

Teacher Use of Diverse Literature in Secondary English Language Arts Classrooms: District Barriers and Resistance Strategies

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This study examines teacher use of diverse literature in secondary classrooms across three districts in a metropolitan city in Texas. The survey data provides insight to teacher barriers to integrating diverse literature such as district mandates and ways teachers have been working to combat these issues.

We Need Diverse Books, a prominent nonprofit that works to promote diversity in children's publishing, wrote a statement against book banning supported by 1,300 children's and young adult authors (WNDB, 2022). The first two paragraphs read:

We, the undersigned, authors and illustrators of books for children and teens, condemn the efforts by organized groups to purge books from our nation's schools. Our concern is not for the books themselves, but for the children, families, and communities who are caught in the crosshairs of these campaigns.

This current wave of book suppression follows hard-won gains made by authors whose voices have long been underrepresented in publishing. Just ten years ago, less than seven percent of children's books featured characters who were Black, Indigenous, or people of color (source: Cooperative Children's Book Center). Representation is finally increasing thanks to the work of groups like We Need Diverse Books. The current banning efforts are part of a strong and purposeful backlash against books written by BIPOC authors. Books with characters who are LGBTQIA+ have been vehemently targeted and frequently misrepresented.

Pen America's report "Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Censor Books in Schools," support WNDB's claim about attempts to silence diverse representation (Friedman &

Johnson, 2022). According to the report, young adult books comprised 49% of the books banned from July 1, 2021 to July 30, 2022. A majority of the books targeted had representation of LGBTQ+ characters (41%). The second most banned books category had protagonists or secondary characters of color (40%). The updated report analyzing books banned from July to December 2022 shows that book banners have continued to target stories by and about people of color (POC) and queer voices. 30% of banned books featured POC and themes around racism. 26% of books banned had LGBTQ+ characters or themes.

Texas, where this study took place, has continued to make national headlines as a state leading the campaign to ban books in schools (PEN America, 2023). Republican house member Matt Krause spearheaded the list of 850+ books for schools to ban, books that featured predominately LGBTQ+ characters and characters of color in October 2021 (Delinger et al., 2022; Ramsey, 2021; Svitek, 2021). Republican Texas Governor Greg Abbott continued the assault by targeting the supposed teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in schools, and as a consequence, books that may be accused of promoting CRT, as he attempts to secure a second term as governor. Overall, Texas led book banning with 801 bans across 22 districts as of September 2022 (Friedman & Johnson, 2022). In PEN American's new report, between July and December 2022, Texas had the most instances of book banning with 438 book bans followed by Florida (357) and Missouri (315).

Most rhetoric around censorship in schools focuses on politicians and parents. However, it's important to understand the perspective of teachers. Much of the existing literature on diverse literature in schools are qualitative studies focusing on teacher perceptions (Ginsberg, 2017; Pesterfield, 2019) with very few quantitative studies conducted on the same topic (Stallworth et al., 2006; Massaro, 2020). This article is part of a larger quantitative study that surveyed diverse literature use and integration in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms in Texas. This specific article focuses on teacher barriers to integrating diverse literature and ways teachers creatively use diverse literature despite curricular restraints. This study uses We Need Diverse Books's (WNDB) definition for diverse literature: "We recognize all diverse experiences, including (but not limited to) LGBTQIA, Native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities*, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities." WNDB is a non-profit leading the push for increased diversity in children's publishing.

STUDIES OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

Before the most recent state-sponsored bans against diverse literature, teachers have experienced a range of barriers impacting their use of diverse literature. The largest study in recent history, Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006), surveyed 142 ELA teachers across 72 public secondary schools in Alabama to examine what book-length works teachers used in class and their reasons for including or excluding multicultural literature. They found four themes in the analysis of teachers' responses: (1) traditional stability, (2) the evolving nature of "The Classics," (3) the issues of censorship, and (4) other obstacles. For traditional stability, the study found that teachers are consistent in the texts they use year after year. The top 10 most frequently mentioned titles were written predominately by white men and are similar to book lists mentioned by Applebee (1996). The texts include *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, and *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles. The only diverse text was *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry. The second theme was on the evolving nature of what teachers perceived to be "The Classics." Rather than philosophers such as Aristotle and Machiavelli and texts like *Beowulf* and *The Iliad*, teachers cited the texts listed above as "classics." Third, for issues of censorship, teachers noted selecting from a narrowly prescribed lists to avoid issues with parents and the community. In addition, teachers expressed a lack of knowledge on how to teach works by authors of color as they themselves did not read them in school. In a sense, they engaged in self-censoring. In other cases, teachers showed a clear misunderstanding of diverse literature as they said that white male authors from different time periods and different geographic locations across the U.S. constituted multiculturalism. Other teachers mistakenly said there was no diverse literature that was appropriate for ninth graders. Other issues included lack of resources like class sets and time to develop new units.

