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**Providing Diverse Texts to Secondary Learners:  
Encouraging Critical Inquiry and Understanding**

**Elinor Manoogian-O'Dell**

**Division of Education and Leadership**

**June 1, 2021**



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**WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF  
WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED**

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Action Research Project Title:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Graduate Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Candidate for the degree of : Master of Arts in Teaching: Initial Licensure

*and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of this master's degree.*

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## Abstract

The goal of this action research project was to become a more competent educator when it comes to incorporating diverse literature in my classroom, and facilitate conversations about race, gender, and power among my students. A contributing factor to the ability to critically think is the capacity to read and reflect. Nationally, at least 8.7 million low-income students in kindergarten through fifth grade read below grade level. Research shows that income is closely tied to literacy rates (Van Pelt, 2018). By helping students connect texts to their own lives and critically analyze them, teachers are setting students up for success in the workplace, but also in their interpersonal relationships and daily lives. The methods of inquiry for this study focused on the principles and practices of action research, using self-study aligned with professional teaching standards, teacher artifacts, journal entries, classroom artifacts, lesson plans, and EDTPA materials as a means of data collection. I used these methods to address three research questions: (1) How can I encourage students to analyze texts through application to personal and social contexts?; (2) How can I develop pedagogical skills to engage students in discussions about race and power?; and (3) How do I develop a library that reflects critical literacy practices? Major themes that emerged from my research were self-study, expert recommendation, and student choice. In order to improve my disposition and ability to lead discussions about race and power, I need the background knowledge and practice to be prepared for those discussions.

## Chapter 1

I grew up in a family that valued education. Both my parents were college professors, and my brother is the most ferocious reader I know. When young, I had difficulties learning to read and found it boring. Consequently, my parents hired tutors for the first three summers of my elementary education. In 5<sup>th</sup> grade, my parents advocated for me to be in the HOTS (higher-order thinking skills) class that met once a week. In middle and high school, I was in courses that typically had honors, advanced, or AP preceding their titles. I had math tutors in high school, took an SAT preparatory class, and was forced to participate in science fairs.

I now see that much of my educational experiences were informed by the privilege of belonging to a formally educated, White, middle-class family. My parents felt comfortable advocating on my behalf to teachers and administration and had the time and resources to volunteer in the classroom, coach my athletics, and chaperone field trips. This privilege provided me with opportunities and expectations of what success looks like. I think the general message I got from school was that I was smart but not the best, and that would never be enough. I generally liked school, but it was also the source of stress and feelings of inadequacy.

If books can act as windows into other cultures or mirrors of our own cultures, I often faced the latter (Bishop, 1990). Most of the books I read featured main characters that resembled me. They were White, cis-gendered females that even shared some of my personality traits. The books I read for school largely centered on Whiteness, and my classes often did not focus on race or ethnicity.

With that said, there are a few language arts and history teachers who I remember clearly. They instilled a love of literature, introduced me to inquiry-based thinking, and unleashed some of my creativity. I was genuinely excited about what I was learning in those classes. Educational



scholars such as Geneva Gay, bell hooks, and Alfie Kohn advocate for a type of education that reduces grades and penalties and instills self-confidence and a love of learning in students. The best teachers I had spent less time on grades, rewards, or threats. This is the type of teacher I want to be.

**Where do you stand on the various influences, issues and ideologies that shape our educational system?**

As an adult, I love reading and learning new things. That was not always the case. There were times when I only put in as much effort as necessary to pass an assignment. I typically skimmed the reading and occasionally did not do the reading. Looking back on my education, I only did these things in classes that did not interest me, or for teachers who did not respect me. Through my experiences, I want to be more like the teachers that made me feel safe to take risks, motivated me to put in the effort, and encouraged me to pursue my curiosities in the classroom. With this in mind, I gravitate towards teaching that is asset-oriented and culturally responsive. I am committed to fostering a growth mindset among my students.

Maslow's theory suggests that motivation is based on a series of needs being met. These needs are arranged in a pyramid with physiological (food, shelter, clothing, etc.) at the bottom, safety, love and belonging, and esteem in the middle and self-actualization at the top (McLeod, 2020). In their book, "Fostering Resilient Learners," Souers and Hall (2016) discuss how teachers can teach from a trauma-informed perspective to reach every student in their classroom. Teachers have to be aware that if basic needs (the ones lowest in Maslow's hierarchy of needs) are not being met, students will have no room to learn. They advocate for teachers to listen to their students, form relationships, extend grace, practice positive reinforcement, and practice self-care. These are all practices I hope to implement in my classroom. Additionally, I also

believe it is important for teachers to become culturally aware and learn how they can inflict trauma by shutting down student self-expression and teaching from a curriculum that focuses exclusively on a White, middle-class experience.

In his book “The Book of Learning and Forgetting,” Smith (1998) states that, “for learning to take place effortlessly, you must be a member of the club. And if you don’t have a club membership, it doesn’t matter how hard and how often you try to learn, you’ll just be more frustrated” (p. 35). Part of ensuring that students feel like they are part of the club is to show that you genuinely care and value their life experiences and cultural backgrounds. According to Smith (year), the harder students try to learn in a setting where they feel excluded, the more they will feel that there is something intrinsically wrong with them and will be unable to learn the material. Students need to feel like they are a welcome member of the class and that they are safe to ask questions and seek out collaboration.

Making a case for improving outcomes for ethnically diverse students of color, Gay (2002) underscores the importance of preparing teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills to use culturally responsive pedagogy in their practice. First, teachers need to be prepared with explicit cultural knowledge that includes learning and communication styles, traditions, values, and contributions. Second, teachers need to be able to identify where the current curriculum is lacking and know how to make the appropriate changes to improve the amount and quality of diverse voices present. Culturally responsive teaching deals directly “with controversy; studying a wide range of ethnic individuals and groups; contextualizing issues within race, class, ethnicity, and gender; and including multiple kinds of knowledge and perspectives” (Gay, 2002, p. 108). A culturally responsive educator demonstrates care for all students by using their own cultural lenses to expand their world views and promote academic achievement. Additionally, teachers

must take the time to know each student individually to better understand what a student can do both currently and in the future. This helps teachers set high and appropriate expectations for each student (Gay, 2018).

Feeling safe in a classroom requires that students' identities are validated. This is why I think culturally responsive pedagogy (CRT) is important. As students know themselves, they know how they are viewing the content of a class. CRT asks teachers to understand the role of Whiteness in the classroom and to combat its negative effects (Borsheim-Black, 2019). Students should see that voices from people of color are valued and social constructs that create division and oppression are not.

Last school year, I was an AVID tutor at a middle school. My primary role was to facilitate inquiry-based learning sessions with small groups of students. One student would present a challenge they were having in a class and the other students would ask questions to help the student figure out the answer. During my sophomore year in high school, my teacher introduced me to Socratic Circles which are similar to these tutoring sessions. In Socratic circles, one circle of students discusses a topic with a focus on inquiry rather than debating. An outer ring of students observes and takes notes on the discussion. These types of activities help students to feel valued and open up healthy dialogues among peers. I still remember what it felt like to hold back my opinions and instead ask my classmates a question in a discussion. I remember how difficult this was, but, at the same time, how much deeper the conversation was because of it. A classroom culture of inquiry depends on an understanding of a shared mindset.

In her work, Dweck (2006) outlined two mindsets I would like to adopt and model a personal growth mindset for my students and help them cultivate their own. Like Dweck, I believe that being smart is not an inherent quality, but rather the result of hard work, curiosity,

mentorship, and collaboration. In my classroom, I want students to know that they might not know something *yet*, but that does not reflect on their intelligence. We all start somewhere.

### **Where do you stand in relation to the various prominent philosophies of education?**

Regarding prominent philosophies of education, I am drawn to Critical Literacy. Critical literacy perspectives “are concerned with analyzing relationships between language, social practice, and power” (Papola-Ellis, 2020, 46). In other words, Critical Literacy allows students to realize their own relationship to power and a texts relationship to socio political issues through writing and studying texts.

I do not think it is realistic or reasonable to exclude the author in an analysis of a text. I intend to create a classroom environment where students approach every text with curiosity and critical eyes. The intent is that students will be able to make up their own minds about a text and how it fits into the world around them. This would require students to comprehend the text and think critically about themselves and our society as a whole. Ultimately, I think education exists to foster the growth of engaged conscientious citizens, and literacy is at the heart of that mission.

Many of the students in secondary school are still working on basic comprehension. In these cases, I do think that aspects of Formalism and Reader Response frameworks make sense. These two theories (Hansen, 2004) are jumping-off points to help students read at the level where they can start to see texts in the context of a whole culture or society. From Formalism, fluency and critical thinking are important to model. Asking students to identify plot points, symbols, and themes, as well as think about how a text makes them feel are important aspects of the Reader Response framework. These seem like the first steps before a reader can view a text

in a societal framework and gather greater meaning on their own. There are opportunities in class for me to read out loud or for the students to use audiobooks to overcome comprehension issues and dig into deeper meaning.

**Where do you stand in regard to teaching with social justice – creating an environment that challenges all students at all times, regardless of their ethnicity, socio-economic status, legal status, etc.?**

I recognize that as a White, cis-gender female, U.S. Citizen from a middle-class background, I have a worldview that I need to understand and question in order to become a culturally competent teacher and effective for every student. This means that I need to identify and overcome my own biases. For me, that involves reading books from the perspectives of others regarding the education system, racial equity, disability, socioeconomic status, and gendered perspectives. It also means opening communication channels with my colleagues, especially those of color, about issues involving equity and joining groups that discuss these issues as well.

