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## Using Culturally Relevant Mentor and Authentic Texts To Promote Socioemotional & Academic Development

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Using Culturally Relevant Mentor and Authentic Texts To  
Promote Socioemotional & Academic Development

By

Rachael Lynn Jones

A Professional Project submitted to

Western Oregon University

In Partial Fulfillment Of The Requirements For The Degree Of:

Master Of Science In Education : Literacy

Spring 2022

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

To be a responsive language arts teacher is to continuously assess the availability and variety of choice books in the classroom to support literacy development. When our students are able to read and explore topics of their own interests, educators not only foster a safe environment for students to learn about challenging topics, but also a space where educators are able to learn from their students' interests to bring into their education. This project's purpose is to identify and put into practice how language arts educators can bring students' interests into the classroom to support development in core content alongside socio-emotional skills.

Considering this project's purpose, I began to reflect on the type of content and creative critical thinking educators engage students in, and to consider the wide range of skill sets and background knowledge students bring to the classroom through their own intersectionalities. In order to best understand my students, I build a foundation of respect and compassion for the classroom environment and work hard to make the space safe to ask all questions and explore challenging topics. This allows us to both develop critical-thinking skills when discussing complicated topics and look into a wide variety of authentic texts that can be found outside of the typical K-12 academia literature.

My thinking is in line with Kittle and Gallagher (2018) who state that there is greatness in gathering around literature and poetry - where students discover the beauty they may hold, and

grapple with literature on their own terms. In other words, there is no ‘one size fits all’ for the lessons educators offer in the classroom, nor are teachers alone capable of differentiating to each individual student 30 times an hour, 6 hours a day (specifically in regards to secondary educational environments). So, by granting students the space and opportunity to explore on their own, and make decisions guided by their teachers, they are more able to influence their own skills and development through individual and personal motivations. This exploration can take many forms, for example: goals and reflections, reading journals, peer conferences, book clubs, etc.

A startling fact about student reading and engagement is that since 1999, the percentage of students in 3rd grade who reported they enjoy reading has dropped by almost a third (National Endowment of the Arts, 2007). Kittle (2013) builds on this statistic by providing examples from peers and her own classroom where the value of engaging secondary students in any kind of reading is a step in the right direction, to build their confidence and enjoyment. By building this confidence, teachers are then able to guide students to and through more complicated and often intimidating pieces of literature that many students would avoid. Students are likely to lose confidence in their skills, as “Assessment Expert Donald Reeves reminds us that “too often, educational tests, grades, and report cards are treated by teachers as autopsies when they should be viewed as physicals”” (as cited in Wormeli, 2018, 35). Students are reminded through these ‘autopsies’ of their deficiencies, and where they are lacking. In the forward of *Readicide* by Kelly Gallagher (2007), Richard Allington writes that there are both state and national reports that link together the No Child Left Behind act of 2001 to increasing reading test scores, impacting instruction to become rote with no improvement in reading achievement scores. To

counter this experience our students face in the United States education system, it is imperative for a core pillar of the classroom experience to flex with our needs as individuals to create a safe space that focuses on growth rather than to catch up on their ‘deficiencies’.

Growing up as a student with specific social emotional needs, I found comfort in the books around me; the stories provided examples for how to navigate situations, or non-examples, ways /not/ to handle a situation. This continued through college, especially in my young adult literature classes, where I found the most healing and growth in myself through some of the books that were recommended to me. Within the pages of these stories from around the world and made up worlds, I found myself growing in compassion and understanding for other points of views, struggles, and experiences. Not only has this helped me personally become a better writer by having more backgrounds to pull from, it has also led me to a place in life where I can listen with an open ear and heart to others differing from me.

This project is a continuation of my passion to expand my classroom library to find at least one book for every student; to remind students that reading is something to cherish and use as a tool when the time is right. This is a concept that I acquired in student teaching clinicals from my mentor, where we worked together to find even one book for a student to enjoy engaging with regardless if they were convinced they would never enjoy reading a book again.

In my career, it has become absolutely vital for students' socioemotional needs to be at the forefront of how I approach any content. By working together core practices from linguistically based pedagogy and socio-emotionally proactive practices enables Language Arts teachers to make the lessons provided more engaging, meaningful, and supporting differentiation to student needs. This is accomplished through:

1. A diverse classroom library, representative of world experiences and the student body.  
This includes choice texts, small group texts, and whole class texts.
2. Establishing regular reading and writing conferences with students.
3. Having routine reading check-ins with students on their enjoyment of reading an independent choice text.

This project is an accumulation of both qualitative and quantitative teaching practices that have had a deep impact in my classroom to further students' writing skills and emotional intelligence. In Chapter 3-5, I will detail how each of these segments build on each other, how to implement, and the results of implementing these strategies in a classroom. These segments can be built into another educators' program over an extended period of time, or picked for what fits another's practice best. Use what resonates with the established procedures, and reflect on how segments can improve other areas of practice.

## **Data**

There are three main segments of data being collected:

1. The check out rate of books and the genres / themes they contain.
2. The literacy skills students bring into the classroom at the start of the year, their potential growth goals, and end of year growth.
3. Self reported emotional safety levels over a period of time

### ***The check out rate of books and the genres / themes they contain***

All of my personal classroom library is checked out and in through the program Book Source. This program assesses the content areas of my library and offers suggestions to balance

topics, genres, and diversity within the library. By using this, at the end of a school year I am able to assess how many times each book was checked out over the course of the year. Book Source is a resource that has been in development since 1974, through multiple acquisitions and growth opportunities they now are a strong partner for educational staff to build on literacy education. BookSource allows teachers access to supplementary guidance on ensuring that classroom libraries are responsive and proactive to growing concerns around the world. By having the program to find new texts, and expand on diverse stories with a third party perspective and analysis, it betters my own classroom library's content and development. This prevents stagnation and falling into a routine that begins to not serve future students as effectively.

***The literacy skills students bring into the classroom.***

Student pre-existing literacy skills are assessed through the program called NoRedInk. In this program there is a diagnostic assessment that can be taken throughout the year to mark students' progress on mastering Common Core Standards based skills. At the start of the year students take the recommended assessment that focuses on core standards and include additional standards as each teacher sees fit. This assessment commonly includes questions about common grammar or spelling errors among my student body. For the 2021-22 school year, this in particular includes measuring the functional understanding of commas in various formats. This data will be collected across grades from 9-11, and is a reflective tool for my department to find gaps in our students' knowledge that educators can more specifically work on in the midst of our projects.

### ***Individual Safety Reflections***

This project will also include space for students to express their own preferences, how they felt supported, safe, or not. There is an inevitability that a classroom can not possibly be perfect for all 100+ students that walk through it in a day, but we can certainly try. The theories and the practices listed out in Chapters 2 - 4 will explain in detail how areas like classroom environment, representation, and internal motivators can increase a students' perceived safety in a classroom, all of which lead towards higher engagement in courses. By asking students for their feedback on what has worked well - or not - from their perspective, it allows me an opportunity to reflect on plans and practices that can be adjusted for the next grading period / semester / school year.

How do these pieces of data support each other? How can they add to students' developing skills? When students are fully engaged in class work, they are more likely to retain the information and skills classes are learning and practicing together (Fredricks, 2004; Marchetti, 2015; Moser, 2017; Murray, 1972). With “emotional engagement in an activity - enjoying it and, better still, finding it genuinely fascinating and exciting - [ this] increases the odds that learners will continue to pursue it over a lengthy time period” (Ormrod, 2020, 481). This longer term engagement is required in the current schooling structure of meeting with students for less than an hour on the weekdays - it can take weeks to work through a unit; maintaining engagement through a whole unit is a definite challenge.

