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Kirsten Toscano
St. John Fisher College

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Using Young Adult Literature to Increase Student Success and Teach Multiculturalism

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Using Young Adult Literature to
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By

Kirsten Toscano

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Dr. Joellen Maples

School of Arts and Sciences

St. John Fisher College

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Abstract

This research study aimed to determine student and teacher perceptions of young adult literature and its uses in multicultural teaching. It has been determined how young adult literature impacts student learning. Data was collected through interviews, surveys, assessments, and library records. Based on the results from this study, it is proclaimed that students respond positively to the content of young adult literature texts. Young adult literature can be used for multicultural teaching and increased student success in reading and comprehension.

Using Young Adult Literature to Increase Student Success and Teach Multiculturalism

There is a considerable difference in the content and material of texts that most adolescent students are reading as part their curriculums in schools and the texts that they are reading of their choosing. Most teachers feel it is important to stay with traditional works from the literary canon when creating a curriculum. However, these texts are difficult for students to relate to and therefore engage in meaningful and purposeful reading of. One way to create interest in reading with adolescent students is with the use of young adult literature.

As a high school English teacher, I have clearly seen this division between the texts used in schools and the types of works that students are genuinely interested in reading. Many teachers are looking for ways to engage their students in the reading and classroom activities. A way to encourage students to interact with the material is through literature that mirrors their lives and what is important to them. Young adult literature focuses on the age range of students in high school and includes characters and plot lines similar to experiences of adolescent readers. Students need literature that is relatable to their lives to feel valued in the classroom. The use of young adult literature would also create a classroom environment that represents different race, religion, and social “norms”.

Many high school English teachers would find it difficult to adopt young adult literature in the classroom because of the perceptions of its literary value. Canonical texts are believed to be the only ones of literary merit and therefore the only works used in most curriculums. The use of young adult literature would certainly be a drastic change for many teachers but a major benefit for students. Students would benefit significantly from the use of culturally relevant literature in their classrooms. These types of work would encourage racial and social justice as a focus of instruction. Through the incorporation of young adult literature

teachers will be able to transform their classrooms for the benefit of their students. Although canonical texts appear to fit the traditional or norm, there are far more benefits to young adult literature. Teachers that hope to promote social and racial justice through culturally relevant teaching can do so through the use of young adult literature.

The purpose of this study was to determine the perception of young adult literature by students and teachers and its uses in multicultural teaching. Research has shown that there are varied opinions of young adult literature and therefore I used several sources of data throughout my research. Through field notes, interviews, student surveys, assessment grades, and library records, it was proven that students enjoy reading and are more successful when tested on young adult literature. Based on these findings, there are multiple implications for teachers when creating reading curriculums for students with the inclusion of young adult literature.

Theoretical Framework

Canonical texts are rigid in the societies and values they portray. Young adult literature offers a wider basis of groups and individuals that can understand and connect to the material. The major tenet of socio-cultural theory is that individuals learn through participation. Vygotsky (1986) described learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment. This participation should be authentic, meaningful, and promoting of justice in both race and social areas. This level of participation and engagement can be achieved through the use of young adult literature.

It is essential for teachers to know and incorporate students and focus instruction around culturally relevant texts. Using young adult literature for instruction allows students to read and

write about topics relating to social and racial justice. Culture and location has a major implication on the way a student gains literacy skills. For some students there are major gaps between their primary discourse and the discourse they are expected to have upon entering formal schooling. For some, this difference could be due to a complete language difference between home and school. Goodman (2001) asserts that children discover and gain literacy through acquisition and exposure to a literate society. Through interacting with other individuals in the literate society around them they gain knowledge an understanding of what literacy is about and its purpose. Children come to understand three main topics in terms of literacy and the written language. These main principles are semiotic principals, functional principles, and linguistic principles. Semiotic principals deal with the way an individual constructs meaning from the written and oral language. This learning is an area in which children come to understand the meaning of both, and the way that operates in relation to one another. Functional principles focus on the way a child discovers purpose in the written language. Children explore this written language at home and also at school. Through the guidance and instruction of teachers and parents, children learn the structure and technical aspects of writing. Finally, the linguistic principles are the understanding a child has of the organization of the written word. All three of these areas function simultaneously. If a child is able to master these skills as a whole, he/she would be considered to have proficient literacy skills.

One area that has become increasingly important in the classroom is culturally relevant teaching and critical race theory. Critical race theory can be defined as “a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses” (Yasso 2005, p. 70). The use of young adult literature with students is a powerful example of culturally relevant teaching. Culturally relevant teaching

offers full access to all students of various cultures. It is a pedagogy that encourages teachers to incorporate all students' cultural references into the learning environment. Culturally relevant teaching places the value on the students and their unique backgrounds. Teachers who know and understand their students will be able to create a classroom experience that allows students to feel comfortable and confident in who they are and where they come from. These students will then be able to connect to the learning experience and share with the class their individual knowledge. Yasso (2005) states that this knowledge demonstrated from students also applies to "visual art, music, or poetry". This shows that there is value in material beyond just traditional or canonical texts. Culturally relevant teaching encourages students to be an active member in their learning through making decisions and interacting with peers. Students in this type of classroom are confident in their abilities as well as their culture. The wide range of topics and backgrounds included in young adult literature allows for students to engage in this type of reading and writing. Culturally relevant teaching creates a learning environment for students that all teachers should strive towards.

An area that is important while teaching with racial and social justice in the classroom through the use of young adult literature is the knowledge base of one's students. A way of examining this would be through critical race theory. Yasso (2005) introduces the idea of Communities of Color. Each community is one with individual strengths which contradicts the popular belief that white middle class is the "norm". This "norm" is often the central focus and discussion of canonical literature being used in classrooms today. This theory allows for People of Color to use their strengths and assets to transform the education system. Through encouraging the education system to evolve, Yasso (2005) believes that schools will begin to serve a different and larger purpose. Schools will be able to serve as a venue for examining

social and racial justice. Critical race theory also encompasses a larger definition of cultural capital. One important area that can influence teachers and education is linguistic capital. This refers to the skills learned through communication with an individual's community and family. A teacher must recognize that this linguistic capital is unique to each individual and therefore many forms of communication and interaction should be implemented in the classroom. Due to the wide range of young adult literature, teachers could instruct using texts that encompass and include the cultural and specifically linguistic capital of their students. Through using critical race theory as an avenue to expand education, students' individual and communal strengths will become valued and appreciated. This understanding would lead to a classroom which promotes discussions and activities focused on social and racial justice.

According to Mays (2008) a teacher must create an environment that supports and engages with the language and cultures of all children. Mays (2008) feels that a teacher must create an environment that supports and engages with the languages and cultures of all students. This type of classroom would allow for equal educational opportunities for children whose primary Discourse does not match the language present and necessary for success in education. This scenario for students is often the case with most traditional works of literature from the literary canon. Mays' (2008) assertions that nurturing language development and engagement in the classroom is supportive of socio-cultural theory. This type of learning environment could be successfully completed through the use of young adult literature with students.

Research Question

Given that teachers should use literature that promotes racial and social justice, this action research project asks, can young adult literature be used in connection to culturally

relevant teaching? Furthermore, what are English teachers' and students' perceptions and attitudes of the diverse content discussed in young adult literature?

Literature Review

The following literature review explores the research regarding many facets of young adult literature and its inclusion in the classroom. The first section addresses both teacher and students' perception of young adult literature and the discrepancy between what each groups believes. It also examines the reasons that young adult literature is seen as motivation for students as well as a taboo for adolescent readers. The second section explores one use that teachers have found when using young adult literature. This type of work has the ability to teach students the idea of empathy and provides them with an opportunity to examine others who are different from themselves. Lastly, the third section of this review addresses the types of societal images portrayed in various young adult literatures. When reading teen literature, readers are exposed to cultures, religions, and situations similar to their own. However, they are often times also shown characters and societies different to their own experiences. The research indicates that there are many different attitudes toward the area of young adult literature. It is a topic that students, parents, and teachers range from seeing as positive and beneficial in the classroom to extremely negative and placing restrictions on its teaching.

Teacher and Student Opinion on YAL

In regards to the category of young adult literature and its value, there are generally differing opinions between students and their teachers. In most secondary classrooms, students are expected to become independent readers, yet they are afforded very few opportunities to explore their own interests especially in the type of literature that they are choosing to read (Ivey

& Broaddus, 2001). Students' reading is dictated by classroom curriculum and beyond that what the school and administrators decide is appropriate. When students are offered the option of choice it is restricted by what is available in the classroom library. However, this choice is all too often not provided for students because of teachers' specific ideas on what quality literature consists of. Teachers often define quality as content from the library by award winning authors with appropriate educational content (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner 1999). For many teachers, this library often does not include the category of young adult literature.