Smith, Hazlett, and Lennon (2018) conducted a national survey of middle and secondary teachers' beliefs about young adult literature (YAL) which was sent to National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) organization members. The study focused on teacher use of YAL broadly and almost all the participants, 62 out of 67 teachers, identified as white women. The 53-item survey included five items related to factors affecting teachers' use of YAL assessed using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Of the 53 items, five specifically asked about censorship. Three items asked whether teachers had been discouraged from using YAL in their teaching by their colleagues, administrators, and then parents. A majority of teachers said they had not been

discouraged from using YAL. 63% of teachers said they had never been discouraged from using YAL by their colleagues, 67% by their administrators, and 69% by parents. One question asked, *I refrain from using young adult literature due to censorship*. 63% of teachers selected 1 (never) or 2 and 15% chose 4 and 5 (always) suggesting censorship is of some concern for teachers. The study was published in 2018 before the recent wave of book banning. Teacher responses would likely differ now.

Most recently, Glaws (2021) conducted mixed-methods research in Colorado to study teachers' use and perceptions of middle grades and young adult literature (MG/YAL) through a survey and interviews. The study was not focused on diverse literature, but provides insight nonetheless. The participants (N = 126) shared 285 unique titles of texts used in class. The most frequent texts included *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. Others frequently listed titles such as *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, and *Night* by Elie Wiesel. Most of the literature was written by white authors and feature white main characters, though Glaws does not list the exact percentage. Only nine of the teachers reported having no autonomy in the book selection process, indicating that the teachers, mostly white, were complacent with the books noted in the study. In the survey and in follow-up interviews, teachers expressed beliefs that canonical texts are necessary as they provide students “a background in the things that are part of our collective culture” and is “part of the shared knowledge of [the students'] culture” (p. 28).

About half of the books listed by teachers featured middle grade and young adult fiction, with most of the diverse texts read by students during independent reading. Popular titles included *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds, and *Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo among others. However, teachers expressed how MG/YAL was useful for entertainment, but not so much for academic study or instruction. This shift was evident in the descriptive statistics where there was a significant difference in the use of MG/YAL between middle and high school with high school teachers relying on canonical texts more, especially in 11th and 12th grade. Teachers reported time constraints, funding, and feeling restricted about using MG/YAL due to testing and accountability measures as the major obstacles to using MG/YAL in their classrooms. Issues of censorship as those reported in Stallworth et al. (2006) and Smith et al. (2018) did not appear as an issue.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Banks (1993) outlines five dimensions of multicultural education: (a) content integration, (b) the knowledge construction process, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) an equity pedagogy, and (e) an empowering school culture and social structure. This study drew from the first two dimensions in creating survey items and used all five in analyzing the findings.

Banks (1993) details four approaches used to integrate multicultural content into K-12 curriculum: contributions, additive, transformative, and social action. The first two approaches fall into the first dimension of *content integration*. According to Banks, content integration is how teachers incorporate diverse cultures in their content area teaching. Content integration in English classrooms is the use of diverse texts not only according to race, but also class, gender, religion, and other social constructs and experiences. Contributions refers to the hero and holiday approach that can be problematic in contributing to essentializing the experiences of already minoritized groups and creating a form of othering. The second approach Banks explains is additive schooling, where teachers add ethnic content, themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing the underlying structure of schooling.

Knowledge construction refers to implicit assumptions and biases that influence the way knowledge is constructed in society. The transformative and social action approach fall into this dimension. Transformative integration involves having students think critically about multicultural perspectives and understand how knowledge is constructed, a dimension of critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2002). In the social action approach, which builds on the transformation approach, students use their knowledge and skills to become civically engaged and work towards dismantling systems of oppression in their community. The transformative and social action approach support students in the third dimension of *prejudice reduction* and developing positive attitudes towards others. The fourth dimension of *equity pedagogy* concerns culturally responsive pedagogy that supports academic achievement of diverse learners. Finally, the fifth dimension of empowering school culture and social structure applies to when the culture and organization of schools center ways to support diverse students. This not only applies to supporting teachers but reassessing school policies such as discipline and assessments.

