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# Giving Students The Opportunity To See Themselves And Diverse Cultures In Literature: A Multicultural Literature Wiki

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Running head: A MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE WIKI

GIVING STUDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THEMSELVES AND DIVERSE  
CULTURES IN LITERATURE: A MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE WIKI

By

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A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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To my amazingly supportive husband, parents, and my aunt Mary.

Without you, none of this would be possible. Thank you for all your support and advise along the way. Your words of encouragement and unbreakable confidence have meant the world to me. A special thank you to my colleague and friend, Blaine Grady for your tireless commitment to my capstone paper and its grammatical excellence.

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# A MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE WIKI

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	1
The Beginning .....	1
Rationale .....	6
Summary .....	9
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....	10
Overview.....	10
Multicultural Literature: Definition .....	10
Multicultural Literature: Necessity in the Classroom .....	11
Multicultural Literature: Lack of Resources .....	16
Choosing Texts for the Wiki: Authorship and Authenticity .....	17
Creating an Optimal and Accessible Wiki.....	22
Multicultural Literature Demographics .....	27
Summary.....	30
CHAPTER THREE: Research Methods.....	31
Introduction .....	31
Choice of Methods .....	32
Setting/Audience .....	33
Project Description .....	35
Summary .....	38
CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusions .....	39
Personal Benefits .....	40
Community Impact and Limitations .....	41

## A MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE WIKI

Where Do We Go From Here .....	43
Summary .....	44
REFERENCES .....	46
Links to Survey and Project .....	50

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Introduction

The goal of this capstone project is to answer the question: *How can literacy teachers more readily access multicultural texts for their curriculum that both reflects their students' backgrounds and cultures as well as gives students the ability to gain access to and recognize themselves in other cultures?*

In this chapter, you will read about my background in the field of teaching and details about the school where I taught as well as the school at which I will begin teaching in the fall. Next, my passion about and the need for more research about this topic will be discussed, and finally the details of the creation of a Multicultural Literature Wiki for teachers.

#### The Beginning

I earned my teaching license in Hamline University's urban teaching program, conducting my student teaching both at an inner city school in Minnesota and abroad in France, at a private international and bilingual school. During my student teaching experiences I saw a broad spectrum of diverse cultural backgrounds, of poverty and wealth. The school in Minnesota was populated mainly by diverse students whose families struggled economically, including many immigrants and refugees who were relatively new to the country. In contrast, the school in France was also culturally diverse, but students' families typically belonged to a much higher socioeconomic status. It was through this experience that I learned regardless of socio-economic background, students need a strong teacher and the resources and differentiation in the classroom to grow.

However, it wasn't until my first real full-time teaching job that I discovered that I was still somewhat unprepared for the instructional challenges that awaited me.

Back in April of 2014, I was hired for my first full-time teaching job. I was hired to replace a teacher who left mid-year, teaching 6th grade Readers' and Writers' Workshops as well as Reading Recovery class for 9-10th graders. Over the course of the three short months that I began my journey as a teacher at the school, I watched, listened, and learned how challenging it was to connect academics to my students lives. I was also very impressed and inspired by my students' and colleagues' capacity for endurance, hope, and enthusiasm to persist even when resources were limited and disappointments seemed countless. The following year, I taught 7th and 8th grade Readers' and Writers' Workshop and then 10th grade English for my final year at the school. It was clear to me that the school was struggling. I had minimal curriculum to work with, and none at all for my Reading class. How about: Classroom behavior was especially challenging due in no small part to the lack of student buy-in of the curriculum I pieced together. However, I remained positive and continued to search for more research and collaborated with my colleagues to do my best for my students.

Of the first school's 1,200 students, 93% are minorities and 97% are defined as economically disadvantaged, qualifying for free and reduced lunches. The demographics of the students are as follows: 2% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 38% Asian, 30% Black, 21% Hispanic, 7% White, and 2% identify as Two or more Races. The data for English Proficiency is: 62% Does Not Meet the Standards, 20% Partially Meets the Standards, 15% Meets the Standards and 3% Exceeds the Standards. The graduation rate of the schools is 71%. This data shows that the school struggles to help students reach



academic proficiency in literacy. Most of the students aren't reading at grade level. I discovered this firsthand during my time there.

First, the school uses standards-based grading, meaning students are graded on their proficiency on learning targets aligned to standards. They are not docked points for lateness, behavior, or participation. Students can redo assignments until they are deemed proficient which allows them to work at their own pace and master the content step by step. During my time at the school, more than half of my students were scoring far below passing. One of the continuous hurdles to proficiency was many of my students were learning English as a Second Language. Another handful had IEPs and 504s and were entering into my class reading far below grade-level. The school had recently integrated 6th grade and it was clear that they did not have the infrastructure in place. Many of the students' poor grades were due to absences and failure to complete assignments. I felt helpless because I knew there was so much work to be done and I was seeing improvement, but these kiddos were still so far from meeting the expectations of the standards. I saw that every staff member was working extremely hard to do the best for these kids.

Focusing on the fact that more than half of my students were not native English speakers, I knew I had the added challenge that many of the students did not have English-speaking parents either, which further compromised their ability to quickly become proficient in English. On top of that, many of these students came from refugee camps and had seen trauma of losing family members and leaving family behind, something that I couldn't possibly begin to understand. Even the students who spoke English as a first language still struggled with reading and had traumatic experiences in

their past due to such issues as homelessness, violence, and high mobility. I learned I needed to form strong relationships and create a safe, respectful environment before I could even begin to think about heavy content. I learned I needed to gather information about my individual students' backgrounds in order to inform my curriculum and text choices, otherwise my students would not have much interest or background knowledge and context to understand certain topics.

What truly worked for me in helping my students to comprehend grade-level texts was when we studied readings that connected to their own lives or experiences. I needed to access their background knowledge and, to do that, I needed to get to know them individually and understand where they came from. I needed to know their cultural backgrounds. The curriculum I was given did not take into account the diverse student body that I had in my classroom everyday. I was given anchor texts written by a lot of dead white men. There are so many of these texts that are rich with imagery, strong themes, and deep meaning and it is very important that my students were able to access this knowledge, but they needed something more. They needed a bridge to get them to that point. When we would dive into these texts, students would lose interest, flat out refuse to read it, or have no idea what the author was talking about because they had no context for the content. I knew I needed to find them something different.

I went to my colleagues and asked them what kinds of texts they used for their students. While some simply complied with what we were given in the curriculum, others had begun branching out and finding new texts. These teachers told me that our students needed to have access to texts that reflect themselves and their prior experiences and background knowledge. However, we found it extremely difficult to find texts that

reflected the Hmong or Karen cultures, a big population of our students. After a long search, we eventually discovered a few texts and let the whole English Department know what we found. Everyone was so excited! The only problem then was, if we are all using the same texts, we couldn't use them again the next year because our incoming students would have already studied them. We have all heard the dreaded, "But we read this last year!!!" plea.

My time at that school came to an end when my husband got a job working for the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. We packed up our things and moved with our 3-month-old baby at the end of the summer. After a long search, I landed a job at a private, all-girls Catholic School. The demographics of this new school are a big change from the school where I was before. According to the principal of the school, Only 30% of the students identify as students of color and 100% of the graduating class of 2017 were accepted into college (Huey-Burns 2017). As part of a heavy college prep curriculum, 9th and 10th grade English classes are mostly limited to British Literature. In 11th and 12th grade, students may take American Literature and read texts from diverse cultures as part of the curriculum.

