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## Secondary Teachers Should Expose Rural Readers To Books That Are Culturally Different Than The Student's Personal Choice

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SECONDARY TEACHERS SHOULD EXPOSE RURAL READERS TO  
BOOKS THAT ARE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT THAN THE STUDENT'S  
PERSONAL CHOICE

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Literacy Education

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

Since becoming a teacher, I have started to be more conscious of the books that I read. Instead of only reading the simple love stories where the so-called prince always seems to sweep the lady off her feet, I now enjoy mystery and edgy drama that gets me thinking about worlds unlike my own. Not just fantasy worlds either, but realistic worlds full of gangs, deadly violence, cultural divides, or even suicide. Worlds that involve characters who are different from the normal crowd are the ones that attract me as a reader now. I am from a large suburb of Minneapolis, where diversity is everywhere. Yet, nobody really seems to address it, positively or negatively. It just exists. Moving to southern Minnesota opened my eyes to how much diversity there truly is out there. By moving to a rural community, it showed me how lacking diversity is in these areas that are not far from the big suburbs.

I teach 7th and 8th grade English at a rural school in southern Minnesota, where diversity is about as rare as is people not farming for a living. In my experience, the amount of exposure that these students have to the outside world is very minimal. Being a smaller school, with people having similar tastes to one another, means that book choices are very basic. There is not the amount of books in libraries as there are in suburban area schools. I want to examine what the students are reading, and how they would react when exposed to books that discuss topics outside of their comfort zone. I wanted to see if I

could find ways to increase student awareness of events that may not occur in their rural community, like gang shootings. I also wanted to find ways to decrease their judgment of life outside of their rural town. This leads me to my capstone statement: Secondary teachers should expose rural readers to books that are culturally different than their personal choice.

### **Exposure in the Classroom**

My interest in personal choice and exposure all began at the first school I taught at a semi-rural school, which had a population of 12,000 people. The diversity at this high school was 90% White, 3% African American, .6 American Indian, 1.5 Asian, and 2.5 other races. In the town where I currently teach, the population is 2,272 people. The school demographics consist of 96% White, 0.5% Asian, 0.2% American Indian, 1.5 % African American, and 1% Hispanic. As one can see, the diversity here is not evenly distributed, creating a culture that is not diverse by any means.

What these students are exposed to, in terms of difficulties living on the streets, or gang fights, etc., is lacking when compared to suburban demographics. Some numbers can be compared, but there are more noticeable differences than similarities. I enjoyed teaching at my first school, one of the reasons being the large diversity among the students who attended school. There was a large Somali and Hispanic population, which provided an exposure to different cultures than most of southern Minnesota. Students of all races were exposed daily to people different than they were, yet they all had the same common goal; to graduate.

When I moved to my current school district, exposure to the Somali culture no longer existed. A piece of culture was pried out of my professional life, at no fault of the school. While walking the halls, I noticed the conversations were different than at my former school, and the topics discussed in class were unlike those at my old school. Culture is analyzed differently, and students are unable to grasp the concepts and beliefs of cultures unlike their own. This is largely due to the fact that their peers come from cultures that are comprised of the same beliefs as their own, making conversation on different cultures seem irrelevant to them.

This attitude towards culture reveals a lot about the exposure they have towards people and ideas unlike themselves. In reference to something novelist Coehlo once said, culture makes people understand one another better. It makes obstacles easier to overcome when there is a mutual understanding that your “neighbors” are just like you, living in the same world as you, and fighting similar battles as you. If students can be open to understanding different cultures, they will be open to reading about these cultures in novels.

The books that I taught at each school are different as well. At the first school, I taught a classic novel called *The Outsiders* by S.E Hinton. At my current school, I teach the same book, but I also teach a book called *La Linea*, which is about two teenagers trying to cross the Mexican border to have a better life in America. In my opinion, when comparing the exposure these two books have for students, *La Linea* sheds light on a topic that is otherwise ignored, or frowned upon, in today’s society, especially in a town where diversity is lacking. The students really enjoy the book, and I think it is because

they are not exposed to Hispanic culture daily, so they get a perspective from kids their age, enduring tasks they cannot imagine having to do. I wish that more books were offered to students out of their realm of reality, so that they can see life through a different lens.

When my current school hired a new librarian, the entire library received a makeover. New Young Adult literature was placed on the shelves for students to read. There is an array of genres at their fingertips; far more variety than what they have previously. The topics addressed within these novels are gritty, real, and uncut, which the students in this rural school need. Topics like gang violence, effects of racism, suicide, and transgender books are just a few of the examples of novels placed on the shelves this year. The exposure that these titles can bring to students will help open their minds to the possibilities and cultures that are in the world around them. When I noticed these titles emerging around me, I wanted to focus on the rural students in the school, and what novels they would be drawn to. I have been drawn to titles outside of my comfort zone during multiple higher education courses, and they have opened my mind to the possibilities of life outside my beliefs. I want to see if the same students can open their minds in the same way that I did.

### **Rationale**

In this study, I hope to learn the reasons behind why rural students have less exposure to a variety of cultural topics than those who live in the suburbs. Topics like gang violence, racial profiling, and transgender novels are not as exposed in rural libraries, due to the lack of understanding around these topics. What factors determine



how exposed rural students are to novels that discuss cultural differences than that of where they live? Is it due to their surroundings and lack of diversity that tends to follow a rural setting? Students get so caught up in their personal choices and opinions, that they barricade themselves from new genres of books. I have students who make comments in the hallways about different races, transgender people, and topics similar to those, so if novels that focus on these topics are placed in their libraries, would they be inclined to grab these novels, or would they leave them sitting on the shelf? In my experience, whatever is comfortable to the students and their lifestyle explains a lot about the books that they enjoy reading.

In order to investigate the reading choices of rural students, I will be focusing on seniors who attend my rural, K-12 school, to see their reaction to books that have more exposure than what they are comfortable with. I noticed lately that the shelves of my personal classroom library consist mainly of the same genres of books. The top two shelves are filled with high school drama books. On the shelf below that, there lies a whole row of fantasy novels. The fourth shelf contains an assortment of fiction genres about the wilderness, love, and adventure. I want to see if I can shift the thinking of my students so that they are more inclined to grab novels outside of these genres, and that discuss real-life issues, such as gang violence and cultural misunderstandings.

One concern with exposure in novels, that ended up putting a fire under me for this topic, was a parental contact I had last year. The shelves in my classroom are open to all students, and they are free to checkout whichever book they choose. About two months into the school year, I had a parent come into my classroom holding a book,

claiming that their child should not be reading about the topic inside, because they are struggling with it in their own life. The book was called *Cut* by Patricia McCormick, and it discussed a young adult going through depression and taking out their anger on themselves. I listened to what this parent had to say, but I thought to myself, why keep your child from reading something that they can relate to, and that might actually help them cope with their struggles? When it came time to write a capstone, and I started seeing more and more novels on my library's shelves about edgy topics, I knew I was curious about the choices students make, and if these choices involve new exposure or not.