Teachers fear the pressure of censorship when considering the use of young adult literature. One teacher in Gibbons, Dail and Stallworth's (2006) study stated that "I don't use any works other than the classics because they just seem to have less objectionable subject matter as far as parents are concerned" (p. 484). This statement demonstrates that teachers feel as though they are unable to choose the literature included in their classrooms. Young adult literature does not have a place in their curriculum because it could possibly be questioned by parents or administrators. These teachers will continue to teach the classics from a narrow list of prescribed literature because they feel it is safer than the negative outcomes. Teachers feel that "adding multicultural literature is sometimes just not worth the effort because parents will always win the argument" (p. 484). Groenke and Maples (2008) agree in stating that it is not advised for teachers to attempt to incorporate young adult literature and critical literacy in schools where teachers are dismissed for encouraging students to explore controversial topics. However, some teachers feel silenced and simply unable to include young adult literature because fear prevents them from creating change (Stallworth et al., 2006).

There are some teachers that do recognize the positive aspects of young adult literature. Stallworth et al. (2006) study found some teachers use young adult literature to teach multiple

literacy concepts. Teachers who advocate for this literature feel that in order to motivate students to read and improve their literacy skills the reading must be relevant. Young adult literature can offer students the opportunity to read literature that presents a variety of time periods, family formations, geographical settings, and genres (Brooks, 2006). Other teachers in the Gibbons et al. (2006) study commented on their pairing of young adult literature with classic novels. Teaching canonical texts with young adult literature bridges the distance between school literacy and students' lives. Freedman and Johnson (2001) agree with the notion that young adult literature provides students with access to insight and access to others outside their families, friends, neighbors, classmates, and teachers. The teachers also spoke about choosing age appropriate texts to enhance relevance (Gibbons et al., 2006). This attitude demonstrates that some teachers do believe young adult literature holds relevance for student readers.

If students are engaged with a work, they will participate in discussion, introspective writing and further individual reading. Some educators feel that young adult literature lacks literary merit and therefore will lack meaningful work from students. In Gibbons et al., (2006) study teachers indicated that young adult literature will not help students meet goals and objectives because it lacks sophistication and qualities of canonical texts. This view that only canonical texts have purpose is common with many secondary English teachers. In Kuo and Alsup's (2010) study, the teachers were drawing on their own past schooling experiences, which were predominantly white and middle class with a profound knowledge about literature in the European canon. These teachers hold on to the belief that only books written from a Western perspective are worthy of study (Kuo and Alsup, 2010). However, young adult literature has grown to include many different genres such as poetry, memories, informational texts, and science fiction and fantasy (Gibbons et al., 2006). Young adult literature provides an excellent

tool for teaching students literary concepts with engaging texts that are also written at appropriate age level (Gibbons et al., 2006). Students will find this engaging because young adult literature is written to include characters with which adolescent students can identify with based on issues relevant to their age, conflicts, and world perceptions (Gibbons et al., 2006). This type of literature is also expanding to include aspects of our diverse society with different ethnic and cultural groups.

Some adolescents have turned their back on school literatures and because of this disinterest they are often labeled struggling readers in the classroom (Alvermann, 2001). Young adult literature helps struggling and reluctant readers build literary skills while additionally being engaged with the material. It provides students with an opportunity to read for enjoyment which then enforces reading and literacy skills in the classroom. Young adult literature is much more likely to motivate adolescent readers versus the canonical texts (Gibbons et al., 2006). Despite the fact that young adult literature reflects the age and lives of adolescents, it is often excluded from classroom curriculum because of parent groups, religious groups, and political groups (Freedman & Johnson, 2001).

Across the board, there are many differing opinions of young adult literature from students, teachers, librarians, and parents. Some view this type of literature as positive and engaging, while most fear the content and whether or not it is appropriate for adolescent readers. Although young adult literature does appeal to teen readers they sometimes view the content of the topic similar to the adults around them. Many adults have an uncertain understanding of what fits in to the category of young adult literature. This ambiguity is what leads many of these adults to raise concern in regards to exposing students to young adult literature. Many critics of controversial young adult literature claim that these novels offer reassurance that adolescents'

lives are accepted or they offer too much insight into ways of life that differ from the reader. Enriquez (2006) collected data through double-entry journals and audiotape recordings of classroom discussion to examine how students and teachers felt toward young adult literature. These observations showed that both teacher and students acknowledged that certain topics are too controversial to be accepted in a school curriculum. They identified that these topics are too adult in the material they included (Enriquez). However, Koss (2009) believes that teens are aware of issues such as sexual advancement, teen pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse at an earlier age. Students are aware of which topics were problematic as well as the arguments that could be presented with including them in the school curriculum. Although students admit that the content of young adult literature may not be appropriate seventy percent of students in the study expressed that they would still read the work if the plot description was appealing. What matters most to these adolescent readers is the story and the way it is told (Enriquez, 2006).

In a study completed by Ivey and Broaddus (2001) it was evidenced that there are differences in the requirements of many school curriculums and the interests of reading expressed by students. Generally, the responses of the students related more to their own personal interest which included popular magazines, books about movies, and books from a series. In a survey of 1,700 sixth-grade students Ivey and Broaddus (2001) asked students to respond to questions about what they valued in reading and what motivates them to read. The study reported that there is often a mismatch between what students want to learn and the content requirements of schools' curriculum. Jacobs (2006) agrees that this is significantly true in regards to male students whose attitude toward reading declines between the ages of seven and sixteen. The content of the curriculum was drastically different from the type of literature that students were reading and the literature that they found to be valuable. This demonstrates that

the needs of students are important to be met because they are beginning to explore possible identities and a range of personal interests about the world (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001).

Within Ivey and Broaddus's (2001) study, 42% responded that they were motivated to read by finding good materials and having choice in the selection. This personal response was closely connected with positive experiences when reading. Many of these students discussed that they enjoyed books with suspense and humor with which they had a personal connection. Students also find interest in young adult literature that is scary or horror, comics and cartoons, and sports (Worthy et al., 1999). Because of these many of the students in the study also reported that their own classroom library was not a place to find interesting texts. Of the students surveyed, 61% responded that the public library was the most popular location for finding books of their interest level (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). Worthy et al. (1999) study similarly showed that 56% of students typically find their reading materials through purchasing sources such as stores, book clubs, and subscriptions. They also reported that classroom libraries were last on the list of places student would locate relevant young adult literature (Worthy et al., 1999). Because of this discrepancy between teachers' opinions about young adult literature and students desire to read this type of literature, the classroom library does not meet the needs of students.

Although young adult literature appears to be a great motivator there are some areas that students struggle with. Literacy researchers have claimed that today's adolescents are good multimodal readers of nonlinear texts (Groenke & Youngquist, 2011). Teachers that do find young adult literature to be an excellent choice for the classroom often choose non-linear texts. They feel these texts will be engaging and meet the needs of the way students read and gather information in the 21st century. In the study performed by Groenke and Youngquist, students

were asked to read and respond to Walter Dean Myer's (2001) *Monster*. The study showed that students were actually often confused by the format and style of the novel. The students struggled to make sense of the novel because they were unable to figure out how to read the text (Groenke & Youngquist). The students' frustration and misunderstanding was evidenced through students' participation in five online chat sessions. Most of the students were having difficulty in the processing of nonlinear narrative techniques. This study concluded that adolescents are somewhat proficient in reading nonlinear young adult fiction. However, they need the assistance of a teacher to help them navigate the format and then the issues in the text (Groenke & Youngquist). Alternatively, adolescents that responded to Koss's (2009) study found young adult literature to be intriguing and a good change from traditional lineal text format. Again, the differing opinions of teachers and students in regards to young adult literature are evident. Overall, these adolescents need teachers to show them how to navigate and understand the questions of character identity in the 21st-century textual works.