METHODOLOGY

This article is part of a larger quantitative study that surveyed diverse literature use and integration in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) classrooms. The original study was a survey administered to secondary ELA teachers in a large, metropolitan city in Texas. The study consisted of an original survey to measure teacher attitudes about and use of diverse literature (Appendix A) as well as the existing Teacher Multicultural Attitudes Survey (Ponterotto et al., 1998) that measures teachers' multicultural attitudes (Appendix B). Using the two surveys, this study examined the types of diversity present in literature used in secondary ELA classrooms, the ways teachers integrated the literature, teacher-level factors, such as race and grade-level taught, teacher diverse literature attitudes and multicultural attitudes, and the correlation between teacher multicultural attitudes and teacher diverse literature attitudes.

Two research questions guided this large study: (1) To what extent do secondary ELA teachers integrate diverse literature in their classrooms? (2) What factors prevent teacher use of diverse literature in their classrooms?

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were secondary (middle to high school) English Language Arts teachers across three diverse school districts (pseudonyms used) in a metropolitan city in Texas during the 2020-2021 school year.

TABLE 1
Teacher Demographics, N=50

TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS	N	%
GENDER		
FEMALE	45	90
MALE	5	10
RACE		
WHITE	35	70
BLACK / AFRICAN AMERICAN	9	18
LATINX	4	8
ASIAN AMERICAN	1	2
MULTIRACIAL	1	2
DISTRICT		
BACHMANN	17	34

MORRIS	8	15
CHEN	25	48
GRADE LEVEL TAUGHT		
MIDDLE SCHOOL	13	27.1
HIGH SCHOOL	35	72.9
YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE		
1-5 YEARS	10	20
6-10 YEARS	15	30
11-15 YEARS	10	20
1-20 YEARS	8	16
21-25 YEARS	2	4
26+ YEARS	5	10
POLITICAL ORIENTATION		
VERY LIBERAL	6	12.5
LIBERAL	13	27.1
SLIGHTLY LIBERAL	4	8.3
MODERATE OR MIDDLE OF THE ROAD	15	31.3
SLIGHTLY CONSERVATIVE	6	12.5
VERY CONSERVATIVE	2	4.2
OTHER	2	4.2

Note. Not all responses total 50 as teachers were not required to answer all questions (i.e. grade level and political orientation).

DATA COLLECTION

Study participants were recruited via email. Potential participants included secondary ELA teachers that taught at the three school districts in schools that approved the research. In Bachmann ISD, five schools agreed to the research and the head principals were provided the survey link to distribute to teachers. In Morris ISD, the district coordinator sent out the link to all secondary ELA teachers. In Chen ISD, 24 principals were contacted and six (four high school and two middle schools) agreed to participate in the study. The survey was distributed via Qualtrics and included a consent form prior to the survey. Compensation was given to participants of Morris ISD. Bachmann and Chen asked to have the compensation removed as it is against district policy.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study used a quantitative survey design to measure three constructs: teacher diverse literature use total score, teacher diverse literature attitudes, and teacher multicultural attitudes. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and multiple linear regression among constructs and teacher-level factors (e.g., race, years teaching, political orientation, and school district). In addition, the study used qualitative coding of open-ended responses measuring teacher literature use and rationale. Qualitative data were coded in NVivo through open and axial coding to form categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that were then compared to existing literature and analyzed using Banks' five dimensions of multicultural education. The findings below reflect the open-ended responses of teacher barriers to integrating diverse literature and ways they overcome them. Specifically, it focuses on the open-ended items related to popular authors and literature titles used in class within the past three years, how teachers would modify existing curriculum if given the option, and teacher barriers to using diverse literature.

