration	English, Math, Science, Visual Arts, Library
Language self-identification*	10 = monolingual (English)	9 = monolingual (English)
	6 = bi/multilingual (English, Spanish and Latin)	2 = bi/multilingual (English, Spanish and French)
Racial self-identification	13 = White	6 = White
	3 = Latina or Latino	3 = Latina
		2 = African American
Focal teachers selected for interviews**	1 Spanish teacher from Nicaragua (Latino/Bilingual)	1 English teacher from the U.S. (White/ Monolingual)
	1 Librarian from the U.S. (White/Bilingual)	

*These teachers considered themselves fluent in two or more languages; however, some of the teachers who identified as monolingual had some proficiency in languages other than English.
**Names are pseudonyms.

Table 2. Texts in unit about (im)migrant youth, particularly unaccompanied minors.

Text	Genre	Engagement with text & response
Díaz (2016). *The only r*oad. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.	Narrative chapter book	Read independently as focal text in unit. Created various self-selected multimodal reader response artefacts in response to book.
Argueta and Ruano (2016). *Somos como las nubes. We are like the clou*ds. Groundwood Books.	Illustrated poetry	Participated in read-aloud in class followed by discussion.
Buitrago and Yockteng (2015). *Two white rabbi*ts. Groundwood Books.	Narrative picture book	Visuals used for discussion and writing prompts.
*Some Americans Are Opening Up Their Homes to Central America*ns. (2018). Retrieved from https://newsela.com/read/americans-open-homes-asylum-seekers/id/43015/	Informational text	Read independently for small group discussion before reading the focal novel in order to build background knowledge.
Office Refugee Resettlement: Facts and Data. (2019). Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/about/ucs/facts-and-data.		
Children Entering the United States Unaccompanied: Section 2 Safe and Timely Release from ORR Care. (2019). Retrieved from https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/children-entering-the-united-states-unaccompanied-section-2.		

*Texts added the second time we taught the course after seeing a need for more factual information.

reflect on their learning. We used the information along with their discussion board posts and our experiences teaching the first cohort to make minor modifications for the second cohort that included adding more informational texts at the beginning of the course. Once both courses were complete, through purposive sampling (Creswell, 2014) due to their differences (race, languages, disciplines, and schools), we interviewed three of the teachers to understand how the reading affected them. Our final data analysis included the surveys, discussion board posts, and interviews to construct a qualitative logic model (Yin, 2018) as shown in Figure 1. This explains the process the teachers progressed through in order to arrive at various places on the continuum of gaining knowledge and taking action regarding (im)migrant students.

Teachers' Responses in the Course

The knowledge-to-action reader response model represents the teachers' diverse experiences across a continuum of critical consciousness explained below. It shows the activities they engaged in, a pre-survey, reading, and responding to texts for background knowledge, reading and responding to a novel to develop empathy, and finally, a post-survey. Then, the model illustrates how they grew, some only gaining knowledge to affect their attitudes, while others discussed general or even specific actions they would or did take due to the reading.
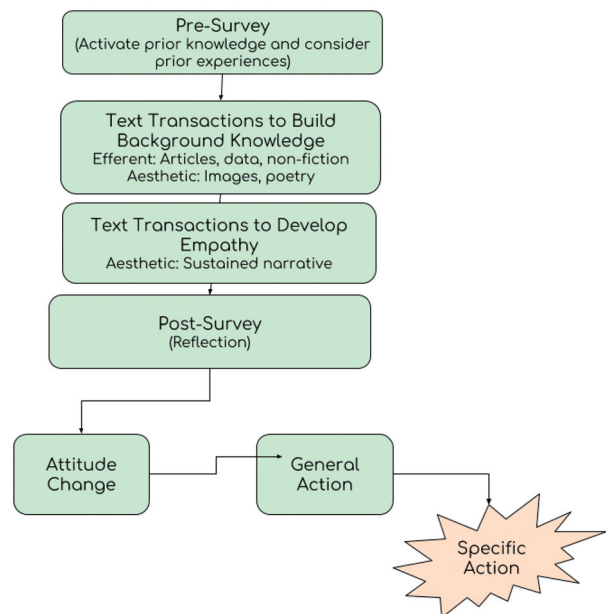

Figure 1. Knowledge-to-action reader response model.