In my classroom, I believe there are many steps I can take to create a more inclusive environment. Education should involve an open dialogue between students, teachers, and other diverse voices - especially in the context of a language arts classroom. I can achieve this by filling my classroom with culturally relevant and challenging literature, rejecting the Correspondence Communication Theory, integrating aspects of contract grading in my assessment strategy, and instituting restorative practices.

In order to fully address the power dynamics in the classroom, I will need to vocalize my lens as a White female teacher, and actively aim to understand the lens of my students. When

conversations about race, ethnicity, and cultural background arise, I will at times have to take a back seat and allow students with lived experiences to lead the conversations.

In terms of curriculum, Ladson-Billings (2018) cautions that we can alienate and perpetuate harmful racial trauma by never questioning, “what intellectual information and experiences students have access to, what they are denied access to, and what distortions of information they encounter can serve as powerful funders of our racial ideology” (p. 95). The curriculum should go beyond celebrating holidays or listening to music that does not belong to the predominant culture. In a language arts classroom, texts and stories should reflect real representations of the multidimensional lives of people from all walks of life.

I would like to have a large classroom library where students can find stories that reflect their realities, but also where they can have their worldviews challenged. Essentially a library where students can find windows and mirrors. The literary canon and assigned readings that I experienced in my education were usually penned by White authors who often wrote from the perspective with a capitalist, patriarchal societal lens. I still believe these texts have value; however, I believe that the voices we introduce to students should be more reflective of the reality of our world which is filled with diverse people from a multitude of worldviews. I would also like to have a classroom library that is inclusive of varying levels of challenge. Students should have access to texts that range from being pleasurable to read to academically challenging. I would like to include access to non-traditional types of literature such as audiobooks, graphic novels, and magazines. These texts would be available so that by the time students finish high school, they will become multiculturally competent in an increasingly globalized world.

Literature is a dialogue between the reader and the text, and the classroom should be a place where students can participate in a reciprocal dialogue. I took an economics class online in college based on memorizing material from the textbook and testing. I retained little from that experience, and I certainly did not feel like a valued member of a classroom community. I would like my classroom to have daily opportunities for students to express themselves and communicate authentically through discussion, writing, and creative outlets. Students should feel that their ideas are valued and desired every day in class.

In a language arts classroom, the teacher's pedagogy should reflect the idea that every voice in the classroom matters (hooks, 1994). In order to do this, the teacher should show that they value every student by getting to know them at the beginning of the year and incorporating their preferences into the classroom. This could be a classroom soundtrack, studying authors and texts that the students already like, or constructing assignments in a way that students enjoy. In order to hear every voice, teachers can give students multiple outlets to respond to texts like writing, discussion, and when appropriate visual art.

In terms of assessment, I would like to implement aspects of contract grading. Kohn (2011) has argued against using grades in the classroom." Because grades have the power to reduce student motivation, diminish curiosity, and encourage the easiest route possible to achieve a good grade, he argues that there are too many negative outcomes when implementing a grading system. I also believe that grades have the potential to reflect a teacher's conscious and unconscious biases. In her article, "Phenomenological Reflections on the Failing Grade," Pike (2011) stated, "in a sense, the mark on an assignment is nothing more than a reflection of the opinion of one's teacher." In order to remedy this, I would like to implement contract grading as much as possible. I realize I will be bound by school and district rules and policies, but I would

like to deemphasize grades as much as possible. I seek to capture the spirit of contract grading which involves student self-assessment as well as teacher assessment of promised and actual work and puts more emphasis on revision, collaboration, and mentorship (Cordell, 2019).

“Quality assessment also focuses on what students can do—their strengths, competencies, and resources that they bring to learning—versus their deficits” (Powell, 2011). In order for the assessments to be effective we need to capture students in authentic discourse about or interaction with a text.

Finally, I believe that as a human with a personal set of experiences, I am bound to make mistakes and cause harm to students as much as I try to avoid these situations through the methods outlined above. Smith, Fisher, and Frey (2015) outlined various restorative practices for the classroom like responding to classroom disruptions with inquiry, teaching students how to talk about and express their feelings and having impromptu and formal conferences with individual students. I believe these practices (like weekly restorative circles) will be essential in my classroom in order to facilitate communication and healing when harm is done.

**Where do you stand in connection to being an ethical teacher and abiding by the laws that govern our school system?**

Abiding by the laws that govern our school system is important. I want to build a teaching career over time and do work that helps encourage growth among the children in my community. Most of the laws that affect education exist to protect the wellbeing of children and their families. Because of this, it is also my ethical duty to follow them. For example, students have a right to privacy; therefore, following FERPA guidelines becomes essential.



There are many laws in place that protect students and align with my ideas of what is ethical as an educator. In order to be an ethical educator, I must create opportunities for all students to learn. For example, *Brown v Board of Education* requires that schools are not segregated based on race. The Individuals with Disabilities Act provides rights and protections to children with disabilities and their families that did not exist in public schools prior to the passage of the law. The Equal Educational Opportunities Act prohibits discrimination of students and requires schools to remove language barriers for English language learners.

Oregon State Law (ORS 659.850) defines discrimination as any act that unreasonably differentiates treatment based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, age, or disability. Additionally, Oregon law (ORS 174.100) includes an “individual’s gender identity, appearance, expression, or behavior” in its definition of sexual orientation. These two laws grant students the right to be called by their preferred names and pronouns. They have the right to use restrooms or changing rooms that align with their gender identities, dress in a way that affirms their gender identity, and to play sports on teams that most closely align with their gender identity.

Before laws like these were passed, I believe educators were not required or empowered to practice ethical teaching, and there are still aspects of educational practice that are not ethical either because of the lack of legal mandates or because of the current ones. In order to be an ethical teacher, I will need to follow the law, while also continuing to advocate for the rights of students within my district, state, and federal government.

**Where do you stand with reference to those who lead our school districts: parents, school board members, legislators, etc. and the decisions they make for you as a teacher?**

Much like my beliefs about the law, I believe that parents, school board members, and legislators generally have the best interest of students in mind when they make decisions. It is important to cultivate a collaborative and respectful relationship with various authorities, especially with parents. Students thrive when they have a team of compassionate adults invested in their wellbeing and education. My role as a teacher is to collaborate but also to hold myself and others accountable in this goal.

**What kind of a classroom environment do you feel is conducive to learning?**

I seek to create a safe, inclusive, inspiring, and mentally stimulating classroom environment. Safe means that students feel that they can ask questions, express their thoughts and feelings, and advocate for themselves. In order to do this, I am required to model vulnerability, curiosity and competence as well as respond to students with compassion, interest, and validation. Inclusivity means that my classroom is filled with literature from many cultural perspectives and that I teach in a way that celebrates diversity, communicates multiple narratives, and addresses the intersection of multiple identities. Inspiring means that I model enthusiasm about the content and about the work that students create. Finally, a stimulating classroom caters to all readiness levels and includes students' interests.

**Who are you as a teacher: what is your mission statement?**

Through my training as a teacher and commitment to language arts in particular, I value guiding students to critically analyze text, identify their own lenses, and understand the perspectives of others. For these reasons, I am committed to creating a diverse classroom library. In all of my efforts, my intent is to embody Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. As a teacher, I focus my energy on developing individual relationships with students and creating a positive classroom environment conducive to communal growth and well-being. This involves encouraging student agency, creating opportunities for class discussions, and providing access to books that help students see themselves and their world from new perspectives.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Purposes and Objectives for the Literature Review

My purpose in this literature review was to understand how teachers and researchers have looked at critical literacy and engagement with diverse literature in a secondary classroom. I approached this in the following a specific set of steps. First, I searched for research on critical literature theory because of my interest in helping students to become life-long critical readers who reach for diverse texts. Next, I searched for studies on anti-racist pedagogy in a language arts classroom and strategies for developing life-long readers because I wanted to focus on content and strategy both separately and intersecting with my future career goals. Additionally, I focused on studying my own practice, focusing on my ability to self-evaluate and become culturally responsive. With this step, I identified studies that indicated the types of instructional practices that are effective for having difficult discussions in the classroom - especially about race and social justice.

This literature review addresses a few considerations that need to be taken into account. As a White cis-gender woman, I have a certain set of experiences that have made me who I am. I must reflect on my own biases, multiple identities, and contexts before I begin to teach others. This is critical and is achieved through continuous reevaluation as to how my set of experiences affect my actions, ability to relate to students, and to develop and deliver curriculum. Due to my background, it is particularly important that I access, read, and reflect on research from and about people of color and people from the LGBTQ+ community. Many of the texts have been selected with this in mind.

## **Procedures for the Literature Review**

I selected literature for this review based on several specific criteria. Specifically, research on critical literacy was included if it contained the following descriptors: middle school, high school, English Language Arts, and secondary education. This search yielded more than 350 relevant articles. In order to narrow my findings and make them more specific to this research project, I then focused my review efforts on articles that discussed social justice, racial equity, or LGBTQ+ rights. I generally selected articles that were peer-reviewed and published between 2015 -2021. From there, I looked for articles that supported sub-themes that emerged from the major articles in my literature review. These sub-themes are: 1) creating a diverse classroom library, 2) developing discourse skills to tackle potentially uncomfortable classroom conversations; and 3) incorporating pedagogical practices that help students analyze literature critically. For these sub-sections, I initially searched the *EBSCO database* for articles that met the keyword criteria listed above, along with conducting a search for books in the database of the Hamersley Library at Western Oregon University. I also gathered readings from previous graduate and undergraduate classes that pertained to my themes.