FINDINGS

FREQUENCY AND TYPES OF DIVERSITY IN LITERATURE USED AMONG ELA TEACHERS

Before describing teacher barriers to integrate diverse literature and ways they are overcoming them, it is helpful to understand the context of books currently being used. Part of the survey sought to measure the current diversity in literature used among secondary ELA teachers. Teachers selected the types of diversity in terms of story protagonist, stories written by and about people of color, and themes in the literature. As shown in Table 2, 98% of teachers surveyed noted that the literature they taught included Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). 31% noted using literature with LGBTQIA main characters and 41% had main characters with disabilities. For texts written by and about people of color, 100% of teachers said they used texts by and about Black and African American writers while the most under-represented were LGBTQIA authors. Second highest was Latinx authors followed by Asian American authors.

Among the themes selected by teachers, the highest was literature that *reflects some of your students' diverse cultures and heritages* at 96% followed by *address discrimination* at 86%. The least popular themes *explored religious diversity* and *addressed current socio-political issues*.

TABLE 2
Types of Diversity in Literature

TYPES OF DIVERSITY IN LITERATURE	N	%
PROTAGONIST DIVERSITY		
BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOR	50	98
DISABILITY	21	41
LGBTQIA	16	31
STORIES WRITTEN BY AND ABOUT		
BLACK / AFRICAN AMERICAN	50	100
LATINX	38	75
ASIAN AMERICAN	37	73
MIDDLE EASTERN	28	55
INDIGENOUS / NATIVE AMERICAN	18	35
DISABILITY	17	33
LGBTQIA	15	29
THEMES		
RANGE OF FAMILY STRUCTURES AND CONFIGURATIONS	38	75
REFLECT SOME OF YOUR STUDENTS' DIVERSE CULTURES AND HERITAGES	49	96
EXPLORE DIFFERENT SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS	42	82
ADDRESS DISCRIMINATION	44	86
EXPLORE RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY	29	57
ADDRESS CURRENT SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES	37	72

According to the survey data, teachers are engaging in the content integration and knowledge construction process of multicultural education. They are overall integrating more texts by and about people of color as well as queer voices and those with disabilities, though there is a noticeable lack of the latter two categories as well as Indigenous/Native American stories. In addition, they are supporting the knowledge construction process, the second dimension of multicultural education, by utilizing texts with a range of critical and culturally relevant themes like those that reflect student cultures and heritages and those that address discrimination and current socio-political issues. Of course, the data was self-reported and the degree to whether teachers are using diverse literature as supplemental texts or through a heroes and holidays approach is not clear. Still, the data is encouraging.

TEACHER SUGGESTIONS ON HOW THEY WOULD MODIFY EXISTING CURRICULUM

Teachers were asked whether if given the option to change or modify the curriculum, they would make any changes. 65% of teachers of color, 11 out of 14, said yes while 57% of white teachers, 20 out of 35 said yes. An independent samples t-test showed a significant difference ($p = .001$) between the teachers of color ($M=1.21$, $SD=.426$) and white teachers ($M=1.43$, $SD=.502$) in their decisions to change or modify the curriculum. Teachers who said they would change the curriculum listed multiple ways they would modify it (see Table 2). The top three suggestions listed were more diverse literature, student and teacher choice, and contemporary literature.

TABLE 3

Teacher Suggestions on How They Would Modify Existing Curriculum

TEACHER SUGGESTIONS	TIMES MENTIONED	% OF TEACHERS
MORE DIVERSE LITERATURE	15	48
MORE STUDENT AND TEACHER CHOICE	8	26
MORE CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE	7	23
MORE RELEVANT AND RELATABLE LITERATURE	2	6
SHORTER TEXTS	1	3
LONGER TEXTS	1	3

Note. Some teachers provided multiple suggestions. The % of teachers is of the teachers who provided responses.

More Diverse Literature

The most common theme was diversifying the literature in terms of race, geographic setting, religion, LGBTQ voices, and general cultural diversity.

I would like to do more contemporary pieces that deal with current race, religious, LGBTQ issues. I also want to diversify selections more. I never have (and I don't know any other teachers who have) been able to cover any literature that has diversity of sexual orientation. I would like to diversify more because these students deserve to be able to read something that they can connect to; they deserve to feel seen and understood. (11th grade English teacher)

I would use more diverse authors because my students are diverse. (9th grade Pre-AP English teacher)

I WOULD LOVE TO HAVE A MORE DIVERSE SELECTION IN MY CLASSROOM. (7th/8th grade English teacher)

Another participant/teacher noted a need for geographical and ethnic diversity to be more relatable for their students.

