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EXPLORING TEACHER'S CHOICES TO PROMOTE DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES: A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY APPROACH

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TEACHER'S CHOICES TO PROMOTE DIVERSE LIBRARIES

EXPLORING TEACHER'S CHOICES TO PROMOTE
DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES:
A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY APPROACH

by

Samantha Leigh Stephens

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Coastal Carolina University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education
with a specialization in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Education Sciences and Organizations

Coastal Carolina University

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Doctoral Committee:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative case study was to identify how teachers include diverse literature in their classroom libraries to provide students with multiple opportunities to read different points of view. The central research questions were: How do teachers provide students with opportunities to explore differing viewpoints through books in classroom libraries? How do teachers choose books and materials to create safe spaces for diverse learners through classroom libraries? Lastly, how are laws impacting how teachers select books to include in their classroom libraries?

Data collection consisted of focus group interviews where teachers shared their experiences with providing students opportunities to explore literature through their classroom libraries. The data was coded with in vivo coding to take the participant's exact words from the focus groups. The theoretical framework that was used to guide this study was Williams Glasser's choice theory, which states that we choose everything that we do. Glasser's theory aligns with this study because teachers choose what books they want in their classrooms.

This case study had a sample of 10 teachers from multiple counties in the state of South Carolina. All of the data was analyzed and compiled for the reader thematically. Themes were chosen based on how often they appeared in the interviews. An item became a major theme if it was discussed in each interview by the teachers. The themes that were found included: welcoming classroom libraries, diversity in literature, windows and mirrors, and censorship. The results from the study indicate that teachers understand the importance of diverse books in the classroom because they help students discover multiple perspectives. However, educators worry about repercussions if they include a book the district or parents don't like in their classroom

libraries. The findings from this study can add to the literature on the importance of diverse literature in classrooms and the risks teachers take by providing it to students.

Keywords: diverse literature, classroom libraries, censorship, windows and mirrors, education

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband Greg who has been my biggest cheerleader and supporter throughout this entire process. I appreciate everything you have done to make sure I could put my best into this work. To my sister Jess for always reminding me that I am the crazy one who loves school. Thank you for your continued support on my educational journey. To my sister Niki, thank you for supporting me while going on this journey. It did not go unnoticed. To my parents Jimmy, Emily, Renee, and Travis you all have helped me in so many ways. You are always pushing me to be better and to ask questions. I would not be where I am without you. And to the rest of my friends and family, thank you for the many jokes and words of encouragement. To my greatest friend Rosie. Your funny memes and jokes always helped when things became stressful.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Book bans are occurring in the United States with books being taken out of libraries and classrooms in larger numbers than previously seen (Pendharkar, E., 2023). Book bans have a history that dates back to the history of civilization, but within the United States book bans surfaced in the 1920s (Collins, J., 2023). In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled on a case where students wore armbands to protest the Vietnam War and found that students and teachers do not lose their constitutional right of freedom of speech or expression (Blakemore, E., 2023) creating the first time free expression was questioned in schools. In another court case in 1982 books were removed because of their content, and a similar ruling stated that books couldn't be removed just because the ideas were disliked by others (Blakemore, E., 2023). Currently, book bans have increased by 28% and are being backed by laws and regulations that limit what kinds of books can be accessed by students (Alter, A., 2023; Pengelly, M., 2023).

A book ban is defined as action taken against a book based on its content and at the request of a parent or community challenge, school administration decision, or actions from lawmakers and government officials (Meehan, K. & Friedman, J., 2023). These books end up being inaccessible to students and take educational offerings away. Books provide outlets for students and can add to a student's educational journey, but the removal of books limits a child's educational experience (Hicks, T. et al., 2022). Students are naturally curious and want to be able to explore the world around them. Individuals who want to censor these ideas are harming the students in their communities. This concept is not new, but social progress and modernization of topics have sparked new conversations and laws making it an extremely important issue to explore (Blakemore, E., 2023).