Many people feel that adolescents' motivation for reading has reduced due to popular technologies such as televisions, computers, mobile phones, and other electronic distractions. However, a study completed by Hopper (2005) showed that 61% of students surveyed claimed to be reading a book at home (p. 115). Many of the books that students expressed as the titles of books that they were reading included popular movies at the time. This survey indicated that students' specific interest was in a genre based on books about magic and fantasy (Hopper). This interest in this specific type of genre show the adolescent's desire to escape or even experience and role play with other identities besides their own. Worthy et al. (1999) agree that students' attitude toward reading is not as negative as other research has shown. Many students find interest in reading issue based young adult literature. Students listed in the study completed

by Hopper (2005) that they enjoyed books with the ups and downs of teenage and family life. There is a growing trend of teen age books dealing with themes of prejudice, bullying, racism, lives of refugees, sex, and appearance. Many of the students listed enjoying *A Child Called It* which deals graphically with child abuse (Hopper). Such reading selections relate to the lives of adolescents and therefore increase motivation to read. Adolescents also expressed that their motivation for reading young adult literature came from previous knowledge of an author, their style, or reading a book as part of a series (Hopper). Recommendations also encouraged adolescents to read. They are significantly influenced by the choices their parents, friends, and teachers. The titles of works that they enjoy reading show that they are responsive to the world that they inhabit. They often choose to read works suggested by their peers which shows that cultural experience of reading is being validated by adolescents (Hopper). The main reasons students are motivated to read is the opportunity to relate the issues and concerns that are similar to their own adolescent experiences. From the perceptive of student interest in reading, students' preferences must be examined by teachers in order to capture their attention. This engagement will foster conditions for learning (Worthy et al., 1999).

Due to the change in the way adolescents are accessing new literacies the form and structure of young adult literature is shifting. These changes in literature overall are impacting the number of young adult literature works that are being published with multiple narrative perspectives (Koss, 2009). This trend reflects the idea that society is changing and becoming more accepting of diverse populations and multiple perspectives on single events. A motivation for students to read adolescent literature is its use as bibliotherapy. These works provide adolescents with a picture of other teens who may be experiencing similar life situations. Readers are presented with ideas of how to act in different circumstances, as well as allowing

them to experiment with different identities (Koss). Adolescents are able to learn about themselves through reflection regarding young adult literature (Jacobs, 2006). Although there are differing opinions on young adult literature, there appear to be more benefits to including it in curriculums.

Young Adult Literature as a Tool for Teaching Empathy

Young adult literature can be used as a means for various uses in the classroom with students. Many researchers feel that the use of this form of literature can teach beyond just the basic literary elements and techniques to create individuals with understanding and empathy for others. Singer and Smith (2003) stated that the use of multicultural literature helps students experience themselves as citizens in a diverse world. Teachers can create this process through using young adult literature which offers readers the opportunity to view individuals different from themselves. In a case study, a teacher, Gloria, was able to create the idea of empathy through asking her students to consider the context of a novel through the perspective of the character as well as their own perspectives (Kuo & Alsup). It is important for teachers to use young adult literature as a bridge and connection to create discussion between students' lives and other cultures (Kuo & Alsup). The use of this type of literature in the classroom allows for students to discuss, write, and read about people different from themselves. Young adult literature can serve as a tool for students' personal-cultural transformation to become empathetic, thoughtful and communicative individuals (Kuo & Alsup, 2010). While examining others through literature, students can become more understanding for others like the characters. Additionally, reading young adult literature with flawed characters provides opportunities for readers' accessibility to the text (Brooks & Hampton, 2005). These characters are identifiable to

many students. To other students these may be characters different from themselves. Again, this provides readers the opportunity to empathy with a flawed individual.

Mason (2008) believes that young adult literature can provide validation as well as information for the teen readers especially when introducing works with LGBT content. Young adult literature involves topics that are considered mature and are therefore integral to young adult life (Schieble, 2010). One of these topics that are often considered mature is the discussion and lives of characters in LGBT literature. Mason would agree with young adult literature as a teaching tool for empathy. Readers are able to empathize with LGBT characters whose lives are different from the readers themselves (Mason). They are being exposed to a society that does not privilege LGBT youth and can therefore examine their own understandings and beliefs. These types of young adult literature can be used to prepare democratic citizens. Creating individuals who are able to value others and not judge one another (Mason, 2008).

Teachers do fear that the use of LGBT young adult literature could have repercussions and resistance when included in curriculum. Mason (2008) in her study expressed that 53% of individuals surveyed had never read any LGBT young adult literature, and most were strongly opposed to doing so. One teacher wrote “Don’t intend to either!!! Our young people are bombarded by this crap in the media and I intend to keep it out of my classroom as long as I teach!!!” (p. 56). Mason’s study additionally showed 47 % of pre-service teachers felt that parents and administrators were a concern when choosing literature for the classroom. This literature could help create a classroom where students can express themselves fully and feel a sense of place and belonging (Mason). However, many educators feel hesitant to include it into the curriculum because of the problems it may cause. Rarely do libraries provide book talks, discussions, or other types of outreach relating to LGBT literature (Meixner, 2006). Mason’s

(2008) study also showed that 56% of teachers surveyed claimed that teaching young adult literature with LGBT content is not important at all. Many of these teachers believe that young adult literature with LGBT content only focuses on the sexual lives of the characters. 27% of the participants expressed that because of this they were afraid of student maturity and reactions in the classroom. Therefore, there are very few places for students to find texts that validate their beliefs and way of life when it comes to LGBT literature. Mason (2008) concluded through her study that by not including texts with LGBT content, teachers risk reinforcing gender role stereotypes.

Young adult literature provides self-affirmation for readers when it conveys characters like themselves. In Singer and Smith's (2003) study of *From the Notebook of Melanin Sun* by Jacqueline Woodson (1995) many of the readers were able to identify with the narrator. Most of the female readers, both White and Black, identified with the commonality of frustration with their parents, similar to the narrator, a Black, teenage boy. Although they did not identify with the race of the main character, they were able to find a connection with the young boy based on similar situations. Brooks and Hampton (2005) agree that students are able connect with heroes and heroines that are flawed and therefore accessible to the reader. The readers found a similar connection to themselves and experiences they had in childhood. Young adult literature helps deepen students' understanding of themselves as well as others who are unique and different (Singer & Smith, 2003). Singer and Smith's findings confirm that when readers can connect with situations or characters in a work there is a greater level of emotional engagement. Kuo and Alsup (2010) agree that young adult literature allows for students to make intimate connections between a novel and their own lives. When students are able to find a connection with young

adult literature that they are reading the level of engagement and interaction with the text increases.

Young adult literature can be a means for comparing differing views in society as well. Brozo, Walter, and Placker (2002) completed a study including 14 seventh grade boys to examine the types and views of masculinity in young adult literature. The students read the young adult novel *Scorpions* (Myers, 1988) and compared perceptions of males to their own understanding of masculinity in their society. The reading of this literature and discussion of masculinity led students to shift their thinking. The students were able to see alternative types of behavior from males and no longer believed male violence was inevitable, but that there were different ways of being a man. Schieble (2010) created a study to explore the reading of *Luna* (2004) as a process for critical reflection. Reading literature like *Luna* (2004) may result in challenging stereotypes about gender and sexual orientation (Schieble, 2010). Teachers using this literature have the ability to create a classroom that attempts to deconstruct assumptions while teaching with social justice. Readers are able to see through reading young adult literature that although other individuals have different lives from themselves they are equally as meaningful (Singer & Smith, 2003).

In a study in which 26 African American and two Latina/o eighth grade students read *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* (1976) students' reading was influenced by their prior knowledge. Their socio-cultural experiences and knowledge of racism's impact on the United States influenced their reading and subsequent interpretation of the novel (Brooks & Hampton, 2003). Exposing students to young adult literature which includes history can impact their perceptions and outlook on themselves and society. Through the reading of the novel, students learned about history and became aware of racism during the 1930 s. The readers became aware of the

unjust ways African Americans had been treated such as attending schools financed and operated by the racist Boards of Education. Because of the interactive element of the narrative the students were able to sympathize for the main character, Cassie Logan. Groenke and Maples (2008) agree that providing students with these types of reading opportunities allows the adolescents to explore both systems of domination and privilege. Many of the students found themselves just as confused as Cassie with respect to understanding the rationale for racist behavior illustrated in the novel (Brooks & Hampton).

In order for students to examine their own beliefs, teachers must make their assumptions and ideals transparent (Scheible, 2010). Teachers need to remain neutral and place the majority of the discussion and analysis in the students' hands. This opportunity allows for the students to critically explore the text and their own understanding of the text within society. Brooks and Hampton's (2005) study illustrates:

How the students used the narrative to learn about and comment on a time critical to their own histories as well as experience a range of emotions that may eventually affect how they understand, confront and overcome any aspects of racism they encounter (p. 98).

