

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

It's Not on the List: An Examination of Teachers' Perspectives on Implementing Multicultural  
Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Lubna Nona Kassab

Committee in charge:

University of California San Diego

Professor Alison Wishard Guerra

California State University, San Marcos

Professor Brooke Soles, Chair

Professor Joni Kolman

2023

Copyright

Lubna Nona Kassab, 2023  
All rights reserved.

The dissertation of Lubna Nona Kassab is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego  
California State University, San Marcos  
2023

## DEDICATION

To my mom and husband for their belief in me and their undying support throughout this  
journey.

To my beautiful daughter, Eliana and unborn son. May you always see the beauty in who you are  
and where you come from.

*In loving memory of my father and father-in-law who both worked tirelessly to instill the  
importance of education in their students and loved ones.*

## EPIGRAPH

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they aren't true, but they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dissertation Approval Page .....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Epigraph .....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Tables .....	ix
Vita.....	x
Abstract of the Dissertation.....	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Purpose of the Study.....	6
Research Questions.....	7
Conceptual Framework .....	7
Cultural Proficiency .....	8
CRP.....	9
Definitions of Terms .....	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	13
The Significance of Multicultural Education.....	13
Multicultural Literature in the English Language Arts Classroom.....	16
Implementing Multicultural Literature Effectively.....	22
Multicultural Literature Pedagogy in the Classroom .....	23
Creating a Culture of Care .....	24
Struggles With Implementation .....	26
Barriers Schools and Teachers Face in Implementing Multicultural Literature Effectively	28
Multicultural Education in Teacher Preparation Programs .....	29
The Effects of White Fragility .....	32
Summary of Research .....	36
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	38
Research Design.....	39
Setting and Context.....	40
Participant Recruitment and Selection.....	41
Data Collection .....	42
Interviews.....	43
Instruments for Interviews .....	44
Protection of Human Subjects .....	46

Data Analysis .....	47
Coding.....	47
Validity and Trustworthiness.....	48
Positionality .....	48
Chapter 4: Findings.....	51
Profile of Participants.....	53
George.....	55
Christina .....	56
Steve.....	56
Alida.....	56
Brandon.....	57
Maria .....	57
Bob.....	57
Emergent Themes .....	58
Barriers Teachers Face in Implementing Multicultural Texts .....	59
Accessibility to Texts Is an Issue.....	59
Not Being Comfortable Discussing Multicultural Literature .....	60
Multicultural Literature Was not the Focus of Any Teacher Training .....	62
Lack of Multicultural Literature in High School .....	64
Assessments Are a Priority for the School .....	65
Overvaluing the Literary Canon .....	67
Ways in Which Teachers Overcome the Barriers in Implementing Multicultural Texts .....	68
Developing a Mindset That Text Relevance Matters.....	69
Using Multicultural Poems and Short Stories.....	70
Using Internet Resources .....	72
Implementing Strategies to Help Students Navigate Difficult Conversations.....	73
Finding Autonomy as a Member of a PLC.....	74
Summary .....	77
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	79
Discussion of Major Research Findings .....	79
Teachers Recognize the Significance in Incorporating Relevant Literature.....	80
Institution Serves as a Barrier .....	81
Lack of Available Training for Teachers .....	82
Unexplainable Commitment to Literary Canon .....	83

Limitations .....	84
Recommendations and Implications for Leadership.....	85
Recommendations and Implications for Social Justice .....	86
Recommendations and Implications for Teachers .....	87
Recommendations and Implications for Districts.....	87
Recommendations and Implications for Credential Programs .....	88
Areas for Future Research.....	88
Conclusion .....	89
References.....	91
Appendix A: Cultural Proficiency Framework.....	102
Appendix B: Cultural proficiency continuum.....	103
Appendix C: Semistructured Interview Script.....	104
Appendix D: Participant Confirmation Email .....	105
Appendix E: Semistructured Interview Protocol.....	107



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Summary of Research Questions and Related Themes/Subthemes.....	53
Table 2 Participants' Background.....	55

## VITA

2008 Bachelor of Arts, English, University of San Diego

2012 Master of Arts, Rhetoric and Writing Studies, San Diego State University

2023 Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership, University of California San Diego  
and California State University San Marcos

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

It's Not on the List: An Examination of Teachers' Perspectives on Implementing Multicultural Literature

by

Lubna Nona Kassab

Doctor of Education

University of California San Diego, 2023  
California State University, San Marcos, 2023

Professor Brooke Soles, Chair

Despite the growth of ethnic diversity in the student population in the United States, many English language arts teachers continue to prioritize assigning literature written by white authors. Researchers have outlined the many benefits of studying multicultural literature for both white students as well as students of color. Many case studies have been conducted in which the researchers observe the challenges a teacher may face in implementing lessons regarding

multicultural literature and how they may overcome those barriers; however, there is little literature addressing those challenges from the point of view of the teachers.

In this project, I used a qualitative phenomenological research study design understand was the barriers high school English language arts teachers face regarding implementing multicultural literature, and how they may overcome those barriers and make decisions for their classroom, and the role their institutions play in that decision-making process. The study revealed that participants faced issues with text accessibility, being able to effectively navigate classroom conversations around controversial topics and balancing their time between implementing curriculum and preparing for all the required assessments.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The United States has become more ethnically, racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse in the last 20 years, with over 109 counties across 22 states that contain a majority nonwhite population (Lopes-Murphy, 2012; McGuire-Schwartz & Arndt, 2007; Strobel et al., 2007). This trend is expected to continue with the nation becoming increasingly diverse more quickly than it ever has in its history. It has been projected that by 2050, only 38% of the children in the United States will be white (Childstats.gov, 2012). The education field has been tasked with responding to this rapid change and ensuring students are prepared to live and work in a pluralistic society. They need the knowledge, attitude, and skills to function in this changing world. For this to happen, teachers need to take a close look at the curriculum to ensure it values different students' cultures and prepares them to thrive in a diverse world. Teachers across the system, in all grades and subjects, need to find ways to integrate multicultural texts into the curriculum (Childs, 2017).

### **Problem Statement**

With the rise of diversity<sup>1</sup> in the classroom, the need for multicultural texts<sup>2</sup>—defined as texts from minority voices usually excluded from the canon—has increased. For many years, texts written by white male authors were privileged in the curriculum (Colby, 2004). However, research has shown multicultural literature has many benefits including, but not limited to (a) students feeling a sense of pride when their heritage is reflected in the literature, and (b) students

---

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this study, *diversity* is defined as people from a range of social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this study, *multicultural texts/literature* is defined as anything that incorporates nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, family status, geographic difference, linguistic variation, and any other possible differences from the mainstream culture.

feeling valued when their experiences are valued in literature (D'Angelo & Iliev, 2014; Klefstad & Martinez, 2013; Montelongo et al., 2014; Smallwood, 1998; Wang, 2017). Multicultural literature not only has a positive influence on students of color, but also on their white classmates. Although some white students, families, and even teachers might be resistant toward multicultural literature, such literature can have many benefits such as pushing them to think about why multicultural literature in the classroom feels unnecessary to them and challenging other racist ideologies (Hinton & Berry, 2004).

Additionally, literature affords students the opportunity to integrate diverse voices and perspectives into the classroom, particularly around challenging topics (Glazier & Jung, 2005). Students should be exposed to mirror and window texts to promote intercultural and intracultural understanding and appreciation (Fang et al., 1999; Ruday et al., 2022). *Mirror texts* allow students to see themselves reflected positively, and *window texts* allow them to have a glimpse of other cultures around them. By having access to and studying this type of literature, students are able to feel valued and to better understand the world around them, which can lead to more tolerance and acceptance by the people with whom they are surrounded. More specifically, students learn that people of color have significantly contributed and continue to contribute to history, culture, politics, and society (Bishop, 1990; Sotirovska & Kelley, 2020). Through this type of study, students learn about how those from marginalized identities have contributed to history and about current social contexts, which lead to discussions of themes such as identity and the rewards and challenges of different cultural experiences (Atwell, 1990).

Despite the many ways students benefit from engagement with multicultural literature and critical literacy, the literature has suggested they are rarely present in high school English language arts classrooms. Recent standards and policies have aimed to integrate more

multicultural literature into the curriculum; however, implementation has been stalled (Glazier & Jung, 2005). This delay has been partially due to schools often prioritizing the dominant, white and middle-class culture, which in turn has prioritized the language and texts that perpetuate these dominant ideas (Giroux, 1989). Implementation has also been stalled because it is a form of silencing those marginalized and their stories. Topics often avoided in classrooms include, but are not limited to, social class, race, and culture. Avoiding literature around these topics helps teachers avoid any discourse around these topics (Glazier & Jung, 2005).

Because the research has shown benefits of having students engage with multicultural literature, it is important to consider the factors that shape the implementation of multicultural curriculum and critical pedagogies in high school English language arts. Despite this availability of published texts, many English language arts teachers hesitate when it comes to choosing books their students may better relate to due to the lack of resources at their sites or uncertainty in the discourse that needs to accompany the study of these texts; thus, teachers have continued to assign canonical texts such as Shakespearean plays (Dyches, 2017). Additionally, districts, schools, or individual teachers hesitate because (a) they struggle to address the content standards with nontraditional texts, (b) conversations may arise in class that they may not know how to navigate, or (c) they are resistant to changing the curriculum they have been using for so long.

Some teachers may be reluctant to abandon the canon because of the idea that it includes key texts necessary for student knowledge. Others may just be comfortable teaching the curriculum they have been using for years and do not want to recreate it. It is also necessary to consider if there is a disconnect between the teachers' experiences with literature and their students' experiences with it. If the teacher was often represented in the texts to which they were

exposed, it might not be as readily clear to them that there can be negative effects for students who do not have that experience.

It is important to understand this phenomenon because the use of multicultural literature in the classroom has many positive effects including but not limited to engaging students, helping to stimulate an understanding of diversity in the classroom, and developing empathy and a sense of identity. It becomes problematic when teachers do not provide these experiences for their students.

### **National Socio-Political Context**

In 2020, many teachers began showing support for the nationwide protests for racial justice in the United States. Their efforts included ordering new books, creating Zoom backgrounds, and posting wall art, but unfortunately, they immediately faced pushback nationwide (Pollack et al., 2022). A Texas educator was placed on probation because her Zoom background included a rainbow flag and a Black Lives Matter poster. She was only allowed to return to her former position when over 23,000 people signed a petition in her defense (Fernández, 2020). Similar situations occurred in Oklahoma and Missouri. Teachers were facing backlash for showing any support for diversity (Harris, 2021). Teaching about or even mentioning very relevant current events that affected so many US populations caused local pushback from parents, colleagues, students, and the community (Pollack). Critics across the nation were censoring teachers' inclusion efforts which begged questions about who made the decisions about what was taught and discussed in classrooms (Pollack et al., 2022). Aside from



the local pushback, many state politicians proposed and passed laws either restricting or completely banning discussions of race, gender, inequality, and inclusion (PEN America, 2021). Some teachers depend on laws, organizations, standards, unions, and local opinion to determine if they could continue their inclusion efforts. Pollack et al. argues that teachers need to know their own agency in order to keep what they want on the agenda while appeasing local critics. They must navigate the system in order to learn who to get on their side that will garner support from a broader population (2022).

### **California Socio-Political Context**

A lot of the recent pushback against Southern Californian teachers by local critics is an effort to restrict empathetic teaching of marginalized populations, and censoring students who want to speak up about current socio-political issues. According to California's Education Code Section 51204.5, the historical "roles and contributions" of various marginalized groups "shall be included" in "instruction" (California Legislative Information, 2020). Research regarding school climate has suggested that activities that promote social inclusion should become teachers' priority because they support student success (Way & Nelson, 2018). Teachers in California; however, are not receiving the support to implement these types of lessons. They are experiencing pushback from different levels of their institution. A teacher in Chula Vista, California noted that it felt impossible to please everyone if they implemented lessons dealing with social issues. Another teacher in San Diego, California recalled not having the support of her principal when a parent complained that the teacher mentioning the struggles faced by undocumented immigrants was inappropriate. The irony in this situation is that the same principal used to teach units on immigration when she was a classroom teacher. Other teachers in

California also voiced resistance when they discussed same-sex relationships, religion, and skin color (Pollack et al., 2022).

Although immigration, the border wall, and immigration detention centers are all relevant topics in Southern California considering it is a border state, many educators avoid teaching them because of fear of backlash from parents and administrators. They were concerned that their lessons would be viewed as too political. During the 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 school years specifically, educators in San Diego described excessive pushback against any discussion of immigration given the administration's view on undocumented immigrants (Pollack et al., 2022). They feared the emails from parents or having the principals email them about what they were doing in their classrooms.

### **Purpose of the Study**

As citizens of a global society, students need to learn how to communicate, collaborate, innovate, and critically think in a diverse setting. These skills are important because adolescence is a time for students to question the world and understand how they fit into it (Landt, 2006). Stover (2000) suggested most adolescent concerns are common across cultural borders. These concerns include defining oneself outside of the family, coming to terms with the idea that their family is "less than perfect," determining their set of moral and ethical principles, coming to terms with their sexuality, developing relationships with their peers, thinking about the future, and forging a niche in larger society. Multicultural literature is one of the many ways students can head in that direction; therefore, it is important to research what opportunities teachers must incorporate it into their curriculum (Landt, 2006).

This phenomenological study allowed English language arts teachers to share their perceptions around the development and implementation of curriculum. The goal of this study

was to understand how high school English language arts teachers made curricular and pedagogical decisions for their classrooms, and the roles that institutional policies and procedures played in that decision-making process. I wanted to learn how these teachers' backgrounds, education, and experiences shaped what they did in the classroom. Additionally, I wanted to learn how they navigated the institutions in which they worked.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were investigated in this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the barriers they face in implementing multicultural texts?
2. In what ways do teachers overcome these barriers?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study used the conceptual framework for culturally proficient educational practice (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Lindsey et al., 2018) as a lens to analyze teacher mindset and culturally relevant pedagogy to evaluate the decisions made about the curriculum by the teachers who were interviewed in this study; however, the framework was not used to analyze the data. I conducted this research project using a positivist approach rather than using the framework as a guide for my data analysis. For the purpose of this study, culturally proficient educational practice was referred to as "The Framework," and culturally relevant pedagogy was referred to as "CRP." These frameworks guided the drafting of the questions for the semi-structured interviews. The Framework served as a great lens for this study because it provided a structure for teachers to examine their own work, decisions, and relationships. In addition, it helped me understand teachers' mindsets around diversity. The focus of CRP was to uphold student cultural identities and student success; however, it was an effective way to analyze the pedagogical decisions a

teacher made because it encouraged teachers to really analyze and reflect on classroom practices, including what they were doing, how they were doing it, and why they were doing it.

### **Cultural Proficiency**

The Framework (see Appendix A) is an outlook and way of thinking that guides a person or organization as they view, plan, and make decisions in a diverse setting (Lindsey et al., 2019). The Framework provides an understanding of the individual and organizational barriers that many face. Oftentimes, entitlement and privilege make people disregard barriers faced by others. They may be unaware they need to adapt; this lack of awareness is a type of resistance with the underlying belief that individuals or other groups need to change to adapt to the dominant group.

The Framework consists of four interdependent tools known as the tools of cultural proficiency: (a) guiding principles, (b) overcoming the barriers, (c) the continuum, and (d) the essential elements. These iterative tools inform and reinforce each other. The guiding principles of cultural proficiency include (a) culture is a predominant force; (b) group identity is just as important as individual identity; (c) diversity among cultures is vast, and everyone must have a culture; (d) each group of people has unique cultural needs; and (e) the family as defined by culture is the most significant part of the child's education. As a result, school systems need to incorporate cultural knowledge into practice and policymaking.

The barriers to cultural proficiency can be both individual and organizational. There are three categories of barriers: (a) unawareness of the need to adapt and resistance to change, (b) not acknowledging systemic oppression, and (c) benefitting from privilege and having a sense of entitlement. These barriers may be a result of systemic issues, values, or past experiences.

The cultural proficiency continuum provides language that describes both healthy and unhealthy behaviors of both individuals and organizations as they make decisions and create

policies. The different stages of the continuum include cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness<sup>3</sup>, cultural precompetence, cultural competence, and cultural proficiency (see Appendix B). Movement along the continuum reflects a paradigmatic shift in thinking from just tolerating diversity to taking action to achieve equity.

There are five essential elements of cultural proficiency:

- Assessing cultural knowledge and being aware of what one knows about their and others' cultures, about how one reacts to others' cultures, and what one needs to do to be effective in cross-cultural situations.
- Valuing diversity and making the effort to be inclusive of people whose viewpoints and experiences are different from oneself, which will enrich conversations, decision making, and problem solving.
- Managing the dynamics of difference and viewing conflict as a natural and normal process that has cultural contexts that can be understood and can be supportive in creative problem solving.
- Adapting to diversity and having the will to learn about others and the ability to use others' cultural experiences and backgrounds in educational settings.
- Institutionalizing cultural knowledge and making learning about cultural groups and their experiences and perspectives an integral part of ongoing learning. (Welborn et al., 2022)

## **CRP**

CRP was coined by Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and is built on three foundational pillars: (a) academic achievement, (b) cultural competence, and (c) sociopolitical consciousness.

---

<sup>3</sup> I would like to acknowledge the use of ableist language in this citation.

Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Wood, 2015). This type of teaching is committed to collective and not just individual social, political, emotional, and intellectual empowerment by using culture to affect knowledge, skills, and attitude. Culturally responsive teaching builds on what students know, teaches them to embrace their culture and love learning, highlights strengths, and gives them confidence to overcome weaknesses (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). The three main components to CRP include (a) students must experience academic success, (b) students must develop or maintain cultural competence, and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). As students gain knowledge, they also gain understanding of their role as agents of change (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2014). Proponents of CRP insist schools prepare students to become better citizens by broadening their sociopolitical consciousness to critique the cultural norms, values, and morals that institutions produce that perpetuate social inequity (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

CRP can look very different in various settings, but typically teachers use their students' cultures as a vehicle for learning and as a bridge from home learning to school and academic learning (Bennett, 2014). Teachers can ensure they are aware of culturally specific instances of prior knowledge that students bring with them to the classroom about the topic. For example, math teachers research everyday use of geometric concepts or scientific topics in their students' culture of origin, allow students to demonstrate this prior knowledge, and develop a bridge between this knowledge and school learning. Teachers can also incorporate students' home languages into the curriculum and show enthusiasm about what is being taught and what is being learned. Teachers who practice CRP are always willing to reexamine pedagogy and make it more

relevant to students. They take the time to learn about cultures other than their own. They not only see themselves as part of the community in which they teach, but they also give back to it and foster it in their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This mutual learning can be done by incorporating literature that reflects their students' backgrounds and provides meaningful content that builds connections to what students experience at home (Bennett, 2014).

### **Definitions of Terms**

To clarify the language used in this study, the following list of definitions is provided:

*Canon:* A list of the most important, influential, or definitive works in literature, often considered to be the classics.