## **Current Context - Banned Book Perspective**

In our current cultural climate, it is crucial to provide students with a diverse library that offers both representation and exploration of other experiences to support and expand their understanding of the world around them. Books, stories, and anything that has been 'othered' from the dominant culture or viewpoints have long been suppressed in an attempt to entirely stifle these stories from being shared. This has been repeated throughout history, from events like The Crusades, the Salem Witch Trials, the Holocaust, and Jim Crow in the United States (Kemp, 2015).

A prevalent way to build a community of growth and develop working relationships with community members is through developing empathetic skills. The definition of empathy is :the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner (Merriam-Webster, *Empathy definition & meaning*). These are 'soft skills' not prioritized by state and standardized assessments despite the life long impacts these skills offer. For example, by reading a text about moving to a new country and learning a new language through watching the Nickelodeon cartoon 'Spongebob Squarepants' (Kogan, 2017), even though I have never personally been through such a move I have a deeper understanding of the work and emotional toll it takes to be fully immersed in a new culture and language. These texts that provide a view into a world outside of our own, break down the negative connotations of being 'other'.

## **Mentor vs Authentic Texts : What's the difference?**

When teachers look at the content of literature taught in their classrooms, it is often a 'tried and true' text that is out of date. These texts are artifacts of past education practices that communities have continued implementing for the sake that the next generation read the same things as the previous generation. An example of this could be the practice of teaching a Shakespearean text year after year without reflecting and adjusting the curriculum to also be relevant to the world students are living in. Out of date texts are taught simply because that's the way it always has been, without a critical lens on what can be learned from it outside of tradition. This is not to say that Shakespeare is entirely empty of value in curriculum, but rather the focus should be on how students can make connections between a historic text and our current world.

By utilizing texts with relevance to students teachers have the ability to bring authentic experiences of professional writers in any given field or provide windows and mirrors (see Chapter 2), in contrast to an often disconnected analysis of traditionally taught texts. In a growing era of expanding Career and Technical Education programs, STEM programs, and a wide range of afterschool programs being offered, the proverbial doors are open for students to take on the world by whatever path they choose. Any form of writing that is not an educator-made example to study can be considered an authentic text; anything written for true expression or information communication is considered an authentic text.

Going a step deeper into writing pedagogy beyond authentic texts, a mentor text is a piece of professional writing (the authentic text) that is created *by* a professional of that given field that is then studied for a student to recreate their own (Marchetti & O'Dell, 2015). Without this reference from writing that is used outside of K-12 academia students would have a sterile

environment to learn from. When including authentic texts throughout the school year students are able to see the wide variety of genres and styles that are contained within the sphere of writing. By having a cornucopia of texts available, students have the opportunity to build transferable skills by way of higher engagement, higher self confidence, and self-reliance. These are life long skills which students need for success no matter what life path they walk down.

### **Program & Project Goals**

At Western Oregon University (WOU), in the MEd: Literacy program a key focus is on how to further develop students' capacity to read, comprehend, and create in authentic ways. These Learning Goals are outlined as: 1) Effectively apply the professional content expertise, knowledge, skills, and dispositions of their education profession. 2) Use research and evidence to develop environments that support and assess learning and their own professional practice. 3) Show commitment to and develop professional education leadership attributes. This project is a culmination of everything I've learned throughout my experiences at WOU through my linguistically influenced undergrad and equity influenced graduate program. Words are some of the most powerful tools we carry, regardless of the language spoken or signed. By working together with the power of having a classroom library, classroom relationship building, and student growth I am able to improve my practice to both grow as an educator and build my instructional designs to fit my students' specific needs and interests.

With my library as a central piece of my practice, I am able to continuously grow in my practice with my students so that I am able to both be proactive and responsive to their needs in the classroom. This allows me to develop myself and my professional knowledge through unique experience and new resources, and gives me the opportunity to use my library as an example to

share with colleagues on the power relevant texts can have no matter the content area. This project works to answer the question: How can language arts educators design and build a comprehensive library utilizing student interests that supports students in learning writing and socioemotional skills? Through this, research and applications will show how educators can build a classroom library that promotes engagement and socioemotional learning while providing both authentic and mentor texts that support writing. This project serves as a start into practically weaving together a robust and diverse library, using mentor texts for writing development, and authentic texts for emotional development. Chapter 4 can serve as a guide for other Language Arts teachers to implement in their own classrooms.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language Arts is one of the most challenging subjects to teach due to the nature of exploring what makes us human: stories. It is through these stories humans have passed on knowledge of events, language, and morals, and it is through these stories humans learn of their histories. Research suggests that a comprehensive and inclusive library that will support student interest and development of social/emotional skills should include authentic stories from around the world, this library should have a range of lexile and content topics available, student choice and interests prioritized, and should help to build a safe environment for students to explore their interests and curiosities. This project exemplifies how educators can aid students in becoming lifelong learners. By utilizing mentor texts and modern resources that are actively used in professional fields in the classroom, our students are also able to explore topics around their own interests and expand into new opportunities of engagements. Through this, educators not only foster a safe environment for students to learn about challenging topics, but also build a space where educators are able to learn from our students' interests and inquiries. Therefore, my literature review explores the following question: How can educators bring students' interests into the classroom to support development in core content and socio-emotional skills?

#### **Types of Motivations & Engagement**

When teachers engage students in the classroom, the engagement can take a number of different forms; however, each of these forms of engagement can increase a student's motivation and engagement in the classroom overall. It is more important for teachers to consider in what

ways their students are most motivated rather than questioning *if* students are motivated in the first place (Ormrod, 2020). The general impact of motivation in the classroom will include an increase in effort, energy, persistence, and cognitive processes. These forms of motivation are simplified into three forms of engagement: cognitive, behavioral, and emotional (Fredricks, et al, 2004). While Fredricks had outlined these three forms of engagement, Ormrod (2020) paraphrased each as:

- Cognitive Engagement: “learners must consciously and intentionally think about and make meaningful sense of what they’re doing and, ideally, bring higher-level thinking skills into the process” (p. 481).
- Behavioral Engagement: “visibly participating in the activity, perhaps by manipulating relevant objects or talking about the task with peers” (p. 481).
- Emotional Engagement: “in an activity - enjoying it and, better still, finding it genuinely fascinating and exciting- increase the odds that learners will continue to pursue it over a length time period” (p. 481).

Each of these areas can be incorporated into classroom activities in different intervals, and in doing so allows students to discover what areas they might find to be the most enticing. Working with students to develop metacognition about their own education is a vital skill for all to learn, (Kittle, 2013; Fredricks, et. al, 2004; Gallagher, 2018; Marchetti & Odell, 2015; Ray, 1999, 2004) where students can ask themselves: What areas am I most interested in? What keeps my attention the best? How can I work through things I know I struggle with?

One of the biggest ways to engage students in an Language Arts (LA) classroom is to provide students with texts that they find interesting and meaningful (Kittle, 2013; Miller, D., &

Anderson, J. 2011; Ray, 1999). This means finding resources that they find genuinely fascinating so they will continue to pursue them over a longer period of time, or to find resources for students to make personal connections with through their own prior emotional or academic knowledge (Ormrod, 2020). By incorporating both of these aspects of motivation into classroom materials, teachers unlock a space with students in the classroom to see deeper meanings in texts, their worldly implications, and assess how these can provide tools for future reading and writing (Kittle, 2013; Gallagher, 2018; Ray 1999, 2004; Donald Murray, 2009; 1979). When teachers are able to identify what engages and motivates their students, it allows educators to implement more effective texts in the classroom based on those motivations. This is identified in this project through the books checked out by individual students: what book(s) are most popular across the whole sample, and what topics students are silently curious about that are checked out but not talked about.