One way to instill empathy in students is through the reading of literature that is reflective of social values (Brooks & Hampton). Singer and Smith (2003) would agree that students can learn the idea of empathy through reading. Several White readers in their study were introduced to the reality that others experience the world different from themselves. They discovered empathy for a character in the novel that feels alienated from Whites and extremely conscious of his color. This discovery in readers has the ability to expand their understanding of who they, know themselves more fully by recognizing perspectives that differ from what they already know.

The use of young adult literature can be extremely powerful, especially depending on the demographics of the students in the classroom. Often the groups of students that are emotionally and academically detached from the classroom are adolescent males (Jacobs, 2006). Jacobs was able to observe a group of incarcerated adolescent males interacting with art and young adult literature. The youth in the study completed by Jacobs felt comfortable with the interactions when discussing young adult literature. They became empathetic for the characters in the works and also were able to explore their own identities. This idea would agree with Hopper (2005) in stating that adolescents have a desire to read books about their own adolescent experiences and concerns. They were able to express concerns and opinions raised in the literature read. Jacobs (2006) concluded that the youth were highly engaged in the reading and activities due to content and inclusion of an artistic expression aspect. The boys in the study were able to empathize with the characters in the story in relationships to their own hardships. Some similarities included alternative placement, different types of abuse, parental drug use, activates and affliction with gangs, as well as an interest in music, art, and drama (Jacobs). This heightened sense of engagement with the reading strengthened the boys' ability to examine society as well as empathize for the characters in the text.

Although young adult literature can create positive perceptions of others and empathy, it has also been viewed as carrying on stereotypes. Peresie and Alexander (2005) argue that many works of literature continue to display librarians as the stereotype and thus an undesirable future job for adolescents. The research included content analysis of a sample of young adult fiction to evaluate the depiction of librarians in fiction published between the 1960 s and 2004. The study concluded that most young adult literature portrayed librarians in a negative light. The majority of the characters were portrayed as middle aged or older females. Seventy percent of the

characters were also described as fat, plus-sized and other negative physical descriptions. The young adult literature also depicted the characters' actions as negative describing the characters as cold, absent-minded, and shy. Peresie and Alexander believe that as the librarian and information specialist becomes a profession to emulate rather than ridicule the negative stereotypes present in literature must dissipate. Through exposure to young adult literature adolescents become open and productive citizens who have gained appreciation in themselves, others, and society (Jacobs, 2006). In order for students to positively become open citizens, the literature must also present open opinions of characters.

YAL with Culture and Community

Young adult literature can be an excellent lens for students to explore the culture and community in which they live. It also affords student the opportunity to view and have discussion regarding societies, religions, and people different from themselves. Bean and Harper (2007) suggest that classroom instruction should be a site for inquiry into differences of gender, race, and ethnicity with the goal of expanding human freedom and potential within the democratic society. In reading young adult literature, Bean and Harper prove that students can examine and deconstruct gender, race, and social differences in text and the world. Although canonical texts can be used, the incorporation of young adult literature in the classroom could create opportunities for boys and girls to examine representations and issues of masculinity. Using young adult literature like *The Breadwinner* (Ellis, 2000) teachers could facilitate a classroom where students are able to deconstruct and interrogate the representation of strong

male and female characters as a way to accomplish the goals of social justice (Bean & Harper, 2007).

In the study performed by Freedman and Johnson (2001), 11 middle school girls read *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This* (Woodson, 1994). It was observed that these students were able to examine feelings about race, class, and gender while also thinking about assumptions they had toward each other. All the participants had an opportunity to hear perspectives and through the reading this gave them the chance to try out different lives. This study demonstrated the novel's ability to engage the reader and allow for reflection of the students. Stallworth, Gibbons and Fauber (2006) expressed that:

The classroom community should afford all of its members the opportunity to be respected for their own unique sets of differences as well as encourage them to develop a respect and appreciation for whose cultural and ethnic backgrounds are different from their own. (p. 478).

Reading young adult literature can allow for students to hear new experiences and come to some self-realizations. Freedman and Johnson (2001) addressed that "both the teachers and the students were aware that U.S. society continues to struggle with racism and classism, but that both issues pale when the relationship of two particular people comes to the fore" (p. 362). This type of young adult literature allows for readers to examine the relationship between two characters, while also looking at various perspectives.

Having students explore the society around them also involves racial conflicts. Current racist attitudes and practices are often ignored in typical classroom discussion. Students hear the standard facts about slavery, Jim Crow laws, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement. For many students current events of racism are not explored (Freedman & Johnson,

2000). The use of this young adult literature could offer rich discussion on racism today. In creating a classroom with well-balanced literature, students are encouraged to read and discuss for social justice. However, some teachers are hesitant to explore this topic of social justice and remain grounded to using canonical literature. Many teachers often refer to the works that they have in their curriculum as the classics and thereby good literature. However, they are narrowly defining good literature as works that fit into the Western canon. Still, the canon is shifting as reading is changing in the 21st century. Teachers are moving away from Elizabethan England in literature, to more contemporary and modern titles (Stallworth et al., 2006). In order to teach with multiculturalism, teachers need to have a blend of literature which shows various cultures, religions, and characters from different backgrounds. This way no single story stands for everyone in that particular group (Stallworth et al.). For some students, this reading experience would expose a society different from their perspectives, but very real to others (Freedman & Johnson, 2000). This example illustrates the point that young adult literature can be used to evaluate community and social justice.

When reading young adult literature, it is not simply the act of reading the work, but also the act of discussion with a class of peers and adults that creates and deeper processing and democratic processing of society and culture. It is also essential to provide students with opportunities to read young adult literature because it allows them to look at the larger society and the way it works. Using a critical literacy approach when addressing these novels encourages students to examine beyond their own personal responses and look into what sociopolitical systems they belong to (Groenke & Maples, 2008). Findings of the study completed by Groenke and Maples show that students will raise critical literacy topics without the prompting of their teacher; however, the teacher's follow-up strategies could further

encourage the development of critical talk. This discussion would allow for students to talk with peers and examine their understanding of society within the novel. A critical literacy approach also encourages students to examine who and what is given priority in the text and what representations are missing. This literacy approach to reading creates students who are able to examine culture, religion, and other characters objectively. The literature that we share with students in the classroom should inspire them to a virtuous life. In order for this teaching to occur, teachers must provide their students with young adult literature that accurately reflects the world in which they live (Freedman & Johnson, 2001).

However, teachers did cite reasons for why they find it difficult to incorporate young adult literature into their curriculum. One major reason teachers answered was the lack of resources. The amount of money that the district provides for a teacher to purchase materials could significantly impact the number of multicultural young adult literature that they are able to include. Teachers also responded in the survey as saying that lack of expertise was also an issue when including young adult literature. Teachers feel that they are limited in their knowledge and therefore find it difficult to escape the cookie cutter mold of traditional pedagogical methods (Stallworth et al., 2006). However, Brooks (2006) disagrees that there should be a traditional set of texts. The authors of young adult literature depict various cultural practices in their books and therefore help to characterize the stories as culturally conscious of youth readers. This variety means that these novels will appeal to students of varying backgrounds even if the reader is African American. Three reoccurring themes that the students responded to most frequently included forgiving family and friend relationships, confronting and overcoming racism, and surviving city life (Brooks). The variety in student answers show that students related to different aspects of the novels that were most similar to their own lives. However, multicultural young

adult literature contains various entry points for students from all ethnicities. Lastly, teachers cited that time constraints are also an issue when attempting to incorporate multicultural young adult literature. Many of these teachers have an established curriculum and feel as though they must adhere to this. Teachers also indicated that they had to follow the district curriculum which did not include time for any additional multicultural texts (Stallworth et al., 2006). While these are all legitimate problems, there are way that teachers could ensure a mix of multicultural texts are available to student readers.

Multicultural young adult literature offers an opportunity for critical literacy in looking at power and identity. This literature is such that characters in the text struggle with ethnic and cultural identity (Bean & Rigoni, 2001). This identity exploration is often similar to the lives of the students reading these novels. Excellent examples of these novels lend themselves toward multiple interpretations and allow students to consider social justice issues. When read by students, they are able to look at their own lives and society while questioning social norms (Bean & Rigoni). In providing young adult literature to students, teachers are allowing them to read works that they find interesting and are applicable to the society around them. Validating this type of literature with what they are currently reading in the classroom shows a student that they are indeed already a reader (Alvermann, 2001).