*Cultural proficiency:* The policies and practices in an organization or the values and behavior of an individual that enable the person or institution to engage effectively with people and groups who are different from them.

*Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP):* Teaching in which the teacher demonstrates cultural competence and encourages students to relate course content to cultural context.

*Culturally responsive teaching:* An international approach to connect students' cultures, languages, and life experiences with what they learn in school.

*Multicultural literature:* Literature incorporating nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, family status, geographic difference, linguistic variation, and any other possible differences from the mainstream culture.

*Pedagogy:* Methods and approaches to teaching both in theory and in practice.

*Phenomenological:* A type of study that seeks to understand the lived experiences of its participants to comprehend what it was like to experience a particular phenomenon.

*Scaffold:* Breaking up learning into chunks and providing tools and structures to help students succeed in each chunk.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review begins with an in-depth examination of what the research has shown about the significance of multicultural education in schools. Specific exploration entailed a review of the benefits of multicultural texts in an English language arts curriculum. It is followed by a discussion on the pedagogy teachers can use to effectively implement multicultural literature. In addition, a discussion of the struggle to implement multicultural curriculum in schools effectively uncovers some of the challenges teachers face in their different contexts. Finally, this literature review concludes with a detailed description of teacher preparation programs' effects on curricular decisions around equity and social justice in schools along with a summary of the research.

### **The Significance of Multicultural Education**

The primary goal of multicultural education is to achieve educational equity, and to ensure all students have the opportunity to attain academic success despite their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (Banks & Banks, 2004). Although there are many facets to multicultural education, at its root, the movement advocated for more integration of curriculum that reflected traditionally marginalized groups such as women and people of color (Banks, 1993). As the movement gained momentum, Banks (1993) developed five dimensions of multicultural education, which include (a) content integration, (b) the knowledge construction process, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) equity pedagogy, and (e) empowering school and social culture.

As the significance of multicultural education became more obvious, educating a diverse body of students became more of a priority for local and federal government; however, despite these efforts, the achievement gap widened for students of color more than it did for their white classmates (Page, 2004). Students of color have had lower graduation rates and standardized test

scores (Milner, 2012; Zamani-Gallaher et al., 2014). The 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic shed much light on this issue; systemic inequities were identified that affected students including the English learners (EL) population's access to quality education, especially in the online environment (Hernandez et al., 2021). Rather than identifying and addressing the issues of inequity, school systems, the pedagogies they use, and the curriculum they have implemented have historically reproduced the social class differences in society because they have overvalued the knowledge, culture, and skills that the dominant group holds and devalued what those in traditionally marginalized group bring to the table (Fenwick, 2011). A significant cause is teacher mindset around how much they can control in the classroom, and why there is such a huge achievement gap for non-white students. The achievement gap has placed responsibility on the student, whereas teachers should instead be focusing on the engagement gap, which is the responsibility of teachers (Moll et al., 2011). Ladson-Billings (2006) argued there is no achievement gap; instead, there is a national debt owed to students. This debt includes historical, moral, sociopolitical, and economic debt. To reduce the gap, the educational debt needs to be reduced. The debt can be repaid through resources that should be invested in low-income kids. Not paying back this debt can lead to a variety of social problems such as crime, low productivity, and low wages.

In a qualitative study focused on preparing predominantly white cohorts of practicing teachers for ethnically diverse students, researchers found 95% of teachers who were surveyed were familiar with the idea of culturally responsive pedagogy; yet most of them still attributed low achievement to students, their families, and their socioeconomic statuses rather than the pedagogical factors in the educator's control (Sleeter, 2016). These results highlighted the fact it is not enough to just raise awareness of diversity and inequity when working with the teaching

force. These teachers need guidance on how to transform their mindsets about their students and their teaching practices so they can use more culturally responsive lessons and connect cultural capital to their curriculum (Parkhouse et al., 2019).

A recent study that focused on high school students' engagement and learning during the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic showed many teacher candidates were unable to implement effective strategies and activities that would encourage engagement among EL students.

Learning is very culturally dependent and should be seen as an intersection between students' home and school cultures (Robsan, 2014). When there is cultural discontinuity in the classroom, students can perceive themselves as poor learners and develop a negative self-perception (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). On the other hand, a meta-analysis study conducted by Okoye-Johnson (2011) revealed the implementation of multicultural education can significantly reduce negative racial attitudes and increase comfort and motivation. It has the potential to make some significant positive changes in the way students think about themselves and their peers and how they treat each other. Additionally, when students are more motivated, they are more likely to succeed academically. Therefore, building upon students' background knowledge is a great student engagement strategy and a way to motivate them to develop language and content mastery; additionally, it makes the curriculum culturally and socially relevant to students' lives (De Jong & Harper, 2005; Faltis et al., 2010).

Increasing racial diversity impacts the norms and languages that teachers experience in the classroom, which can impact the education provided for these students (Garcia et al., 2010). For educators, it is about understanding differences students bring to the classroom should be celebrated rather than feared. By doing this, teachers can help reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the educational system (Bottiani et al., 2017). Many educators need to move away from

viewing cultural differences from a deficit-based mindset to seeing them as an asset on which they can develop rich educational experiences (Welborn et al., 2022). Some teachers may not even realize the way they interact with their students can negatively impact their learning. Part of the issue is preservice and even seasoned teachers may be engaged in unintentional discrimination, and they need to be given opportunities to reflect and collaborate on how to avoid discriminating and to discuss the importance of integrating culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in the classroom (Colby & Lyon, 2004). Schools play a large role in creating a culture of tolerance and reliability and diminishing lines that sharply divide people of different ethnicities; therefore, it is important for schools to take steps toward making sure their teachers and other staff members are culturally proficient (Harber, 1994).

### **Multicultural Literature in the English Language Arts Classroom**

Although literature is just one strand of the English language arts curriculum, it tends to provide an organizing framework for units designed by teachers (Maxwell & Meiser, 2001; Milner & Milner, 2003). With the release of the Common Core State Standards in 2010, the use of multicultural literature was no longer a suggestion but an expectation. Reading standards for literature at the secondary level included expectations such as, “Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature” (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6). This goal was the country’s attempt to integrate multicultural literature into education; however, it was received with some criticism and apprehension (McLaughlin et al., 2014). Nonetheless, classroom teachers have the responsibility to meet these standards that are consistent with district and state policies (Welborn et al., 2022).

Aside from the fact that using multicultural literature is mandated by the state and federal standards, research has shown the incorporation of multicultural literature has many benefits for both white and racially marginalized students (Bishop, 1990). Books are windows that offer readers views of the world around them whether they are real or imaginary, strange or familiar. These windows can also act as sliding doors that allow readers to step into diverse worlds and become a part of them; therefore, in proper conditions, windows can also serve as mirrors that reflect the reader's human experience as a puzzle piece in the larger human experience (Bishop, 1990). Readers often seek to see themselves reflected in books they access as a method to affirm self-worth. Thus, window and mirror texts can be of great value to students in the classroom (Scieurba, 2014). For example, African American students have found culturally relevant lessons to be particularly experiential, meaningful, and enjoyable (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010). It can boost their self-confidence and help them to better understand and empathize with their classmates despite how different they may be from themselves (Bishop, 1990). It is important to add, replace, or remove books in the curriculum that no longer suit the needs of the school community or no longer help students find windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors into other experiences; instead, books should celebrate Black joy, excellence, and the everyday—and not just trauma and violence (Falter et al., 2020; Love, 2019).

In her TED Talk titled “The Dangers of a Single Story,” Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche (2009) argued when the very complex human experience is reduced to a single story, it robs people of their humanity and dignity. She said, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (Adichie, 2009, 12:45). When texts in schools are limited and not reflective of who the students are, schools run the risk of spreading an incomplete story to

students about themselves and their peers. Students in turn carry and spread these ideologies throughout their lives by creating a cycle of stereotypes and racism (Picower, 2009). A variety of books are available to help address antiracism and antibias in English language arts classrooms. When reading through these texts, educators might consider what the book says, what the meaning and implications of that message are for their practice, and what they as teachers can do to address similar or related issues in their own classrooms (Falter et al., 2020).

Culturally relevant curriculum can help students beyond academics. A case study focused on two young students who were struggling academically and behaviorally revealed they were able to reverse their negative reputation when their teacher used a culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy because they were able to see themselves in a positive light (Worthy et al., 2012). Despite only being in the second grade, these boys had already internalized the idea that they were “bad”, and they were not capable of doing well in school behaviorally or academically. Once their teacher helped them see their potential through the lessons she had planned, it made all the difference in their success.

Part of the journey toward cultural proficiency and diminishing inequity is learning the ways in which oppression exists in less obvious ways (Welborn et al., 2022). In most high schools across the nation, racism has been very overtly present on the campus; however, it has been more subtly present in the curriculum and pedagogy used in the classrooms. In her article “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” McIntosh (1989) mentioned, “I was taught to recognize racism only in the individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group” (p. 35). There has been a constant debate among English language arts teachers about the use of texts from the literary canon that mostly consists of writing by white male authors (Bishop, 1990). There is a belief amongst teachers that these

“classic” texts are invaluable to a student’s education, and the voices in these texts have more to offer than those written by authors of color. In fact, a survey conducted Market et al. (2012) showed *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Romeo and Juliet* were every bit as dominant in 2006 as in 1996. Many of the plays, films, and poems that appeared on the “Top 10” lists in 2006 were also popular in 1996 (Mackey et al., 2012).

This popularity in turn may have excluded many of those texts that served as mirrors and windows for students who were often already marginalized (Bishop, 1990). This exclusion becomes even more problematic in schools with a population largely of students of color. To move to the more culturally proficient end of the spectrum, there needs to be constant monitoring of the texts students are assigned across the subjects throughout their high school careers. A good education adjusts to the needs of minority and majority groups (Triandis, 1988). In addition, it is important for educators to move beyond mere inclusion of these texts. Educators should use texts to address and discuss inequities, unpack current privilege and racism, celebrate cultural knowledge and assets, and disrupt status quo and long-held norms and institutional practices that prevent or thwart equality for all (Falter et al., 2020).

A study conducted by professors—who taught a majority white college student population who wanted to be elementary school teachers—found “that literature does indeed provide a safe space to grapple with sociological and anthropological notions of race and poverty that might be foreign and unsettling to White, middle class college students” (Masko et al., 2017, p. 64). Through this research study, Masko et al. (2017) found literature was a great way to build empathy and a vehicle to confront one’s own values. It is essential for teachers to examine all curriculum materials and question how inclusive their course or department curriculum have been. Additionally, it is important to consider what the curriculum contains and the messages it

sends, both explicitly and implicitly (Falter et al., 2020). This consideration is significant because it reveals teachers can provide students, through the texts they assign, an opportunity to reflect on some of the ideologies they internalized from their families and communities growing up and to think about and grapple with how accurate they are. This reflection could potentially stop cycles of racism because those negative ideologies would not be passed down to the next generation.

Many English language arts teachers have voiced concerns that there have not been enough quality and substantial multicultural texts to address standards effectively; however, this lack has not necessarily been the case. The Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison documented a few of the trends regarding the publication of children's literature. They discovered of 5,000 books published in 2012, 68 were written by African or African American/Black authors, and 119 were about Africans/African Americans. This report revealed even though there were plenty of quality African American texts, many of which received star reviews in prior years, the underrepresentation of these texts, especially in schools, was obvious. These statistics were very similar regarding texts written by other commonly underrepresented groups. The texts were available but were not highlighted enough for teachers to see and use. When this same pattern is reflected in the school system, it can be difficult for a student of color to see relevance in the curriculum and in their learning. Teachers need to consider the amount of time they spend on books that highlight a wide variety of cultures and races. Antiracist educators privilege diverse texts year-round, not just during multicultural units (Falter et al., 2020).

The ubiquity of technology in the classroom has put countless texts in the hands of teachers that have been written by authors of all backgrounds and portraying protagonists of



different races, ethnicities, religious backgrounds, and genders (Hannon, 2008). Most schools offer one-to-one technology for their students including laptops, iPads, and tablets. In a survey conducted by Klein (2021), 90% of middle and high school teachers said their students each had a device as of March 2021. In the same survey, 84% of elementary school teachers said the same thing (Klein, 2021). This availability of technology gives teachers and students access to many, often free, online texts.

There is no question students need to see themselves reflected positively in the texts to which they are exposed in school (Galda, 1998). When multicultural literature is used and discussed in a safe classroom environment, it can serve as a mirror to reflect students' own culture and a window to the cultures around them (Galda, 1998). On the other hand, when it is not used or misused, students quickly learn they are devalued in society. When portrayals of their culture are negative, mocking, or nonexistent, it is a systematic method for sending the message to students of color that their cultural capital is not valued (Bishop, 1990). When these texts are not used in the classroom, it can have a detrimental effect on students (Zamudio et al., 2011). It can make them feel invisible when no one speaks of their history and when their reality and experiences are constantly unacknowledged and silenced.

Furthermore, when voices of students' ancestors are left out of the records of great works, it is very easy for them to question the purpose and significance of their own existence and that of their culture's (Zamudio et al., 2011). This perception can hurt their sense of identity and make them feel like they do not belong in that classroom and in academia in general. Teachers should seek to humanize students and think critically about how a curriculum could inflict violence on students, intentionally or unintentionally. Examples of curriculum violence include activities in which students participate in reenactments of slavery, having students write from the

perspective of an enslaver, or leaving a particular groups' history out of the curriculum entirely (Falter et al., 2020). On the other hand, a case study focused on Latino students as they read history texts found when culturally relevant texts were selected and used by the teacher, students made those connections between their own background and the content presented to them despite their reading abilities, which in turn increased their engagement and interaction in the lessons (Ramirez, 2012).

The texts a teacher selects can influence a student's identity, sense of belonging, and ability to succeed academically. The more a student is interested in the content, the more likely they are to do well because they will engage in the lessons. On the other hand, if engaging texts are excluded from the classroom, it can result in gaps in student understanding (Wade & Moje, 2001). In a mixed study conducted by Sampson and Garrison-Wade (2010), they found African American students' mean scores for assessments were significantly higher for the more culturally relevant lessons. The obvious reason for these higher scores was because these lessons focused on the history and lives of African Americans. It also provided experientially based activities and included community-based connections that were culturally relevant. Students who do not gain enough background knowledge from texts they are exposed to in the classroom throughout their educational career may struggle to make meaning and understand higher level texts that will inevitably be a part of their future educational career (National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum, 2004).

### **Implementing Multicultural Literature Effectively**

Carefully choosing texts that are reflective of the student population and its needs is not enough. Teachers need (a) to have the underlying goals of cultivating caring relationships to reach all students, (b) to be committed to always learn about cultural diversity, and (c) to strive

for social justice (Sleeter, 2016). Research has provided many suggestions on how to implement curriculum effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse classroom. It is important for educators to be accurate, encompassing, and authentic (Gay, 2000). Although choosing multicultural literature has positive effects on students, especially students of color, educators must also consider other aspects of their teaching for the use of multicultural literature to be effective.

### **Multicultural Literature Pedagogy in the Classroom**

It is important for English teachers to become antiracist; this effort can be done in five steps: (a) listening and reflecting, (b) reading, (c) interrogating, (d) acting, and (e) repeating (Falter et al., 2020). English teachers need to commit to creating authentic opportunities to enact multicultural pedagogy such as culturally relevant teaching, reading response theory, multi-genre instruction and assessment, writing-to-learn, critical inquiry, student-centered teaching, and funds of knowledge (Cook, 2006). The effective integration of these activities would make the use of multicultural texts more meaningful and effective. Students not only need to read these texts, but they also need to interact and grapple with them in multiple ways to learn from them in a meaningful way (Cook, 2006).

In addition, it is important for teachers to build relationships that reflect care and accountability, which might resemble what students may have with their parents or other family members (Page, 2004). However, it is pertinent to recognize parental roles and their involvement in a student's life looks different for each family; therefore, it is important for teachers and school leaders to consult parents rather than making assumptions and applying stereotypes about them based on their involvement (Watson, 2015). Schools and teachers can contribute stability

and long-term relationships to a child's life but only to support and not replace the relationships at home.

A student's primary relationships must be with someone who can provide a lifelong relationship; therefore, schools need to welcome and nurture families (Vélez-Agosto, 2017). These trusting relationships are also important, so students recognize the teacher has their best interest at heart. Additionally, teachers and students need to get to know one another, especially if they come from very different backgrounds. It takes time and effort to authentically achieve this, but these relationships can have significantly positive consequences (Page, 2004). Close personal contact with others from different cultural and ethnic groups allow students them to engage with and learn from a diverse group of people they would not normally encounter. This effort, in turn, may ease fears, myths, and certain negative perceptions they have of groups that are different from themselves. These types of interactions can produce learning that cannot be duplicated by lessons based on textbooks and other sources (Margo, 2014). Many dominant groups and ideologies may try to deny or ignore racism, but those who are constantly victimized by racism understand it better than their perpetrators and may have much to teach their classmates about its dangers and consequences (Sleeter, 2016).

### **Creating a Culture of Care**

Implementing a multicultural curriculum is important. To make this type of curriculum more effective, teachers must create a culture of care. Many students of color have experienced negative school cultures; their needs tend to be underserved, and they are most heavily impacted by racist policies and practices (Kohli et al., 2017). Teachers need to go beyond just acknowledging the hurt and being sympathetic. They need to also work alongside Black students, families, and colleagues (Falter et al., 2020). The material, physical, psychological, and

spiritual needs of all students are different; therefore, it is important teachers do not take the same approach to education for all students (Valenzuela, 2015). When teachers take the same approach for everyone, students feel like they are facing a double standard: they are pressured to care for school when those at school do not care for them. Teachers need to understand their students' subjective reality by being involved in their welfare and emotional well-being (Valenzuela, 2015). Caring teachers take the time to get to know their students and learn about their abilities, learning styles, and interests to design equitable instruction (Pang, 2018). In addition, it is important for teachers to make sure they stand up for their students, so students know they have an ally. Also, teachers need to tell students the truth and be genuine when providing both praise and criticism (Valenzuela, 2015).

Students need to be valued and respected; one underrated way of doing so is by listening to them and responding through pedagogy and curriculum (Page, 2004). Educators must interrogate their biases to understand how they inform teaching practices. They need to center the authentic voices and lived experiences of people of color, apply a critical literacy lens to teaching practices, and work in community with other educators, particularly nonwhite educators (Falter et al., 2020). In a mixed methods study focused on the preferences of African American children regarding culturally relevant and nonculturally relevant lessons, researchers found African American students preferred culturally relevant lessons that reflected who they were and their lives (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010). They appreciated teachers who created ties with their communities. Furthermore, they preferred teachers who took the time to establish relationships with them and took what they learned about them and used it to create stimulating learning activities (Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010).