### **Significance of Project**

Being well-rounded citizens, and having empathy towards others who are different than oneself is of utmost importance in the world nowadays. Ensuring that students are able to have open minds, and a yearning towards learning about cultures unlike their own, is the whole reason behind this project. Rural students, who find that living where they do creates an unintentional barrier to being exposed, could benefit from this project as well. They can learn to open their minds to the fact that there are other authors than just what is in the school library and/or taught in class. Too often I have seen students that are only exposed to the books read within the classroom, and books that are popular among other kids their age. These books tend to be very similar to one another, focusing on love, friendship, relationships, etc.

Young adults are drawn to this popular type of fiction, and are often times unaware of the other novels available to them. They get so absorbed in trying to fit in with what they are reading that they forget that it is alright to try new books. By exposing

students to perceptions and ideas unlike their own, it helps create a stronger culture within a school; a culture where judgement falls to the wayside, and respect takes over.

A school is an area where students learn the most, so exposing them to cultures and ideas far different than what they are accustomed to only helps expand their respect for one another. Developing this respect at an early age helps guarantee a better world in the future. With the amount of rural schools around, helping them create an understanding of cultures they are not normally exposed to will benefit not only themselves, but others who come in contact with them as the years progress.

My motivation for this understanding stems from reading a novel recently which opened my eyes to a culture different than my own. It is called *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds, and it discussed a gang involved shooting in the inner city, which is far opposite of the like I live. I wanted to spread this desire to learn about different lifestyles to my students, but I was unsure how to do so. I tried doing a book chat with them, and this sparked questions and curiosity right away. I hoped this would push them to grab this novel, along with similar ones as well. However, their curiosity quickly faded as they began searching for books on high school drama instead. I thought to myself; “ how can I get them to choose a novel on different cultures all on their own?”

When considering what to write for my capstone, exposure to my rural students came to mind. This project would be a great way to see what students are actually choosing, and how much exposure they are yearning to learn about. Teachers of all subjects can benefit from this project, because every student attends multiple classes a

day. These classes are all unique in their own way, yet one element remains constant; the students. Exposing the students to diverse cultures in fiction helps their minds expand.

This expansion will carry over into multiple subjects because concepts students learn from novels are not solely to benefit an English class. Students learn life-lessons, and they learn how to be genuinely kind individuals. If they are exposed to novels outside what they normally read, they learn kindness in a different way. They learn about acceptance, which leads to less judgement in their future. Less judgement means more understanding as the world continues to change.

### **Summary**

On my journey so far with this capstone project, I have felt myself getting more excited about what information I can accrue on rural students, mine in particular. They are whom I spend my days with, and who this project can undoubtedly benefit. This has brought me to my capstone statement, that secondary teachers should expose rural readers to books that are culturally different than the student's personal choice. This topic can surely benefit students of all ages, and teachers of all areas. Acceptance is so important within schools, and this topic helps teach this concept by exposing ideas most students would not think about considering. In Chapter Two, I examine the literature on rural students, reading choice, exposure, and student behaviors. Chapter Three contains the content of the project, who can use it, and how they can use it.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

In chapter one of this capstone, rural students and their exposure to certain ideas was explored. The exposure, or lack thereof, for rural students within my classroom has been the main drive for me during this entire process. In my experience with smaller schools, there is less variety in cultures, which makes some students judge these cultures before knowing anything about them. They walk the halls using derogatory language unfit to be heard inside school walls. I hope that my research into why providing other avenues of novel choices is a great idea for these students will be beneficial to those who read this capstone.

I have taught at both a large school and a smaller school, and I realize that the students at the more rural school have less exposure to different cultures than larger school because of their community and location. I want to narrow this gap between rural and suburban/ inner city schools so regardless of where you go to school you are being exposed to other cultures. Since judgement is everywhere, this would be a tool to curb such harshness and expose younger generations to other cultures unlike their own. The implementation of an after-school book club, that includes multiple books dealing with unique cultures, prompted me to write about my research statement: secondary teachers should expose rural readers to books that are culturally different than the student's personal choice.

In this Literature Review, the first section will discuss the research surrounding rural areas, the relationships developed in these areas, and how this affects the community members and students. In my experience, there seems to be a lot of trials and tribulations that impact rural communities and the inhabitants there. These problems are unique to rural communities, and tend to be focused on problems only people in a small area seem to face, such as lack of educational materials and locations, money, same cultures, lack of exposure, etc.

Next, the Literature Review will discuss reading choices amongst students. There are many benefits to offering choice for readers, but there are also some side effects of doing so, which will be discussed. The way a classroom culture is formed makes a huge difference for learning, so this topic is explored at length. The reasoning behind why students choose certain books will be explored here as well.

Then, the third section will discuss student behavior. This will be discussed because knowing the reasoning behind why students deserve more exposure is important. In order to be well-rounded human beings, their influences and motivations need to be researched. What drives them to react and choose certain behaviors? That is the main focus for this section. How teachers can help assist these behaviors is also addressed.

The final section of the literature review will look at how exposure to multiple cultures is necessary in rural areas. The definition of censorship is addressed, and the reasoning behind why people feel the need to censor ideas. Those ideas may be regarded as beneficial to someone else, yet because it goes against one's beliefs, it is therefore removed from availability. Parental concerns and the exposure they want for their

children shapes the child's world, and this is the world where they get all their knowledge. Not only do students get knowledge from their parents, but they get knowledge from school as well, which means librarians should not self-censor items in the library either. Depending on content, it could be something that students could benefit reading and learning from.

Incorporating all of these ideas into the Literature Review helps answer the question: "How can secondary teachers expose rural readers to books that are culturally different than their personal choice, in order to increase awareness and decrease judgement?"

### **Rural Challenges**

Life is all about location, whether that means being in the right place at the right time, or being in the right area to better grow as a person. When people choose rural areas to live and start their family, the ambiance and the school system is what draws them in and keeps them. As Howley (2006) stated, "Place, for rural people, involves the meanings and relationships associated with land, nature, and local history and knowledge," (p. 65). People who associate themselves with small rural towns tend to have a closer connection with those around them, and they feel closer to the area. Rural residents tend to be more attached to the feeling of "place," for it provides a stronger sense of purpose and identity for them (Falk, 2004; Howley, 2006; Vorkinn & Riese, 2001).

What does the term "rural" truly mean? Many people define it as they deem appropriate, but Monk (2012) defined the term rural as "simply a catchword for

everything that is not urban or metropolitan,” (p. 156). Any town that can be found on the outskirts of a bigger one can be considered as rural, and people of those communities should realize where they fit on this type of scale.

### **School Population**

Even though there are many benefits to living in a rural area, it still comes with problems pertaining solely to rural communities and the way that they operate. Not only are there certain tasks that affect community members, but there are challenges that greatly affect students and education as well. Monk (2007) stated that, “Smaller schools tend to have smaller class sizes, although cost sensitivities can prompt measures like combining grade levels,” (p. 160). Smaller class sizes can definitely benefit students by giving them more one on one time when needed within the classroom. Sometimes, though, small class sizes lead to combining certain grade levels because there are not enough students to make up a class. This is not optimal for learning because their specific needs at those grade levels cannot be fully addressed when other grade levels need attention as well.

Schools can become so small that they may need to close down, or consolidate to make up the cost difference. Piphon (1987) said that small rural schools trying to fight off state officials in order to keep their school thriving may start to become a rare occurrence (p. 6). It becomes hard for schools to try and battle with the state to keep their livelihood afloat. Trying to figure out if a school will stay open or not can put stress on students and staff alike. “Despite consolidation, rural schools are still smaller and poorer than nonrural



schools,” (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, p. 116). Money is something that is hard to come by, especially when limited resources are available.