When using multicultural young adult literature with students the discussion can reduce the limitations of the teacher as the central omniscient authority. This type of literature is an excellent medium for opening students to possible ways of coping with situations like racism in their societies and family pressures (Bean & Rigoni, 2001). Multicultural young adult literature has the ability to connect students with diverse cultures and traditions while providing insight into their own. Providing texts that connect to students' lives help students like Erika, a student

used for the case study, connect to in-school literacy and help to prevent disengagement.

Students are able to engage in both fiction and nonfiction texts which connect to a student's exploration of life. Ma'ayan (2010) states that using young adult literature that breaks down "the hegemonic privileging of white, middle class voices shifts schools to be successful learning spaces for all students. It is the first step in conquering pervasive disengagement of students in urban school" (Ma'ayan, p. 25).

In conclusion, there are many facets to the category of young adult literature. One major aspect of this type of work is the way that it is portrayed and perceived. A second is the uses for teaching that young adult literature has. And lastly, how these works place students in terms of society in which they live.

Research shows that there are many different views and standpoints on young adult literature. Students and adolescents strongly believe in this type of literature. They are able to connect to the characters and the situations that they are in. They often list this type of literature as what they enjoy reading, but have difficulty finding at school. Young adult literature motivates them to engage in the reading as well as lively and meaningful discussion. However, many educators feel that this type of literature is too mature for adolescent readers. They also fear what parents and administrators will feel if these works were to be placed in the curriculum. Educators also do not include young adult literature because they are only familiar with works from the literary canon and therefore only feel that these are appropriate.

One major benefit for the incorporation of young adult literature is that it teaches students to have empathy. These types of novel introduce students to others that are often experiencing similar situations. However, they also present readers with characters that are different in a variety of ways. Through reading young adult literature and participating in discussion in the

classroom students can gain new perspective. They will be able to sympathize for others unlike themselves by hearing a characters perspective or seeing what others feel.

Finally, young adult literature shows readers various communities and individuals in those worlds. Sometimes these societies are similar to their own, which in turn increase their connection to the text and engagement. However, these novels also introduce readers to communities that can be comprised of culture, religion, and values different from their own.

This creates significant opportunity for reflection and growth as a democratic individual.

Overall, young adult literature can be a significant source for identity exploration in adolescent readers.

Method

Context

Research for this study took place in the West School District (pseudonym), which is located in a small town in Western New York. The West School District is comprised of three elementary, one middle, and one high school building. The enrollment for the West School District is approximately 2,451 for the 2010-2011 school year (New York Department of Education, 2012). This study took place and focused on participants and data collected at the one high school building in the district, Porter High School (pseudonym).

As of 2010 – 2011 the enrollment at the Porter High School was approximately 839 students in grades 9-12 (New York Department of Education, 2012). The number of students in a grade 10 English room like the one in this study are an average class size of 25. At the high school 21 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Within the Porter School District the racial/ethnic origin of the students is primarily White, totaling 95 percent for the 2010-11 school year. Additionally, the schools population includes 2% Black or African

American, 1% Hispanic or Latino, and 1% Asian or Native Hawaiian (New York Department of Education, 2012).

This study took place in one of three 10th grade English sections at the high school. The Porter High School offers many extra-curricular and athletic programs to the students. Some of these include Student Senate, Math League, Yearbook, Key Club, Book Club, and Media Club. They offer such sports as football, soccer, hockey, baseball, volleyball, track and several others. The school also offers students the option of AP, IB, and Gemini level courses in most subject areas. Connection to the community often happens through these club events. However, there is also a monthly school newsletter that is sent home to parents detailing many activities and student accomplishments happening in the classroom.

The 10th grade English classroom where this study will take place consists of one teacher, one co-teacher and on average 24 students per class period. The demographics of these classes include 45 White students and 2 Black or African American students. These classes also consist of 8 students with IEP's and 5 students with 504 plans. These students receive additional services for testing and classroom activities from the special education teacher.

Participants

In this study, I interviewed two teachers from the English department at Porter High School. Mr. Steves (pseudonym) has been teaching English at Porter for 1 ½ years. Previously he had taught at two other high schools, totaling 5 years experience. He teaches senior English and junior IB English. He is certified in Communications, Adolescent Education, and Liberal Studies. Ms. Hill (pseudonym) has been teaching at Porter for 24 years. She currently teaches senior English, Gemini, and AP literature. She also has experience teaching Regents level

English 10-12 grade. She is certified in English Adolescent Education and also has certifications for teaching her college level courses.

There were 12 students who participated in the questionnaire portion of this study. All are part of my 10th grade English classes taught at Porter High School. All of the students in the study answered a questionnaire about their reading preferences along with their opinion of young adult literature. These students also allowed me to use their grades from previous summative assessments on literature read throughout the school year.

Taylor (pseudonym) was the first participant in this study, who is a 15 year old female, White student. Taylor does not receive additional services at Porter High School. She is an outgoing student who works diligently in regards to classwork in English. She is very sociable and interacts well with both her peers and teachers. She is planning on taking IB English as a junior for the 2012-13 school year.

The second participant in this study was Mike (pseudonym). Mike is a 16 year old White male student. He does not receive any additional services at the high school. Mike is currently very active with both the football and basketball team at Porter. He has a very caring personality and always offers responses and feedback during classroom instruction. He is hesitant towards reading for pleasure but feels it is important to read for class in order to do well on assignments and tests.

Austin (pseudonym) who is a 16 year old White male was the third participant in this study. He does not receive any additional services from the school. Austin is currently involved in several clubs at school including Student Senate and Key Club. He also is the school's mascot and attends many of the sporting events. Austin is a conscientious student who works hard to

complete his school work. However, he struggles with writing and spelling. He often reads the material and novels for school at home with his mother.

The fourth participant in this study was Emma (pseudonym). Emma is a 15 year old White female. She is a very outgoing student who loves to talk with her friends in and out of class. She has expressed that doing well in school is important but often does not complete and turn in assignments. She does not receive any additional services from Porter High School.

Brandon (pseudonym) was a 16 year old White male and the fifth participant in this study. He does not receive any additional services from the high school. Brandon is a quiet and reserved student who has expressed he enjoys both English and History class. He generally turns in work done with minimal effort. However, he does read the material for class and expresses interest in some of it.

The sixth participant in this study was Emily (pseudonym), a 16 year old White female. She does not receive any additional services at the high school. Emily is a hard-working student in both her classes and on the Varsity cheerleading team. She expressed interest in reading young adult literature outside of the classroom and often takes books out of the local library.

Jenna (pseudonym) is a 15 year old White female and the seventh participant in this study. She does not currently receive any additional services from the high school. Jenna is student that is very active in her school community. She is a member of the Varsity cheerleading team, and a sophomore class officer. However, she is a reserved student in the classroom. She excels on written assignments and enjoys reading at home. She is planning on taking IB English for her junior year in 2012-13.

The eighth participant in this study was Alyssa (pseudonym). She is a 15 year old White female who does not receive any additional services at the high school. Alyssa is a quiet student

that is very hard-working and determined in the classroom. She is very conscientious in her reading and homework done for English. She expressed she often reads at home for pleasure.

Jeana (pseudonym) was the ninth participant in this study. She is a 16 year old female White student. She does not receive any additional services from Porter. Jeana is a very studious individual who works creates exceptional work. She is quiet but also willing to share answers during instructional time. She is a member of the Media Club and expressed that she enjoys reading young adult literature at home.

The tenth participant in this study was Colin (pseudonym). Colin is a 16 year old White male. He does not receive any additional services at the high school. He excels in many classes and received multiple awards for the highest overall average in a class. He is a hard-working student that is always willing to help another student in class. Colin expressed that he read outside of class for information in regards to technology.

Abby (pseudonym) was the eleventh participant in this study. She is a 15 year old White female who does not receive any additional services at Porter High School. However, she is in a co-taught section of English. She is a very bright and outgoing student who asks questions and participates frequently. She expressed that she often borrows books from the library, friends and teachers to read.

The final participant in this study was Jamie (pseudonym). Jamie is a 16 year old African American female student. She does receive services from the special education teacher and is a member of a co-taught English class. She receives the use of word processing, and extended time for testing and assignments. She is a friendly student who struggles in English despite the fact that she works hard. She expressed that she enjoys reading young adult literature for pleasure at home.