Creating a culture of care also means understanding certain cultural norms and values. For example, in Mexican culture, the Spanish term for education (*educacion*) encompasses both educational and familial relationships as well as social skills and proper manners. When teachers reject this definition, they are essentially rejecting the Mexican culture, which Valenzuela (1999) argued subtracts resources from Mexican American youth. This rejection shows although the chosen curriculum is important, it is also crucial to establish that sense of trust and care. Students want to know lessons are tailored to who they are and what they need to learn. Many students of color and of any culture feel a great sense of relief when they feel like they are heard, especially when it comes to issues of race and racism—topics that tend to be taboo (Flynn, 2012).

Lastly, a teacher should believe in their students, have high expectations of them, and help students achieve those expectations. Those high expectations can help students build confidence and self-esteem, and in turn set high expectations for themselves. By taking these steps, teachers will more likely see the effect multicultural literature can have on any student in their classroom, even ones who tend to not be engaged on a regular basis (Page, 2004).

### **Struggles With Implementation**

Despite all the suggestions recommended by researchers, teachers may still struggle in the implementation of these texts into the curriculum. This struggle might be due to challenges in navigating the discourse that arises because of this implementation. If the teacher (who is usually white) creates an “us versus them” dynamic between white students and students of color, it might form a feeling of culturelessness among white students and possibly stifle their voices in the classroom (Glazier, 2005). In a qualitative study, Glazier (2005) observed Julie, a white English teacher in a metropolitan high school that consisted of about 40% white students and 60% minority students (i.e., Hispanic, African American, and Asian). Researchers visited her

classroom 7 times within a 6-week period as students studied *The Way to Rainy Mountains*, a story about the Kiowa Nation. The researchers found the text was a great way to teach students about the importance of cultural diversity and aided many students in making text-to-self connections. On the other hand, Julie also encountered resistance from the majority group; students said they had a hard time connecting to the text and the characters as well as discussing some of the issues that were brought up, such as racism (Glazier, 2005). This challenge may reveal why some teachers are resistant to implementing multicultural texts. When most of their students are not motivated to stay engaged in the reading, they may not know how to navigate those dynamics. They may choose to not use that text in the curriculum rather than find a different solution, so all students are engaged and see the significance in the lessons.

In another study conducted by Ladson-Billings (1995), preservice teachers were observed as they were assigned and worked on a book report collaboratively. Each group was assigned a different book and analyzed it through the lens of poverty and race. They found most students did not recognize issues of race in the stories until the professor pointed them out. For example, in one book, an African American character became the hero when he adopted a white homeless girl. At first, the preservice teachers did not recognize the author was trying to fight the myth of Black poverty or challenge the idea of a necessary white hero. However, “once the issue was raised, they put voice to their understanding of the intersection of race and poverty presented by these novels and the theoretical texts they have read for the course” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 64). This example illustrates the importance of engaging in conversations based around literature that could potentially shape or reshape the ideas people have regarding race and socioeconomic statuses and the stereotypes associated with them.

## **Barriers Schools and Teachers Face in Implementing Multicultural Literature Effectively**

Even though there are many resources that can help teachers implement curriculum designed around multicultural literature, educators still have many obstacles they need to overcome. Teachers shy away from multicultural literature for various reasons including not having access to it in certain districts, being afraid of student or parent reactions, and not seeing books written by authors of color featured in prominent book clubs (Berry & Hinton, 2004). Two other main challenges in incorporating multicultural literature in the classroom are obtaining high-quality texts and lack of awareness among teachers of its importance (Colby & Lyon, 2004). In addition, diversity in classrooms has proven to be an obstacle for many educators. Teachers do not always know how to handle the challenging conversations that may arise around issues of race and racism; they need to learn how to interfere with systems of white privilege and racism in their classrooms (Freire, 2000).

Training on topics of race and racism is crucial because multicultural literature is not only important for students who are marginalized, but also for the dominant group of students. I am not making an argument about the effectiveness of professional development, instead I am stating this is one way of reaching teachers. Bishop (1990) said “they [the dominant group], too, have suffered from the lack of availability of books about others” (p. 2). They need books as windows into the reality of diversity around them and to see they are just members of one group and not the only group. If they only see reflections of themselves in texts, “they will grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world—a dangerous ethnocentrism” (Bishop, 1990, p. 2). Despite its importance for all students, educating all English language arts teachers to reach a diverse population is a very complex process (Cook, 2006).



Several barriers need to be overcome to assure all English language arts teachers are prepared for the task.

In addition to issues around educator mindset, another obstacle teachers face when trying to implement culturally proficient lessons is standards or state-mandated tests. Teachers are pressured to make sure their students perform well on these exams and to strictly follow the curriculum prescribed by the district, which leaves very little room for incorporating teacher creativity and style. It is pertinent teachers have some autonomy in the curriculum they create because they know their student populations, and they know how to best address their needs. However, it is essential for districts to continue to monitor what is going on at each of their school sites. Autonomy does not guarantee innovative and equitable work from teachers. Districts need to reach a delicate balance so teachers have freedom in the classroom and leadership can still maintain oversight. Both parties need to build trust in one another and remember that student needs come first (Estrada, 2017).

### **Multicultural Education in Teacher Preparation Programs**

In 1977, the National Council for Accreditation and Teacher Education adopted a multicultural education standard that led to the widespread study of this topic in teacher preparation programs across the nation (Banks, 2004). Despite these efforts, teacher education programs have been the root of many of the racial and ethnic issues in K–12 education (Sleeter, 2016). Many university leaders have claimed to focus on multiculturalism and social justice; yet teachers they prepare and send out into the workforce have still struggle with talking about race in the classroom and teaching students of color in an effective manner (Sleeter, 2016). Many teacher candidates have continued to carry their neutral and racist views of schools and students (Roegman et al., 2021).

Although 83% of the teaching force has been white (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012) for a very racially and ethnically diverse student population, teacher preparation programs have tended to only include a course or two on multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, teaching English language learners, and social justice thinking (NCES, 2012; Sleeter, 2016). These programs may not be enough to prepare preservice teachers for the reality of the diverse classroom. Understanding cultural responsiveness is very complex, especially for a new teacher. Observations have shown preservice teachers' race consciousness heavily affected their positionality and decision making in the classroom. For example, white teacher candidates (i.e., preservice teachers) at a large urban university's urban teacher preparation program resisted learning about race (Matias et al., 2014). Many of these candidates refused to see this resistance as an issue. Instead, they chose to normalize their ideologies by using mechanisms of whiteness such as color-blind ideology and denial (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Solomona et al., 2005; Yoon, 2012). This resistance highlighted struggles that beginning teachers have had with cultural responsiveness caused mostly by the lack of conversation around the issue of race (Shah & Coles, 2020).

In a qualitative study conducted by Colby (2004) with 100 preservice teachers enrolled in an elementary English language arts methods course, they analyzed the teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding the importance of using culturally and thematically diverse literature. Many teachers mentioned they had not considered the dilemma students of color faced regarding having access to appropriate literature. Some had not even considered how they would select texts up until that point in their program. Others became defensive because they believed there should not be an emphasis on any culture because that approach was biased, and good literature

is good literature (Colby, 2004). These attitudes provide insight into the struggle many beginning teachers face as they learn about racism and their own racial privilege (Colby, 2004).

Teacher preparation programs need to pay more attention and more explicitly address issues around race and racism, especially because many instructors for these programs seem to need more training around this issue as well (Gere et al., 2009). Additionally, unless teacher education programs commit to researching how their candidates incorporate concepts learned during the program into the classroom, they risk having only a surface-level commitment to implementing their multicultural mission statements, which may lead to underprepared educators in the classroom who may not be able to lead critical conversations around race and racism with their students (Cook, 2006).

For many white teachers, one multicultural education class taken in college, or one cultural competency training completed in the workplace is the only experience they may have with discussing and challenging their racial ideologies. Often, these classes and trainings do not even directly discuss racism and white privilege; instead, they depend on using language with terms such as “urban,” “inner city,” and “disadvantaged” and rarely use “white” or “over advantaged” or “privileged” (DiAngelo, 2011). This type of language perpetuates racist attitudes and the idea it is “their” (i.e., people of color) problem. Facilitators of these conversations may not be willing to explicitly talk about white privilege because of a fear of losing their job (for facilitators of color) or because of their lack of knowledge on the topic (for white facilitators; DiAngelo, 2011). When teacher preparation programs have limited courses in multicultural education or they do not directly or appropriately address issues of race, they may credential teachers who are less than culturally proficient and not even aware of their shortcomings. This limitation can prove problematic when they enter the classroom.

In a qualitative study, Sleeter (2016) found several preservice teachers of color voiced they wanted to teach in communities like their own. They found although these teachers were in their program, field placement and curriculum did not prepare them for this. Furthermore, they found their professors were often unaware of this major issue in the program. There cannot be significant positive changes in different communities if the teachers that go into them are not properly prepared. They can risk burning out or repeating the same negative cycles that existed in that school system already. Furthermore, teacher preparation programs cannot improve if they do not survey their students to determine their concerns. Whether preservice teachers plan on teaching in predominantly white communities or communities of color, it is important they learn to critically think about race. White people may think multicultural education is only for those who deal with marginalized populations; however, it is important all white people “build the stamina to sustain conscious and explicit engagement with race” (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 66). Communities need to work together and bring many voices to the table, always consider the context of the school and students, make sure everyone participates even if they feel like the issue does not apply to them, and acknowledge it is long-term work (Sleeter, 2016).

### **The Effects of White Fragility**

White privilege is a system of unearned advantages given only to white people. Because the teaching force is mostly white and students are mostly nonwhite, there is cultural incongruity (Brown-Jeffrey & Cooper, 2011). To deal with this incongruity, it is important for school leadership to bridge the gap by critically engaging teachers in discussions about race, and more specifically, white privilege. White educators can struggle with these discussions because they do not recognize the privilege of being white in the United States because it is seen as normal and neutral (Hines, 2016). Because many white people have been taught to not question

institutions, they struggle in seeing racism as an institutional and systemic issue. Rather it is seen as a series of individual acts (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; McIntosh, 1990). With this mindset, it is difficult to see the significance of engaging in conversations about race and racism in the classroom. Many of these educators are dealing with *white fragility*, which is a state in which even a little racial stress cannot be tolerated and often causes a person to become defensive. They may become outwardly angry, fearful, or guilty, and leave the conversation or situation. This behavior is often caused by a range of emotions triggered by interruptions from what is racially familiar.

Tools of whiteness is a framework used to understand ways in which individuals and institutions use dominant racial ideologies to counter or perpetuate implicit and explicit biases and racist behaviors toward Black, Indigenous, Peoples of Color (BIPOC) peoples. These tools can be performative, ideological, or emotional. These tools are used to help institutions and individuals in those institutions justify upholding white supremacy and dominant white social norms (Picower, 2009). Similarly, *white imagination* encompasses white people's experiences as individuals in dominant society, so they do not have to consciously think about their race or how their race impacts others around them. These behaviors include emotional divestment, lack of critical understandings of race, resurgence of white guilt, and recycling of hegemonic whiteness. Like the tools of whiteness, these behaviors only work to reinforce white supremacy and to aid institutions to not acknowledge the historic and current oppression and marginalization of people of color (Picower, 2009).

A white person may face several challenges, including a challenge to objectivity, which suggests a white person's point of view is affected by their race. Another is the challenge of white racial codes when nonwhite people directly address racial issues and voice their

perspectives. Additionally, white people are challenged by racial comfort in which people of color openly discuss issues of race without considering the feelings of white people around them. Next, they are challenged by revealing sensitive information when people of color refuse to openly tell their stories or reveal their histories. They might also face the challenge of white solidarity when a white person explicitly disagrees with the perspective or opinion of another white person. The challenge of racist behaviors is when a white person is being told their behavior, action, or language had racist implications. The challenge of individualism suggests being part of a group is significant. The challenge of meritocracy acknowledges that access is inequitable among racial groups. The challenge of white authority occurs when a person witnesses a person of color as an authority figure or a person of power. Lastly, the challenge of the white central figure or the white hero occurs when people of color (i.e., characters in a book or movie) are presented in a flattering and non-stereotypical manner (DiAngelo, 2011).

These behaviors and challenges were observed when researchers studied white teachers and white teacher candidates who dealt with topics around race and racism in the classroom in qualitative studies. Researchers found many students, whether they were future teachers or not, continued to avoid this topic of race, which could potentially be a threat to society (Mosko et al., 2017). The first step in solving any problem is acknowledging it is an issue. When that first step is not taken and discussed, it can be difficult to move on to the more important step, which is finding a solution. Matias et al. (2014) argued when these teachers and teacher candidates refused to acknowledge the presence of the white imagination in relation to everyday acts of whiteness, racism was upheld.

Similar behaviors were observed in an ethnographic case study conducted in Sam Williams' classroom (2000), a British literature teacher who attempted to create a culturally

responsive canonical curriculum for urban students. Through this study, the researcher noted a few of the struggles teachers faced as they tried to engage in culturally responsive pedagogies. One of the main struggles Williams had was his position as a white man. Many students questioned his credibility in teaching about racial tensions, and so did he. Another challenge he faced was leading class discussions about racism while allowing white students to feel comfortable. When the issue of racism is addressed, common responses from white people include anger, pulling away, emotionally withdrawing, argumentative attitudes, and cognitive dissonance (Dyches, 2017). Those who identify as being a little more liberal might not get angry, but they do not engage in the conversation either because they have the attitude that they know the subject well. Ultimately, everyone is a part of the racist system and either perpetrates or interrupts it; DiAngelo (2011) stated, “White racism is ultimately a white problem and the burden for interrupting it belongs to white people” (p. 66). This view can be a very challenging and uncomfortable process because it requires people to look critically at their most cherished beliefs and habitual practices; yet, as difficult as it may be, it is pertinent for growth and for learning (Kumashiro, 2002).

Aside from negotiating the racial tension during classroom discussions, Williams (2000) faced similar issues as many other teachers including a lack of access to copies of the texts his students were studying as well as the time to revise the curriculum based on the needs he observed during class. Despite these challenges, he was still able to build strong relationships with his students and fostered an environment in which students felt safe to work collaboratively (Dyches, 2017).

Although white fragility and the lack of multicultural education for preservice teachers are significant issues that lead to resistance against using multicultural literature in high school

classrooms, research has shown certain interventions can help make progress in this area. If white faculty members in the teacher education programs can use knowledge from social movements, work with their communities, include a more diverse range of voices at the table, and place themselves in an analysis of race rather than outside of it, they can effectively confront the issue of white fragility and in turn make a difference for their students (Sleeter, 2016).

Additionally, it is important for students in teacher education programs to consider issues of racism and classism with the intention of shaping schools to become more equitable institutions for students, especially those who tend to be marginalized. Although it may be uncomfortable, this effort means these preservice teachers must examine their own white privilege, their own experiences, and their own racial identities—all of which are factors that shape their worldview and how they may interact with students in their classrooms (Mosko et al., 2017).

### **Summary of Research**

The U.S. student population has clearly become more culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse. Unfortunately, the curriculum, texts, and pedagogies often used in the field of education have not reflected that diversity. Many teachers still heavily depend on canonical texts in secondary English language arts classrooms that may not be culturally reflective of the students in their classrooms. There are many consequences to this lack of change, including negative self-perceptions and larger achievement gaps, especially for students of color (Gere et al., 2009).

Incorporating multicultural literature into the curriculum of English language arts classrooms can have many benefits for students (Gere et al., 2009). When students see themselves reflected in texts positively, there are many positive effects for them personally and academically. This could potentially affect the way they interact and accept other people for the rest of their lives. Despite these findings, educators still face many struggles in making



multicultural literature a regular part of the curriculum. Some of the obstacles include, but are not limited to, white fragility and a lack of proper preparation in both preservice and seasoned teachers (Sleeter, 2016).

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I used a qualitative phenomenological research study design as the methodology of this study (Creswell, 2007; Mertler, 2021). Phenomenological studies allow the researcher to identify commonalities in the perspectives of several individuals regarding a certain phenomenon (Fraenkel et al., 1993). In this kind of study, the participants' perceptions of the event are more important than the event itself (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). In a phenomenological study, the researcher engages in interviews to better understand a phenomenon from a participant's point of view (Mertler, 2016). The sample size for the interviews is usually between 5–25 people, and each interview usually lasts between 1–2 hours (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

The phenomenon I wanted to understand was the barriers high school English language arts teachers face regarding implementing multicultural literature, and how they may overcome those barriers and make decisions for their classroom, and the role their institutions play in that decision-making process. This methodological design aligned with my overarching research questions because the purpose of this study was to understand the barriers secondary English language arts teachers faced in implementing multicultural literature into the curriculum from their own perspective and how they overcame them. I used the culturally proficient educational practice (i.e., The Framework) to develop both of my primary research questions. According to The Framework, it is important for teachers to recognize, acknowledge, and commit to overcoming barriers—the things that get in the way of cultural proficiency—and to that, they must first identify what those barriers are (Lindsey et al., 2014).

The following questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of the barriers they face in implementing

multicultural texts?

2. In what ways do teachers overcome these barriers?

The goal of the study was to understand from teachers' point of view the extent of the barriers they faced that hindered them from implementing multicultural texts into their curriculum and ways in which they overcame those barriers. I conducted seven semi-structured interviews with teachers in the English department of a large public high school in Southern California. The Framework and culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) served as frameworks to understand an individual or organization's values and behaviors in a diverse setting and to determine changes that need to be made. The Framework was used as an analytical tool to understand the teachers' ideology regarding diversity, and CRP was used to analyze their decision-making process when it came to curriculum design and selecting texts for their students to use during lessons (Welborn et al., 2022). Both The Framework and CRP were used to write questions for the interview (see Appendix C).

### **Research Design**

Because the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand teachers' perceptions of the barriers they faced in implementing multicultural texts and how they overcame them, I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven teachers who built and taught English language arts curriculum (Mertler, 2016). By using interviews, I was able to capture teachers' points of view on the issue because the main source of data was their responses to questions regarding curriculum and pedagogy. The goal of the phenomenological approach is to understand the essence of the meaning of the participants' experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study focused on the lived experiences—firsthand accounts—of seven participants who were English language arts teachers. They were chosen based on the criteria listed in the Participant

Recruitment and Selection section. Participants were asked to respond to questions about their background and teaching experience, how they handled diversity in their classroom, and any other factors that affected how they chose texts they assigned their students. By conducting individual semi-structured interviews, I was able to capture how they made sense and meaning out of their teaching experience and decision-making process. The role of making sense of experience is emphasized in a phenomenological approach to interviewing; it gives the interviewee an opportunity to select details from their experience, reflect on them, and give them order, thereby making sense of their stories (Seidman, 2006).

This type of phenomenological study puts the emphasis on the individual's experience, and how it is expressed in language as authentic as possible to that experience (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). In phenomenological research, researchers use interviews or extended conversations as the source of their data. These data are usually acquired through in-depth, lengthy individual interviews that are either semi-structured or unstructured, and in which the participant does most of the talking while the researcher listens (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Mertler, 2021).