As I have just begun my first year at the school, I can already tell that there is a need for more multicultural literature in the curriculum for underclassmen, and I am going to do my best to introduce this project to administration and show how it will prove immediately useful as a supplemental or research tool for both my 9th and 10th grade English curriculum as well as for other literacy teachers at the school. Students of all backgrounds can only benefit from multicultural literature; whether it is being able to see your own story presented to you in a class anchor text, or being able to have access to

stories other than your own that you might never have had access to otherwise.

Multicultural literature is essential to the growth and development of our students minds.

I will strive to include more diverse literature that is still rich in the language and content students need to prepare for life beyond high school.

### **Rationale**

This project is designed to provide teachers with an online database of literature and poetry from diverse cultures so teachers can provide their students with texts that either reflect their cultural backgrounds or give access to content about cultures outside of their own in order to increase comprehension of diverse texts and overall interest. However, this database will not only be beneficial to teachers. Students could also use this database to find texts that are culturally relevant to their backgrounds for independent reading projects. In addition, this could be used as a base for creating and writing curriculum for anchor texts. The project will be made so it can be easily accessed and formatted in a way that teachers and students can understand. The first model will provide text titles, summaries, major themes, and lexiles. However, after the capstone is completed, I plan to continue working on the wiki, adding new titles and giving more information about the existing ones. The beauty of a wiki is also the opportunity for collaboration. Other teachers may add to the database of literature and also comment on what they have read and/or taught. The beauty in the wiki lies in this fluidity.

The reasons I chose to do this project began in college. I came from a relatively homogenous school system where most of my classmates and I shared the same racial background. Similarly, so did my teachers and I never questioned the English curriculum. I never asked why the majority of the authors we read were also white, because their

experiences often reflected my own. They reflected the majority of my classmates' and my teachers' backgrounds. In college, I travelled to Senegal for the Minnesota Studies International Development (MSID) program. It was then that I felt what it was like be a minority for the first time. It was then that I felt what it was like to strive to find anything familiar, anything that I could relate to. I finally started to understand what so many people go through in the United States. I know I can never fully understand it, but I started to empathize and finally began to own my privilege.

When I began my student teaching experience at an urban school in Minnesota, I got to experience first-hand what our minority students go through in school. Luckily, I had an amazing mentor and, together, we analyzed the demographics of our classes and tried to choose texts that best represented our students' backgrounds. The majority of our students were African American and it was relatively easy to find texts both written by and about African Americans. We only had eight weeks together, so we didn't have time to do texts for our Hmong and Latino students. However, when we read the texts we chose in class, I noticed our students really engaging in the content. They were able to connect to the themes of being marginalized and judged based on race. This was a class of students who were taking a recovery English credit, but while reading Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying*, I saw definite signs of learning and growth from these students. They focused and wrote furiously during journal time, and class discussions were not just lively, but they allowed students to really show what they already knew about the world. They connected to this text in a way they never could have had we be reading *The Odyssey* or *Jane Eyre*. I don't want to say those texts aren't meaningful, because there is a reason they have been in English curriculum for so long. Students may be able to relate to

several themes in the novels, but they may not relate to the characters themselves and may therefore lose interest or disconnect. Furthermore, a teacher usually knows their students and should be able to pick texts that their students will relate to. I remember my mentor telling me that it was important for the students to be able to see themselves in what they are reading.

When I began my first teaching job, I discovered the truth of his words. My classes were extremely diverse and I remember struggling to get my students to connect to the texts we were reading. When I tried to figure out why, I only found one common theme: the majority of the texts I was choosing were by white authors, with white characters. When I began to choose texts that reflected the backgrounds of my students, like I had done in student teaching, I saw a big change in the engagement of my students. However, it was extremely difficult for me to find texts that represented my Hmong and Karen students. It was then that I thought about the idea of creating a wiki of texts for teachers to use to enrich their curriculum.

Students need to see themselves in what they read. They need to know that they are worthy of appearing in literature and that their struggles are not only real, but others also experience them. This also goes for white students. They need to see how big this beautiful world is. They need to be given the opportunity to travel outside their comfort zone and see another piece of the world and how others experience it. Teachers also need to be able to readily access these texts. I remember struggling so hard to find texts that represent my students' backgrounds. If I had a wiki to go to that would tell me which texts I could use and how to find them, it would save me so much of my precious planning time. That is why this project is so necessary. This project will teach me so

much about the existing literature for all students. It will open doors for teachers everywhere who need more time to plan. It will give them easier access to the texts that their students will connect to. Eventually, I hope to see more multicultural literature in curriculum across the country. It has already started, but I'd like to make it that much easier, starting with the teachers in my past and current districts.

### **Summary**

Chapter One introduced my project to create a wiki of multicultural texts for teachers to use in order to enrich their curriculum to mirror the cultural backgrounds of their students and also introduce them to new ones. Chapter One painted a picture of my educational path leading to the creation of the project. Chapter Two provides an in-depth look at the existing research on multicultural literature, authorship and authenticity, and the creation of an optimal and accessible wiki. Chapter Three explains in detail the design and creation of the wiki. Finally Chapter Four explains my conclusions and what I learned throughout the capstone process. It also considers possible implications and limitations of the project, and reflects on the my personal growth after working on the project.

I believe it is essential that in every classroom, teachers include texts that both reflect the background of the students as well as introduce them to new ones. We must show our students that their voices and experiences are worthy of appearing in literature. We must show them that they are welcome, safe, and respected in school. By including multicultural literature in the curriculum, teachers can take that first step.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Overview

This chapter provides background information and research in order to answer the central question of this capstone: *How can literacy teachers more readily access multicultural texts for their curriculum that both reflects their students' backgrounds and cultures as well as give students the ability to gain access to and recognize themselves in other cultures?*

The goal of my research is to explore the importance of multicultural literature in the classroom, how to choose the literature for my project, and how to create the project itself. First, I will explore the meaning and necessity for multicultural literature in the classroom. Second, I will explain the meaning and importance of authorship and authenticity when choosing the literature to include in the wiki. Third, I will explain the criteria teachers need in order to choose and teach the texts included in the wiki. Fourth, I will detail how to best create the wiki and the guidelines used in its creation. Finally, I will address the racial demographics of two public school districts as well as a private school that will inspire the literature included on the wiki.

#### Multicultural Literature

**Definition.** There are many definitions of multicultural literature throughout the extensive writing and research on the topic and its necessity in classrooms. For the purposes of this project, the definition of multicultural literature will be: literature for young adult readers including and focusing on the cultures of people from a non-mainstream cultural background. In its most authentic form, it is an area of literature that



focuses on the realities of various cultures (Bista, 2006; Lindgren 1991; Rochman 1993). Inspired by Gopalakrishnan's definition, taken from her 2011 article, Introduction to Multicultural Children's Literature: A Critical Issues Approach, “Multicultural children's literature is about the sociocultural experiences of previously underrepresented groups. It validates these groups' experiences, including those occurring because of differences in language, race, gender, class, ethnicity, identity, and sexual orientation” (p. 5). Due to restrictions of time, the wiki will include texts organized by different cultural groups only.