In order to integrate the literature review, I separated research into the major themes: classroom library development, personal growth, and pedagogical practices. I read each article to determine how it fits within these broad thematic categories. Through a process of reading and rereading for salient features of each study, I next determined the subheadings in the literature review. My intent was to start with a broad treatment of each theme and then to systematically reduce broad understandings of critical literacy theory to a specific understanding of how these themes are present in research about diverse literature, classroom discussion, and pedagogical practices.

I have organized my literature review in the following ways. First, I discuss developing a diverse classroom library. Second, I consider research on modeling critical analysis and developing a disposition that leads to constructive classroom conversations because students need guidance when it comes to analyzing and discussing diverse texts. Finally, I looked at research on specific pedagogical practices so that I can implement these strategies in my future classroom.

### **Purpose**

I entered this research hoping that I could find information and strategies to encourage my future students to critically read literature and productively apply what they read to their lives. The major theory that emerged is critical literacy theory which asks readers to read the text but also to analyze the author's background and motivations and how the text exists in the world.

I found that in order for students to read texts with a critical literacy lens, they need access to diverse literature. Diverse books from authors from various backgrounds should be physically present in the classroom through the development of a classroom library. Teachers can build this library by reading books, watching videos, viewing social media, and reading articles from relevant authors, educators, and researchers focusing on children's and young adults' (YA) literature.

As important as access to diverse literature is the disposition of the teacher. Critical literacy theory should be demonstrated by the teacher in the way they construct lessons, lead discussions, and model their own reading habits. The development of active listening and facilitation skills related to having discussions about potentially uncomfortable topics such as race, religion, gender is critical to pedagogical practice. Specifically, teachers can lead

discussions with inquiry-based methods and practice finding points of agreement and understanding before introducing a new perspective.

Finally, the teacher should implement specific pedagogical practices that model and scaffold learning to help students analyze literature critically. These skills are important to help students prepare for post-secondary education, but they will also need these skills to navigate texts and media presented to them on a daily basis through news and social media.

### **Overview of the Research Studies**

One hurdle that language arts teachers face is disrupting the traditional literary canon included in most curriculums. Books in this canon are typically written by and about middle-class White heteronormative people (Applebee, 1993; Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) have discussed antiracist literature instruction for White students. Critical Race Theory, anti-racist literature instruction and other critical theories ask teachers to help students of all races and ethnicities gain a better understanding of their own identity and how that might influence how they read literature (Freire, 1970; Li, 2015). Students benefit from being able to see themselves in the books they read (Howard, 2016). Anti-racist literature instruction specifically asks students to focus on their own racial identity and to use literature as a means to engage in uncomfortable conversations.

Students need to learn how to explore and discuss concepts about racism such as systemic racism vs interpersonal racial discrimination, color blindness, White privilege, racial identity, and White savior complex. Ultimately, they should be able to recognize “the role that literature plays in reinforcing or interrupting constructions of race and racial stereotypes” (Borsheim-Black

& Sarigianides, 2019, p. 11). With this in mind, it is not always necessary to replace typical canon literature, but instead, it is important to view such works through a critical lens.

Ideally, students would not have to continue to analyze these same texts, however, and would instead be exposed to a wide range of diverse literature. One way to do this is to develop a classroom library that students can utilize for independent reading in addition to having some hands-on curating through book suggestions and recommendations (Gallagher, 2018).

### **Library Development**

While reading about pedagogy and theory from scholars and authors with interests in secondary education, I often notice that certain titles are mentioned - sometimes more than once. Many writers who are engaged with the topic also read in their spare time, and thus are rich sources for classroom library book recommendations. Alexie (2011) highlighted two texts, Laurie Halse Anderson's "Speak" and Chris Lynch's "Inexcusable" as vehicles for critical literacy. His own book, "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian" has affected many secondary students and exposed them to Indigenous epistemologies and cultures. Alexie notes that students often tell him that his YA novel "is the only book they have read in its entirety" (Alexie, p. 1). These are the types of books that need to be in a classroom library - ones that inspire reluctant readers and introduce (or reflect) a culture that is often not visible in literature (Bishop, 1990; Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). It becomes clear that simply reading from experts in the field, authors who write about specific cultural groups and experiences, or connecting with these influencers on social media will likely help expose someone to quality literature appropriate for young adults.



Due to volume alone, deciding what belongs in a language arts classroom library is not necessarily an easy task. Part of the library should include texts that display the world's linguistic diversity and the diversity specifically found in the United States. Texts can demonstrate the richness that variations in language can add to our daily lives and world views. Bishop (1990) suggests including texts like "Tales of Belva Jean Copenhagen," which are written with the linguistic characteristics found in Appalachia, and "My Brother Fine With Me," which features the African-American Vernacular English (Bishop, 1990). Furthermore, texts could be written in a language other than English. Soltero (2011) states that "research evidence...highlights that ELLs who receive instruction in the native language develop the second language more efficiently than children who are immersed in the second language" (p. 23). Students benefit from texts in multiple languages and should have some texts readily available to them.

### **Engaging Students in Discussions about Race and Power Role of Teacher**

As Freire (1970) stated that schools have traditionally been based on the idea of a "banking system." The teacher's "task is to 'fill' the students with the contents of [their] narrative – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance" (p.52). An example of this might be if a teacher taught students to add without connecting this process to money or some other real-world examples. Thus, students are learning facts without context and cannot use this knowledge in a meaningful way. Freire's solution to this problem is to reconcile the distinct roles of teachers and students and for teachers to simultaneously become a teacher and a student.

## **Race and Power in the Classroom**

Aronson et al. (2020) conducted a study of a teacher education program and focused on a group using critical literacy to examine their role in disrupting Whiteness in their future classrooms. They found that simply exposing students to counternarratives provided the potential for growth. White students in particular began to blame past teachers who “lied to them” and the school system in general that misled them on topics about race and the history of the United States (p. 311). Along with this response, they found a lack of personal responsibility with a greater concentration of blame on authority figures. The authors state that this is a problem because students direct their anger at individuals rather than a system rooted in White supremacy. However, some students did find a call to action in the process and were able to begin to analyze how they had participated in the process and what they could now do in response. The authors concluded that students in teacher education programs need to seek out counternarratives and practice having uncomfortable conversations about race and power in order to prepare themselves to teach students using critical race and critical literacy theory (Aronson, Meyers, and Winn, 2020).

## **Pedagogical Practices**

A Pew Research Center study (2019) found that two-thirds of residents in the United States get their news from social media. These numbers are even higher among younger people. As more individuals access and read their news online, critical literacy practices become more applicable to everyday life. In their study, Elmore and Coleman (2019) wanted to increase critical media literacy skills in their 8th-grade classroom by asking students to study political memes. They found that students were more capable of analyzing texts critically after conducting

the multi-day lesson. In particular, students were able to decipher when a piece of media was using an emotional approach or creating a false binary. Generally, they were more prepared to engage with the media critically in discussion and apply their skills to future classroom lessons (Elmore & Coleman, 2019).

Conducting a study in a high school history classroom, Li (year) introduced a new lens for students to use when critically analyzing textbooks. *New Historicism* helps students evaluate text based on the author's sociopolitical and cultural contexts and the presentation of facts. For example, although Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial group and have lived in the United States for over 100 years, they are severely underrepresented in common high school history textbooks. This lens allows students to explore why this may happen, and how to supplement their reading. Li (2015) also found that history classrooms in U.S. high schools were “too bloated to take on these new burdens of diversity though they are the traditional resource for socio-political and multicultural education” (p.19). Both reform and having English language arts classes act as “parallel spaces” to help encourage multicultural discourse are necessary (Li, 2015).

### **Strategies for Discussions**

In terms of classroom discussions and discourse between students and teachers, the teachers need to engage caution when talking about their personal worldviews. Freire (1970) stated that it is not a teacher's “role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours” (p. 77). When teachers push their worldviews on their students, they fall back into the “banking system” by not acknowledging that students have experiences and situations that allow

them to contribute a unique perspective to the classroom. It is vital that a teacher situates themselves as both the classroom teacher and a student regarding race and power issues.

bell hooks (1994) writes, echoing Freire, that students should be active participants in learning and not passive consumers. Students and teachers should engage in “mutual participation” which will result in “engaged pedagogy.” Engaged pedagogy involves the teacher genuinely valuing every person in the class, recognizing that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, and that everyone contributes something of value. hooks writes that this is “the only type of teaching that truly generates excitement in the classroom, that enables students and professors to feel the joy of learning” (hooks, 1994, p.204).

Sometimes teachers will encounter students that do hold world views that should not be tolerated in the classroom, like racism. Camp (2018) outlined certain techniques that White people specifically can implement in conversations about race to combat racism. Readers need encouragement to focus on compassion rather than winning an argument or proving a worldview. From this view, Camp (2018) illustrates those conversations become about “freeing people from a blindness that engulfed them” (p. 1). Continuing, Camp (2018) outlined a way to approach these conversations that includes building rapport with students, relating an experience that helps the listener understand why the teacher views things a certain way, using relaxation techniques, asking questions that focus on experiences that lead to beliefs, and listening to other viewpoints.