### **Resources**

Although rural students have advantages from their knowledge of the community and environment, their disadvantages stem from limited accessibility to resources and institutions (Lester, 2012, p. 411). There are physically not enough buildings and opportunities in a rural area to match up with urban areas. People who live in these areas know a large amount about the area, but are held back due to their lack of resources and places for further knowledge. The cost of living varies from rural to urban communities, which means that there are differences in the poverty rates at each. Lester (2012) stated that “High rates of poverty and minimal educational resources in rural communities can create and contribute to a perpetuation of high concentrations of poor students” (p. 408).

If students are affected by money issues, then their education can be affected, leaving them with less opportunity for resources to help them further their knowledge. Income in rural areas is considered to be below the poverty line (Lester, 2012, p. 408). These rural students have access to different types of education and opportunities. “Among the inherent characteristics [of rural towns] are small size, sparse settlement, narrowness of choice, distance from population concentrations, and an economic reliance on agricultural industries,” (Monk, 2007, p. 156).

There are less people to utilize the educational opportunities that present themselves within a small town, leaving agriculture as one of the larger forms of education and occupations. (Howley, 2006). Many students choose this path, and they

tend to think that if they farm, they do not need an education. This mindset can get rural towns into trouble with education, because students will put forth less effort in trying to expand their knowledge. Rural life experiences may limit education aspirations that students have (Howley, 2006).

### **Relationships**

Relationships, in general, tend to be different in a rural community because family shapes who we are as a person, and how we are raised (Coleman et al., 1989). Parents' attitudes and perceptions of raising their children show through their behavior, and this behavior thus results in how the child develops (Coleman et al., 1989).

This closeness and parental attitude affects how a child perceives their education. Parents are the first step in a child's success (Coleman et al., 1989). Rural parents and families find that exposing their child to new interactions and people is tough to find. Extended family members are always in constant contact with each other in rural areas, which leads to a pattern of limiting numbers of interactions with people outside of a family unit (Coleman et al., 1989). Since families are so close-knit within rural areas, the children rarely get exposed to people outside their community and family.

This leads them to have less experience with people different than themselves. "Limited association with other groups leads to a strengthening of already held values and is thus conducive to greater fixity of habits and opinions," (Coleman et al., 1989, p. 330). People tend to stick to an opinion they have, and it is very hard to rid themselves of this opinion. Rural populations especially feel apprehensive of learning about cultures different than their own, especially if they are not aware of what that culture's beliefs are.

Urban students and families may feel differently on this topic because they are generally exposed to a greater variety of beliefs and values within their community (Coleman et al., 1989). Their “norm” becomes a blend of many cultures, whereas rural students do not have much of a variety to throw into their mix. This is not something that can be put solely on the shoulders of the students in the rural community, though. Rural family members tend to be more traditional in their beliefs than urban families (Coleman et al., 1989). These traditional beliefs are hard to change, especially when surrounded by a community that believes the same.

With a lack of new cultural backgrounds moving into rural communities, beliefs tend to stay rooted in what is known. “Less populated communities are more conventional and cultural change occurs more slowly than in more populated communities” (Coleman et. al, 1989, p. 329). All of these challenges are faced by rural communities and their students daily. Defining what rural means is the first step to figuring out what is necessary to move forward in education in “rural” areas. The lack of resources and experiences that people of rural communities have access to poses challenges that only these members of the populace can understand.

### **Student Behavior**

Every student is unique in their own way, and the same can be said about their learning styles and needs. Each student learns in a way that suits their needs, and this may be different than others in their grade/school. When it comes to reading, they also are unique in their choices, likes, and dislikes. All of this variety means that every student has certain “things” that influence them. These influences also motivate students to learn

more, or shift their focus of learning. Teachers can also make or break a student's behavior. This section highlights influences and motivators of student behavior.

### **Influences**

Students yearn to belong within their school, and among their peers. Fitting in and seeming important to the peers around them is what drives students to act as they do, especially in a school setting. Walsh (1984) said that "Children are influenced by their peers' tastes even more than adults are" (p. 251). Adults are affected by what others do around them to an extent, but when children see their peers reading a certain novel, they want to fit in with them so they will be more likely to grab that novel and start reading it.

While children may not be experts when it comes to literary criticism, they are experts on what appeals to other children their own age (Walsh, 1984). They do not need to know how to criticize a novel deeply. Without really knowing it, children are the experts when it comes to what other children their own age would be interested in reading. Yes, each child has their own opinion, but they all can fall under the same umbrella of interests.

Edmunds and Bauserman (2006) claimed that "Children [find] books interesting because of the books' relation to their personal interests" (p. 416). They are influenced by what interests them outside of school, therefore being more willing and interested in reading novels that pertain to those subjects.

Students are influenced by what their home life is like, and what they may or may not be exposed to there. This could lead to a lack of variety in their reading interests because either they are not allowed to read the topics at home, or their home life

influences what they yearn to read about. Gambrell (1996) claimed that “Some students arrive at school with far more experience with [...] book language and home support for reading than others,” (p. 15). Each home life is different, and the baggage that students take with them to school varies as well.

Certain topics may be beneficial for certain students to read about because it may help them through tough times, or it may help them find themselves. Neuman (1986) claimed that “Reading materials contain particular attributes that appear to have a differential effect according to the informational needs and the personality characteristics of readers” (p. 48). Each child and their needs are different, and this should be taken into account when it comes to reading. Whatever influences a child varies, as well as what motivates children to read. They may or may not realize what types of items or people are influencing them, but they do know what motivates them and makes them interested in reading further.

### **Motivators**

Every student is unique when it comes to driving forces that encourage strong reading. It is generally known that motivation plays a critical role in student learning (Gambrell, 1996). When students are not motivated to learn, they shut down. All learning is seized because the student does not care for the topic at hand, or does not see how reading or learning about this topic is beneficial to them. They need to be engaged in their reading in order to be motivated to learn.

Gambrell (1996) claimed that an “engaged reader is motivated, choosing to read for a variety of purposes, such as gaining new knowledge, escaping into the literary world

of a text, and learning how to perform a task,” (p. 16). Each student reads for reasons that vary, and sometimes these reasons are only intended for them to know. These motivations can change depending on what is taking place in their life, so when they pick up a book to read, they are choosing to do so for whatever reason they feel is necessary at that point.

“Four key features [...] appear to be associated with motivation to read: access to books in the classroom, opportunities to self select books, familiarity with books, and social interactions with others about books” (Gambrell, 1996, p. 20). A classroom, or school library, is best suited for strong readers when there are a variety of options within their classroom to choose a novel. Books being read for classroom material need to be about familiar topics inside a classroom so that students can become comfortable with reading and discussing about them.

If they get to discuss what they read with their peers, they are increasing their knowledge about the novel just by discussing it out loud. Students who engage in frequent discussions with family and friends were more motivated, leading to higher reading scores, (Gambrell, 1996). Their comprehension levels increase because they are showing their learning out loud, and putting the pieces together of how the books is laid out.