After the project's submission, it will remain fluid and I plan to elaborate on my own definition, I will also expand beyond language, ethnicity, and race to include literature focused on telling the stories of those with physical and mental disabilities, low socioeconomic status, and diverse religious upbringings. Various family structures, such as foster families, and sexual and gender identity are also culturally diverse characteristics that should be included in multicultural literature (Hermann-Wilmarth, 2007, p. 350). These themes and topics are intertwined to create the working definition of multicultural literature in this capstone project. The literature represented in the capstone project will aim to be all-inclusive and representative of as many members of non-mainstream culture as possible. It will aim to give teachers and students access to voices not usually heard in the literature used in the classroom. Its goal is to appreciate, accept, and understand cultural differences in the classroom.

**Necessity in the classroom.** In her TedTalk, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), an author and cultural critic, described “the danger of a single story.” She explains, “Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can

also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity." The goal of my project is to give teachers the opportunity to break free of the single story in their classrooms by giving them access to as many multicultural texts and stories as possible. A glance at the curriculum of any school district in language arts, reading, or literacy shows us that it includes literature selections in some form or another. This literature is used to enhance reading, vocabulary, writing, listening, speaking, language, and the list goes on. However, many classrooms mainly use multicultural literature for "free choice/independent reading, for entertainment purposes, or for specific preassigned times like Black History Month or Asian Appreciation Month" (Gopalakrishnan, 2011, p. 8). This project advocates for the integration of multicultural literature throughout the day and school year, for every lesson, as anchor texts and assessments, both formative and summative.

Multicultural literature is not just a tool for the classroom, but a necessity. As stated by Fenice Boyd (as cited in Boyd et. al 2015), associate professor of literacy education at the University at Buffalo, "Multicultural literature in the overall English language arts curriculum... is a long overdue and positive change to the study of literature that offers teachers and students a more realistic reflection of society, history, education, and schools in the United States" (p. 461). It is absolutely true that the demographics of the United States is changing and becoming more and more racially diverse. By using multicultural texts in the classroom we can very truly offer students a more "realistic reflection" of their lives. It is essential to use literature that represents the students' backgrounds and cultures. As teachers, we must support all our children by bringing high-quality, diverse children's books into our classrooms and fostering

thoughtful, inclusive discussions (Boyd et al, 2015). By accessing students' prior background knowledge, we will improve motivation and comprehension of texts in the classroom. We need to push past showing our students a single story of white culture and give them access cultures of their peers as well. We need to be thoughtful of the backgrounds of all our students and strive to show them that their narrative is just as important as any other by including books by authors and illustrators who have created literature that gives children who are not white and middle-class "affirmation, visibility, and insight into the world in which they live" (Horning, Lindgren, & Schliesman, 2014, p. 1). The literature we choose for our curriculum needs to be informed by the students in our classrooms.

In 1965, poet and critic Nancy Larrick wrote an article titled The All- White World of Children's Books, in which she argues that all children need to see themselves and others in the books they read. She notes, "Across the country, 6,340,000 nonwhite children are learning to read and understand the American way of life in books which either omit them entirely or scarcely mention them"(Larrick, 1965, p. 63). She further insisted that if children never have the opportunity to see themselves in books, they receive the subtle messages that they are not important enough to appear in books and that literature is not for them. They see the culture represented in the literature as the norm and themselves as the "other." Contrariwise, if children see only their own experiences in the books they read, they come to the conclusion that those who are different from them are not worthy of appearing in books. This is also mirrored by the idea that, "Students shape their view of the world and of themselves partly through the books they read" (Galda et al. 2013, p. 52). It isn't enough just to represent the students in

the classroom, but also others who are not present to share their personal narratives. It is just as important to offer books and texts that represent different perspectives from the everyday lives of our students (Boyd et al, 2015). In her article about this topic, Yenika-Agbaw (2014) explains that

Multicultural literature not only enriches children's experiences in the classroom but may also provide ample opportunities for a rich conversation on books, cultures, and life in general. Additionally, it could also empower school-teachers to take more risks, as they strive to expand their classroom libraries to mirror the complicated nature of our human experiences (p. 241).

The point here is that it is important for our students to not just see themselves and others in literature, but to also *recognize* themselves *in* others, and to ultimately understand our common humanity (Galda, et al. 2013). When the students begin to recognize that, they will be able to engage in the texts they read on a deeper level. This is a skill that will serve them well for the rest of their lives.

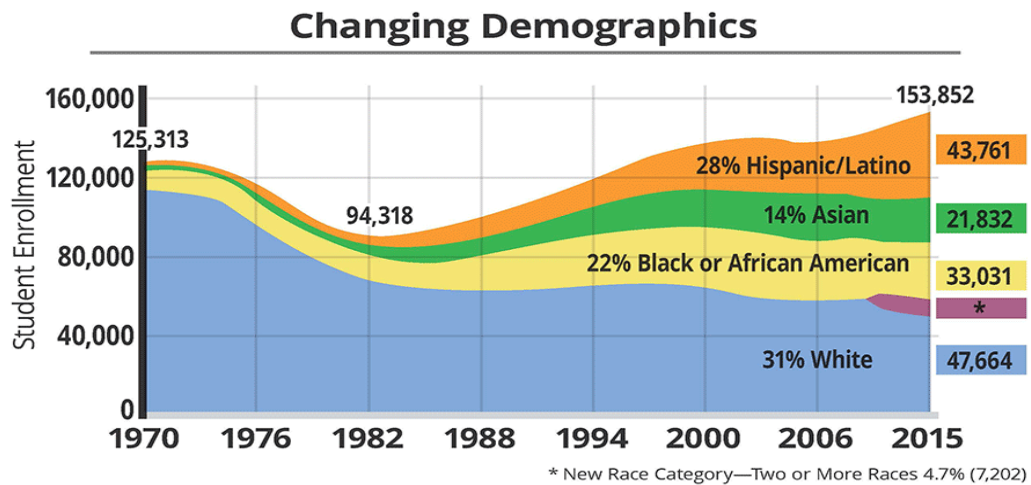
Reading multicultural literature becomes a window to understanding the cultural heritage of others for students and has the potential to reflect positive images of one's culture by acting as a mirror. It also has the potential to reflect the cultural heritage of other groups (Galda 1998). When students are presented with literature that only reflects their cultural background and experiences, they may believe that their experience dominates all others. For this reason, the literature presented in schools should be inclusive (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). The texts taught in literacy classes must give children pathways to question the ways in which cultural groups are presented within stories. When students are able to interact with texts, then they can begin to question the

author and apply the information to what they see in their lives. Multicultural literature, according to Cai (2002),

involves diversity and inclusion, but, more importantly, it also involves power structure and struggle. Its goal is not just to understand, accept, and appreciate cultural differences, but also to ultimately transform the existing social order in order to ensure greater voice and authority to the marginalized cultures and to achieve social equality and justice among all (p. 7).

Multicultural literature has the power to engage students in a way that allows them to become world citizens. By giving them access to stories and voices not normally heard in the classroom, students are given the opportunity to deeply question their own worldview.