I conducted one interview with each participant, and I analyzed the content of the interview transcripts through The Framework and CRP lens. The study's semi-structured interview questions were designed to capture the nature of the phenomena and the context that influenced the experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

### **Setting and Context**

Research for this study took place in my workplace, which was a high school in a public 8th–12th grade school district in Southern California. The school was made up of about 2,700 students and about 200 faculty and staff members. The ethnic makeup of the school was 61%

Hispanic, 20% Asian, 7% white, and 4% Black, and the gender demographics were 53% male and 47% female. The data obtained for this study were gathered from teachers in the English department. I interviewed 7 of the 16 teachers who worked in this department. The school mission statement included goals for all students to be college ready and committed to creating a community that fosters a sense of belonging. This site worked well for the study because the teachers in the English department came from very diverse backgrounds in race, age, and experience; therefore, they provided different perspectives that addressed my research questions.

### **Participant Recruitment and Selection**

I intentionally selected individuals at a site that better helped me understand the topic at hand; this strategy is also known as purposeful criterion-based sampling (Mertler, 2016).

According to the English language arts department website for this site, there was a collective goal of making sure students were effective language users so they could succeed academically and become “well informed citizens.” I interviewed seven teachers in the English language arts department. In this department, teachers had varying backgrounds in race, age, experience, and education. I needed to hear from all of them to better understand which factors affected teachers’ decision-making process when it came to text selection and curriculum design (Mertler, 2016). I chose to interview multiple teachers at a singular site to see if there was a pattern of institutional impact on their decision making. I presented the research ideas briefly during a department meeting by using a slide deck presentation. This presentation gave me an opportunity to clearly explain the purpose of the study and address any comments or questions that arose from the department. As I addressed participants, I outlined the purpose of my study, why it was

important to me, the process participants would go through, incentives for their time, and their rights as a participant. Lastly, I explained the criteria for the selection process for the interviews.

After I presented at the meeting, I emailed all potential participants (see Appendix D) with the screening requirements and asked them to reply if they met the criteria and were willing to participate in the study. Potential participants were screened to ensure they met the following criteria. Participants had to (a) hold a teaching credential in English language arts, (b) have at least some autonomy when it comes to curriculum design, and (c) have been teaching for at least part of 1 year. Although new teachers may not have had much experience, they still provided insight into the mindset of new educators going into the profession. Although the advanced placement (AP) literature courses limited teacher text selection because of its course description and requirements, AP teachers were still able to participate in the study because they had the option of supplementing the texts required by the AP program. It was interesting to see how they navigated the system. Lastly, it was important teachers had some autonomy with curriculum design or the research questions would not have been applicable to them because they focused on decision making.

### **Data Collection**

The main data collection method for phenomenological studies are long, in-depth semi-structured interviews in which the participant does most of the talking and the researcher listens (Leedy & Ormad, 2013). Before scheduled interviews, I sent the interview questions (see Appendix C) to the participants to allow them some time to think about their responses (Patton, 2015). Because participants were asked about experiences that could have occurred years ago, they might have needed a significant amount of time and reflection to gather their thoughts. Allowing them the time to think about their experiences ahead of the interview benefitted both

the researcher and the participant (Gubrium et al., 2012). With the participants' consent, interviews were audio recorded for later transcription (Glesne, 2006). The audio recordings and transcriptions were securely saved on the laptop computer in a file labeled with participant pseudonyms.

## **Interviews**

I interviewed seven different teachers in the English language arts department at the public high school in Southern California by using the semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E). I used convenience sampling to determine which school site best fit my purposes as a researcher. The semi-structured interview format allowed me to give structure to the interviews with open-ended questions and allowed participants the opportunity to express themselves without excessive influence from the interviewer (Leedy, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The questions for the interview addressed the following themes: teacher background, teacher ideology regarding diversity, and the teacher decision-making process regarding curriculum design. It was important to address teacher background because it helped them feel more comfortable. In addition, research has shown where a teacher received their credential and their experience with curriculum growing up affects the decisions they make in the classroom.

The semi-structured interview questions were divided into three parts: questions regarding background, questions regarding the barriers teachers faced in incorporating multicultural literature, and questions regarding how they overcame those barriers (see Appendix C). I designed these three parts so participants could first introduce themselves and then respond to questions that addressed each of my main research questions. The interview was designed to build a larger picture of the current mindset regarding curriculum and pedagogy at this school site. The questions regarding background addressed participants' experience and education.

These factors were important because they may have affected decisions a teacher made in the classroom. The questions regarding barriers addressed factors teachers considered as they made decisions regarding texts they assigned students and their thoughts on recent district policies that restricted three specific texts. Lastly, the questions regarding how they overcame those barriers addressed any training, experiences, education, and professional learning community (PLC) work that drove teachers to make these changes and to choose to incorporate multicultural texts. There was also a set of questions that asked participants about how group dynamics, specifically PLCs, played a role in their decision-making process. I asked these questions because group dynamics can have a heavy influence on the texts teachers pick because teachers often work in teams, which may sway their decisions.

### **Instruments for Interviews**

For this study, I conducted one-on-one interviews with teachers in the English language arts department. Qualitative research through interviews is a practical way of collecting and describing central themes on the subject (Creswell, 2008). The main purpose of interviewing is to understand what participants want to convey (Kvale, 1996). Interview questions were developed to allow teachers in the English department to describe decisions they made and the reasoning behind those decisions regarding text selection in the curriculum; I specifically focused on implementation of multicultural texts. To maintain uniformity of the structure and theme of the questions, I used the general interview guide approach to ensure the same information topics were collected from each of the interviewees and still maintained a degree of freedom and adaptability during the interview (Kvale, 1996). One of the main reasons I conducted individual interviews was to allow participants to feel more comfortable to speak



freely as they discussed their decision-making process in a space where it was only the researcher and participant (Creswell, 2008).

Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to address specific dimensions of the research questions and allow participants to offer new ideas regarding topics of research (Galletta, 2013). Thus, I used semi-structured questions with the flexibility of natural conversation to explore different ideas. Interviews were scheduled for 45–60 minutes. The first 5–10 minutes of the interview allowed the participant to discuss their teaching background, which helped build trust and comfortability. Although all participants were my colleagues, I did not know all of them well enough to already have built a trusting relationship; therefore, it was important to give them that space to introduce and tell me more about themselves. In this first portion, they discussed where they received their teaching credential, how long they had been teaching, where they had taught, and anything else they thought had helped mold them into the teacher they were. From there, participants were informed of the next major topic of the interview that shed light on their ideology regarding diversity. I asked questions regarding how they defined diversity, what benefits they saw from it, and how they worked with students with diverse backgrounds.

For this study, I developed a set of questions I used for the semi-structured interview, and I also used probing questions based on the responses I elicited from participants to give them the opportunity to elaborate and provide a complete picture of their experience (Mertler, 2016). With permission from the participants, interviews were audio recorded so I could transcribe and analyze them. I saved the audio file and gave it to an accredited service for transcribing. The audio recording was provided to all participants to ensure accuracy.

Before starting any parts of this process, interviewees were informed of the purpose of the interview, and I addressed the terms of confidentiality to ensure participants understood their role and rights in the research project. I explained the format of the interview and the time allotted for it. I also reinforced there was no strict time limit, which allowed the interviewee to share all their thoughts and ideas freely. After my explanations, I allowed the interviewee to ask any clarifying questions, and I addressed any doubts or concerns.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

To thoroughly address any risks and inconveniences participants may encounter during the study, all participants received information on how to opt out of the study at any point if they chose to no longer participate. Interviewees were able to take breaks at any point, refrain from responding to a question, or ask clarifying questions. These are all important factors in conducting a successful interview (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2016). This project had very low potential for risk to participants; however, I moved through the interview based on their comfort level. They were allowed to opt out at any point.

As the primary researcher, I worked alone for the entire study. This limited the risk of having any information being accessible to anyone else. All participant data were recorded, transcribed into text, and kept on my personal laptop that was password secured. In accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, all data received from participants were collected with the explicit permission of the participants. After I have finished analyzing the data and have completed my final dissertation with approval, I will permanently delete all data from my computer and drive. Participants were aware of all measures I took to minimize any risk of allowing any other person to access the data.

## **Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is done through an inductive approach and culminates in a narrative summary that synthesizes all the data collected from various sources—in this case, the survey and the focus groups—into common themes (Mertler, 2016). After collecting the data, I read through all the information and recorded all possible themes and categories in a codebook. I then read through the data again and coded them using all possible themes and categories in the codebook. The process involved several iterative cycles of reading and coding, which lead to making connections between the data and the original research questions.

I also looked for inconsistent information that conflicted with patterns and themes that emerged during the analysis. Lastly, I interpreted the data by connecting the patterns, themes, and categories to my research question to provide implications for practice, leadership, and social justice. To increase my analytical validity, I incorporated quotes from the interviews in my final analysis of the data (Parson & Brown, 2002).

### **Coding**

To search for meaningful themes that shed light on the decision-making process teachers go through as they design curriculum and select texts, all data organization, coding, and categorization was done by hand. I chose this approach because it is particularly beneficial when research efforts are aimed at prioritizing and illuminating the participant's voice (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2021). In my analysis of the interview transcript, I aimed to understand how and why teachers either chose to incorporate multicultural literature into their curriculum or why they chose to leave it out. I closely read the data line by line in several open hand coding sessions to identify both emic and etic codes (Emerson et al., 2011). The Framework and CRP were used as guides to analyze and interpret the data. After each round of data analysis, I wrote analytical

memos, which were brief notes about thoughts, ideas, and questions that come to mind as I gathered, coded, and analyzed the data (Miles et al., 2014). After several iterative rounds of coding, I used inductive analysis to describe the main features that resulted from the data coding (Parsons & Brown, 2002).

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

*Validity* is determining if the study truly measures what it was designed to measure, and *reliability* refers to determining if the measure and observations employed in the study are dependable (Creswell, 2002). It is important to consider both validity and reliability when conducting a qualitative study. To increase interpretive validity, I wrote a memo after each interview to make sure I always put forth the interviewee's ideas and not my own (Peshkin, 1988). I also conducted member checks to increase credibility, and both descriptive and interpretive validity. *Member checking* is the process of asking participants for their opinion on the trustworthiness of the thoughts and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This process is an effective way to ensure the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2013). Each of the participants received a copy of the interview transcript and my preliminary findings for review to ensure their voice and ideas were represented accurately (Glesne, 2006).

### **Positionality**

I was a current member of the department where I conducted my research. I had only been working at this school for about 3 months at the time of this study, so I did not know the teachers too well. Multicultural literature had not been a major topic of discussion during department meetings, so I did not know where most teachers stood on this topic, which helped minimize bias during data interpretation.

At the time of this study, I had 9 years of experience teaching English at the middle school, high school, community college, and university levels. I am also a first-generation American and went through the public school system. I experienced not having any literature that reflected my ethnicity, language, or culture until I was in college. Even at that point, the literature assigned to me reflected a negative perception of my background.

I am of Middle Eastern descent, and in a multicultural literature class, I was assigned a short story about a Libyan man who committed one of the first acts of terror on an airplane. This reading was the only story assigned that was either set in the Middle East or written by a Middle Eastern author. Although it was a well-written story and an important event in history, this presentation alone did not constitute an accurate or even complete portrayal of Middle Eastern culture, values, or people. This story should not have been the only exposure to Middle Eastern culture I had in college. Because I am familiar with my background, I know there is more to the story, but I can only imagine the image it paints for people outside the culture. Post-9/11, most media coverage of the Middle East or Middle Eastern people has been associated with terrorism. When students are only exposed to the same ideas in the literature they are assigned, it perpetuates rather than counters those negative stereotypes.

As I started my teaching career, I noticed the problem continued—the literature often assigned to students did not necessarily reflect their backgrounds. The schools in which I taught were very diverse; however, the literature used in the English curriculum was primarily written by white authors. I taught in an all-Jewish school, three schools in the South Bay area, and a large public university in San Diego. I noticed the titles most used—like any of the Shakespearean plays, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *The Giver*—did not reflect the cultures of the students in the classes. These texts were not windows and doors for students to see themselves reflected

in a positive way, nor were they a way to learn about the people and world around them (Bishop, 1990). I was aware I needed to reflect on the research process as it related to my own identity and experiences (Milner, 2007). To minimize my own biases, I engaged in reflexivity during this research project by writing detailed notes and memos as I collected and analyzed data as a way to mitigate my biases, assumptions, and preconceived notions (Emerson, 2011; Mertler, 2016).

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The initial three chapters provided a brief overview of the study, a review of the current literature relevant to the topic, and an explanation of the methodology. The purpose of this study was to understand from the teachers' perspectives the barriers they faced in implementing multicultural literature into their secondary English language arts curriculum and how they may have overcome those barriers. Chapter 4 discusses the findings that emerged from the data collection conducted to understand how teachers make curricular decisions.

Both culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and culturally proficient educational practice (i.e., The Framework) were used as the conceptual frameworks to design this study. The first cultural proficiency element is assessing culture. This study was designed to highlight participants' voices as they described their backgrounds and past and present experiences. By allowing participants to share their history regarding their own high school experiences and motivations to become teachers as well as their decision-making processes, it became a principal factor in understanding the participant (Quezada et al., 2012). Using the Cultural Proficiency Continuum also allowed for a way to explain one's values and how they were associated with the decisions they make every day. The Continuum allowed for the framing of conversations in the interviews and open engagement to understand participants' deeper thinking regarding the curricular and pedagogical decisions they made (Quezada et al., 2012).

CRP is built on three foundational pillars: academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (Author, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning (Wood, 2015). It builds on what students know, teaches them to embrace their culture and love learning, highlights their strengths, and gives them confidence to overcome weaknesses

(Aronson & Laughter, 2016). The interview questions were created to allow participants to discuss how they designed and implemented curriculum that reflected the major aspects of CRP. For example, participants were asked questions such as, “How do you approach culturally sensitive topics in your class?” and “In which ways do you aim to diversify the readings and literature so as to represent the ethnic backgrounds of your students?”

This study sought to explore perceptions of English teachers with differing backgrounds regarding the barriers they faced in implementing multicultural literature in the English language arts classroom and how they may have been able to overcome those barriers. Participants differed in age, teaching experience, ethnic background, and educational backgrounds. In Table 1, the research questions with the corresponding themes and subthemes are outlined. The major themes are listed on the left side under the research questions they correlate with, and the subthemes that emerged under some of the major themes are listed on the right side of the table.



**Table 1***Summary of Research Questions and Related Themes/Subthemes*

Research question	Themes	Subthemes
RQ #1: What are teachers' perceptions of the barriers they face in implementing multicultural texts?	Accessibility Is an Issue	-
	Not Being Comfortable	Credential program focused a lot on English language development rather than multicultural education
	Discussing Multicultural Literature	Multicultural literature was not the focus of any professional development Lack of multicultural literature in high school
	Assessments Are a Priority for the School	-
RQ #2: In what ways do teachers overcome these barriers?	Overvaluing the Literary Canon	Expectation that students can reference Shakespeare
	Developing a Mindset that Text Relevance Matters	Using multicultural poems and short stories
	Using Internet Sources	-
	Implementing Strategies to Help Students Navigate Difficult Conversations	-
	Finding Autonomy as a Member of a PLC	-

**Profile of Participants**

There was a total of seven participants interviewed for this study. All seven were English language arts teachers at the same site at a high school in the South Bay area of California. All participants chose their own pseudonyms. The semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom. Each one lasted about 1 hour. In the first phase of the interview, participants shared a little about their backgrounds and their decisions to become teachers. Afterward, they discussed many of the aspects that influenced the curricular and pedagogical decisions they made for their classes with a focus specifically on multicultural literature.

The participants' teaching experience ranged from 2 years to over 30 years at the time of data collection. In order to protect their anonymity, their exact number of years teaching is not revealed; however, I have included a window that shows their approximate experience. In the

table below, *Novice* refers to anyone who has been teaching from 0-5 years, *Advanced* refers to anyone who has been teaching from 6-10 years, and *Experienced* refers to anyone who has been teaching for more than 10 years. Among the seven participants, they attended four different universities where they received their teaching credentials. The first participant to receive his credential, received it in 1991, and the participant who received a credential the latest, received it in 2020. They taught a range of classes at various levels including 9th–12th grade English, honors classes, accelerated classes, advanced placement (AP) classes, and English language development (ELD) classes. Six out of the seven participants previously taught at other sites in California. All seven of them held other jobs aside from teaching in and out of the education field. Although one participant declined to state his race, the remainder of the participants were racially diverse including teachers who self-identified as white, Latino, Mexican, and Filipino. Table 2 represents an overview of the demographics of the participants.

**Table 2**

*Participants' Background*

Name (Pseudonym)	Race or ethnicity	Years teaching	Credential year
Alida	Filipino	Experienced	1990s
Bob	white	Advanced	2000s
Brandon	Latino	Novice	2000s
Christina	Chicano Mexican	Advanced	2000s
George	American Mexican	Experienced	2000s
Maria	Mexican	Experienced	2000s
Steve	Declined to state	Experienced	1990s

**George**

George is an experienced teacher. He received his teaching credential in the 2000s. He also recently completed a degree in educational leadership which taught him about many issues schools faced. Because he received his credential, he assumed different roles at the site. He had also begun monitoring students who were at risk of failing. He identified as Mexican American. His parents were both born in Mexico; however, one of his grandparents was born in Kansas. Many members in his family were involved in the field of education. He considered himself to come from a highly educated, and well-read family who exposed him to a lot of great literature as he was growing up.

He decided to become an English teacher because he always excelled in the subject growing up, but according to him, the real driving force for decision was an interest in becoming a basketball coach. Although he did not do coach anymore, he had coached several teams in the district. He held many different positions in education across the county over the years and had been at this particular site for about 6 years.

## **Christina**

Christina is an advanced teacher. She received her credential in the 2000s. She identified as Mexican American. Both of her parents were born in Mexico, and she was born in the United States after her family immigrated in the late 1980s. She majored in English in college and decided to become a teacher after her counselor suggested she take a few education courses to fulfill her college graduation requirements even though she did not initially think about going into the field. She enjoyed those classes and the internships she completed at varying schools working with students, so she decided to become a teacher. After she graduated, she taught at a couple of different high schools in the state of California.

## **Steve**

Steve is an experienced teacher. He received his teaching credential in the 1990s. Steve majored in English and considered going to law school but ultimately decided education was a better fit for him. He always liked school, and he excelled in his classes. He wanted to give his students some of the same good experiences given to him by his previous teachers and professors when he was a student in high school and college. Additionally, he enjoyed tutoring while he was in college, so he knew teaching was a good fit for him. He also liked that this career would also allow him to coach. He was currently a member of the coaching staff at his site. He received his master's degree in education from National University in 2001.

## **Alida**

Alida is an experienced teacher. She received her teaching credential in the 1990s. She identified as Filipino. In the 1970s, her parents immigrated to the United States, where she was born. Both of her parents were also teachers as were many other people in her family. Alida was given many opportunities to teach and tutor from the time she was in elementary school; she

participated in summer and afterschool programs. During these experiences, she often received positive feedback from her peers and adults around her who encouraged her to become a teacher.