Knowledge Gain to Influence Attitude

The 27 teachers showed varying degrees of knowledge about unaccompanied minors prior to reading, representing extreme ends of the continuum: from no awareness of unaccompanied minors to Daniel, a focal teacher we interviewed, who explained that he came to the U.S. as an unaccompanied minor from Nicaragua many years ago. Despite the great variations, all educators explained that reading gave them new knowledge and for some, reconnected them to the topic in

order to affect their attitudes about students or immigration in general. Teachers recognized that they had unaccompanied minors in their classes as well as in previous school years although they were unaware of it at the time, particularly at School 1 where they were receiving an increase of students from Central America. At School 2, Alice, the English teacher we interviewed, recalled a student she had previously taught:

> It was several years ago the [student] that I was closer to, I think there were a couple others but I didn't get as close so I didn't know as much. But the one kid was an eighth grader and he lived with an older cousin. But the older cousin wasn't that much older and, just not having like a stable adult who was really invested in [his] success.

In the post-survey and through their regular responses through online discussions, all 27 teachers expressed that they gained knowledge related to students' needs and feelings, complicated situations, and strengths. Alice explained:

> They have that sense of 'I am capable' like 'I can do things. I took care of myself here and I can move forward and take care of myself.' And sometimes that comes earlier than you really want it to but that's not a negative. That's a positive thing.

Teachers also demonstrated an understanding of the students' need to feel safe in their school and the more obvious, to learn English and adjust to a new culture. Some educators also evidenced their understanding that youth might feel sadness and frustration due to family separation. A white monolingual administrator explained that she was now aware that students might have anger toward the U.S. government and its role in the situations that forced them to flee their countries. Alice's new understanding of the circumstances unaccompanied minors face is evident in her statement:

> I really didn't know that they went out that young by themselves and how hard that would be to be in a situation where the only choice that makes everybody safe is doing this very unsafe thing. I haven't gone through that decision-making process and that book [*The Only R*oad] did a really good job showing it.

A different English teacher's post-survey demonstrated how her attitude toward unaccompanied minors changed.

> I have never really taken the time to imagine the journey that many immigrants faced in order to sit in my classroom. I have a new respect for those students and their families. I will never take another day living in the United States for granted.

General Actions

After reading the texts and engaging in response activities, the educators' reflections showed the need to take action to support these students. Many of these included general actions that they would take in the future such as an Algebra teacher who explained: "We need better support systems put in place so that these kids do not fall through the cracks." Another educator wrote: "As an administrator, I can help students just like this [sic]. I can help change the course of their life. I can be their champion." Whereas these general actions (as denoted by words such as "listen" "understand, "support" and "help") are a step in the right direction, we note that they are vague ideas that might not necessarily take effect in the teachers' practice. Therefore, we distinguish these from specific actions, because we believe the latter are required in order for impactful change to occur in schools.

Specific Actions

About half of the participants shared very specific actions that they would take, or did take during the course, due to their reading. Specifically, Daniel, who had been an unaccompanied minor from Nicaragua, chose to share his story with his students because the reading helped him relive his own adolescent experiences. He used a writing workshop model to share his first day of school in the U.S. as his students were working on their own writing. He explained: "So while they were writing their first day of school memories, I said, 'I'm going to do that, too. I'm going share with them my story.' So I did."

Like Daniel, the teachers who took specific actions noted that they changed some of their instructional practices such as providing translations to course material and pairing students with a speaker of their home language. Andrea, the librarian we interviewed, led efforts to provide native language resources in the library for all students. Multiple teachers at School 1 advocated for newcomer students, including unaccompanied minors, to take an advanced Spanish course, rather than testing out. The Latina Spanish teacher who taught this course wrote: "I will continue to teach them in their first language, expose them to the Spanish and the Latin American literary canon, and mold them to be leaders in the National Honor Society."

Some of the specific actions teachers mentioned focused more on the social and emotional needs

that unaccompanied minors in their schools might have: A science teacher wrote: "Schools should have special programs that help these students secure food sources, income opportunities, emotional support, and tutorial services." A few educators stated specific changes that needed to take place on their campus, such as hiring Spanish-speaking counselors and creating an adult mentorship program.

