1-1-2021

TEACHERS PERCEPTIONS OF USING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE AS A CATALYST TO DISCUSS SOCIAL JUSTICE IN MISSISSIPPI CLASSROOMS

Shimikqua Ellis
University of Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE AS A CATALYST TO DISCUSS SOCIAL JUSTICE IN MISSISSIPPI CLASSROOMS

A proposal presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the department of Teacher Education
The University of Mississippi

By
Shimikqua E. Ellis
May 2021

ABSTRACT

Educational inequality and racial injustice are serious challenges that educators continue
to face. More educators are seeking social justice teaching practices and implementing culturally
responsive pedagogies to address systemic inequities in schools. Literary scholars suggest that
books should serve as mirrors and windows for readers. Diverse young adult literature is a
powerful medium through which social injustices, racial inequities, and social problems can be
addressed in the classroom. This study is designed to help teachers create a more inclusive
classroom through using adolescent literature. Four teachers in diverse schools throughout
Mississippi used *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas to implement social justice literacies in
ELA classrooms. Data was collected through classroom observations, focus groups, interviews,
journals, and lesson plans. Collected data was analyzed for recurring themes that relate to social
justice issues.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to "my boys" and brown boys everywhere. I dedicate this to my nephew

Miles Aaron Tatum. Miles your strength, determination, courage, and resilience inspires me.

You motivate me to push forward when things get hard. I love you and will always be there for

you. I dedicate this to my godsons Gabriel Cortez Winston and Joshua Cortez Winston.

Watching you grow and glow brings me great joy. Being your godmother is truly a blessing. My

beautiful, brilliant boys… I see you, I love you, and I celebrate you. Your lives matter! Your

brilliance matters! I also want to dedicate this to all the brown boys known and unknown whose

lives were stolen by the violent clutches of racism. Through this research, I will continue to

strive to eradicate hate and ignorance through education.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCSS	Common Core State Standards
CRT	Critical Race Theory
ELA	English Language Arts
MDE	Mississippi Department of Education
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Programs
NCES	National Center for Educational Statistics
NCTE	National Council for Teachers of English
THUG	The Hate U Give
YA	Young Adult
YAL	Young Adult Literature
YALSA	Young Adult Library Services Association

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I give honor and praise to God, who is the head of my life. I am so thankful for his grace, provision, and direction throughout this entire dissertation process. None of this would have been possible without God. So, I give God all the praise! Secondly, I would like to thank my mother Spignotta Milam, for being my first teacher. Mom, you introduced me to God and taught me how to pray. You taught me the importance of serving others and giving back. You instilled a love for reading and writing in me at an early age. You taught me to value education and hard work. Thank you for always being my number one supporter and prayer warrior. I want to thank my Daddy for all the ongoing support and prayers as well. I would also like to thank my wonderful god father Steve Bradford, for being an avid supporter of my academic career goals. You provided weekly pep talks, fatherly advice, a laptop, assistance with statistics homework, and so much more. Thank you for encouraging me throughout this entire process. I love you.

I must acknowledge my entire Ellis, Milam, Williamson family for all the kind thoughts, prayers, and support throughout this extensive process. My sorors, mentors, and friends have also constantly lifted me up throughout this journey. I have been raised by a very large village that has made me a better person and scholar. So many of you served as mentors, sponsors, and advisors. I really appreciate all the support.

I want to thank the amazing educators who bravely volunteered to participate in this study during a global pandemic. Your courage, candor, and commitment allowed me to gather rich data that can benefit educators all over the country and make our schools a better place. Thank you! I wish you all continued success!

Last but most certainly not least, I want to thank my dissertation committee: Dr. Rosemary Oliphant Ingham, Dr. Joel Amidon, Dr. Stephen Monroe, and Dr. Kenya Wolff. Dr. Oliphant Ingham thank you for volunteering to be my chair and believing in my research. Dr. Joel Amidon and Dr. Kenya Wolff thank you for challenging me and encouraging me when I needed it. Your critiques and advice have made me a better researcher. I truly appreciate your mentorship and support. I am so grateful for my entire committee.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<center>**CHAPTER ONE**</center>

Introduction

The need for social justice pedagogy is pertinent in education, especially in communities that have a history of being oppressed through schooling (Belle, 2019, p. 1). Educational inequality and racial injustice are serious challenges that educators continue to face. (Dover, 2010). Predominantly white affluent school districts have better facilities, course offerings, graduation rates, and higher test scores than predominantly Black urban districts (Barton, 2003). The majority of White and Asian students continue to score above 21 on the ACT, while the majority of Black and Hispanic students score 18 and under (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). The standardized test scores and overall academic achievement of minority students continue to lag behind affluent White students (Irvine, 1991, p. 43). In 2018, a national survey indicated that 64% of African American, 45% of Latinos, and 40% of Native Americans agree that children in their own racial or ethnic group don't have the same chances to get a quality education as white children (Casey & Levesque, 2018, p. 23). Belle (2019) states:

> The problems of the public education system are layered and connected to policymakers, school districts, parents, teachers, students, and deeply entrenched racist ideologies. A surefire way to penetrate the racialized and class-based problems of urban school systems is by adopting a social justice pedagogy. (p. 1)

I chose to do my study on social justice education in Mississippi, due to the long - standing history of racial injustice and educational inequities in the state. For example, the kidnapping and murder of a Black boy named Emmett Till in 1955 brought national attention to the racial injustice in the state, and became one of the major catalysts for the Civil Rights

<center>1</center>

movement (Crowe, 2003). In many regions, schools are still segregated to this day due to the influx of private academies in the 1960's and 1970's that were originally established to resist school integration (Carr, 2012). The 2018 Mississippi Population Census reported that 59% of the state's residents are White, 38% are Black, 1% are Asian, 1.3% of residents are two or more races (Statistical Abstract, 2020). However, in the 2018 school year, only 30% of Black students in Mississippi scored proficient or advanced on the English II exam, while 62% of White students in Mississippi scored advanced or proficient (Mississippi Department of Education [MDE], 2019). The racial injustice in the state parallels the educational inequities that caused the state to rank 48th in education nationwide according U.S.News & World Report (2019). There were no published statistics on the private schools and academies. The researcher reached out to numerous institutions, but no data was provided. In Mississippi, 12% of Whites have less than a high school diploma, but 21% of Blacks have less than a high school diploma (Statistical Abstract, 2020). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Mississippi ranks last for academic achievement, and only 25% of eighth graders scored proficient or above on the state reading test (NAEP, 2019). According to Carr (2012), "It would be easy to see Mississippi more generally -- as an anomaly when it comes to education: hyper-segregated, fraught with racial mistrust, stuck in the past. But in some respects, the story of education in Mississippi is becoming the story of education in America" (Carr, 2012, p. 2). Nationwide there is a distinct gap in achievement between White students and students of color. In 2017, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported that 30% of high school dropouts were White, while 66% of high school dropouts were Black (NCES, 2017).

These drastic disparities in student achievement have caused scholars to shift their focus from evaluating the achievement gap to analyzing and addressing systemic inequities (Ladson-

Billings, 2006, p. 11). As a result, more educators are seeking social justice teaching practices and implementing culturally responsive pedagogies to address systemic inequities in schools. Scholar Jaqueline Glasgow (2001) writes:

> In an increasingly abrasive and polarized American society, social justice education has the potential to prepare citizens who are sophisticated in their understanding of diversity and group interaction, able to critically evaluate social institutions, and committed to working democratically with diverse others. (p. 54)

Teaching for social justice exposes students to rigorous multicultural curricula that facilitate youth skills for critique of power structures in their social worlds, so they can act for change (Boyd, 2017, p. 12). Bender-Slack (2010) claims:

> Teachers have a moral responsibility to promote a more just society and equal social relations by teaching students to be active agents in the process of making history as well as examine how they potentially function as part of an oppressive and exploitative institution. (p. 195)

Social justice education focuses on exposing and dismantling the oppressive structures that create and maintain inequity (Boyd, 2017, p. 35). Educators and researchers recognize that educational inequities need to be addressed and are requiring teachers to prioritize social justice and equity. For example, The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) now requires teacher education programs to assess candidates according to their ability to demonstrate proficiencies related to diversity (NCATE, 2007). The National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) has also added new standards for the initial preparation of secondary English language arts (ELA) teachers that emphasize candidates' social justice orientations and skill sets (Alsup & Miller, 2014). Standard VI requires candidates to demonstrate knowledge of how theories and research about social justice, diversity, equity, student identities, and schools as institutions can enhance students' opportunities to learn in English Language Arts (NCTE, 2012, p. 2).

According to Black and Sarigianides (2019), literature instruction in particular can be a powerful tool for social change, and ELA classrooms are important sites for working toward racial justice (p. 9). Shipp (2017) states, "The English classroom should be a safe haven, a collaborative workshop for practicing modes of discourse, a retreat for the exploration of identity, and a forum for sometimes sensitive conversations about race, class, and society" (p. 39). Boyd (2017) asserts that the ELA curricula already draws connections to texts from students' lives and society and requires students to critically analyze the author's purpose and meaning (p. 6). Then Boyd (2017) further states, "These same text-based strategies can be employed from a social justice angle. When teachers and students look at context, they can ask questions about who was privileged in that era and how this fits in with their own" (p. 7). Social justice oriented English educators emphasize and implement critical literacy. Wallowitz (2008) states, "Critical literacy invites students to read from many different perspectives and to always keep in mind whose voices are being heard and whose are missing, because who is missing from texts is as important as who is included" (p. 25).

This need for texts that engage students in social justice and critical literacy has led English educators to reevaluate school curricula as well. Gay (2010) states "Culturally responsive pedagogy requires that much more multicultural content is needed in school curricula about ethnic groups of color in all subjects and grade levels. All students should see accurate reflections of their culture and others throughout the curriculum" (p. 168).

Literary scholars suggest that books should serve as mirrors and windows for readers. According to Sims Bishop (1990) "mirrors" allow students to see a reflection of themselves in the literature and "windows" allow students to view a perspective or experience completely different from their own from reading a text. Gay (2010) further states, "Diverse literature is also

4

a powerful medium through which students can confront social injustices, visualize racial inequities, find solutions to personal problems, and vicariously experience the issues, emotions, thoughts, and lives of people otherwise inaccessible to them" (p. 158). A wider spectrum of relevant cultural experiences become more accessible to students when studying young adult literature (YAL). In their research regarding young adult literature in ELA classrooms, Gibbons and Stallworth (2006) note that "young adult literature appeals to adolescent readers because it is written about characters whom they can identify based on issues such as age, sexuality, conflicts, and world perceptions" (p. 56). Young adult novels also can help teachers create opportunities for students to think critically about relevant issues that impact their local communities and lives. Glasgow (2001) claims "Young adult literature provides a context for students to become conscious of their operating world view and to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations" (p. 54).

This study focuses on High School English, because there are no contemporary young adult novels on the ninth-grade Mississippi ELA exemplar text list. Currently there are 11 fictional texts on the Mississippi ELA Text Exemplar List for ninth grade. All 11 books were written by white authors and lack contemporary protagonists of color (MDE, 2019). Only three of these approved books have Black characters: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain (1884), *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck (1937), and *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960). White students have the privilege of seeing themselves positively reflected in traditional ELA curricula, media, and society, but Black students have traditionally been denied this opportunity. Jackson and Boutte (2015) note that "White males are most likely to receive texts, novels, and curricula where their perspective is represented, whereas Black youth typically receive texts that send the message that they are inferior, subordinate, and unreal" (p. 108).

Baker-Bell, Butler, and Johnson (2017) argue that English teachers must understand that "choosing Eurocentric texts that omit the lived realities of Black people or misrepresent the multiple ways of being Black leads to anti-Blackness and the devaluation of Black life" (p. 123). Christensen (2009) states "the books we choose to bring into our classroom say a lot about what we think is important, whose stories get told, whose voices are heard, whose are marginalized" (p. 6). When Black lives are presented as inferior in the ELA curricula, these are the windows and mirrors that students receive at school. According to Cridland-Hughes and J. King (2015), "the traditional curricula softly kills the spirit and humanity of Black youth" (p. 68). Johnson et al. (2017) wrote:

> Throughout society, people are discussing the physical deaths of Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Laquan McDonald, Rekia Boyd, and Aiyana Stanley-Jones; however, it is quite difficult to assess the continuing assaults and the symbolic and spiritual deaths that unfold in classrooms through perpetuating whiteness and anti-Black racism. (p. 61)

Shipp (2017) posits:

> It is too often the case that students of color are unable to relate to what is taught in their classrooms. This lack of connection and validation often affects the level of student engagement and even academic success. Students tend to display forms of resistance when they cannot identify the importance of what is being taught. (p. 36)

Mississippi has recently added the contemporary young adult novel *The Hate U Give* (2017), by Mississippi native Angie Thomas to the 12th grade ELA text exemplar list (MDE, 2019). *The Hate U Give* is an award-winning contemporary young adult novel that focuses on modern social justice issues like police brutality, poverty, and educational inequities. Mississippi ELA educators now have the opportunity to utilize this young adult novel to discuss racial injustice in their classrooms. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore Mississippi educators' attitudes regarding using the YA novel *The Hate U Give* to discuss racial injustice in

ELA classrooms. This study will investigate the ways Mississippi educators utilize *The Hate U Give* to discuss racial injustice in ELA classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The researcher intends to investigate teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to implement social justice literacies in Mississippi classrooms. Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) states "English teachers should be librarians of justice, hope, and consciousness. English classrooms should provide something more complex than grammar, something deeper than the classics, and something much more meaningful than writing between the lines" (p. 26). This study will investigate the following: Teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social injustice such as racism and educational inequities through *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. The researcher seeks to utilize the findings from this study to help teacher education programs prepare English educators to implement social justice literacies with young adult literature in classrooms.

Research Questions

This study will investigate the following research questions:

(R1) What are Mississippi teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice?

(R2) What are the perceived barriers faced by Mississippi teachers when they attempt to teach about social injustice through young adult literature?

Significance of the Study

Currently the ninth grade Mississippi ELA text exemplars consist of canonized texts that exclude diverse perspectives and modern young adult novels. As stated previously, the Mississippi ELA text exemplar list for ninth grade English does not include any contemporary

young adult novels on racial injustice. The only texts directly dealing with racism or racial issues on the ninth -grade list are: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960) (MDE, 2019). Only recently has the young adult novel, *The Hate U Give,* been added to the 12th grade English Mississippi Text Exemplar list, so this study will be spearheading new educational opportunities in Mississippi (MDE, 2019). As racial violence and hatred continue to terrorize our students and communities, educators need to take a stand against police brutality and racial injustice, and it should start in the classroom. Johnson et al. (2017) state, "the violence will not cease as long as the curriculum reinscribes and perpetuates oppression. Therefore, ELA teachers and literacy educators must reimagine ELA classrooms as revolutionary sites that disrupt racial injustice while striving to transform the world and humanize the lives of Black youth" (p. 62). When educators and students discuss and examine how the injustices in *The Hate U Give* mirror issues in their own communities it can ignite change. When students read thought provoking, engaging, and relevant young adult novels it can increase their interest in reading, enhance critical thinking skills and social consciousness.

Limitations

1. This study only focuses on the perspectives of four educators in the state of Mississippi This small number of participants may be limiting to the study.
2. Racial injustice is a sensitive subject, and some participants may withhold biases or uncomfortable details when self- reporting to the researcher.
3. The presence of the researcher during lesson observations may impact the students and teacher's behavior during the lessons.

Delimitations

1. Selected participants will be individually interviewed in order for the researcher to gain insight on the participants' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions toward using *The Hate U Give* to address social justice in the classroom.

2. The focus group and individual interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy.

3. Participants' reflective journals will be coded and analyzed in the study as well.

Definition of Terms

- YAL or young adult literature is literature written about and specifically for adolescents.

- Educulturalism is an activist learning process through which we teach critical thinking about social and cultural issues through music, the visual and performing arts, narrative and dialogue (Lea & Sims, 2008).

- Social justice is understanding and discerning systems of oppression and taking action against those structures for a better and more equitable society for all individuals (Boyd, 2017).

- Critical pedagogy is an analysis of the relationship between socio political power, social processes, and the construction of knowledge. (Dover, 2013). Critical pedagogy holds that democratic principles, such as inclusion, respect for diversity, and human rights, must govern the school experience in all areas (Bender-Slack, 2010).

- Critical literacy is a philosophy that recognizes the connections between power, knowledge, language, and ideology, and recognizes the inequalities and injustices surrounding us in order to move toward transformative action and social justice.

Critical literacy examines texts in order to identify and challenge social constructs, underlying assumptions and ideologies, and power structures that intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate social inequalities and injustices (Wallowitz, 2008, p. 16).

- Human rights education is about empowering learners to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others (Osler, 2016, p. 5).

- Antiracist education focuses on how schools name, define, and negotiate cultural and racial differences. Moreover, it confronts educational policies and practices that reproduce race together with gender, sex, class, and other inequalities (Rodriguez & Villaverde, 2000, p. 129).

- White privilege is a societal construct of unearned advantages that benefit white people while disadvantaging people who are not white (Rothenberg & Accomando, 2019, p. 151).

- Whiteness is a complex, hegemonic, and dynamic set of mainstream socio-economic processes, and ways of thinking, feeling, believing, and acting (cultural scripts) that function to obscure the power, privilege, and practices of the dominant social elite. Whiteness drives oppressive individual, group, and corporate practices that adversely impact schools, the wider U.S. society and, indeed societies worldwide. (Lea & Sims, 2008, p. 2)

All of these terms are involved and explored when educators implement social justice in the classroom.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction:

This chapter reviews current literature regarding the research questions in this study. The latest scholarship on young adult literature, teaching for social justice, *The Hate U Give*, and critical theoretical frameworks are discussed in this chapter. A surplus of scholarship on teacher's perceptions of young adult literature and teacher's perceptions of social justice are provided. However, scholarly studies on ELA teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature to teach for social justice are scarce. This demonstrates the significance of examining ELA teacher's perceptions of using young adult literature to promote social justice literacies in this study.

The literature review starts with a clear definition of young adult literature, why it is important, and how educators perceive it. Then scholarship is presented explaining social justice education, why it is important, and how teachers perceive it is provided. Next a scholarly overview of the novel *The Hate U Give* and its literary merit is shared. This is followed by an overview of the theoretical frameworks that pertain to this study. Detailed descriptions of critical race theory, critical literacy, Critical Race English education, and social justice education frameworks are provided. Lastly, this chapter summarizes this scholarship and introduces chapter three.

Importance of Young Adult Literature in Classroom

In the book, *Teaching Young Adult Literature*, Brown and Stephens (1995) share Scholar

G. Robert Carlson's definition of the genre by stating:

> Young adult literature is literature wherein the protagonist is a teen, age (12-18) or one
> who approaches problems from a teenage perspective. Such novels are generally
> moderate length and told from first person. Typically, they describe initiation into the
> adult world, or the surmounting of a contemporary problem forced upon the
> protagonist(s) by the adult world. Though generally written for a teenage reader, such
> novels- like all fine literature-address the entire spectrum of life. (p. 16)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Assembly on Literature for

Adolescents (ALAN), of NCTE, and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)

have helped promote and establish YAL as a credible and valid genre for Secondary English

classrooms. Ever since the 1986 *Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English

Language Arts*, The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has recommended that

"secondary English teachers must be widely read in literature for adolescents, as well as in

standard classic works" (Brown & Stephens, 1995, p. 4). Nowadays more English teachers than

ever before are using YAL, instead of just the classics, to teach literature. Scholars even argue

that YAL can be used in ELA classrooms to help students understand and appreciate the classics

(Kaywell, 2000). Young adult literature belongs in today's English classrooms because it helps

educators meet curriculum standards, become more culturally responsive, and increases the

engagement of struggling readers.

An important educational benefit to using young adult literature in the classroom is it

motivates reluctant readers to read. Research shows that the number-one method of improving

reading skills is by practicing reading (Alverman & Phelps, 2002) and that motivation to read

affects reading proficiency (NCES, 2003). Therefore, the texts selected for Secondary ELA

classrooms must engage readers in order to maximize students' academic performance. Gibbons

et al. (2006) state "Clearly student engagement with a work of literature ensures introspective writing, lively discussions, and perhaps most importantly – the students will keep reading long after the required selection has been finished" (p. 53).

Young adult literature can help educators cultivate lifelong readers. In their research findings Gibbons et al. (2006) note:

> YAL should be integrated into the middle and high school English classroom because such literature can help improve students' reading skills; encourage young adults to read more books, thereby improving their abilities to read; facilitate teachers' abilities to incorporate more books of interest to adolescents into the curriculum, thereby avoiding the non-reading curriculum or workbooks and lectures. (p. 53)

Modern ELA teachers must be innovative to find ways to reach and engage reluctant readers to promote literacy and help close the achievement gap. In her book, *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do,* Dr. Kylene Beers (2003) gives examples of reasons why reluctant readers are often drawn to YAL:

- Characters their own age
- Characters who face tough choices
- Thin books with short chapters
- Some illustrations, especially of characters
- Well defined characters
- Plots with a lot of action that begins right away
- Funny books
- Realistic language
- Mysteries
- An easily defined conflict (pp. 285-286)

In Roberts' (2013) *Teaching Young Adult Literature* article he quotes Gordon Korman saying that:

> YAL belongs in the classroom because sometimes you have to see the whole forest, not just individual trees. I think we can get so hung up on a certain classic novel, literature unit, or language arts skill set that we can forget the much larger educational goal of turning our students into lifelong readers and learners. (p. 89)

The fact that young adult literature is written specifically for teenagers makes these texts more relatable, engaging, and accessible for teens who struggle with reading and fail to connect with adult texts. In her series *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, Joan Kaywell (2000) points out that the classics are often too distant from our students' modern experiences and the reading level or vocabulary is too difficult" (p. ix). Kaywell and other scholars recommend pairing contemporary literature and YAL with classics to bridge the distance between students' lives and the textual world. YAL is not a form of remediation, it is quality literature that directly appeals to the reality of modern young people.

Gallo (2001) asserts that:

> older and more advanced secondary students can already handle the classics, but even our brightest students are still teenagers with typical teenage problems and needs, and by limiting those more advanced students only to the classics our curricula fail to meet their social and emotional needs. There are plenty of complex Young adult novels that are sophisticated enough for AP English. (p. 36)

Popular young adult author Alan Sitomer is quoted in Roberts (2013), stating:

> I think YAL belongs in the classroom because one has to remember, the canon and the classics are filled with books that were once contemporary. We revere Dickens now but do we fail to remember that back in the day, Dickens was the most popular author alive during his era? Measuring books based on their merit as opposed to categorizing them and dismissing them by the date in which they are written seems a much smarter policy when selecting literature for the classroom. (p. 90)

Young adult literature is a well-established genre that should be used in ELA curriculums. Gibbons and Stallworth (2006) research study on YAL usage in ELA classrooms shows the following benefits:

- Offers educators quality options for implementing full length works of literature in their curriculum that contain complex literary devices;

- Matches and Enhances students reading interest;

- Builds important literary skills in readers;

- Provides a bridge for struggling readers to successfully comprehend the classics; and

- Helps foster a love for reading and reading for enjoyment (pp. 56-60).