### **Brandon**

Brandon is a novice teacher, which makes him the newest teacher out of all the participants. He received his teaching credential in the 2000s. He identified as Latino Chicano. His original major in college was kinesiology, but he changed his major to English, which he decided was a better fit. After switching, he was not sure if he wanted to go the teaching route, but after serving as an Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) tutor for 2 years and having had multiple inspirational professors, he decided to become a teacher.

### **Maria**

Maria is an experienced teacher. She received her credential in the 2000s. She also held a librarian credential and had served as a librarian for several years. After the COVID-19 global pandemic, her position as a librarian was no longer available, so she went back to teaching full time. She identified as Mexican. She was born in the United States, but her parents were from Calypso, Mexico. She grew up in the Coachella Valley where she attended a community college after high school. According to her, there were not too many majors to choose from, so she picked English. Although English was her second language, she said she always excelled in the subject and felt like it came easily to her. That led her to a path in education.

### **Bob**

Bob is an experienced teacher. She received her credential in the early 2000s. She identified as white. She knew she had some Scottish heritage, but she was unsure of the rest of her ethnicity. Teaching was her third career. She started as a costume designer for a theater and then worked retail for a few years. After she inherited some money, she decided to go back to

school. In college, she majored in theater and decided to go into teaching. She decided to earn an English teaching credential because it was the closest subject to theater; and in the state of California, a credentialed English teacher could teach theater classes. She had worked at several schools as a teacher and as a librarian.

### **Emergent Themes**

I designed the interview questions in a manner that would allow participants to deeply reflect on how and why curricular decisions were made in their classrooms; I focused more specifically on how they chose texts they assigned to students. One part of the interview questions focused on the barriers they may have faced in implementing multicultural texts, and the other part focused on if and how they may have been able to overcome those barriers. They were asked questions about their own experiences as students, how often they made changes to their curriculum, what usually drove those changes, and how they handled difficult and controversial conversations in their classrooms.

When they shared their experience in designing and implementing curriculum, three major themes emerged as barriers they faced in implementing multicultural literature: (a) Accessibility to Texts Is an Issue, (b) Not Being Comfortable Discussing Multicultural Literature, and (c) Assessments Are a Priority for the School. Further, three themes emerged around how teachers overcame those barriers. They included: (a) Text Relevance Matters, (b) Using Online Resources, and (c) Creating a Safe Space for Students. In the following sections, I first share the barriers the participants described they faced, and then I share some of the ways they have been able to overcome those barriers.

## **Barriers Teachers Face in Implementing Multicultural Texts**

The responses offered by participants in the following section are reflections of what they saw as barriers in implementing multicultural texts. Although literature has shown there are many benefits to both students of color and white students, many teachers have struggled to stray away from canonical texts and assign texts written by authors from around the world. When students see themselves reflected in texts positively, there are many positive effects for them personally and academically. This reflection could potentially affect the way they interact and accept other people for the rest of their lives (Gere et al., 2009). Despite this research, participants faced issues with text accessibility, being able to effectively navigate classroom conversations around controversial topics and balancing their time between implementing curriculum and preparing for all the required assessments.

### **Accessibility to Texts Is an Issue**

Six out of the seven participants noted one of the barriers they faced when trying to incorporate multicultural texts in their curriculum was accessing the text. Their current school site seemed to be limited in what teachers could offer students when it came to reading material; regarding printed texts, they could only access whatever was in the textbooks or available in the library. This limitation drove a lot of their decision making. When asked how they made curricular decisions in the classrooms, Bob replied by stating, “A lot of it comes down to what we have access to as far as the books.” Steve’s reply was very similar; he stated the following, “I think availability, accessibility, whether it’s [in the] library or textbook.”

Alida discussed how she has often been limited to the books available in the library or the stories available in the textbooks as well. She stated the following:

I think in the past I mean, a lot of it has to do with accessibility, you know. Can we get the books? Can we get the stories? So, I think, especially when I first

started teaching, it's whatever was in the textbook, because if it wasn't in the textbook and the book wasn't available in the library, there wasn't any way I could get a hold of it. And I think because of that, you know, there were limitations as to what I can pick out.

She acknowledged a lot of texts can be accessed online, but she did not think this was always a good solution. She explained by stating:

I'm kind of wary about saying, "okay, well, if I just get a PDF . . . that should cover it." I know I talked to somebody in the department where I guess that's what they're doing, you know . . . I don't think there's any copies in the library for the text that this person picked. So they just got a PDF. And they're doing it that way. But I think I'm kind of old school in that if I'm going to read a text, I don't want to read a text on my laptop. I mean I have a kindle, and I think the kindle is a very different feeling than reading it on a screen, so I would prefer having that paper copy. . . . So, I went ahead and photocopied it for students because I [think] just staring at a screen for that long [is hard] especially after Covid. It's just not cool.

Teachers did not have the ability to procure different types of literature outside of what was available to them, which became a barrier. They may have wanted to teach certain multicultural texts, but if the texts were not available, there was very little the teachers could do about changing that, especially if the funds were not available. Accessing texts was a major barrier for teachers and one of the reasons why they could not implement multicultural literature into the curriculum.

### **Not Being Comfortable Discussing Multicultural Literature**

A prominent theme that emerged from participants' responses was not feeling equipped to teach and discuss texts written by multicultural authors. Many shared they felt hesitant teaching students about a culture that was not their own or that they did not know too well. There was a common concern regarding not being able to navigate the conversations that might arise during a discussion about a multicultural text. Brandon shared by stating, "I just try to be careful with what I choose, because I'm not a part of those cultures, so I'm not always 100% sure on



how to explain it.” He further explained if the author of the book was Latino and discussed topics such as *Machismo*,<sup>4</sup> he felt more comfortable with the lesson because it was similar to his own background. Christina mentioned she felt the same way, but she was working on becoming more comfortable teaching books from diverse backgrounds. She shared by stating, “But once I feel more comfortable with the course, I hope I have the confidence and capability to bring in, you know, multicultural authors. So that could be a goal I set for myself for the years to come.” For now, she stated it was not a priority because she did not have the time needed to dedicate to becoming more familiar and comfortable with these texts.

Similarly, Alida discussed the idea of teaching *Beloved* by Toni Morrison in her classes.

This novel examined slavery in the United States. She said the following:

You know, I was telling my friend that when it came to *Beloved*, even though I’ve taught it before, I think after Black Lives Matter . . . I don’t feel completely equipped to do that book. I would actually love to teach it, but I still feel apprehensive about teaching it because of the content of it. . . . So, because of the content of it, I’m kind of like, okay, what kind of, you know. Am I really qualified to have conversations about the violence of slavery in that book?

She mentioned if she had another trusted teacher on campus who could help her plan the curriculum for the book, she would not hesitate as much. Without that support, however, she did not feel comfortable assigning it. She explained by stating:

But I don’t feel like I’m enough of an expert in it to say that I would do a good job if that makes sense. I don’t want to take something like that and do it some injustice. And I know I have African American students in my classes and to enter a conversation where I’m like “we’re just going to go through this and just do it without a lot of forethought and a lot of really careful planning,” because I think that’s a book that you do need to have some careful planning in this day and age. I’m hesitant to do it at least right now. I’m hesitant to do it.

---

<sup>4</sup> A concept associated with a strong sense of exaggerated masculine pride. It is characterized by dominance and aggression.

Maria also described an experience she had in the past in which it was difficult for her to have an effective conversation with her class about Hitler and his role as a leader in the Holocaust during a unit they studied. She explained how a miscommunication in a message she shared with her class led to students writing content in their papers that she was not expecting. After she collected the papers from that unit, she had to have several conversations with students to gain clarification on what they wrote. She shared by stating:

I was talking to a student, and I said, “how come you wrote that . . . Hitler was a good leader?” He [said], “well, I thought . . . that’s what you wanted for me to write.” . . . I’m like, “oh, my God! That’s not what I wanted for you to write!”

She realized they misinterpreted what she was trying to say. After this experience, she never taught that unit again. She said the following:

I was not comfortable with that . . . I couldn’t teach it. . . . It took me a long time to think, “okay, why am I running into trouble here?” I thought about it. It would have been a good conversation for college students, maybe, but not for high school students, you know.

The apprehension these teachers had when it came to navigating these conversations was getting in the way of them implementing multicultural literature. They did not want to offend any students, nor did they want to do the texts injustice. When teachers did not feel prepared to facilitate these conversations, they avoided implementing the literature altogether.

### **Multicultural Literature Was not the Focus of Any Teacher Training**

One of the reasons teachers might have felt so underprepared to navigate difficult conversations was because their teacher preparation program did not provide enough development about this topic. Participants were asked to discuss the kind of training and preparation their credential program included regarding multicultural education. Even though the seven participants received their credentials from five different universities, they all said their preparation was very limited. Bob said she took several “token” multicultural classes where she

learned very little about the topic. She mentioned if a student was able to throw around a few “buzzwords,” they would be able to pass the class; however, she took away much substance that she was able to put into practice once she started teaching.

Another common response among participants was credential programs focused more on teaching ELD strategies rather than focusing on deeper multicultural education topics. Steve noted by stating, “Obviously, we did a lot of the language development stuff . . . you know . . . ESL [English as a second language] type classes.” Brandon described his experience in a very similar way. He also said they primarily focused on strategies for teaching English language learners in his program.

Christina recalled discussing more pedagogical strategies rather than curriculum design and decision-making topics in her credential classes. She explained by stating:

I think it was like the typical ELD and SADIE [specially designed academic instruction in English] strategies. It was more like helping students understand the curriculum that we’re presenting them with like scaffold and support. But yeah, when it came to texts, I don’t really remember that being a priority. So it was mostly like, “how do you help an ELD student in your classroom?” We did kind of discuss dual immersion courses and things like that. But yeah. I don’t really remember, like [discussing] texts. I think they kind of left that up to like the teachers who were working with at the time are working on that.

Although these participants attended four different universities, they all came across the same problem: English language arts teaching candidates did not specifically learn about text selection or implementation during their programs even though that was an integral part of their role once they started teaching.

Aside from feeling underprepared by their programs, the participants also discussed not being able to access very much training through their current district. Participants were asked about their experience with professional development regarding multicultural literature through the district. Similar to their responses about their credential program, all seven participants said

the district had offered little to no training regarding the incorporation or implementation of multicultural literature. Brandon said, “I don’t think I’ve necessarily had any for that specific reason. We’ve had a focus on second language learners but not necessarily the reading or the diverse aspect of the curriculum or anything like that.” Steve, who had been in the district a lot longer, mentioned, “You know, I’ve been to so many trainings and a lot of them incorporated multicultural literature, but I can’t think of one that was like the main focus necessarily.” When asked, George explained, “I’m currently getting a lot of [professional] development, you know, periodically on continuing to do things that are equitable, and we will talk about that, but it’s not always a huge focus.”

As stated in the previous subsection, many participants did not implement multicultural texts because they did not feel prepared to navigate conversations that might arise in the classroom. This hesitancy was a result of the lack of training they felt they had not only in their teaching credential programs but also through their district.

### **Lack of Multicultural Literature in High School**

Five out of the seven participants indicated multicultural literature was not represented in their high school classrooms when they were students. For example, Christina shared by stating:

When I got to high school, and I got into the more advanced courses like the honors or AP, I feel like the teachers started teaching more like towards the canon of literature that consists of, you know, like Shakespeare and Fitzgerald, kind of more like white male authors.

Alida noted she never read a book by an author with an ethnic background like her own. She explained by stating:

You know, I even told my students last year I was like, “yeah, when I was going through high school, I never saw a Filipino author.” I only got into that once I hit college and then I took a Filipino American history class.

She further shared, “So yeah, I mean it was pretty much, I think, old white guys, American and British.”

Brandon explained although he read books by a couple of different Black authors, they never spent much time discussing the texts in school. When asked if multicultural texts were represented in his high school curriculum, he replied by stating:

Not as much as I think they should have been. We read some. Once I got to high school, we might have read one or two Black authors, and we didn’t spend that much time on them because I can’t even remember which ones they were. What I do remember reading is like Ray Bradbury [and] Mark Twain. And those are definitely not incredibly diverse.

George also was not exposed to multicultural literature in high school, and he felt very strongly about it. After reflecting, he stated, “I learned how wrong it was for them to cheat me of that.” He recalled by stating:

I [remember] a lot of John Steinbeck. I read the *Witch of Blackbird Pond*, and in high school . . . there was a lot of the canon that was in the textbook. We stuck to this textbook, and I know back then the textbooks really were heavy on, just like, you know, the basic traditional pieces.

The fact that participants were not exposed to multicultural literature when they were high school students could also affect why they did not feel comfortable incorporating it into the curriculum as teachers.

### **Assessments Are a Priority for the School**

During the interviews, the participants mentioned preparing for and assigning assessments often took priority over developing and making time to incorporate multicultural literature. Different levels of the institution required them to give many tests and quizzes. For example, the PLCs were required to give four common formative assessments (CFAs) a year, the district required two performance tasks and two end-of-course exams, and the state required the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CASPP). AP classes had to prepare

for the end of the year AP test as well. Steve explained by stating, “For AP literature, you know, there’s lists that are published of works that commonly show up on the test. So that’s one of the criteria to pick resources. Is it something that shows up there?”

Alida also mentioned choosing texts based on preparing students for the AP tests. She reflected by stating:

Currently for AP [literature], is it something they can use for the exam? Is it something that they can say, “hey, I’m, you know, I’m at the table, I have the exam in front of me, I, you know, can start going through that [list] of titles” and any of the titles that we give them should be something that they can easily use. So, I think that’s kind of the thought process for AP [literature].

Aside from the AP test, participants mentioned having to consider preparing for and administering multiple other tests throughout the year that affected curriculum planning. Alida mentioned, “I think you get so caught up in ‘okay, what are we doing next? When’s the CAHSEE [California high school exit exam] happening? Or when’s the SBAC [smarter balanced assessment] happening?’”

In addition to these tests assigned by the State of California, participants mentioned having to consider assessments mandated at the district and school levels. Christina explained:

So, there’s this big move towards CFAs and assessments and things like that. And I feel that as of now, that’s kind of at the forefront. And because we have these deadlines that we need to meet, I feel like I just don’t really consider multicultural literature because I’m thinking of all these other things I have to think about. But this year, with AP, and yeah deadlines, it just hasn’t really been something that I’m prioritizing.

By trying to juggle all these external assessment requirements, these considerations affected the way teachers made curriculum choices. Trying to incorporate multicultural literature could not be a priority for them when they had many other aspects to consider.

## Overvaluing the Literary Canon

As the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 has shown, many teachers tended to overvalue the literary canon and its significance in students' education. It was difficult for many to accept there were other more diverse texts that better reflected the student population that could be used to teach the same skills. Six out of the seven participants discussed what they thought was the value in the canon. Steve noted:

You know, I think that . . . it's kind of, you know, [a] simplistic answer. But they're in the canon for a reason, you know, because they're kind of like, either culturally important or historically important, you know, or of literary merit.

He continued to discuss his disappointment in its diminishing significance. He stated:

I mean it really used to be kind of a bedrock foundation here. I think then kinda, you know, everything was built around it. Now it kind of seems like it's more like an add on. And I think it is disappointing, frustrating, or whatever. Because, like I said, I think there's value in that every freshman reads *Romeo and Juliet* . . . because that way they can have a common experience. And, like I said, as teachers down the road, you know, we can fall back on that.

George also discussed his thoughts on the canon. He said, "And I think it's also important to touch on the traditional pieces." He was more concerned with how students would perform on assessments if they were not familiar with texts in the canon. He explained:

I still think it [the canon] matters, and there's some realities about life that I don't like. But I think if we act like we don't have to deal with it [the canon], we also hurt students. So, you know, like, for example, if you're not into standardized testing, I understand, but the reality [is] that colleges look at them, that you still take standardized tests.

More specifically, participants discussed the value they saw in teaching Shakespearean texts. As shown in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, many teachers gravitated toward choosing Shakespearean plays even though they may not have been relevant to their student population (Dyches, 2017). Although participants were not specifically asked about their views on Shakespearean texts and their role in the English language arts curriculum during the

interview, three out of the seven participants discussed what they thought was the importance of ensuring students were exposed to and could reference Shakespeare during and after their high school career. Steve discussed his expectation that students in the 11th or 12th grade would recognize what he referenced from their ninth or 10th grade years. He explained by stating:

I like to reference *Romeo and Juliet* when I'm teaching Shakespeare because the assumption is that all the kids have read that in ninth grade, and that at least that's one common frame of reference. You know we could say "oh, remember, in *Romeo and Juliet* . . . he thought . . . she was dead. Well, that's dramatic irony," and everybody would be . . . "Oh, yeah, I remember that," but unfortunately that's not always the case.

Both Bob and Christina also discussed their thoughts on the significance of Shakespeare. Bob saw value in Shakespearean texts because of the language whereas Christina focused more on themes and their relevance to students. Bob mentioned:

I tend to think he's [Shakespeare] important, but I don't know that the way he's currently taught in English classes teaches what I really care that students learn about Shakespeare. Learning that one person can affect language to the depth of which he did beyond a statement of he added 6,000 words to [the English] language.

Christina stated, "I look at relevance, you know, like with something like Shakespeare the vocabulary is dated, but I feel like the themes my students can relate to. So [I] just try to find those connections between the novel and my students."

### **Ways in Which Teachers Overcome the Barriers in Implementing Multicultural Texts**

The following section offers responses from participants that reflect ways in which they tried to overcome barriers they faced in implementing multicultural texts. Despite the many obstacles they may have faced, they tried to find ways to incorporate texts written by authors from around the world. Many of them recognized the significance of their students reading texts that were relevant to them and found ways to access resources outside of the ones provided by



the school site. Additionally, they strived to find ways to create safe spaces for their students, so they felt comfortable having deep and meaningful conversations with their peers.

### **Developing a Mindset That Text Relevance Matters**

All seven participants mentioned the relevance of the texts to students mattered to them as they made decisions about which texts to assign. They, however, defined relevancy differently. Christina and George both considered the length of the texts they would assign in relation to the reading and grade level of the students they taught. George said, “I think this year one of the things that I’ve really tried to do is to think about the length of passages.” He explained he did not want to assign anything too long or “cumbersome” that would make the students lose interest. He provided some examples of his thinking by stating:

I try to get the shorter ones [texts] that have more current topics, like *The Color of Water*. I think that title is one that we chose [because] it wasn’t too long even when I taught AP Lit. Last year we went with *Frankenstein* and *Slaughterhouse 5*, and with Shakespearean play for our big pieces, because we really didn’t want to have the kids worry about reading 300–400 pages when they really can get the same skill in less than 200.

Additionally, George considered what students would be interested in; he explained:

Authors that are culturally responsive to the students is what I try to do. And, again, a lot of things that are current and have a lot of conflict and emotion because the kids are really into it, you know, emotional conflict.