Students enjoy choosing what they read. “A key to motivation is giving the student responsibility in deciding what s/he reads,” (Hoover, 1979, p. 582). When a student can decide what they want to read, they will be more willing to learn from their novel, thus leading to more enjoyment for them. Their learning is coming straight from

their own decisions, which students tend to enjoy. Their learning is placed into their own hands, instead of the hands of their teacher.

Teachers should remember to provide some choice in student learning, because this creates lifelong learners. Too often, children's motivation to read decreases as they get older (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006). The monotony of being told what and how to learn weighs on the students, creating an environment where they do not feel energized to read. Teaching students to enjoy reading is a tough skill, especially in today's society that moves at a mile a minute.

### **Teacher Influence**

How a student is taught to read is crucial in developing lifelong learners. Are they taught to enjoy the novels, or are they taught that they will be quizzed after each chapter, so they better pay attention? Teachers are important in the role they play in developing strong readers.

There are many different facets that teachers can focus on in order to influence readers in a positive way. Gambrell (1996) claimed that "[an] engaged reader is socially interactive, able to share and communicate with others in the process of constructing and extending the meaning of a text" (p. 16). Conveying how important reading can be for a student's future should be a main focus for the teacher. By allowing students to interact amongst each other in developing their ideas about a text, a teacher is allowing student-centered learning.

Students who come from a privileged background tend to talk more in a classroom setting, because they like to have their ideas validated, while students from

less privileged groups tend to speak up less (Cannon, 1990). Developing a safe environment for discussions from all students is crucial for teachers to do because their students will acquire the most knowledge from classrooms like that. They will be able to compare their experiences to those around them, expanding their knowledge about people who are different from them. With this expanded knowledge, curiosity about something different from their regular novel choices might start appealing to these students.

Research suggests that teachers who love reading, and are avid readers, have students who enjoy reading as well, providing higher reading achievement scores (Gambrell, 1996). Teachers should know that they are some of the biggest influences to children. If they show how important reading is in their own lives, students will start to realize that it is important to their teacher, so it can be important to them as well.

Gambrell (1996) also stated that “it is within the power of every teacher to inspire and motivate children to find a lifetime of pleasure and information in the reading of good books (p. 20). Students look up to their teachers, and if the teacher sets time aside in their schedule to sit down and read a good book, the students realize that they can too.

“Children frequently identify their teacher as the person who [introduces] books to them,” (Edmunds & Bauserman, 2006, p. 419). Their parents may never read books, so a child might not associate reading with positivity. A teacher can sometimes be the only person to unmask the hidden beauty that reading can exhibit.

The teacher has such a paramount role in influencing and motivating a student to read. How a student perceives reading can be decided based upon how a teacher portrays reading, and how important it is inside their classroom. When teachers are sometimes the



only person who reads in a student's life, this reading and discussing needs to be at the forefront of their education so that the student can become a lifelong learner.

### **Classroom Culture**

“In middle school and beyond, students demonstrate a decrease in reading motivation that is due to instructional practices” (Morgan & Wagner, 2013, p. 660). Because the way that classrooms are utilized in today's society, it is easy for reading to be overlooked. There are far too many things that teachers have to keep track of and teach to their students, that sometimes reading and choice in what to read is neglected.

Moving from whole class instruction that consists of assigned reading, to more self-selected texts, benefit students in many ways (Morgan & Wagner, 2013). When students are assigned certain novels to read, they lose the importance of finding and enjoying an actual novel. They get caught up with the fact that they need to read a certain number of pages by an assigned date, instead of focusing on aspects of the novel that they find pleasing.

Gambrell (1996) stated that “Teachers have long recognized that motivation is at the heart of many of the pervasive problems we face in educating today's children” (p. 17). Fewer and fewer students are finding the motivation they need to want to read more. They would rather use their time on other things, like using technology for entertainment purposes.

Students will attempt harder novels and enjoy texts that challenge them more when they have background knowledge on the book and its contents (Morgan & Wagner, 2013). Teachers should provide background information on what the book is about, or

why the author wrote it, for a few different reasons. One reason is because the students will not feel as though they are diving head first into this challenging text without knowing why or how to read it. Another reason is because they will give up less easily if they can determine an ending factor for reading the novel.

As DiTullio (2014) stated, “We need to be conscientious about creating a classroom environment where students can safely take risks and, more importantly, safely fail” (p. 40). If students are challenging themselves with arduous novels, or novels that are out of the “norm,” we as teachers need to allow them this opportunity to fail if need be. If these novels do not work out for them, respect needs to be the number one concern, from teachers and from other students.

Students learn about the real-world while they read, and reading helps develop well-rounded individuals because they are exposed to multiple cultures within these novels. They realize that their world is much bigger than just what they know, which is especially important for rural readers. Birch and Cassels (n.d.) claimed that “Recognizing, reasoning about, and responding to the mental and emotional states of others are fundamental aspects of social interaction and development” (p. 7). Reading more novels outside of their normal choice allows a reader to develop an understanding of emotions, based off of characters and plot. By having more understanding students within a classroom, the culture of that classroom will shift and be more respectful overall, making learning more influential.

Classroom libraries are so important when it comes to developing a positive classroom culture, as well as open-minded readers. Greater attention and priority needs to

be placed on quality classroom libraries because there is usually something worth sharing in most novels, (Gambrell, 1996). Books are meant to be read and shared with others, so a classroom library should have many different options for students to pick up and read.

Gambrell (1996) also stated that “Increasing the number of books available to children in the classroom can have a positive effect on the amount and quality of the literacy experience in the classroom,” (p. 12). The more book choices available to the students, the more they will be excited to choose another book after they finish one. A priority for a classroom teacher should be about creating a strong classroom library, that encourages readers to branch out and pick novels of all different kinds. The culture within a classroom is so important for strong learners and readers, and should be focused on to encourage more students to step up and read when they can.

### **Benefits of Choice**

As stated earlier, choice in education is crucial to developing strong learners. People in general prefer having control of situations, and reading should be no different. Some teachers are apprehensive when it comes to offering too much choice in education, but when it comes to reading, it is acceptable to provide choice in the novels that students can read. As a teacher, you are just broadening their horizons and opening up new knowledge for them to explore.

Choice can be a positive and driving force for young readers, and it should be utilized when it can (Morgan & Wagner, 2013). Teachers should realize that when students decide what they want to read, they will be more willing to grab a novel and read it, if they have chosen the book, so it is up to them to enjoy it, not up to the teacher. The

teacher did not make them read the novel they chose, so they will start associating reading with positive choices. Reading choice creates more motivation within students and it provides better engagement for those readers who think that reading is difficult (Morgan & Wagner, 2013). Students are better motivated to learn when it is something they enjoy, and the same can be said about reading. They would prefer to read if it is about something that piques their interest.

“When students make choices about their reading, they are engaging in decisions that will contribute to their self-efficacy, as well as ones that will facilitate their independence as readers” (Lent, 2008, p. 62). Students learn to make decisions for themselves, which will be beneficial in their lives as they grow up. Reading is a lifelong skill, and when offered choice in what to read, the students learn that reading is valued and can be enjoyable, even when they get older.

When students can choose what to read, they are given a chance to navigate their way through new ideas. Learning happens when something new is introduced and the student interprets this knowledge in a way that best suits them. Choice helps students appreciate different perspectives and realities in the world, especially when it comes to power and privilege (Cannon, 1990).