**Motivation = Safety + Self Worth; Motivation = Engagement**

Students do not come in open and ready to learn every single day. Sometimes, they are petrified into what seems comfortable in order to avoid failure. It is key to unlock and understand motivations and engagement patterns with students, so that educators have the opportunity to support students in their own passionate work. Motivation is a term seen in many learning psychology theories (Ormrod, 2020), and is often seen as one of the most important elements of educational participation. This project focuses on identifying what motivates students on a psychological level to then engage them in academic and socioemotional content in the classroom. This can only happen in an environment where there is safety in making mistakes or having value to contribute. Ormrod (2020) summarizes the need for autonomy as such,

...when environmental circumstances and events lead people to conclude that they have little involvement in determining the course of their lives, they may comply with external demands but are unlikely to have much intrinsic motivation - and thus they're unlikely to work very hard at what they're doing. Often, too, they may feel bored or depressed and have a diminished sense of self worth. (pg 493)

A student's self worth and motivation are innately tied together. Educators can see students' intrinsic motivation developing independently of these external demands (a passing grade) when students have agency in their work, research, and queries. When each of these areas are supported, scaffolded, and allowed room for growth, students are able to expand their own ability to access intrinsic (internal) motivation rather than only working by extrinsic motivation (external pressures).

Looking into the types of texts students choose from for independent reading is an insight into what could increase their individual motivations. By assessing the quantity of specific genres or topics checked out, teachers gain the first step of information needed to begin seeking supplemental literature to bring into the classroom. The practice of my library will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. It is important to note that by having a student's interests reflected in materials worked during in-class time, teachers open the workspace to utilize student interests, intrinsic motivations, and build a safety net where more questions can be explored rather than a sterile and prescriptive environment lacking intrinsic motivation.

By working in a space where students have access to structured, achievable, and meaningful learning opportunities, the next step is to breach into areas of learning that are often

uncomfortable topics to discuss but vital to understanding the human experience, the world around us, and expanding an individual's perception of the world.

### **Fair Isn't Always Equal**

The title of this section lends its name from the text *Fair Isn't Always Equal: Assessment And Grading In The Differentiated Classroom* by Wormeli. They discuss at length the varying needs of our students and applications for educators to implement based on the student body. When in the classroom, regardless of the community, the grade, or the average socio-economic status, it is impossible to tell everything our students are working through outside of the classroom. These external factors (i.e. having enough sleep and/or food, the prior knowledge they bring to any lesson) have educators constantly navigating each students' hierarchy of needs on an endless cycle. When looking to Maslov's hierarchy of needs, it is known that students need their physical safety needs met first: food, water, shelter, an absence of danger. Beyond this basic need, climbing up the pyramid sits the third tier of 'Love and Belonging' (Maslow, A.H., 1943). While it is not a teachers' primary goal to fulfill students' physical safety and emotional needs, it is a requirement for students to have these needs met before they can reach the areas of the Maslov Hierarchy for growth. With the goals to reach the levels of esteem (a desire for positive reputation, achievement, mastery, or independence) or self-actualization (realizing individual potentials) it is a prerequisite to have passed through the stages of having the physical and safety needs met. Within having a diverse library and being able to open windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for students, this allows students to explore what it could mean for them to feel loved, to feel like they belong, and to discover elements of life that they may resonate with (self actualization).

Our students have different backgrounds coming into the classroom, and educators need to be able to flex the curriculum, instruction, and topics of instruction to the needs of the student body. A more severe example of this would be the legal requirement to uphold 504s and IEPs, yet in my professional experience many of these supports can support other students who do not have an individualized support plan through a special education department.

Bringing diverse and authentic texts into a classroom library allows students to get access to more resources for learning about various cultures and individual issues to develop increased empathy skills (Atwell, 2016; Bishop, 1990; Kidd & Castano, 2013), and to hopefully find comfort and security within reading other texts that are windows or mirrors (defined below). The next step is to utilize both independent choice books and any authentic texts from other professional writers in their own appropriate fields to connect between reading and writing skills that are often isolated in the LA classroom to authentic applications that will develop transferable skills across multiple opportunities for reading and writing regardless of the register, genre, or style. When students are practicing making observations and decisions on the authentic texts they work with, having Reading and Writing conferences throughout the school year can be a strong formative assessment tool for educators, and a chance for students to practice active reflection on themselves.

Reading and Writing Conferences are an individualized meeting with students to check in on their progress, where their worries and concerns lie, where they see their own strengths, and gives the much needed one-on-one conversations to work with students (Anderson, C, 2000; Applebee & Langer, 2011; Dean, 2017; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Kittle, 2013; Miller & Angerson, 2011; Ray 2003; Stantman, D., 2005). Each conference will have a slightly different

structure dependent on the students' needs and the unit at the time; examples of these will be worked in greater detail in Chapter 3.

As described in the first chapter of Marchetti & O'Dell (2015), mentor texts have many applications that can be expanded far into students' interests and needs beyond what a singular LA teacher would be reasonably capable of in any given day. When educators develop a secure environment for students they have the ability to grow in confidence and their own ability to search for additional resources when needed. Let us explore what mentor texts are and how they can be used to meet student interests.

### **Mentor Texts**

Student-led research for mentor texts is a structured method for studying content that is relevant to a unit, subject, and standards in the classroom. For the purpose of this project and my practice, mentor texts are defined as model pieces or excerpts of writing by established professionals in a given field that can inspire students and teach them how to write through any genre or style (Marchetti & O'Dell, 2015). The purpose of bringing mentor texts into a class is to activate different forms of engagement and give students the space to develop critical inquiry skills and see writing in various professional examples. Here are examples of the forms of engagement outlined by Fredricks et. al (2004) and Ormrod (2020) in line with this project:

#### ***Cognitive Engagement:***

To bring students to continuously and intentionally making meaningful connections to a text, students need to have access to texts that foster critical thinking and making meaningful connections. If a teacher uses materials that are pre-made strictly for a teacher-led lesson it takes

away from students' time to work with authentic materials, where they can process their own connections to a text and how they could transfer that knowledge to another writing task (Murray, 1972; Paraskevas, 2021).

***Behavioral Engagement:***

Behavioral engagement requires having the time and space to work with manipulatives and/or discuss things with their peers. In the use of mentor texts, students are able to physically search for various features to a text, compare them with others, and reflect with peers on how texts are similar and different. These discussions cohabitate with cognitive engagement where students are making connections across various texts, ideas, or experiences. However, the physical act of talking with another student provides the behavioral engagement styles as well.

***Emotional Engagement:***

Emotional engagement is one of the most influential in initially grabbing students' attention, and keeping them engaged over a longer period of time. This is due to the fact that by enjoying a text, being fascinated by the contents, or generally finding the text to be exciting, increases a students' pursuit of that style/genre of texts over a longer period of time. By increasing students reading time, it provides exposure to genres, styles, new lexicon, and windows, mirrors, or sliding glass doors (see next section for definition).

When using mentor texts, students are able to explore their own interests and develop their own intrinsic motivations for their writing. Besides using mentor texts for observing how to write in a particular genre or style, these texts can also provide an expansion on emotional intelligence and identity growth through reading about stories like their own - or entirely

different. Marchetti & O'Dell (2015) display every type of engagement as well as the need for self actualization (Maslow, 1943) through the resource and practice that is using mentor texts. This continues to be shown through works of Katie Wood Ray, Kelly Gallagher, and Penny Kittle - leaders and mentors in the practice of teaching with mentor texts.

### **Diverse Library & Representation**

Bishop (1990) took the usefulness of having mentor texts to learn from academically to a deeper level, where books can also be used as 'windows, mirrors, or sliding glass doors' to learn about the world experiences around us. Learning about the world around us expands the base knowledge moving forward of worldly perception, and offers examples of how to respond / not respond to potential situations. 'Windows' are a type of story that allows readers a perspective into the life of somebody else, like looking through a window. In contrast 'mirrors' are a reflection of the reader's personal story in whatever narrative they happen to be reading. Lastly 'Sliding Glass Doors' are stories that both bridge the 'window' concept of looking into somebody else's life but also be able to relate to the story similarly to 'mirrors' (Bishop, 1990). Each of these areas provides space for students to develop empathy through experiencing as closely as they can other individuals' experiences in a personal and private environment.