Young adult literature provides engaging and sophisticated reading options for meeting ELA standards as well. Young adult literature, like all good literature, contains well developed characters, engaging plots, varied conflicts, and sophisticated themes that provoke critical thinking and reflection. Therefore, young adult literature can be used to cover the entire spectrum of secondary English curricula. Nationwide secondary ELA curricula and Common Core curricula require students to study literary elements like plot, theme, setting, and character development (Common Core State Standards [CCSS], 2019). All of these literary elements are found in young adult literature. In their research, Gibbons and Stallworth (2006) mention that "YAL provides an excellent vehicle for introducing students to literary concepts through engaging texts that are written at an appropriate reading level" (p. 56). Also, plot is a prominent literary element that is frequently taught with young adult literature. When it comes to plot there are four types of conflicts that protagonist face and young adult literature offers them all. In the Donelson and Nilsen (2004) book titled *Literature for Today's Young Adults,* the authors discuss how "young adult literature offers self against self, self against society, self against another, and

self against nature" (pp. 30-32). For example, in Robert Cormier's YA text *The Chocolate War,* the self against society conflict is evident. In the contemporary YA novel, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, you have self against another, self against society, and self against self.

Theme is another important literary element in curriculums that is easily taught through young adult literature. Stover (2001) proclaims that:

> good YAL deals with themes and conflicts that mirror the concerns of society out of which it is produced. It does so in ways that help readers understand the complexities and shades of gray involved in dealing with these issues. (pp. 119-120)

Many educators are currently using different types of YAL to meet ELA curriculum standards (Hays, 2016, p. 4). Young adult literature also consists of multiple genres and topics. Over time, young adult literature has expanded to include memoirs, fantasy, poetry, biographies, science fiction, informational texts, and much more (Donelson & Nielsen, 2004). Some contemporary educators also find that the modest length of certain young adult texts helps them cover an expansive curriculum in a smaller amount of time. For example, Gibbons and Stallworth (2006) found that "not only does YAL paired with shorter texts address the time constraints that are a reality in classrooms, but it provides a vehicle through which teachers can explicitly teach targeted reading strategies" (p. 56).

Another major benefit of utilizing YAL in Secondary English classrooms is it helps educators meet the growing demand for an inclusive curriculum. Donelson and Nielson (2004) state "YAL includes a growing body of work that represents different ethnic and cultural groups, reflective of our ever-growing diverse society" (p. 399). Unlike the classics that have traditionally dominated the ELA curriculum, contemporary young adult characters are more diverse. Many YA novels, like Erika Sánchez's *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* (2017), *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008) by Matt De La Pena, and *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your*

Ass (2013) by Meg Medina, focus on relatable Mexican American or Latina characters. YA authors like Jenny Han, Ellen Oh, and Gene Luen Yang have all made valuable contributions to YAL with memorable Asian American characters. Also, Native American perspectives are illustrated in Tim Tingle's YA novel *How I Became A Ghost* (2013) and *Arrow of Lightning* by Joseph Bruchac (2017). This type of multicultural literature is an essential part of any culturally responsive ELA curriculum.

Diverse Young Adult Literature

According to New York times bestselling author Walter Dean Myers (2014) "Books transmit values. They explore our common humanity" (p. 4). Literary scholars suggest that books should serve as mirrors and windows for readers. According to Sims Bishop (1990) "mirrors allow students to see a reflection of themselves in the literature and windows allow students to view a perspective or experience completely different from their own from reading a text" (p. 1). In 2018, *School Library Journal* published survey results that revealed that 81 percent of school librarians consider it very important to have a diverse book collection for children and teens. Diverse collections, in this context, were defined as books with protagonists and experiences that feature underrepresented ethnicities, disabilities, cultural or religious backgrounds, gender nonconformity, or LGBTQIA + orientations (Ishizuka, 2018). The NCTE *Resolution on the Need for Diverse Children's and Young Adult Books* (2015a) regards the omission of diverse books in school curricula as additional evidence of inequity in school curricula and instruction.

In his famous *New York Times* article, "Where are the People of Color in Children's Books?" Walter Dean Myers (2014) writes:

> In 1969, when I first entered the world of writing children's literature, the field was nearly empty. Children of color were not represented, nor were children from lower economic classes. Today, when about 40 percent of public-school students nationwide are Black and Latino, the disparity of representation is even more gregarious. (p. 3)

Haddix and Price-Dennis (2013) state that "the Whiteness of traditional curriculum teaches both students of color and White students racialized lessons about whose stories matter, whose voices are prioritized, and whose version of history is acknowledged" (p. 248). In Nancy Larrick's prolific 1965 article titled, "The All-White World of Children's Books" she laments:

> Non-white children are learning to read and understand the American Way of life in books that either omit them entirely or scarcely mention them. These omissions damage the child of color and may harm white children even more: Although his light skin makes him one of the world's minorities, the white child learns from books that he is the kingfish. There seems little chance of learning the humility so urgently needed for world cooperation instead of world conflict, as long as children are brought up on gentle doses of racism through their books. (Nel, 2017, p. 2)

In 2013, the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin conducted a study that found that out of the 3,200 children's books published that year, only 93 were about Black people, 34 about Native Americans, 69 about Asians and 57 about Latinos (Flood, 2014, p. 1). In a 2017 article titled "Why Young People Need Diverse Books", Meadows Fernandez writes:

> Roughly 80 percent of the children's lit industry – writers, publishers, executives, and reviewers – is white, according to a recent survey by Lee & Low Books Inc. Only 22 percent of children's books features a protagonist of color, and an even smaller percentage – 12 percent – is authored or illustrated by a person of color. (p. 2)

The 2017 Cooperative Children's Book Center Study found that, out of 3700 books YA books surveyed, just 3.68% contained significant LGBTQ+ content (CCBC, 2018).

The vast underrepresentation of diverse literature for children has been championed and challenged by the creation of The We Need Diverse Books organization in 2014. In an interview about the launch of the We Need Diverse Books campaign, co-founder and president Ellen Oh was quoted as saying, "Because it's 2014, but we still keep seeing all-white panels at book festivals, or even all-white male panels (in genres vastly dominated by women!) and that's kind

of insane to me. Diversity shouldn't be the exception. It should be the norm" (Flood, 2014, p. 1).

In an interview for the *New York Times*, critically acclaimed Young Adult author and We Need

Diverse Books advisory board member, Meg Medina (2016) states:

> I think what is important for me to do is to advocate for the humanity of everyone, their value, their story; that the language of their mothers and fathers is a beautiful one, that the stories of growing up how they did are significant. I have a feeling of being an ambassador to people who don't have a relationship to people from other places, but mostly I want to help kids feel proud of where they come from. To know that they are enough. (Russo, 2016, p. 2)

> A diverse society should have diverse books. More than half of the students in U.S.

public schools identify as people of color (NCES, 2016a) and more than one-eighth are served

under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (NCES, 2016b). In 2018, 4.9 million

public school students were identified as English language learners (ELL) and 78% of these

students were Hispanic (NCES, 2018). Multicultural education scholar James Banks states:

> Our schools and classrooms should reflect those ideals of equality and democracy that our culture holds so dear, even if the ideal has yet to become the reality. Democratic principles are based upon concepts of tolerance and understanding. What better way to develop those concepts than to explore multicultural literature that exposes students to a wide range of human experience and helps them to realize that often our similarities outweigh our difference. (1989 p.18)

In the book *The Critical Power and Potential of Multicultural Young Adult Literature,* Ricki

Ginsberg and Wendy Glenn (2017) note:

> Perhaps due to the rise of the # We Need Diverse Books campaign, the number of published titles that feature diverse voices has grown in the field. Teachers are increasingly using books that include these voices in their classrooms, and seek critical practices and perspectives for teaching these texts in culturally responsive and affirming ways. (p.1)

Gay (2010) claims "Culturally responsive pedagogy requires that much more multicultural

content is needed in school curricula about ethnic groups of color in all subjects and grade levels.

All students should see accurate reflections of their culture and others throughout the

curriculum" (p. 168). The literature curriculum should include a myriad of rich complex stories that represent racial identity intersecting with other identity markers – age, class, sexuality, language, geography, and ability (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019).

In a recent *School Library Journal*, Kathy Ishizuka (2018) states, "Along with giving students choice in reading, diversity is the most important issue in the field of teen and children's literature right now" (p. 1).

A wider spectrum of cultural experiences become more accessible to students when studying young adult literature. In their research regarding young adult literature in ELA classrooms, Gibbons and Stallworth (2006) note that "YAL appeals to adolescent readers because it is written about characters whom they can identify based on issues such as age, sexuality, conflicts, and world perceptions" (p. 56). For example, you have YA texts with strong Muslim protagonist like *Love Hate & Other Filters* (2018) and *The Lines We Cross* (2017). There is even a wealth of YA novels that focus on queer characters with varied genders and sexual identities. Adam Silvera's *More Happy Than Not (2015)*, *Boy Meets Boy* (2003) by David Levithan, and *Rainbow Boys* (2001) by Alex Sanchez are just a few popular YA novels with LGBTQ protagonists. Rodriguez (2019) states, "Ultimately, the best among YA literary characters that readers meet dispel biases, myths, and stereotypes in coming of age through various experiences, perspectives, and portrayals connected to the lenses of adolescence, culture, gender, identity, language, sexuality, schooling, and, education" (p. xiii). Young adult literature has more of a surplus of diversity in contrast to the traditional hegemony of the classics.

Gay (2010) states "Diverse literature is also a powerful medium through which students can confront social injustices, visualize racial inequities, find solutions to personal problems, and vicariously experience the issues, emotions, thoughts, and lives of people otherwise inaccessible

to them" (p. 158). Young adult novels also can help teachers create opportunities for students to think critically about relevant issues that impact their local communities and lives. The popular award-winning YA novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas focuses on social justice issues like police brutality, poverty, and educational inequities. Controversial modern issues like gentrification in *Pride* (2018) by Ibi Zoboi and immigration issues in *The Sun Is Also A Star* (2016) by Nicola Yoon are just more examples of how young adult literature can be used in classrooms to stimulate critical dialogue regarding diverse social justice issues with teens. Rodriguez (2019) states "More expansive interpretations of what constitutes as inclusivity in Young Adult literature are positioning the conversation toward empathy through texts and socially responsible literacies that speak to various identities and perspectives" (p. xiv).

Teacher Attitudes about Using Young Adult Literature in the Classroom

Some educators harbor negative attitudes regarding utilizing young adult literature in the classroom. For example, certain teachers avoid the genre due to censorship (Hayes, 2016, p. 57). In the article titled "Book Censors Target Teen Fiction," Liz Bury (2013) writes that according to the American Library Association, attempts to ban books are increasingly driven by the desire to protect teenagers from tales of sex, drugs and suicide in young adult fiction. Popular young adult novels like *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, *The Harry Potter* Series by J.K Rowling, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, and many more have been banned (Bury, 2013). Hayes (2016) states:

> One of the most powerful adversaries against the implementation of YA literature is the classroom teacher. Often, teachers will self-censor in terms of the types of literatures they select to instruct their students in reading and writing because they are unwilling to fight the battles that they foresee, and see as inevitable when it comes to the anticipated resistance from school district school board members, administrators, and/or parents. (p. 57)

Furthermore, some teachers perceive young adult literature as lacking the rigor and complexity needed for Secondary ELA curricula. According to Gibbons et al. (2006):

> a number of English teachers believe young adult literature should not occupy a prominent position in the curriculum: they believe that young adult literature may be useful as an option for struggling upper elementary and middle school students or as out of school leisure reading. Teachers assuming this stance believe that such literature is not deep enough to include in the regular curriculum. (pp. 53-54)

Hays (2016) states, "While English teachers are working to incorporate various versions of the Common Core State Standards into their curriculum, they are often emphasizing canonical fiction over alternative literature that students may connect with at a higher level" (p. 53).

Until recently, a large majority of teachers have continued the tradition of selecting canonical, white, cisgender, heteronormative texts for instruction (Smolkin & Young, 2011). Bucher and Hinton (2014) state, "A number of teachers are reluctant to use young adult literature as a basis for instruction in middle school and high school and, for a number of reasons, prefer to focus on the classics" (p. 64). In her book *With Rigor for All: Teaching The Classics to Contemporary Students,* Carol Jago (2000) argued that since young adults do not need guidance to understand a young adult novel, this literature should be used for independent, pleasure reading and not studied in the curricula. She also claimed that the characters were often one dimensional and these texts lacked the complex themes and vivid language found in the classics (Jago, 2000, p. 76).

Other critics have advocated for YAL to be used in developmental English classes, in middle schools, or for unmotivated students who find the traditional literary canon of the high school English curricula too difficult (Knickerbocker & Rycik, 2002). Bucher and Hinton (2014) write how educators use quality YAL to address reluctant readers needs and interests. Johnson (2011) states "Young adult literature is one of the most engaging and effective tools to promote

the goal of lifelong literacy for middle and high school students" (p. 1). In their article titled "Young Adult Literature in the English Curriculum Today: Classroom Teachers Speak Out" Gibbons et al. (2006) assert that young adult literature is quality literature that teachers use in a variety of ways to engage and educate young people. Gibbons et al. (2006) write:

> Among others teachers listed Lowery, Hinton, Myers, Voight, Marjorie, Weinman, Sharmat, Namioka, Cooney, and Duncan as authors whose works they have incorporated into their curriculum and that their students enjoy reading. In this way young adult literature equips teachers to face the challenge of engaging students as readers in the classroom, with the long- term goal of fostering a lifelong love of reading. (p. 56)

In her series *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics*, Joan Kaywell (2000) points out that "the classics are often too distant from our students' modern experiences and the reading level or vocabulary is too difficult" (p. ix). Kaywell and other scholars recommend pairing contemporary literature and YAL with classics to bridge the distance between students' lives and the textual world.

Furthermore, many English teachers believe that young adult literature provides a surplus of sophisticated reading options for addressing standards, designing relevant curricula, and engaging 21st century youth in rich discussions of literature and life (Gibbons et al., 2006, p. 53). Donald Gallo (2001) advocated for the inclusion of YAL in his article titled "How Classics Create an Aliterate Society". Gallo (2001) claims, "Everyone knows there are easy teen novels for younger and less able readers, but there are also some superb novels in this genre that are more complex- sophisticated enough for AP readers" (p. 36). Nowadays more educators are incorporating young adult literature across the curriculum. Bucher and Hinton (2014) write:

> Fortunately, newer trends such as using young adult literature across the curriculum and literature-based instruction have grown in popularity, suggesting more productive ways to use young adult literature. Rather than working in isolation, many educators now make collaborative decisions on curricular themes and use young adult literature that crosses subject areas and helps students see new and different perspectives on issues and subject content. (p. 55)

Recently there has also been an increase in the use of young adult literature to encourage social activism and good citizenship in classrooms (Hays, 2016). In "Speak the Effect of Literary Instruction on Adolescents' Rape Myth Acceptance," Victor Malo-Juvera (2014) describes a study that used the young adult novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson to discuss date rape with middle school students. In "Using Linked Text Sets to Promote Advocacy and Agency Through a Critical Lens," Katherine Batchelor (2018) shares how teachers use young adult literature text pairings to promote advocacy and social justice in classrooms. Batchelor (2018) notes that:

> educators selected young adult novels like *How It Went Down (2014)* and *All-American Boys* (2015) to help students understand the historical context of the Black Lives Matter movement and *OCD Love Story (2013)* and *Thirteen Reasons Why (2007)* to help students explore mental health issues. (pp. 382-384)

Stover (2001) notes that:

> good young adult literature deals with themes and issues that mirror the concerns of the society out of which it is produced. It does so in ways that help readers understand the complexities and shades of gray involved in dealing with these issues. (pp. 119-120)

What is Teaching for Social Justice?

Teaching for social justice is creating an educational environment that propels students to recognize inequities or injustices and act for change. Social justice educators critically evaluate the relations between power, privilege, and the distribution of knowledge between marginalized groups (Ayers et al., 2009). Social justice educators teach about all forms of oppression, injustice, or discrimination with regard to differences in race, class, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, or ability (Sensoy & Di Angelo, 2017, p. 11). In her research Dover (2013) explains "Social justice education integrates aspects of democratic education, critical pedagogy, and culturally responsive education in an attempt to effect holistic educational and societal transformation" (p. 6). Democratic education is a type of participatory pedagogy that promotes

the civic functions of schooling, self-governance, and civic community engagement (Dewey, 2007, p. 43). Then critical pedagogy emphasizes learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against oppressive elements of reality (Friere, 1970, p. 78). Multicultural education is "a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in schools" (Banks, 2001, p. 1). Lastly, Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 31). Teaching for social justice involves all of the above, while teachers and students become critical and reflective change agents in the process.

In *The New Teacher Book*, Christensen, Karp, Peterson, and Yonamine (2019) state that in order to implement social justice teaching, classrooms and curricula practices must be:

- Grounded in the lives of our students

- Critical

- Multicultural, anti- racist, and pro-justice

- Participatory and experiential

- Hopeful, Joyful, kind, and visionary

- Activist

- Academically rigorous

- Culturally and linguistically inclusive and empowering. (p.vi)

Teaching for Social Justice has become a significant and transformational part of Secondary English education. Boyd (2017) states:

ELA readily lends itself to social justice because it centers on texts for study, including print and media, and the content of those texts as well as how teachers work with them in the classroom can be embraced with critical goals in mind" (p. 7).

Scholars in the field have even advocated for a "Critical English Education" that challenges dominate canonical texts and provides students with the skills to "create their own critical texts" (Morrell, 2005, p. 312). Furthermore, scholars have discussed how YAL can prepare students to empathize with diverse populations, and to become "critically conscious of their operating world views" by exploring multicultural literature (Glasgow, 2001, p. 51). Reading, writing, and multiple literacies are important instruments to teach for social justice. This is especially relevant in ELA classrooms "where the critical study of texts in social context and language and power can help students learn to connect their lived realities with the worlds of text" (Boyd, 2017 p. ix). For example, Linda Christensen (2017), writes that teaching literacy skills is ultimately a "political act" because reading and writing allows students to "know themselves and to heal themselves" (p. vii), and they provide students with the tools to "interrogate society" (p. vii). Famous philosopher and educator Paulo Friere (1970) advocates for this type of ELA instruction when he states that students must "learn to read both the word and the world" (p. 12).

In a position statement titled "Beliefs about Social Justice in English Education," the English Language Arts Teacher Educators (ELATE) of NCTE assert that a framework for Social Justice consists of the following three components:

1. Reflection refers to unpacking personal truths from people, ideologies, and contexts to help explain how hegemonic hierarchies are oppressive.

2. Change refers to becoming more socially aware of how power and privilege that arises from within institutions in relation to social class, ethnicity, culture, gender, religion,

national origin, language, ability, sexual orientation, gender expression, political beliefs,

marital status and/or education, can be oppressive.

3. Participation teaches how action, agency, and empowerment can be used to transform

    ideas, contexts, and may even lead to systemic change. It conceptualizes a critical review

    of literature that supports social justice methodologically both in the classroom (ELATE,

    2009, p. 16).

The framework that NCTE provides helps literacy educators gain a very general understanding

of what teaching for social justice entails.

However, merely "studying the literature is not enough, students need to understand the

history" (Christensen, 2020, p. ii). In order to effectively teach for social justice, teachers must

focus on history and critical literacy. Teaching kids the history of racism, is a part of helping

them understand that oppression is systematic. When selecting a framework for my study I

searched for a practical fusion of Secondary Social Studies and Language Arts that aligns with

Common Core State Standards. In his book *Social Studies, Literacy, and Social Justice in the*

Common Core Classroom, Ruchi Agarwal-Rangnath (2013) merges Social Studies and Literacy

standards to provide a detailed common core friendly Social Justice framework for classroom

teachers. Argarwal-Rangnath's (2013) social justice framework focuses on five components:

inspiring wonder, painting the picture, application, connecting, and facilitating change. I plan to

focus and expand on these tenets in Secondary ELA classrooms in this study.

<u>Inspiring Wonder</u>

Critical literacy is a vital part of teaching for Social Justice in an ELA classroom (Boyd,

2017, p. 8). Students begin to question social reality and think critically about the underlying

values and assumptions embedded within the texts. Students develop the capacity to question,

critique, and challenge things that seem unfair or unjust. Teaching students to question the

material in textbooks or media and challenge students to think critically about power/privilege is

a major component. Students will practice questioning the information they learn, testing where

certain facts appear biased or unreliable, and thinking about perspective (Diamond, 2016, p. 2).

- Students critically examine the text for reliability or bias.

- Students ponder which groups are included and which are not.

- Students question why certain groups or information is missing from the text.

- Students critique and analyze the point of view that is presented.

- Students evaluate who stands to benefit from or be hurt by the text.

- Students challenge any examples of power and privilege in the text.

- Students challenge things that seem unfair or unjust.

- Students evaluate and critique the representation of marginalized groups in the media.

Painting the Picture

Social justice-oriented teachers work intentionally to challenge normative thought by

integrating multiple perspectives into the curriculum especially the voices of those dominated,

marginalized, or traditionally excluded in texts (Rangnath et al., 2016, p. 7). Curricula helps

students explore the past and present injustices, bias, power, or privilege by challenging students'

misconceptions, and getting them to think deeply and critically about the literary content through

the exploration of multiple perspectives. Literacy scholar Christensen (2009) states:

> As a social justice educator in a language arts classroom, I look for stories where the
> protagonists refuse to accept their place in society; I try to find fiction and nonfiction
> about people who disrupt the script society set for them. I want students to see that
> history is not always inevitable, that there are spaces where it can bend, change, and
> become more just (p. 6).

- Students evaluate the author's message or intent.

- Students recall historical and systematic forms of oppression.

- Students identify varied forms of privilege and power.

- Students explore multiple diverse perspectives on the same topic.

- Students recognize which voices may have been missing from the story line.

- Students trace whose literature and history is taught and whose is ignored.

Application

Students piece together a historical puzzle based on their explorations and interpretations of the text. Students also develop and share their own theories of what they believe happened in the story based on their examination of multiple perspectives. The purpose of application is for students to synthesize and process content by providing a space for students to grapple with what they know and what they have interpreted through the text (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013, p. 98).

- Students apply what they learned in the text to personal experiences and real life.

- Students recall their own privilege and their own biases.

- Students compare and contrast the author's point of view with their own.

- Students formulate their own stance on issues of injustice or inequality.

- Students challenge stereotypes.

- Students analyze historical trends to trace systematic forms of oppression.

Making Connections

Educators challenge and encourage students to make concrete connections between the past and contemporary Social Justice issues. Diamond (2016) states, "that students should become acutely aware of the way their lives intersect with important themes. They should be able to align themselves with certain causes and issues, which allows us to establish a community that seeks

deeper understanding" (p. 2). Students should be able to conceptualize how oppression and inequity in the text mirrors real life.

- Students evaluate how specific issues (like racism, classism, sexism, etc.) from the text affect them personally.

- Students evaluate how specific issues impact others in the local or global community.

- Students identify how their own privilege or positionality impacts others.

- Students create text to self, text to text, and text to world connections.

- Students compare historical trends to literature and real life.

- Students recognize the relationship between systematic forms of oppression and power or privilege.

- Students justify how other texts and media reflect similar biases and stereotypes.

Facilitating Change

Empowering students to collaborate, organize, take action, and to reaffirm their role in shaping the world today is an essential part of teaching for social justice. Boyd (2017) states that teaching for social justice "involves utilizing pedagogies that cultivate students' abilities to dissect power relations and help students locate themselves within these structures of power so that they can act for change" (p. 12). Students must begin to see themselves as active, participating, and influential members of society. "In Writing to Change the World: Teaching Social Justice through Writers Workshop," Diamond (2016) claims that her purpose as a writing teacher is "to teach my students that through writing we can develop our unique voices, to share our lives, communicate our ideas, and most importantly, change our world" (Diamond, 2016, p. 6).