A lot of our texts are set in New York City and that setting is hard for kids in Texas to relate to. I wish we had a little more variety. In addition, we need more texts that embody Mexican American life for our students in Texas. (6th grade English teacher)

One teacher noted their disappointment with the lack of perspectives in their non-fiction-based class and district-mandated reliance on canonical texts, which can be argued as a form of censorship by omission

Though my class is a non-fiction based class, there are a TON of diverse writers and perspectives that are missing from this class, and we are missing a huge opportunity to take advantage of bringing in modern social issues that are critical to help students understand the complexities and diversity of our country. For the past several years, the district has insisted on teaching Hamlet in a non-fiction class, something I have refused to do not only because it's not relevant to the course but because it is not diverse in any way. I would love to replace that unit with a book club unit that brings in student choice and voice and allows for more representation in the texts that we're reading. (12th grade English/Pre-AP English teacher)

An eleventh-grade teacher expressed similar sentiments.

I want to update at least some of the titles to modern, diverse literature that is more representative. I think my students would be far more engaged and would develop more of the empathy I am hoping for with something that is more accessible and more diverse. I get the desire to make sure they are at least passingly familiar with the classics. However, I teach on level English III. Just getting them to read at all is hard enough, let alone the dense, archaic speech of many of the 19th century authors that make up our reading list. I have so many kids who think they hate reading and I think they just haven't found the right books. I want to make the threshold for entry a bit lower, with at least a couple of titles and see if I can't hook some new readers, even in the 11th grade. (11th grade English teacher)

Another teacher expressed it simply.

Less dead white guys - students in public schools need more exposure to diverse literature. (11th grade English/Pre-AP English teacher)

More Student and Teacher Choice

Teachers mentioned having more choice both for students and teachers. The teachers wanted the ability to select beyond the district list and more availability.

I would rely less on district approved lists and more on what the student population would relate to or be interested in. (11th grade Pre-AP English teacher)

I am currently working on filling my classroom library with more diverse books that include a wide variety of authors and characters from all walks of life. The district has transitioned to more independent reading which allows the students to choose their own books. This is great, but I want to make sure there are books that fit everyone in my class. (6th grade English teacher)

Another teacher explained the benefits of providing student choice.

This would also mean that students could help direct the choosing of class study texts and direct their peers towards titles, voices, and authors that they feel represent them. (11th grade English teacher)

More Contemporary Literature

Another theme was adding more contemporary pieces to teach about contemporary critical issues and show the evolving world we live in. The two teachers below express the same sentiments.

I would change the literature to contemporary titles. The books were written a long time ago and much time is devoted to building background knowledge. There is a wealth of books that would be relevant, diverse, and offer opportunities to teach the current social change movements. (6th grade English teacher)

Literature should change frequently because the world it reflects is constantly changing. Literature should equip students to approach life through multiple perspectives and should be frequently updated. It is difficult to have this kind of classroom if students do not have a teacher who is a reader themselves. (12th grade English/IB teacher)

Teachers overall wanted more diverse literature, student and teacher choice, and more contemporary literature. Along with desiring more diverse books for content integration and the knowledge construction process, they are advocating for Banks' third and fourth dimensions of multicultural education: prejudice reduction and equity pedagogy. Teachers expressed the need for books to help students "approach life through multiple perspectives" and to "teach current social change movements." This supports student cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness, and also, prejudice reduction. Teachers also mentioned wanting books "that fit everyone in my class," those "the student population would relate to or be interested in," and books "they can connect to; they deserve to feel seen and understood." Here, teachers are drawing on making teaching culturally relevant, part of equity pedagogy. Additionally, teachers noted providing more student choice, a form of culturally responsive teaching. In analyzing teacher responses through the dimensions of multicultural education, it is clear to see that teachers are desiring changes that are rooted in critical pedagogical frameworks that support student learning.

TEACHER BARRIERS TO USING MORE DIVERSE LITERATURE

Teachers who said they would change the curriculum were invited to explain why and also asked to explain if there are any barriers that prevent changes. Table 3 shows the five major themes reported by teachers.