This methodology is bringing representation and diversity into the books available for students to choose from, bridging together individual student needs, and academic needs. What students can gain from this is a deeper connection to empathy: representation bringing in security, safety, and affirmations; diversity bringing in worldly views from all corners of the

world, curiosity, and learning about other perspectives in life. Alongside needing books that represent students' experiences and wonderings, the variety in the forms of texts students should have access to is also vastly important. Research shows that non-traditional forms of books such as graphic novels can support language development and exercise the brain similarly to a chapter-book (Atwell, 2016). All of these together build on the concept mentioned prior, where these texts support the development of each level in Maslov's hierarchy of needs and branching into opportunities for engagement.

### **The Gap in Resources**

Through my experience it has become apparent that there is a gap between the use of mentor texts for academic goals, and using authentic texts for the socio-emotional opportunities to learn from. As defined earlier a text can be both a mentor and authentic, and the most effective type of text to study. With the development of culturally responsive pedagogy, well discussed in Dr. Khalifa's book *Culturally Responsive School Leadership* (2018), the need to maximize the time and resources in the classroom is a growing challenge. In my educational experience as a student-educator, it was often unclear on how to connect using a diverse library for independent reading and pulling together mentor texts for students to study. When it was time to put together my own classroom, I continued to experience this gap from student-teaching into my first years of teaching. Loose connections from mentors offering advice through my clinical experience reflected this gap in resources available for emerging teachers. There was no solid example to follow. I know how important each of these areas mentioned above are in theory, but there was just *something* that felt disjointed when going into practice. This project aligns these disjointed elements in my developing pedagogy.

## Chapter 3

### DESIGN & APPLICATIONS

#### **Demographics of Practice**

For the process of this study, the student sample is from a small rural school in an agricultural valley. The student body has largely known each other since Kindergarten, and the school qualifies for free breakfast and lunch for all students due to the high population of households under the poverty line. Broken into demographic groups, my students are all freshmen outside of the occasional student retaking LA 1 - mostly due to Covid-19. The ethnic population has a 67% majority identifying as White, 27% identifying as Hispanic/Latino, 4% of students identifying as Multiracial, and 1% are Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander. Notably, >95% of the student body qualifies for free / reduced lunch.

#### **Methodology of Development**

##### *Mindmapping*

When beginning the process of developing pedagogy for this professional project, I started with writing down the areas of pedagogy and practice I've learned from others previously. This was an individual reflection based on previous research and readings conducted through my undergraduate and graduate experiences. The list created contained these concepts:

- Reflecting student interests in classroom library
- Using windows & mirrors to develop safety and respect
- Prioritizing socio-emotional development

- Exploring uncomfortable topics through these windows
- Using mentor texts and authentic texts to study for writing skills
- Using data from classroom library to curate library further
- Using data from classroom library to bring in outside resources that align with their chosen interests
- Using a diverse library to reawaken a love for reading in secondary education

Chapter 2 went into detail on how each of these elements is impactful for human learning and development, and how teachers can tap into students' personal interests to increase classroom engagement. Each one of these practices are interconnected but require a clear description for student-educators on how to weave each of these together so they work in tandem rather than in isolation. This project is a culmination of each of these concepts in a Language Arts classroom, and how they are intertwining in my own practice. Finding how each practice listed above is already being used in the classroom, what areas I know already I am planning on evolving, and where there are gaps in my mental plan for my practice is the next step to make a cohesive action plan moving forward.

### ***Planning***

The first step of this project is to update the BookSouce catalog, at the start of the school year or semester mark. Make sure that all books are scanned in, and add in any new books to the catalog. I do this at the beginning of a major grading period so I can regroup on the living collection and once rosters are attained I can add in students into BookSource so book loans can be maintained. BookSource's cataloging allows for data to be processed for the account

administrator, easily identifying various categories in the library (rate of titles checked out, genre distribution in collection, suggestions for topics to bolster a diverse library collection).

BookSource does allow students to log in, browse, and check out books individually; this is not a feature I use in this practice. By having students come to me to check out books, it allows me to keep a mental list as well of who has what book. This is especially useful when a book has increased popularity and multiple students are asking for a title. Another benefit of checking books out for students is that the check out data on books is as accurate as possible. While there will be books borrowed only during in class reading time that aren't checked out, the majority will get checked out with a gentle reminder.

Next, I took time to make sure that my shelves are in order by regrouping genres and topics to their shelves. This is made easier by categorizing books with color coded dot stickers on the spine. At this time, books are in a transition phase of being dotted where I add dots when an undotted book is returned or when browsing the shelves with a moment of time on hand. It is a slower process than putting stickers on every book at once, but this also allows me time to observe what books are circulating visually before double checking on BookSource. As I am in the earlier stages of curating the library, this will aid in culling the books that are not circulating or relevant to lessons throughout the year by visually seeing what has been selected by students or to be found relevant to instruction that I inherited from prior educators.

These dots serve three major functions. 1) allows educators and students to see genres or content themes easier; 2) allows educators to sort and quickly pull titles from curated collections within the library for book recommendations or short notice book talks; 3) students who become familiar with their independent reading interests can use the dots as a visual aid in browsing a

large collection of books. In my experience, reluctant readers are often also facing a kind of analysis-paralysis by not knowing where to *start* looking for an independent reading book. These stickers give students a potential starting place to practice self reliance, and, with time, to build confidence in choosing a book of their own. Another way to get students (reluctant or avid readers) into new materials is through a book talk.

Book talks are not original to this research, and have been mentioned by other names by many other educators - Penny Kittle, Kelly Gallagher, Dr. Marie LeJeune, Amy Bowden, and Donnalynn Miller, just to name a few. These are simple yet effective, sharing cover information, opening lines, or personal reviews of a book with students as a preview. Book talks are a great way to incorporate additional materials into a lesson for extended reading options. For example, sharing books that have star-crossed-lovers during the *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare unit. This brings *Romeo and Juliet* into the modern world, showing the relevancy and patterns that stories often carry. Without these additional book talks, there would be significantly less connections between a 400 year old play and students.

I have a select number of books that I have personally selected to share with students every year that I incorporate into my lesson planning. By keeping a list of books I have read before that I know I want to share throughout the year, I am able to plan them into lessons, or I am able to pull from the shelves quickly since this is a reliable story that I can fill a minutes of class time in a meaningful way sharing about the book. The personal connections from books I have deeply enjoyed - or having changed my life - are also a tool to build on the emotional safety and security in the classroom by being vulnerable with my students. Acknowledging that even

their teachers have human feelings, problems, and silent issues builds on the safety of the room and relationship with students.

The variety of stories shared is key to supporting students from various backgrounds and life experiences, opening more windows, mirrors, or sliding glass doors to each student. Every year when I share my personal story with *I'll Give You The Sun* it's the first time I openly share that I resonate with the characters working through identities. Without fail, every year students come to me in private to thank me for sharing that story because it was either something they had never considered or accepted was a common struggle for humans their age, or that say they "feel a lot safer coming to you, thank you for opening up. It means... It means a lot." Students remind me every year that this is not supportive only to me, but to them as well. We must be human with our students, so we can all grow together. Sharing our reviews and interests in books is one of the ways we can do this.