- Students discuss, debate, and formulate solutions to inequalities or injustices.

- "Students expand their awareness of social issues affecting the world and address them through writing" (Diamond, 2016, p. 6).

- Students reflect on how they can be change agents in their own communities.

- Students express empathy and solidarity with marginalized and oppressed groups.

- Students collaborate with peers, leaders, and community members to assist and advocate for oppressed groups.

- Students collaborate with others to deconstruct systems of oppression.

Why is Teaching for Social Justice Important

All Schools should be models of equity and excellence. A students' race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, or neighborhood should not hinder or limit a child's academic performance. Unfortunately, too many American schools are failing American students. Christensen et al. (2019) state "too many schools are training grounds for boredom, alienation, and pessimism. Too many schools fail to confront the racial, class, and gender inequities woven into our social fabric" (p. ix). As previously stated, more than half of the students in US public schools identify as people of color, but nationwide there is a distinct gap in achievement and opportunities between White students and students of color. In 2017, the National Center for Educational Statistics reported that 30% of high school dropouts were White, while 66% of high school dropouts were Black students (NCES, 2017). Howard (2016) claims that American schools continue to fail the multiracial population due to:

> disproportionate academic outcomes for different racial groups, increasing incidents of racially motivated violence and hate group activity, inequalities in educational funding, inadequate preparation of teachers to deal effectively with increasing diversity, curriculum that remains Eurocentric and monocultural, political manipulation of ethnic and racial fears and hostilities. (p. 7)

Predominantly white affluent school districts have better facilities, course offerings, graduation rates, and higher test scores than predominantly Black urban districts (Barton, 2003). Race-based disparities continue to exist in almost every dimension of educational outcomes (Howard, 2016). In 2018, a national survey indicated that 64% of African Americans, 45% of Latinos, and 40% of Native Americans agree that children in their own racial or ethnic group don't have the same chances to get a quality education as white children (Casey & Levesque, 2018).

Bolgatz (2005) states "If we agree that democracy is worth protecting and that racism subverts it, then our schools must prepare citizens who can imagine and create ways to change the discriminatory conditions that exist" (p. 5). In order to create true democracy, we must teach students how to recognize inequity and how to address it. If people do not disrupt unfair systems of privilege, they are willingly or unwillingly maintaining the status quo and inadvertently enabling racism (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006). Belle (2019) posits "Social justice education is centered in democracy and the freedom to exercise one's full humanity" (p. 1). Bender-Slack (2010) claims:

> Teachers have a moral responsibility to promote a more just society and equal social relations by teaching students to be active agents in the process of making history as well as examine how they potentially function as part of an oppressive and exploitative institution. (p. 195)

Social Justice oriented teachers embrace diversity and seek equitable practices to promote equity and academic excellence. Scholar Jaqueline Glasgow (2001) writes:

> In an increasingly abrasive and polarized society, social justice education has the potential to prepare citizens who are sophisticated in their understanding of diversity and group interaction, able to critically evaluate social institutions, and committed to working democratically with diverse others. (p. 54)

To stimulate students' awareness about diversity and to inspire and sustain an ethic of inclusion, it is important to offer students the critical analytical skills needed to understand systems of power and the tools to create change (Matloob Haghanikar, 2019). Teaching for social justice exposes students to the rigorous multicultural curricula and critical thinking skills that help facilitate the changes that our school system and country need (Boyd, 2017).

In *Teaching for Joy and Justice*, Christensen (2009) asserts:

> If we intend to create citizens of the world, as most districts claim in their mission statements, then we need to teach students how to use their knowledge to create change. Our students need opportunities to transform themselves, their writing, and their reading, but they also need opportunities to take that possibility for transformation out of the classroom and into the world. (p. 8)

Teacher Perceptions of Social Justice Education

During a Social justice study at a high school in the Midwest, a researcher asked about teaching for social justice and a teacher exclaimed "I want them to think of themselves as citizens that can do something to fix a problem or make a problem better, or fight for change, or fight… some injustice. I mean if they learn that and get a little bit of passion, to me, job is done you know?" (Castagno, 2019, p. 25). In another research survey on teacher opinions of teaching for social justice, Dover (2013) quotes an educator from the Northeast that described teaching for social justice as "an inquiry driven process that promotes critical thinking and active citizenship for personal and societal change" (p. 522). In another study of ELA teachers' views on teaching for social justice, an educator defines it by stating:

> I think just trying to get people to be empathetic, step inside somebody else's shoes, I mean the best way for me to do that is to have kids read things, you know, written by authors who have different views than they do or try to write things to sort of force them into somebody else's shoes. (Bender-Slack, 2010, p. 190)

Research shows that teachers' perceptions of teaching for social justice tend to vary. Ayers, et al. (2009) state:

> The term social justice seems to be in the ears and on the lips of educators who set as their task the fostering of a more democratic society through classroom practices. While generally well-intended, the ways in which different educators go about defining social justice, and acting from those definitions differ greatly. (p. 30)

Bender-Slack (2010) claims that "teaching for social justice is complex, and the understanding and implementation of social justice pedagogy are individualized by ELA educators based on their understandings" (p. 181). According to Agarwal-Rangnath (2013):

> Some may perceive teaching for social justice as something taught outside of the general curriculum, while others may see teaching for social justice as a vision that translates into everything they do – seating arrangements, lesson plans, conversations with students, and community activity. (p. 4)

Certain educators think that simply exposing students to texts representing diverse ethnicities, sexual orientations, and social classes equates to teaching for social justice, while more informed educators require students to critically analyze the power and privilege within these diverse texts (Boyd, 2017).

In *Social Studies, Literacy, and Social Justice in the Common Core Classroom*, Ruchi Agarwal-Rangnath (2013) discusses how many novice teachers are "unclear of what teaching for social justice means, unsure of how to translate their vision of social justice teaching into practice, and uncertain of how to integrate social justice ideals into a standards and test- driven environment" (p. 2). Teachers may also be under the common misconception that 'teaching standards' and 'teaching for social justice' are mutually exclusive (Dover, 2015). The increasing demand for accountability and restrictive mandates pressure contemporary educators to solely target tested content and skills (Milner & Browitt, 2002). Without proper training and support,

sometimes new teachers get so overwhelmed with state-testing, required curricula, classroom

management, and school politics that social justice gets pushed aside (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013).

However, many social justice-oriented educators still navigate social justice teaching

amid restrictive mandates. Despite the many troubling implications of the CCSS, many justice-

oriented teachers remain hopeful about elements of the CCSS that they see as aligned with what

they were already doing or wanted to do in the classroom (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2016).

 Many teachers still have autonomy to design lessons that meet standards and align with their

social justice interests (Dover, 2015). These teachers work intentionally to challenge normative

thought by integrating multiple perspectives into the curriculum, especially the voices of those

dominated, marginalized, or traditionally excluded in texts. They connect the stories of struggle

and resistance to contemporary social justice issues and make connections between historical

events and present-day circumstances (Agarwal-Rangnath et al., 2016).

In a nationwide study of English language arts teacher implementation of CCR and teaching for

social justice, Dover (2015) surveyed lesson plans and found the following:

> Overall, participants selected lessons that emphasized the reading and analysis of justice-
> oriented literature and informational texts; 83% of submitted lessons taught skills and
> content that relate to the CCR Anchor Standards for Reading. 75% of submitted lessons
> prepared students to meet CCR Anchor Standards for Writing, and 71% addressed CCR
> Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening. (p. 520)

According to Bender-Slack (2010), many educators believe that literature naturally lends

itself to teaching for social justice instruction (p. 189). Dover (2015) states "Within language arts

and literacy education, justice- oriented approaches also prioritize the reading of multicultural

texts, cultivation of critical literacy, and examination of injustice in literature and life" (p. 518).

In *Social Justice Literacies in the English Classroom* Boyd (2017) states:

ELA readily lends itself to social justice because it centers on texts for study, including print and media, and the content of those texts as well as how teachers work with them in the classroom can be embraced with critical goals in mind. (p. 7)

In a national study of ELA teachers practicing social justice education with the Common Core Standards, Dover (2015) found:

Of the 20 participants who submitted lessons related to literary analysis, ten (50%) focused on canonized literature, nine (45%) poetry or lyrics, eight (40%) nonfiction or informational texts, and seven (35%) video or electronic media. Several participants submitted lessons relating to the same core texts; *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Night* by Elie Wiesel, and *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller, and the film Hotel Rwanda were referenced by multiple participants. (p. 521)

Glasgow (2001) states "Young adult literature provides a context for students to become conscious of their operating worldview and to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations" (p. 54). Recently there has also been an increase in the use of young adult literature to encourage social activism and good citizenship in classrooms (Hays, 2016, p. 54). In "Using Linked Text Sets to Promote Advocacy and Agency Through a Critical Lens," Katherine Batchelor (2018) shares how teachers use young adult literature text pairings to promote advocacy and social justice in classrooms. Batchelor (2018) notes that:

educators selected young adult novels like *How It Went Down (2014)* and *All-American Boys (2015)* to help students understand the historical context of the Black Lives Matter movement and *OCD Love Story (2013)* and *Thirteen Reasons Why (2007)* to help students explore mental health issues. (pp. 382-384)

Rodriguez (2019) states:

Ultimately, the best among YA literary characters that readers meet dispel biases, myths, and stereotypes in coming of age through various experiences, perspectives, and portrayals connected to the lenses of adolescence, culture, gender, identity, language, sexuality, schooling, and education. (p. xiii)

Lastly, some educators view teaching for social justice as risky and difficult. In a study by Bender-Slack (2010), educators cited fear and discomfort as roadblocks that deter their social justice teaching (p. 191). The literature shows that educators fear offending or upsetting students

by discussing "sensitive topics." For example, Bender-Slack (2010) includes the following

quotes from teachers who shared their fears concerning social justice topics:

> Sometimes I feel like I don't want to hurt their feelings. I don't want to offend them or something and some of them really are really poor and live in trailers and stuff, so I guess maybe I'm sensitive to the topic. (p. 193)

Another teacher from the same Bender-Slack (2010) study stated:

> I think the climate in this particular region right now, because it's just now becoming more diverse and there are some serious growing pains, and it makes everybody really uncomfortable. And I've always talked about race, I mean, that's how I learned to teach. I've always tried to relate it to my kids and their situations in life. And for me to talk about racism when I've got one Black student in my class makes me uncomfortable and I'm sure by the looks that I've gotten, some of my minority students are uncomfortable, and… I don't want them to feel that way. (pp. 193-194)

Most educators prefer to engage in practices that avoid conflict and uncomfortable

conversations. According to Castagno (2019), "Nice people avoid uncomfortable conversations

and some educators do so by sidestepping conversations about race and inequity altogether" (p.

31).

Teacher Perceptions of Discussing Racial Injustice in the Classroom

The National Council of Teachers of English (2015b) urges "English educators to use

classrooms to help as opposed to harm, to transform our world and raise awareness of the crisis

of racial injustice" (NCTE, 2015). In response English educators have called for critical

approaches to literary analysis to help students explore race, power, privilege, and oppression

through literature (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). The challenge is many educators still

view race as a taboo or controversial topic for classroom instruction. In *Talking Race in the*

Classroom, Bolgatz (2006) discusses how some teachers feel uncomfortable discussing race in

the classroom. Bolgatz (2006) claims, "Few teachers are taught how to be racially literate, so we

do not know how to help our students learn these skills. Not knowing how to handle the

controversies, we are unwilling to wander into what we perceive to be dangerous waters (p. 12). According to Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019), the "fear of losing rapport, fear of losing control of the conversation, fear of losing sight of ELA content, and the need to remain politically neutral are reasons that educators avoid race in the classroom" (pp. 20-22).

Some teachers prefer to remain politically neutral and avoid classroom conversations on race. Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) state "For some of us, broaching the topic of racism in class feels as though we are crossing a political line, allowing our personal politics to affect a teaching environment intended for students from families with a range of political opinions" (p. 21). A large number of teachers believe that they are supposed to suppress their personal opinions and beliefs in the classroom (Leer, 2010). In *Not Light, But Fire: How to Lead Meaningful Race Conversations in the Classroom*, Matthew Kay (2018) states "Teachers don't know how to check kids when they say something racist. Teachers don't know what to do. It's easier not to talk about politics" (p. 246).

Another barrier is certain teachers fear that addressing racism veers too far from the English content (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). With the stresses of high stakes testing and Common Core curricula restraints many educators are apprehensive about spending instruction time on race and other social justice related topics (Dover, 2015). In her award-winning book, *Everyday Antiracism* Mica Pollock (2008) describes the racial disparities in the school curricula. Pollock (2008) states:

> Although our schools are rhetorically committed to the principles of multiculturalism, little substantive state or national curriculum guides educators and students to confront issues of racism and racial inequality. Today schools – especially schools that serve poor children – fail to present critical perspectives on these issues. (p. 156)

Other teachers avoid race conversations because they fear losing rapport with students. Borsheim-Black and Sarigiandes (2019) note that teachers who intend to initiate lessons on race

often end up wondering, "What will happen to my relationships with students if I offend them, make them feel defensive, or make them feel bad?" (p. 20). When approaching race in the classroom Smith (2019) claims:

> Putting this level of pressure on ourselves means that the thing we fear more than anything else is failing. Often this is defined as losing control of what's happening, as when racist comments start flying around the room and people start to yell at each other. Sometimes our greatest fear is saying something racist ourselves and being embarrassed in front of the room. (p. 273)

Brookfield (2019) states "When students challenge me on my perceived racism, my lack of wokeness, or what seems to them to be arbitrary or unfair behavior by me, it is inherently destabilizing" (p. 295). Teachers prioritize a great amount of time establishing a good rapport and positive relationships, so they are sometimes reluctant to introduce uncomfortable topics that may compromise their relationships with students (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). Kay (2018) states:

> It is painfully clear that every teacher's missteps during race conversations are magnified regardless of their intentions. The penalty for misspeaking, improper planning, or a lack of foresight can be the total loss of a teacher's moral authority. And once lost, students' respect can seem impossible to recover. (p. 9)

> Teachers also worry about losing control during conversations about race. In *Teaching Race,* Stephen Brookfield (2019) recalls how easily a conversation about race in the classroom can get out of control:

> A muttered racial insult (I never found out from whom) exploded into conflict, and before I knew it, I had a fight on my hands. A white student and a Black student suddenly jumped up and started enthusiastically cheering on the combatants. From that moment on I knew that racialized flashpoints could explode unexpectedly out of nowhere, and that discussions could go off in completely unanticipated directions. (p. 191)

In *Talking Race in the Classroom*, Bolgatz (2005) also shares certain educator's anxiety of losing control during race conversations by quoting teachers. Bolgatz (2005) quotes:

Kerry explained why he did not want to talk about race. What if someone said something that made another student mad? he asked, and the student went to my boss and told them that my class is racist? I could lose my job! (p. 57)

Ultimately, many educators still have a variety of reservations about discussing race in the classroom. In *Teaching Race: How to Help Students Unmask and Challenge Racism*, scholar Bobbi Smith (2019) states:

Teachers who dedicate themselves to antiracist practice take their commitment seriously. Afterall, this is important work, full of significance for creating a world that is more just and compassionate. We want to feel we have made a difference and that all the pain and tension have been worth it. Our hope is that by transforming people in our classrooms, maybe we can make some small contribution to transforming the world outside. Because the stakes are so high, the prospect of failure is terrifying. (p. 273)

The Hate U Give

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas is considered one of the most popular young adult novels in 2017. In a Goodreads review of the novel, Michael Cart (2016) writes:

Thomas' debut, both a searing indictment of injustice and a clear-eyed, dramatic examination of the complexities of race in America, invites deep thoughts about our social fabric, ethics, morality, and justice. Beautifully written in Starr's authentic first-person voice, this is a marvel of verisimilitude as it insightfully examines two worlds in collision. An inarguably important book that demands the widest possible readership. (p. 48)

In her article "The Hate U Give Enters the Ranks of Great Young Adult Novels," Diamond (2017) states:

Thomas's intimate writing style and the novel's first-person perspective taps fully into Starr's shock, pain, and outrage during the shooting and its aftermath. As a result, *The Hate U Give* allows some readers to see the complexity of their lives mirrored in literature; for others who may be removed from Starr's experience or haven't lived through similar tragedies, it can help generate deeper understanding. (p. 2)

This critically acclaimed YA novel was written by Mississippi native Angie Thomas and inspired by the Oscar Grant case and other police brutality cases across the country. In Thomas' novel, sixteen-year-old Starr Carter witnesses a police officer kill her unarmed friend and

struggles with the injustices surrounding his murder. With realistic characters, an engaging plot, and relevant themes of racism and police brutality, *The Hate U Give* quickly became a popular favorite among teens and literary critics. According to Buckley-Marudas and Ellenbogen (2019):

> Thomas's text, although raw, honest, and emotionally difficult, invites young people into important conversations about human rights, activism, and social change. To youth readers, this text communicates that they are not alone in their fear, rage, and confusion, and they are not isolated in their desires to seek justice. (p. 72)

In the *English Journal* article "To Dismantle Racism We Must Discuss It," Lorena German, a Secondary English teacher in Texas talks about how she teaches the novel *The Hate U Give* in her classroom. German (2019) states:

> Starr, the main character in *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, is another young woman who comes to our classroom and helps us discuss race, White supremacy, and the color hierarchy so prevalent in our society. Starr's friend Khalil is killed by a police officer. What's unique about Starr's story is that her friend dies because of circumstances related to the color of his skin. We talk and think about the ways that people's skin tone unconsciously informs our perceptions and beliefs about them. Starr helps us see how racism affects our imagination and therefore influences our biases (p.16).

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas was published in 2017, and quickly became a best - selling Young Adult novel that has been on the New York Times bestseller list for more than 160 weeks. *The Hate U Give* was acknowledged by the American Library Association with the William C. Harris Debut YA award in 2018. The novel also won the Coretta Scott King Award (2018), the National Book Award Longlist (2017), Goodreads Choice Award (2017), and was nominated for the Carnegie Medal in 2018. In 2018, the novel was turned into a motion picture by 20th Century Fox Productions and was nominated for several NAACP Image Awards.

Although the book has gained numerous accolades from students, teachers and literary critics, there has been some resistance. Thomas' use of urban colloquialisms and sensitive subject matter has been criticized. According to Gomez (2018) "would be" censors have attacked the book for being "pervasively vulgar" and for the depiction of drug use, profanity, and

offensive language. The book landed in the eighth spot for the American Library Association top ten challenged and banned books list for 2017 (Gomez, 2018, p. 1). For example, the Katy Independent School District in Texas banned the novel from all the district libraries in 2017 (Rosenfield, 2017). In Charleston, South Carolina *The Hate U Give* was banned by the Fraternal Order of the Police based on the distrust of police and police brutality displayed in the novel (Gomez, 2018). The censorship and criticism surrounding the themes of racism and police brutality in the text have actually propelled major conversations about why it is important to discuss these issues with young people. In his article for Huffpost, Ryan Douglass (2017) posits:

> Here's why *The Hate U Give* is important: Black Lives Matter is a plea for all of America (not just its judicial system) to see Black people as valuable, non-threatening human beings. What we need is for those who shy away from publicly championing this cause to pick up books from Black perspectives, feel the pains and joys of Black people, find where we connect and where we differ and ultimately join our fight. If this book won't do it, nothing will, because *The Hate U Give* teaches without preaching. (p. 2)

All the national attention and positive reviews have put *The Hate U Give* on many educators' reading list. The publishing company even provides lessons and activities for *The Hate U Give* on the Harper Collins publishing website.

Theoretical Frameworks

Several critical theoretical frameworks will be used in this study to analyze the use or abuse of power in educational settings. Wallowitz (2008) notes that "critical theorist assume that teaching is a highly political act and that all knowledge is socially, politically, and culturally constructed" (p. 1). As the researcher critically explores the use of young adult literature to discuss social justice in classrooms the following theoretical lenses will be used.

Critical Race Theory

According to Parker et al. (1999), Critical race theory (CRT) is a revolutionary intellectual movement that puts race at the center of critical analysis (p. 1). Critical Race theorist acknowledge that racism is pervasive in American society, and applies not only to individual beliefs, prejudices, and behaviors, but also to the ways it operates systematically and materially to privilege some and marginalize others (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). Critical race theory in education is an analytical lens that examines existing racial power structures in classrooms. It is an effective way to explore and uncover racial inequity in education. CRT critically examines how white privilege and white supremacy power structures operate in educational settings, and who benefits from this use of power. Ladson-Billings (1998) notes "that critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is normal in society" (p. 7). Therefore, CRT scholars recognize that institutionalized racism is ingrained in American culture and in the very fabric of the American school system. These scholars also recognize that the classroom is where the construction, production, and distribution of knowledge is a central site for the construction of social and racial power (Parker et al., 1999). Therefore, critical race theorists evaluate how white power structures dominate school practices, procedures, and curriculums. Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that helps educational scholars progress toward racial equity in education, by exposing oppressive power structures that marginalize minorities in American school systems.

Critical Literacy Theory

Critical literacy is another important theoretical perspective used in this study. Critical literacy is a theoretical lens that examines the makeup of texts for implications of power (Wallowitz, 2008). It is deeply rooted in the work of Paulo Freire who championed the rights of

oppressed and marginalized citizens in Brazil to create an informative and transformative education system (Friere, 1970). Critical literacy is built upon the premise of being or becoming critically conscious through literacy (Boyd, 2017, p. 13). Critical literacy theorist assess what text is studied, how it is being studied, and for what purpose it is being studied. According to Wallowitz (2008) "critical literacy focuses on social transformation as well as individual transformation by critically examining the power structures represented in texts to further the paradigm shift toward a transformative and liberating education" (p. 25). Critical literacy is an essential part of this study, because it acknowledges the significance of interrogating texts and aims to leverage and analyze diverse perspectives in literature. This framework reinforces the concept that young adult texts can cultivate student's critical consciousness regarding racial injustice and inequity (Marudas & Ellenbogen, 2019, p. 74).

Critical Race English Education Theory

Critical Race English Education (CREE) is a fairly new theoretical framework that pulls from critical race theory and critical literacy frameworks. Scholar Lamar Johnson (2018) describes CREE as:

- Explicitly addresses issues of violence, race, whiteness, white supremacy, and anti-Black racism within school and out of school spaces.
- Explores the intimate history and the current relationship between literacy, language, race, and education by expanding the concept of literacies to include activist contexts and social movements.
- Seeks to dismantle dominant texts (i.e.., canonical texts, art, and media) while also highlighting how language and literacy can be used as tools to uplift the lives of people who are often on the margins in society and PreK-20 spaces.

- Builds on the Black literacies that Black youth bring to classrooms. Black literacies affirm the lives, spirit, language, and knowledge of Black people and Black culture (p. 108).

Social Justice Education Theory

In the *Handbook of Social Justice in Education*, Ayers et al. (2009) assert that Social justice education rests on three pillars or principles:

1. Equity, the principle of fairness, equal access to the most challenging and nourishing educational experiences, the demand that what the most privileged and enlightened are able to provide their children must be the standard for what is made available to all children. This must count for equitable outcomes, and somehow for redressing and repairing historical and embedded injustices.

2. Activism is the principle of agency, full participation, preparing youngsters to see and understand and when necessary, to change all that is before them. This is a move from passivity, cynicism and despair.

3. Social literacy, the principle of relevance, resisting the flattening effects of materialism and consumerism and the power of the abiding evils of white supremacy, patriarchy, homophobia- nourishing awareness of our own identities and our connection with others (p. xiv).