He continued to explain by stating:

I heavily rely on Gary Soto. I think he’s a great Mexican American author that talks about topics that are current. He talks about romance. When I pick passages, although I do try to pick authors of color and female authors, I always present it in a way where the themes or the ideas are universal.

Christina tailored the length of the texts based on student level. She said:

My students are able to work with more advanced texts like whether it be vocabulary or other skills, they’re able to go a little faster, whereas in a regular

English [class] . . . our text within our classrooms might look a little different in length.

Aside from length, Christina considered the dates when the texts were written and how relevant those time periods were to her students. She recalled teaching the ERWC course, a 12th grade class, in a previous year and realizing a lot of the prescribed curriculum was dated. She explained:

But before I would change text if they were dated. So, when I taught ERWC, I noticed that a lot of the curriculum was very dated. So back then I'd probably change them at least like 50% of the time. . . . Yeah. So just like relevance, if they were discussing things that didn't really pertain to my students or my students wouldn't understand because it was just too in the past, like I would try to bring in something more current.

When asked about curricular decisions, Brandon mentioned multiple times that text relevance was important to him. He said:

I make sure it's relevant. I think that's what's most important because if it's not relevant, the kids just check out, and I know that's true because I check out if a book is not relevant for me. But I think that's the most important thing.

He continued to explain that he considered what was interesting to them and what they would need in their classes in the following years.

### **Using Multicultural Poems and Short Stories**

A common problem many participants mentioned in implementing multicultural texts was a lack of time to implement long texts and a lack of access to copies of novels. One way six out of the seven participants tried to overcome that barrier was by using shorter multicultural texts such as poems, short stories, or excerpts rather than full-length novels. Brandon mentioned:

So, we'll do like a short story or a memoir or poems of all sorts of different cultures, whether it's Filipino, Black, [or] white. And I try to vary it. It's always the hardest with novels since we only get to read like one or two novels a year, and those are the ones I really have to choose carefully. But when it comes to short stories, poems, memoirs, and short excerpts like that, I'm able to constantly change it up.

Alida discussed a similar planning strategy. She explained:

I think when it comes to the poetry that we choose, we definitely try to be multicultural . . . Latino authors, Asian authors, African authors, African American authors. We definitely try to do that, but when it comes to the core pieces, that can be difficult.

At one point, one of Alida's goals was to incorporate more literature that would reflect the ethnic backgrounds of her students. She realized there was a sizable Filipino population in her classes, but she did not have access to any novels about a Filipino's experience or written by Filipino authors. Her solution was to search for a book that included short stories so she could make copies for her students. She recalled this by stating:

But I went ahead and found a book that had short stories and I went ahead and picked one that . . . was short enough. [One] that I thought was accessible enough, but definitely related [to the] Filipino experience, at least one slice of it.

Christina also discussed the flexibility she realized short stories gave her when it came to diversifying the literature she assigned. She noted by stating:

When I first started teaching 10th [grade] accelerated, and we were doing a literary analysis unit, instead of focusing on one novel, our department had decided that we could use short stories, and therefore have more of an ability to bring in multicultural authors. And I think it just kind of made me realize, like if you sit down and really, like, you know, make the time you can bring in multicultural authors.

Steve also used short stories but tended to depend on the stories available in the textbook.

He explained:

As an English teacher I've lived through multiple textbooks and they've always had lots of different multicultural literature in them ever since I've been teaching,

and especially with the short stories. So, I think it's important that the literature should [be] wide ranging and diverse.

The participants learned to become resourceful. They may not have had the option or funds to purchase the novels they wanted, but they found other ways to incorporate multicultural literature in small ways.

### **Using Internet Resources**

Despite many participants who mentioned accessibility was an issue when it came to implementing multicultural literature, six out of the seven teachers mentioned they depended on the internet to find online copies of texts. Steve mentioned, "You know a lot of times I just, you know, you can find copies online." Alida said something similar when discussing resources. She asked, "Can we go online? Can we find something different, something new?" She also discussed using the internet as a resource to get curricular ideas. She explained:

But currently, I've actually been seeing some things online by other AP [literature] teachers, like there was a conversation about . . . can students write about a musical for the AP exam. And there were responses like, yeah, you know they can. They can do that now.

George explained he started depending on online resources because the textbooks they had at the school were so old. He was more specific with the online resources he used. He said:

So, we pick, you know, poetry from poets.org, or there's some pretty good lessons on common lit. And so as long as the genre of the pieces fits into the timeframe that I'm teaching, whether it's poetry or short story, or if it's an expository text [I incorporate it]. We kind of have been picking things from here and there.

The participants learned to take advantage of all the resources they found online. Although the internet had its limits and texts available online might not have been the teachers' first choices, they knew it was one way to stretch the resources the school provided for them.

## **Implementing Strategies to Help Students Navigate Difficult Conversations**

In the last phase of the interview, participants were asked how they managed difficult conversations around controversial topics in their classrooms. These included topics such as race, ethnicity, culture, and gender identity. Participants discussed strategies they used to ensure students had respectful conversation and felt comfortable enough sharing their authentic thoughts and opinions. Both Christina and George explained how it was important to them that students felt safe in their classrooms. Christina discussed the work she put into making her classroom a safe space prior to having these class conversations. She said:

[It requires] a lot of front loading before then. I do a lot of work to make my classroom a safe space where students feel comfortable sharing opinions and are willing to listen to the opinions and ideas of others.

She made sure to prepare students when she anticipated a topic that would arise in a text of which they may not have been familiar. She stated:

If it's like, we're like reading about a culture that's different from their own, and if there's anything super sensitive coming up, you know, I try to like preface it with, "hey, you know we're about to read this. Let's talk about it," and before we kind of go into it.

George discussed how he also used the frontloading strategy in an experience he had in a previous year. There were students who were upset over a school spirit day, and he decided to address the issue in his class. He explained the context of the situation by stating:

So, they did this thing called Gender Bench, where the boys would dress up in what they consider to be girls' outfits, and girls dressed in the boy's outfits, and then they were inappropriately dressed. A lot of the boys were, you know, hypersexual in their clothes, and the girls just were, you know in big, really big clothes, and they didn't really look like each other. They looked like cartoons of each other.

Some students were unhappy about the situation and felt disrespected because they felt like transgender people were being used as a joke. His students asked to have a conversation about

the issue during class, and he agreed to it. George tried his best to be a part of the conversation and guided students to have a respectful discussion. He said:

But it was a difficult situation where, you know, a lot of students were saying things that they probably regretted saying, so I also tried to front load some ideas to help guide the conversation. And so, I think when you do have these difficult conversations, you need to be involved. You need to set guidelines, and they need to make sure that the purpose of the conversation is clear, and that it's not in any way going to lead to negativity as much as possible.

He wanted to make sure students had the appropriate language and tools to ensure the conversation was both meaningful and respectful.

Steve and Brandon, on the other hand, took a different approach. They liked to stay more neutral during class conversations so students felt more comfortable sharing their own opinions.

Steve explained:

I believe in the Socratic method, and I think that as a teacher, you're not a preacher. You're a . . . facilitator and trying to encourage independent thinking. So, I think it's important to, I guess I would say, kind of [remain] neutral and [ask] more like, "what do you think about it?"

Brandon realized quickly as a teacher that if he did a lot of the talking during class, students would remain quiet and just wait for him to provide the answers. Instead of just lecturing, he stated he used more of the following approach: "just ask more questions for them to kind of go deeper into it. But it's less [him] telling answers and more of them thinking and just double checking."

### **Finding Autonomy as a Member of a PLC**

The site where the interviews were conducted emphasized the importance of teachers working in a PLC. The purpose of a PLC was for teachers who taught the same class to work collaboratively at the school level to improve student outcomes. At this school, PLCs met every Monday to discuss assessments, lessons, and other curricular decisions. Because the expectation

was assessments needed to be aligned in the PLCs, the texts used by the teachers in that particular PLC should be the same as well.

The participants outlined both the benefits and challenges of working in a PLC. Alida explained:

So I think I really needed to hear that kind of discussion [during a PLC] and say, “okay, so what is the best way to do this?” Because I know I’m not the expert. I may have these many years of teaching, but if anything, what [that] has taught me is that I am not the best at every single thing, and it’s best to listen to other people. And you know, if they have a better idea, you go with that and not just go “okay, I know what’s best.” [That] really frustrates me when I hear people say, “oh, yeah, I have all of these years of experience and that supposed ethos . . .” Because I don’t agree. I mean teachers should be lifelong learners.

Christina also noted another benefit of working in a PLC was the structure that it provided. She said, “Curriculum decisions are usually made within the PIC . . . I like that. We’re structured. I like that. We’re on the same page, and I like that. We have the same requirements.” However, she also discussed challenges she faced. She mentioned, “It does become a little difficult when we’re deciding on texts because, you know, some of us might have different opinions on what we want to bring in.”

Despite the highs and lows of working in a PLC, five out of the seven participants said they found autonomy in making decisions for their classes when they thought it was best for their students, even if members of their PLC were doing something differently. In most cases, they did not tell their PLC they were straying away from the agreed-upon plan, or they told them they did something different after the fact.

Maria, who was a self-proclaimed “rule-follower,” said, “[I] still would . . . deviate [from her PLC] when it doesn’t make any sense for my students, [if] it’s not working well in class.” She explained she tended to follow the district and school rules about 90% of the time, but if modifications were needed, she made them. She explained:

Many times, I think I want to go slower and deeper [into the curriculum], and then I will modify that and do more of the same thing that we started up doing, or an extension of that activity as opposed to writing double essays or something like that.

Christina also shared one of her experiences from a previous year by stating:

So back when I was teaching coteach I kind of had similar struggles with the PLC and the teachers that were teaching kinda advanced classes. They were able to go a little faster, and we had a set deadline, and within my class, when I gave them the assignment I noticed, like they're not getting it. I need to slow it down. I need to guide them through the text so that they're able to complete the written assignment, because that's what we were really looking at. So independent of my PLC, I decided to read the text with them, so that they would be able to complete the task that we were actually assessing, which is the writing test. I really felt that my students performed a lot better because of it, because they were able to understand the text that they had to write about.

In a cotaught class, the primary teacher has an additional teacher to help them to support students. These classes have a high number of students with individual education plans; and therefore, require extra support. Christina slowed down the pace of the class because she felt that was what the students needed to succeed.

Brandon also found himself in a similar situation as Christina. He wanted to take a different approach to a sequence of lessons than his PLC did. He recalled by stating:

We started reading a play this year. A lot of my coworkers decided to use the audio book or to read as a whole class. I decided to break up the play so that my kids [could read] in groups of four. They answered the questions together as a group. And that turned out to be a really efficient way of breaking up the reading, and I let my coworkers know afterwards. But that was something that I decided to do.

When I asked him why he told his PLC about his decision after he had already made the change, he said he wanted to first make sure his new lesson plan worked.

Bob discussed a decision she made independent of her PLC during distance learning. Distance learning occurred when students did not attend classes in person due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Instead, they took their classes online via Zoom or Google Meet. At the time,



PLCs were still meeting and making decisions online; however, she decided to make some changes to the plan. Bob said:

I think it's Shakespeare in distance learning. Many of [the] other teachers of ninth grade were against teaching *Romeo and Juliet* online, and they had very good and intelligent reasons for doing that. But I thought [that] not learning *Romeo and Juliet* as freshmen would not exactly hurt them socially, but it's one of the major stories that everybody knows or thinks they know . . . So, while I didn't want to teach the entire book online, I narrowed it to scenes.

When asked about decisions he made without consulting with his PLC, George shared he continuously incorporated pieces of relevant music into the curriculum regardless of the class or level he taught. He said:

One thing that I do regularly, and I actually started this when I was teaching Advanced Placement Language and Composition is I will bring in portions of current music. So we're studying a speech by John Wendell Phillips, or something, and there's a certain strategy that he's using. I will go, and I will get an appropriate part of a rap song. Bring it in and have the kids apply the same treatment to that little verse that they would do to the body paragraph in a speech. Sometimes it starts as a warmup, and then sometimes I see that the kids are really digging and diving into it and understanding the actual critical thinking that takes place when you analyze whether it's a rap or speech. And so I think for me, being able to take the skill and figure out how to have kids apply it to things that some people would say are inappropriate for English, I think, is really key.

### **Summary**

This chapter contains findings from the semi-structured interviews with participants regarding the curriculum choices they made by specifically looking at the barriers they faced in implementing multicultural texts and how they may have overcome those barriers. I used a phenomenological research method, informed by The Framework and CRP to explore responses to the research questions. This chapter details the experiences of seven teachers at a high school in the South Bay area of California.

The themes presented by participants highlighted their teaching experiences. Some participants had only been in the field for a couple of years, but others had been teaching for

more than 20 years. Four themes emerged as the barriers teachers faced in implementing multicultural literature. These themes included (a) Accessibility Is an Issue, (b) Not Being Comfortable Discussing Multicultural Literature, (c) Assessments Are a Priority, and (d) Overvaluing the Literary Canon. Four other themes emerged as the ways in which teachers tried to overcome those barriers. They included (a) Developing a Mindset That Text Relevance Matters, (b) Using Internet Resources, (c) Implementing Strategies to Help Students Navigate Difficult Conversations, and (d) Finding Autonomy as a Member of a PLC. Overall, participants presented an understanding that it was significant to incorporate multicultural literature into the curriculum; however, they struggled in how to do it effectively. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the research findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter includes an overview of the study, a discussion of the findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion. The purpose of this study was to understand the barriers that secondary English language arts teachers faced from their own perspective in implementing multicultural literature into the curriculum, and how they may have overcome those barriers. Research on this topic has shown many English language arts teachers do not incorporate enough multicultural texts despite all the benefits it has for both white students and students of color. This study sought to understand from the teacher's perspectives why this was the case. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to give voice to these teachers. This study used culturally proficient educational practice (i.e., The Framework) and culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) conceptual frameworks to explore experiences of participants. Both frameworks were used to compose the semi-structured interview questions and to analyze data collected.

### **Discussion of Major Research Findings**

Participants in this study offered important insights into their experiences as English language arts teachers who chose texts that would be read in their classrooms, as well as the designers of the pedagogy used to implement it. Participants showed they recognized how crucial it was to incorporate texts that were relevant to their students, and they discussed many barriers that prevented them from choosing more texts that served as windows and mirrors for their students. These barriers included the institution for which they worked, the lack of available training on how to implement multicultural literature effectively, and an unexplainable commitment to the literary canon. Despite these many barriers, participants showed they were taking the first steps necessary to diversify the curriculum and implement it in an effective way.

## **Teachers Recognize the Significance in Incorporating Relevant Literature**

Research has indicated adapting to diversity is an essential element of cultural proficiency; thus, having the will to learn about others and the ability to use others' cultural experiences and backgrounds in educational settings is pertinent (Welborn et al., 2022). Despite the many barriers teachers described they faced in incorporating multicultural literature, all the participants recognized the significance in choosing literature that was relevant to their students, which is an important first step in achieving cultural proficiency. They may have not always considered students' race or ethnicity, but they did consider other factors such as students' interest, ability, and gender identity. They discussed trying to find texts that reflected their students despite the difficulty they faced in accessing those texts. As individuals and as a department, they had continuous conversations about the diversity at the school and how they could meet the needs of the diverse backgrounds represented in their classrooms. Many of them shared during their interviews that their backgrounds were not reflected in the curriculum when they were in high school, and how it negatively impacted them. They seem to be keeping this mind as they prepare for their own students. They are trying to find ways to make their students' experiences different.

It is important that these participants and other teachers in the same situation are equipped with tools to take the next steps past just having conversations. When they have these tools, they can feel more comfortable with implementing effective lessons around the literature they decide fits best for the students in their classrooms.

With the rise of diversity in classrooms in the United States, it is pertinent to have teachers who recognize the important role literature plays for students. By allowing students to see themselves positively reflected in the texts they read, students are able to feel like their

experiences are valued in literature (D'Angelo & Iliev, 2014; Klefstad & Martinez, 2013; Montelongo et al., 2014; Smallwood, 1998; Wang, 2017). Participants in this study recognized this value and were on the path to make this happen more regularly.

### **Institution Serves as a Barrier**

According to participants, two major barriers at their site prevented them from incorporating multicultural texts. The first was an overwhelming number of assessments required by the institution, and the second was a lack of available multicultural texts. According to the research, schools have often prioritized the dominant, white, and middle-class culture, which in turn, has prioritized the language and texts that perpetuate these dominant ideas (Giroux, 1989). Many participants discussed the difficulty they had accessing materials such as multicultural texts at their site. Many of them noted they had to choose from resources that were available in the library or in the textbooks, which were very limited. At this site, textbooks were chosen by a committee and were often used for many years, which meant many teachers did not have input on the textbook assigned for their classes. They also explained most of the texts available in the library were traditional canonical texts. This collection of texts the school had developed showed the school's priority over the years had been "the dominant, white, and middle-class culture," as research has revealed. This priority can be problematic considering the school's student population was primarily Hispanic, Asian, and Black. The literature that would reflect these student populations was not readily available to teachers.

Participants also noted challenges related to navigating many requirements from the school site. As a result, this drove them away from being able to focus on incorporating multicultural texts. Many participants expressed feeling overwhelmed by the number of assessments they had to ensure students were prepared to take. These assessments included

common formative assessments, the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, and advanced placement (AP) tests. They had to ensure texts they chose would prepare students for those tests, even if they were not multicultural; and they had to make sure they took time from the curriculum to prepare and administer the assessments—time that could be dedicated to lessons designed to implement multicultural literature. This practice implies cultural proficiency in terms of the English curriculum was not a priority for the site. It is clear that if school sites do not make multicultural literature a priority, teachers will most likely not make it a priority either, especially if they have many other aspects of teaching to juggle.

### **Lack of Available Training for Teachers**

Another barrier teachers at this site faced was they struggled with choosing effective pedagogical strategies they could use as they implemented multicultural literature in their English language arts classrooms. These texts encourage discourse around topics that may make some people feel uncomfortable. Friere (2000) argued diversity in current classrooms has proven to be an obstacle for many educators. Teachers do not always know how to handle the challenging conversations that may arise around issues of race and racism. Therefore, they need to learn how to interfere with systems of white privilege and racism in their classrooms (Friere, 2000). Participants expressed even though they experienced this challenge, they received very little to no support to overcome it.

According to participants, they had not experienced nor even been offered very much professional development on the topic of multicultural literature or its implementation throughout their careers—whether they had been teaching at the district for a couple of years or for over 30 years. Although they attended various training regarding other topics, there had been no trainings for this specific topic in the last few years. The topic did not seem to be a priority for

the district. The district has been pushing equity initiatives for the last few years, and should consider what that looks like in curriculum.

Participants expressed they had not experienced any training as a working teacher nor as a teacher candidate in a credential program. They all noted during their credential programs, they did not learn how to choose nor navigate conversations around multicultural literature.