### **Incorporating Pedagogical Practices to Help Students Critically Analyze Literature**

Asking students to examine literature through a critical literature lens is not simply a good idea; it is also advocated for by many overarching organizations prominent in ELA education. The National Council of Teachers of English released Position Statements (2018) that

ask teachers to help students navigate power and privilege through anti-racist teaching. Meixner and Scupp (2020) noted these statements in their work. They highlight as important the NCTE Position Statements that ask teachers to expose students to “Diverse Gender Expression and Gender Non-conformity Curriculum ” and to define literacy in terms of the digital age. These statements do not simply ask students to read and comprehend classic literature but to read literature that reflects the current macro contexts and, in this case, understand how gender and issues of equity are important to our lives. As Freire (1970) wrote, students must read the word and the world.

To connect personal and social contexts to what they are reading, the content of the classroom has to be relevant to students’ lives, or the teacher has to help guide students to find that relevance. In her article, Ladson-Billings (2018) suggests, asks teachers to create a culturally relevant curriculum, asking students to tackle issues that pertain to their communities, like homelessness or gang violence. She states that culturally relevant teachers understand that students desire the ability to apply what they learn in class to their real lives and that the ultimate goal of public schools is “the development of citizens for a diverse democracy” (p. 88). Westheimer (2015) identifies this as the “justice-oriented citizen” and calls for a clear definition of the type of citizen schools aim to create (p. 242).

### **Media to Provide Social Context**

One of the easiest ways for an ELA teacher to help students see the world is to expose them to diverse literature. As previously mentioned, a diverse classroom library is at the heart of a classroom where students are taught to critically read texts. Bishop (1990) divided stories into three categories: windows, mirrors, and bridges. Windows give readers a view into someone else’s human experience while mirrors reflect a reader’s own experience. When students cannot

find mirrors in literature, or when those mirrors are caricatures or contain negative images, they understand that they and their families have less societal value (Bishop, 1990). On the other hand, when students find too many mirrors and not enough windows, they may develop a dangerous view of their importance in society.

It is not enough to simply fill a classroom with diverse books. Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) described a method of lesson planning called backward planning. This method centers on social justice and asks the teacher to find standards that fit the social justice issue rather than the other way around. In anti-racist instruction, the first step is articulating a racial literacy objective (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019).

### **Literature Circles/Team Teaching**

Although there are many different strategies that could be used in a critical literacy pedagogical practice, book clubs were consistently highlighted in the literature. Gallagher and Kittle (2018) advocated for the implementation of book clubs in an ELA classroom across the span of the entire school year. Students form book clubs to read individually, as well as engage with whole-class novels. Book clubs give students the opportunity to have rich conversations around a shared text and create a natural atmosphere of inclusion and collaboration that is critical to learning (Smith, 1998). Book clubs can reduce student isolation and increase enthusiasm (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018). Students typically stop pretending to read when they are going to talk with their peers about a piece of literature (Gallagher & Kittle, 2018).

Meixner and Scupp (2020) taught middle school students to use five different lenses through which to understand aspects of LGBTQ+ issues. Assigning students to book club groups, the researchers asked students to apply these lenses as they read their chosen texts. Within their book club groups, students were asked to analyze other forms of media (like

advertisements) through these lenses and present them to their peers. On one assignment, they were asked to specifically look through a lens of heteronormativity and analyze magazines, cartoons, infographics, and other sources of media. Students returned to their book club readings with a new sensitivity to personal pronouns. Meixner and Scupp (2020) found that students were hesitant to give character pronouns until they had named them and that this practice continued outside of literature and in the classroom. Additionally, students developed a new respect for their classmates' pronouns, and the communication necessary in order to avoid misgendering someone. They also were able to identify a theme in a text and relate it to how they interacted with the other students in the classroom.

## **Summary**

This literature review indicates that while there are many resources available to teachers who want to develop their own skills as well as create a diverse classroom library, there are still many gaps in teacher preparation programs. Teacher candidates must seek out these resources on their own by identifying competent and influential educators, researchers, and authors. They can read their work and find recommendations through academic articles, social media pages, and books.

Given the findings of this literature review, the next chapter will explain the methods and procedures that I used to develop my own physical library, my need to gain personal awareness and develop and refine skills regarding and to encourage students to read from a wider range of voices and critically examine what they read. It is clear that in order to engage in these conversations and analysis, I must have access to relevant texts and basic background knowledge about social justice issues, historical context, and other real-world implications.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The methods of inquiry for this study focused on the principles and practices of action research, using self-study aligned with professional teaching standards, teacher artifacts, journal entries, classroom artifacts, lesson plans, and EDTPA materials as a means of data collection. I will begin with a review of action research principles to establish the foundation for this study's method of inquiry. Second, I will review the choices and purposes of data collection that helped to highlight my instruction and means for searching for improvement. Third, I will detail my context for the study, methods of data collection protocols, maintaining credibility and trustworthiness of the data, and acknowledge my limitations as a researcher. Finally, I will present the procedures used for studying my practice while providing data and analysis that speaks to adaptations and adjustments made to my instruction as I implemented this study.

In this chapter, I have outlined the following sections: a) first, I will discuss my research questions; b) second, I will outline my procedures for the research project; c), I will discuss my rationale for my methods of data collection, the types of data I collected, and whether or not the data is reliable; d) I will present the context in which my study was conducted; e) Finally, I will include the ways that my methodology may have changed throughout the research process.

#### **Methodology Rationale: Action Research**

In order to answer my research questions, I will conduct an action research project. Action research combines problem-solving actions with data-driven research. After identifying a problem or question, teachers can use action research to gather information, collect data, and apply different approaches. This type of research is meaningful because it focuses on a teacher's specific goals in relation to a specific school and its students (Preisman, 2007). Action research



centers the teacher in professional development and allows teachers to tailor their learning (Gould, 2008).

### **Research Questions**

Before beginning my graduate program, I had an idea of why I wanted to teach. Valuing critical thinking and inquiry, I believe it is vital for citizens in a healthy community to develop and refine these skills. A contributing factor to the ability to think critically is the capacity to read and reflect. Nationally, approximately 8.7 million low-income students in kindergarten through fifth grade read below grade level (Van Pelt, 2018). Research shows that income is closely tied to literacy rates. Because 40% of individuals who are incarcerated are illiterate and most are people of color compared to the general public, the issue of literacy also is an issue of race and racism (Van Pelt, 2018). For these reasons, I believe that literacy is a social justice issue. With this in mind, I shaped three research questions focused on themes of literacy and social justice and how I can make progress on these issues as a teacher. The first question relates to pedagogy, the second involves diversity, and the last question is specific to language arts

1. How can I encourage students to analyze texts through application to personal and social contexts? My hope is that students will not only learn the mechanics of reading and writing but that they will be able to analyze a text in terms of the world around them. If students can make these connections, then they can use reading as a tool to critique and learn about the world around them and plan for a better future.
2. How can I develop pedagogical skills to engage students in discussions about race and power? After students gain literacy skills and develop the ability to process new information in terms of their own experiences, they will then be able to discuss what they

think and feel about a text with others. I would like to develop my skills as a facilitator in order to provide a safe and nurturing environment for students to learn. Conversations about race and power can be particularly difficult to talk about, and I would like to develop my skills and practice discussing these topics before I take the lead in my own classroom.

3. How do I develop a library that reflects critical literacy practices? In order to critically read and discuss literature, students will need access to diverse, thought-provoking literature that both reflects their world and pushes them to understand other perspectives. Following the guiding principles of critical literacy theory, I want to develop a classroom library that provides students with these opportunities.

### **Context of the Study**

Currently, I teach at a rural middle school in the mid-Willamette Valley, Oregon that serves students in the 6-8th grades. The staff includes 32 teachers, 16 educational assistants, and two counselors. Among the 646 students enrolled during the 2019-2020 school year, less than 1% are Asian or Black/African or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 1% are American Indian/Alaskan Native, 8% are multiracial, 10% are Latinx/Hispanic, and 81% are White. The teachers are 97% White.

The teachers are divided into departments at my school. The English Language Arts (ELA) department has seven certified teachers, one of whom is my mentor teacher. I have received feedback from him as well as our co-principal. During the winter term, I taught one

period of 7th grade ELA and a two-week unit full time. During the spring term, I took on more responsibilities and taught a three-week unit.

### **Research Study Procedures**

My approach to addressing my research questions involves a) a self-study; b) discussion and interviews; and c) reviewing classroom artifacts and lesson plans. In the following section, I outline each of my research questions and describe the specific procedures I will implement to gather and analyze data.

#### ***Research Question 1: How can I encourage students to analyze texts through application to personal and social contexts?***

The main sources of data for this research question will be both personal journal entries and lesson plans. In November 2020, I began a journal to keep track of book recommendations, school events, and reading student work. Data regarding lesson plans include both those developed for practice such as the lesson plans created in graduate courses 7th-grade language arts classroom instruction and those included in the final EDTPA.

#### ***Research Question 2: How can I develop pedagogical skills to engage students in discussions about race and power?***

The data collected for this research question would include journal reflection on a) discussions with experts in the field, and a mentor teacher other than my placement teacher; b) participation on the Racial Equity Team; and c) participation in multiple professional development opportunities. In addition to studying on my own, I will develop a network of contacts who can support me through this process. I have identified a mentor teacher other than

my placement teacher to meet with occasionally to discuss diverse classroom literature and personal development related to social justice issues. I also plan to ask other educators and professionals outside of education about their social justice work and to gather information through these conversations. Additionally, I am a member of the Racial Equity Team at my middle school. Through this team, I have developed relationships with other educators and staff who value social justice pursuits in education and are willing to engage in conversations about race and power with me. Finally, I have identified multiple organizations that provide training and workshops for education related to racial justice and other social justice issues. I plan to attend multiple workshops throughout my graduate program.