Finally, student demographics have been steadily changing over the years to become more and more diverse. According to a Maryland County Public Schools' Annual Report, student demographics have shifted and one of the ways they are striving to close the achievement gap is by providing diverse learning opportunities. Incorporating more multicultural literature into the classrooms would be an effective way to do that. As one can see in the following graphic, numbers of students enrolled in the public schools greatly decreased in the 80's and then the diversity steadily rose with a new race category emerging around 2010 to allow students to identify as two or more races.



**Lack of Resources.** One issue much of the research has pointed out is that, although substantial gains have been made, there are still not enough books being published that are outside of the white, middle-class, heterosexual world. According to Boyd, Causey, and Galda (2015), books rarely reflect the census figures for the United States. In order to educate all children appropriately, teachers need more books that depict diverse lifestyles, opportunities, beliefs, choices, and worldviews in addition to books that focus on the status quo. However, book publishing statistics have not changed much in the past 30 years, with less than 5% of books published being by or about minority cultures. There are even fewer books that “depict characters with exceptionalities like disability, LGBTQ characters, and various religious beliefs” (Boyd et al, 2015, p. 380). Despite the shifting racial demographics of students in the United States, Latinx students continue to be grossly underrepresented in children’s books (Naidoo, 2008). According to Braden and Rodriguez (2016), there is also a growing need to identify how Latino and Hispanic students can and should be represented in the literature. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) from the University of

Wisconsin-Madison began documenting the number of children's books they received that were written both by and about different minority races. Please refer to the following table to see what their data collected from 2016 detailed:

Year	Number of Books received at CCBC	African/African Americans	American Indians/First Nations	Asian Pacifics/Asian Pacific Americans	Latinos
		By: 92	By: 22	By: 212	By: 101
2016	3,400	About: 278	About: 55	About: 237	About: 166

It is clear from the data that there are still gains that need to be made in the publishing of multicultural literature and it is a great first step to start including the literature in the classroom. It should also be noted that there are significantly less texts written by "cultural insiders" (an author who identifies as a member of the culture in which he/she writes about) as there are "cultural couriers" (an author whose topic is about a culture with which he or she does not identify) (Isaacs, 2007). If I were to exclude texts written by cultural couriers, we would have very few texts to choose from. Therefore what makes an authentic multicultural text must be explored.

### **Choosing Texts for the Wiki**

**Authorship and Authenticity.** In her article, Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults, Krishna Bista writes that "Educators believe that the

authentic literature or books include only those written by a member of an ethnic group about that ethnic group, its cultural traditions, and its people, whereas authority refers to the role of authors who represent multicultural literacy or have control of the plot and characters in writing authentic literature" (2012, p. 318). Research into the importance of authorship will provide information as to the authenticity of the text and whether or not it is appropriate to provide texts written by "cultural couriers" in addition to "cultural insiders" (Isaacs, 2007, p. 424). There is a big debate as to whether or not a text will give enough authentic information about a culture if it was not authored by a writer who is a member of said culture. In her article, Building Bridges from Both Sides, Katherine Isaacs writes that sometimes it is not possible to find an insider's perspective and that it is permissible to use texts written about other cultures by someone from outside the culture. However, research must be done in order to discover the validity of their facts. It also must be taken into account that what we are dealing with is sometimes fiction, and in order to write an exciting and captivating text, the culture will not always be factually represented. It is up to the teacher at this point to fill in the holes. It can be very dangerous to introduce multicultural literature that hasn't been properly screened for authenticity. Lack of understanding of another culture can not only lead to misrepresentation of the culture but also create difficult situations in the classroom. It has the potential to bias one group in society against another group, violate the integrity of a culture, and defeat the purpose of multicultural literature (Bista, 2012).

When choosing the books for the wiki, one must take into account the representation of the culture being presented in the text. One needs to ask themselves: Is it necessary to include texts only written by an author from the presented culture, or are



cultural outsiders acceptable? Is it better for a teacher to present a text to a group of students that was written by an author who is not a member of that culture - thus risking possible inaccuracies or cultural inauthenticity - for the good of having a text about that specific culture? Or is it better to have no book at all? According to Juli-Anna Aerila and Lydia Kokkola in their article, Multicultural Literature and the Use of Literature in Multicultural Education in Finland,

Children's literature has a long tradition of promoting pluralism by providing vicarious insights into cultures and peoples with which the reader is not familiar. Unfortunately, children's literature has an even longer tradition of promoting racial stereotypes and further stigmatizing minority cultures, and uninformed attempts at promoting understanding have been known to increase racial tension (2013, p. 41).

As teachers, when choosing texts to be used in the classroom it is necessary to choose texts that do not promote racial stereotypes. We can do that by making sure the texts are authentic and that the author is either a "cultural insider" or has effectively researched the culture he or she has written about. From the research collected, I have discovered that as long as the teacher is aware of the authorship and presents it to the students in a way that observes the authorship, it is much better to give students a glimpse into the culture regardless of the author's culture rather than deprive them of that experience all together.

In her article, Isaacs thoroughly examines this question of whether "cultural courier" or only "cultural insider" texts are appropriate to include in curriculum for our students. On one hand, there are those that believe, "only writers from within a culture can tell its story properly" (Isaacs, 2007, p. 420). In this sense, we encourage more voices

to be heard and empower voices who have been historically silenced to be heard. It encourages the respect for other cultures and experiences. It seems to be a more authentic look into another way of life. When teachers present information to our students, we want that information to be right, however what is *right* is not always simple to determine. We also need to take into account that cultures are large and there are distinct, unique individuals that exist in all cultures. Everyone's experience in life is going to differ from someone else's experience. Therefore a "cultural insider's" story and experience may not be any more an authentic representation of a culture than a "culture courier." As educators, it is our task to teach this as well. We are not giving the entire story of a culture in one piece of writing; we are giving a snapshot of one author's story. In the end, "the bias for the voice from within the culture may defeat the goal of multiculturalism" (Isaacs, 2007, p. 421). When creating the wiki, I plan to highlight this for teachers.

Sometimes it just isn't possible to find a text written by a "cultural insider" and instead the "cultural courier" is able to make a culture, a country, an experience more understandable and relatable for our students and "No human culture is inaccessible to someone who makes the effort to understand, to learn, to inhabit another world" (Gates, 1991 as cited from Cai, 2003, p. 39). We also need to take into account that we need our students to engage in these texts. Isaacs notes that she has long argued that, "Books about other countries written by people who are outside that culture, people who are sympathetic but who also understand what American children know and understand, are an important stepping stone for young readers today. They are a bridge to understanding" (2007, pp. 425-426). It is possible that in not including these books, that have been tirelessly researched and presented with honesty, accuracy, imagination, appreciation and

dedication, we could be weakening that bridge for our students. Bista also explains, "Literary creation depends on the imagination and experience of authors rather than whether the author comes from a particular group" (2012, p. 318). On the wiki, I will give the teachers a choice by including both cultural insider and cultural courier texts. I believe that the more we can teach our students about a culture, about other people and different ways of living and thinking and being, the less likely our students will see those people as strangers or as an "other."