TABLE 4
Barriers to Using More Diverse Literature

BARRIERS	TIMES MENTIONED	% OF TEACHERS
DISTRICT MANDATES	20	65
FUNDING ISSUES	7	23
TIME AND RESOURCES	4	13
PARENT COMPLAINTS	2	6
ISSUES WITH OTHER TEACHERS	2	6

District Mandates

The biggest issue teachers had with changing their curriculum to be more diverse was district mandates. Twenty teachers across all three districts said this was a concern. Multiple teachers mentioned being unable to deviate from district lists.

I do not have control over whole-class novels. They are chosen from a district-provided and/or team provided list. (10th grade English/Pre-AP teacher)

The district makes all decisions on books. (6th grade English)

It is laborious to get new texts added to our district list for whole class study. The course I teach has to focus a good deal on non-fiction because the AP Exam connected to it focuses on argument and non-fiction analysis. But there are very few non-fiction titles on our district list. And non-fiction to some degree becomes dated rather quickly. I would love to be able to simply get a parent permission form for students to read and study newer titles together more flexibly. (11th grade English teacher)

Others expressed concern about the process for using new texts.

District guidelines for text selection have not been updated since the 1990s. The process is cumbersome and often stalls. It's difficult to simultaneously request new titles and plan to perhaps fall back on old titles if permissions don't come through in a timely fashion or at all. (11th grade English teacher)

Funding Issues

Funding was also a concern for teachers. Teachers expressed not being able to get funding for class sets.

We can only read books that fall under district guidelines. Additionally, getting funding to buy even a class set of books is nearly impossible. (11th grade English teacher)

Accessing enough copies of the texts - if we don't have a class set, using it is a poor choice.

This is my first year at this campus, so I am just following a long [sic] with the curriculum they are giving me at this point. (8th/9th grade English teacher)

Money. I would purchase every single diverse book I could, but I'm limited on funds. I purchase a new book here and there, but buying six at a time to encourage a small group is costly. It will take time, but there are so many more books available now and I want them all. (7th grade English teacher)

Other Barriers

Other barriers teachers mentioned included issues with parents, potential censorship, and their colleagues.

District approval. I don't want to lose my job because a parent complained about a novel they have deemed in appropriate. Books should never be banned, but should be conduit for conversation and learning. (11th grade Pre-AP English teacher)

Parent complaints (11th grade English/Pre-AP teacher)

The conservative nature of the state (10th grade Pre-AP English teacher)

Being the only teacher of color in my grade level/department, most of the teachers on my team shy away from diverse literature that sheds light on topics such as racism and segregation. I have no problem teaching it, but I believe that it makes the others uncomfortable. As a district and campus, we are encouraged to "be on one accord" and read the same-if not, similar-text in our classes. This results in me having to sometimes make other selections. (8th grade English teacher)

Banks's fifth dimension, empowering school culture and social structure, is helpful in seeing clearly how educational systems are failing in to support teachers in integrating diverse literature in their curricula. Teachers are struggling with districts that are mandating book lists or making it very difficult for teachers to incorporate new texts. In addition, there is very little support at the district and school level for teachers to even buy new texts. Funding is a major issue. A more complex issue is censorship. Teachers in the study expressed concern about getting in trouble from parents for using certain texts in class. This fear echoes growing national concern from teachers across the country about losing their jobs from "gag orders" that limit the use of diverse books in their classrooms (Freidman et al., 2023). This is a state issue but also an issue at the district and school level in how teachers may experience varying degrees of support from their leaders (Mitchell, 2023). The final quote mentioned by the teacher of color is also noteworthy. The teacher expresses how they are open to using diverse literature that addresses issues such as racism and segregation, but their white peers are uncomfortable and hesitant to do the same. Part of empowering school culture and social structure also includes supporting and scaffolding learning for teachers. In this case, teachers,

especially white teachers, need development in growing their personal knowledge, skills, and dispositions in using diverse text to teach critical social issues.

TEACHER RESILIENCE AND ACTIVISM

Though teachers expressed multiple barriers for integrating diverse literature, many noted the different ways they advocated for diverse literature through curricular changes and instruction.

One teacher mentioned overcoming financial barriers and crowd-sourcing funds to buy diverse books for their classroom.

*I have to ask for funds from my network to fulfill DonorsChoose.org grants to ensure that students get copies of contemporary novels from diverse authors. This year alone, I have secured copies of *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, *Bang* by Daniel Pena, and *Concrete Rose* by Angie Thomas for my students solely through grants. This is not a focus on the district-level: getting diverse, powerful, contemporary books into the hands of students. (No grade level indicated.)*

Teachers described how they supplemented their required curriculum with diverse texts.