### ***Implementation***

Simply put, these plans and recommendations in Chapter 4 will need individual interpretation in how they will work best in different classrooms. For this project, elements implemented will be introduced in small pieces throughout the unit. Reading check-ins take place approximately once a week at the end of silent reading. A Writing Conference takes place during in-class work time on a writing project. Reading Conferences can happen anywhere from the passing period when a student is asking for a book or returning a book, to bringing them suggestions when they aren't reading independently during class reading time. They even can take place similarly to writing conferences during working class time. Whole Class Book Talks happen when a book has crossed my desk that I find fascinating, when I can come up with

relevant books to the lessons, or when I have a few minutes at the end of class because a lesson ran faster than anticipated. Each of these variations can be planned for to a certain degree, and to make them the most efficient, educators need to have these ready to go on the fly when the time comes. A hundred things happen a minute, it feels like sometimes in the secondary classroom. Collecting a wealth of resources for students and inquiry practice aids in maximizing the relatively short time educators have with students.

### *Assessment*

At the start of this study, students filled out a survey via a Google Form [Appendix E] where they are asked explicitly how they feel about each of these techniques, the classroom environment, and how they feel about reading in general. Throughout the year students are asked reflective questions, especially at the end of grading periods, about what has been going well from their perspective and what hasn't been the best for them. By maintaining these semi-regular reflections, asking adjacent questions about the technique implemented remains consistent enough with the expectation for this Google Form for this project to not be anomalous. At the beginning and the end of the assessment period students will complete this Google Form, and development will be assessed through the variation in their answers.

After a four week period of utilizing the techniques more intently with cohesion in practice, students will be given the same Google Form to assess their perspective on the usefulness of each in the classroom. During these four weeks, I will simultaneously be collecting information on what book talks have been successful, what conferences had the most impact, and reflect on the data BookSource gives for End of Year data. All of these elements will be compiled into a larger reflection at the end of the school year to determine what I found to be

successful, what students found to be successful, and what elements either of us feel need adjustments. By conducting this project, I have a solidified understanding of the pedagogy and human learning theories that impact different areas of my practice - and will allow me to make more meaningful decisions about my practice the following year.

## Chapter 4

### EDUCATOR RESOURCES

For the duration of this professional project, a series of practices were implemented with more intention, attention, and reflection: Book Talks, Conferences, using Mentor and Authentic texts, and addressing individual emotional needs into activities. This chapter will include an explanation of how these practices have been implemented in my classroom. I will describe each practice, provide suggestions for lessons, suggestions for further reading, and how to implement them in your own classroom. Take what resonates with you, and build these into your own practice. Do not expect everything to work instantly or smoothly. With any other practice, it's *practice*; there will be times where it feels like nothing is working or everything is going smoothly.

#### **The Library & BookSource**

One of the key ways that I build relationships with students, which is the foundation of my classroom management, is using choice reading to find individual interests and niches for students to enjoy reading a book. This is begun through a start of the year survey [Appendix A] where students are asked a variety of questions, including but not limited to: What are your favorite hobbies?; Does your family read at home; Is there a topic you hate talking about?; Is there any information I may need to know to be a more effective teacher for you? Appendix A is geared to 7th graders at the start of the year. Adjust these questions to your own practice. Because I am not teaching at the high school level again, my questions are fairly similar, but also

have grown to include questions such as: What are your pronouns? Do you go by a different name than the roster? What are you most worried about?

Each of these questions gives insights into the relationship between students and reading, or where to begin fostering a relationship with them on their favored topics. For example, it has been my experience that students who report reading as a hobby or report that their family reads at home usually don't require help building confidence in their reading abilities: they show excitement in reading and finding new books. These students will still need guidance from time to time on next reads, or a new challenge, or even a comfort book to nurture their mental health. In contrast, students who report that no one in their families read independently are often correlated with being reluctant readers by high school as I have seen in my practice. These are now the students at the top of the list to check in with, find out more about their hobbies and interests and then books about those experiences and topics. The key is to find a book that taps into students' interests, as this functions as an internal motivator (Fredricks, et. al. 2004; Miller & Anderson, 2011). Motivation to learn more, read more, *be* more in the things they love.

Students are encouraged to read every single day, for approximately 20% of the class time they are in my classroom. Currently, I have a 54 minute class period and we read for 10 minutes at the start of class. Across the duration of the year, this start of the class reading time slowly increases to 15 minutes to challenge students' reading endurance.

There are no other rigorous academic obligations with independent reading beyond reading it during given class time. This is assessed through self-reported Reading Checks (on a Google Form) and individual reading conferences (see next section). Reading Check includes questions about the reading progress for the week, if they think they will continue to read this

book, and a short summary - a sentence or two - about the current plot point. What this allows me to do is quickly get a view of students who are reading and engaging with their story and enjoying it, and students who are not enjoying the story and who I need to prioritize to help find a book they will enjoy.

Starting each class by reading is one of my favorite management tools because students know that I have the expectation of them to be in their seats and to get settled into their books while I take attendance and then also join them for reading. It becomes expected, it becomes routine, and it becomes reliable. It can be difficult at times to calm a class down, especially coming back from lunch or anything extracurricular, but this dedicated reading time provides a predictable and calm space for students to be able to settle and then be able to access the content that I have prepared for them. The predictability allows students to not be on edge in anticipation of wondering how class is starting, supporting their need for physiological safety. An additional bonus of reading at the start of the period is being able to entirely avoid the negative experience of a teacher yelling at students to sit down and settle down for class to start.

My classroom library is organized and curated in a number of ways. To aid students in choosing a new book, my library has color dots on the spine that match a color code I have posted along the walls. This code has two jobs: one to tell students what genres or themes are present by just the spine, and the second to organize books by genre or theme on the bookshelves for ease of finding. For example, graphic novels in my library have a light blue dot on their spine and have their own shelf. A book can have multiple dots, so a graphic novel that is fantastical and has LGBTQIA+ characters has a blue, purple, and yellow dot. When working with students to find a new book that I would recommend, the dots are such a useful tool. Students can be

independent and look for a genre they know they want to read, or I can tell a student to look at the books with the yellow dots to fit their desires for their next read.

The second main way that my library is organized is through a program called BookSource. This program is a long-standing resource that has developed over decades to bring diverse and affordable books to classrooms, and in turn eventually developing a library catalog system for teachers to use. Every book that is added into the library is scanned in and added to inventory. Every student on my roster (and students who visit from other classes) has their own account that I update each year. This account allows me to check books out to students and keep track of where each book is. Currently, I do not use the feature where students can check books out themselves; I find the physical shelves are more visually appealing than the inventory search menu, but this may change as more book covers are added to BookSource's system and my library grows.

The library is my first source students see me use as a mentor text in my classroom each school year. As students work to become familiar with my classroom library, they simultaneously are working on studying the features of book covers as a genre of writing (The Book Cover Project). Students will look at the common features of book covers (titles, authors, pictures) and the pieces that make book covers unique (colors, fonts, reviews vs synopsis, etc). By looking at these features on professionally published books, students have quality mentors that they can question and be critical of in order to create their own book cover. This starts the practice of questioning a text, studying its features and organization, to finally create their best attempt at this genre. This is the first time we practice analyzing a mentor text in class together to see what we want to take inspiration from, what elements are required, and what elements are

optional. The Book Cover Project has become a quintessential part of my lesson planning that I do every single year with my students and is one of my favorite ways to get to know them.

By bringing these books into my classroom, students begin to develop the trust that is needed for gaining confidence in exploring texts together and their overall comfort in the space. If students do not feel safe, the learning process is disrupted and will not develop to its full potential (see chapter 2).

### ***Book Talks***

At the beginning of the year - and through your practice- catalogue multiple mini-synopsis and/or reviews of a variety of books from the library at hand. Be sure to pull books from as many genres and contents as possible, while remaining genuine to your own personal reading tastes. Write down a simple bulleted list of plot hooks, descriptions, or review notes to have on hand when needed. This effectively brainstorms these mini presentations educators give on a moment's notice. Knowing if a specific book will be shared by reading the first chapter, book sleeve, or by a personal review gives confidence in the presentation of a recommendation - to not feel fake, to feel genuine.