Participants asserted their credential programs tended to focus more on how to teach English language learners. They may have taken a class on multicultural education in general, but it did not teach them the skills or concepts necessary for the classroom. Although many credential program leaders have said they focus on multiculturalism and social justice, the teachers they prepare and send out into the workforce still struggle with talking about race in the classroom and teaching students of color in an effective manner (Sleeter, 2016). According to participants, they cannot depend on the district, or their teaching credential programs to equip them with the necessary tools. As a result, this affects students because what the teachers can offer them in terms of curriculum and pedagogy is limited. As shown in the introduction of this dissertation, there is a lot of push back from colleagues, administration, and families when it comes to discussing issues of race and racism in California. If teachers are not trained to implement the curriculum effectively, they will not know how to handle are the concerns that seem to be inevitable.

### **Unexplainable Commitment to Literary Canon**

The term *canon* is used to refer to those texts traditionally recognized as containing literary merit and being worthy of academic study. Although the texts in the canon are safe and usually readily available, it is important for English language arts teachers to reevaluate how relevant these texts are to students. Several participants were committed to ensuring their

curriculum included texts from the canon even if they were not able to explain why they thought they were important or relevant to their students. This was an unexplainable expectation they had for themselves as educators. They were also worried if they did not assign these texts, students would not be prepared for future courses or even for college. These texts took the place of multicultural texts that could have been more relevant to students. There are many consequences for students when teachers primarily depend on canonical texts, including negative self-perceptions and larger achievement gaps especially for students of color (Gere et al., 2009). The participants who valued the canon the most seemed to be those who shared educational experience in which the canon was emphasized to them either in high school or college. They had teachers who prioritized it over other texts which led to them prioritizing it as teachers.

Many English language arts teachers see canonical works as an unquestionable building block in the foundation of a solid education (Goodwyn, 2018). The Common Core Standards, which teachers must abide by, do not specifically list certain works that have to be taught. It is purposely left open so educators can teach the skills using whichever texts they find to be the most effective for their students. The participants' commitment to the canon serves as a barrier to them incorporating more multicultural literature.

### **Limitations**

There were limitations to this study. Because the sample size of this study was seven, and because it was limited to one school site, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all English language arts teachers nor to all high school sites. Because this was a qualitative study,



only readers can decide if the findings can be applied to their context (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

An additional limitation is the lack of conceptual framework in this study that limited engagement with theory in the research project. I conducted this research project using a postpositivist approach rather than using the framework as a guide for my data analysis. In a postpositivist approach, the ideas, and even the identity, of a researcher influences what they observe and therefore impacts what they conclude. Future research which is conducted can take a more traditional approach and use culturally relevant pedagogy, critical race theory, and the continuum for cultural proficiency to analyze the data collected in a similar study to ground the findings in more theory. Despite the limitations of this study, understanding the barriers teachers face in implementing multicultural literature and how they may overcome those barriers is crucial in increasing the number of multicultural texts used in high school English language arts classes.

### **Recommendations and Implications for Leadership**

Helping students positively develop their self and cultural identity is part of high school teachers' responsibilities; however, leadership needs to ensure educators are equipped with the tools to do so. Students who can positively connect to their cultural identity will less likely suffer from psychological distress (Ahmed et al., 2011). One way of doing this is by allowing students to see themselves and their cultures positively reflected in the literature they read. Administrators have the responsibility of ensuring classroom teachers have access to the necessary tools to assign and effectively discuss multicultural literature. It is important they ensure part of their budget is dedicated to purchasing texts that teachers determine to be reflective of the student population.

Additionally, school leadership has the responsibility of providing professional development so teachers feel comfortable handling the conversations that arise as they read multicultural literature. Many participants discussed understanding the importance of incorporating multicultural literature into the curriculum but admitted to not knowing the most effective ways to do it. It would be helpful if school leadership developed a toolbox teachers could use when helping English language arts teachers become more comfortable creating and implementing lessons based on multicultural literature.

Lastly, there may be pushback from parents about the multicultural literature their students are reading. It is crucial for leadership to support its staff in situations like this so teachers are not pressured to leave out certain texts because of the criticism they may face from families.

### **Recommendations and Implications for Social Justice**

Literature is powerful and through it, students construct messages not only about their culture but also their role in society (Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). Incorporating multicultural texts into the curriculum regularly is about more than just the academic benefits it provides for students. More importantly, it is about showing students of color their identity and culture are just as important as the dominant culture's. They need to see what their ancestors contributed to society to realize they can be just as impactful. Using curriculum that is not diverse and not inclusive nor reflective of all students' backgrounds magnifies the educational inequality for students. Additionally, it widens the achievement gap that is already a large problem in the United States.

Although teachers make the primary decisions regarding curriculum in the classrooms, making a change regarding this topic cannot solely fall on them. They need support at all levels

of the institution, including their colleagues, the English department, school administrators, and district leadership. District and school administrators have the responsibility to develop policies that promote social equity throughout the institution. Part of their role is bringing issues such as the lack of multicultural literature in the classrooms to teachers' attention and giving them the time, space, and resources to solve the problem.

### **Recommendations and Implications for Teachers**

It is crucial for teachers to create experiences for students that include strong and purposeful pedagogy and curriculum that will not only help them develop educationally but also mentally and emotionally. Equally important is ensuring students' cultures and backgrounds are highlighted and integrated into their learning. These must be viewed as assets students carry rather than disadvantages they must overcome.

Additionally, teachers need to become stronger advocates for more quality and diversified literature. Publishers are printing more texts that portray underrepresented groups (Anderson, 2013). Teachers need to become more familiar with these titles and advocate for their schools to purchase these books. Because teachers are the population at schools that work the closest with students, they are the ones that recognize students' needs. Teachers need to communicate those needs to leaders outside of the classroom so leaders can support them in making changes.

### **Recommendations and Implications for Districts**

When districts do not offer the training necessary for teachers to be able to implement multicultural texts, they are sending the message that it is not a priority for them. It is pertinent that districts offer proper and continuous professional development for English language arts teachers. Leaders need to assess the diversity of the students in their district and assure teachers

are prepared to implement the pedagogy that would be most effective for this population.

Teachers voiced they needed support in effectively incorporating multicultural literature, and it is the district's responsibility to dedicate part of its budget and professional development time to this need.

When teachers are well equipped to foster inclusive classrooms with diverse curriculum, students are more likely to succeed. Because teachers who are completing teacher preparation programs are feeling underprepared to work in diverse classrooms, it is crucial for districts to offer high quality and continual professional development.

### **Recommendations and Implications for Credential Programs**

Choosing the correct literature for an English language arts class is crucial for its success. Teacher educators in credential programs should weave in regular opportunities for teacher candidates to practice selecting literature and to discuss the justification for their choices so they are more prepared to have those conversations with their colleagues in the workplace. Additionally, teacher candidates need to practice navigating the challenging conversations surrounding race and racism that they will inevitably have with their classes when they assign multicultural literature. Practicing these discussions in class with other teacher candidates will allow them to have a safe place to practice talking about topics they find unfamiliar or uncomfortable. This practice will also allow them to be more aware of their own attitudes toward diversity.

### **Areas for Future Research**

Empirical studies that highlight the importance of teacher voice are necessary to further the understanding of barriers teachers face in selecting multicultural texts and how they may overcome those barriers. Teachers in different contexts are facing different challenges that

should be acknowledged so steps can be taken to overcome those challenges. The scope of this study can be expanded to explore the nuances that exist in different school settings. Conducting this study at private and charter schools might reveal different findings that did not arise when I conducted this study at the large public school. Additionally, conducting the study at public high schools with different student demographics might also reveal some interesting new patterns.

The data and findings found in this study could be significantly strengthened through a qualitative exploration with school librarians. Most teachers in this study stated one of their biggest barriers was the lack of multicultural literature available at their sites. It would be helpful to learn how schools developed the collection of texts they currently have. It could be a great first step in figuring out how to change that collection so that it is more representative of the student body.

Lastly, it is clear there are teachers who have found different ways to overcome many of the barriers with which other teachers struggle. Further research focused on the success teachers have in implementing multicultural texts effectively may help inform new approaches in professional development for educators.

## **Conclusion**

Many texts have been written to either implicitly or explicitly deal with issues of racism, discrimination, prejudice, or eurocentrism (Willis-Rivera & Meeker, 2002). It is important for high schools to provide access to these multicultural texts for their students because it increases the likelihood, they will have texts that represent their various backgrounds and enriches their understanding of other backgrounds. Quality multicultural literature is a great tool for schools to use in raising awareness of the many current social issues people are face in the United States. It

is crucial for quality multicultural literature to not reinforce oppression, stereotypes, and assimilation of marginalized groups.

When teachers do not use multicultural texts in English language arts classes, it could be sending subtle yet strong messages to students that their culture is not as important as the dominant culture. For white students, it might send the message that other cultures are not as important as their own, which reinforces the idea that their culture is dominant. I, for one, do not want students to take these ideas out of the classroom and apply them to the society as a whole.

## REFERENCES

- Adichie, C. M. (2009, October). *The dangers of a single story* [Video]. TED Conferences. [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)
- Anderson, N. A. (2013). *Elementary children's literature: Infancy through age 13* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Applebaum, B. (2017). Comforting discomfort as complicity: White fragility and the pursuit of invulnerability. *Hypatia*, 32(4), 862–875. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12352>
- Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(1), 163–206. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315582066>
- Atwell, M., & Klein, A. (1990, March 5). *Celebrating literacy*. Proceedings of the 14th Annual Reading Conference at California State University, San Bernardino, CA, United States.
- Banks, J. A. (1993a). The canon debate, knowledge construction, and multicultural education. *Educational Researcher*, 22(5), 4–14.
- Banks, J. A. (1993b). Multicultural education: Development, dimensions, and challenges. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 75(1), 22–28. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20405019>
- Banks, J., & Banks, C. (2004). *Introduction*. In J. Banks & C. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. xi–xiv). Jossey Bass.
- Bell, E., & Wilmott, H. (2017). *Positivist & non-positivist qualitative business research* [Video]. Sage Research Methods. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526419545>
- Bennett, J. G. (2014). *The effects of a computer-assisted and culturally relevant repeated reading intervention on the oral reading fluency of second grade students at-risk* (Publication No. 205-229 2018) [Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives: Choosing and using books for the classroom*, 6(3), 1-2 <https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf>
- Bonilla-Silva, E., & Embrick, D. G. (2006). Racism without racists: “Killing me softly” with color blindness. In C. A. Rossatto, R. L. Allen, & M. Pruyne (Eds.), *Reinventing critical*

- pedagogy* (pp. 21–34). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bottiani, J. H., Bradshaw, C. P., & Mendelson, T. (2017). A multilevel examination of racial disparities in high school discipline: Black and white adolescents' perceived equity, school belonging, and adjustment problems. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*(4), 532–545. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000155>
- Brown-Jeffy, S., & Cooper, J. E. (2011). Toward a conceptual framework of culturally relevant pedagogy: An overview of conceptual and theoretical literature. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 38*(1), 65–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479642>
- California Legislative Information. (2020). Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3w4L0o8>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. SAGE Publications.
- Childs, K. (2017). Integrating multiculturalism in education for the 2020 classroom. *Journal for Multicultural Education, 11*(1), 31–36. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-06-2016-0041>
- Colby, S. A., & Lyon A. F. (2004). Heightening awareness about the importance of using multicultural literature. *Multicultural Education, 11*(3), 24–28. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ783082.pdf>
- Cook, L. S., & Amatucci, K. B. (2006). A high school English teacher's developing multicultural pedagogy. *English Education, 38*(3), 220–244. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40173338>
- Cooperative Children's Book Center. (2013). *Children's books by and about people of color published in the United States*. <https://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/pcstats.asp>
- Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative*. Prentice Hall.
- Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- De Jong, E., & Harper, C. (2005). Preparing mainstream teachers for English-language learners: Is being a good teacher good enough? *Teacher Education Quarterly, 32*, 101–124. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23478724>



- Diangelo, R. (2011). White fragility. *The International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 3(3), 54–70. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45157307>
- Dogra, N., & O'Reilly, M. (2016). Interviewing children and young people for research. *Interviewing Children and Young People for Research*, 1-240.
- Dyches, J. (2017). Shaking off Shakespeare: A White teacher, urban students, and the mediating powers of a canonical counter-curriculum. *The Urban Review*, 49(2), 300–325. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-017-0402-4>
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. University of Chicago press.
- Estrada, P., & Wang, H. (2017). Making English learner reclassification to fluent English proficient attainable or elusive: When meeting criteria is and is not enough. *Educational Research Journal*, 55(2), 207–242. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217733543>
- Faltis, C., Arias, M. B., & Ramirez-Marin, F. (2010). Identifying relevant competencies for secondary teachers of English learners. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 33, 307–328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2010.529350>
- Falter, M., Alston, C., & Lee, C. C. (2020, August 14). *Becoming anti-racist English teachers: Ways to actively move forward*. Writing Project. <https://writenow.nwp.org/becoming-anti-racist-english-teachers-ways-to-actively-move-forward-eade2964180>
- Fang, Z., Fu, D., & Lamme, L. L. (1999). Rethinking the role of multicultural literature in literacy instruction: Problems, paradox, and possibilities. *New Advocate*, 12(3), 259–276. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ606408>
- Fenwick, L. (2011). Curriculum reform and reproducing inequality in upper-secondary education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 43(6), 697–716. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2011.576773>
- Fernández, S. (2020, August 28). Texas teacher who posted Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ posters in her virtual classroom was placed on leave after parents complained. *ABC 13 Eyewitness News*. <https://abc13.com/texas-teacher-placed-on-leave-black-lives-matterposter-lgbtq-virtual-classroom/6392597/>
- Flynn, J. E., Lensmire, T. J., & Lewis, C. (2009). A critical pedagogy of race in teacher education: Response and responsibility. In S. Groenke & A. Hatch (Eds.), *Critical pedagogy in teacher education in the neoliberal era: Small openings* (pp. 85–98). Springer.
- Frankenburg, R. (1993). *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness*. Routledge.

- Freire, P. (1970/2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum.
- Galletta, A. (2013). Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication. New York University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814732939.001.0001>
- Garcia, E., Arias, M. B., Harris-Murri, N. J., & Serna, C. (2010). Developing responsive teachers: A challenge for a demographic reality. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(1–2), 132–142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487109347878>
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Gere, A. R., Buehler, J., Dallavis, C., & Haviland, V. S. (2009). A visibility project: Learning to see how preservice teachers take up culturally responsive pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46(3), 816–852.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831209333182>
- Giroux, H. A. (1989). Critical pedagogy: Everyday life as for curriculum knowledge. In H. A. Giroux & P. L. McLaren (Eds.), *Critical pedagogy, the state, and cultural struggle* (p. 236). SUNY Press.
- Glazier, J., & Seo, J. (2005). Multicultural literature and discussion as mirror and window? *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(8), 686–700.  
<https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.48.8.6>
- Glesne C. (2016). *Becoming qualitative researchers : an introduction* (Fifth). Pearson.
- Goodwin, A. L. (1994). Making the transition from self to other: What do preservice teachers really think about multicultural education? *Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(2), 119–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487194045002006>
- Goodwyn, A. (2018). The status of literature: English teaching and the condition of literature teaching in schools. *English in Education*, 46(3), 212-227.
- Gubrium J. F., Holstein J. A., Marvasti A. B., McKinney K. D. (2012). *The SAGE handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (2nd ed., pp. 27–43). SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781452218403>.
- Hannon, C (2008). E-texts in the classroom. *EDUCAUSE Quarterly*, 31(1), 12–13.  
<https://er.educause.edu/articles/2008/2/etexts-in-the-classroom>
- Harber, C. (1994). Ethnicity and education for democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 14(3), 255–264. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0738-0593\(94\)90039-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0738-0593(94)90039-6)

- Harris, M. (2021). In Missouri, teaching kids about race put black educators in serious danger. *Slate Magazine*. <https://slate.com/human-interest/2021/07/rockwood-school-districtdiversity-curriculum-brittany-hogan-resign.html>.
- Hefflin, B. R., & Barksdale-Ladd, M. A. (2001). African American children's literature that helps students find themselves: Selection guidelines for grades K–3. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(8), 810–881.
- Hernandez, A. M., Daoud, A., Woodcock, A., & Landin, K. (2021). Examining field experiences of teacher candidates during COVID-19: Systemic inequities unveiled for underserved English learners in K–12 grades. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 22(3), 307–324. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15381927211057764>
- Hines, M. T. III. (2016). The embeddedness of White fragility within White pre-service principals' reflections on White privilege. *Critical Questions in Education*, 7(2), 130–145. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1104686.pdf>
- Hinton, K., & Berry, T. (2004). Literacy, literature, and diversity. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48(4), 284–288. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40016915>
- Klein, A. (2021, May 28). During COVID-19, schools have made a mad dash to 1-to-1 computing. What happens next? *EdWeek*. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/during-covid-19-schools-have-made-a-mad-dash-to-1-to-1-computing-what-happens-next/2021/04>
- Klefsstad, J. M., & Martinez, K. C. (2013, November). Promoting young children's cultural awareness and appreciation through multicultural books. *Young Children*, 68(5), 74-81. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=91977529&site=ehost-live>
- Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., & Nevárez, A. (2017). The “new racism” of K–12 schools: Centering critical research on racism. *Review of Research in Education*, 41(1), 182–202. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16686949>
- Kumashiro, K. (2002). Troubling education: Queer activism and anti-oppressive pedagogy. Principals' reflections on white privilege. *Critical Questions in Education*, 7(2), 130–145.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interview Views: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–461. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, 34(3), 159–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849509543675>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. the Remix. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 74–84. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.84.1.p2rj131485484751>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2021). *Culturally relevant pedagogy: asking a different question*. Teachers College Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X035007003>
- Landsman, J. (2001). *A white teacher talks about race*. Scarecrow Press.
- Landt, S. M. (2006). Multicultural literature and young adolescents: A kaleidoscope of opportunity. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49(8), 690–697. <https://doi.org/10.1598/jaal.49.8.5>
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2005). *Practical research* (Vol. 108). Pearson Custom.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2013). *Practical research: Planning and design* (10th ed.). Pearson.
- Lindsey, R. B., Nuri-Robins, K., Terrell, R. D., & Lindsey, D. B. (2018). *Cultural proficiency: A manual for school leaders* (4th ed.). Corwin.
- Lopes-Murphy, S. (2012). Universal design for learning: Preparing secondary education teachers in training to increase academic accessibility of high school English learners. *The Clearing House*, 85, 226–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2012.693549>
- Mackey, M., Vermeer, L., Storie, D., & DeBlois, E. (2012). The constancy of the school “canon”: A survey of texts used in Grade 10 English language arts in 2006 and 1996. *Language and Literacy*, 14(1), 26–58. <https://doi.org/10.20360/G29882>
- Margo, R. (2014). Representation of the Ethiopian multicultural society in secondary teacher education curricula. *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 16(1), 54–75. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jtes-2014-0003>
- Masko, A. L., & Bloem, P. L. (2017). Teaching for equity in the milieu of white fragility: Can children's literature build empathy and break down resistance? *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 19(1), 55–67, 169, 171. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/teaching-equity-milieu-white-fragility-can/docview/1963916075/se-2>