I am able to supplement the books that we are required to read in class with outside materials, so as much as I can, I try to bring in articles and videos written by and about diverse writers and speakers. (12th grade English/Pre-AP teacher)

We have no leeway on our anchor texts, so I utilize supplements of poetry, art, and short stories. (11th /12th grade English/Pre-AP teacher)

In doing a poetry unit this year, we chose to focus on adding in more diverse literature by adding "Afro-Latina" by Elizabeth Acevedo and "The Rose that Grew from Concrete" by Tupac. Students loved both pieces because they felt like they could relate more to them, and we were able to have wonderful, organic discussions. (11th grade English teacher)

*I use student choice a lot. I also try to have a variety of narrators. Recently I used "Break" by Rabih Alameddine published in *The New Yorker*. (12th grade English/IB teacher)*

Some teachers taught using required canonical texts but with a critical twist or option for diverse text.

*We frequently look at the "traditional" view with a canonical work, and then we will explore a more contemporary counterpoint. One example is rhetorical study of the *Declaration of Independence*, followed by a reading and discussion about a passage from "Between the World and Me" by Ta-Nehisi Coates to discuss how context and exigence changes the meanings of a work. (10th grade Pre-AP/11th grade English teacher)*

I have offered more choice books. I will use a text as a mentor text. Frequently this text is "classic" (I.E. older, whiter)... Then I offer students a variety of contemporary choices to pick from and I make an effort to include titles that feature a range of voices and diversity in characters. (12th grade Pre-AP English/Dual credit teacher)

Or restricted in their curriculum, teachers adapted their instruction to offer opportunities for more diverse literature.

Class novels are determined by district. I include diverse literature in my classroom and incorporate it via book talks. (7th grade English teacher)

The students get to vote for one book that I read aloud to them during each nine weeks. This gives me a chance to share new stories with different characters and we can discuss the book for fun. (7th grade English teacher)

Much of the outside of class reading my students do is of their own choosing. I encourage students to work alone or in small groups to find works (fiction or non-fiction) that speaks to them and that they will enjoy. This, they incorporate into writing or projects of varying types, usually with their peers as their audience so that student presenters aim to interest their peers in what they believe their peers will find of value. In our district that has previously been somewhat restrictive about allowing new titles for whole class study, this has made it possible for students to find and read and share works that mirror their backgrounds OR open their senses to backgrounds they hadn't considered previously. Inside our class (whole class readings), much of it is non-fiction and comes from short excerpts from a variety of eras and voices. (11th grade English teacher)

Teachers in the study noted various obstacles to integrating diverse literature in their classrooms including district mandates, funding issues, and fears of censorship. However, they also shared ways they creatively worked around hurdles like district bureaucracy through engaging in equity pedagogy. Teachers supplemented required readings with contemporary diverse texts that students could relate to along with diverse poems, short stories, art, and videos. They also adapted instruction to include student choice and support independent reading through book talks.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study suggest that while very few teachers mentioned outright hard censorship concerns in their choices of literature used in their classrooms, restrictions from the district were serious barriers. The survey results were gathered in Spring 2021. The assault on books in Texas fully launched in October 2021, after Krause's booklist. Had the survey been distributed in the 2021-2022 school year, the results would likely have changed. I suspect teachers would report being more fearful and hesitant to use diverse literature. Even so, I imagine there would still be teachers integrating diverse literature in creative ways from providing students choice and integrating art, poetry, and videos from diverse perspectives in their teaching as mentioned by the research participants. The study has shown that there are teachers that understand the need and power of diverse stories and continue to find ways to integrate them in their classrooms despite obstacles.

However, teachers must be supported in all five dimensions of multicultural education, especially the fifth in having an empowered school culture and social structure. Teaching is difficult enough without educators having to worry about being fired for using a contemporary diverse text that supports student racial literacy. Securing free speech and the ability of teachers to use and continue to use diverse literature in classrooms will take a concerted effort, both a bottom-up and top-down approach from little free libraries to major federal lawsuits fighting book bans (PEN America, 2023; Smith, 2023). We are seeing local groups and national organizations making waves. Hopefully, this movement will reverse the U.S. trend toward authoritarianism and do better for our schools and communities.

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