Books and classroom libraries are important pieces of a welcoming classroom environment. Positive classroom environments can promote safe spaces and create areas where students feel welcome to learn and explore differing viewpoints (Fievre, M. J., 2021). A variety of books offers students the opportunity to explore new worlds and allows them to develop an understanding of others (Catapano, S., Fleming, J., & Elias, M., 2009). When teachers build classroom libraries it is important to have a variety of texts for students to read (Catapano, S., Fleming, J., & Elias, M., 2009). Students can get lost in the stories that they read, and when we expose students to culturally diverse books, we allow them to see others. Culturally diverse books are defined as books that include LGBTQIA+, native, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic cultural, and religious minorities (We Need Diverse Books, n.d). Books that incorporate different voices should be present in classrooms because when students have the opportunity to see different pieces of media, they can grow socially and emotionally.

Having diverse classroom libraries is important to help students have the ability to engage in a text that sparks their interest and makes learning personal (Blintt, J., 2020). Social and emotional learning can be achieved when we have diverse books in our classroom libraries, as diverse books help students understand the lived experiences of others and help them find value in the world (Cahill, M., Ingram, E., & Joo, S., 2021). By including books that show different perspectives, students have the opportunity to build empathy and deeper critical thinking skills early (Blintt, J., 2020). Teachers have the opportunity to promote diverse stories in their classrooms and provide new experiences for all students.

Stories that are being banned and taken out of classrooms can help the majority culture students understand others in important ways. Within the last school year, book bans have been

ongoing in states such as Texas, Florida, Missouri, Utah, and South Carolina (Meehan, K. & Friedman, J., 2023). Book bans align with many of the laws in these states but what these states fail to do is see the value from different perspectives (Collins, J., 2023). In most cases, when this happens, the books are removed from students or the access to the book is restricted. Book bans take important books out of classrooms and libraries which censor the diverse topics available to students. Book bans create harm for students in that LGBTQ, non-white, or non-dominant students feel that they do not fit in their schools and are outcasted (Perez, A., 2022). Challenges of these books occur because individuals feel that they are protecting children, but novels can provide young readers with insight into topics they could be struggling with or experiencing themselves (“Read Banned Books,” 2023).

When book bans happen, students lose the opportunity to engage with diverse books because access to the book is removed or restricted (Meehan, K. & Friedman, J., 2023). This means that students are losing the books that could mean something to them. Diverse stories provide the opportunity for students to identify who they are but also allow for the appreciation of others who are different from themselves (Garces-Bacsal, 2022). Books can create windows and mirrors for students. This means that when a student reads a book and sees themselves presented in the book, then that book is a mirror for them. When a young reader reads a book and sees representation and other lived experiences, then the book is a window (Bishop, R., 1990). To take this one step further, when windows are presented to students through books, they might find that those windows become sliding glass doors because they can step through and truly experience the characters' lives and lived experiences (Henderson et al., 2020). Books can mean so many different things to many students, but book bans take those opportunities away from them.

Book bans remove important pieces of information for students but also put teachers in a bind within their classrooms. For teachers, book banning means self-censorship, curriculum changing, and creating conflicts about what they believe is appropriate for students (Rickels, K., 2023). Teachers could be feeling the pressure of book bans and worry about what could happen if they have certain books in their classroom libraries. Teachers want to provide students with accurate and quality materials, but political and parent groups want some content in classroom and school libraries removed, creating a burden for many teachers with classroom libraries (Alvarez, B., 2022). Having students feel represented and allowing them to make connections with materials in their classrooms is important. If students do not feel valued or connected to what they read, it means that those students do not have connections to make (Yeros, 2020). The transformative power of books helps teachers meet the needs of their students in many different ways. Book bans are removing the power of thought from learners and robs the classroom of creativity and belonging. Individuals within our schools often don't know of the fight to keep books on shelves but when notified, they are more likely to fight back by protesting and pushing to read the banned book (Pendharkar, E., 2023).