Seeing teachers read for enjoyment helps to paint a brighter picture for reading within a classroom. Teachers self-select novels that appeal to them, so students see an example of what choosing interesting novels looks like. “When we, as teachers, share our own reading with students [...] we demonstrate to our students that reading helps us learn more about the world in which we live” (Gambrell, 1996). Teachers are some of the best

role models for children, and if they can exhibit this behavior, students will realize that reading is an activity that they can choose for themselves, and it can actually be enlightening as well.

Offering choice in reading helps students put their education into their own hands. The benefits of choice in reading far outweigh the negatives, therefore creating a positive classroom culture. When a classroom is positive and centered around quality literature options, students will thrive because they are exposed to different cultures, communities, and lifestyles unknown to them before.

### **Censorship**

Students, and people in general, tend to get caught up in their own pace of life, and do not like to branch out from their realities too often. Lopez claimed, “Books that offer a different worldview add to our understanding of social diversity in our communities and allows us to be a progressive society,” (2016). In rural areas, just like suburban areas, the community tends to label books as appropriate, or not appropriate, to read, in my experience. “Often the organizations or schools that ban these books fail to see the book as a whole; they often center on the one page, the one scene or even the one word containing the offensive language or meaning and judge the whole book based on that one aspect,” (Lopez, 2016). This is what draws me to my first topic about censorship in general, and what it looks like and does to students.

When somebody does not agree with another person’s beliefs, their first instinct is to get rid of that “negativity.” People fear that if their children read controversial texts, their minds will be skewed. Palmer (1982) claims that “students attitudes and behavior

reflect stable aspects of personality which are influenced more by parents, peers, schooling, and cultural socialization, than by reading,” (p. 311).

Just because a student reads a book about a controversial topic does not mean they will be shaped by that information. Their lives outside of reading tend to shape their actions more than the book itself. “Rather than changing opinions, reading tends to confirm our knowledge of issues and reinforces already established beliefs” (Neuman, 1986, p. 47). People form their own opinions on aspects of life, and reading generally helps solidify what somebody already believes, in one way or another. Lopez stated, “It's a natural and innate human trait to be inquisitive and one cannot ignore or run away from that curiosity,” (2016). There must be a way for students to form their own opinion on these novels, and not be censored from it.

Now, more than ever, there are massive efforts to censor everything, including homework assignments and textbooks within a classroom (Palmer, 1982). The world is constantly changing around us, and so are the beliefs of people. They are starting to think that censoring topics that are edgy is the best way to keep children safe when, in reality, it only shelters them from ideas that could broaden their knowledge of the world.

Politics, religion, lifestyle choices, and morals are the most frequently censored areas for books (Carnovsky, 1950). Students need to learn about these areas because it helps them see more of the world that they may not get exposed to. Lopez claimed, “We would not be a functioning [...] society without books that offer a different view of the world, (2016). Schools need to allow students to be part of the story in a setting that is different than what they know. (Lopez, 2016). Doing so, allows students to expand their

knowledge in a safe environment where questions can be asked and answered instead of assuming information.

“Religion [is] a subject on which we tend to be more sensitive than on any other” (Carnovsky, 1950, p. 26). There are more religions than people even know of in the world, yet some people tend to think that their religion is the only one that matters. It makes it hard to learn about other religions when it comes to small, rural towns, because if a school or parent chooses to censor books about other religions due to their beliefs, their children miss out on the variety of ideas that the world presents.

As Denzin (2013) claimed, “On a purely logistical level, limiting or censoring texts seems an insurmountable task” (p. 10). There are so many options in the world where the topics offset many people’s opinions. The list of controversial authors and their work is so extensive that if censors were able to achieve their goals in removing them all, there would be little books of interest left out there (Swiderek, 1996).

“Society [needs] to agree upon what types of content would make the ‘inappropriate’ list,” (Denzin, 2013, p. 10). If there is an underlying definition for this, then censors would be better understood, but the problem with this is the fact that society will probably never come to a consensus on what ‘inappropriate’ means. Everybody believes in what matters to them, and this is something different for each person.

Swiderek (1996) stated that “to be educated means to be allowed to think and wonder about ideas and their consequences” (p. 592). This idea is one that a majority of people can stand behind, because education is so crucial in this day and age.

Rickman (2010) claimed that “while all individuals have the right to challenge ideas, none have the right to censor access to information,” (p. 3). The challenging of ideas is what makes the world so interesting, but when somebody decides that their beliefs dictate what other people should be exposed to, is where censorship does more harm than help. Students especially need access to ideas of all kinds. They get caught up in their own lives that they tend to forget about how vast Earth and its cultures are.

Realistic Young Adult fiction (YA) is a commonly censored genre by parents, librarians and teachers, due to what these books tend to address. YA novels have started to deal with issues that are significant to the young adult’s lives, whereas previously, fiction only offered viewpoints of mature individuals (Rickman, 2010). Some parents, teachers, and librarians, think that materials discussed are too intense for a young adult to be reading. In actuality, “Realistic YA fiction provides a place to rehearse aspects of the reality of life in a safe environment” (Rickman, 2010, p. 6).

Students sometimes need a ‘safe’ place to escape their realities. Edgy, yet real, YA books are the way to do this for some, in my experience. “[...] students are going to experiment and explore their individuality and the world around them regardless of what their parents or schools believe,” (Lopez, 2016). They can explore life outside of their norm without the fear of being judged, which some students truly need. Reading is a way of escaping the everyday world and diving into something different than what the reader is accustomed to. Having more novels that invoke student curiosity could be a great way to increase students engagement with reading. Sometimes, though, parents can be the ones who are censoring these students more than anyone.



## **Parental Censorship**

Parents have a vision for what they want their child to be exposed to in life, and that gets harder to control as their child grows older. Adults believe that teenagers could be influenced, or even damaged, from materials within a book (Palmer, 1982). As long of the novel meets their own requirements for being acceptable, then their child may read it.

Palmer (1982) claimed that “many parents [...] assume that because they responded to a book in a particular manner, all others reading the book will respond in the same fashion,” (p. 311). This is where teenagers and their parents tend to clash, because they each think they know what is best for the teenager. Parents need to understand that sometimes what is best for their child is to read about the topics that interest them. It does not mean that it will make them go out and do the activities portrayed in the book. Students may be emotionally moved by a book, as with anyone, but it does not mean they will go forth and change their attitudes and behavior because of it (Palmer, 1982).

Parents have less control over censoring novels when their child goes to school, which puts a lot of pressure on teachers, so teachers need to be prepared with the “why” of their novel. “Many parents [...] need to understand that literature is capable of exposing readers to value systems, ideas, and practices which may be different than their own,” (Palmer, 1982, p. 311). The reading of a variety of texts different from what is available at home is what makes education flourish within a classroom. The child is then exposed to many viewpoints and ideas that they may not be exposed to at home.

Teachers discontinue using books, or limit access to them, when a parent disagrees with the reasoning behind it (Lent, 2008). It is the teacher's job to incorporate a positive learning experience for all of their students, but it is also important that the parents can respect the decisions they make, and recognize the educational opportunities for their children. "[...] kids are going to do what they want regardless of their parents' or school administrators' expectations." (Lopez, 2016). Keeping the lines of communication open and clear is solid way to ensure parents are on board with the teacher's literature decision.