Thus, Social justice education emphasizes curricular content covering social injustice, social identities, oppression theory, intersectionality, and reflexive teaching practices that focus on equity and systemic changes (Dover, 2013, p. 6). The social justice framework critically uncovers the oppressive values and politics that undergird educational decisions and practices regarding curriculum and instruction (Bender-Slack, 2010). Secondly, it questions or challenges

why we do the things we do in schools and who benefits from them. It also attends to ways in which schooling often contributes to the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of inequalities, particularly along the lines of race, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, and other such categories. In other words, the school experience may be one of oppression and or liberation (Bender-Slack, 2010). Furthermore, Boyd (2017) claims, teaching for social justice "involves utilizing pedagogies that cultivate students' abilities to dissect power relations and help students locate themselves within these structures of power so that they can act for change" (p. 12).

Summary of Chapter

According to the review of the literature, there is a substantial need for social justice education and young adult literature can help educators address these needs. The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to implement social justice literacies in Mississippi classrooms. Thus, the literature explores teachers' perceptions of young adult literature and teachers' perceptions of social justice.

This chapter summarized literature available relating to social justice education, the benefits of young adult literature, and critical frameworks that apply to this study. The research consistently suggested that educators' views and attitudes toward social justice and using young adult literature in the classroom vary. The literature review revealed a need to further investigate teacher's perceptions of using young adult literature to discuss social justice in the classroom. The following chapter will describe the research design, research methods, and analyses of data that will be used for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter offers a detailed explanation of the critical qualitative research methodology that will be applied in this study. An overview of the researcher's background, theoretical frameworks, epistemologies, and design rationale are provided. A description of the selection of participants, project timeline, data collection procedures, and data analysis plan is also provided. Finally, the validity and reliability measures will be addressed.

Intent and Research Questions

The intent of this qualitative study is to investigate and examine ELA teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice in Mississippi classrooms. The following questions guide this study:

(R1) What are Mississippi teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice?

(R2) What are the perceived barriers faced by Mississippi teachers when they attempt to teach about racial injustice through Young Adult literature?

Rationale for Using Qualitative Research

The exploratory nature of the research questions led to the use of qualitative methodology for the design of this study. According to Creswell (2014), "Qualitative research is an approach for understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p.

4). This study focuses on understanding educator's attitudes and perceptions, therefore qualitative inquiry is the best approach. Qualitative inquiry utilizes a wide variety of tools to investigate phenomena with extensive depth and detail. Butina (2015) asserts that "qualitative methods are used when you want to find out what people do, know, think, and feel by observing, interviewing and analyzing documents" (p. 191). Focus groups, interviews, observations, document analysis, and recordings are all valuable forms of data collection that are utilized in qualitative inquiry. All of these qualitative methods will be applied to collect data from participants in my study. In qualitative research data is coded into emerging themes and categories to help interpret meaning. In qualitative research, the categorizing is also based on the researcher's interpretation (Saldana, 2011).

The Research Process: Emergent Design

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the indefinite status of public schools' plans for the fall, the research design was emergent. Emergent design is the typical research process for qualitative research. In emergent design, the various phases and steps taken throughout the study are subject to change depending upon the data being collected and the circumstances. For example, interview questions may change, along with settings, and participants in this study (Creswell, 2009). The data that was collected from focus groups, journals, or field notes lead to new questions for the researcher to explore. Also plans to physically visit field sites for observations changed based on conditions that were not under the researcher's control.

Phenomenological Approach

Creswell (2014) describes phenomenological research as "a type of inquiry in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 14). All of the research questions in this study investigate the perceptions or

experiences of participants, and therefore embody the phenomenological approach. Patton (2005) notes "that in-depth interviews with individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon of interest are recommended for phenomenological studies" (p. 104). This study focuses on teachers' perceptions of their experiences using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss racial injustice, so in-depth interviews were conducted to capture the essence of the participants' lived experiences. According to Moran (2000), to truly understand phenomenology, explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within (p. 4). In phenomenological research it is very important for the researcher to set aside any bias or preconceived notions in order to accurately report and interpret the essence of participants' lived experiences. So phenomenological researchers employ a technique called bracketing. Bracketing (epoche) "is the process in which the researcher isolates personal biases in order to be open to the experience itself" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27). Another technique that researchers utilize in phenomenological analysis is imaginative variation. Moustakas (1994) states:

> The task of imaginative variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions. The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced. (p. 97)

The researcher applied all these techniques in this phenomenological study.

Theoretical Frameworks

In qualitative research, a theoretical framework is the lens that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed (Creswell, 2014). A critical theoretical framework was used in this study to analyze the use of power in educational settings (See Ch. 2 for details). According to Creswell (2014), "critical theory perspectives are concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and

gender" (p. 65). Critical theoretical frameworks include distinct assumptions, concepts, and beliefs that apply to this study. Wallowitz (2008) notes that "critical theorist assume that teaching is a highly political act and that all knowledge is socially, politically, and culturally constructed" (p. 1). As the researcher critically explored teacher's perceptions of using young adult literature to discuss social justice in classrooms, the following theoretical lenses were used for data analysis.

Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that puts race at the center of critical analysis (Parker et al., 1999). Ladson-Billings notes "that critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is normal in society (Ladson-Billings, 1998 p. 7)." Critical Race theorists acknowledge that institutionalized racism is ingrained in American society and the very fabric of the school system. This institutionalized racism applies not only to individual beliefs, biases, and behaviors, but also to the ways it operates systematically and materially to privilege some and marginalize others (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). These scholars also recognize that the classroom is "where the construction, production, and distribution of knowledge is a central site for the construction of social and racial power" (Parker et al., 1999, p. 5). Therefore, critical race theorists evaluate how white power structures dominate school practices, procedures, and curriculums.

A social justice framework is also used in this study. According to Ayers et al. (2009), social justice education is centered on:

> Equity, the principle of fairness, equal access to the most challenging and nourishing educational experiences, the demand that what the most privileged and enlightened are able to provide their children must be the standard for what is made available to all children. (p. xiv)

The social justice education lens emphasizes curricular content covering social injustice, social identities, oppression theory, intersectionality, and reflexive teaching practices that focus on

equity and systemic changes (Dover, 2013). The social justice lens critically uncovers the oppressive values and politics that undergird educational decisions and practices regarding curriculum and instruction (Bender-Slack, 2010). Secondly, it questions or challenges why we do the things we do in schools and who benefits from them. It also attends to ways in which schooling often contributes to the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of inequalities, particularly along the lines of race, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, and other such categories (Bender-Slack, 2010).

Epistemological Perspective

Qualitative research is often described as an umbrella covering a variety of epistemological perspectives, research techniques, and philosophical assumptions. Positivist/ post positivist, Interpretive/Constructivist, Critical, and Postmodern/Post-structural are all significant epistemological perspectives used in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the researcher embraced concepts from several of these perspectives, but the main epistemological perspective is considered critical. Patton (2015) notes "that critical research aims to critique existing conditions and through that critique bring about change" (p. 692). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "in critical studies the assumption is that power in combination with hegemonic social structures results in the marginalization and oppression of those without power. Critical research seeks to make these dynamics visible so that people can challenge power relations" (p. 61). Critical researchers believe that the very act of participants talking about their experiences with race, class, and power imbalances can change their consciousness about these topics and invoke change (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 63). Therefore the goal for this study and its results was to critique, challenge, and analyze the power relations in classrooms by exploring teacher's perceptions.

In this study, critical research was mixed with other qualitative methodologies. For example, this study had a phenomenological design and phenomenology is widely known as a type of Interpretive/Constructivist research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that "Interpretive/Constructivist research assumes that reality is socially constructed; that is there is no single observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Researchers do not find knowledge; they construct it" (p. 9). This also applied to my study because critical researchers assume that "all thought is mediated by power relations that are historically and socially constructed" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 10).

Furthermore, Grbich (2013) notes that:

most forms of qualitative research now have an established postmodern position: for example ethnography, grounded theory, action, evaluation research, phenomenology and feminist research. Postmodernism favors descriptive and individually interpreted mini-narratives, which provide explanations for small-scale situations located within particular contexts with no pretensions of abstract theory, universality, or generalizability involved. (p. 11)

Postmodern/post-structural frames analyze how all forms of power influence research. As mentioned earlier the critique of power dynamics are at the heart of critical research and this critical study examined the power dynamics in teachers' classrooms. In this study, the researcher critically questioned who has power in the schools, how is it negotiated, what structures create the distribution of power, and who does this benefit? (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Role of Researcher

The primary task of a researcher in a phenomenological study is to reflect on the data to "synthesize the commonalities of participants' collective experiences and perceptions" (Saldana, 2011, p. 8). The researcher is the main instrument for data collection in qualitative research. The researcher selected, interviewed, and observed participants in their natural setting while making

ethical considerations. The researcher collected, transcribed, coded, and interpreted all the data. Therefore, the researcher had to be transparent about personal biases, values, interest, and background to maintain credibility. Grbich (2003) asserts that "the researcher cannot be separated from his/her background, life experiences and memories, which inevitably filter impressions of the actions and behavior of others" (p. 6). As the researcher in this study, I acknowledge that all of my personal experiences and feelings about social justice influenced how I interpreted the data.

Background of Researcher

My theoretical frameworks, my ethnic background, and lived experiences have shaped my views on racism and social justice. My personal background and lived experiences are also a significant part of who I am as a researcher. In order to share how my personal background shapes how I view the phenomenon studied, I will be transparent about my lived experiences.

In the Summer of 2012, I taught a computerized credit recovery summer school class full of brilliant and beautiful Black boys at Hazelwood East High School in St. Louis, Missouri. Normally the students' eyes were focused on their computers as they worked on subject-based modules for course credit, but not this time. This was the day of the Trayvon Martin murder case verdict, and all eyes were glued to the TV screen. I had decided to briefly pause the modules so we could watch the verdict together. All my students knew about the incident, and we were devastated when we first heard about it. I kept thinking about how it could have been my little brother, since he was a Black male college student in Orlando, Florida, at the time. As a school community, we all wore black hoodies and had moments of silence to honor Trayvon. The anticipation of the final verdict was too high for me and my students to miss the opportunity to view the final outcome.

Unfortunately, I was not prepared for that verdict. I just knew that with all the media coverage and evidence, that this time justice would finally be served (I thought). We would be able to celebrate as a class and then get right back to our work. But when George Zimmerman was pronounced not guilty, there was no way we could get back to work on computerized modules. The room erupted with the rage and despair of young people who had just been told by a judge on national TV that a person can murder an innocent Black child with impunity. I fell silent and was in a state of shock and anger. I looked at the anger and disappointment on the boys' faces, and I wanted to give them hope. I wanted to tell them that their lives matter, and we have laws and police in place to protect and serve all US citizens. But the hopelessness and powerlessness I felt, paralyzed me. I thought about how I became a teacher to give hope and empower students and communities through literacy. And at that moment, I felt inadequate and useless because I did not know what to do. I felt like I had failed them. I thought about how unprepared I was for that moment and longed for an age-appropriate book or a curriculum for me to use to address this type of injustice with my students.

As the years since then have passed, countless police brutality cases continued to terrorize people of color while police got paid leave. One of my cousins was brutally beaten by two officers in Georgia for merely jogging near his college campus. One of my mom's former students, Michael Brown, brought national attention to my hometown when he was murdered and the officer was released without charges. And the list of racially charged incidents has just kept piling up.

 In 2017, Angie Thomas' YA novel, *The Hate U Give* was released and became a national bestseller. All the pain, anger, disenfranchisement, and trauma that I and so many others have experienced with every new police brutality case was clearly illustrated and validated by

this book. As I read the book, I believed that it was exactly what I needed back in 2012 and what teachers and students need today. By this time, I was a PhD student co-teaching a Young Adult Literature class for future ELA teachers at the University of Mississippi. Since *The Hate U Give* was a new Young Adult novel by a Mississippi writer addressing relevant racial, educational, and socioeconomic issues that affect youth, I made sure that I shared it with my teachers. All my students enjoyed the book, but many were unsure and apprehensive about how to teach the book in schools, considering the current racial climate in this state. This made me wonder what types of support and resources teachers need to overcome these challenges/barriers in Mississippi classrooms. What exactly were the teachers afraid of and why?

Researcher Bias

As an African American English teacher with a passion for social justice, I brought my personal perspective to this study. My personal experiences with racial injustice and educational inequity naturally influenced my approach to this study. My passion for the topic fueled a detailed and unmitigated analysis of the data. I leveraged the literature and data from participants' focus group interviews, individual interviews, lesson plans, and reflective journals to limit any personal biases or assumptions about participant's that I might hold. I referred to the social justice frameworks suggested by Ruchi Argarwal-Rangnath (2013) to guide and limit my interpretations of data. I also utilized a peer researcher throughout the data collection process to help eliminate personal bias. The peer researcher member-checked for rigor and trustworthiness in data collection and interpretation.

Participants

Padilla-Diaz (2015) suggests that the studied group in a phenomenological study include 3-15 participants (p. 104). This study has four participants. This smaller sample size made it easier for the researcher to identify underlying common essences and meanings pertaining to the studied phenomenon. The selection of participants in this project was also influenced by the researcher's constructivist world view. According to Creswell (2014) "social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 8). Under this perspective the climate, politics, demographics, and culture of each school setting can influence a teacher's perspectives regarding the phenomenon, because it is socially constructed. As mentioned earlier, predominantly white affluent school districts often have better facilities, resources, course offerings, and higher graduation rates, than predominantly Black urban districts (Barton, 2003). In order to explore the variations of perspectives between individuals working in privileged affluent settings, versus participants working in marginalized settings, the researcher selected participants from both settings. In order to select participants from affluent areas the researcher purposely sought out two educators who worked in A-rated school districts. In order to select participants working in marginalized settings, the researcher sought out two educators that worked in D- or F-rated school districts. I purposefully selected four educators from different schools through snowball sampling. All participants met the following criteria:

- Teach ninth grade English in a public school in Mississippi;
- Have approval from superintendent and school administrator;
- Have a current state approved teaching license;
- Have taught in Mississippi for at least one year;
- Have read *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas and are willing to teach the novel to all of their freshmen this fall; and

- Sign and submit an Informed Consent form (Appendix B).

Recruitment of Participants

I defended my prospectus first. After I gained the approval of my dissertation committee, I applied for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Mississippi. In order to gain access to participants, I asked colleagues to recommend names of people who may be interested in participating in this study. I utilized my contacts at Teach for America Mississippi, The Mississippi Association of Educators (MAE), and Mississippi Teacher Core Alumni to locate potential participants. Then I emailed a recruitment letter to all the names that I received via snowball sampling. My recruitment letter offered a brief explanation of the study (See Appendix A to view the recruitment letter). All correspondence with participants in regard to this study was through email accounts and school mailing addresses. Participants were also asked to sign an informed consent form at the beginning of the study. Table 1 contains a demographic breakdown of the participants.

Table 1

Description of Participating Teachers

Pseudonym	Age	Highest Degree	Total Years Teaching	Gender	Ethnicity	Mississippi Region
Amanda	29	Bachelors	6	Female	White	North
Barbara	46	Masters	25	Female	White	North East
Carla	44	Masters	2	Female	Other	Central
Daphne	24	Bachelors	2	Female	White	Delta

Amanda

Amanda is 29 years old and has a Bachelor's degree in English with a Minor in Education. She obtained her Mississippi teaching license from an Alternate Route Program. Amanda also worked as a library assistant at School One, while working on her license. School

One is in an A-rated School District in North Mississippi. At School One, Amanda teaches four classes with an average of 20 students in each. These classes include freshman English, freshman Pre-AP English, 10th Grade Pre-AP English and one Avid Advisory course. She has taught for six years.

Barbara

Barbara is 46 years old with a Bachelor's degree in Elementary education and a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Mississippi. This is Barbara's 25th year in the classroom. At School Two, Barbara teaches two Freshman English courses and two Dual Credit English 3 and 4 classes. These courses all have 20 students per class. She taught *The Hate U Give* to her juniors and seniors in her dual credit courses. School Two is rated A by the Mississippi Department of Education and located in Northeast Mississippi.

Carla

Carla is 38 years old with a Bachelor's degree in History Education and a Master's degree in Adult Education from an online institution. Carla was placed at School Three through her Alternate Route certification program. This is her second year at School Three. At School Three, Carla teaches four classes of freshman English with at least 31 students in each. Carla also teaches two junior English classes with 43 students in each class. School Three is in an impoverished urban area in the Central region of the state.

Daphne

Daphne is 24 years old with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology. She is completing her Masters in the Arts of Teaching through the Mississippi Excellence in Teaching Program (METP). This is her second year in METP and at School Four. School Four is a small, rural, D-rated school located in the Mississippi Delta. At School Four, Daphne teaches every 9th and 10th

grader in the entire school. She teaches two sophomore English classes, three freshman English classes, and one Psychology/Sociology class.

Table 2 shows the classroom demographics for each participant.

Table 2
Description of Participant's Settings

High School	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
Rating	A	A	D	D
Participants	Amanda	Barbara	Carla	Daphne
Total Students	1,267	359	1,057	200
White	763 (60.2%)	273 (76%)	6 (0.6%)	14 (7%)
Hispanic	63 (5%)	8 (2.2%)	2 (0.2%)	5 (2.5%)
Asian	38 (3%)	1 (0.3%)	n/a	n/a
Black	399 (31.5%)	77 (21.4%)	1,049 (99.2%)	181 (90.5%)
American Indian	4 (0.3%)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Free Lunch	430 (34%)	119 (33.1%)	1,057 (100%)	200 (100%)
In SPED Classes	109 (8.6%)	34 (9.5%)	118 (11.2%)	20 (10%)
In AP Classes	386 (30.5%)	100 (27.9%)	106 (10%)	17 (8.5%)

The largest and most racially diverse school in this study is Alpha High School. Alpha is located in a small college town in North Mississippi. The major employer is the local university, so many of the residents work for the University. According to the Mississippi Department of Education, it is an A-rated School district. Alpha High School has a massive newly renovated campus with state-of-the-art facilities. There are 1,267 students enrolled in Alpha High and the vast majority of the students identify as white. Only 399 students identify as Black, 63 identify as Hispanic, 38 as Asian, and four as Native American. There were 386 students enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) classes at the time of this study. This school offers plenty of Pre-Advanced Placement, Advanced Placement, and Dual Enrollment course opportunities for

students in many various areas. There are 430 students who qualify for free or reduced lunch and 109 students are diagnosed with a disability. At the time of this study, Alpha High provided a virtual learning option or face to face instruction for students.

Beta High School is a much smaller school in a smaller community in Northeast Mississippi. The spacious campus is well-maintained with modern facilities. This A-rated School only has 359 students. There are only 77 Black students, eight Hispanic students, and one Asian student on campus, so the student population is predominantly white. There are 100 students enrolled in AP classes. Only 34 students have been diagnosed with a disability and 119 students qualify for free or reduced lunch. This school also provided a virtual learning option as an alternative to face-to-face instruction.

Gamma High School is located in an urban impoverished area in central Mississippi. The Mississippi Department of Education provided School Three with a D rating. The school building is dilapidated and in desperate need of renovations. Many of the facilities are outdated. There were 1,057 students enrolled in Gamma High at the time of this study. The district decided to go completely virtual for the entire semester, but many parts of the building had a poor internet connection. The student population is predominantly Black, and all of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Only six White students and two Hispanic students are enrolled in the school. There are 106 students enrolled in a limited offering of AP courses, and 119 students are diagnosed with a disability.

With only 200 students, Delta High School is the smallest and poorest school in this study. It is located in a small rural farming community in the Mississippi Delta. The outdated school building has many structural problems, including a malfunctioning heating and air conditioning system, broken water fountains, bathrooms that are out of order, etc. The student

population is predominantly Black, and all of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. There are only 14 White students and 5 Hispanic students at Delta High School. There are 17 students enrolled in a limited offering of AP courses, and 20 students are diagnosed with a disability. It also received a D rating from the Mississippi Department of Education. At the time of this study, this school only offered virtual instruction, and there was no option for face-to-face instruction.

Data Collection Procedures

In this study, various types of data were collected to ensure the credibility of the findings. Four different types of data were collected: focus group interviews, individual interviews, fieldnotes, and participant's journal entries.

Ethical Considerations

The confidentiality of participants was strictly enforced with the use of pseudonyms for participants. The use of numbers was used to conceal school names. Any data collected was stored in a private and secure location that only the researcher could access. Any sensitive or confidential details about students, teachers, parents, or administrators retrieved during the data collection process was not shared with the public. The researcher destroyed all audio and digital recordings of participants at the completion of the study. Participants were asked to review all the final transcripts for accuracy and consistency.

Focus Group

Data collection began with a focus group of participating teachers. A focus group is an interview with a set of participants that have experience or knowledge regarding the phenomenon of interest (Morgan, 2011). The focus group was recorded with the participating teachers' consent in order to ease the transcription of data. The researcher's purpose for holding

a focus group was to gain aspects of participants' experiences and perspectives that would not be accessible without group interaction (Morgan, 2011). According to Hennick (2014):

> the most unique characteristic of focus group research is the interactive discussion through which data are generated, which leads to a different type of data not accessible through individual interviews. During these group discussions participants share their views, hear the views of others, and perhaps refine their own views in light of what they have heard. (pp. 2-3)

The sharing and comparing of participant's perspectives on the phenomenon in this group setting provided rich descriptions to address both research questions in this study. Morgan (2011) states "The process of sharing and comparing among participants is thus one of the most valuable aspects of self-contained focus groups" (p. 4). A constructivist perspective underlies this procedure, since the data obtained from a focus group is socially constructed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 114). Unfortunately sharing and comparing stories can also be a limitation in focus groups. In a focus group some participants may withhold info or avoid sharing after hearing what other participants say about a sensitive topic. Sometimes in the focus group participants may withhold honest experiences or opinions to avoid offending the researcher or other participants during group interviews. In order to avoid this limitation, it was important for the researcher to build a strong rapport among participants.

The researcher started the study with a focus group via zoom software to meet participants and begin to build rapport. This way participants actually had the opportunity to meet each other and the researcher. Building good rapport with participants is important when conducting qualitative interviews. Leech (2002) claims:

> Without rapport, even the best-phrased questions can fall flat and elicit brief, uninformative answers. Rapport means more than just putting people at ease. It means convincing people that you are listening, that you understand and are interested in what they are talking about and that they should keep talking. (p. 664)

Therefore, the researcher opened up with introductions and an ice breaker activity with participants to build rapport. The researcher also explained the research project and participant expectations before, requiring all participants to sign and submit the consent forms. All consent forms were explained and collected at this initial meeting. After introductions and the submission of consent forms, the researcher began recording and moderating a semi-structured interview. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) a semi-structured interview is the middle ground between structured and unstructured interviews, because semi structured interview consists of the following:

- Interview guide includes a mix of more and less structured questions;

- All questions used flexibly;

- Largest part of the interview guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored; and

- No predetermined wording or order. (p. 110)

The use of semi-structured interviews helped reduce some of the power imbalances that take place in structured interviews. Structured interviews only allow participants to answer a narrow set of questions in a specific order, which can limit data production (Morgan, 2011). The researcher did not want to limit participant's voices, so a more exploratory approach was employed through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants responses to guide the discussion, while helping the researcher gain more data regarding the phenomenon of interest.

The interview started with a grand tour question. Leech (2002) states that a "grand tour question is a question that asks respondents to give a verbal tour of something they know well" to get them to open up to the researcher (p. 667). The researcher used an interview guide (see Appendix E) that consisted of ten open-ended questions to moderate the discussion. The

researcher intentionally moderated the discussions to make sure that all of the participants' voices were heard. A higher level of moderator involvement kept the conversation focused on topics that interested the researcher instead of extraneous issues (Morgan, 2011).