Problem Statement

Students in the classroom need to feel represented and make connections with diverse materials in their learning environment. When learners find books in their classroom library that do not represent who they are but only represent others, it makes those individuals feel devalued, disconnected from what they are reading, or uninspired by what they read (Yeros, 2020). If there is a lack of understanding of who the students in the classroom are or where they come from by the teacher who creates the library, students will have a less fulfilling experience. When teachers have libraries that only represent the majority culture, students miss important building blocks in

their development of empathy and understanding for others who are different than themselves or a deeper understanding of their own culture. Stories that students read create windows into worlds, sliding glass doors for the engagement in text, and mirrors to reflect the characters presented within them (Bishop, 1990). Readers have the opportunity to see themselves in different texts and see their peers united, creating a diverse picture for everyone (Sotirovska, V. & Kelley, J., 2020). Books have the opportunity to entertain, foster a love for reading, and inform individuals in the classroom (McNair, 2016). When we allow students to get lost in the books that they read we only enhance how students identify themselves and appreciate others who are different from them (Garces-Bacsal, 2022). Stories that include characters from all walks of life celebrate the voices of those who are not in our mainstream media. Students who have the opportunity to read differing books see the bigger picture and can grow socially and emotionally in their environments.

Students learn from a variety of places and one of those places is a classroom library. When classroom libraries are organized by topic or themes it encourages them to read books with multiple perspectives and allows them to facilitate critical reflection (Hawkins, L., 2021). Organized books give more opportunities for books to be displayed and entice readers to explore different books (Catapano, S., Fleming, J., Elias, M., 2009). Having stories that represent who they are, and show their cultures, can increase their ability to understand who they are and who others are. Programs such as We Need Diverse Books advocate for changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects all young individuals (We Need Diverse Books, n.d.). This program provides information for teachers to share these stories with their students and there are many other programs out there that do the same. Diverse Books for All Coalition is a group of nonprofits and membership organizations that work together, and their

goal is to increase the accessibility of high-quality children's books by and about diverse cultures, races, identities, and abilities (Diverse Books for All, n.d.). These programs attempt to help teachers find stories that reflect the students in their classroom.

Books in our classrooms can act as windows for students. This means that books allow readers to see others' lived experiences. To go even further, windows can become sliding glass doors and in turn, help readers to step through and experience characters' lives and experiences (Henderson et al., 2020), encouraging students to make deeper connections with themselves and others around them. The purpose of books for many individuals is to open up thoughts and think deeper about the current world. Books can be used in multiple ways in the classroom. When educators start to remove book choices, we lose ways to impact our students. Students of color, LGBTQIA+ students, or students with disabilities can become disengaged in their learning and feel a lack of inspiration to believe in themselves when they are not represented in classroom materials (Banks, D., 2020). Teachers have the opportunity to create comfort for students, and one way that teachers can do that is through literature.

Diverse books in classrooms also impact our students' social and emotional learning. Culturally relevant stories can engage students and help them make connections between school and their lives (Garces-Bacsal, 2020). Diverse books help students understand the lived experience of others who do not look like them and see their worth and value reflected in the world (Cahill, M., Ingram, E., & Joo, S., 2021). Teachers can put these books in their classrooms to help promote social and emotional growth in students. Teachers have the opportunity to make big differences in their classrooms but to do that, students need to have the opportunity to find inclusive books in their classroom libraries.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify how teachers are providing students with opportunities to explore different viewpoints through literature in classroom libraries.

Literature has the opportunity to transform human experiences to where it is reflected, allowing students to find themselves (Bishop, R., 1990). This research also helped in understanding why teachers choose specific books and materials to create safe spaces for their students and how laws are impacting how teachers choose to include books in their classroom libraries. This study helped the researcher understand the choices that are being made by teachers in their classrooms to provide support to all students with an inclusive classroom library. The research questions that will guide this study include:

RQ1: How do teachers provide students with opportunities to explore differing viewpoints through books in classroom libraries?

- If teachers choose to provide a classroom library, how do they give students opportunities to explore differing viewpoints in the books provided?
- How do they use the school library to help students explore differing viewpoints?