Parents who are aware of their district policies "may be willing to engage in dialogue rather than blindly insisting that works be banned because of offensive words or themes" (Lent, 2008, p. 66). Keeping parents informed and involved in discussion of controversial literature will help get their voice heard, and place importance on their concerns. So not only should parents avoid censoring literature that they deem inappropriate, but teachers and schools should not make these decisions either. Therefore, they should work together to make the best choices for the students

### **Library/School Censorship**

In today's society, edgy topics such as suicide, gender, and racial inequality are what authors choose to write about, and literature is under constant examination because of this. Mikulecky (1979) claimed that "The use of printed material in schools has never been under as much scrutiny form as many diverse groups as is presently the case," (p. 4). Groups of all people, and from all different backgrounds feel the need to censor novels that they feel is inappropriate due to their cultural religious, or political beliefs

Classroom libraries can be censored just as easily as school libraries. Teachers have to be careful as to not censor their classroom libraries, no matter their rationale for it (Swiderek, 1996). Students have access to all types of libraries, and they should be exposed to whatever interests them because that is how they become educated.

If a teacher is using any literature in their class, they should be prepared to explain why and how they plan on doing so (Palmer, 1982). This is true for any teacher, but especially for a teacher who wants to incorporate controversial literature, because administration, parents, and the community may ask questions. “Pressure to block access to resources is ever increasing,” (Rickman, 2010, p. 2). Everybody wants to state their opinion on what literature students should have access to, but it needs to boil down to what is best for the student.

School libraries are just as important when it comes to having plentiful resources for students to read from as a classroom library, but librarians tend to self-censor, whether they intend to or not. Rickman (2010) stated that “Self-censorship by a school librarian involves making collection management choices on the basis of avoiding conflict with administrators, parents, or colleagues,” (p. 1). Librarians are in charge of the vast majority of books within a school, and sometimes they would rather avoid controversy within the community or school due to the books on their shelves.

“Because the school library is an important complement to the school classroom, it is critical that these resources represent a wide range of ideas and information,” (Rickman, 2010, p. 1). Education is so important, and broadening the minds of newer generations is so crucial to living in a positive world. Libraries should encapsulate

multiple viewpoints, ideas, and topics so that students can realize there is more to life than just the community that surrounds them.

One of the most meaningful quotes from my research comes from Swiderek (1996) claiming that, “If the pen is to remain mightier than the sword, we need to make sure books are not removed from the library shelves,” (p. 593). Knowledge stems from literature of all kinds, and reading and writing is so crucial to keep the world spinning. If we want to keep generations educated about all aspects of life, years from now, libraries need to remain open to literature of all kinds. The best education comes from reading, and the best weapon one can have is knowledge and the ability to think critically.

### **Conclusion**

Students that are located in rural communities tend to be exposed to fewer cultures than other communities. Realizing this fact brought me to my statement: Secondary teachers should expose rural readers to books that are culturally different than their personal choice. After reviewing multiple articles and pieces of literature, I established a few focal points for the literature review.

Rural areas are unique, and educating students from these areas takes a certain kind of focus. This makes educating rural students, and getting those communities on board with new ideas, a distinct challenge. The resources available to students are specific to what their school has access to, and what is acceptable in the community. The relationships that people have with each other also shape the way rural communities work together when it comes to education. Teachers should take these ideas into consideration when teaching reading in a rural setting.

Every individual behaves in their own way, yet students all across the world have very similar concerns. They can be easily influenced by anything or anybody, especially when it comes to reading. There are certain items and ideas that motivate them to want read more, one of these motivators being their own teachers.

Offering students the choice in what and how to read is a great way to get them to expand their reading repertoire and offers them a way to gain more insight into the world beyond their school. The idea of “choice” in reading pushes students to educate themselves more than they would when simply assigned a novel to read. By setting up a positive classroom culture that is centered around positive reading, students will thrive and become stronger readers.

Keeping students away from topics and novels they want to read creates censorship. Censorship is done all the time, whether people know they are doing it or not. Parents think that keeping their child away from certain topics will keep them out of harm’s way, when in actuality, it could become the complete opposite of this. Schools and librarians sometimes feel that censoring their libraries is the proper thing to do, and keeping controversial titles off the shelves will keep those ideas locked up.

Part of education, however, is learning about and discussing the world around you. Rural students need exposure to other parts of the world because it is too easy for them to focus on their small community, never branching out. Exposing these students to novels that include topics that are least discussed in their community, or incorporate cultures unlike their own, is a unique and necessary task.

In Chapter Three, I explore the making of a book club that helps expose rural readers to ideas outside of their personal choice in a novel. I take the research examined in Chapter Two, and use it towards creating the best experience possible for rural students.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### **Introduction**

While teaching in a rural area has more positives than negatives, I still sat wondering about the lack of exposure those students had to cultures unlike their own. This brought me to my research statement, “Secondary teachers should expose rural readers to books that are culturally different than the student’s personal choice.”

I started paying close attention to the novels my students were reading, and they all seemed very similar. A quiet white girl meets a rich white boy at school, falls in love with him, and has something go wrong in their relationship, etc. So many of the plot lines that my students were reading mirrored a story similar to this. Now, in a rural area, people get stuck in their mindsets and rarely feel a need to change.

I figured there had to be a way to expose these students to novels that encompassed other cultures and their values. It is necessary, in this day and age, to expose students to cultures and values that are different than what they grew up with. Creating a two, or three, week unit that involves a book club feeling is what this chapter discusses. This book club would provide opportunities for these rural readers to expand their book choice into something outside of the realm of choice they normally stay inside.

By utilizing the Understanding By Design approach, created by Wiggins and McTighe, I first thought about where I wanted the students to end up. I kept in mind the fact that I will be working with seniors, and that I need to make sure their time is valued. Seniors do not want to have their time wasted, and they need to know they “why” of what is being asked of them. Once I realized this, I created my ideas for their reflection around it. As Walters and Newman (2008) stated, “Backward design begins with the selection and analysis of desired results, which consist of subcomponents such as established goals, understandings, and essential questions,” (p. 163).

I knew where I wanted to end up, with students shifting their mindsets and getting exposed to other cultures, so Understanding By Design was the best approach. I took the fact that student will be reflecting on their readings, and realized a comparison essay would be the best way to compare their rural lives to those of the characters in the books. I wanted to ensure that students could reflect on what they read and relate it to their own lives because that is when learning flourishes.

This book club would be a great tool to utilize within any rural area classroom, especially for upper high school students. It can be used as a way for teachers to create an open and respectful classroom, where differing views can be explored. If more rural schools would implement the book club project, more students would venture out into the world with accepting minds that can create brighter futures.

Chapter Three discusses the audience the book club is focused around, who will benefit most from utilizing it, and in what setting it would thrive in. After this is addressed, the timeline for the implementation will be discussed. Next, it addresses what



the book club is comprised of, including how to lay it out over the course of four weeks, as well as reading questions that are asked throughout the club. Finally, it provides rationale for why the book club is an important tool for secondary teachers from rural areas to use so that their readers can be exposed to multiple cultures and viewpoints, increasing their awareness of these cultures while decreasing the amount they judge other cultures.

### **Audience/Setting**

The audience will be high school seniors because they have more school experience and ideas to pull from for the book club activities. I felt this experience would lend more to group discussions about diverse topics. Since this is a book club that exposes rural students, the setting will be at a K-12 school in southern Minnesota.