***Research Question 3: How do I develop a library that reflects critical literacy practices?***

Through my research and discussions with other teachers, I plan to identify grade-level books and media that highlight characters and narratives that exhibit a variety of human experiences. Additionally, I will identify books based on recommendations from my mentor teachers, colleagues, and online resources. I plan to read as much literature as possible to evaluate whether or not it should be included in my classroom. Once I have identified literature that I would like to include in my classroom, I will look for cost-effective ways to attain the materials.

**Data Sources and Collection**

According to typical action research practices (Preisman, 2006), I must identify a topic or issue to study, collect data related to the chosen topic or issue, analyze and interpret the collected data, and finally carry out an action plan, which represents the application of the action research

results. Data collection in an action research project is related to the topic and provides answers related to the research questions.

### ***Journaling***

My primary source of data will be a journal that I keep throughout the program. This journal will include reflections about classes, workshops, or other activities I attend. I will also record ideas and information gathered from interviews and informal conversations with educators and other professionals as well as maintain notes and reflection for any professional development opportunities. Finally, I will maintain a comprehensive list of recommended books, books that I have read, book descriptions and evaluations of its contribution to critical literacy practice and decide to acquire for my future classroom library.

### ***Interviews***

My second main source of data will be informal discussions and semi-structured interviews with mentor teachers. I will conduct at least three interviews with my identified mentor to both a language arts teacher and leader of the Racial Equity Team to discuss my classroom library, text assignments, and the creation of a classroom culture that encourages critical inquiry. I will keep notes during these interviews and record my insights immediately following these sessions.

### ***Lesson Plans***

Lesson plans from graduate-level courses, student teaching at a middle school, my Mock EDTPA, and my EDTPA will be included as data. I will analyze these lesson plans for changes in pedagogy and depth of the topic.

### *Classroom Artifacts*

Data will also include the books I have collected for my classroom library with information about the books compiled in a Google Sheets document. I will record the main character's race and ethnicity and other relevant information including the year of publication and the diversity of the characters.

Table 1.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

	Data Sources	Purpose	Procedure and Timeline
1. How can I encourage students to analyze texts through application to personal and social contexts?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thesis Journal</li> <li>2. Teaching Resources Compilation</li> <li>3. Lesson Plans</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My thesis journal gave me a space to reflect on my own teaching.</li> <li>2. The Teaching Resources document was used to compile texts and classroom content ideas</li> <li>3. My lesson plans showed me how I am developing as a culturally responsive educator.</li> </ol>	<p>I kept a journal starting in November.</p> <p>I began collecting texts during the summer of 2020.</p> <p>I began lesson planning during the summer term and ended during the spring term.</p>
2. How can I develop pedagogical skills to engage students in discussions about race and power?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thesis Journal</li> <li>2. Reflective journal prompts from "Me and White Supremacy" by Layla F.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The journal will help me reflect on race and power and self-evaluate my capacity to engage thoughtfully in the conversation.</li> <li>2. This book and the</li> </ol>	<p>I read "How to Be an Antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi during the winter term. I read "Me and White Supremacy" by Layla F. Saad during spring break and the beginning of spring</p>

	Saad. 3. Observations	journal prompts will help me reflect on my own privilege and how that might show up in the classroom.	term. I read “Letting Go of Literary Whiteness” by Carlin Borsheim-Black and Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides  I kept a journal starting in November 2020.
3. How do I develop a library that reflects critical literacy practices?	1. Classroom artifacts 2. Interviews 3. Thesis Journal	1. The data from my library will tell me how diverse my literary offerings are for my students. 2. Discussions with other teachers will help me choose appropriate books. 3. My journal will help me understand where I’m getting my book ideas from.	I will catalog my classroom library over spring break.  I will meet with a mentor teacher at least three times to discuss books.  I kept a journal starting in November with weekly entries.

## Participants

Because I am conducting first person action research, I am the main participant in my study. During the fall of 2019, I joined a secondary school in the rural Willamette Valley, Oregon as a school assistant. I joined the racial equity group and quickly learned that I knew little about equity in education. By reading books, going to conferences, and having conversations with other team members, I began educating myself about various issues dealing with race in the United States.

I began my Master's in Teaching at Western Oregon University during the summer of 2020. As I embarked on my action research project, I knew I wanted to get into how I could promote equity and, more specifically, racial equity in my language arts classroom.

My Master of Arts in Teaching program has given me a couple opportunities to do this work. I took Curriculum Assessment & Management II during fall term and Teaching Equity Justice and Agency during winter term. These two courses introduced me to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Anti-racist teaching. Both courses improved my capacity to promote racial equity.

I developed my three research questions with my decision to do self-study action research. Additionally, the current pandemic context limited my ability to conduct action research with human subjects.

### **How I Studied My Teaching**

In order to study my teaching, I analyzed my lesson plans to see if I was more likely to incorporate topics that can be difficult to talk about like race, religion, and gender identity. I highlighted portions that fit this description. I also kept a journal from November 2020 to June 2021. As these topics came up in the classroom, I highlighted them to reflect on later. I also paid attention to when I found new sources of information like books and websites and how often I referenced them. Lastly, I tracked book recommendations in this journal. During Spring Break, I cataloged all of my books for my classroom library and analyzed how many books I have that incorporate different races, ethnicities, and gender identities.

### **Table 2**



## Data Analysis Steps

<p><b>Phase i</b></p> <p><b>Familiarize myself with data</b></p>	<p>Review thesis journal and highlight areas where major “ahas” occurred.</p> <p>Begin digital diary of thoughts concerning themes and any “surprises” of information.</p>
<p><b>Phase 2</b></p> <p><b>Generate initial codes</b></p>	<p>Organize data into meaningful groups with research questions in mind.</p> <p>Manually code with notes in the journal and lesson plans.</p> <p>Code for all potential themes.</p>
<p><b>Phase 3</b></p> <p><b>Search for themes</b></p>	<p>Organize codes into potential themes using a digital table.</p> <p>Note thoughts on relationships between the emerging themes in the digital diary.</p> <p>Add a miscellaneous section in the digital code diary for any seemingly unrelated code.</p>
<p><b>Phase 4</b></p> <p><b>Review themes</b></p>	<p>Revise table of potential themes, considering internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity.</p> <p>Read collated data extracts for each theme, checking for coherent patterns.</p> <p>For extracts with no coherent pattern, re-examine theme and related coded data for sub-theme or renaming of the theme.</p> <p>For themes where a coherent pattern exists, examine for individual theme validity in relation to entire data.</p>

	<p>Stop when no more substantial and relevant themes emerge</p> <p>Examine how themes fit together in relation to research questions and note thoughts and considerations in a digital journal</p>
<p><b>Phase 5</b></p> <p><b>Define &amp; name themes</b></p>	<p>Adjust the digital table of themes to organize collated data extracts within each theme for consistency.</p> <p>Identify relative narrative for each theme in the digital diary.</p> <p>Write a detailed analysis for each theme, to include individual relevance and how that relates to the overall analysis and answers the questions of this research.</p> <p>Examine written analysis for any excessive overlapping of themes.</p> <p>Examine each theme for any sub-themes needing to be identified and explained.</p> <p>Add potential names to each theme.</p> <p>Triangulate data to ensure that the themes are coherent.</p>
<p><b>Phase 6</b></p> <p><b>Write the thematic report</b></p>	<p>Write an analysis within and across themes.</p> <p>Assure there is written evidence within each theme with related data extracts.</p> <p>Choose vivid and relevant examples for each point of evidence in answering research questions.</p> <p>Create an analytic narrative that incorporates evidential answers to each research question.</p>

## **Credibility**

Validity and reliability are important aspects of social research and can be accounted for in a variety of ways (Torrance, 2012). Both validity, the quality of being logically sound, and reliability, the degree to which accuracy can be considered dependable, are components of credibility, the quality of being trusted or believed. The credibility of qualitative research is grown through a “confluence of evidence” that includes multiple types of data (Eisner, 1991, p. 110). Validity of research is one component of providing credibility and can be done through triangulation of data (Lather, 1991). Carter, et al. (2014) explained that one method of triangulation is method triangulation which includes using multiple methods of data collection. Eisner (1991) also believed that getting input and opinions from others in the same field serves as a means of consensual validation. This helps to further demonstrate credibility.

In my research, I used multiple methods of data collection. These different methods served as method triangulation based on the explanation from Carter et al. (2014). The methods of data collection were developed through journal entries, interviews, lesson plans, and classroom artifacts. This allowed me to analyze the data through different means to ensure that I was correctly interpreting the data, as well resulting in “a broader understanding of the phenomenon” (Carter et al., 2014, p. 546).

## **Limitation to Data Collection**

The nature of action research methodology is not objective or experimental. Because of this, findings should not be generalized. Additionally, action research is cyclical and would ideally be repeated multiple times. After completing a project, the researchers reflect and then try again.

The restraints of my MAT program do not allow for this repetition, and I would need more time in order to complete a cyclical study.

### **Delimitations**

This study took place over winter and spring terms in 2021. These terms were chosen because I had the most flexibility regarding how many class periods and units, I was able to teach instead of just participating in observations. The significance of the winter term is that it was mostly online and conducted via Zoom due to health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were in distance learning until the last two weeks of the term when they moved to a hybrid model. Spring term was completely conducted in a hybrid model and had more opportunities for class discussions as students were physically present in the classroom.