RQ2: How do teachers choose books and materials to create safe spaces for diverse learners through classroom libraries?

- If teachers do choose books and materials to create safe spaces through classroom libraries, how are they doing so?
- In what other ways are teachers creating positive environments for students?

RQ3: How are laws impacting how teachers select books to include in their classroom libraries?

Theoretical Framework

The process of understanding what books teachers put in their classroom libraries and how teachers feel about meeting the needs of their students can be understood with choice theory. Choice theory explains that we choose everything we do (Glasser, 1999). Glasser states that information goes into our brains, where it is processed, and then we make decisions based on that information. What teachers decide to place in their classrooms is a decision that they make on their own. The information that they receive from their district is processed through their brains and then they decide what to do from there. Because of these pieces, choice theory can help to explain why teachers are making the decisions they are making to include or exclude specific books in their classroom library and how they are supporting students in the classroom.

Teachers are in charge of their classrooms and make decisions by the minute to determine what is best for their students. When teachers place books in their classrooms, they have to decide what is appropriate for their students. The development of literacy skills can be impacted by what a teacher decides to include within their classroom. Reading to students, or allowing students the opportunity to read, is impacted by the use of a library area in the classroom (Neuman, 2001). Teachers then have the opportunity to choose books that represent the voices in the classroom. Choice theory then tells us that teachers can choose what to include but it is then up to the learner to make choices of how to feel about them (Glasser, 1999). Books can greatly impact our students, but teachers have to decide what to include to meet basic needs.

Choice theory also determines how a teacher will choose to create a particular environment within the classroom. The teacher can choose to create a safe space where students can take risks by sharing their views or choose to have students keep them to themselves to not create conflict (Holly, L. & Steiner, S., 2005). Teachers make the initial choice of what books are

in their classroom libraries and from that choice students have to consider it and make their own choice to read those selected books. Choosing to create safe spaces and the integration of diverse books is based on the teacher's thoughts and ideas. The teacher is only able to make choices for themselves in hopes that the choice they do make can meet the needs of the students.

Choice theory tells us that the outside world does not make us do anything and that our behavior is a way to control ourselves. (Glasser, 2010). This means that individuals have the power in situations, and it is up to that person to determine how they will respond to the demands of the social and physical environment (Gabriel, E., & Matthews, L., 2011). When teachers choose to select certain books for their classroom, they decide on the classroom environment. Teachers have to rely on their instincts and training to make decisions that will ultimately determine the classroom environment. Choice theory tells us that teachers are in the driver's seat in their classrooms and will determine what they feel to be important and unimportant. It also helps to understand their choices because their choices could be determined based on what teachers are told to do and what not to do. Choice theory empowers teachers to take ownership for the book choices they make and also empower students to take ownership for the books that they choose to read (Glasser, 1999). Choice theory is all about action and will determine that teachers make the decisions to include certain book choices for them and not others. Students will then make their own decisions about what they read or don't read.

As we begin to understand why a teacher chooses the books they do and how they create safe spaces for individuals, we can begin to understand why some teachers may feel pressured to self-censor. This research provides information about how teachers in the southeastern United States are providing opportunities for their students. We also understand how teachers create spaces for students to feel comfortable in their learning. The choices educators make help to

understand the pressures that teachers may feel in creating classroom libraries and how it impacts their decision to include certain books within the classroom. This research helped to understand what books teachers are choosing and what classroom environment they want for their classroom.