Additionally, we noted some specific changes on these campuses to address the needs of unaccompanied minors and other (im)migrant students. Specifically, an algebra teacher who identifies as White and monolingual instituted Wednesday afternoon tutoring for all newcomers, leveraging community support to provide them a full dinner each week. School 1 had a special training for teachers about helping undocumented students navigate the legal system to apply for college. Both schools have added more classroom texts and signage in Spanish as well as other languages that represent their student population. Andrea has led many of these efforts whose library signage we display in Figures 2 and 3. Further, with the increase of newcomers from Central America at School 1, they sought to understand more about students' histories to identify unaccompanied minors and offer support. Through learning more about students' histories, an English and algebra teacher discovered that some students from Central America spoke Indigenous languages in addition to Spanish and they have encouraged the students to use these languages in the classroom.
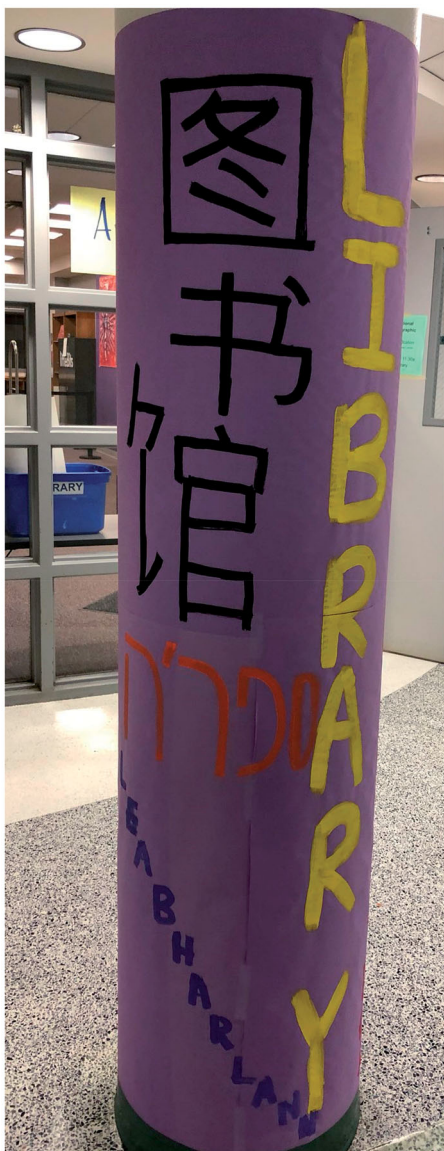

Figure 2. Multilingual signage for the high school library.

Figure 3. Multilingual signage for the high school library.

Implications for Teacher Education

This approach to teacher education used reader response to develop critical consciousness in 27 high school educators. Within the process, teachers evidenced gains in knowledge, which led to recognition of general actions, and, for some, specific actions they would/did take. Teachers showed movements to various parts of the knowledge-to-action continuum illustrated in Figure 1. Their process through the continuum was diverse, dynamic, and often cyclical. We explain the crucial elements of this process below, illustrating how teacher education courses might adopt this model to address additional marginalized, misunderstood, and under-served student populations.

Prior to reading the novel, teachers engaged in building background knowledge through brief efferent and esthetic reading experiences (Rosenblatt, 1978) that covered various genres such as news stories, statistics, charts, artwork, poetry, and picture books. These texts provided spaces for teachers to engage with facts as well as evocative stories and images to consider their own students. Figure 4 is an image from the book *Somos Como las Nubes: We Are Like the cloud*s (Argueta & Ruano, 2016) that induced much conversation about the gang violence that might make people feel like forced migration is their only option for survival.

Yet, what teachers stated had the most impact on them was their engagement in sustained reading of a narrative text. Andrea told us: "Just by reading a book like *The Only R*oad, I don't see how [teachers] wouldn't be more empathetic." In line with Koopman and Hakemulder (2015) theory, teachers gained knowledge from reading about young migrants' journeys that lead to empathy. They experienced the defamiliarization process (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015) with the characters in *The Only Road* (Díaz, 2016), young people traveling undocumented and without adult family members from Central America to the U.S. border. It was essential to allow time and space for the teachers to identify with a character whose life experiences was greatly different from their own. During the weeks of sustained reading, they were guided to reflect and relate their reading to current events. This structured space and independent reading allowed teachers to grapple with ideas that are often divisive such as forced or unsanctioned migration. Through discussion, they learned from others' transactions with the text, particularly from those who had first-hand knowledge of migration such as Daniel. Teachers who previously had little knowledge about why young people (or adults) crossed the border without documentation

began to express frustration with violence in Central America and the U.S.'s role. At the end of their reading, we guided teachers in reflecting on their attitudes and actions. Organized reflection provided them an opportunity to think about what they gained from reading about this topic and to consider how it might affect their instructional practices.