### **Biases/Assumptions**

All data were self-generated. I collected lesson plans, journal entries, and classroom library data. The nature of this self-generated data suggests that my own biases could have affected the results. Especially in the journal entries, I can only make observations based on my own reality, so I may have missed times that I could have been able to engage in tough conversations, write down a book recommendation, or gain new insights from a conversation. As I have learned more about racial equity and the history of race in the United States, I have been able to reflect on experiences when I failed to identify racism or missed important contexts. I can only assume that as I continue to teach and engage in conversations, I will need to continue to educate myself so that I can continue to eliminate any blind spots I might have. This will be a lifelong process.

## Chapter 4

In this chapter, I will present my data including a) my procedures for analyzing my data; b) restatement of my goals; and c) discussion of the specific results of my analysis. The initial goals that I established for this action research project were crafted in order to become a better teacher through data collection and analysis. I met them by designing a self-study action research project addressing three areas: 1) my disposition; 2) the content and strategy of my teaching; and 3) the content of my classroom library.

### Data Sources

The data came from personal journal entries, conversations with a mentor teacher, resource compilation, lesson plans, self-evaluation, and the contents of my classroom library. I kept a journal from November 2020 until April 2021. In this journal, I wrote about my experiences in graduate courses, conversations with mentor teachers, my experiences as a student teacher, and my own growth and development. I kept this journal using Google Docs.

Beginning in summer 2020, I also began to collect texts and other resources that could be used in the classroom to help expand student perspectives and worldviews. I organized the resources into categories on a Google Doc.

I conducted a self-evaluation using the questions in “Me and White Supremacy” (2020) by Layla F. Saad. These questions helped me reflect on my own relationship to race and power. Some of the questions asked, “How have you stayed silent when it comes to race and racism?” and “How do you benefit from White silence?” (Saad, 2020). In order to teach students about their own lens, I had to know mine first. I completed these questions using Google Docs.

The last source of data was from the books I collected for my classroom library. I cataloged all of my books and recorded information such as the first publishing year and the diversity of the main characters. I used a spreadsheet through Google Sheets in order to organize my library and also to track students who were borrowing books.

### **Data Coding and Emergent Themes**

I approached my data by first printing out everything that I was going to analyze and reread and reviewed each data source. To identify data that was linked to specific research questions, I assigned colors to each of my research questions and used highlighters to mark data that linked to the research questions. I completed this process with all of the journal entries, lesson plans, and resource compilations. In the subsequent reading of the data, I started identifying and labeling codes for sections that I highlighted. Next, I created a coding sheet and focused on the data under each code. In this way, I was able to identify common themes across the data. These themes are separate from my literature review and instead are a reference to commonalities between data. In the following tables, I outline the research question, the codes that were created, and the theme(s) that emerged.

#### **Research Question 1**

I asked how I can encourage students to analyze texts through application to personal and social contexts. Students should go beyond the mechanics of reading and writing and learn to analyze a text contextually in terms of the world around them. My goal was to help students expand their world views by introducing them to new perspectives and assisting them to critically analyze the perspective presented in the text.

#### **Table 3**

Themes	Code and Description	Examples
Theme 1: <i>Content</i>	<p>Facts: New information that I learned about racial equity or the history of race and power in the United States.</p> <p>Curriculum: Examples of content that I found to teach in the classroom.</p> <p>Texts: New poems, short stories, books, videos, etc. that I found to include in my classroom curriculum.</p>	<p>Information from an article “The Rise of Hate in Schools” (2019).</p> <p>“A teacher asked 8th-grade students to record audio versions of “The House on Mango Street” and then he used the recordings in his 6th-grade classroom.”</p> <p>“Braiding Sweetgrass” by Robin Wall Kimmerer  “<i>There, There</i>” by Tommy Orange</p>
Theme 2: <i>Expert Sources and Practice</i>	<p>Classroom Content: examples from teachers in the classroom</p> <p>Classroom Instruction: Methods and strategies used by classroom teachers to elicit critical thinking from students.</p> <p>Professional: general ideas from a professional, whether that’s a K-12 teacher or a college professor.</p>	<p>“Teachers need to help students identify how they show up to a text in the context of their race...because the U.S. mainstream literary canon is so White, White students often assume characters of color are White or fail to see how race affects the story.”</p>
Theme 3: <i>Student Choice</i>	<p>Choice: Activities that allowed students to choose some aspect of their learning, whether that was books or mediums to write on.</p> <p>Positive Student Response: Occurrences where students positively verbally responded to an assignment.</p>	<p>“I assigned a persuasive essay writing this week and students could pick their own topics. I would say at least a third of the students chose a social justice issue...Students had a really positive response to the assignment and wrote more than was required.”</p>

### ***Theme 1: Content***

In my journal, I wrote about reading Gregory Michie's "Holler if You Hear Me" for a graduate class. In his book, Michie (2019) writes about his experience reading Sandra Cisneros's (1983) "The House on Mango Street" with a group of students. This text features a series of vignettes. The main character is Esperanza Cordero, a 12-year-old Chicana girl who is growing up in the Latinx quarter of Chicago. Her story is an excellent way to encourage conversations about the intersection of race, class and gender. Michie asks older students to read the novel aloud and record it for future students. By doing this, older students feel empowered, and younger students feel more connected to the text. In my journal, I write "this is the kind of activity that gets everyone involved and primed to dive deeper into tough issues" (unpublished journal entry).

In compiling teaching resources using Google Docs, I found many texts that represent a worldview or experience that I have not seen traditionally included in curricula. I found texts and recorded activities that could be used in the classroom and due to the number, I identified, I divided the texts into categories. The first set of categories were indicative of the type of texts: book excerpts, podcasts, videos, films, short stories, poems, articles and other. I then categorized these same texts into themes: Hope, Thanksgiving, racial equity, slavery, the power of storytelling and language, Native American literature, learning and school, reading, digital literacy/technology, immigration, Latinx, India/Hindu, and mental health. These categories are dynamic as I review more texts and search for ways to incorporate more narratives and contexts into my classroom. In my lesson plans, I have already been able to use some of these texts.



One of the most notable sections of my teaching resources compilation was the Indigenous literature section. During the spring of 2020, I took a Native American Literatures class at Portland Community College. During my time in this class, I recorded fourteen resources that include websites, short stories, and poems. These resources together would create a unit on Indigenous literature in a secondary classroom.

When I analyzed my lesson plans, I found a pattern in the lesson plans related to brain science. My placement school adopted a curriculum from Amplify, and in this curriculum, there is a whole unit on the adolescent brain. We use the text, “Inventing Ourselves: The Secret Life of the Teenage Brain” by Sarah Jayne Blakemore. This text leads to a discussion about socialized vs biological traits. Students discussed traits that we are born with versus ones we learn like religion and gender. I note that “this unit would be a good primer to discussions about race and power because students first identify that some traits and behaviors are socialized and are not inherent while others are biological and universal” (unpublished journal entry).

Another pattern that emerged through analyzing my lesson plans was that I chose primarily White authors at the beginning of the school year, but later in the year, I incorporated more authors of color. When I had the chance to design my first lesson, I chose texts from Elizabeth Gilbert and Rick Reilly - two White authors. These texts resonated with the students but reflected their own cultures. The second unit I designed covered poetry, and in this unit, I used mentor texts from Naomi Shihab Nye (an American author with Palestinian roots) and Adrienne Su (a Chinese American poet). I chose to make this change as I learned more in my graduate courses and read about the traditional U.S. literary canon.

## *Theme 2: Expert Sources and Practice*

This theme emerged in four different locations within my journal. I found expert voices that detailed classroom procedures, lesson plan ideas, and activities that I could implement in my classroom. Some experts were academics who teach about pedagogy, while others were teachers who produce video content for platforms like YouTube. Megan Forbes produced videos under the name “Too Cool for Middle School.” In one of her videos, I wrote about how she gives diverse books as rewards to students for big accomplishments. She also talked about how she conducts Socratic seminars in an online format. These seminars aim to help students explore a text through inquiry and spark their curiosity. Other expert voices were mentor teachers from my district and my professors from Western Oregon University.

In one conversation with a mentor teacher, I discussed feeling like I was misunderstood by my classmates during a college seminar. In the class, I had expressed my hopes that White readers would be able to find mirrors in characters that did not look like them. I wrote that my mentor teacher was able to help me understand why I was misunderstood: I did not explicitly mention race.

Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) emerged as academics who could lend their expert voice. I read “Letting Go of Literary Whiteness.” Through this reading, I learned about specific ways I can have conversations about race and power. For example, I wrote about realizing that White students assume that all characters are White unless explicitly stated because the books that they are regularly given only feature White characters. I learned how to interrupt this and help students see the world as multicultural instead of one-dimensional (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019).

During fall term, I took a curriculum and classroom management class from Dr. Lin Wu. This course specifically helped me identify my own lens and interrogate my motivations for teaching. One of the first readings we did was impactful in that I was able to identify some of my own harmful beliefs about education. Bulman (2002) identified common teacher tropes portrayed in popular media. He writes that many urban schools are featured in films in which a heroic White teacher, usually with minimal training, joins the school's staff and "saves" a group of "rowdy" students of color (Bulma, 2002). I realized through this reading that I did in a way see myself as someone who could save children from their own circumstances. Future readings showed me that many of the issues in the U.S. education system are systemic and cannot be solved by one teacher (Coombs et al, 2012; Garcia et al, 2012; Milner, 2005).

### ***Theme Three: Student Choice***

There were two long entries about successful classroom experiences that involved student choice in my journal. Both occurrences involved improved student engagement and students exceeding assignment requirements.