Operational Definitions

1. *Book Bans*: A book ban is described as a legal action that is taken because of the content that is included in the book because of parent or community challenges, administrative decisions, or in response to action taken by lawmakers, which in turn leads to that book being inaccessible to students (Pen America, n.d.).
2. *LGBTQIA+*: Abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other queer communities.
3. *Safe Spaces*: environments that allow students to have the freedom to make mistakes without judgment and engage in critical, honest, civil, and challenging discussions about sensitive topics (Fievre, M.J., 2021).
4. *Diverse Learners*: students that differ in how they learn. Meaning they have different learning styles, modalities, interests, talents, and personalities that impact how they learn (Law Insider, n.d.)
5. *Culturally Diverse Books*: books that include LGBTQIA+, Native people, people of color, gender diversity, people with disabilities, and ethnic, cultural, and religious minorities (We Need Diverse Books, n.d.).
6. *Windows and Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors*: a book is a mirror when the students can see themselves represented in the literature. A book is a window when students see representation and others' lived experiences represented in the literature. Sliding glass

doors are when students can walk through into the imagination and become part of the story that the author has created (Bishop, R., 1990).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

There are a few assumptions that need to be addressed about this research study. This research study looked at the choices teachers are making regarding their classroom library. Within this study, interviews were conducted to gain access to first-hand accounts of what is occurring in teachers' classrooms. This can lead to the assumption that all teachers who will be interviewed for this study will answer questions with honesty. The assumption of honesty can be assumed due to the nature of who was being interviewed and the subject matter of the research study. Teachers have to go through extensive background checks and training to become a teacher.

Another assumption that is made is all teachers interviewed for this study are qualified and practicing educators. The individuals who participated in this research study are teachers who are currently working in the school system located in the state where the research is being conducted.

A third assumption that can be drawn is that all teachers who were interviewed are likely to have classroom libraries that are set up or are likely to have had classroom libraries set up in the past.

A final assumption that can be drawn is that teachers who choose to participate are interested in diverse storytelling to increase cultural diversity within their classrooms.

A limitation of this study is the limited amount of time to conduct and analyze the interviews needed to address the research questions that are presented. This study had a limited amount of time to complete all aspects of the research, which means that a limited number of

participants were used. This also indicated that another limitation of this study is that a small sample size was used during the collection of this research. Small sample sizes mean that there was a limited amount of data that was collected and then analyzed which limited the impact of this research. There is also a limitation of bias due to teachers who choose to participate in this study. The teachers who did choose to participate may hold stronger views and more diversified outlooks toward the subject matter of this study.

The specific area that was chosen for this study was being used because it helps to understand the choices teachers need to make in areas where laws and policies impact what can be presented to students in the classroom. The specific geographical area that was used for this study is an area that sees many policies that are impacting teachers and the choices that they make for their classroom libraries. Classroom teachers were used in interviews because they are the individuals who have to make these specific choices for their classrooms. Teachers have an understanding of laws and policies that impact them and their choices. Using teachers for interviews helped to gain first-hand knowledge of what choices these teachers are making. It allowed for a narrative approach to be used because we are taking their stories and knowledge to help build an understanding of why they are making specific choices for their classroom libraries.

Significance of the Study

Classroom libraries and the books that teachers choose to put in their classroom libraries have an impact on students. Good books can help students understand someone who does not share the same race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status as them (Flannery, M., 2020). Diverse books in classroom libraries create safe spaces for students and allow them to see themselves or walk into a world that may be different than their own. Teachers have to choose to

read these books aloud and share their enthusiasm so that students can decide on their own to seek these books out (McNair, 2016). Students are going to follow what their teachers give, so teachers need to be willing to provide support by recalling pieces of text during instruction, creating opportunities for deep dives, and keeping up with recently published materials (DeHart, J., 2022). Teachers have the opportunity to choose what books are in their classroom libraries and when they include diverse books, they are choosing to tell a student I see you.

Teachers need to provide students with opportunities within their classroom libraries for windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors to be explored (Henderson et al., 2020). The opportunity to provide windows and mirrors to students can improve how students see themselves but also understand how others feel. Books have the opportunity to introduce traditions that are important to different cultural groups which allows readers to make comparisons to their own lives (Bishop, R., 1990). Teachers can use shared reading times as opportunities to share books and have conversations with students where educational standards are met but expose them to different types of people and cultures (Prince, A., & Hayden, E., 2022). Using the shared reading time creates a path for students to explore these books in their classroom libraries.