When selecting the literature for the wiki, Boyd et al. (2015) suggest taking several steps in order to determine if the text fits within the parameters of an authentic piece of multicultural literature:

- (a) study the work of authors and illustrators to determine the quality of culturally rich books, including style, topics, themes, and perspectives;
- (b) draw from award categories of nonwhite cultural groups as well as various resources; and
- (c) learn to determine the authenticity of authors' work by looking at visual and verbal sensitivity, authenticity and accuracy, and ideology (p. 381).

It is important to choose literature that is "culturally rich and of excellent literary quality" (Galda et al. 2013. p. 51). When choosing literature for my wiki, I will make sure to do research on each author. I want to know that they did extensive research into the culture that they wrote about. Similar to Braden and Rodriguez in their 2013 study on authenticity of 42 Latinx children's books, I will begin my research by using the guiding questions constructed by Mendoza and Reese (2001) for my analysis of the multicultural literature for the wiki :

- Are characters outside the mainstream culture depicted as individuals or as caricatures?
- Does their representation include significant specific cultural information? Or does it follow stereotypes?
- Who has the wisdom?
- How is the language used to create images of people of a particular group?

(p. 22)

This framework will act as a starting point to begin to examine the texts and to help think about cultural authenticity in the books. I also must note that I recognize that my research of literature for the wiki does not fully capture the criteria to evaluate cultural authenticity of texts. However, this guiding framework will at least allow me to have a starting point and to get a clear sense of the unspoken questions that I will be encountering as I read the literature. Finally, I will follow the advice of Aerila and Kokkola (2013) and find multicultural literature that is suitable for the classroom while being aware of content that could embarrass or offend a child whose culture is being portrayed, and making sure the author is qualified to represent the cultural group accurately and respectfully. I won't simply put a text on the wiki because of content alone.

In conclusion, when determining the authenticity of the texts for our classrooms, we should not look at the ethnicity of the authors and illustrators as a guarantee of authenticity. Instead, cultural experience and research can help individuals gain insights on the heart of a culture. Therefore, when choosing texts for the wiki, I will not exclude any works based solely on the ethnicity of the author.

### **Creating an Optimal and Accessible Wiki**

**Definition.** "Simply put, a wiki is a site designed for collaborating with others" (Komando, 2008, p. 1). This Multicultural Literature Wiki will be a great collaboration of teachers to help one another find multicultural texts to best fit our diverse classrooms. "Wiki" originates from the Hawaiian word "wikiwiki" that means "quick." A computer-based wiki is a type of content management system that allows a community of people to add, edit, structure, and delete content held in a central location (Ndunguru, 2013). The most well-known wiki is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia that is written and maintained by anyone who desires to contribute, regardless of credentials and authenticity. The main reason I chose to use a wiki instead of just a GoogleSite is because of the ability to collaborate on the same document. I want other teachers to be able to add texts that they have used in the classroom. I am only one person and can't possibly read and teach everything out there. For the purposes of this project, the Multicultural Literature Wiki (MLW) will be maintained by me, but teachers who have been given access will be able to add and edit content in order to make this wiki a "living and ever-evolving source" (Ndunguru, 2013, p. 7).

### **Creating the Wiki**

According to Cheryl Ndunguru's (2013) article on a wiki she created for the Office of Personnel Management in Training and Development Policy, there are basically five steps that one must follow when creating a wiki. Step One is to establish a need for the wiki. The need for this wiki is that teachers need more multicultural literature for their curriculum and a fast and convenient way to access it. The second step is to conduct a risk analysis to make sure the information on the wiki is secure. This step is will be done

for me as I will be using WikiSpaces, which is a place where educators can create their own wikis. It is already extremely secure and only those who are granted access can post and edit the wiki. Third is to actually set up the wiki. Step Four is to achieve buy-in. This will be done by surveying and asking teachers to view and give their input on the wiki. The final step is to keep the wiki up to date. I will do this by checking in on a weekly or monthly basis. I will also keep adding texts to the wiki as they are written and published.

Patt Moser (2009) also provides a step-by-step guide to wiki creation in the article: *A wiki collaboration to create national guidelines: Tips for professional practice*. The first step is to "gather the committee members" (p. 46). For the purpose of this project, I will wait until the wiki is completed before I give access to teachers for feedback. Step Two is to start the wiki and be sure to include names and contact information, resource materials for members to read and refer to, an initial draft, and automatic notification to the creator so a notification is sent whenever a change is made to the wiki so the creator can keep track of the ongoing conversations and changes. The wiki will include my name and email address so I can be reached with any questions. The resource materials will be the literature that is posted. I will include a link to the text online or a link to purchase the text. Step Three is to, "Invite the members to join the wiki and be sure to give them read/write privileges" (p. 49). It's especially important to allow others to be able to make changes and additions to the wiki so it is a true collaboration.

Step Four of Moser's guide (2009) is to provide timely reminders to contributors to encourage them to keep editing. It is important not to rely solely on the wiki to maintain itself. I will send reminder emails or Facebook messages to contributors to kindly ask them to post when convenient. Step Five is to "Frequently reassure all of the

members that they can edit a wiki without permanently deleting another member's work because the history page will always allow restoration of anything that was altered. Try to allay their misgivings about appearing to criticize the work of others" (p. 49). This is a great reminder for the teachers who are contributing. We all need to be aware of the fact that some texts may work better for others. Some teachers may find a text offensive, or think that it isn't culturally authentic. The wiki can also be a place for a productive dialogue about the texts. The sixth step is to remember to edit the wiki from time to time to include the thoughts that other chose not to write themselves. If there is a teacher who shows me a text I will ask them to post, but can always do it myself if they prefer not to do it. The final step is to notify members when the draft is finished and give them a chance for a final review. The wiki I will be creating will be infinitely evolving. As long as more multicultural text is produced, the wiki will continue to grow.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services put forth an even more detailed set of guidelines for website creation: *Research-Based Web Design & Usability Guidelines*. This text provided eighteen chapters of information and guidelines to create the most optimal website possible. I read the guide and picked the most useful information, specific to the design of my own wiki. The first important piece of information was to make sure to create a discernible homepage that differs from the rest of the website, "A well-constructed homepage will project a good first impression to all who visit the site...A homepage should clearly communicate the site's purpose, and show all major options available on the Web site" (Bailey et al, 2006, p. 34). The homepage will be the first thing users will see and will invite them in. It is important to give the

users a positive first impression. This will need to include the purpose of the wiki and will give the links to all the different multicultural text groups.

Before the creation process, it is important to make sure the usability of the site is taken into account. The usability being defined as “perception of how consistent, efficient, productive, organized, easy to use, intuitive, and straightforward it is to accomplish tasks within a system” (Bailey et al. 2006, p. 3). It is important to make sure the expectations and needs of the teachers using the wiki are taken into account in order to include everything they may need or find useful. One example of this is to make sure to create a layout that is predictable. One can assume most of the users of the wiki will be familiar with best website layout, so making a wiki as simple to navigate as possible will have the most positive outcomes. The guide continues on to explain that the users of websites will have positive interactions when “information is displayed in a directly usable format and content organization is highly intuitive” (Bailey et al. 2006, p. 9). Usability will ultimately make or break this project. This is where a practice run with a test group will prove effective in the process.