Researcher Stance

As the researcher for this study, I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College. I am currently pursuing a Masters Degree in Literacy (5th – 12th grade). I received a Bachelor's Degree from Nazareth College in English Adolescent Education (7th – 12th grade). I have been teaching 10th and 11th grade English for the past three years at Porter High School. These classes include Accelerated and Regents level classes. During this study, I will have the role of a privileged, active observer and a passive observer. According to Mills (2011), the role of a privileged, active observer allows the teacher to “stand back, and watch what is happening during a particular teaching episode, moving in and out of the role of teacher, aide and observer” (p. 75). I will have this role of privileged, active observer because the material that the students are reading including young adult literature has been taught in my class this year. I facilitated the students with direct instruction in reading, writing and activities throughout the year involving both canonical texts and young adult literature. Additionally, I will be able to take on the role of passive observer through the collection of data in a questionnaire of students and field note observations of their interaction with the texts. This role will affect my study in that I will be able to observe the students answers while also directly instructing students when reading the literature.

Methods

This study will involve forms of data that will reflect different lengths of time and instruction throughout the school year. Data will be collected from students, teachers as well as the school's library. The collection of data from the students occurred during direct classroom instruction as well as a questionnaire. The data regarding staff was collected in a formal

interview. The information from the library was collected using the computer software at the circulation desk.

One portion of the study was to administer a questionnaire to students in regards to young adult literature (See Appendix A for interview protocol). Students were asked questions about their reading preferences and practices. They also answered questions about their perceptions of young adult literature and if it should be used in schools. Lastly, students were asked about the topics that they find to be appropriate or inappropriate for reading with classroom instruction.

The second form of data that was collected for this study was through one formal interview with two teachers at Porter High School (See Appendix B for blank interview questions). These teachers were recorded and asked six questions about the type of literature that they use in their classroom. They were asked also about their familiarity with young adult literature. Both Mr. Steves and Ms. Hill were asked to give their opinion on using young adult literature for instruction with students. Teachers were asked the same questions as students about the topics that should or should not be included in reading in the classroom. Questions also addressed the level of multicultural literature that is included in the teacher's classroom. The staff that was interviewed provided their opinion of the uses of young adult literature from the perspective of an instructor.

Data was also collected in the form of students' grades from the 2011-2012 school years. Students that agreed to participate in the study allowed me to take previous grades from summative assessments. These grades were compared based on what type of literature the students were reading and the score that the student received. I also used data from final exams based on the student's reading of *Of Mice and Men* (1993), and *The Hunger Games* (2008).

The last form of data that was collected was from the library at Porter High School. A report from the circulation desk was printed which showed the title, author, and number of times the work has been checked out of the library this year. This list showed if there are any trends or types of texts that the high school students are borrowing from the library at school.

Quality and Credibility of Research

Through completing this study, I was able to ensure quality and credibility in my research collected. In order for a qualitative study to be valid, four characteristics must be met: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Mills (2011) defines credibility as “the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (p. 104). To ensure credibility during this study, I applied several strategies. As the teacher in the classroom, I was able to guarantee my extended participation at the research site in my classroom (Mills, 2011). During my research I was able to use persistent observation to identify atypical characteristics in my data. To make sure I avoided bias, I used peer debriefing with a critical colleague who helped listen and reflect on my insights during the research. Furthermore, I was able to practice triangulation to cross-check my data and ensure credibility (Mills, 2011). My data included both qualitative and quantitative methods: questionnaires, student grades on assessments, and field notes.

Transferability was also present in this study. Transferability is the understanding of a researcher that their study is bound by the context in which it occurs and that generalizations should not be developed for the larger population (Mills, 2011). To ensure transferability, I took notes about the context of the study through my field notes/comments on students in classroom. These notes were used to compare the context of the study with other settings (Mills, 2011).

This research also guaranteed dependability of the data included in the study. Mills (2011) defines dependability as “the stability of the data” (p. 104). I was able to ensure dependability through my use of multiple sources of data. Therefore, the strengths of certain data collection methods compensated for the weaknesses of other collection methods (Mills, 2011).

Finally, confirmability was included in the study to ensure quality in the research. Confirmability refers to “the neutrality or objectivity of the data that has been collected” (Mills, 2011, p. 105). For triangulation of this study, I was able to use questionnaires and interviews, field notes, test results, and library records of titles borrowed by students. My triangulation of data guaranteed confirmability because multiple sources of data were collected which allowed for multiple viewpoints on young adult literature. Additionally, I was able to practice reflexivity, or revelation of underlying biases or assumptions about material of young adult literature.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants

Prior to starting my study and collection of data, I provided the necessary consent and assent forms to the participants to ensure that their rights were being protected when participating in this study. I was able to acquire an informed consent form from Mr. Steves and Ms. Hill because I interviewed them to obtain information on their opinion and perception on using young adult literature for instruction with students. I was able to obtain parental permission forms from the students willing to complete the questionnaire, due to their age. Additionally, I obtained child’s written assent for the students’ participation in the questionnaire and the use of their grades on previous assessments. Furthermore, I used pseudonyms for the students and teachers participating in the study to ensure their identities remain anonymous.

Data Collection

There were several different tools that I was able to use to collect data for the study of young adult literature. These included active observations, field notes, interviews, grades on assessments, resources from the library, and a questionnaire. My observations occurred throughout my teaching in the classroom and field notes which reflected on the students' response to reading various canonical and young adult literature. I interviewed two teachers in the English department at Porter High School about young adult literature. This information was used to provide me with insight into their teaching practices as well as their perceptions of using young adult literature. The questionnaire taken by the students asked questions similar to those of the teachers. This information showed students attitude toward reading young adult literature as well as titles that they have enjoyed reading. Next, I was able to analyze grades from final assessments that the students have completed throughout the school year for both canonical and young adult literature. The two assessments were similar in format and length. Both assessments consisted of matching, multiple choice, and short answer questions. These grades were then compared to each other to identify which exam the students scored highest on. The final form of data which was collected was from the library at the high school. The high school librarian assisted me in creating a report using the library software in regards to titles checked out of the school's library for the 2011-12 school year. This list was used to illustrate the types of titles and authors that are being checked out of the library as well as the frequency.

Data Analysis

To begin the process of analyzing my data, I looked at the grades I collected from my grade books during the year. I took the scores of students' homework and final assessments for both *The Hunger Games* and *Of Mice and Men* and found the average score. I was able to see the average score in students' homework and assessment for one work of young adult literature

and one canonical text. In looking at the data collected from the library circulation desk, I tallied the number of times a novel was taken out of the library. I soon narrowed this list down to the top five texts that had been loaned from the library and the number of times for the 2011-2012 school years. Next, I coded the student surveys and the teacher interviews. I went through both documents taking notes about the ideas expressed by the participants and labeling them with a code. I then went through and separated the codes into lists of similar ideas. From these lists I was able to identify a working list of three overall themes for my data. In the final coding, I compared my data to some of the related literature to find aspects that coincided or contradicted each other. I solidified my decision on the themes of student and teacher perception of young adult literature, young adult literature used in multicultural teaching, and student success in reading young adult literature.

Findings and Discussion

This research study explored student and teacher perceptions and interest in young adult literature along with student success when reading. After looking at the data in this action research of field notes, teacher interviews, student surveys, student assessment scores, and library loan records, several themes emerged. These themes make it evident that students prefer to read young adult literature and therefore educators should use this literature in their instruction. The following themes concluded from the data for both the teachers and students involved included teacher and student perception of young adult literature, young adult literature used in multicultural teaching, and student success when reading young adult literature.

Student and Teacher Perception of Young Adult Literature

One area to investigate in the discussion of young adult literature is how it is perceived by students and teachers. This study looks at the attitudes and perceptions that students and teachers have towards young adult literature and its inclusion in the classroom. Both student and teacher participants were asked similar questions about their familiarity with young adult literature and their attitudes toward reading and including these types of works in the school curriculum. These interviews and surveys provided the opportunity to hear from both teens and adults about the same topic.

One piece of data collected was a survey completed by students in a 10th grade English class. Students were asked questions regarding their reading practices, recent books read, and their attitude toward material read in school. Students were asked their opinion on reading young adult literature/teen fiction in school. All of the students surveyed responded that yes, young adult literature should be taught in school. One student commented, “Yes, because some teens can relate to situations in the book and then using how the characters solved their problem the teen could use it to solve their own” (Student Survey, June 2012). This response suggests that Jamie (pseudonym) can use young adult literature as a tool for problem solving in her own life experiences. Kuo and Alsup (2010) agree that young adult literature allows for students to make intimate connections between a novel and their own lives. Alyssa (pseudonym) responded to the question with, “Yes, because we are young adults” (Student Survey, June 2012). Again, this response suggests that students respond strongly to young adult literature because it illustrates characters, and situations similar to their adolescent experiences.