The school population is 622 students, with student demographics of 96% White, 0.5% Asian, 0.2% American Indian, 1.5 % African American, and 1% Hispanic. The graduating classes are around 60 students, making their exposure to other cultures very minimal. This book club will help open up the minds of the senior class, hopefully expanding their desire for knowledge before they embark into the “real-world.” This book club can be utilized into any grade level, but 12th grade students are the focus for this project, benefiting them with further exposure to other cultures before most of them leave their small community for college.

### **Timeline / Project Description**

The timeline for this book club could be anytime within class time, but for my example, it will be focused after school for a four-week time span. The students will be

reading books of their choices, and analyzing and discussing their books with each other. After the four weeks is up, the students will be writing a short reflection paper comparing themselves to a character in one of the novels.

The initial start of the book club includes showcasing novels that the students may possibly choose to read. This is done in a book-chat style, including explanation on characters in the book, setting, and passages taken directly from the pages. This allows students to get a bigger picture on what the novel is about, and they get a sneak-peek into the author's writing style.

Then, the book lists are provided. There are two lists, "Book List One" and "Book List Two." The first list includes novels that have similar characters, plotlines, and ideas. For this book club, the choices include *Legend* by Marie Lu, *If I Stay* by Gayle Forman, or *Turtles All The Way Down* by John Green. These are books that students are more attracted to and would gravitate to naturally. Their plot lines are similar, with having to save the world, or making drastic changes to their lives, or with a girl falling in love with the wrong boy. Any book similar to this would due, but these are the choices that I thought would go well with this book club.

On the other hand, "Book List Two" includes books that expose students to ideas that are outside their realm of thinking; books that have deep cultural roots and can open their minds to new ideas. For example, *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds is about an inner city teenager who experiences shootings, drugs, and a lot of death on the streets. In small rural towns, kids do not normally experience things like that on a daily basis, so this would be a great book to help expose them to the experience of an inner city

teenager. *The Hate You Give* is the other choice novel because it looks at racial injustice and how children are affected by this.

Once students have chosen their books, before they read they should answer the “Pre-reading questions.” These questions help them analyze their novel choices, while reflecting on their own lives. This way, the students can better relate what they are reading to themselves. Since this is an after-school book club, students are expected to voluntarily commit their time to reading and reflecting. Each time we meet, which is once a week for four weeks, students are expected to come ready to discuss the book.

They are not asked to write anything down, for they will be writing a reflection paper at the end, but they do need to come with developing thoughts and inner reflections. This will make the discussions worthwhile. Amongst your discussions about the novels, distribute the “During Reading” reflections per each book. That includes one for the book from “Book List One” and one for the book from “Book List Two.” These questions allow the students to reflect on what they are enjoying, or not enjoying, about the books they are reading. It also allows the students time to think about how the other students in their school would react to reading these types of books. Would it go over well in their school? Would it not, and why? These questions basically open their eyes to why they are enjoying or not enjoying what they are reading, and figuring out why.

After reading both novels, and discussing weekly about what has been read, the students are to reflect back on it. Distribute the “Post-reading questions” which help the students fully reflect on what they read. Alongside these questions, ask the students to

choose a character from either of the books and compare themselves to this character. What are some similarities or differences between themselves and that character?

### **Final Book Club Reflection**

The final step of this book club will be to have the students write a one-page reflection paper comparing their life to a character in one of their novels. What are some similarities or differences between themselves and that character? Ask the students to write a one-page comparison. This comparison paper allows the students to reflect on what the characters were like, and if they are similar to them. By doing this, the students can see how they relate to the “Book List One” characters, or the “Book List Two” characters. Both are characters around their same age, but they experience vastly different encounters. If the students find themselves relating to the characters in “Book List Two,” it helps them realize that those kids are not that much different than themselves, even if their culture is vastly opposite of their own.

If students feel as though they would pick up a culturally diverse novel next time they have the choice, then the book club worked well. The point is to expose rural readers to ideas outside the same-old similar plotline novels, and ensure that their minds remain open to ideas and cultures that may differ from their own.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter three focused on the design of a four-week book club within a classroom. This book club exposes students to novels they wouldn’t normally choose, and opens their minds to cultures and ideas different than their own. First, the audience this book

club best pertains to was discussed, detailing how it would benefit upper high school students the most. The setting was also addressed here, stating that a rural setting would work best for this book club unit.

Next, the timeline for incorporating this project was discussed, explaining how a four week period after school would be the most beneficial for this project because it allows students to move at their own pace while still discussing what they are reading. Then, the project description was discussed, including when best to distribute reflection sheets, and how to get students excited to read these novels.

Finally, the project reflection paper was addressed, detailing why it is important for students to relate to the characters that they read about. If the students chose to relate to a character from “Book List Two,” then the book club was successful because it proves to the student that they can relate to kids from different cultures.

Chapter Four focuses on the reflection of the book club, and how it can truly benefit the students and teachers involved. Limitations are also addressed in this chapter, clearing up any problems that may arise while incorporating this project into a curriculum. The final part of this chapter discusses the future plans for making this unit better, and possible steps that can be taken to encourage teachers to make this the best book club it can be.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### REFLECTION

#### **Introduction**

When I look back on this Capstone, and all the hard work that went into making this the best possible project I could create, I think about where I started. It brings me back to last spring, and how this “seed” of a project idea has now shaped into a blooming flower that gives me a lot of pride. Since I teach in a rural school district, I was able to shine light on some of the ways the rural mindset could be shifted when it comes to reading. I wanted to figure out how I could expand the knowledge and mindset of my rural students so that they could read and learn about topics outside of their usual interest, which brought me to my research question: Why secondary teachers should expose rural readers to books that are culturally different than their personal choice.

This question was discussed in chapter one, expanded with research in chapter two, and pushed forward in chapter three. Chapter four will address what this process has taught me, how this project will best benefit student and teacher alike, and any limitations that could possibly arise from this project. The final part of this chapter will discuss future plans for this project, and how teachers can shape this project to best suit their classroom and culture.

#### **Reflections**

When I think back to my question of how secondary teachers should expose rural readers to books that are culturally different than their personal choice, I think about the

importance behind exploring this idea. From what I see in today's society, people get so caught up in what they believe, and what only they enjoy, that they miss out on the possibilities that arise when exploring other people's beliefs and culture.

This led me to my creation of an after-school book club, where teachers can help students explore these ideas through reading. I thought the best way to shine light on different cultures, other than just rural culture, would be through a book club, where students had control of what they wanted to read, yet were provided options that differ from their usual book choices. I wanted them to be exposed to the fact that there a lot of different cultures besides just the few that they see daily in their rural community.

As a learner, my mind was opened to a few ideas. After completing the majority of this capstone project, I attended a "What's New in Young Adult Literature" conference, where I was exposed to hundreds of books that would be so beneficial for this project. I realized that the possibilities are endless with book choices and what to use for this project, because society is always changing. This makes me very excited because it means that my project will be beneficial to teachers and students for a long time. Now, more than ever, children need to better understand those different than themselves, and my project is a great way for teachers to help guide this understanding.