Another section of the guide details how to involve the users in the creation process, “The greater the number of exchanges of information with potential users, the better the developers’ understanding of the users’ requirements. The more information that can be exchanged between developers and users, the higher the probability of having a successful Web site” (Bailey et al. 2006, p. 2). This highlights the importance of involving some teachers that will most likely have need of the wiki and getting their opinions before the actual launch of the site. The teachers chosen will be current and past colleagues who have expressed a need for access to more multicultural texts.



Based on two large surveys conducted for the purpose of creating the guide, some of the most important actions, conducive to my project, that a creator of a website can take are to: ensure the Website is arranged in a logical way, provide articles containing citations and references (in this case it will be the texts included), show author's credentials (I will include a blurb on the homepage about how the authors were chosen, based on authorship and authenticity), ensure the site looks professionally designed, ensure the site is as up-to-date as possible, and provide links to outside sources and materials (links will be provided to a PDF version of the book if available and a link to purchase) (Bailey et al. 2006).

This wiki will open many doors for teachers to collaborate with one another and to help each other reach our diverse students. In their 2010 article, *Taking down walls: An international wiki creates a community of thinkers*, Maltese and Naughton wrote that "With an online community like a wikispace, classroom walls are blurred, leaving room to actually team-teach with colleagues from across the world" (p. 43). Teachers will be able to add texts they have taught before and comment on how they taught them and how their students responded. Moser (2009) points out, "In many ways, using a wiki to write a collaboratively produced document is not much different than trying to accomplish the same task with a committee of people who all meet in the same room periodically to work on a goal" (p. 46). A wiki can erase borders and bring together teachers that never would have met otherwise. It also provides an incredible time saver for teachers. Without the need to organize a meeting, a wiki is a space where all can gather whenever is most convenient. Nothing is more precious to a teacher than time, which there never seems to be enough of. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three.



						of Color	
Elementary School	18%	3%	37%	41%	30%	76.84%	19,189
Middle School	21%	2%	37%	40%	34%	74.89%	4,552
High School	15%	2%	49%	34%	24%	80.47%	11,919

Maryland Private School

	Hispanic	Asian	Black or African American	White	Two or More Ethnicities	Total Students
High School	8.5%	2.9%	10.3%	75.3%	3.1%	555

From the tables, one can see that the racial demographics are extremely broad. Simply including "Asian" and "Hispanic" literature would be far too broad and not necessarily capture the true story of the students. According to Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003), culture is not static and all members of a group are not homogeneous nor do they share the same

experiences. When finding literature for the classroom for the wiki, the cultures represented needs to be more specific than "Asian or Hispanic." When looking at the Census for these schools, the data of immigrants or "foreign-born residents" showed more specificity. For the Minnesota school district, the students who identify as Asian are mostly from India, Laos, Vietnam, China, Thailand, and Burma (Myanmar). The students who identify as Hispanic are mostly from Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The students who identify as African are mostly from Ethiopia and Somalia (<http://www.mncompass.org>, 2015). For the Maryland public school, the students who identify as Asian are mostly from China, Korea, India, and Vietnam. Those who identify as Hispanic are mostly from El Salvador, Mexico, Ecuador, and Guatemala (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/24031>) . This data will be extremely useful in creating the wiki as it defines what cultures should be represented on the wiki.

### **Summary**

In Chapter Two, you have read about the research conducted on the definition and necessity of multicultural literature. Second, research on the importance of authorship and authenticity in choosing texts for the wiki was detailed. Finally, research was presented on how to create an optimal and accessible wiki for teachers to join me in collaboration in posting multicultural literature to be used in all classrooms. Chapter Three will give more details on the project itself, the research methods, its necessity, and how it will be created.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project Description

#### Introduction

The purpose of this capstone is to answer the question: *How can literacy teachers more readily access multicultural texts for their curriculum that both reflects their students' backgrounds and cultures as well as gives the students the ability to gain access to and recognize themselves in other cultures?* Chapter Two researched the necessity of the presence of multicultural literature in the classroom. It explored the ideas and importance of authorship and authenticity of the texts and provided a rationale for the texts to be included in the project. Finally, it outlined how the wiki will be created and made accessible for teachers to use and to contribute to.

The first section of Chapter Three will outline the school setting in which I work currently, as well as the past school experience I have had. Each of these schools are drastically different in student body and cultural background and will provide the framework for which I choose the texts to include. It will outline how this project can benefit all students and teachers. The next section will explain the research that will be conducted and how it will be used to complete the project. The following section will explain how the wiki will be created and organized. It will detail how the texts will be chosen and listed on the wiki. Finally, I will explain how to make the wiki accessible and how I plan to advertise its existence so that other teachers may collaborate with me and add texts to the wiki as well.

This project is meant mainly for teachers or curriculum writers who have the want or need to introduce multicultural literature into their curriculum in order to give their

students access to a wider lens of the world and themselves. This wiki may also be used for students and parents who wish to have access to the reading options as well. The wiki will go live at the end of 2017 and anyone worldwide will have access to it as well as the ability to edit and add to it. My goal is to have this become a mass collaboration of educators who understand the need for multiple cultural perspectives to be taught in all classrooms.

### **Choice of Method**

The research done in order to complete the project has been found in articles and books written about multicultural literature and its necessity in the classroom as well as articles about website and wiki design. I will also be conducting surveys of schools from my past district as well as the district I currently teach in after the wiki is created. I will survey teachers from middle and high school levels. I will be surveying both public and private school teachers. I will be doing a mixed-method research paradigm in that the questions on the survey will be both quantitative and qualitative. I will be asking teachers about the racial and cultural demographics of the students in their classes as well as their opinions of having access to a wiki. I will ask how they would use it, how it would benefit them personally in their curriculum development and how to improve its usability and readability (Moser, 2009). I will ask for their feedback in order to see what changes need to be made. I plan to send out surveys to nine schools by contacting a few members of the administrative team from each school. I will include two schools from my previous district in Minnesota, six from the district I live in now in Maryland, and one private school, where I began working in the fall of 2017. I will create the survey, ask permission

and for the emails of the literacy teachers, send the surveys, and document results of the surveys given after the creation of the wiki.

As far as the content of the wiki, I have read articles on how to choose authentic texts for the wiki and I will apply those parameters to the texts I choose. I will give the teachers a choice of including both cultural insider and cultural courier texts. On the homepage of the website, I will include instructions for those who choose to collaborate and add texts to the wiki. I will ask that they do research on the background of the author and be sure to keep this in mind while posting.

### **Setting/Audience**

The main audience for my project will be teachers. The wiki itself can really be used by anyone who teaches literature and in any setting. The goal is to give students access to diverse texts as much as possible, not only in the English classroom. This wiki can be used by teachers with students of any background or culture. Before the wiki is officially launched and made accessible to the general public, a test group will be notified and asked to preview the wiki. The test group will be former and current colleagues that have expressed an interest or need for access to multicultural literature. I will also ask that each colleague choose one other person to invite to view the wiki so I can get opinions from those outside my personal circle and increase the odds that feedback is objective.