This focus group took place on an early fall Saturday morning over the course of three hours. This focus group was held virtually on zoom to limit research costs, assist with time constraints, and minimize travel concerns for participants. A virtual focus group also minimized health risks to participants during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews with each participant were conducted at the end of this study. In phenomenological research, semi-structured in-depth interviews are considered an appropriate data collection strategy (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Morris (2018) describes semi-structured interviews as "involving a researcher asking open-ended questions and following up on the responses of the interviewee in an endeavor to extract as much information as possible from them" (Morris, 2018, p. 3). Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in question order, and questioning is based upon participants' responses instead of a set protocol. Semi-structured interviews were held via zoom at the end of this study when participants finished teaching the text. This interview allowed the researcher to gather richer thicker descriptions of the participants final reflections, thoughts, and perceptions regarding the phenomena of interest. Follow-up individual interviews allowed the researcher to learn more about any perspectives that may have been underrepresented in the group interview (Morgan, 2011). This final interview provided clarification and/or verification of data that was collected from field notes, journals, or the focus group. An interview guide (see Appendix F) consisting of eleven open-ended questions with

probes that align with the research questions were used. Probes are follow-up questions that help researchers "gain more clarity and detail on a topic" (Morris, 2018, p. 4).

However, like most research methods, in-depth interviews have limitations. According to Morris (2018) an "important limitation is that the interviewee could present false or inaccurate information and data obtained cannot be generalized to the population" (p. 6). It is very difficult to verify what participants say without participant observation or interviewing others who have sound knowledge of the participant and this is not always possible. This is why it was important for the researcher to build a strong rapport with participants and observe them during this study.

All interviews were conducted on zoom for convenience and scheduled in advance. In-depth interviews should be done face to face and zoom allowed a face-to-face experience without traveling long distances in a vehicle to research sites. All zoom interviews were recorded, so the interviewer could easily replay them for transcription. For validation and credibility, the researcher shared the interview transcripts and final reports with participants to make sure participants' ideas were represented accurately (Butina, 2015).

Field Notes

Interviews were the primary source of qualitative data collection, but observations were effective as well. Unlike interviews, observations took place in the setting where the phenomenon of interest actually occurred, and data provided a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest, instead of the second-hand account obtained from an interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As an outsider the researcher was able to observe significant routines and contextual information that participants neglected to mention in interviews or journals. Observations also helped the researcher obtain knowledge of context, specific incidents, mannerisms, or behaviors that can be reference points in follow up interviews. During

observations, the qualitative researcher took meticulous notes to document the observation of participants called field notes. Saldana (2011) states that fieldnotes are "quickly composed, handwritten jottings of what your senses take in, how bodies move in space, and occasional rich quotes of what participants say" (p. 51). Field notes are meticulous notes taken at the field site that capture the essence of what the researcher observed.

A common challenge or limitation that researchers face is that fieldnotes tend to be heavily subjective, due to the researcher's personal beliefs or biases. The researcher addressed this by "bracketing" to remain objective during observations. Bracketing is the process in which the researcher isolates personal biases in order to be open to the experience itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). So before entering the field site, the researcher honestly explored any personal experiences, biases, or prejudices regarding the phenomena that she held and set them aside (bracketing) to be objective during the observations. The researcher also used a structured template to guide fieldnotes and reduce bias (See Appendix D for field notes template form).

In this study, the researcher observed each participant once. Three out of four of the - observations were done on zoom, due to Covid-19 restrictions. The phenomenon of interest took place in the selected teacher's classrooms, so the researcher secured superintendents signatures of approval and consent forms from school officials in order to gain access to field sites. The researcher also obtained an IRB, before contacting participants. Participants scheduled dates for observations with the researcher in advance. After gaining approval, the researcher continued to establish a good rapport with participants by logging on at the agreed time and fitting into the participants regular routines. This study was about the teachers' perceptions, so the researcher focused on observing the participants actions, words, body language, interactions, and even silences. In field notes the researcher wrote as descriptively as possible in present tense (Saldana,

2011). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recommend that researchers title each set of fieldnotes and "separate the facts from personal inferences, comments, subjective responses in separate paragraphs labeled observer's comments or OC's" (pp. 163-164). The researcher followed all of these recommendations and marked the specific dates and times in field notes as well. The researcher observed each participant for one hour or one period of instruction based on the school's schedule. At the end of the observation, the researcher utilized what Merriam & Tisdell (2016) call anchor interviewing, which means interview questions are anchored to what is observed. For example, the researcher casually asked the participant how they feel the lesson went as the researcher prepared to exit. The participant's responses provided excellent direct quotes to address both research questions in this study. Then the researcher added the participant's response to the field notes. Each observation's field notes were transferred to a word document at the end of the day while the data was fresh on the researcher's mind.

Journal Analysis

In qualitative data collection, document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents in order to elicit meaning, or gain understanding of phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). Documents can contain texts and images that reflect and or represent their creator's ideologies, priorities, intentions and value systems (Saldana, 2011). Qualitative researchers often collect documents or artifacts from participants to extend understanding of phenomenon and answer research questions. In this study, the participating teachers wrote reflective journal entries after each lesson and submitted them to the researcher for document analysis. The analysis of reflective journals directly corresponds with the first and second research questions in this study (R1: What are Mississippi teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to social justice? and R2: What are the perceived barriers faced by

Mississippi teachers when they attempt to teach about racial injustice through Young Adult literature?) This research method also transferred the power dynamics between researcher and participant. Participant journals provided teachers more autonomy to share what they wanted to say, when and how they wanted to say it.

Any challenges or limitations of utilizing participant journals for research are also addressed in this research study. For example, a lack of data or insufficient details is often a limitation in participant journals, but the researcher addressed this by providing specific reflection guides for participants to fill out. The researcher provided a digital journal template for participants to input lesson reflections (See Appendix C). The use of specific journal protocols enhanced the descriptions of the phenomenon and quality of data in this study. Another challenge that the researcher addressed is the issue of participants forgetting to complete journal entries or failing to submit them daily. Therefore, the researcher provided digital submission options to assist participants with the daily completion of journals.

Participating teachers had the options of daily uploading reflections on the template in a google document, daily emailing the template to the researcher, or orally recording reflections with their phones and texting them to the researcher. The researcher believed that offering participants convenient digital options enhanced daily journal submissions. Therefore, each participating teacher was required to create journal entries after they teach each social justice lesson and submit them to the researcher electronically.

Maintaining digital journals enabled participants to self-report data pertaining to their personal thoughts and feelings regarding the phenomenon instantly. This allowed the researcher to evaluate the teacher's perceptions, ideas, and concerns regarding intentions and ideas pertaining to social justice in the classroom. These journals also supplemented data from other

sources like classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The journal entries verified or corroborated findings from the interviews and observations (Bowen, 2009). Journal entries also identified contradictions and additional questions for the researcher. Journal entries yielded a surplus of direct quotations or entire passages of data that were organized into major themes or categories. Moreover, journaling was an effective way to gather data that could no longer be observed. The researcher used content analysis and thematic analysis to evaluate all of these documents. Bowen (2009) states that content analysis is the process of organizing information into categories related to the central questions of the research (p. 32). Thematic analysis is a process of recognizing patterns and emerging themes within the data to create categories (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 82). These documents were valuable contributions to the knowledge base and informed the questions that needed to be asked at the end of the study.

Data Analysis

Flick (2014) describes data analysis as "the classification and interpretation of linguistic or (visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning making in the material and what is represented in it" (p. 5). The focus groups, interviews, field notes, and participant journals provided a surplus of material/data to review. In a phenomenological study data analysis begins with horizontalization. Horizontalization is the process of laying out all the data for examination and treating all the data as having equal weight and value (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data analysis took place simultaneously in and out of the field. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that "without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that has been analyzed while being collected is parsimonious and illuminating" (p. 197). In this study, data analysis began as soon as the focus group data was collected. First

the researcher reviewed the research questions and purpose of the study. Then the researcher read and reread the data, making notes and separate memos about reflections, ideas, potential themes, and unanswered questions to pursue. In phenomenological research, it is important to continually return to the essence of participants' experiences to derive meaning and this is called phenomenological reduction (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the researcher recorded every relevant expression horizontalization was utilized.

Data analysis in phenomenology, also requires the researcher to apply textual and structural analysis techniques. Padilla-Diaz (2005) posits the importance of utilizing both textual and structural analysis to interpret findings by stating: "Textual analysis refers to the description of what is expressed by participants. Structural analysis refers to the interpretation of how it is expressed by participants" (p. 105). How a participant discusses phenomena (via body language, tone, or facial expressions) is equally important as what they say about the phenomena, when researchers intend to accurately capture the essence of lived experiences.

In order to analyze this surplus of data it was sorted, organized, summarized, and transcribed using a transcription service. Then qualitative analysis software was used for coding. In qualitative research, a "code" is defined as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/ or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data"(Saldana, 2016, p.4). During the analysis of interview transcripts, field notes, lesson plans, and journal entries, code themes were based on recurring trends and frequently mentioned concepts.

Coding Cycles

Qualitative coding took place in cycles. In a zero-coding cycle, the researcher began to make first impressions of the data by noting great quotes within the data. In the first coding

cycle, the researcher began to get familiar with the data at a textual level and jotted down any emerging themes. Then in the second cycle of coding the researcher reassessed the data for patterns, frequencies, similarities, differences in order to put codes into categories. Saldana (2016) explains that "your first cycle codes are reorganized and reconfigured to eventually develop a smaller list of broader categories, themes, concepts or assertions" in second cycle coding (p. 234).

Provisional coding and theoretical coding methods were applied, due to this study's critical theoretical framework. All transcripts were coded based on provisional coding in cycles 1 and 2. According to Saldana (2016) "provisional coding begins with a start list of researcher-generated codes based on what preparatory investigation suggests might appear in the data before they are collected and analyzed" (p. 297). All the provisional codes were connected to the research questions which center social justice and critical race theory. The first research question mentions teachers' perspectives and the second mentions perceived barriers, so these were predetermined themes in the provisional coding cycle. In the second coding cycle, theoretical coding methods were applied. In theoretical coding, "all categories and concepts become systematically integrated around a central core category that suggests a theoretical explanation of the phenomenon" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 13). The concepts and categories of this study were connected to social justice, critical literacy, and critical race theory frameworks. These frameworks require a critical examination of power, privilege, and race in the data, so the researcher emphasized this with theoretical coding methods. Central concepts like "maintaining power structures" and "challenging power structures" were the prominent codes in this last cycle of coding. Then the researcher used the constant comparative method to analyze all of the data. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) claim:

the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. The dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. (p. 32)

Validity and Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers must conduct research in an ethical manner to ensure validity and credibility. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 237). Validity refers to the accuracy or correctness of descriptions, interpretations, or findings in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2005, p. 13). In qualitative research, trustworthiness deals with issues of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to enhance validity and trustworthiness the researcher utilized analytic memos, thick descriptions, peer researchers, and triangulation in this study. In qualitative research providing rich, thick descriptions from interview transcripts and direct quotes improves validity. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016):

Providing enough description to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situations match the research context, and whether findings can be transferred. (p. 259)

Triangulating different data sources can offer more validity and meaning for the themes in a study (Creswell, 2014). The researcher collected and compared four different types of data: focus group interviews, individual interviews, classroom observations, and participant's journal entries. All of these different data collection types aided me in triangulating the information and offering significant meaning to the study.

Throughout the research process, I wrote self-reflective analytic memos generated from interviews and field notes. Analytic memos enable the researcher to "dump their brain" and reflect on the phenomenon, ask questions, and develop themes based on the data (Saldana, 2016, p. 46). These analytic memos documented the researcher's personal reactions to the data, by

allowing the researchers to consider positionality, personal emotions, and theoretical frameworks that relate to the findings. The researcher also member-checked all of the data sets for validity. The focus group and all interviews were videotaped to increase validity. Every participant had the opportunity to review their individual transcripts for accuracy. Member-checking all the data is another way that the researcher increased validity. I also utilized a peer researcher throughout the data collection process to help eliminate personal bias and error. Peer debriefing or peer review was another way to enhance the trustworthiness and validity of a study. The peer researcher member-checked for rigor and trustworthiness in data collection and interpretation. A peer debriefing offers additional checks that help reduce bias and increase the accuracy of data collection and the interpretation of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations

This qualitative study also had limitations. As a phenomenological study influenced by constructivist principles, findings in this study were limited by the unique experiences, settings, and perspectives of a very small group of participants. This study only focused on the perspectives of four educators in Mississippi. This small number of participants may be limiting to the study. The phenomenon of interest in this study touches on some sensitive topics that some participants may be uncomfortable discussing in authentic ways. Social justice, race, privilege, and power in schools are sensitive subjects. In the focus group participants may have withheld honest experiences or opinions to avoid offending the researcher or other participants during group interviews. The reality that some participants may withhold biases or uncomfortable details when self-reporting to the researcher in semi-structured individual interviews is also a limitation. Some participants may have only written what they think the researcher wants in the

journal instead of their honest perspectives in daily journal entries. The fact that 3 out of 4 of the data collection methods in this study are self-reported can also be considered a limitation. The presence of the researcher during lesson observations may have impacted the students' and teacher's behaviors or attitudes during the lessons.

Furthermore, Covid-19 restrictions added a myriad of limitations to this study. Due to Covid-19 exposure and outbreaks, I was unable to physically go to all the schools to observe instruction. Three out of the four teacher observations were done on zoom, and this drastically limited what could be observed and documented in field notes. Two of the selected field sites were completely virtual, so students and the actual classroom arrangement weren't visible during these zoom observations. Only one virtual observation took place in a face-to-face learning environment, and the placement of the camera limited the researchers view of the students, whiteboard, and classroom. The researcher was only allowed to view the backs of a few students' heads and a small portion of the whiteboard and teachers desk based on the camera placement during the teacher's observation. Three of the participants were put on mandatory quarantine due to Covid-19 exposure at their schools. These quarantines lead to stressful interruptions that limited those teachers' lesson planning, daily journal entry submissions, instruction, and interactions with students in the classroom. One participating teacher tested positive for the coronavirus and was hospitalized, so the researcher only received six journal entries from this participant.

Timeline

In June 2020, the researcher defended the Prospectus to the Dissertation committee. After the prospectus gained approval, the researcher submitted an application to the Institutional

Review Board (IRB). The researcher obtained IRB approval through the University's procedure

for research. After IRB Approval, the researcher got on social media and began recruiting

participants. For convenience, the researcher contacted faculty at the University to identify MTC

participants and recent alum that may be interested in participating in the study. The researcher

also asked contacts from Teach for America Mississippi and Mississippi Association of

Educators to identify potential participants. After four participants were identified from

qualifying districts, the researcher sent out research Project Packets to participants. In September

2020, all participants met virtually for a focus group.

The focus group was recorded. In keeping with the constant comparative analysis

methods, data was analyzed as it was collected. Copies of the novel *The Hate U Give* were

delivered to all of the participants before the focus group. Participants had from September 1st to

November 30, 2020 to teach the novel. Participants submitted daily reflection journals

electronically to the researcher. Participants emailed the researcher preferred observation dates

and the researcher scheduled and confirmed these observations. The researcher observed each

participant teach one lesson in order to gather data from September to November 2020. After

collecting journal entries and fieldnotes, the researcher conducted a semi-structured virtual

interview with each participant at the end of the semester. In December 2020, the researcher

transcribed, coded, and analyzed the data from interviews, lesson plans, journals, and

observations. Then the researcher wrote the findings, results, and recommendations during the

months of January and February. In March 2021, the researcher defended the dissertation in front

of the committee.

Summary of Chapter

The purpose of this study is to investigate and examine ELA teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice in Mississippi classrooms. This research study will examine the lived experiences of four ELA teachers who teach the novel *The Hate U Give* to freshmen in Mississippi. This study uses a critical lens to analyze race and power relations in educational settings.

Chapter three presents all the qualitative research methods used to conduct this phenomenological study. Participant selection, a timeline, data collection methods, and analysis procedures are all explained in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Findings

Introduction

This qualitative study examined ELA teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice in Mississippi classrooms. The emphasis was on the use of the young adult novel *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas in secondary English classrooms in Mississippi. A focus group, observations, participant journals, and in-depth interviews were conducted with four participating teachers. Data collected from participants was analyzed using a combination of critical race and critical literacy theoretical frameworks to analyze issues of power. The following research questions guide this study:

(R1) What are Mississippi teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice?

(R2) What are the perceived barriers faced by Mississippi teachers when they attempt to teach about racial injustice through young adult literature?

In this chapter, the results and findings for the research questions are displayed through recurring themes in the data. Four participating teachers' perceptions of the phenomenon of interest are shared through in-depth interview quotes, journal entries, field notes, and focus group transcripts. Three participants self-identified as white and one self-identified as other. The common essences of these participants' perceptions and the emergent themes in the data findings are expressed in this chapter. The findings are displayed via central themes for each of the research questions.

In this study, the first research question examines participants' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice. The results for research question one found the following themes that emerged from participants' common perspectives regarding the phenomenon: 1) building empathy through relevant young adult literature, 2) social justice awareness with interdisciplinary resources, 3) young adult literature acting as a transformative dialogue facilitator and 4) social justice aligns with ELA standards. The findings for research question two are the following themes: 1) misperceived barriers, 2) lack of preparation and effective training and 3) navigating race, power, and politics in the classroom. These emergent themes and the categories within these central themes are shared in this section.

Building Empathy Through Contemporary Young Adult Literature

Empathy is defined as the ability to be compassionate toward others and understand how others feel. In this study, participating teachers' journals and interviews revealed that empathy was something that they valued or viewed as important. Participants viewed teaching the young adult novel *The Hate U Give* as an opportunity to promote empathy among students in ELA classrooms. During in-depth interviews, participants reflected on how they leveraged the novel to promote empathy in the classroom. Carla stated:

> We jumped into some real diverse conversations that allowed us to really be optimistic to listening to some concerns, and like trying to figure out like how we control our biases, and our perceptions to kind of better understand what the next person is saying.

When asked "What impactful lessons do you feel your students learned?", Barbara stated:

> Listen more, before you speak. Be slow to speak. Listen. Listen to others' feelings. Listen to what others are going through. And we talked about the friend, if you say friend maybe… the acquaintance of Starr's that would have low maybe snide remarks, that she might not view as racism, but Starr knew were racist comments. I think maybe the students stop and think more about things that they may say. It may be things that they'd grown up hearing and not realize that it could be interpreted as something racist. And I think that's something that they've tried to be more aware of as well.

Windows and Mirrors

Literary scholars suggest that books should serve as mirrors and windows for readers. According to Sims Bishop (1990) "mirrors allow students to see a reflection of themselves in the literature and windows allow students to view a perspective or experience completely different from their own from reading a text" (p. 1). Windows and mirrors serve as a sub theme, because participants discussed how the novel provided a window into different perspectives to help students empathize with others. During the focus group, Amanda explained:

> I think that through stories, through our stories and through literature, it gives us the ability to maybe shift our perspective. When we hear someone else's story, there's just something that's undeniable there, if that makes any sense. And so, through this story you see Khalil and his background, and what's true and what's real. Then it offers new light to these scenarios that are real life, right? And we talk about with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee wrote that novel, not because she just made up that a Black man was accused of rape, it's because this was a real thing and this was happening, and this is what the justice system looks like. And so, this is our modern day look at racial injustice. And I just think it's so valuable for Black students and our white students and everyone else to hear the story and to maybe step into a world that gives them an opportunity to change their perspective and to learn and to experience something new.

In her interview, Barbara illustrated how this text provided a window for students to view perspectives and experiences that were different from their own:

> I chose the title *Walk a Mile in My Shoes* [by Michael Delaney]. We discussed so much that happened in the book. Maybe it never happened to us directly, but we had to stop and think how we would feel in those positions…. Now, the racial part, the injustice, I think about the time that Starr's father was you know, slammed down on the concrete. We would read through it and then we would stop, and I'd say, "I want you to put yourself… try to put yourself in her father's position. Now try to put yourself in the position of the children watching this happen to their father." And none of us in here had experienced that or witnessed anything like that. So, I use that as another opportunity to say you know these things do happen. And a lot of my students in here have, all of them have African American friends, and I think it made them pause and reflect on thinking about their friends.

Study participants also discussed how *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas served as a mirror for many contemporary students. Teachers elaborated on how the real and relevant

injustices in this young adult novel can be leveraged to build empathy among students. All the

participants reflected on how this contemporary young adult novel was relevant and relatable to

students' lives and what is going on in society. In her interview Barbara explained:

> I think there's multiple benefits. Obviously, the young adult literature is written on their level applicable to their age group. It has the protagonist, that is, you know, age-wise very close to their age. This particular novel… sadly now it mirrors real life. You know what is being experienced now. It does an awesome job of it. But I'm saying sadly, because this happens. And I think it makes them very aware they can put them put themselves or their friends in… They can find themselves in this novel, or they may find people that they can relate to, in this novel. And then also you have the author of the book, who is right here from where these students are. I just think that this book is very applicable to what's happening in society now.

During the focus group, Daphne elaborated on the significance of students being able to relate to

the text by stating:

> So, I think I'm very excited to teach this book, because this is a book that a lot of my kids identify with already. I think that in the book, there's a character that each of my students can relate to. Whether it's Starr, somebody in her family, just a situation that they can relate to in a way that maybe they haven't seen in literature, especially literature we've read in the classroom.

When asked about young adult literature in her interview, Amanda explained:

> I think the biggest thing is that it's relatable. Like they see themselves in the characters and they understand… it's like… it's modern language. So it feels like your friends. When we read *Speak* it's a similar concept. It's very much um, it's real to them. They can see the characters, and they know the characters and they see themselves in it and the storyline and all that's happening. So, relatability is the main thing that I think is the most powerful.

> Moreover, participants shared how a text that mirrors real life can validate and affirm

readers who have experienced similar situations. In the focus group Carla stated:

> When I did read the book, I realized that I related to it as, this is me. I came from a very impoverished area in the Mississippi Delta…. I can relate to a lot of what Star was going through in the actual book.

The power of books that mirror real life validating real student's lives is also reflected in

Participant Amanda's journal. She wrote "For me, it feels so positive to see them excited to read

and to see my Black students represented and some of their experiences validated."

Increased Literacy and Engagement

The relatability and relevance of this young adult novel increased students' interest in

reading. Participating teachers reported that students' interest in reading significantly increased

while teaching *The Hate U Give*. Carla expresses this in her interview by stating:

> It was so good for our AR program. We had the most participation based on our *The Hate U Give* book. So, just having them eager to read, eager to pick up a book. It just gave me all of the excitement that I needed. I saw that young contemporary literature creates a more relevant environment for the students, that gets them to have the desire to read. Because if you don't have something that's kind of young and contemporary it's really difficult to make it stick. Because, you know, what I find interesting, as a baby born in 1982, right… I'm quite sure a baby born in 2005 has no clue what I'm talking about right? Just the same with me, I wouldn't have a clue about some of the things that they're talking about unless they enlighten me, and that is exactly what we can do with contemporary literature.

In her interview Barbara also elaborates on high student engagement when she claims:

> They wanted to come in and read. And I think that's one thing that encouraged me, because I knew that they were actively reading. I mean they weren't just calling words. They were excited to come here and read, and the day they read the last chapter, we only had a few more days left of this class, but we don't have any more of this book to read. So, they were disappointed when it was over, and that encouraged me. That, you know, just reiterated that they really did enjoy reading the book, so I was thankful for that.