In the first journal entry, I reflected on a persuasive writing unit that I assigned during my two-week unit during winter term. Multiple students in each class chose to write about racism, LGBTQIA+ rights, or ways to combat hatred in their essays. In this unit, students spent a day brainstorming and researching their topics. I wrote in my journal that I saw increased student interaction in the chat feature of Zoom during this day of instruction. The students who chose these topics generally exceeded the assignment requirements in length and wrote multiple paragraphs about their topics.

In the second occurrence of “student choice,” I wrote about bringing books into class from my personal library. “When Stars Are Scattered” (2020) details the experiences of a Black boy who lives in a refugee camp in Kenya. I wrote that this is the first time I have seen certain students engage in literature featuring characters of color. Fourteen students asked to borrow the books after reading them for 20-minutes during our silent reading time. Of the students, all but one was White. The other student is Latinx. One White student said in a writing response, “This is the best book I have ever read.” After having a conversation with the student, I found out it’s one of the first books he has read to completion.

## Research Question 2

Regarding this research question, I asked how I could develop pedagogical skills to engage students in discussions about race and power. Early on, I identified this as an area that has made me feel hesitant and, at times confused; however, it was also an area that I felt I needed to improve in order to become a skilled teacher.

**Table 4**

Themes	Codes	Examples
Theme 1: <i>Knowledge Acquisition and Confidence</i>	<p>Facts: This is pertaining to U.S. history and current information about the criminal justice system, political systems, public education, etc.</p> <p>Confidence: Times in which I describe an increase in courage and ability to apply knowledge.</p> <p>Self-study: Times I sought out and consumed resources on</p>	I read “How to be an Anti-Racist” by Ibram X Kendi.

	<p>my own.</p> <p>Noticing: Times when I saw something regular through a new lens.</p> <p>Speaking up: Times I spoke up and interrupted something that was racist, sexist, ableist etc.</p>	
Theme 2: <i>Self Study</i>	<p>Reading: Items that I read on my own.</p> <p>Exercise: Times I practiced what I learned.</p> <p>Practice: Times I put ideas from self-study into practice in the classroom.</p>	I read Ebony Elizabeth Thomas's (2019) book "The Dark Fantastic"
Theme 3: <i>Noticing and Speaking Up</i>	<p>Classroom occurrence: Times I spoke up against inappropriate conversation in the classroom.</p> <p>Confidence: Times I mentioned feeling more comfortable talking about race and power in the classroom.</p> <p>Classroom Management: Times I was able to respond appropriately to someone saying something racist in the classroom and getting the class back on track.</p>	An occurrence when a student was making fun of a Korean last name and I immediately interrupted it.

### ***Theme 1: Knowledge Acquisition and Confidence***

In my analysis, I noted five separate journal entries where I focused on acquiring new knowledge that boosted my confidence in regard to talking about power and race. These entries

were some of the longest in the journal. One entry discussed reading “How to Be an Antiracist” by Ibram x Kendi. For instance, I stated “Understanding the origins of race relations in the US has not only been enlightening, but it’s empowering. I feel more confident responding to student questions after reading this” (unpublished journal entry). Through reading this text, I gained a greater understanding of the history of race relations and the insidious ways that racism is present in our daily lives. In one entry, I detailed interaction with a White 7th-grade student in which I confidently discussed why we do not mock other people’s names in our classroom. I ended my entry by noting an increase in confidence in calling out racism and redirecting students.

### ***Theme 2: Self-Study***

Early in my journal entries, I discussed finding resources created and/or recommended by experts in the field with the potential to improve my ability to engage in difficult classroom conversations. In a graduate course, I was introduced to the “Racial Healing Handbook ” which “introduced me to ways to structure sentences and thoughtfully phrase replies in a way that disrupts racist or problematic conversation in the classroom” (unpublished journal entry). I also found Ebony Elizabeth Thomas’s (2019) book “The Dark Fantastic” through watching a video by Too Cool for Middle School. In this book, I learned about the problematic nature of fictional stories that consistently include side-lined Black female characters. Lastly, I read Ibram X Kendi’s (2019) “How to be an Anti-Racist” because of a recommendation from my mentor teacher.

A major contributor to becoming more comfortable having conversations about race and power was attending the racial equity meetings at my school. I write that “every time I go, I feel

more comfortable speaking up in the classroom” (unpublished journal entry). At these meetings, I’m able to express my fears and ideas and get feedback from other members of the team. I also get recommendations such as Dr. David Campt’s work.

Lastly, I used Layla F. Saad’s (2020) book “Me and White Supremacy” to evaluate how I was feeling about my own lens and ability to have conversations on race. In this book, the author presents reflective questions about every chapter. On day four of my reading, I identified one of my biggest weaknesses when it comes to talking about race: silence. I write that “It has only been recently that I have begun to speak up. Some of that is because I now have power as the adult in charge of a classroom, and some of it is because I have learned to better identify and name the injustices” (unpublished journal entry). I had come to realize that staying silent is a function of White privilege and perpetuates White supremacy. By simply interrupting a racist statement or conversation, I was beginning to do the work of helping my students understand their own lenses and the harm that their words can have.

### ***Theme Three: Noticing and Speaking Up***

After my introduction to the resources mentioned above, my journal entries increased, focusing on how interactions in the classroom could become problematic. I also recorded what happened when I spoke up.

In late November and early December, I pointed out multiple times when I notice conversations that are untrue or misrepresent people of color. In one instance, the text described how the Chinese focal character does not have access to indoor plumbing. As we read this, I heard a student say that Americans can’t relate to this problem. At the time, I was an observer in the class and could not respond, but I researched the topic later and found that “1.6 million

Americans still do not have indoor plumbing. Many of these Americans live on Native American reservations” (unpublished journal entry). This was the first entry when I started to become more aware of what my future role as a teacher may require.

After I began to teach in the classroom and was no longer only an observer, I noted more instances when I noticed problematic language and was able to interrupt it. In February 2021, my class was discussing the difference between socialized behavior and biological behavior. I asked a White student to give an example of culture from their own lives. The student immediately started talking about ancient cultures and “tribes” instead of his own life. I asked if he has a culture, and he responded, “I’m a Christian if that’s what you are asking.” I respond by talking about different aspects of U.S. culture. I wrote, “I don’t think I would have been able to confidently reply to this if I hadn’t been studying culture before” (unpublished journal entry).

In March 2021, I wrote about an encounter I had with a student who was making fun of an author’s name. Every week, I had written a quote from an author on the whiteboard. During that week, I wrote down a quote from an American author with a Korean last name. The student was saying the anime over and over and then adding, “What kind of name is that?” I responded, “That is a Korean last name, and in this classroom, we do not make fun of people’s names” (unpublished journal entry). The student seemed embarrassed and tried to revise their previous statement by saying that they actually thought the name “was cool.” I wrote that I could feel myself becoming more comfortable being assertive in calling out racist commentary in the classroom.

### **Research Question 3**

Finally, I asked how a new teacher can develop a library that reflects critical literacy practices. In my future classroom, I want to have multiple bookshelves filled with books that



students can use for book projects, reading circles, and free time reading. These books should be both windows to the lives of others and mirrors of their own lives. In addition, they should help students develop competency in at least one additional culture other than their own.

**Table 5**

Themes	Code and Description	Examples
Theme 1: Expert Recommendation	<p>Professor Recommendation: books and texts mentioned by a college professor.</p> <p>Author Recommendation: books and texts mentioned by a young adult author.</p> <p>Researcher Recommendation: books and texts mentioned by someone who researches literacy</p>	<p>“Long Way Down” by Jason Reynolds was recommended five separate times by a mentor teacher, a professor, and peers in my graduate program.</p>
Theme 2: Social Media	<p>Publisher: recommendations from publishing company.</p> <p>Author: Typically, a YA author.</p> <p>Teacher: K-12 teacher.</p> <p>YouTube: someone who posts book content on YouTube</p> <p>Instagram: someone who posts book content on Instagram.</p>	<p>“Poet X” by Elizabeth Acevedo, “The Crossover” by Kwame Alexander, multiple books by Toni Morrison, and “March: Book One” by Andrew Aydin and John Lewis.</p>
Theme 3: Students	<p>Choice: times that students had choices of books to read.</p> <p>Positive Student Response: times when students expressed positive views of a book or reading.</p>	<p>I discovered “I am Number Four” by Pittacus Lore, and “The Selection” by Kiera Cass.</p>

	Student Recommendation: books mentioned by students.	
Theme 4: Data	Black White Latinx Asian Indigenous LGBTQIA+ Ability	“The Poet X” by Elizabeth Acevedo features Dominican characters that identify as LGBTQIA+

### ***Theme One: Expert Recommendation***

Throughout the data, I found that the most common way I found to add books to my library was from the recommendation of experts. Experts were professors, teachers, authors, and researchers. In my journal, I recorded 76 book recommendations. These recommendations were generally divided into categories like “graphic novels,” “verse novels,” “LGBTQIA+ books,” and “Latinx books.” Of those books, I have been able to purchase and read 17 of them.

Some books, additionally, stood out because they were recommended multiple times. For instance, “Long Way Down” (2017) by Jason Reynolds was recommended five separate times by a mentor teacher, a professor, and peers in my graduate program. Other titles that showed up multiple times were “Poet X” (2018) by Elizabeth Acevedo, “The Crossover” (2014) by Kwame Alexander, multiple books by Toni Morrison, and “March: Book One” (2013) by Andrew Aydin and John Lewis.

### ***Theme Two: Social Media***

I recorded multiple social media accounts that I discovered between November 2020 and February 2021 in my journal. On Instagram, I found teaching accounts like “foldingfictions” and

“toocoolformiddleschool.” Both of these accounts are run by language arts teachers who recommend books from their own classroom libraries. Accounts like “wellreadblackgirl” and “theconsciouskid” are examples of accounts that promote books that include diverse characters and storylines.