I taught at an inner city Title I school for three years. I had diverse students with cultural backgrounds from all over the world: Southeast Asian, Latino, White, Native American, African American, etc. Every class was a melting pot of cultures. I found it very difficult to find texts that would activate every student's prior knowledge and allow

them to access and connect their own cultural backgrounds and stories. I would use the classic British literature that I read in school, but my students struggled to connect with the text, with overall comprehension, and to ultimately find the motivation to read independently or even pay attention while reading aloud in class. When I finally discovered and used a short story from Hmong culture, I saw my students come alive. We read *Jouannah, a Hmong Cinderella* by Jewell Reinhart Coburn. My students who are immigrants and refugees from Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam were elated to see a familiar story. A few girls came up to me after class and told me how they thought we only read stories about white people and how happy they were to be able to relate to a text in class. It was then that I knew how important it was that my students of color see themselves in what we read in class. As discovered in my research process, "Multicultural literature not only enriches children's experiences in the classroom but may also provide ample opportunities for a rich conversation on books, cultures, and life in general" (Yenika-Agbaw, 2014, pg. 242). However, it is extremely difficult and time consuming to try to find these texts. This is why my project of creating a Multicultural Literature Wiki is important for teachers and students everywhere.

I have since moved from Minnesota to Maryland where I have found a job teaching at a private, all-girls Catholic school. I couldn't have found a school more different than my previous one. Even though my classroom is be smaller and less diverse than before, I still have many students of color and the need for more diverse texts is still present. I will therefore add to the goal of highlighting diverse literature by additionally using texts with voices and themes the students generally don't or won't have access to in a curriculum heavy in traditional literature courses. My colleague gave me the idea of



using world myths in our Mythology Unit. This will give the students access to more diverse creation stories and give them the opportunity to also research a culture that is not their own. These world myths will be included in the wiki as well.

### **Project Description**

I began my project by following five steps I found from many sources including Cheryl Ndunguru's article on a wiki she created for the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in Training and Development Policy. She states there are five steps that one must follow when creating a wiki for a group of collaborators. The first step is to establish a need. It is necessary to make sure the wiki is the best tool for your needs. Ask yourself the following questions: "Will this project involve multiple people? Will the team or organization benefit from making this information accessible to others? Will you need to use or share this information in the future? Is this an evolving or a static document? (A wiki is not suitable for static documents.)" (Ndunguru, 2010, p. 8). It is important to be clear with what you want to accomplish with the wiki and how others will benefit from it. In the case of this project, it is clear that it will be used for teachers to find and add multicultural texts to use in the classroom to either represent the diverse cultures of the student body or give students access to often marginalized voices. This wiki will undoubtedly benefit the teachers who use it as well as their students.

The second step before actually creating the wiki is to "conduct a risk analysis" (Moser, 2009). It is necessary to make sure you know how secure you wish your information stored on the wiki to be. According to Moser, a librarian who wrote the article, *A Wiki Collaboration to Create National Guidelines: Tips for Professional Practice*, different software programs will have different levels of security. This project

isn't designed to be a secret, but rather the opposite. It is important that as many teachers as possible have access to it. In order to keep it authentic to its purpose, I will keep it updated and check the authenticity of the posts periodically.

Moser's (2003) Step Three in wiki creation is to choose where to actually set up the wiki. There are several options out there for free wiki hosting including "Wikia® and MediaWiki® which allow you to build a wiki from the ground up" (mindtools.org). However, I found that Wikia is more geared towards entertainment and pop culture. MediaWiki is linked to Wikipedia and I wanted something that will be taken more seriously. I found WikiSpaces to fit my needs perfectly because it allows teachers to create pages for free. In addition, since it is made especially for education, it will be taken more seriously. Once the space is chosen, the wiki can begin to be set up. For this project, I will group texts by five different cultures taken from the demographics of the students in my past and present districts: Asian and Asian American (Chinese, Hmong, Korean, Japanese, and Karenni), Black and African American, Hispanic and Latino/Latina, Native American, and African (specifically Cameroon, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone). Most of these categories are also broken down into American sub-categories, meaning that it would not just be Mexican stories, but also Mexican-American stories. I will include fiction, nonfiction, plays, poetry, and short stories. In each grouping, I will add texts by authors who identify as members of that culture as well as texts about those cultures. When choosing texts, I will draw from the research of Isaacs (2007) who advocates for the usefulness of texts written by both cultural insiders and cultural couriers. Therefore, I will research both types of authors for this project.

After my initial additions to the wiki are complete, I will invite a small number of users to test the wiki's usability and readability (Ndunguru, 2010). I will ask those users for feedback and then take action on their suggestions. I will ask them to comment on the texts on the wiki, as well as try to add their own ideas. I will see how easy the wiki is to use and make necessary changes to both content and usability. This will ensure that the wiki will be a success once it goes live to the world. This initial test group will be a combination of my former and future colleagues, as well as a small group of teachers from schools around my current district.

The final step is to market the wiki (Bailey et al. 2006). It is important that as many teachers as possible know about the wiki. I plan to go on Facebook and email my past and current coworkers as well as teachers in my current school district. Another way to market is to link the wiki to Pinterest. Finally, I will ask the Secondary (9-12) District Literacy Specialist from the public school in Minnesota where I was formally employed to link my wiki to the district's ELA wiki. Through all these steps, the word will spread. If not, I will keep emailing and trying to contact teachers to join this collaborative effort. While marketing, it is also important to keep the wiki up-to-date and keep adding texts as I come across them. This will be an ongoing project for years to come.

As a goal for the initial launching of the project, the wiki will be organized into the previously mentioned five categories: African American Literature, African Literature, Asian and Pacific Islander Literature, Hispanic and Latino/Latina Literature, and Native American Literature. These categories are based on the data retrieved from the district databases from both the public and private schools in Minnesota and Maryland where I have teaching experience. I will include many texts that I have either

read myself or personally researched. I will include fiction, nonfiction, short stories, plays, and poetry. One year after the launch, more research will be done to track diversity in those same areas and, over time, the categories may increase to include more diverse cultures. Every six months, I will review and monitor the wiki for content and relevance.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three gave details into the research methods, the necessity and reasons for the project, the steps involved in creating the project, and how it will be made accessible for collaboration. Chapter Four will explain the conclusions that were drawn from creating the project and my plans for the project in the future.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusions

#### Introduction

The purpose of this capstone is to answer the question: *How can literacy teachers more readily access multicultural texts for their curriculum that both reflects their students' backgrounds and cultures as well as gives the students the ability to gain access to and recognize themselves in other cultures?* Chapter Three provided details about my past and current experiences teaching as well as the demographics of the schools and how I used that information to inform the content of the wiki. Next, it outlined how the project is meant to benefit all teachers and students regardless of cultural background by making access to multicultural literature easier. Finally, it explained the research needed to create and maintain the wiki, as well as how to advertise its existence so that other teachers may help me continue to grow and expand the wiki.

Chapter Four will contain information about my personal learning process and how, as a result of the project, I have grown as a researcher, writer, and learner. Second, I will revisit my literature review and explain how it was beneficial to me as an educator and essential to my project completion. Next, I will discuss the projected policy implications of my project and some possible limitations. In this section, I will also discuss the results of my surveys and how they influenced the final product of the wiki. Finally I will discuss the future of the project: how the wiki will continue to evolve, how the word will get out about its existence, and how it will benefit the the education profession.