Essentially these types of positive responses towards young adult literature indicate that adolescents enjoy reading these types of works. Gibbons et al (2006) would agree that students will find this reading engaging because young adult literature is written to include characters

with which adolescent students can identify with based on issues relevant to their age, conflicts, and world perceptions. These data perhaps indicates that students have a stronger emotional connection to reading young adult literature because of the content it includes.

Teachers were also asked a similar question regarding the use of young adult literature in school curriculum. Both Mr. Steves (pseudonym) and Ms. Hill (pseudonym) were asked about their knowledge of young adult literature and how they felt about including it in the classroom. According to Kuo and Alsup (2010), teachers hold on to the belief that only books written from a Western perspective are worthy of study. However, data from the teacher interviews demonstrates some teachers feel otherwise.

When asked about teaching with young adult literature, Ms. Hill responded negatively to the literature. She commented, “To me, it seems like young adult literature is too easy for students. I don’t think it would really be something that I would try to include in my curriculum” (Teacher Interview, June 2012). Ms. Hill’s response perhaps illustrates the attitude that teachers have toward disliking young adult literature. An assumption is made that young adult literature does not belong in a school classroom because it lacks difficulty. Ms. Hill went on to say, “I believe that more classic literature is more appropriate for the classes that I teach” (Teacher Interview, June 2012). Ms. Hill’s reaction to using young adult literature possibly means that she feels that traditional literature is the only type that should be used in upper level AP and IB classes like the ones she teaches. This limitation on the literature students are introduced to by Ms. Hill could indicate that she feels young adult literature does not have the same literary merit or qualities worth teaching to students. Ms. Hill will presumably continue to teach using texts which limit the variety of characters and scenarios students are exposed to. This response implies that teachers feel that only canonical literature can be used to teach

students at the secondary level where students are generally challenged only by the reading level of a text.

However, Mr. Steves had a different opinion when asked about using young adult literature to teach in his 11th grade English classroom. He commented, "I think that it is important for students to connect to what they are reading and it sounds like young adult literature is a good way to do that" (Teacher Interview, June 2012). This positive response possibly indicates that some teachers do believe young adult literature belongs in school curriculum. Mr. Steves believes that students are able to find a connection with young adult literature and therefore value reading more. He added, "If I had the opportunity, I would probably try to add some to our curriculum." This type of response could illustrate research by Groenke and Maples (2008) which states that it is not advised for teachers to attempt to incorporate young adult literature and critical literacy in schools where teachers are dismissed for encouraging students to explore controversial topics. The data could imply that although some teachers feel positively about young adult literature, they also feel hesitant to include this literature in their teaching.

One area of concern with young adult literature is the content it includes. Research by Freedman and Johnson (2001) suggests that despite the fact that young adult literature reflects the age and lives of adolescents, it is often excluded from classroom curriculum because of parent groups, religious groups, and political groups. Teachers are met with opposition to young adult literature because parents, administrators, and other groups find the content of these books to be too mature for students.

Data was collected in regards to students' opinion on content taught in schools. Students surveyed were asked to respond to what topics they believed should not be read in schools

because they were inappropriate. Students' answers included sex, drugs, romance, and molestation (Student Survey, June 2012). These responses could possibly mean that students are able to identify content that is mature and therefore consider it to be inappropriate for school. Students might feel as though this material should not be read in school because they are controversial topics or perhaps uncomfortable to talk about with other student and teachers. However, Koss (2009) believes that teens are aware of issues such as sexual advancement, teen pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse at an earlier age. This awareness could be implied in several of the students' answers from the survey. Abby (pseudonym) responded stating, "All topics should be taught to open students' minds about the world and also to be aware what is happening" (Student Survey, June 2012). This answer suggests that students feel that adolescents should be exposed to a range of content. Jamie (pseudonym) responded to the question stating, "I think any topic in school would be okay as long as we are learning a lesson/moral from it" (Student Survey, June 2012). This student response could imply that adolescents feel that all topics are school appropriate because they are able to learn from the reading. This could mean that students enjoy reading young adult literature because they are able to find a moral of life lesson in the actions of the characters in the work.

However, teachers and administrators often have a restricted view of content that should be allowed in schools. Enriquez's (2006) research demonstrates that both teacher and students acknowledged that certain topics are too controversial to be accepted in a school curriculum. They identified that these topics are too adult in the material they included. This reaction implies that teachers believe that the content in young adult literature is too mature for adolescent readers.

The data observed from the teacher interviews shows that teachers agree that there are topics which can be considered inappropriate for teaching with students. Mr. Steves stated, “I guess it gets tricky when you read of talk about things like sex, drugs, or race” (Teacher Interview, June 2012). This teacher response implies that these topics are too mature and therefore difficult to discuss in a classroom. This conclusion perhaps means that teachers feel that young adult literature which often includes these types of issues should not used in direct instruction. Ms. Hill made similar comments when she said “I definitely feel that the more adult and racy topics should not be talked about in school. I try to avoid touchy subjects and focus more on the literacy aspects of the work” (Teacher Interview, June 2012). This statement implies that topics included in young adult literature are adult in content. However, this is contradictory to the students’ responses and published literature which indicates that they already have knowledge and experience with these topics. An assumption is made that teachers do not include young adult literature in the classroom because the content is too mature for adolescent readers.

Table 1

Books Most Frequently Loaned, Porter High School 2011-2012

Title	NTL
<i>The White Dragon</i>	17
<i>Catching Fire</i>	15
<i>The Hunger Games</i>	15
<i>Lord of Snow and Shadows</i>	13
<i>Shadowfall</i>	13
<i>10 Things to Do Before I Die</i>	12
<i>The Outsiders</i>	11
<i>The Boy Who Couldn't Die</i>	10
<i>The Industrial Revolution</i>	6
<i>Car Maintenance</i>	5

Note. NTL= Number of times loaned

Despite teachers' negative attitudes toward young adult literature, teen readers appear to prefer this type of reading. Table 1 illustrates the 10 works most frequently works loaned from the Porter High School library. The eight books that students loaned from the library most often were fiction titles. This list could illustrate that students generally visit the library for pleasure reading. Among these titles were fantasy, mystery and series young adult literature. This popularity could mean that students enjoy reading young adult literature over other types of works. The less frequently loaned books from the library included reference books generally on topics used in research for student assignments. These titles could demonstrate that students also use the library for school assignments when books are needed. However, none of the titles in the top ten were canonical works of literature. This lack of canonical titles most likely means that students do not find these works an area of personal interest or literature they desire to read.

Young Adult Literature Used in Multicultural Teaching

Young adult literature could be a significant resource for teaching multiculturalism at the secondary level. Singer and Smith (2003) would agree in stating that the use of multicultural literature helps students experience themselves as citizens in a diverse world. Reading young adult literature could provide adolescent readers with a view of characters similar and vastly different to themselves. These unique and different perspectives would allow for teachers to introduce and explore viewpoints of adolescents that may be different from their students.

Through the data collected during the teacher interviews, both educators expressed the effective use of young adult literature in multicultural teaching. Mr. Steves commented, "Those types of books do explore different races and religions than some of the standard texts we use. I think it is important for us to teach our students that there is more out there that what is represented around them at our school and in their community" (Teacher Interview, June 2012).

An assumption could be made that Mr. Steves does consider young adult literature important in showing students different perspectives. It could be suggested that he believes students' lives at his school are lacking knowledge of different races, religions, or beliefs. It is important for teachers to use young adult literature as a bridge and connection to create discussion between students' lives and other cultures (Kuo & Alsup 2010).

However, as illustrated in the interview with Ms. Hill, some teachers find it difficult to incorporate young adult literature because they lack knowledge of the literature. When asked about multiculturalism in young adult literature she responded, "I don't really have much experience with that young adult literature entails" (Teacher Interview, June 2012). This response is possibly the perspective of many teachers, in that they lack the knowledge and experience with what young adult literature encompasses. Because they have never read it themselves, or have looked at it closely, it is possible that teachers lack understanding of what young adult literature is about. Ms. Hill went on to say, "I guess if this new literature addresses things like someone's race or different religions than is could probably relate to multiculturalism." It can be assumed that Ms. Hill will not be using young adult literature in her classroom. It appears that much of her instruction is on literary aspects and therefore does not allow for discussion of multicultural topics and those most relatable to students. Stallworth et al. (2006) would disagree because their research shows in order to teach with multiculturalism, teachers need to have a blend of literature which shows various cultures, religions, and characters from different backgrounds. This way no single story stands for everyone in that particular group. Ms. Hill's aversion to young adult literature and multicultural teaching could be a result of her minimal knowledge compared to her understanding of literary focus.