For example: every year I share the book *I'll Give You The Sun* by Jandy Nelson [Appendix D], and I know that I can always count on sharing this book with my students because it is a powerful and personal example of falling out of love with reading, falling back into love with reading, with the lesson of *even if you don't like the book you're reading, it's okay to put it down. What's most important is that you keep trying new books, because you never know when the perfect book is going to stumble into your life.*

## *The Library : Set Up & Execution*

### Organization:

- Scan all books into BookSource (or other bookkeeping system)
  - Use this program to check out books & assess the contents of your library.
- Tag spines of books by content categories and or lexile.
  - Examples for genres or themes include: yellow = LGBT+, Purple = Fantasy, Green = Nature. The actual colors can be picked intuitively, with the sticker options available to you at the time.
- Cluster shelves by content categories or by lexile scaling. My recommendation is by category / genre.

### Student Expectations:

- At the start of the period, students read for a routine amount of time independently while I take attendance and then read along with them.
  - Our class period is about 50 minutes, and I have taught another grade where we had 10 minutes of reading in a 47 minute class. Class time is very limited - it is each teachers' decision on how much class time to dedicate to independent reading.
- Each student will check a book out by the end of week 1 of school, or have a chosen book from another source, to read in class.
- Once a week students will fill out a Reading Check-In, noting the page number they are on, what title they are reading, and what's going on in the plot.

Teacher Expectations:

- A legend for dots on book spines needs to be made (preferably laminated) and hung around the bookshelves.
- Work through adding dots to the spines of as many books as you can, when you can.
  - If you have TA's I highly recommend getting them familiar with
- Establish a clear turn in system. I have a metal basket by my door for any book return to be deposited.
- Maintain checking books regularly. Every few days to once a week, depending on volume.
- Create a catalog of personal book reviews / book talk ideas. Brainstorming it ahead of time will help with being able to pull from the shelf at a moment's notice.

***The Book Cover Project : Lesson Plan***

[ Personal Lesson Plans, Appendix B ]

Lesson Title: The Book Cover Project; Unit: Start of the Year, between days 2-4

Standards: 9-10.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.; 9-10.W.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Inquiries: What elements make a book cover useful? How do you judge a book by its cover?

Starter: (we have read a children's literature book at the start of each day) Looking at the children's literature we've read this week, what common features do you see across the books? Make a list of observations together.

Instruction: Using a diagram reference to identify elements commonly used on book covers. Examine what is always used on book covers, what is used most commonly, and what is occasionally used from other texts pulled from the library. Look for books in different genres or contents, examples include: a graphic novel, a poetry book, a chapter book, an informational book.

After making a list together on what is always used, often used, and uncommon, instruct students to make a book cover of their own. This is a book that represents them, or something they care about. ( I also use this as my opportunity to discuss how to care for craft supplies in my classroom, to set the expectations.) Students will need to include at minimum a title, the author, an imagery choice, and a synopsis. Give students work time to create their book cover, with the list of requirements and/or the diagram of book cover items on the board. These can easily be displayed in the hall or around the room, too! Some students may have made a deeply personal book cover and don't want it displayed, so be sure to ask just in case before displaying anything.

### ***Recommended Reading***

- Readicide* by Kelly Gallagher (2009)
- Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers* by Penny Kittle (2015)

- *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the inner reader in every child.* By Donnalynn Miller & Anderson (2011)

## Conferences

As the year progresses, there are two conference forums that will give students a small but practical reflective practice where teachers can guide students through next steps or brainstorming ideas together: Reading conferences and Writing conferences. Each conference opens an opportunity for students to open and be honest with themselves about their progress, successes, and areas for growth. Each of these texts helped set up the base for running conferences in the classroom, and I recommend each of them wholeheartedly. Having conferences with students is not a new concept, in any way. However, a focus on collaboration rather than remediation is the biggest take away from them all.

In between the daily reading and writing practices, educators must make time with students to have one-on-one time in order to see what gaps in understanding there may be, and what opportunities for extension in content are available. By establishing a routine understanding and expectation of an informal conference with the teacher, students will see through experience that their teacher is there to *support them* (building on their need for emotional safety, allowing the further development of safety + security = motivation).

Starting conferences often looks like sitting down with a student in a space that neutralizes the authority/power dynamic. Going to a student's desk and sitting with them, or kneeling down below the desk, lessens pressure to perform in my experience. Ask students where they are at in their project/book: "Tell me about how things are going? How are you

feeling?” Based on student responses I have a series of questions and responses that I will follow up with.

***Positive About Reading, or Confidence in a Project.***

When a student establishes that they are confident in their project or they are quite pleased with their independent reading choice, I will follow up with. “Is there anything else I can do to support you? Or is uninterrupted work time going to be the best use of your time?” More often than not, I have found that students will ask for time or will have one thing in mind that they want to brainstorm together and then get back to their work. I try my best to not hinder their workflow, and let them run with their found motivations and inspirations.

***Unsure about Reading, or Unsure about Project.***

When a student hesitates, their body language shifts to more defensive stances (looking away, turning away, shoulders slouching inward). This is when educators should take their time with reluctant students. They are on the precipice of building more self confidence, and as established earlier, that self confidence is a key component of them reaching the stage of self actualization and feeling capable. I will pry gently asking students to “Tell me more about how you’re feeling. Where are you stuck?”, or in a reading conference, “What about it *have* you been enjoying so far? Or what about it do you *really* dislike?”. Their answers help me pinpoint where specifically I need to target my attention.

If a student is feeling stuck because they expect perfection from an initial draft, we can work on understanding the writing process: Practice = Progress ≠ Perfection. When a student is facing a writing block where they can not progress, I recommend skipping to the next segment in

their writing and coming back to the section they're struggling with later. If a student is truly disliking a book, we explore the library together to find a replacement, reassuring them along the way that putting a book down because you're not enjoying it isn't a failure.

### ***At A Complete Standstill.***

There will be times when students admit to being at a complete standstill with their book or their writing project, or plainly refuse to do the work because they 'can't'. When this inevitably happens, the first and most important thing is to reassure students that they are not a failure. As their educator, their lower Maslowvian needs must be met before we can reach stages of growth. Comfort and encouragement are conveyed in expressions such as, "It's okay if you're stuck. It happens to all of us. It happens to me too. It's totally normal. The most important thing is that we don't give up." Earlier in the year I will give a book talk on a few different books that have gotten me out of reading ruts where I just can't read - and share the importance of not giving up because you never know when the perfect book will walk into your life. I give an example of this in my personal anecdote in Chapter 3.

When a student is at a complete standstill on a project, I sit with them and begin with asking them to tell me everything they can about where they are at. This helps students identify their progress, and often starts a mutual conversation brainstorming together. By working together to think of an idea that catches their attention, and to identify a small step towards the end goal. Giving students a small and achievable goal for the period also brings students a sense of productivity that can combat the anxiety of feeling like they're making no progress. Examples include trying out a new book, using voice-to-text in Google Docs, making an outline or mind map, etc. Anything that the student who is feeling down can accomplish in a smaller amount of

time gives the satisfaction of marking off something from their to-do-list, and reminds students that they are *capable*.

### **Conferences: Set Up & Execution**

Student Expectations:

1. When the teacher comes around or calls them to an area of the classroom, bring themselves and anything that is relevant to the assignment. This is usually their chromebook, journal, or reading book.
2. Honesty is expected. "I can't help you if you don't help me understand where you are at. Teaching is a two way street, I can't do everything for you."

Teacher Expectations:

1. Get a notebook you enjoy writing in. A simple spiral to a fancy journal - it doesn't matter. It's important to enjoy using the book, however, so you are more apt to remember using it for taking notes.
2. Decide between making a page for each student, or working in the book chronologically (starting from page one writing notes on each student as I meet with them). I have tried both and lean towards chronological order but there is merit to having everything in alphabetical order or by class periods.