The participants journal entries also revealed high student engagement with this text. In one of

her daily reflection journals Amanda wrote:

> The students come into class asking if we are reading and continuing to tell me that they cannot wait to read. They are interested and we are having hard conversations through the guided reading. I feel so much more confident and comfortable discussing. The students are getting more comfortable sharing their opinions.

Carla wrote:

I was surprised by how present and engaged my students were throughout this session and very proud of the academic conversations that I popped in on in the break-out rooms. If I teach this again, I wouldn't change anything.

Social Justice Awareness with Interdisciplinary Resources

The second central theme for research question one is promoting social justice awareness with interdisciplinary resources. Interdisciplinary resources can consist of art, music, history, current events, podcasts, news articles, videos, etc. In this study, participating teachers mentioned using a wide variety of resources along with the selected text to promote social justice awareness in ELA classrooms. During the focus group, participants expressed the importance of discussing current events while teaching *The Hate U Give.* Barbara stated:

> I don't think you can effectively teach this book if you don't address the current events. What's happened this summer… And you definitely have to address it. And have the students discuss how much of it they know, how much of it do they understand? What are their feelings about it? How much do we think from the media or in how the media plays in on this? What picture are we getting? We can watch this video, or we read this news article.

Daphne also added:

> I think this is a perfect time for a book like *The Hate U Give* because of what the world looks like, what the country looks like, these students are seeing a lot of things that weren't around a few years ago. And so, I think it's important to bring in kind of current events and to show that to students. And I think through this we can kind of work towards social justice.

Music was another resource that participating teachers integrated with instruction of the text. Participants indicated that incorporating music in their lessons or instructional activities during *The Hate U Give* Unit was beneficial. In her journal, Daphne reflected on the impact that music had on her lessons:

> I believe the students learned a lot about literature through music. And how we can look at music as a way to look at current times and society. I was surprised by how well students did with identifying the meanings of the different parts of the songs! They

STRUGGLE with poetry, but bring out Kendrick Lamar and they are PROFESSIONALS at analysis. I was so impressed with them.

Barbara also elaborates on her use of music with the text in her interview. When she was asked is there a lesson or activity that your students expressed was their favorite? She stated:

I think the most favorite thing they did was creating that playlist to represent Starr and her two different… you know sides, and the talking about the code switching. I think they enjoyed that part. They love music. I love music, but I think that was one of their favorite things to do.

Nonfiction texts and podcasts were also leveraged to promote social justice awareness along with the text. Participating teachers utilized various interdisciplinary resources to promote social justice awareness in ELA classrooms. Daphne recalls the use of a nonfiction text with students in her journal:

We talked about what it is like for minorities in schools. During this lesson, I felt impressed! The text I selected, "Being a Minority at a Predominantly White Institution" by Stephanie Jones was a very advanced text. I feel as though students really understood the concept in ways they would not if we were not reading THUG simultaneously. I believe the students learned how to make a claim and support it with evidence. I was surprised by the complex issues they were able to breakdown and analyze! Students were comparing the text to their own lives and experiences.

During her interview Barbara described podcasts and digital media that she shared with students:

I think we watched every interview that Angie Thomas has ever given. We watched so many of those. I told you about that podcast that we listened to.
We also listened to another podcast that was with Angie Thomas called "We Have to Get Uncomfortable". We read the article about the history of the band aid color. Let's see…...Okay, we also listened to another podcast on NPR "The Hate U Give Explores Racism and Police Violence." We listened to that podcast. And we watched some clip from the actress that played Starr when she was interviewed on some tonight show or different shows that she was a part of. We watched some of those as well.

Transformative Dialogue Facilitator

Viewing young adult literature as a transformative dialogue facilitator is also a central theme regarding teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice. A transformative dialogue is a safe space where transformative learning takes

place through discussion and all participating speakers assume the role of student and teacher.

The student transforms into a teacher, and the teacher learns from elevating students' voices. In

this study, participating teachers described how creating safe spaces for dialogue and learning

from students were beneficial parts of their experience teaching *The Hate U Give*. The teachers

elaborated on how important and beneficial they believed it was to emphasize dialogue in ELA

classrooms. During the focus group Barbara stated:

> We read Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail." And one of my quotes...
> Well, there are many in the "Letter from Birmingham Jail", but one is how he says that
> his beloved Southland for far too long has tried to live in monologue rather than dialogue.
> And monologue and dialogue are key literary terms that we speak of in ninth grade
> English. And we talk about what that means, that there needs to be more dialogue.

When asked "What advice would you give a teacher attempting to teach this novel for the first

time in your school and why?", Daphne claimed:

> Try to involve as much discussion as possible. That's something that wasn't easy in the
> virtual world, but I got better in the end. And my one sort of regret is that I wasn't
> experimenting with that more early on, because the kids really did get so much out of the
> novel, and even more out of hearing each other talk about it.

In her interview Carla declared:

> I have some great students that were able to have dialogue that just amazed my soul! And
> so… they ended up talking about it. And even though they all grew up within the same
> area, but in so many different levels of this community, that they were able to talk
> through like, even if they were in different types of gangs. They were still able to have a
> discussion that was respectful.

In her journal Amanda wrote:

> The students come into class asking if we are reading and continuing to tell me that they
> cannot wait to read. They are interested and we are having hard conversations through the
> guided reading. I feel so much more confident and comfortable discussing. The students
> are getting more comfortable sharing their opinions.

> In order to foster and maintain rich dialogue around social justice topics in the classroom,

teachers focused on making their classrooms a safe space. The term "safe space" is used to

describe an inclusive environment where diverse voices and perspectives are heard, respected, and welcomed. Participating teachers voiced how they valued making sure students were comfortable sharing their diverse perspectives and opinions during class discussions. During the focus group, Barbara said:

> There's a lot of discussion that has to go on, and the children have to feel safe with you as the teacher, as the facilitator in the room, and have to feel a safe space and nonjudgmental, because these are such topics to be discussed that they may not even be discussing at home. You may be the only adult they had these discussions with. It's a large task and especially in light of situations that have occurred over the summer, I just want to read the room, so to speak, and make sure that the students feel safe about… all these topics that will be addressed with this novel.

When asked about goals for teaching the book in her interview, Amanda stated:

> I think one of my biggest goals was to create a space for my students to feel safe enough to be seen. I helped push us into a space of having the conversations that were difficult and a lot of students wanted to share. I tried to shy away, and I gave them a platform where the conversation in the room was hard, but productive.

Amanda also voiced this in the following journal entry:

> They all gravitated towards discussing how the theme connects to the world around us. It led to some great conversations and safe discussions on race and social justice. They really learned a lot and I felt thankful for their growth towards safety in the room surrounding these subjects. After the discomfort and the tensions, we became a space that was comfortable and expansive.

In her journal, Barbara also wrote "I believe the students learned that they could openly discuss their feelings, opinions, attitudes, etc. concerning social justice."

During a zoom observation of Barbara's class, the researcher was able to witness one of these transformational class conversations. The researcher noted how students' voices and perspectives were centered in the following fieldnote:

> Teacher seems to value student discussion regarding social justice topics based on how she ran her class. She intentionally and strategically verbalized the quote from the book discouraging silence about injustice and encourage students to think about it.

Students were encouraged to share BLM views verbally with the class and in writing. Student voices were dominant. Kids talked about protest experiences. Two students volunteered to share their experiences at a protest over the summer. The teacher encouraged the students to speak and listened intently. She seems to have established a climate in which students are comfortable voluntarily sharing their perspectives and listening respectfully to others.

In this study, safe spaces helped nurture rich dialogue that elevated students' voices. When student voices are centered in the classroom teachers learn from students in transformational dialogues. Participating teachers elaborated on how they learned from students during these transformational conversations. In her interview Barbara stated:

I learned some had been to peaceful protest this summer. And I learned. I think I learned more from them. How they felt…. and also the age difference. I'm 46, as opposed to these students I taught 11th and 12th graders, just how I was just so……. not shocked is not the word, but I was encouraged by how they stop and think about the world around them and are not quick to judge. As I was afraid maybe they were. They're educated. They're educating themselves about social issues. I just think the entire reading was enlightening for all of us involved me as the teacher and my students.

In her interview, Amanda elaborated on how she learned from this experience by saying "Looking at other people's experiences is needed, and understanding others, the other side, and someone else's perspective is valuable. I think that we probably all learned."

During the focus group discussion, Daphne shared how she planned to facilitate conversations in a way that will allow her to learn from students and let the students' voices guide the dialogue:

I think my identity and my experiences are going to affect how I teach the book, because I am always going to go in with a listening ear. And I'm never going to be the person trying to teach it, but more I'm going to be the person facilitating, and really trying to listen to their conversations and kind of learn as a group.

Teaching Social justice aligns with ELA Standards

The final theme and finding for research question one, focuses on how participants believed that using young adult literature to discuss social justice helped teach ELA state

standards. The data shows that participants viewed social justice as something that aligned with

what they were already expected to do in the ELA classroom. All of the participating teachers

successfully implemented the Mississippi College and Career Ready State Standards for ELA

while teaching *The Hate U Give*. Participants' journal entries provided evidence of lessons that

met standards and align with social justice. For example, Daphne reflected on how she taught

critical skills like citing textual evidence when making a claim. In her journal, Daphne wrote:

> During this lesson, I felt impressed! The text I selected, "Being a Minority at a Predominantly White Institution" by Stephanie Jones was a very advanced text. I feel as though students really understood the concept in ways they would not if we were not reading THUG simultaneously. I believe the students learned how to make a claim and support it with evidence. I was surprised by the complex issues they were able to breakdown and analyze! Students were comparing the text to their own lives and experiences.

She also described helping students understand differing points of view. She wrote:

> It was interesting having discussions with the boys in class. I was surprised by how knowledgeable students were about the different points of view! The kids did a cool activity on the last page comparing Starr's point of view to the authors.

> Theme was another important ELA standard that participants taught along with the book.

According to indicator RL.9.2 of the Mississippi ELA Standards, freshmen are expected to

"determine the theme(s) or central idea(s) of a text and analyze in detail the development over

the course of the text, including how details of a text interact and build on one another to shape

and refine the theme(s) or central idea" (MDE, 2016). Participating teachers' journals provided

various examples of lessons that focused on this standard. In her journal Carla wrote:

> Today I taught the differences between the theme and main/central idea. I chose an excerpt from Chapter 3 in which it discusses how the police left Khalil's body in the streets and how Starr is dealing with witnessing Khalil's death. I believe the students learned that the theme can be one word or phrases and that the main idea is a one sentence summary. The students also learned how to write a summary analysis.

Amanda also reflected on lessons about theme and several other ELA state standards in her

journal:

> I found a really detailed One Pager assignment for them to complete for a final project. It covers all of our standards and we will have a writing component. They researched and discussed themes - police brutality and racism and all the things. It was really fruitful for me to have some one-on-one time with them as we discussed topics. They all gravitated towards discussing how the theme connects to the world around us.

In the rest of this section, the three emergent central themes for research question two will be

discussed. Research question two focuses on teachers perceived barriers to discussing racial

injustice in the classroom. A barrier is defined as any challenge, obstacle, difficulty, or struggle

that participants may encounter regarding the phenomenon. According to the data, there were

misperceived barriers, barriers that stemmed from a lack of training, and racial and political

barriers that participating teachers faced. These barriers are central themes with sub-themes that

will be explained in this section.

Misperceived Barriers

When study participants used the novel *The Hate U Give* as a catalyst to discuss social

justice in their classroom, there were various challenges and surprises. The focus group was held

before the study started, so during this time teachers expressed many concerns that they believed

would be obstacles or challenges to discussing racial injustice within the text. However, once

they started the text, participants discovered that these were misperceived barriers. Misperceived

barriers are concerns that did not present the challenges or obstacles that participants assumed

they would create. In the beginning, participants wrongfully assumed that parental dissent, the

mature/controversial content in the text, and immaturity of freshmen would be barriers.

Surprisingly the data shows that these were all misperceived barriers. In the following quote

Daphne sums up how she was pleasantly surprised when things that she thought would cause

problems did not present a challenge for her. In her interview about her experience teaching the text she stated:

> I would say it went a lot better than expected. Not that I expected… I mean anything bad to come with it. I was just very nervous. Teaching virtually, as well as teaching a book with… the topic that it has with what's sort of going on in the world today, I didn't really know what to expect.

Teachers did not know what to expect from parents and the school community, because this was their first time teaching the text. For example, several teachers originally were fearful of how parents may respond to the text. During the focus group, Barbara voiced these concerns by stating:

> Not that what I teach in my classroom is secret… Not that I don't want my parents to know what I'm teaching… But you just read the first page or two or three and there's weed smoking and the profanity. Then these kids! I know they drop the F-bomb, I know that. But at home, I'm thinking... Ohh! These parents monitoring the virtual school. I'll just be honest, that is a concern of mine.

Then Carla admitted:

> I think it's going to be a challenge, because I'm not too familiar with where my students are, their background, and their experiences that they've had, as well as diving into even if it's a touchy subject for their parents, because it may not reflect just the student. They go home and by us actually teaching virtually, parents may be at home, they may hear something. I don't want to really just trigger something for them as well. I kind of worry that the parents would then start to say, "Hey, this may not be what I want my child to actually dive into.

Amanda also directly stated: "I'm really just scared of the white parents."

After finishing the text, participants expressed how relieved and excited they were when they found that the parents were actually supportive of the text. During her final interview when Daphne was asked "how did your school community respond to the novel?" she declared:

> So… my 10th grade parents I've worked with before, so I wasn't too worried about them. The ninth graders, I had never…. I've never met in person still and never met their parents. So as the first thing we did this year, I was very nervous. I didn't have a single issue. I actually had two parents tell me they were reading the book, along with their kids,

which was very sweet. Um, so yeah… I had no issues whatsoever, a lot of support sort of all around.

Carla also expressed these sentiments in her final interview. When asked how her school community responded to the novel, Carla said:

> They ended up loving it. I've had parents to say, "hey can I have a book"? And so… we did have… I think it was like five books left over. And we did get a chance to give it to those parents who asked for those books. And they kind of participated in classes as well. I thought it was just awesome. They logged in, and they were answering questions and asking questions and so forth. So, we really had a great time, kind of bringing the community in with that actual book.

Most of these initial concerns about the text stemmed from the profanity and mature content that is used throughout the novel. Educators often censor the texts that kids read at school, so this concept is not new. Study participants consistently expressed discomfort regarding the foul language and obscene content in the book. When asked "What did you find challenging or difficult?" in her interview, Barbara admitted:

> Here in the Deep South in the Bible Belt…. You know I guess the language, and as I said some of the sexual references as well…. Maybe I would find difficult in a classroom setting. But I didn't have any.

Daphne also expressed similar concerns in her interview. She stated:

> At the beginning, I was hesitant with sort of everything I introduced to the classroom, that was supplemental. I kind of felt almost like I was pushing the limits with all of the cursing and the drugs and all that sort of thing. So, I didn't want… to do too much extra in class, but with the additional support that made me seem silly. It made me feel silly. So, I think having that support really encouraged me to find resources that the kids would get the most out of without sort of having to worry.

Ultimately, these urges to avoid exposing students to text with profane content made participants question if this text was appropriate for freshmen. Participating teachers initially expressed concerns about freshmen being too immature to handle the text in the very beginning. Fears about freshmen being too immature for *The Hate U Give* were so strong that the school

administration intervened at Barbara's school, where she implemented the text in her dual enrollment class of juniors and seniors. In her interview Barbara admitted:

> Well, I would say, you know, initially, my ninth graders were going to read this, and my principal and superintendent did not feel comfortable with ninth graders especially, because we are doing the virtual slash in class option here. And they would need to have an older more mature audience.

However, the other participants taught the text to freshmen and experienced success. After participating in this study, participants discovered that the idea of freshmen not being able to handle *The Hate U Give* was a misperceived barrier. Carla mentioned this misperception in her interview. When asked if she felt like her concerns about teaching the book to freshmen were valid after teaching the book, Carla responded:

> I feel like they were incorrect.… I had concerns, like I said, based on my own biases. But after teaching it, I wish I would have went in fearless (sic). Like, let's go, let's get it! This is the lesson. Like, you know any other book that I would teach.... Yeah, it was incorrect, and I don't know if I would ever feel that way about a book again.

Lack of Preparation and Effective Training

Some of the challenges that participating teachers voiced could be resolved with effective training and support. The data reveals a lack of preparation and effective training for the participating teachers as another central theme. This lack of preparation and effective training theme spotlights virtual learning challenges and struggles to create safe spaces. This study took place in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, so participants voiced concerns about not knowing how to effectively implement virtual learning in their school communities. Two of the participating teachers were in a 100% virtual learning environment for the entire semester. The other two participants taught online and face to face. However, all of the teachers expressed virtual learning concerns. During the focus group, Carla said "I feel like it's creating a more

stressful thing for me to try to figure out how can I make all of what I would do in person and face to face virtual." Then Amanda added:

> I'm supposed to start *The Hate U Give* on Monday. I cannot. I do not feel comfortable beginning this conversation with them and I'm on the screen being Air Played by a student and I can't really control and really be that presence in the room.

Barbara reiterated these concerns when she stated:

> This is such an impactful novel. I would prefer to be face-to-face with the students, like I've always been. I'm very anxious about putting this book in the hands of a student, an online student, and not being able to, like I said earlier, have the face-to-face discussions. I don't know my students that well yet.

In her journal, Daphne wrote "I felt awkward at first…. It is hard connecting to kids that are completely virtual. I do not force kids to turn their cameras on either which can make it even harder!"

The researcher was also able to view the aforementioned struggles with virtual learning during scheduled Zoom observations of instruction. In the field notes below, the researcher documented the virtual challenges that Carla faced at Gamma High:

> The majority of the time was spent on relieving student anxiety and navigating technology issues. She constantly repeated the following phrases: "Those of you that are entering don't panic, I don't want you to get overwhelmed, I do apologize…. Looks like I'm having some internet connection issues; thank you for being patient with me." Half of the class period was spent troubleshooting, assisting students with technology issues, and repeating directions for students that struggled with audio. Technology, time limits, and an abnormally large class (50 students) seemed to be a challenge.

Secondly, a lack of effective training and support on establishing safe spaces that cultivate authentic dialogue regarding racial injustice was a barrier for participants in this study. As mentioned earlier, the term "safe space" is used to describe an inclusive environment where diverse voices and perspectives are heard, respected, and welcomed. Unfortunately, many teachers had not experienced professional development or thorough training in this area. Participating teachers voiced how they initially struggled to make sure that students were

comfortable sharing their perspectives and opinions during class discussions. During her

interview Daphne stated:

> It's an interesting dynamic with my students, because I am a white teacher, and I have
> one white student this year. The rest of them are African American and I have two
> Hispanic students. And so, at the beginning students were very guarded with their
> responses. A lot of times they would say like, well, Ms. Daphne I don't mean any offense
> but…. And every time they would say that I would address it, and say, what you're saying
> is not offensive unless you say Miss Daphne you are blank. I'm not going to take it
> offensively. You know, I want you to unpack what we're reading. And so, hearing me say
> that was shocking to them at first, but they got more used to it.

> Amanda also initially found it difficult to create a safe space in her classroom when she

started to teach *The Hate U Give*. Amanda voiced her frustrations with not knowing how to

create an inclusive environment in her journal. She wrote:

> Students watched documentaries about slave trade and Black America. A student verbally
> expressed disapproval. This student continued in class to make remarks and disapproving
> mannerisms when discussing racism and Black America. He is writing Trump 2020 to
> protest the discussion all over his notebook and hand. We had two or three conversations
> all of which were uncomfortable and felt like they didn't go anywhere. The other
> students, my Black students are uncomfortable and watching his every move. I'm so
> anxious that I'm not doing a good job presenting this and creating a space that feels safe
> and open.

During the observation at this school site, the researcher noticed that the students in this

classroom were actually segregated by race. In the field notes, the researcher documented the

following seating arrangement:

> The classroom is basically segregated with Black kids on the right except for one white
> male sitting in the front. All the white kids sit on the left. There is one Hispanic male in
> the back on the side that the Black students are sitting on.

During her final interview, Amanda reflected on this seating arrangement by stating:

> So that class sat next to the people that they knew, and that they were friends
> with. Which is what they all do. And so, in that class it was… what ended up creating a
> segregated room. And so, what I noticed, though, is that as we got into the really
> uncomfortable…. At the beginning when we were in the midst of all the initial
> discomfort, the rows further separated. And, um, I, one of my hesitations for moving was

again cross contact tracing. And having been exposed if I move them and then that technically means that they've been exposed to twice as many people….

They were sitting there, because that's where they felt safe. And so, if we were having these uncomfortable conversations that often feel unsafe, because they're uncomfortable, then moving them didn't feel like the wisest option yet… and I just really had a major internal battle with what the right thing to do was… so I still don't know.

Navigating Race, Power, and Politics in the Classroom

The final theme for research question two is navigating race, power, and politics in the classroom. The participants reported feeling uncomfortable discussing race in the classroom. Throughout the focus group and individual interviews, discussing race, power, and politics were consistently presented as obstacles that teachers were worried about. Carla voiced her discomfort regarding discussing race related topics with students in her interview. Carla claimed:

I saw myself as fearful of a lot of topics, especially when we talked about Starr dating outside of the race, and like talking about what does your Black mean to you. And then realizing like if I had different races within my classroom, how would that have sounded? or would I have changed that discussion question?

During the focus group, teachers expressed that they believed that their racial identity may make teaching *The Hate U Give* a difficult and uncomfortable experience. In the focus group, Amanda said:

Then it's also this white teacher is going to stand up and teach me about this experience, that I know nothing about? That I can't actually experience ever? Like, how does the white woman stand up and teach this book to the kids and feel... what's the appropriate..? I don't know.

Amanda reiterated this racial discomfort in her final interview. She declared:

It's just absolutely not realistic to say that, as a teacher, and as a white teacher, you're going to come into the room and teach this book and not be uncomfortable. If you're not uncomfortable you're not doing it right.

The racial injustice in the book and the racial turmoil that was happening in the country during this study, also impacted the participants' experiences. Amanda reflected on this in her journal when she wrote:

Breonna Taylor's verdict came out. The world feels dreary and heavy to me. To many. Students read Khalil's death, murder. I cannot shake the intensity, the power, the purpose. Even knowing this, I feel anxious and uncertain about how I'm doing. Especially wanted to be careful, cautious, purposeful and intentional as a white woman. My whiteness cannot be changed. What I do with it can. God I pray.

When asked about the meaning behind this journal entry in her interview Amanda stated:

I mean on a very basic level… our race is something that we cannot……we do not have control over. So, it is who we are. It is such a huge part of our identity… and whether that's for better or for worse, I think it's important to recognize, you know people talk about being colorblind, and I don't think that that's productive. Because… I have to recognize my whiteness so that I can recognize my privilege. So that I can recognize my implicit bias, or that I can recognize, um, you know that I'll move through the world differently than someone who's Black or someone a Person of Color. Um, what I can change is what I do with that privilege, or what I do with you know my position in this world. And so I think that that's to fight and to be an ally, and to be a voice when I'm supposed to be and to be ears when I'm supposed to be. And then learning when to be one of the other, and showing up for my friends and for my students. And, you know, as far as the end part, you know I think that this was very much something that I felt was a part of my own journey… like personally and spiritually, and was at the center of… a lot of my prayers during that time period.