By far the most mentioned social media account was the YouTube channel overseen by “toocoolformiddleschool”. This site was created and updated by a middle school language arts and history teacher, Megan Forbes. In one video, she discusses new fantasy reading circles. She discusses how fantasy books can help people reimagine the future and critically think about our current systems of power. She recommends six books including “Charlie Hernandez and the League of Shadows” (2018) by Ryan Calejo, “Elatsoe” (2020) by Darcie Little Badger, “The House in the Cerulean Sea” (2020) by TJ Klune, “A Song Below Water” (2020) by Bethany C. Morrow, “Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky” (2019) by Kwame Mbalia, and “Woven in Moonlight” (2020) by Isabel Ibanez. I have since purchased all of these books for my library.

Another source that I turned to for learning about race and power was Kimberly Foster or “For Harriet” on YouTube and Instagram. The first video that I watched by her detailed the issues with the book and movie “The Help” (2009) (2016). From this movie I learned about the White Savior trope and other issues with the portrayal of Black women in mainstream media. Since then, I have continued to watch her content and learn more about the treatment of people of color in society and the portrayal in books and film. This is vital information to a future Language Arts teacher.

### ***Theme 3: Students***

In my journal, I recorded almost 30 novels that students in my classroom were consistently reading. Some novels showed up multiple times. These novels were “Harry Potter”

(1997) by J. K. Rowling, “The Giver” (1993) by Lois Lowry, graphic novels by Raina Telgemeier, “The Hunger Games” (2008) by Suzanne Collins, and “Coraline” (2003) by Neil Gaiman. A few students specifically asked me to read books that they were also reading. Through these two students, I discovered “I am Number Four” (2009) by Pittacus Lore, and “The Selection” (2014) by Kiera Cass. In my journal, I noted that “neither of these books is particularly well written, but they definitely have an addictive feel to them.” I was able to quickly read both and discuss the books with each student which I wrote: “strengthened our relationship as readers and cooperative learners.” I also noted that all of these books feature White main characters and only a few side characters who are people of color. This shows that it’s important for me to read what students are reading, but to also push students to read outside of their comfort zones.

#### ***Theme 4: Data***

Over Spring Break, I cataloged my classroom library using Google Sheets. I organized my books by the author’s last name and recorded the title, year of first publication, race and ethnicity of the main character, representation of LGBTQI+ characters, and the inclusion of characters with disabilities. I recorded 219 books that I currently own and that will be included in my future classroom library.

Of those 219 books, 10 included an Asian main character, 28 included a Black main character, 10 included an Indigenous main character, 12 included a Latinx main character, and one included a Middle Eastern main character. This accounts for 61 books or about 28% of my library. Of the total books, 86 were not marked for race either because the book did not explicitly highlight race or because I had not read the book and could not find the information online.

Other categories included queer character representation and inclusion of characters ranging in ability. 14 or 6% of the library included queer characters. Four books or 1.8% included characters that were blind, deaf, or unable to speak. 104 or 47% of the books were published in the last ten years.

## Chapter 5

### Introduction

The purpose of this action research project was to improve my teaching. I was specifically interested in how I could elicit critical thinking and discussion among my students concerning issues like race and power. This matters to me as an educator because students will be faced with an ever-increasing multicultural world. Beyond that, students will eventually be in positions of authority and capable of shaping society through their actions, decisions, and treatment of others.

Major themes that emerged from my research were self-study, expert recommendation, and student choice. In order to improve my disposition and ability to lead discussions about race and power, I need the background knowledge and practice to be prepared for those discussions. This involves seeking out books, podcasts, professional development sessions, and conferences that support the development and refinement of my professional skills. Second, it emerged that my best resources for pedagogical practices, diverse texts, and classroom management strategies were experienced professionals and experts in content areas including teachers, authors, and professors. Finally, students comprehend texts more fully and think critically, when teachers encourage student agency and autonomy in their learning process. This was clearly evident through inviting students to make choices about their texts and content.

## **Implications**

### ***Research Question 1: How can I encourage students to analyze texts through application to personal and social contexts?***

In the future, I must provide students with a base-level knowledge, encourage them to make selections of reading and writing topics that engage them, and cultivate opportunities for discussion in order to encourage critical analysis of texts. For example, by learning about neuroscience and adolescent brain development, students were able to identify socialized and biological traits in future texts. This made it easier to discuss topics like race, gender, and power.

Students also were engaged in a text if they were able to choose the text and when they had opportunities to access diverse texts. In order to provide this for my students, I plan to collect and organize additional teaching materials and texts in my Google Doc and seek out opportunities to take literature courses or participate in professional development that introduces, develops, and encourages the integration of diverse literature, narratives, and writing styles in the classroom. Once students have access to these materials, I must continue to encourage students to discuss their findings through whole-class discussions, Think-Pair-Share (TPS) , and Socratic Circles.

Lastly, I would like to use films, TV shows, and music from pop culture to diversify my class canon. In one lesson, I used the song “My Shot” by The Roots, Busta Rhymes, Joell Ortiz & Nate Ruess to teach simile. Students generally responded positively and were able to identify the similes in the song. Just like Elmore and Coleman’s study about political memes, using popular culture to teach a lesson helps students understand and retain information better (Elmore & Coleman, 2019).

***Research Question 2: How can I develop pedagogical skills to engage students in discussions about race and power?***

After reviewing my data, it became clear that the best way for me to improve my pedagogical skills relates to engaging students in discussion and critical thinking about race and power. In order to do this, I plan to seek out opportunities to hear new perspectives, read expert writing, and speak with others about what I have learned and revisit readings on culturally responsive teaching I have done during my graduate studies. I should continue to find literature that dives deeply into issues of race and power will encourage more learning on my part and solidify my understanding of my own lens.

After I have the opportunity personally to read and reflect, I plan to intentionally seek out the voices of my colleagues and peers, especially people of color who are trained on racial equity. Participating in the Racial Equity Group and meeting with mentor teachers has improved my practice in the past and will help me to further develop methods to have hard conversations with students before I teach specific topics in the classroom. With this learning, I can practice inquiry forms of discussion that help elicit critical thinking among students rather than pushing my perspective on them (Freire, 1970).

***Research Question 3: How do I develop a library that reflects critical literacy practices?***

The data revealed that I need to further develop my skills in developing a diverse classroom library. Only 28% of my library featured BIPOC characters. I would like this number to reflect the actual population of the United States. According to the Bureau of the Census (2015) projections, White people will be the demographic minority by 2044. Although, White people will likely continue to hold the majority of political power. With this in mind, I would



like at least 50% of my library to feature characters of color. The research supports that having access to these texts will elicit better discussion and critical thinking among students (Bishop, 1990; Möller, 2016; Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019).

I found certain sources on Instagram and through personal contacts that featured strong book recommendations featuring diverse characters. These sources included “Too Cool for Middle School” and “The Conscious Kid” on Instagram. Additionally, a mentor teacher.

One idea that resulted from this project would be to establish a class Instagram page. Through this page, students and the teacher could share thoughts about the books, poems, and short stories that they are reading with a focus on diverse literature. This would allow students to recommend texts to each other and peers outside of the classroom. It would also help them synthesize the texts that they are reading and analyze them in a broader context. Lastly, parents could interact with the texts that students are reading through an Instagram account.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The major strength of my study was the data I collected from my self-study. I was able to read books, access resources, and confer with others about my research multiple times throughout the study. This resulted in rich data that elicited results addressing my research questions.

During the time of my study, health regulations related to the coronavirus limited my study because the classroom setting was constantly changing. This was the main limitation of my study. This meant that my classroom setting was constantly changing. First, I was teaching students through Zoom, then we moved to a hybrid classroom model, and finally, we saw our students five days a week for a regular school day. This made it difficult to consistently offer students varied instruction. It made it especially difficult to conduct conversation or group work

activities. Additionally, if I were to do this during a time that did not feature a pandemic, I would have conducted human-subjects research in addition to my self-study. Specifically, I would have formally interviewed students and teachers in person, as well as observed classroom discussions and teacher strategies in person.

Another limitation was my ability to plan the coursework in my classroom. Because I was a student teacher, I only had a few weeks of coursework designed by me. We also have a purchased, district-adopted curriculum that we normally followed which made it difficult to plan unique content that featured texts from diverse authors.

Lastly, a major limitation to my study is my own identity as a White cis-gendered female preservice teacher. My identity and thus my lens influence the ways that I collect, analyze, and present data. I am still at the beginning of my journey in understanding racial equity and how systemic racism affects the educational system. Because of this, I have blind spots that will affect this study and I will only become aware of them with more study, exposure, and practice. In order to mediate this, I have multiple professors who are trained in racial equity look at my data and results and suggest areas for improvement. I have also continued to attend professional developments and meet with colleagues who I can run ideas by and learn from.

## **Summary**

Through this research, I have become further grounded in culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002). Offering students choice and designing a curriculum that reflects their culture and helps them become fluent in another culture is vital to this work. This involves self-study, practice, and text acquisition by the teacher. It also especially involves building relationships with students and understanding their cultural perspectives. In order to become a culturally

responsive educator, I will continue to build my classroom library with a focus on diverse texts, seek out opportunities to expand my knowledge on ethnicity and race, and provide rich opportunities for my students to access and discuss diverse texts. The ultimate goal of this would be for students to develop knowledge and skills to read the world and transform systemic injustices.

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