Designating work time to cohabitate with conference time is most beneficial due to the flexibility the work time offers for both students and educators. I will often host writing conferences by volunteers first to get them as much aid as possible to let them flourish in working

independently. Then work through the rosters one by one, giving advice and brainstorming as each student needs.

3. Establish with students from the beginning that these conferences are a way for me to check in with them individually, give more individualized advice, and make sure I can get around to everyone. Low pressure, just honesty.
4. When meeting with a student, note down what they're reading, what they've been enjoying or avoiding. Anything you may need to come to later to answer any questions or needs they have. My notes are often messy but list out each of their interests I've learned about, books they enjoy, and I will put a large star next to their name if they need a new book for the next class period. Similar to annotating, this will be a personal note style [Appendix C] that works with you.
5. At the end of conferences, reassure students that they have an achievable step to take. Often I write down the next steps on a sticky note to keep. Then I usually ask "If this feels like enough to work with" or "Do you feel comfortable getting started on your own".

***Recommended Reading:***

- Write Beside Them: Risk, Voice, and Clarity in High School Writing* by Penny Kittle
- Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers* by Penny Kittle
- The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller

- *Shades of Meaning: Comprehension and Interpretation in Middle School* by Donna Santman

## **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Diversity & Representation**

### ***Discussion***

Content with visual aids in partnership with a range of vernacular lexile (every day vocabulary) provides students a platform to see new vocabulary in both plot structure and visual context. In my experience, graphic novels or longer children's literature are great to lean on when a student who is experiencing reading fatigue can still engage with the text while also consuming the imagery (Applebee & Lsnger, 2011; Gallagher & Kittle, 2018; Gordon & Ya-Ling 2008; Korgon, 2017; Marchetti & O'Dell, 2015; Miller & Anderson, 2011; NEA, 2017; Premont, et al, 2017; Wormeli, 2018). Using graphic novels is a less stressful bridge to bring students to, in the goal of bringing them to a text they engage with.

Research has also shown that as long as students are engaged in regular reading, regardless of whether it is a graphic novel or chapter book, it provides students with just as many benefits (Atwell, 2016). Daily reading (about 20 minutes a day) exercises the brain to receive information more efficiently in most areas of academia.

The extension to the library with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is to create a collection of news articles, personal narratives, podcasts - any media you can think of - that can also be used for studying as a mentor text. While Marchetti & O'Dell (2015) recommend giving students the time and space to search for their own texts, as the act of searching for mentors is a strong tool for transfer of skill, for students who are struggling or need an ounce more of

guidance having a smaller selection can potentially help reduce their analysis paralysis and make progress. When curating a collection of smaller texts to use as mentors, the same areas taken into consideration for the independent reading collection can be taken in here: what kinds of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors could these provide? How could these be relevant to professions/careers after high school? Does this text follow a format standard or is it unique? What writing skills can be learned from this? On top of this, ask what emotional benefits there may be: is this a challenging perspective? Who does this support or challenge? What kind of debriefing will students need? Similar to having book talks at the ready, just in case, these can serve as a net of safety for the educator in a time of need.

Curating this secondary collection is done best by keeping a figurative eye out for texts on the day-to-day. Here is a list of genre/format examples that I have put together from my own experience:

- NPR Stories / StoryCorp
- NewsELA weekly articles (used to practice annotating as well)
- Journalist reports (local or national news)
- Obituaries
- Recipes
- Podcasts
- Event Invitations

In her lectures, Cornelia Paraskevas notes this as ‘bottom feeding’, looking *for* the overlooked everyday-type texts. Each of these items have their own organization, their own information to

share, but also are frequently found in multiple areas of lives. Take the example of studying a recipe, this can be useful in a multitude of ways:

- Teaching students how to inquire and observe a text and its structure.
- Morphing a text normally associated with food into something unique like a summary of a character or personality trait.
- Working through the process of what makes quality instructions to follow.
- Bringing a helpful life skill closer to students who may not have the opportunity to practice recipes at home, making the format more familiar even the slightest bit to increase their readerly and writerly confidence.

All of these things are possible from the study of a single recipe in the classroom. Each of these builds together on using an authentic text to bring together socio-emotional and economical gaps, while providing students with a mentor to practice transferable skills in writing through inquiry.

### ***Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Set Up & Execution***

Once your library is settled, and you've established a routine of meeting with students regularly, the last step to bringing mentors for emotional and writing development together is to bring smaller diverse texts to the whole class or small group instruction. There are a few ways that this can be done, do note that this list is not extensive: Current Event Articles, Special Topic Articles & Publications, Documentaries & Video Diaries.

**Current Event Articles.** Like mentioned above, using current event articles is a great way to break up the expected texts in a lesson and to familiarize students with informational texts in regular and smaller doses. Using a site that provides differentiation like NewsELA.com is a

great tool for bringing smaller texts into the classroom to practice comprehension and analysis skills, while also having differentiated instruction by lexile levels. These can be used occasionally for big events or special occasions, or also a regularly scheduled assignment where students are assigned a reading on Monday and need to come to class on Friday ready to discuss the analysis questions and turn in their annotation practices. These regular articles allow students to reach beyond the events of their social spheres and read about the world around them. As established by Bishop (1990) and Kidd & Casanto (2013), this aids in building sympathetic abilities in students, as well as provides another opportunity for windows, mirrors, or sliding glass doors.

**Special Topic Articles & Publications.** Most often, these articles are the ones that come up when there is a need in the student body to discuss a particular topic in a safe capacity. These needs can range from a death in the community, to a natural disaster, or anything that disrupts a significant amount of the student body in a meaningful way. There is no specific identifier that I have found in my practice to know when special topics or resources are needed, but a common factor is seeing students in distress. This has happened most often in my practice by racial disparities or general unawareness of the consequences of actions. How I have addressed these in the classroom include short stories, poems, or autobiography type accounts where students have access to an intimate window, mirror, or door into another's perspective. These significant events are times where students need the reassurance of their security, their safety, and how to move forward.

**Documentaries & Video Diaries.** Connecting back to the concept of adding visuals helps increase engagement (Atwell, 2016), it does not have to be exclusive to graphic novels.

For example having a documentary is a strong way to tie in real humans into the stories and experiences being shared. These also provide another genre of texts that students could study to create their own script and video. An example of this from my own practice would be when my class was reading the text *Refugee* by Alan Gratz together, it was paired with a mini documentary series by Real Stories. From my students on this documentary, they expressed how this helped them see the reality of the novel we were reading, and *care* for their story. This pairing of text to documentary is now a favorite pairing of mine, where students are exposed to more genres, formats, and stories.

***Recommended Reading:***

- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors. *Perspective: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3).
- Kemp, G. (Eds.). (2015). *Censorship Moments: Reading Texts in the History of Censorship and Freedom of Expression (Textual Moments in the History of Political Thought)*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
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- Wormeli, R. (2018). *Fair isn't always equal: assessment and grading in the differentiated classroom*. Stenhouse Publishers.

## Chapter 5

### SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

As educators in a pandemic and post-pandemic world, addressing the physical and social emotional needs of our students has become more vital than ever before in the classroom. Educators have to ensure that our students have not only the technical writing and reading skills to work in any field, but also to ensure that our students have tools to navigate any number of interpersonal situations in relationships. Teachers know that they cannot predict the future and tell for certain which student is going to be working in which fields or which jobs, especially considering many jobs students will have don't exist right now. However, teachers have the privilege and the opportunity to help our students expand their tool belt for being self confident, building deeper relationships with expanded sympathetic and empathetic abilities, and leaving the classroom with the ability to ask questions about an unfamiliar text in a meaningful way.