In this study, participating teachers also indicated an urge to remain politically neutral, which caused them to be apprehensive regarding classroom conversations about politically charged racial issues. The fact that this study took place during the 2020 election was a factor that participants mentioned frequently. Many participants voiced struggles with avoiding personal politics while having meaningful conversations with students in their final interviews. When asked "What did you find challenging or difficult?", Barbara stated:

The subject matter. We wanted to be knowledgeable of it, but not want the students to be swayed by maybe my thinking about a situation. I wanted them to think for themselves. I didn't want to become political about it, but I wanted to give them the information for them to, you know, form their opinions and know how they would feel in certain situations.

In her interview, Amanda voiced her fears and frustrations regarding the political climate that she struggled to navigate in her classroom by stating:

It just makes me nervous to have parents who think that I'm pushing some sort of extremist liberal agenda, because that is a, that is a real, um, that is a real perspective that exists in the world. And you know that made me nervous. And because those people often have a lot of power. Um, and so making sure that I knew what I was talking about and making sure that I stayed objective and making sure that everything that we discussed was centered around the literature.

Amanda's journal entries also reflected the power struggles that she faced while attempting to teach *The Hate U Give*, during a very stressful election year. In her journal she wrote "I wanted to just not do anything *THUG* related this week because of the election. That fear crept in and then I remembered how stinkin' purposeful it felt to be wrapping up this week." Her journal entries also expose students' struggles with the political climate. Amanda wrote:

Students discussed a potential fight regarding Trump 2020 flags and middle fingers. One student in class was involved. It felt like an open space and students felt comfortable discussing though were clearly divided on racism/disrespect. My student that often shares disapproval thoughts/views was not here. They were sent home due to safety issues/disrespect around the election.

Summary of Chapter

In conclusion, this chapter offered detailed results on the data collected from four high school English teachers from four different school districts in Mississippi. This chapter included the data compiled from a focus group, interviews, field notes, and participants' journals to answer this study's two research questions identified in Chapter One. The next and final chapter will include an analysis of these findings as they relate to the literature, theoretical frameworks, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Introduction

As racism and educational inequities continue to terrorize our students and communities, educators need to take a stand, and it should start within the classroom curriculum. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice through *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas.

This final chapter discusses and analyzes the central themes in the findings and how they relate to the literature. It offers implications for teachers, teacher education programs, and policymakers to improve current practices. This chapter also provides recommendations for further research and concludes with a brief summary.

This chapter discusses the findings of the following research questions:

(R1) What are Mississippi teachers' perceptions of using young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice?

(R2) What are the perceived barriers faced by Mississippi teachers when they attempt to teach about social injustice through young adult literature?

In order to analyze the findings several critical theoretical frameworks were used. Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that puts race at the center of critical analysis (Parker et al., 1999). Ladson-Billings (1998) notes "that critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is normal in society" (p.7). Critical race theorists acknowledge that institutionalized racism is ingrained in American society and the very fabric of the school

system. This institutionalized racism applies not only to individual beliefs, biases, and behaviors, but also to the ways it operates systematically and materially to privilege some and marginalize others (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). These scholars also recognize that the classroom is "where the construction, production, and distribution of knowledge is a central site for the construction of social and racial power" (Parker et al., 1999, p. 5). Therefore, critical race theorists evaluate how hegemonic power structures dominate school practices, procedures, and curriculums.

A social justice framework is also used in this study. The social justice education lens emphasizes curricular content covering social injustice, social identities, oppression theory, intersectionality, and reflexive teaching practices that focus on equity and systemic changes (Dover, 2013). The social justice lens critically uncovers the oppressive values and politics that undergird educational decisions and practices regarding curriculum and instruction (Bender-Slack, 2010). Secondly, it questions or challenges why we do the things we do in schools and who benefits from them. It also attends to ways in which schooling often contributes to the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of inequalities, particularly along the lines of race, class, gender, language, sexual orientation, and other such categories (Bender-Slack, 2010).

Interpretation of Findings

In this qualitative study there were eight central themes that emerged from the data analysis. For research question one there were the following five themes: 1) Building empathy through contemporary young adult literature, 2) increased literacy engagement, 3) social justice awareness with interdisciplinary resources, 4) transformative dialogue facilitator, 5) social justice aligns with ELA standards. Research question two had the following three central themes: 1) (Mis)perceived barriers, 2) lack of preparation and training, 3) navigating race, power, and

98

politics in the classroom. This section will discuss how the above themes compare to previous scholarship in the field.

Empathy and ELA

In this study, teachers viewed social justice as something that should be promoted in the classroom by cultivating empathy. Participants' focus on empathy corresponds with scholarship that claims teaching empathy in schools produces responsible democratic citizens that consider the needs of individuals from diverse backgrounds and respect beliefs that are not necessarily their own (Mirra, 2018). Participants believed that young adult literature can encourage social activism and empathy. In this study, teachers used the young adult novel to build empathy for racial injustice and the Black Lives Matter movement. Participating teachers focused on having students reflect on Starr and the police officers' experiences to have students explore different perspectives. In this study, the teachers' perspectives validate other scholars who claim young adult literature can prepare students to empathize with diverse populations, and to become "critically conscious of their operating world views" (Glasgow, 2001, p. 51). The findings show that secondary English teachers value making students aware of different perspectives and experiences through young adult literature to build empathy. These teachers believed that the novel *The Hate U Give* helped students embrace diverse experiences and opinions to become collaborative thinkers and nurture a culture of inclusion.

Increased Engagement

As mentioned in the literature review, many modern educators believe in the use of quality YAL to address young readers needs and interests (Bucher & Hinton, 2014). The teachers in this study share the same views. Participating teachers reported that students' interest in reading significantly increased while teaching *The Hate U Give*. Participants reported that

reluctant readers and off task students became engaged while reading this text. All the

participants reported that students were even discussing the text outside of class with parents and

siblings. This study also affirms the argument that the relatability and relevance of young adult

novels increase students' interest in reading (Johnson, 2011). Participants noted the fact that the

novel mirrors real life events and the fact that students are able to see themselves in the

characters as significant points of interest to students. This concept of students being attracted to

texts with characters that they can relate to also supports scholarship regarding mirrors and

windows (Sims Bishop, 1990). These findings also support Gibbons and Stallworth (2006)

claims that "YAL appeals to adolescent readers because it is written about characters whom they

can identify based on issues such as age, sexuality, conflicts, and world perceptions" (p. 56).

Interdisciplinary Resources

The study results show participants promoting social justice awareness with

interdisciplinary resources. Participating teachers mentioned the use of art, music, history,

current events, podcasts, social media, news articles, and videos in their lessons. In *Social Justice*

Literacies in the English Classroom Boyd (2017) states:

> ELA readily lends itself to social justice because it centers on texts for study, including
> print and media, and the content of those texts as well as how teachers work with them in
> the classroom can be embraced with critical goals in mind. (p. 7)

This research shows that educators can implement a wide variety of resources along with

the selected text to promote social justice awareness in ELA classrooms.   In the data,

participants also expressed the significance of discussing current and historical events while

teaching *The Hate U Give.* The Black Lives Matter movement events that took place over the

summer and historical events and figures who fought for racial justice were discussed in

participants lessons. This integration of history in ELA classes during social justice lessons

supports arguments that history must be discussed in order to show how inequities are systemic (Agarwal-Rangath, 2016).

Standard Alignment

The findings show that participants believed that using young adult literature to discuss social justice helped teach ELA state standards. All the participants' journal entries provided evidence of lessons that met standards and align with social justice. The analysis of character, theme, central idea, point of view, and many other critical literary skills were taught while discussing social justice issues. This supports the research that claims educators have autonomy to formulate lessons that meet standards and align with their social justice interests (Dover, 2015). All of the participating teachers successfully implemented the Mississippi College and Career Ready State Standards for ELA while teaching *The Hate U Give*. This data supports the literature that argues that many educators view social justice as something that aligns with what they are already expected to do in the ELA classroom (Agarwal-Rangath, 2016). The fact that this novel was also successfully taught in a rigorous dual enrollment course for juniors and seniors also supports the arguments that quality young adult literature is rigorous enough for Advanced placement courses and shouldn't be limited to remedial reading courses (Gallo, 2001).

Transformational Dialogue

A transformative dialogue involves a safe space where transformative learning takes place through discussion and all participating speakers assume the role of student and teacher. In this study, participating teachers described how creating safe spaces for dialogue and learning from students were beneficial parts of their experience teaching *The Hate U Give*. The findings show that teachers valued a safe inclusive environment where diverse voices and perspectives were welcomed in their classrooms. The emphasis that participating teachers put on needing and

creating safe spaces supports scholarship on the need to cultivate safe spaces in educational

settings (Kay, 2018).

The teachers also elaborated on how important and beneficial they believed it was to

emphasize dialogue in ELA classrooms. These participants' positive perceptions of dialogue

justify the emphasis that other scholars have put on reading, speaking, and writing for learning in

ELA curricula. Findings show that participants also viewed young adult literature as a

transformative dialogue facilitator when discussing social justice, and this supports claims that

YAL can encourage social activism and good citizenship in classrooms (Hays, 2016).

Misperceived Barriers

In this study misperceived barriers were concerns that did not present the challenges or

obstacles that participants assumed they would create. The participants' initial concerns

regarding the inappropriateness of language in the selected text, shine light on common

discourses regarding censorship in young adult literature. These findings support Hayes (2016)

claims that:

> the most powerful adversaries against the implementation of YA literature is the
> classroom teacher. Often, teachers will self-censor in terms of the types of literatures they
> select to instruct their students in reading and writing because they are unwilling to fight
> the battles that they foresee, and see as inevitable when it comes to the anticipated
> resistance from school district school board members, administrators, and/or parents. (p.
> 57)

According to the findings, participants wrongfully assumed that parental dissent, the

mature/controversial content in the text, and the immaturity of freshmen would be barriers. The

results show that parents actually participated and supported the reading of the text. All the

students were able to handle the profanity, drugs, gangs, sexual content, and violence in the text,

because many of them have already been exposed to these things in real life. Participating

teachers were impressed by how well freshmen processed, analyzed, and discussed a text that

102

they assumed students might not be able to handle. These results also support arguments that the violence, sex, and racism, in contemporary YAL is also found in canonized text like Shakespeare and Faulkner, so educators may need to reevaluate what they consider to be inappropriate (Perez, 2016).

Preparation and Training

A lack of preparation and training was a consistent barrier for teachers in this study. The unprecedented circumstances of a global pandemic revealed the need for more access to digital tools and educational technology training for educators. All the participating teachers expressed fears, concerns, and struggles with virtual learning, because it was so new and so sudden. Schools did not give teachers enough training and adequate time to prepare for virtual learning before school started in August. Two participants struggled with teaching face-to-face and virtual students simultaneously for the first time. Then the other two struggled with being immersed into a completely virtual learning environment for the first time. The data regarding instructional technology barriers in this study supports the arguments that all teachers need to be trained in digital pedagogies to prepare for a digital generation (Kivunja, 2013).

The findings also show that teachers were unsure how to create safe spaces to foster authentic dialogue around racial injustice in the classroom. Participants voicing constant struggles with being uncomfortable and unsure about the establishment of safe spaces and the evidence of a segregated classroom illustrated this barrier. This data justifies the argument that all educators need to learn how to create safe spaces through training and practice (Kay, 2018).

Race and Politics in the Classroom

This study confirms that race and politics are significant topics that cannot be ignored in classrooms. Teachers reported that the racial themes in the text and the racial tension in the

country were prevalent issues of concern throughout the study. According to the data, the 2020 election and recent Black Lives Matter incidents also influenced participants' perspectives and interactions with students in the classroom. My findings reinforce scholars' claims that most teachers are afraid or uncomfortable discussing race and racism with students (Borsheim-Black & Sarigianides, 2019). Participants' fears of upsetting parents, losing rapport with certain students, and not discussing it correctly were barriers to facilitating discussions on racial injustice. This project shows how most teachers have not been taught how to be racially literate and are unwilling to risk controversy or conflict that they are untrained to handle (Bolgatz, 2006).

The findings also indicate that teachers perceived racial dialogue to be synonymous with politics. The literature reveals that this is a common issue among many American educators. Borsheim-Black and Sarigianides (2019) state:

> For some of us, broaching the topic of racism in class feels as though we are crossing a political line, allowing our personal politics to affect a teaching environment intended for students from families with a range of political opinions. (p. 21)

Even though this study took place in an election year, during an intense presidential election, discussions of politics in the classroom were viewed as taboo or inappropriate by participants. The participants' remarks illustrate that these teachers believe that they should keep personal opinions regarding race and politics away from students. Participants repeatedly mentioned that they did not want to be political when it came to discussing race. However, all the participants mentioned wanting to make a difference, and that is done with politics.

Implications for Teachers:

Twenty-first century educators are uniquely positioned to challenge power structures that fuel racism and inequities in America. Boyd (2017) states:

Teaching is itself a form of activism that allows for the realization of social justice both in how and what educators teach their students. Schools, as social spaces reflective of our diverse society and places ripe with the potential to shape individuals' thinking and actions, are perfectly situated for effecting change. (p. 7)

Educators should operate as change agents and promote activism in the classroom. In order to challenge the status quo, educators must foster inclusion, celebrate diversity, and promote equitable practices in their classrooms and curriculum. Educators need to understand how to implement antiracist teaching practices. This means teachers must pursue a heightened level of self- awareness and social awareness. First teachers must identify and examine their own biases, privilege and positionality. Then they must learn how to use their position to advocate for all students. They also should regularly watch the news, read articles, and study diverse perspectives to gain social awareness. Teachers should take the time to study the culture and interests of students, so they can select rigorous culturally relevant texts that align with students' interest for instruction. Attending local church services, charitable events, sporting events, and doing home visits can help teachers learn more about the cultural interests and ethnic backgrounds of their students. Listening to students and asking about their interests is also a great way to build rapport. Educators should avoid making assumptions and just ask students how they would like for their teacher to support them. Teachers should prioritize building a good rapport with students in order to create an inclusive safe space.

Teachers should consider ways to make sure that students see how the curricular content relates to students' lives and the real world. Race and politics are prevalent themes in texts taught in schools, and a major part of American society. Therefore, educators should be discussing these relevant issues with students in class. In order to cultivate critical thinkers, change agents, concerned citizens, policymakers, problem solvers, and informed voters, educators must create opportunities for research, analysis, and dialogue on these topics in the classroom. Avoiding

classroom discussions on politics and race just perpetuates the oppressive silence that maintains injustice. Teaching is indeed a political act and English teachers should view themselves as change agents. For example, Linda Christensen (2017), "writes that teaching literacy skills is ultimately a "political act" because reading and writing allows students to "know themselves and to heal themselves," and they provide students with the tools to "interrogate society" (p. vii).

Teachers should embrace teaching content that is beyond their comfort zone and differs from their own experiences in order to expose students to diverse perspectives. Educators must seek resources and support instead of using discomfort as an excuse to avoid meaningful discussions. Educators must embrace lifelong learning and be proactive about their own professional growth. Educators can easily access podcasts, articles, books, videos, and trainings on a wide variety of topics. Teachers should seek support from parents, principals, professional organizations, and instructional coaches when unsure of how to approach these topics.

Implications for Teacher Educators and Teacher Education Programs:

Teacher educators and educator preparation programs should use their power and resources to dismantle the oppressive hegemonic power structures that continue to perpetuate and maintain educational inequities. Schools of education have the responsibility and the power to transform the mindsets of teachers who can cultivate the cultural competencies of the nation's children. All teacher educators must prioritize culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies and antiracist teaching practices to help eradicate racism in schools. Building a strong rapport and creating inclusive safe spaces should be routinely taught in required classroom management courses. Teacher education courses should foster dialogue and research on racism, poverty, diversity, and social justice in education. Pre-service teachers need the opportunity to examine their own biases and perceptions of social justice before entering the classroom and colleges

should be facilitating these opportunities. Schools of education should regularly require book studies, workshops, speaker series, and other enrichment activities that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational settings. Pre-service internships need to be structured to expose teacher candidates to diverse student populations in order to prepare them to support diverse learners.

Teacher education programs also must prepare future educators to meet the demands of digital natives in virtual learning environments. Educators must be able to engage and facilitate innovation in the 21st century classroom. Therefore, teacher educators must cultivate digital literacies and digital pedagogies by exposing preservice teachers to relevant and effective digital resources. Schools of education should offer educational technology courses and workshops that help preservice teachers leverage the most effective digital tools for instruction. Universities can also consider partnering with local school districts, businesses, and educational technology companies to host education innovation fairs or conferences to explore the latest apps or tools that can be used in the classroom. Colleges and universities must also foster a culture of lifelong learning by expecting faculty to attend training on effective new digital instructional tools so they can share these innovative tools with students.

Implications for Administrators/Policymakers

Administrators and policymakers are important gatekeepers that can help create standards, systems, training, supports, and policies that oppose systemic racism and inequity in schools. School administrators need to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion training in K-12 schools along with parental advisory councils with representatives from diverse backgrounds. These diverse parental advisory boards can increase parental involvement and assist with more inclusive text and curricula selections. School administrators can hire diversity coaches that can

mentor and support teachers attempting to cultivate inclusive safe spaces in their classrooms. Administrators should also consider including training on digital learning tools and creating safe spaces as a part of mandatory first year teacher training. Superintendents should also invest in partnerships with local universities to maintain current professional development on digital pedagogies and culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies. Superintendents and school boards also need to foster community partnerships that finance the laptops, tablets, internet access, and educational technology that all students and teachers need to maximize instruction in virtual settings. Administrators and politicians must also prioritize equitable school funding to eliminate educational inequities.

Policymakers should challenge the hegemonic power structures that exclude diverse contemporary YAL from the canon and approved reading lists for secondary schools. New policies can also require colleges and universities to offer multi-ethnic studies and social justice courses to all teacher candidates in order to maintain accreditation. State Departments of Education should reassess standards and required curricula to include more diverse authors and inclusive texts that prepare more culturally competent college and career ready students. Policy makers also should explain how culturally responsive pedagogies should be implemented within the state standards to help educators effectively achieve these goals.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are many opportunities for further research because this study was only a small snapshot of a few teachers' perspectives in one southern state. This study was also heavily impacted by the unique limitations of the Covid-19 pandemic. A next step would be to duplicate this study when the Covid-19 pandemic is over and the researcher can conduct in person observations of face-to-face instruction. The findings also indicate that the racial and political

climate of the 2020 presidential election also influenced this study. Therefore, the researcher could duplicate this study in different geopolitical settings to compare and contrast educators' perspectives regarding the phenomenon in different states. How would teacher perspectives differ in a more liberal northern state? How would teacher perspectives compare in another conservative southern state? Would similar or different barriers emerge in different geopolitical settings? Additional studies could capture the unique perspectives of educators working in diverse geopolitical settings. There was only one urban field site in this study, so it would also be interesting to investigate this phenomenon in more urban or metropolitan school settings.

Another option would be to develop a longitudinal study to explore how these selected teachers' perspectives evolve regarding this phenomenon over time. For example, the researcher could revisit the selected participants in three years and interview them again. A longitudinal study could expose how educators deal with perceived barriers over time and how teachers use what they have learned to improve instruction. The researcher could explore how participating in this study impacts how the participants approach young adult literature and social justice in the classroom.

The findings also indicate that there is a need for research that examines parents' perspectives of utilizing contemporary YAL as a catalyst to discuss social justice issues in ELA classrooms. It would be helpful to explore parents' opinions about the use of *The Hate U Give* in schools and if parents perceive any barriers regarding discussing racial injustice in schools.

Similarly, a research study should also investigate students' perspectives of utilizing young adult literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice in ELA classrooms. There are various new young adult novels that highlight the Black Lives Matter Movement, and more research is needed to explore how these novels can be leveraged in school settings. Future research could

also examine other contemporary young adult novels by other authors of color addressing social justice issues. Further research on the influence of Hispanic, Latinx, and Afro-Latinx YAL in schools is also needed.

Conclusion

As an advocate for literacy and social justice, I believe it is imperative that all educators understand that now is the time for change. Social justice literacies belong in the English classroom. Diverse young adult literature belongs in the ELA curriculum. Teachers can effectively teach young adult novels like *The Hate U Give* to cover ELA standards and promote social justice. Black lives matter. Kindness matters. Inclusivity matters. Everything teachers say and do in the classroom matters. Every text you choose to spend instruction time on matters. So, choose wisely.

Systematic racism continues to cause the physical and academic deaths of African Americans in and outside of classrooms. But socially conscious educators can change the narrative through antiracist teaching. Teachers must act for social change in order to transform our schools and create a more inclusive and equitable world.

List of References

Agarwal-Rangnath, R. (2013). *Social studies, literacy, and social justice in the common core classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Agarwal-Rangnath, R., Dover, A., & Henning, N. (2016). *Preparing to teach social studies for social justice: Becoming a renegade*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Alsup, J., & Miller, S. (2014). Reclaiming English education: Rooting social justice in dispositions. *English Education, 46*(3), 195-215.

Alverman, Donna E. & Stephen F. Phelps. (2002) *Content Reading and Literacy. 3ʳᵈ edition* Boston: Allyn and Bacon Publishing

Ayers, W., Quinn, T., & Stovall, D. (2009). *Handbook of social justice in education*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Baker-Bell, A., Butler, T., Johnson, L. (2017). The pain & the wounds: A call for critical race english education in the wake of racial violence. *English Education*, *49(2)*, 116-130.

Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. (1989) *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. (2001). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley Publishing.

Barton, P. E. (2003). Parsing the Achievement Gap: Baselines for Tracking Progress. Policy Information Report.

Batchelor, K. (2018). Using linked text sets to promote advocacy and agency through a critical lens. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 62(4),* 379-386.

Bausell, S. B. (2017). The grammar of English education. Pedagogical possibilities of critical discourse analysis. Unpublished manuscript, School of Education, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Beers, K. (2003). *When kids can't read what teachers can do.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Belle, C. (2020, April 22). *What Is Social Justice Education Anyway? (Opinion)*. Education Week. https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-what-is-social-justice-education-anyway/2019/01

Bender-Slack, D. (2010). Texts, talk and fear? English language arts teachers negotiate social justice teaching. *English Education, 42(2)*, 181-203.

Bishop, R. S. (1990). Windows and mirrors: Children's books and parallel cultures. In *California State University reading conference: 14th annual conference proceedings* (pp. 3-12).

Bogatz, J. (2005). *Talking race in the classroom.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods (3rd ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Borsheim-Black, C., & Sarigianides, S. T. (2019). *Letting go of literary whiteness: Antiracist literature instruction for white students*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9(2)*, 27-40.

Boyd, A. (2017). *Social justice literacies in the English classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Brookfield, S. (2019). *Teaching race: How to help students unmask and challenge racism.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishing.

Brown, J. E., & Stephens, E. C. (1995). *Teaching young adult literature: Sharing the connection*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Brown, J., & Stephens, E. C. (1998). *United in diversity; Using multicultural young adult literature in the classroom.* Urbana, IL: NCTE Publishing.

Bucher, K., & Hinton, K. (2014). *Young adult literature: Exploration, evaluation, and appreciation*. New York, NY: Pearson Publishing.

Buckley-Marudas, M., & Ellenbogen, C. (2019). Using YA literature to support students as they wrestle with violence, police brutality, and trauma: Engaging the hate u give. *The ALAN Review, 46(3)*, 71-83.

Burant, T., Christensen, L., Walters, S., & Salas, K. D. (Eds.). (2010). *The new teacher book: Finding purpose, balance, and hope during your first years in the classroom*. Rethinking Schools.