Student Success in Reading Young Adult Literature

The success that a student has when reading and interacting with a text is based on their engagement with the literature. Gibbons et al., (2006) research shows that young adult literature is much more likely to motivate adolescent readers versus the canonical texts. When students are motivated to read and interact with a text, their performance on assessments is likely to increase.

One piece of data collected was the students' test scores of final assessment after reading *The Hunger Games* and *Of Mice and Men*. Students were given similar assessment for the books throughout the school year. Both assessments included matching, multiple choice, and short answer questions. In Table 2, the average score of both assessments are listed for the students involved in the study. The data only calculates the average of the students in the study, not the overall average of the classes provided the assessment.

Table 2

Student Assessment Scores

Text Read	ATS
<i>Hunger Games</i>	91
<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	86

Note. ATS = average test score

The data demonstrates that of the students surveyed the average test scores were higher for *The Hunger Games*. This increase in grades could possibly be in part due to their engagement level with the text. Students may have been more successful on this assessment because they enjoyed the reading which increased their test scores. Koss's (2009) study would support this assumption in that the students found young adult literature to be intriguing and a good change from traditional lineal text format. This difference could have potentially been one reason for their improved test scores.

Within the data of the student survey, students were asked their favorite book that they had read for school. Every student responded with *The Hunger Games*. When asked why they enjoyed this book students responded with a range of answers. Jeana (pseudonym) commented, “It wasn’t like normal books we read in school.” (Student Survey, June 2012). This response could mean that Jeana found the material relatable and therefore more meaningful reading and interaction with the text. Additionally, this response could demonstrate that most teachers use canonical texts which students find little enjoyment in reading. Emily (pseudonym) stated, “It was filled with action and is just all around a good book” (Student Survey, June 2012). This positive reaction to young adult literature could have been a reason for the students’ success when tested on the reading.

Table 3

Student Homework Scores

Text Read	AHS
<i>The Hunger Games</i>	89
<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	82

Note. AHS = average homework score

Table 3 illustrates the student’s average homework score on all assignments completed during the reading of *The Hunger Games* and *Of Mice and Men*. Similar to the students’ test scores, students received higher grades on homework regarding *The Hunger Games*. An assumption could be made that students were more involved in the reading of the young adult literature text versus the other canonical literature. Student may have been more engaged in reading the young adult literature and therefore produced higher quality homework as a result. It is assumed that students were more engaged with the reading and assignments regarding young adult literature. However, this discrepancy in student success could possibly connect to the material of the canonical texts. Students are much more removed from the lives of adult migrant

ranch workers living during The Great Depression. It is possible that students struggled more with the material in *Of Mice and Men* because of their lack of experience with the situations in the novel. Teachers often define quality as content from the library by award winning authors with appropriate educational content (Worthy, Moorman, & Turner 1999). However, in Table 3 it appears that students can be equally and more successful in reading young adult literature as opposed to canonical works.

Implications

Through interviews, student surveys, assessment scores along with library records, it has been found that young adult literature is highly valued by adolescent readers. The data obtained from this study shows that when young adult literature is used in the classroom students are more successful. Young adult literature provides students with reading which illustrates material that is relevant to their lives and also offers opportunities to explore individuals different from themselves. The results from this study lead to several implications for teachers.

One implication for teachers is that secondary curriculums should include young adult literature. Students have a positive perception of young adult literature because they are able to connect to the characters and experiences included in the reading. Teachers need to change their negative attitude toward including young adult literature in the classroom. Young adult literature should be used as a tool to teach literacy concepts with engaging texts written at an age appropriate level (Gibbons et al., 2006). The curriculum that is created for secondary students should begin or further include young adult literature selections for instruction. In doing so, students will more engaged in the reading and additionally successful on assessments.

A second implication for teachers in regards to young adult literature is the opportunity for multicultural teaching. Through reading and discussing young adult literature with secondary students, teachers could create and implement lessons around multiculturalism. This inclusion supports the notion that young adult literature provides students with insight and access to others outside their families, friends, neighbors, classmates, and teachers (Freedman and Johnson, 2001). Teachers should use young adult literature as an engaging way for encouraging students to explore their understanding of themselves and other individuals.

A final implication for teachers in terms of young adult literature is the opportunity for choice. Young adult literature is much more likely to motivate adolescent readers versus the canonical texts (Gibbons et al., 2006). Teachers should allow for students to have some freedom in choosing which young adult literature to read based on their interests and reading preferences. Students could be allowed to self select books for independent reading, or supplemental reading to texts. Teachers could also encourage students to read through showcasing young adult literature on a bulletin board or in a classroom library. Teachers should offer students the opportunity to read young adult literature and encourage their freedom to choose texts.

Overall, there are numerous implications for teachers in regards to including young adult literature in classroom instruction. These implications need to be taken into consideration when deciding how to successfully include young adult literature into a secondary curriculum. This research study shows that each of these factors was impressed upon in some way, and thus confirming that young adult literature can be used in curriculum to teach multiculturalism and engage student readers.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine how young adult literature is perceived by students and teachers and its use in multicultural teaching. Research has shown that students' interaction with a text connects to the socio-cultural theory and therefore I used several sources of data throughout my research. Through interviews, surveys, assessment scores, and library records, it was concluded that students value reading young adult literature and are more successful on assessments regarding this type of reading. It was also concluded that teachers need more experience with young adult literature in order to include these texts in multicultural teaching. Based on these findings, there are multiple implications for teachers considering including young adult literature in instruction.

This study revealed several limitations that should be considered when understanding the results of this data. The first limitation was that only two teachers were interviewed about their perception of young adult literature. The results may have varied if more teachers had been interviewed or perhaps teachers at different schools. It can be concluded that the teachers' limited knowledge of young adult literature could vary depending on the teacher's age, year's experience, or school in which they teach. Another limitation in this study was that students' assessment scores were based on one young adult literature selection and one canonical text. This limitation may have narrowed the scope of understanding the difference between student's successes in reading young adult literature. The students included in the study may have performed better on the young adult literature assessments for several reasons which cannot be defined by the limited data. Results might have differed if the data included more students or additional assessment scores. The third and final limitation to this study was the location of the data collected from the school library. The most popular texts loaned from the library were

limited to the texts available at the school. At a public library the results of the books loaned most often for adolescents might have differed based on the newer and wider availability of texts. The students' limited selection or use of the popular public library may have yielded different data. Based on these limitations and my data analysis, there were questions that remained based on this research study.

After analyzing the data from this study, I am wondering if the results would be similar on a larger scale of students and teachers involved. It would be interesting to examine more assessment scores of a larger group of students at different schools, or with different teachers to see if students still performed better when reading young adult literature. I am also wondering if teacher's knowledge and understanding of young adult literature would be greater if more teachers were interviewed. Having more teachers' opinions might show that more educators are supporters of using young adult literature. Furthermore, I am left curious about the popularity of young adult literature with students at a library outside of the school. It would be interesting to track the popular titles loaned from a public library based on an individual's age. Overall, there are several aspects of this research study that should be taken into consideration if this research was to be completed again.

Through this research, I developed a strong understanding of the benefits young adult literature has on classroom instruction. I have also learned about the diverse perceptions that both students and teachers have toward this type of literature. I was not surprised by my research because there was a considerable amount of previous research similar to mine. Young adult literature has been proven to engage secondary level students and increase their overall success with reading and comprehension.

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Appendix A

1. What are some titles of books that you have read recently?
2. Was this book read for school or on your own?
3. What is your favorite book that you have read for school?
4. Why did you enjoy this book?
5. How often do you read at home?
6. Where do you go to get books you are interested in reading?
7. Do you think young adult literature/teen fiction should be taught in school? Why?
8. Do you think there are some topics that should not be read about in school?
9. If yes, what topics do you consider inappropriate for reading in school?

Appendix B

1. Can you tell me about your past teaching experience?
2. What types of literature would I find in your classroom?
3. How familiar are you with young adult literature?
4. How do you feel about including young adult literature in the classroom?
5. If you were to include young adult literature in your teaching, do you think there are any topics that are not appropriate for school?
6. Does that mean you think some of these topics are okay for discussion with students?
7. Do you think that young adult literature could be a means of multicultural teaching?