Teachers have the opportunity to include many different options for students to read and give students voices. This research is important and will help the education community understand how teachers are making their decisions at a critical point in education. We need to understand why teachers choose certain books or why they might leave a book out. This research will help educators hear from each other about the difficulties that many face in their classrooms. By completing this research, there will be an increased awareness of how laws and policies are

impacting the choices teachers must make about what books they place in their classroom libraries.

Conclusion

Chapter one included an introduction to book bans and the importance of classroom libraries. The contextual background was given to provide insight into the importance and significance of the study. The purpose of this study is to understand the specific choices teachers are making about the books they provide to their students and the research questions that were presented show the purpose and connect to the theoretical framework that the study will follow. By completing this study, the voices of teachers were analyzed to understand what choices they make when it comes to the stories that they include in their classroom libraries to help students feel represented.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Books are being banned from many libraries due to the content that they discuss and often these books are diverse books that include experiences from LGBTQIA, people of color, people with disabilities, and other minority individuals (Perez, A., 2022; We Need Diverse Books, n.d.). Books that center on the voices of other individuals help students see the lives of others. When we incorporate diverse books in our classrooms and libraries, we can help students become compassionate individuals and expose students to many different cultures and identities (Prescott, 2022). Diversity in books allows students to explore and celebrate the uniqueness that makes them who they are and shares with them that they are celebrated allowing them to make connections between those stories and their lives (Yeros, 2020).

Diverse books are absent from bookshelves and missing from teachers' library collections, leaving students in the classroom to feel left out (Henderson et al., 2020). These books are missing from their libraries due to little to no funding or because teachers have to purchase these books with their own funding (Henderson et al., 2020). The books that create windows and mirrors for students are unavailable and students miss out on literature that reflects their experience and broadens their perspective. Windows and mirrors in books mean that readers are seeing themselves or they are seeing someone else represented in a book. When readers can see themselves it allows them to feel validated when they read, creating stronger bonds with what is being read. (Tschida, C. et al., 2014). Reading becomes unique when students find the representation that they long for in their education and what makes this unique is that there is the opportunity to share authentic experiences and appreciate those who are different (Garces-Bacsal, R., 2022). When students see a character that is different from themselves, windows are provided for students in books and then can become sliding glass doors. This means

that students can walk through the imagination and become part of the story that the author has created (Bishop, R., 1990). Diverse books and stories are lacking in classroom libraries and they are being removed because of specific topics that they discuss by book bans (Cahill, M., Ingram, E., & Joo, S., 2021).

Our world is forever changing, and students need to be ready to navigate the diverse world that we live in. Using diverse books in the classroom encourages students to be active citizens in a society that is transforming (Little, E. & Kendall, A., 2022). When students read books that show differing opinions they can build on their knowledge of other individuals. When diverse books are promoted in the classroom, there is a chance for them to think and respond critically to topics that promote different cultures, races, or ethnicities and they allow students to bring in their own experiences to make connections (Garces-Bacsal, R., 2022). Students can gain multiple perspectives from these stories and share authentic experiences with other students in the classroom. Those experiences help build empathy towards others.

Books that provide students with an understanding of others allows them to build a sense of community within the school environment (Prescott, 2022). Students can engage in materials that showcase the members of the community and bring students together. Nonfiction allows students to find topics that they are interested in and share a passion for, which encourages students to share what they learned with others in the classroom (Steps to Literacy, 2019). Informational text pieces can be a large benefit to students. When we provide non-fiction texts such as cookbooks or procedural texts, students can connect literacy to their home, community, and school (Kganetso, W., 2017). Cookbooks in the classroom can be considered approachable to students because they provide interest, text and visual features, and repetitive language (Walker, S. & Walker, N., 2018). Incorporating nonfiction books in the classroom library

encourages students to learn about new topics. Students are naturally curious and want to take in as much information as possible, regardless of the topic. Books have the opportunity to bring current event conversations into the classroom (Yadao, D., 2019) which can allow the students to learn something new together. Topics such as war, survival popular history, popular science, and true crime are popular with students and can be included within a classroom library (Barbour, B., 2023). Current events help students to make real-world connections and build off personal experiences (Seagraves, E., 2021). Diverse books emphasize where students could be different from one another which can help to reveal the truth of human experiences. It is important to understand that we all have similar things that we go through and unique experiences.