Bury, L. (2013). Book censors target teen fiction, says American library association. *The Guardian*. www.theguardian.com/books/2013/sep/23/American-library-association-banned-books

Butina, M. (2015). A narrative approach to qualitative inquiry. *Clinical Laboratory Science Journal*, *28(3)*, 190-196.

Carlson, D. L. (2007). Examining the embedded assumptions of teaching for social justice in a secondary urban school: A case study. *Perspectives on Urban Education, 5(1)*, 2-22.

Carr, S. (2012). In southern towns segregation academies are still going strong. *The Atlantic*, *12*. https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/12/in-southern-towns-segregation-academies-are-still-going-strong/266207/

Cart, M. (2016). The hate u give. *Booklist*, *113*(8), 48.

Casey, L., & Levesque, E. M. (2018, January 11). *New survey of minorities adds dissenting view to public satisfaction with schools*. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/01/11/new-survey-of-minorities-adds-dissenting-view-to-public-satisfaction-with-schools/

Castagno, A. E. (2019). *The price of nice: How good intentions maintain educational inequity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Christensen, L. (2017). *Reading, writing, and rising up: Teaching about social justice and the power of the written word*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools Publishing.

Christensen, L. (2020, April 10). Social Justice in the Classroom: An Interview with Linda Christensen.

Coates, T. (2015). *Between the world and me*. New York, NY: Random House Publishing.

Children's Book Center. (2020). *Books by and/or about Black, Indigenous and People of Color (All Years).* Cooperative Children's Book Center. https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-about-poc-fnn/

Copenhaver-Johnson, J. (2006). Talking to children about race: The importance of inviting difficult conversations. *Childhood Education*, *83*(1), 12-22.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2014). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Fourth ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). Five qualitative approaches to inquiry. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*, *2*, 53-80.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publishing.

Cridland-Hughes, S. A., & King, L. J. (2015). Killing me softly: How violence comes from the curriculum we teach. *The assault on communities of color: Exploring the realities of race-based violence*, 99-102.

Crowe, C. (2003). *Getting away with murder: The true story of Emmett Till case*. New York, NY: Penguin Group Publishing.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teaching for social justice: Resources, relationships,and anti-racistpractice. *Multicultural Perspectives, 19(3)*,133-138. https://doi-orgs.umiss.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/15210960.2017.1335039

de Brey, C., Musu, L., McFarland, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., Zhang, A., ... & Wang, X. (2019). Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018. NCES 2019-038. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

Dewey, J. (1916/2007). *Democracy and education*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger.

Diamond, A. (2017, March 29). *Review: Angie Thomas's 'The Hate U Give' Enters the Ranks of Great YA Novels*. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/03/the-hate-u-give-angie-thomas-review/521079/

Diamond, L. (2016, October 11). Writing to change the world: teaching social justice through writers workshop. MAHB. https://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/writing-change-world/

Douglass, R. (2017, March 14). *Why Everyone Needs To Read "The Hate U Give" By Angie Thomas*. HuffPost. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-everyone-needs-to-read-the-hate-u-give-by-angie_b_58c7345be4b03400023f4aa8

Dover, A. G. (2010). *Teaching for social justice with standards-based, secondary english language arts curriculum*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Dover, A. G. (2013). Teaching for social justice: From conceptual frameworks to classroom practices. *Multicultural Perspectives, 15(1)*, 3-11. doi:10.1080/15210960.2013.754285

Dover, A. G. (2016). Teaching for social justice and the Common Core: Justice□oriented curriculum for language arts and literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 59(5), 517-527.

Dover, A. G. (2016). Teaching for social justice and the common core. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 59(5)*, 517-527. https://doi:10.1002/jaal.488

English Language Arts Teacher Educators. (2009). Beliefs about social justice in english education. Retrieved April 21, 2020, from https://secure-ncte-org.umiss.idm.oclc.org/library/NCTEFiles/Groups/CEE/Beliefs_about_Social_Justice_EE.pdf?

Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5(1)*, 80-92.

Fernandez, R. M. (2017). Why young people need diverse books. Yes! Magazine. Retrieved February 15, 2020, from https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2017/06/13/why-young-people-need-diverse-books/

Flick, U. (2014). Mapping the field. In. U Flick (Ed.), *The Sage handbook qualitative data analysis.* (pp. 3-18). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Flood, A. (2014) "We need diverse books calls for more representative writing for children. *The Guardian*.

Fowler-Amato, M., Lee Keenan, K., Warrington, A., Nash, B. L., & Brady, R. B. (2019). Working toward a socially just future in the ELA methods class. *Journal of Literacy Research, 51(2)*, 158-176. https://doi:10.1177/1086296X19833577

Friere, P. (1968/2002). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Bloomsburg.

Gallo, D. (2001). How Classics Create an Aliterate Society. *The English Journal, 90*(3), 33-39. doi:10.2307/821305

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research , and practice.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Germán, L. (2019). To dismantle racism, we must discuss it. *English Journal, 108(4)*, 15-16.

Gibbons, L. C., Dail, J. S., & Stallworth, B. J. (2006). Young adult literature in the English curriculum today: Classroom teachers speak out. *ALAN Review*, *33*(3), 53.

Ginsberg, R., & Glenn, W. J. (2019). *Engaging with Multicultural YA Literature in the Secondary Classroom: Critical Approaches for Critical Educators* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Glasgow, J. (2001). Teaching social justice through young adult literature. *English Journal*, *90(6)*, 54-61.

Goebel, B. (2018). What's so funny about social justice? *English Journal, 107(6)*, 48-53.

Gomez, B. (2020). *Banned Spotlight: The Hate U Give*. Banned Books Week. https://bannedbooksweek.org/banned-spotlight-the-hate-u-give/

Gómez González, A. (2021). Science With and for Society Through Qualitative Inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *27*(1), 10–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419863006

Grbich, C. (2003). *New approaches in social research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Grbich, C. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Haddix, M., & Price-Dennis, D. (2013). Urban fiction and multicultural literature as transformative tools for preparing english teachers for diverse classrooms. *English Education, 45(3),* 247-283.

Hagerman, D., & Porath, S. (2018). The possibilities of teaching for, with, and about social justice in a public middle school. *Middle School Journal, 49(5)*, 26-34. https://doi:10.1080/00940771.2018.1509561

Hays, A. (2016). Using young adult literature in a classroom: How does YA literature impact writing literacies? *Study and Scrutiny: Research in Young Adult Literature, 2(1)*, 53-63.

Hennink, M. M. (2014). *Focus group discussions.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Irvine, J. J. (1991). *Black Students and School Failure: Policies, Practices, and Prescriptions*. Praeger.

Ishizuka, Kathy. (2018). Can diverse books save us? In a divided world, librarians are on a mission. *School Library Journal*. https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=can-diverse-books-save-us

Jackson, T., & Boutte, G. (2009). "Liberation literature: Positive cultural messages in children's and young adult literature at freedom schools." *Language Arts*, *87(2),* 108-116.

Jago, C. (2000). *With rigor for all: Teaching the classics to contemporary students.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Publishing Co.

Johnson, A. B. (2011). Multiple selves and multiple sites of influence: Perceptions of young adult literature in the classroom. *Theory Into Practice*, *50(2)*, 215-222.

Johnson, L. (2018). Where do we go from here? Toward a critical race education. *Research in the teaching of English, 53(2)*, 102-123.

Johnson, L., Jackson, J., Stovall, D. O., & Baszile, D. T. (2017). "Loving blackness to death": Imagining ELA classrooms in a time of racial chaos. *English Journal, 106*(4), 60.

Kay, M. (2018). *Not light, but fire: How to lead meaningful race conversations in the classroom.* Portland: Stenhouse Publishers.

Kaywell, J. F. (2000). *Adolescent Literature as a Complement to the Classics. Volume 4*. Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., 1502 Providence Highway, Suite 12, Norwood, MA 02062.

Kivunja, Charles. (2013). "Embedding Digital Pedagogy in Pre-Service Higher Education to Better Prepare Teachers for the Digital Generation." *International Journal of Higher Education,*2(4),131-142.

Knickerbocker, J., & Rycik, J. (2002). Growing into literature: Adolescents' literary interpretations and appreciation. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 46(3)*, 196-208.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? I*nternational Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11(1)*, 7-24. https://doi:10.1080/095183998236863

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, *35(7)*, 3-12.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F., IV. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97(1)*, 47.

Leech, B. L. (2002). Asking questions: Techniques for semistructured interviews. *Political Science and Politics Journal Online*. Retrieved May 22, 2020, from www.apsnet.org.

Leer, E. (2010). *Multicultural literature in monocultural classrooms: White teachers explore diverse texts with white students*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Malo-Juvera, V., & Greathouse, P. (2020). *Breaking the Taboo with Young Adult Literature*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Matloob Haghanikar, T. (2019). Diversifying Our Curriculum: Values and Intercultural Experiences Through Educational Technology. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, *48*(2), 213–224. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047239519875735

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (1st ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.

Milner IV, H. R. (2013). Scripted and narrowed curriculum reform in urban schools. *Urban Education,48(2),163-170. Doi:10.1177/0042085913478022*

Milner, A., & Browitt, J. (2002). *Contemporary Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Mirra, N. (2018). *Educating for Empathy*. New York, NY: Teachers College Publications

Mississippi Department of Education. *Mississippi Text Exemplars* (2013). Mississippi
Department of Education.
https://districtaccess.mde.k12.ms.us/commoncore/Training%20Public%20Access/CCSS-
ELA/Mississippi%20Text%20Exemplars/MS%20Book%20List%20(2).pdf

Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Morgan, D. L. (2011). *Focus groups as qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
Publications.

Morrell, E. (2005). Critical english education. *English Education*, *37(4)*, 312-313.

Morris, A. (2018). *A practical introduction to in-depth interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
Publications.

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Musu-Gillette, L., De Brey, C., McFarland, J., Hussar, W., Sonnenberg, W., & Wilkinson-
Flicker, S. (2017). Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2017.
NCES 2017-051. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

Myers, W. D. (2014, March 15). *Where Are the People of Color in Children's Books?* The New
York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/opinion/sunday/where-are-the-
people-of-color-in-childrens-books.html

National Assessment of Educational Progress (2019). nces.edgov/nationsreportcard

National Center for Education Statistics (2017). nces.edgov/pubs2017

National Council of Teachers of English. (2012). *NCTE/ NCATE standards for initial
preparation of teachers of secondary English language arts, grades 7-12*. Urbana, IL:
Author

National Council of Teachers of English. (2015). *NCTE Statement Affirming #BlackLivesMatter*.
National Council of Teachers of English. http://www.ncte.org/governance/pres-team_9-
8-15.

Nel, P. (2017). *Was the Cat in the Hat Black?: The hidden racism of children's literature, and
the need for diverse books*. Oxford University Press.

Nilsen, A. P., & Donelson, K. L. (2009). *Literature for today's young adults*. Boston: Pearson.

Oakes, J., & Lipton, M. (2007). *Teaching to change the world*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Osler, A. (2016). *Human rights and schooling: An ethical framework for teaching social justice.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Padilla-Diaz, M. (2015). Phenomenology in educational qualitative research: Philosophy as science or philosophical science? *International Journal of Educational Excellence, 1(2)*, 101-110.

Parker, L., Deyhle, D., & Villenas, S. A. (1999). *Race is- race isn't: Critical race theory and qualitative studies in education.* Boulder: Westview Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Patton, M. Q. (2005). Qualitative research. *Encyclopedia of statistics in behavioral science*.

Perez, A. (2016). Embracing discomfort in YA literature. *The ALAN Review, 43(2),* 83-86.

Pollock, M. (Ed.). (2008). *Everyday antiracism: Getting real about race in school*. The New Press.

Roberts, M. (2013). Teaching young adult literature: YA literature belongs in the classroom because. *The English Journal, 102(5)*, 89-90.

Rodriguez, R. J. (2019). Teaching culturally sustaining and inclusive young adult literature: Critical perspectives and conversations. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Rodriquez, N. M., & Villaverde, L. (2008). *Dismantling white privilege: Pedagogy, politics, and whiteness*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Rothenberg, P. S., & Accomando, C. H. (2019). *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study: An Integrated Study* (Eleventh ed.). Worth Publishers.

Russo, M. (2016, December 20). *R.J. Palacio and Meg Medina Talk Diversity and Children's Books*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/20/books/review/rj-palacio-and-meg-medina-talk-diversity-and-childrens-books.html

Saldana, J. (2011). *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research (Understanding Qualitative Research).* Oxford University Press,

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2017). *Is everyone really equal?: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Publishing.

Shipp, L. (2017). "Revolutionizing the english classroom through consciousness, justice, and self-awareness." *English Journal*. Urbana, IL. : NCTE, *106 (4)*, 35-40.

Sims, E. J., & Virginia, L. (2008). *Undoing whiteness in the classroom: Critical educultural teaching approaches for social justice activism*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Smith, B. (2019). Examining mistakes to advance antiracist teaching. In Brookfield, S., *Teaching race: How to help students unmask and challenge racism: (*pp. 273-291). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishing.

Smolkin, L. B., & Young, C. A. (2011). Missing mirrors, missing windows: Children's literature textbooks and LGBT topics. *Language Arts*, *88(3),* 217-220.

Stover, L. T. (2001). The place of young adult literature in secondary reading programs. *Teaching reading in high school English classes*, 115-138.

U.S.News & World Report. (2019). *Best States 2019: Ranking Performance Throughout All 50 States*. https://www.usnews.com/media/best-states/overall-rankings-2019.pdf

Wallowitz, L. (2008). *Critical literacy as resistance*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing.

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER

July 1, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

      I am an instructor in the School of Education and a doctoral candidate in the English Education program at the University of Mississippi. As part of my doctoral research, I'm recruiting English Language Arts teachers who teach freshmen in school districts in the Jackson metropolitan area. My dissertation research focuses on how secondary English Language Arts teachers use Young Adult Literature as a catalyst to discuss social justice. If you choose to participate in this study, you will receive free copies of *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas for all of your students. Your part in this study will be to create lesson plans using this book to teach social justice. To help you with creation of these lesson plans, a Google folder of instructional materials and resources for teaching social justice and *The Hate U Give* will be provided. You will also keep a reflective journal describing the facilitation of daily lessons. All participating teachers will also be observed during one lesson. Interviews and focus groups will be held before and after the book is taught.

      At the end of the study, I will forward a summary of my findings to all participants. Copies of submitted lesson plans (with the submitting teacher's permission) will be disseminated to all study participants. To participate in this study, please e-mail me at seellis1@go.olemiss.edu. Thank you! I'm very excited about the possibilities of this research, and I look forward to your participation!

Sincerely,

Shimikqua Ellis
Graduate Instructor, University of Mississippi
Doctoral Candidate, University of Mississippi

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT & CONFIDENTIALITY FORM

I volunteer to participate in Shimikqua Ellis' qualitative dissertation research (titled "Teachers' Perceptions of Using Young Adult Literature as a Catalyst to Social Justice") and understand that:

1. My real name will not be used, nor will I (or my school) be identified personally, in any way at any time.

2. I will retain full authorship and intellectual property rights to any curriculum I write, and my lesson plans or journal entries will not be republished without my permission.

3. I may withdraw from this study, without penalty, at any time.

4. I understand that results from this study will be included in Shimikqua Ellis' doctoral dissertation and may also be included in manuscripts submitted for publication.

Signed_____ Date_____

Printed Name_____

Mailing Address_____

Email Address_____

Please return all study related materials to Shimikqua Ellis
513 Oxford Way Oxford, Mississippi 38655
Questions or comments? Contact Shimikqua at 601-812-7134 or
Seellis1@go.olemiss.edu

APPENDIX C

LESSON REFLECTION JOURNAL TEMPLATE

NAME:_____DATE:_____

Today I
During this lesson I felt
I believe the students learned
I was surprised by

If I teach this again, I would change
Overall, I believe this lesson was
Any additional comments or concerns about the lesson

FIELD NOTES TEMPLATE

Date: **Site Location:** **Number of Students:** **Start Time:** **End Time:** **Agenda/Activity:**	
Description of Setting:	
Description of Participant:	
Participant's Words, Dialogue, and conversation:	
Participant's Actions:	

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why are you teaching *The Hate U Give* at your school? (R1)

2. How do you think your identity and experiences will affect how you teach this book? (R1)

3. How do you think your students' identities and experiences will affect how you teach this book? (R1)

4. 4.Previously what social justice themes have you discussed in your classroom? (R1)

5. 5.What type of support or resources do you believe you need to effectively teach the themes of racial injustice and inequity in *The Hate U Give*? (R2)

6. 6.What types of challenges or issues do you believe you may encounter when you teach *The Hate U Give*? (R1 & R2)

7. How do you plan to deal with these issues or challenges? (R2)

APPENDIX F

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Talk about your experience teaching this book? (R1)

2. Describe which lessons or instructional activities you believe worked best with this unit? Which lessons do you feel best explored social justice issues within the text? & Why? (R1)

3. How did your school community respond when you taught this novel? How did this response impact your instruction? (R2)

4. What did you find challenging or difficult? How did you deal with sensitive topics like racial injustice in the novel? (R2)

5. What advice would you give a teacher attempting to teach this novel for the first time in your school? & Why? (R2)

6. What types of resources did you utilize to teach this book? & Why? Were there any personal or professional experiences that helped you as well? (R2)

7. What would you do differently if you teach it again? & Why? (R1, R2,)

8. What impactful lessons do you feel that students learned? What did students learn about social justice and ELA through this text? (R1)

9. In your opinion what are the benefits of using contemporary young adult literature to explore themes of racial injustice with teens? (R1)

10. What inspired or motivated you when you taught this book? (R1)

11. What were your goals for teaching this book and how did you achieve these goals? (R1)

VITA

SHIMIKQUA ELLIS
Department of Teacher Education
School of Education
University of Mississippi
49 Guyton Drive, University, MS 38677

Education

PhD in English Education, University of Mississippi 2016- 2021
Dissertation Chairperson: Dr. Rosemary Oliphant Ingham
Dissertation Topic: *Teachers Perceptions of Using Young Adult Literature As a Catalyst to Discuss Racial Injustice in Secondary ELA Classrooms*

Masters in the Art of Teaching Communications, Webster University 2004-2008

Bachelors in English, Clark Atlanta University 2000-2004

Adult Teaching Experience

Graduate Instructor
2018-Present   University of Mississippi   Oxford, Ms.

    Taught EDSE 442 Methods of Teaching Secondary English courses.

    Taught EDCI 352 The History of Education course.

    Taught EDCI 353 Planning & Teaching Strategies for Effectiveness course.

    Taught EDLS 525 Trends in Adolescent Literature course.

Manager of Alumni Teacher Leadership and Development
2014-2016   Teach for America(TFA)   Jackson, Ms.

    Facilitated Professional Development on Culturally Responsive Teaching for teachers in the Mississippi Delta.

    Developed and managed an Alumni Teacher Fellowship for TFA alumni teachers in the Mississippi region

Coordinated networking and professional growth events for Teach for America alumni teachers in Mississippi.

English Education Instructor at Nantong University

Summer 2012   Jiangsu Educational Service International Exchange(JESIE)   China

Facilitated and Designed English Education course

Modeled and taught American teaching strategies to Chinese teachers of English

Conducted workshops on American culture and education

K-12 Teaching Experience

Fifth Grade English Teacher

2016-2018   Oxford Intermediate School   Oxford, Ms.

Developed engaging lesson plans.

Developed assessments.

Collaborated with parents to support student success.

English Language Arts Teacher

2006-2014   Hazelwood East High School   Florissant, Mo.

Instructed English literature courses for grades 9-12

Co- wrote and implemented engaging new curriculum for 9th grade Reading Interventions course

Co- wrote and helped develop a Pre-Advanced Placement Literature program

Interpersonal Communication Instructor

Summer 2007   University of Missouri Summer Bridge Program   St. Louis, MO.

Enhanced students visual, oral, and written communication skills for college essays and entrance exams

Taught ACT preparation skills course

Paraprofessional

2004-2005   McCluer North High School   Saint Louis Mo.

Tutored and assisted physically, mentally, and emotionally impaired students

Supervision Experience

University Supervisor
2018-Present   University of Mississippi   Oxford, Ms.
     Observed and evaluated teacher candidates' lessons and instructional practices.

Honors

2020 - University of Mississippi Graduate School Ambassador
2020 - Graduate School Council Grant
2019 - ALAN Foundation Research Grant
2011- Apple for the Teacher Award (Iota Phi Lambda Sorority)
2010- Emerson Excellence in Teaching Award
2009 - Teacher of the Month Hazelwood East High
2007- Educator Appreciation Award (Most Influential Teacher)

Service to the University

     2019 – 2020 Faculty Search Committee for the School of Education at the University of Mississippi

2018 – 2020 School of Education Equity and Inclusion Committee at the University of Mississippi

2018 -2020 Planning Committee Member for the Transitions to College Writing Symposium at the University of Mississippi

2017- 2020 Founder and President of PhD in Education Network (PEN) at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi

Scholarship

Ellis, S. (in press) The Legend of Buddy Bush and Beyond. In Bickmore, S.T. & Clark, S. (Eds.). *African American authors of young adult literature: A three volume series; Volume 3. A period of growth in African American young adult literature*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield

Ellis, S.(2020, September 17). Amidon Planet Podcast E032: Not Light, But Fire with Shimikqua Ellis [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from https://amidonplanet.com/episode32/

National Conferences

November 2020 – "Celebrating Six Decades of African American Authors of Young Adult Literature: From Myers to Reynolds and from Taylor to Magoon" at National Council of Teachers of English Virtual Conference

October 2020 – "Navigating Whiteness: A Survival Guide for Doctoral Students of Color at Predominantly White Institutions" at National Association of Multicultural Educators Virtual Conference

November 2019 -"Hot Topics for ELA Classrooms" at National Council of Teachers of English Conference in Baltimore, Maryland

November 2019 -"Reimagining Teacher Education with The Hate You Give" at National Association of Multicultural Educators Conference in Tucson, Arizona

July 2019 -"Electrifying English with The Hate You Give" at ELATE Conference in Fayetteville, Arkansas

November 2018 -"All American Boys, #Black Lives Matter, and Socratic Seminar to Promote Productive Dialogue in the Classroom " at National Conference of Teachers of English in Houston, Texas

Regional Conferences

October 2019 -"Blog about It: Using Blogs for Writing Instruction in ELA Classrooms" at Transitions to College Writing Symposium in Oxford, Mississippi

October 2019 -"Preparing Culturally Responsive Teachers" at Teacher Education Professional Development Forum at the University of Mississippi

December 2018 -"Literacy for Multimodal Learners" at Literacy Association of Tennessee Conference in Murfreesboro, Tennessee

October 2018 -"Building Bridges and Not Walls to Integrate Technology in English Classrooms" at Transitions to College Writing Symposium in Oxford, Mississippi

December 2015 - "Successful Strategies for Struggling Readers" at Mississippi Reading Association (MRA) Literacy Conference in Biloxi, Mississippi

November 2015 -"Rigor and Relevance in the Classroom" at Teach For America Alumni Summit at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi

September 2015 - "What is Culturally Responsive Teaching?" at Teach for America Alumni Summit at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi

August 2015 - "Rigorous Project Based Learning" at Teach for America Kick off at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi
June 2015 - "Empowering and Engaging Classrooms" at Teach for America Induction at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi

January 2013 - "Conquering Common Core Standards" at Hazelwood School District Professional Development in St. Louis, Missouri
August 2011- "Positive Behavior Intervention Systems" at Hazelwood School District Professional Development in St. Louis, Missouri

Professional Memberships

National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE)
Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE (ALAN)
National Association of Multicultural Educators (NAME)