As a researcher, I learned to be patient with myself, and patient with information I find. I learned to explore information further, and to look into where my sources received their information. This was my best bet in finding information about my topics. My project was further molded by the research that I did. I was researching more ideas to add to my capstone and project up until the very end. A lot of times, taking a break from

research for a day or two, sometimes even a week, was the best possible action to take.

This break was what my mind needed to rejuvenate itself and to be able to start fresh with additional research.

Throughout my research, I was continuously reminded that students are the number one reason for my project, and that their opinions and choices are the most important part of this. The whole goal for this project is to put the students' choice in their own hands, and that their choice drives their learning. I want them to feel confident in picking up a book that they would not usually gravitate towards, and to feel comfortable in learning about it. Reflecting is the most important part that I learned in this research, because students need to be able to reflect on what they read, and relate it to their own lives and choices. If they can do that, my project will help them immensely.

Censorship, and the importance of children having access to what they want to read, was an important concept that stuck in my mind after researching. This project and capstone helped me realize that books of all types, authors, content, etc., need to be present on the shelves of every school, rural or not, because the content is what children need to read about. They need to form their own opinions and ideas based around what they read about others. It could definitely help open their minds to other cultures.

The one idea from my research that stuck out to me the most would be a quote by Swiderek (1996) claiming that, "If the pen is to remain mightier than the sword, we need to make sure books are not removed from the library shelves" (p. 593). It is one of the few quotes that I remember because the words have so much power behind them. It is basically stating that writing is more powerful than fighting, and if we were to take away



that freedom of writing and reading, fighting would ensue because there would be no other ways of expressing oneself.

As a writer, I learned that organization is key to writing anything. Taking a step back, looking at all the information I had on hand, and then organizing it into sections was the smartest thing I did when it came to writing this. The flow of the paper had to be established before even moving forward with writing anything. Discussing what it means to be in a rural setting was the first step because it laid out the reasoning behind my entire capstone project. Then discussing the classroom culture and why it needs to change was the second step.

Further discussing why censorship is not something beneficial was lastly discussed. “Many parents [...] need to understand that literature is capable of exposing readers to value systems, ideas, and practices which may be different than their own” (Palmer, 1982, p. 311). Palmer is basically describing my capstone idea, in a nutshell. Books are the most important way for children to learn more about the world around them, and blocking that means of communication could be detrimental to their learning.

### **Possible Implications**

As with any project, there are multiple ways to implement it into a classroom setting. My project was designed to be implemented as an after-school book club, open for discussion and reading time, but would work well as a unit within a school day. Any of the texts mentioned will obviously work well with this project, but it is designed in such a way that any novel a teacher deems fitting for their student to read about may be implemented into this book club. Based on the findings in the literature review, a lot of

books and topics could possibly be censored for a variety of different reasons. These types of books would work best for the “Book List Two” idea of my project, and the teacher can use their own judgment for implementing such novels into this book club. “A key to motivation is giving the student responsibility in deciding what s/he reads” (Hoover, 1979, p. 582). As long as the student has a choice in which of these books they read, the book club has great potential for being successful.

### **Possible Limitations/Recommendations**

Obviously, with a project I create, I see far more possibilities than limitations. When further examining the layout of this book club, however, I realize that a limitation will be the “after-school” part of the book club. It would take volunteering after school, by seniors in high school, in order to be successful. Maybe some students who would like to join to book club may not be able to due to prior engagements after school. I recommend taking a poll of when students would be willing to meet, and clarifying that this is the best time for meeting. Establish a set time first, that works out with all members of the party, before committing to the time.

Another possible limitation with this project would be the age of the students. I claim that seniors will be the best age group for this book club because they are more willing to discuss topics that other ages might approach in an immature manner. As with the book choices, it should be up to the teacher’s discretion on whether their students are capable of mature conversations about other cultures and topics. The teacher can then decide which age group they want to use for their book club, and/or if they want to mix the ages up to allow more students of different levels to join the book club.

### **Future Research**

Since this project is focused on rural students and books that portray different cultures than their own culture, further research in rural community could be done. Further research on interactions in rural communities, education in these areas, and culture shift among those who move away could definitely become a focus for a future research project.

Another future research project idea could be to analyze student interest with culturally diverse books. Rural community or school libraries could be the focus here. “Because the school library is an important complement to the school classroom, it is critical that these resources represent a wide range of ideas and information” (Rickman, 2010, p. 1). The types of books in these libraries could be looked into, and data could be compiled of the variety of books, or lack thereof, in some cases. It would be beneficial to take a look at the data surrounding how many students pick up certain novels, and the ages of these students. Then, one could analyze why this age group gravitates towards certain topics of novels, and how it affects them. The strongest sources for researching, that I recommend using, would be Denzin (2013), Lester (2012), and Rickman (2010). These authors and their ideas were crucial to my research in this project, and would benefit anybody wanting to research any of these ideas further.

### **Sharing Ideas/Benefits to Profession**

When it comes to this capstone project, I am very proud of the product I have created. I plan on sharing this with the Hamline community via Digital Commons, in hopes that some teacher, somewhere, will decide to try out my book club idea and see

results in the same way that I have. Knowledge is the best gift that somebody can give to another person, and reading builds up knowledge in a fun and creative manner. I also plan on sharing my capstone project with my co-workers. I am in a K-12 building, so I plan on sharing with teachers in both the elementary side and the high school side. A great time to share my ideas would be at our educational development seminars, because we have them every other month, and I could share my ideas there. It would be the best way to get everyone's focus and where I could pinpoint what teachers would be willing to implement it into their classroom. To see how an elementary teacher can take my idea and mold it to a younger audience would be an experience for growth. I could then take their ideas and make my book club stronger.

My book club benefits teachers all over for a few different reasons. We all have heard degrading comments in the hallways and classrooms of our school that make us stop and reflect on our society for a moment. We yearn for ways to open the minds of the students who makes these comments, and just students in general. Our job as a teacher is to mold the youth of today. My book club is a way to mold students of all walks of life, and for students to read books about diverse cultures and lifestyles. The hope is that after reading books about real-life events or situations, that they can develop empathy towards other cultures and lifestyles, thus making society stronger as a whole.

This book club also gives teachers a chance to see how their students reflect and view their own lives. Can they compare themselves to characters in the book? How about situations in the book? If they cannot compare themselves, can they at least show respect towards these characters and events? That is what this book club brings to the teaching

profession; a way to shine light on topics that are otherwise difficult to fully portray to students.

### **Summary**

Chapter four provided a reflection on my capstone project. It addressed what this process has taught me, how this project will best benefit student and teacher alike, and any limitations that could possibly arise from this project. What I learned as a learner, researcher, and writer were all addressed in this chapter as well. This was a great way to reflect on what this capstone meant to me, and what it means to have a physical copy of something that can benefit students and teachers of all ages. It also discussed future research ideas, as well as ways that this book club can benefit the teaching profession.

This entire capstone was created around the following question: Should secondary teachers should expose rural readers to books that are culturally different than their personal choice? Being a teacher in a rural area means that this question signifies something more than just a capstone to me. It was a way to gain better understanding between myself and the community I teach in. It was also a way for me to develop a project that allows students to choose what they are reading, and to reflect on how that reading relates to themselves and others around them. My hope is that any teacher that decides to utilize my capstone project will see the importance and benefits of exposing students to books that portray diverse cultures and lifestyles. If this capstone project can open up the mind of just one individual, then this project is priceless.

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