### Personal Benefits

Throughout this capstone process, I have learned so much about myself as a researcher, writer, and educator. I've also discovered more about what I wish to prioritize in my curriculum. As a researcher, this capstone has given me the tools to search for and locate credible sources. I've learned how to navigate the article databases and how to word my searches correctly so I get optimal results. The articles that I most enjoyed reading were: *Culturally Diverse Literature: Enriching Variety in an Era of Common Core State Standards* by Fenice Boyd, Lauren Causey, and Lee Galda and *Building Bridges from Both Sides* by Kathleen Isaacs. The article on culturally diverse literature was my starting point. From this article I really honed in on what makes culturally diverse literature extremely important to have in the classroom. This article also cited a lot of the same sources I used in my literature review and was how I found many of the sources I used. This article also introduced me to MacArthur Award-winning Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie and her TedTalk: *The Danger of a Single Story*. This speech is a perfect first-person example of the how literature can have lasting effects on the personal narratives of children, especially our students. It is essential that educators give students access to their own cultures' stories as well as stories that reflect their classmates' personal narratives. I have since shown this TedTalk to many of my classes to begin the school year and set a tone for the texts we will be reading.

The second article that really shaped my capstone was *Building Bridges from Both Sides* by Kathleen Isaacs. This opened my eyes to the fact that I couldn't be choosing any texts for the wiki without doing extensive research on the author. This article gave vital information on the importance of authorship and authenticity. Therefore

when I chose the texts to include in the wiki, I first looked to see if the author of the work(s) was a member of the culture he or she was writing about as well as if they had won any awards. If the author was not a member of the culture, a cultural courier as Isaacs (2007) puts it, I made sure they did the necessary research and possibly won awards for the work, and therefore made it authentic. My hope is that none of the texts presented in the wiki merely give a stereotype of the represented culture, but an authentic glimpse. I know that no single story can completely communicate all the beautiful complexities of a culture, but the goal is to at least give an accurate glimpse. Isaacs' article helped me find those texts.

I have also learned how to create and update a wiki. I had never realized how much dedication it takes to add every detail as well as make sure it is accessible and easy to navigate. The articles by Patt Moser and the United States Department of Health and Human Services were paramount to the construction of the wiki. These articles taught me the importance of feedback and introduced the amazing ideas of asking others to contribute as well. It took me a while to figure out how to give others access to the wiki after I invited some colleagues to view it and they were denied access. Not everything was as cut and dry as I expected it would be. However, after I received feedback from my colleagues and others in the profession, I realized what an impact this wiki could make.

### **Community Impact and Limitations**

This project can possibly have a very positive impact on the educational community. It will start with my current school and hopefully the ripples will continue to grow and the word of the existence of the wiki will spread. I have already discussed some more possible text options to include in the 9th and 10th grade curriculum at my school

and my Department Chair is more than happy to oblige the conversation and possibility of making changes. My understanding is that the curriculum has included mostly British literature in the past, but it is slowly evolving to include more and more diverse texts. Already she has offered to introduce short stories and essays written by Toni Morrison and Edwidge Danticat, a Haitian writer and editor. Overall, the goal of this project is to make these texts more available for all teachers who need to meet the needs of their students by including more diverse texts in their curriculum. Hopefully this will also inspire administrators to change curriculum to include more of these texts. The wiki will be constantly updated with new works as they are published.

One of my challenges and possible limitations was figuring out how to choose and label the different cultures that I wanted to include in the wiki. I wanted to make sure that I used the correct labels for each culture. I asked many people and read many articles about the numerous labels that are sometimes used for a single culture. For example, I know many of my students identify as black instead of African American, as they aren't from Africa and don't consider themselves to be African. Therefore I chose to label one of my wiki cultural sections as Black or African American. I know many of my labels are extremely broad, such as the Asian or Pacific Islander section. There is no one defining Asian culture; there are so many different countries and cultural groups in Asia. This is a definite limitation in the project. Over time, I hope to create more subsections as I discover more and more texts to include from Asian writers. In general, I hope to continue this project for years to come. Even as I am writing this I found a whole book of Native American Poetry that has a Kickstarter campaign and will be published early next year. As soon as it comes out, I am ready to read it and hopefully add it to the wiki.



Another limitation of the project is getting the word out about its existence. I want to conduct more research into how to get the website listed and ranked higher on Google search. Without that, it will have to be word of mouth that promotes the wiki in its first stages. As awareness increases, I hope to get more and more collaborators to contribute to the project. There is just so much literature out there, and I want to include as much as I can. However, there is only so much time, and with a full-time job and a little baby at home, I can only get so much reading done. Adding collaborators will help me with my own time limitations. This will be detailed more in the following section about my plans for the future of the wiki.

### **Where Do We Go From Here**

Moving forward, there are many steps that I would like to take to both improve and promote the wiki. In order to improve the quality of the wiki, I look to the feedback from my survey. I sent the survey to nine different schools. I included two schools from my previous district in Minnesota, six from the district I live in now in Maryland, and one private school, where I currently work. I contacted the principal and a few faculty in the English departments of each school and asked them to kindly distribute the surveys. I received 15 responses. The feedback I received was very helpful and moving forward I have a lot of ideas of how to improve the quality and usability of the wiki. For example, I had one teacher, who teaches English as a second language, tell me that it would be helpful for her to have lower level texts as well for her English language learners. Most of the texts on the wiki currently are for 6-12 grades. I plan to add a few titles to each section that would be more accessible to those students who are perhaps reading at a lower level than their native-English-speaking peers.

Another helpful piece of feedback was from a social studies teacher. She advised me that in order to make the website more accessible to those who teach social studies, it would be best to have a page that puts all the texts into a timeline so teachers of that subject could just grab texts for the corresponding time periods of their units. I think this is a great idea and, moving forward, I will create a page that organizes the text chronologically. This could even be helpful to other literacy teachers who are looking for a text to fit within a certain time period or theme. Another social studies teacher gave me the feedback that the texts currently listed would be great supplemental texts and would help students to further understand their place in history. They could also help facilitate a discussion about how fiction can mimic historical experiences. One year after the launch, more research will be done to track diversity in the two school districts that I originally researched and, over time, the categories may increase to include more diverse cultures. Every six months, the wiki will be reviewed and monitored for content and relevance.

To promote the wiki, I will continue to contact schools in the region. I will ask my colleagues both here and in Minnesota to help me spread the word as well. Another idea is to link the wiki to Pinterest as I have found that many of my colleagues get ideas for their curriculum on that website. After that, I can continue to do more research into how to make my wiki more accessible from search engines. In order for this wiki to have any impact, people need to know it exists. I will also continue to read and add as many texts as I can.

### **Summary**

If I can accomplish a successful promotion, this wiki will have a profound impact on many students who need to have their stories represented in the classroom. This

project has made such a huge difference to me as an educator. I am constantly trying to look deep into myself and ask what kind of affect I am having on my students. This project has allowed me to glimpse into so many different cultures. I have read so many novels, plays, and poems. It has opened my eyes to the world we all live in, and I can't wait to use it in my own classroom as well as make it possible for others to do so. The beauty of this project is that the possibilities are endless. There are still so many texts out there just waiting to be read and included on the wiki, and as long as more multicultural literature is being written and published, the wiki will continue to grow.

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\*\*Link to Survey: <https://goo.gl/forms/69xDzhxyxd933UE2>

\*\* Link to Multicultural Literature Wiki: <https://multiculturaltxts.wikispaces.com/>