However, the only way change will occur is for teachers to take specific actions, enacting critical consciousness (Freire, 1974). We wanted educators to respond to their reading in a way that affected their instructional and classroom practices to work toward lasting changes at their schools. Reading purposefully selected texts and responding in community is a potential way to influence teachers' attitudes and actions toward diverse student populations or other issues of social justice within our society.

> Reader response, such as our knowledge-to-action model, is an innovative practice to meet teachers where they are and bring them along a continuum in a safe space that accounts for their diverse experiences, prior knowledge, and initial attitudes toward particular groups of students and families.

Certainly, within a divisive society in a post-truth era (Peters, 2017), teachers will not be immune to their sociocultural environment and will often hold various racial and other biases (both implicit and explicit) about marginalized students (Starck et al., 2020). Reader response, such as our knowledge-to-action model, is an innovative practice to meet teachers where they are and bring them along a continuum in a safe space that accounts for their diverse experiences, prior knowledge, and initial attitudes toward particular groups of students and families. This approach indicates promise in using reading, especially narrative texts, to affect teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and even actions on any relevant issue in society. Through this experience, we are convinced that our focus in teacher education should be to develop critical consciousness rather than focus on strategies and best practices. Surely, we have much work to do to bring about transformative justice; yet, if we believe in the
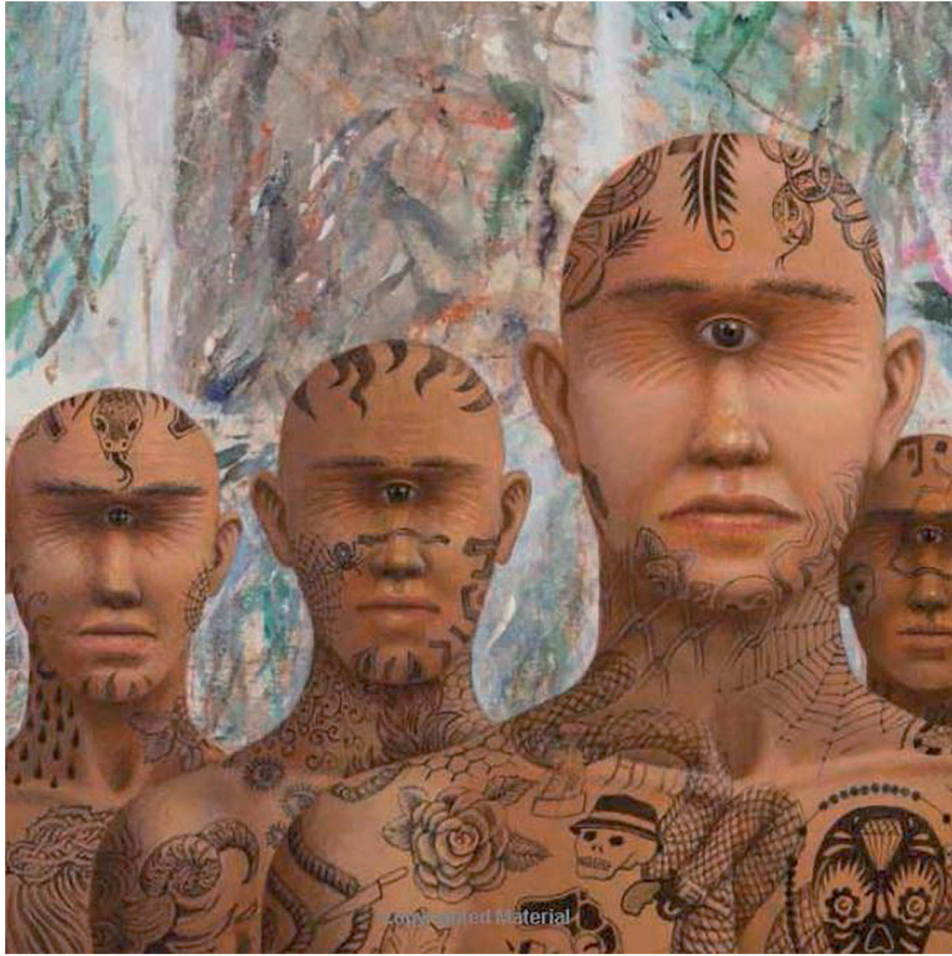
Figure 4. Example of image analyzed in Argueta and Ruano (2016).

moral arc, reader-response just might be a unique method to get us there.

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