- Matias, C. E., Viesca, K., Garrison-Wade, D. F., Tandon, M., & Galindo, R. (2014). "What is critical whiteness doing in OUR nice field like critical race theory?" Applying CRT and CWS to understand the white imaginations of white teacher candidates. *Faculty Publications: Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education*, 289–304. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/teachlearnfacpub/221>
- Maxwell, R.J., & Meiser, M.J. (2001). *Teaching English in middle and secondary schools* (3rd ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Mcguire-Schwartz, M., & Arndt, J. (2007). Transforming universal design for learning in early childhood teacher education from college classroom to early childhood classroom. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 28, 127–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901020701366707>
- McIntosh, P. (1990, Winter). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School*, 49(2), 31–36. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.30714426>
- McIntyre, A. (1997). *Making meaning of whiteness: Exploring racial identity with White teachers*. State University of New York Press.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research : a guide to design and implementation / Sharan B. Merriam, Elizabeth J. Tisdell*. (Fourth edition.). Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Brand.
- Mertler, C. A. (2021). *Introduction to educational research*. SAGE Publications.
- Mertler, C. A. (2016). Quantitative research methods. *Introduction to educational research*, 107-143.
- Miles M. B. Huberman A. M. & Saldaña Johnny. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis : a methods sourcebook* (Fourth). SAGE.
- Milner, O., & Milner, L.F. (2003). *Bridging English* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Milner, H. R. (2007). Race, Culture, and Researcher Positionality: Working Through Dangers Seen, Unseen, and Unforeseen. *Educational Researcher*, 36(7), 388-400. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X07309471>
- Moll, L., Little, R., Pang, V. O., & Pollock, M. (2011, November 3). *Only life educates: Mobilizing cultural resources for teaching and learning*. Seminar Series presented at SEEE Seminar Series, University of San Diego, CA, United States.
- Montelongo, J. A., Hernández, A. C., & Herter, R. J. (2014). English-Spanish cognates and the Pura Belpré children's award books: Reading the word and the world. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 16(3), 170–177. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1035599&site=ehost-live>

- Morrison, T. (1992). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. Harvard University Press.
- Museus, S. D. (2014). The culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model: A new theory of success among racially diverse college student populations. In M. B. Paulsen (Ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (vol. 29; pp. 189–227). Springer Netherlands.
- National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum. (2004). *Background knowledge*. United States Office of Special Education Programs. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-009-0336-x>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). *Fast facts: Teacher trends*. Institute of Educational Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=2>
- Nevin Iliev, & Frank D'Angelo. (2014). Teaching Mathematics through Multicultural Literature. *Teaching Children Mathematics*, 20(7), 452–457. <https://doi.org/10.5951/teacchilmath.20.7.0452>
- Okoye-Johnson, O. (2011). Does multicultural education improve students' racial attitudes? Implications for closing the achievement gap. *Journal of Black Studies*, 42(8), 0021934711408901. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934711408901>
- Page, M. L. (2004). Going beyond the book: A multicultural educator in the English language arts classroom. *Voices From the Middle*, 12(1), 8–15. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/going-beyond-book-multicultural-educator-english/docview/213931429/se-2>
- Pang, V. O. (2018). *Diversity and equity in the classroom*. Cengage Learning.
- Parkhouse, H., Yi Lu, C., & Massaro, V. R. (2019). Multicultural education professional development: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 89(3), 416–458. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654319840359>
- Parsons R. D. & Brown K. S. (2002). *Teacher as reflective practitioner and action researcher*. Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage publications.
- PEN America. (2021). *Educational gag orders*. <https://pen.org/report/educational-gag-orders/>
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In Search of Subjectivity. *One's Own. Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17–21. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1174381>

- Picower, B. (2009). The unexamined whiteness of teaching: How white teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12(2), 197–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320902995475>
- Pollock, M., Kendall, R., Reece, E., Lopez, D., & Yoshisato, M. (2022). Keeping the freedom to include: Teachers navigating "pushback" and marshalling "backup" to keep inclusion on the agenda. *Journal of Leadership, Equity, and Research*, 8(1), 87–114. <https://journals.sfu.ca/cvj/index.php/cvj/article/view/185>
- Quezada, R. L., Lindsey, D. B., & Lindsey, R. B. (2012). The tools of cultural proficiency. In *Culturally proficient practice: Supporting educators of English learning students* (pp. 21–34). Corwin Press, <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781506335742.n2>
- Ramirez, A. D. (2012). Latino cultural knowledge in the social studies classroom. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 11(2), 213–226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192711436084>
- Roegman, R., Kolman, J., Goodwin, A. L., & Soles, B. (2021). Complexity and transformative learning: A review of the principal and teacher preparation literature on race. *Teachers College Record*, 123(8), 202–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681211048657>
- Ruday, S., Azano, A. P., & Kuehl, R. (2022). Books as portals: Using place to understand rural students' individuated reading experiences. *English in Education*, 56(2), 122–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/04250494.2021.1919017>
- Rudestam, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (2014). *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process*. SAGE Publications.
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publications.
- Sampson, D., & Garrison-Wade, D. F. (2010). Cultural vibrancy: Exploring the preferences of African American children toward culturally relevant and non-culturally relevant lessons. *Urban Review*, 43(2), 279–309. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-010-0170-x>
- Sciurba, K. (2014). Texts as mirrors, texts as windows: Black adolescent boys and the complexities of textual relevance. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(4), 308–316. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.358>
- Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. Teachers College Press.
- Shah, N., & Coles, J. A. (2020). Preparing teachers to notice race in classrooms: Contextualizing the competencies of preservice teachers with antiracist inclinations. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 71(5), 584–599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119900204>
- Sleeter, C. E. (2016). Critical race theory and the Whiteness of teacher education. *Urban Education*, 52(2), 155–169. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916668957>

- Smallwood, B. A. (1998, December). Using multicultural children's literature in adult ESL classes. ERIC Digest. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED427557>
- Solomona, P., Portelli, J., Daniel, B. J., & Campbell, A. (2005). The discourse of denial: How white teacher candidates construct race, racism and "White privilege." *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(2), 147–169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320500110519>
- Sotirovska, V., & Kelley, J. (2020). Anthropomorphic characters in children's literature: Windows, mirrors, or sliding glass doors to embodied immigrant experiences. *Elementary School Journal*, 121(2), 337–355. <https://doi.org/10.1086/711054>
- Souto-Manning, M., & Mitchell, C. H. (2010). The role of action research in fostering culturally responsive practices in a preschool classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 37(6), 269–277. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-009-0345-9>
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, 7, 221–258. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8>
- Strobel, W., Arthanat, S., Bauer, S., Flagg, J., & Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Technology Transfer. (2007). Universal design for learning: Critical need areas for people with learning disabilities. *Assistive Technology Outcomes and Benefits*, 4(1), 81–98. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ899369.pdf>
- Stover, L. T. (2000). *Who am I? Who are you? Diversity and identity in the young adult novel*. Boynton/Cook.
- Triandis, H. C. (1988). Cross-cultural contributions to theory in social psychology. In M. H. Bond (Ed.), *The cross-cultural challenge to social psychology* (pp. 122–140). SAGE Publications.
- Valenzuela, A. "Gender Roles and Settlement Activities Among Children and Their Immigrant Families." *The American behavioral scientist* (Beverly Hills) 42, no. 4 (1999): 720–742
- Valenzuela, A. (2005). Subtractive schooling, caring relations, and social capital in the schooling of U.S.-Mexican youth. In M. Fein & W. Weis (Eds.), *Beyond silenced voices: Class, race, and gender in United States schools* (pp. 83–94). Publisher.
- Wade, S., & Moje, E. (2001, November). The role of text in classroom learning: Beginning an online dialogue. *Reading Online*, 5(4), 74–99. [http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art\\_index.asp?HREF=/articles/handbook/wade/index.html](http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=/articles/handbook/wade/index.html)
- Watson, T. N., & Bogotch, I. (2015). Reframing parent involvement: What should urban school leaders do differently? *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 14(3), 257–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2015.1024327>

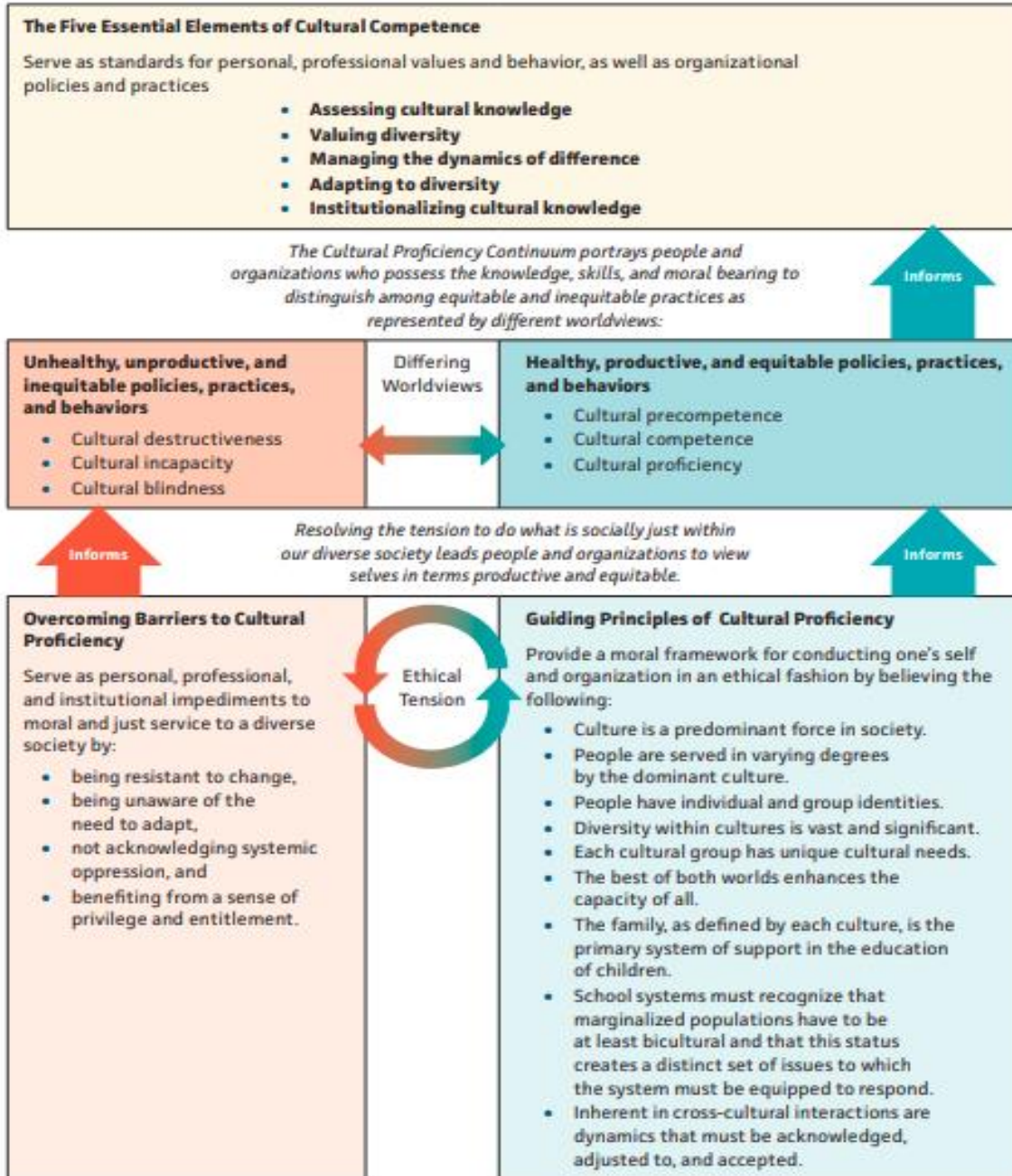


- Way, N., & Nelson, J.D. (2018). The listening project: Fostering curiosity and connection in middle schools. In Way, N., Ali, A., Gilligan, C., & Noguera, P. (Eds.), *The crisis of connection: Roots, consequences, and solutions* (pp. 274–298). New York University Press.
- Welborn, Casey, T., Myatt, K. T., & Lindsey, R. B. (2022). *Leading Change Through the Lens of Cultural Proficiency An Equitable Approach to Race and Social Class in Our Schools*. SAGE Publications.
- Willis-Rivera, J.L. & Meeker, M. (2002). De que colores: A critical examination of multicultural children's books. *Communication Education*, 51, 269-279.
- Wood, T. L. (2015). *The effects of culturally relevant pedagogy on high school students*. Education, Health & Human Services. Print.
- Worthy, J., Maloch, B., Pursley, B., Hungerford-Kresser, H., Hampton, A., Jordan, M., & Semingson, P. (2015). What Are the Rest of the Students Doing? Literacy Work Stations in Two First-Grade Classrooms. *Language Arts*, 92(3), 173–186.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24575566>
- Yoon, I. H. (2012). The paradoxical nature of whiteness-at-work in the daily life of schools and teacher communities. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 15(5), 587–613.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2011.624506>
- Zamani-Gallaher, E. M., Lester, J., Bragg, D. D., & Hagedorn, L. S. (2014). *ASHE series on community colleges* (4th ed.) Pearson.
- Zamudio, M., Russell, C., Rios, F., & Bridgeman, J. L. (2011). *Critical race theory matters: Education and ideology*. Routledge.

## APPENDIX A:

### Cultural Proficiency Framework

**FIGURE 1.2** • The Culturally Proficient Framework



APPENDIX B:

Cultural Proficiency Continuum

Cultural Destructiveness	The organization or individual seeks to eliminate cultures in the school and community.
Cultural Incapacity	Individuals or the organization trivialize and stereotype other cultures; making them inferior to the dominant group.
Cultural blindness	The individual or organization are not noticing or acknowledging other cultures and being blind to the need for differentiation.
Cultural Precompetence	The individual or organization are actively seeking to increase awareness of what the individual or school doesn't know about working in diverse settings. It is possible to move forward or still regress from here.
Cultural Competence	The individual or school Inclusive of different views in such a way that healthy and positive interactions can take place.
Cultural Proficiency	Individuals and the school are instruments for creating a socially just democracy. Individuals interact with colleagues, students, their families, and their communities in a way that advocates for lifelong learning to effectively serve the educational needs of all cultural groups.

## APPENDIX C:

### Semistructured Interview Script

Thank you for participating in this interview. My name is Lubna Kassab and I am a doctoral student studying Educational Leadership in a joint doctoral program through UC San Diego and Cal State San Marcos.

We are here today to learn about the decision-making process teachers go through as they choose the texts they assign their classes. **The goal of this interview is to identify how English teachers make curricular and pedagogical decisions in their classroom.**

If you are not comfortable responding to any of the questions, you do not have to answer.

Our conversation will last approximately 60–90 minutes and will be audio recorded to make sure I don't miss anything you say. After the interview, you can request a copy of the recording as well as the transcripts at any time. I will be sending you a summary of my findings to ensure that your voice is accurately portrayed in my study.

All of the information that you share will be confidential. Your name will not appear on any document resulting from this study, nor will the name of the school in which you teach. Before we start the interview, I will be asking you to choose a pseudonym for yourself.

If at any point you feel uncomfortable, we can stop this interview. If at any time you do not want to answer any particular question, please let me know and we can move on to the next question.

You may also stop participating at any time with no penalty to you.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Let's begin.

## APPENDIX D:

### Participant Confirmation Email

Hello,

My name is Lubna Kassab and I am a doctoral student in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of California, San Diego and California State University, San Marcos. I received your statement of interest to participate in my dissertation study titled Multicultural Literature in The Secondary Level English Language Arts Classroom. My study seeks to explore the decision-making process teachers go through as they make decisions regarding curriculum, more specifically the texts they assign students.

For this study, I am looking for participants who meet the following criteria:

- hold a teaching credential in English Language Arts
- have been teaching for at least part of 1 school year
- have at least some autonomy when it comes to curriculum design so that they do not have to always choose texts from a curriculum list from the state or AP (Advanced Placement) program
- teach at least one course that is not specific to a topic that requires certain texts

The data for this research will be obtained from one -on-one-interviews. The interviews will last approximately 1 hour each. The interviews will take place at your Convenience in your classroom. Your involvement is voluntary, but I would greatly appreciate your cooperation.

Respondents who agree to participate will be interviewed and given \$20 Amazon gift

cards for their time.

Please review the attached information sheet and contact me at [XXXXXX@ucsd.edu](mailto:XXXXXX@ucsd.edu) to confirm that you would like to participate in this study. If you feel you are not a good fit for the study and can recommend someone who you believe may be interested in the study, please share this information. I am happy to answer any questions or provide more information about the study or the eligibility criteria.

I greatly appreciate your participation in the study!

With gratitude,

Lubna Kassab

Doctoral Student - Cohort 16

Joint Doctoral Program - Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

## APPENDIX E:

### Semistructured Interview Protocol

---

Research question	Interview question
<i>Background questions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Tell me about how you came to be a high school English Teacher.</li><li>● If you feel comfortable, please tell me a little about your racial and/or ethnic background.</li><li>● How many years have you been teaching?</li><li>● Where and when did you receive your teaching credential?</li><li>● How long have you been teaching at this site? How many years have you taught at other sites?</li><li>● Which classes are you currently teaching?</li><li>● How long have you been teaching each of these classes?</li></ul>
<i>How do high school English Language Arts teachers make curricular and pedagogical decisions for their classrooms?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● How are curricular decisions made for your English classes?</li><li>● Tell me about a time when you made an independent curricular decision for your classroom (that required no consultation with others). What were the results?</li><li>● How often do you change the texts on your list? What drives those changes?</li><li>● What are some of the factors you consider as you choose the novels you assign to students?</li><li>● Do you make it a priority to incorporate multicultural literature? Please explain why or why not.</li><li>● Were multicultural books and authors represented in your middle school and high school curriculum when you were a student?</li><li>● How do you think those experiences have affected you as a teacher?</li><li>● What kind of training and preparation did your credential program include regarding multicultural education?</li><li>● How did those training affect the curricular decisions you make as a teacher?</li><li>● In which ways do you aim to diversify the reading and literature so as to represent the ethnic backgrounds of your students?</li><li>● What do you think is the literary canon's place in education today?</li><li>● What is the significance in students studying multicultural literature?</li></ul>
<i>In what ways do institutional policies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Tell me about a time when a curricular decision was made at the department level that influenced your teaching.</li></ul>

---

Research question	Interview question
<p><i>and procedures influence teacher decision making regarding curriculum and pedagogy?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Describe any professional development you have received regarding the integration of multicultural literature in this school or district.</li> <li>● How has that professional development affected the curricular decisions you make as a teacher?</li> <li>● Please describe a time when you had to deal with a difficult conversation about current events or culture in your classroom. How did you navigate that conversation?</li> <li>● How do you approach culturally sensitive topics in your class? (CRP)</li> <li>● How would you compare the literary merit of books outside of the canon to those that are part of it?"</li> </ul>