It is evident across multiple discourse circles that there are common areas that are beneficial when applied to classroom practices, from using mentor texts for linguistic study to having books that align with student body populations. When bringing these two areas together, they allow both sides of the pedagogical practice to grow from each other. This gap that I have begun to build with the matrix frame from this project is what has built on my professional goals and the MEd's program goals of developing my professional practice, to develop my classroom environment, and to expand on content expertise. The foundational web this project came to, brought me a deeper understanding of learning theories, and what I am passionate about in my

own practice. Just like engaging in my students' interests and motivations, this project breached into my own.

By implementing each of these techniques and practices with deeper intention and documentation, I am able to make more intentional and mindful decisions for my students to engage in our class. When supporting their emotional needs first, students' safety and validation are able to support students reaching for independence and self actualization. Without that, my students would not be able to openly communicate and express their needs, concerns, and areas they are struggling with.

Coming to the conclusion of my Masters' degree at Western Oregon University, this Professional Project has allowed me to formally assess practices that were learned and put in place through my preparation program. As this project stems from a need I found in my young practice, the practices put in place grant educators to approach independent reading recommendations with greater intention, insight, and internal motivations of our students. Growing through this project has brought together a matrix of materials and how they can be built upon in multiple different lenses of study.

Specifically looking at book talks, there was a significant increase in students checking out independent books. Looking at the end of year data of books checked out, nearly 40% of the books checked out I had given a book talk on through the year. Without these book talks, it is possible that these books would not have ended up in the hands of my students.

Teachers have an insurmountable job, that is not new. These are actionable resources that can be applied to any LA classroom and this can have meaningful implications for all areas of a student's growth. By opening the doors to bring in various resources, stories, identities educators

also are there to support our students as they go through the harrowing task of discovering themselves.

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Wormeli, R. (2018). *Fair isn't always equal: assessment and grading in the differentiated classroom*. Stenhouse Publishers.

# Appendix

## Appendix A - Student Feedback Google Form

At the start of the year, how did you feel about reading \*

	I hated it	I didn't care for it	It's okay	I like it	I love to read
How did you feel about reading?	<input type="radio"/>				

Tell me what has been the most helpful for you this year. \*

	I don't care for these at all 😞	They're alright I guess	They're pretty good	They're very helpful	I NEED more
Book Talks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading Conferences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing Conferences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individual Work Time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading Check Ins	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Genre dots on books	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Why do you think the elements you chose were so helpful or unhelpful? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Do you feel safe in Ms. Jones' Room? Why or why not? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Is there anything else you'd like me to know? \*

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**Submit** [Clear form](#)

## Appendix B - Start of the Year Student Survey

<h1>Student Survey</h1>		Three words that describe you:	Your favorite show?
		1.	
Name:		2.	Your top 5 favorite songs! 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
What is your favorite subject in school?		3.	
Your favorite holiday?	What do you want to be when you grow up?		
Your favorite animal:	Your favorite sports:		
Your closest friends:	A random fact about you:	What are you looking forward to in this school year?	
Your favorite movies	Your favorite books	What makes a good teacher?	
	Your birthday		
<p>Use the back of this paper to draw a picture or write a note to Ms. J. You can write and questions you have too.</p>			

## Appendix C - Personal anecdote

In my fourth year of college, the year before my student teaching, I was taking a young adult literature class where we learned many different activities and ways to utilize multiple genres and themes of books throughout units of study. In this class we had the assignment to read one book a week from a shortlist of themed books or genre typed books for that week. I grew to trust this professor deeply over the course, and still consider them a strong mentor in my life, so when they recommended the book *I'll Give You The Sun* By Jandy Nelson I trusted them wholeheartedly. I didn't know what to expect but it was new that this book carried themes of art, questioning sexuality, and familial struggles. It piqued my interest, so I gave it a try.

What I did not anticipate however, was the personal struggle in this book feeling like a warm hug. I did not realize how angry I felt about events happening in my own personal life until I was reading about characters going through similar situations. They were asking the same questions I was about myself and my family. It was so enlightening to see in descriptions how I was feeling that previously I did not know how to describe. This book helped me realize so much about how I was feeling in these familial issues that I was experiencing. I realized that I wasn't alone. If the author was able to write this story then clearly I wasn't an anomaly experiencing what was going on. I wasn't the only one who felt this; I had another classmate who was also dealing with similar family issues and the two of us bonded over the fact that this book caught us off-guard and was so supportive that it helped us feel like we belonged, that our feelings were valid, that we weren't alone.

This is a book I now recommend to my students every year, I have multiple copies of it because multiple students will ask for it at a time, and it is a book in my library that I use as an example to encourage students to not give up if they don't like a book so they don't stop reading.

I encourage them if they are not interested in an independent reading text that they find something new, because you never know when you're going to come across a book but it's going to be a warm hug for you that you never knew you needed.

By bringing this book into my life my professor at the time was able to engage me in a way with the text and in literature analysis that I would not have been able to achieve otherwise. We did various activities where we were using this as a mentor text attempting our own versions of writing techniques I've only seen in this book, and I can tell from my own personal experience I would not have tried as hard if this book had not meant so much to me personally.

## Appendix D - Book Cover Lesson Plans

2021-2022  
Ms. Jones



09/09/2021 - 09/09/2021

Thursday 09/09/2021

School Day 3

LA 19:51am - 3:15pm

Library Exploration & Book Covers

SOY SOY

### Standards

**5** Students understand that they are producers of information.

**1** Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works

**3** Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

**9-10.W.10** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

### Essential Question

What elements make a book cover useful?

How do you judge a book by its cover?

### Lesson / Instruction

Starter: Looking at the children's books we've read, what common features do they have?

Instruction: Book Cover summary and overview of common features.

Activity: Book Cover Project - create a book cover that represents YOU

Exit: Book Talk : The Tea Dragon Society

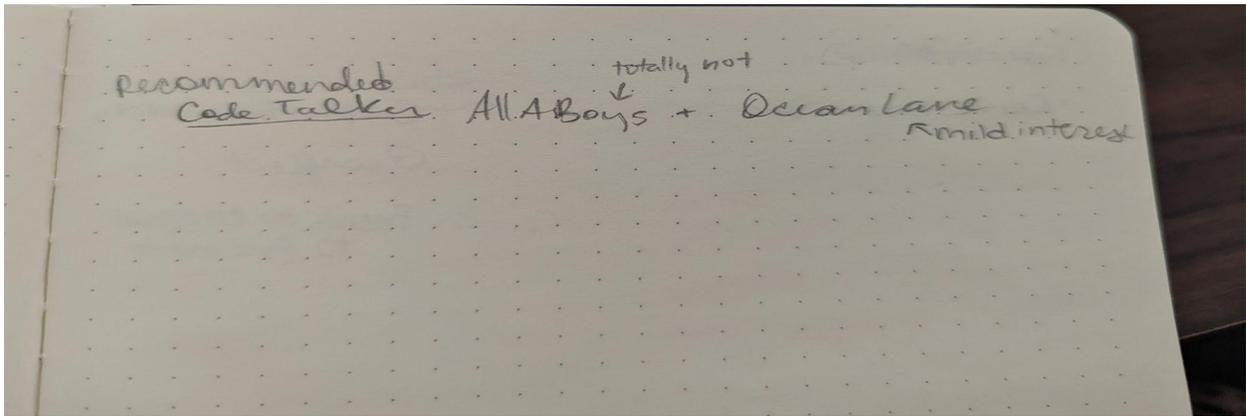
### Differentiation / Accommodations

Frame of common elements

Outline of elements to fill in

Visual & Verbal instruction

## Appendix E - Reading Conference Notes



Description:

Recommended

Code Talker (tried this one)    All Boys (totally not)    Ocean Lane (mild interest)