The use of diverse classroom libraries and books reflects the lives of individuals with different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds (Cahill, M., Ingram, E., & Joo, S., 2021). Books that allow students to see different perspectives can enhance their learning. Students can improve academically by reading these books and improving their ideas of others (Jeong, J., Gaffney, J., Choi, J.-O., 2010). This is not the only benefit that comes from having a diverse set of books in our classrooms. Students of different identities can often feel left out in what they read in the classroom and need to be provided with reading material that allows students to feel safe and represented in the literature that is presented to students (Henderson, J., et al., 2020). Diverse classroom libraries are vital to all students' learning (Prescott, 2022).

Importance of Classroom Libraries

To understand why diverse classroom libraries are necessary, it is important to understand why classroom libraries in general are important to students. When teachers create classroom libraries, they are encouraging students to read and also have better attitudes toward reading, improve their reading achievement, and increase comprehension skills (Coppens, 2018).

Classroom libraries encourage students to read more and allow for opportunities for collaboration with other students within the classroom. Students can have the opportunity to talk about the books they are reading with their peers which can increase an individual's motivation to read (Neuman, S., n.d.) When a child enters a classroom library it is important to have a wide range of books for students to read. There should be various genres, formats, and types that can be used when working on a specific content area (Catapano, S., Fleming, J., & Elias, M., 2009), providing students with multiple ways to obtain knowledge throughout the school year.

When classroom libraries include material that is fiction and nonfiction, students have the opportunity to increase their reading skills but learn at the same time. When non-fiction text pieces are placed in the classroom, students can ask themselves a question and go find the answer to that question at the moment (Neuman, S., n.d.; Palmer & Stewart, 2005). There are more opportunities to learn and grow when classroom libraries are present for students. Students can find a wide range of topics in non-fiction books in their classroom libraries which is an advantage to students and teachers can show students why nonfiction is just as important as fiction books (MacKay et al., 2020). Providing these topics and shedding a spotlight on the importance of reading is beneficial to our students.

Non-fiction text pieces are increasing in our classroom libraries and are allowing students to be exposed to these text pieces more frequently (MacKay et al., 2020), students need to learn more about a topic and not be constrained to only being able to do that on their specific library days. Even the use of cookbooks can bring students joy when added to the classroom library. Not only is the range of books increased, but students have the opportunity to gain new vocabulary skills, provide the opportunity to practice math skills, and provide students with a look into new

cultures and types of foods (Walker, S & Walker, N, 2018). Overall, nonfiction pieces in our classroom libraries add a new dimension to student learning.

Non-fiction text pieces are important for students to have in the classroom, but having fictional titles for students is also vital to each individual's learning. When teachers stock their classroom libraries it is important to have multiple copies of books for students to read and it is important to include titles that are popular and well-known to students (Coppens, 2018). Fiction books can help students by sparking their imagination and creating worlds where they can escape their reality. Creating an environment and providing books of different viewpoints allows a classroom library to be seen as an ally where the importance of reading and relationships shines (Weetman, N., 2023). An opportunity for students to become more involved in what is in their classroom library can come from the teacher allowing students to be part of the process. When students are involved in this process students gain confidence in what books they are choosing, and how books can be organized, and even encourage students to read books that they might not typically be interested in (Jones, 2006). Students have the opportunity to be exposed to multiple ideas from the books that they find in their classroom library. Allowing students to take part in the decision-making can also improve the content that is housed in the classroom library (Wolpert-Gawron, H., 2015).

Classroom libraries are vital to a teacher's classroom. To spark interest in reading, books need to catch their attention, captivate their imaginations, and make them want to go back to that book over and over again (Neuman, 2001). The books that teachers choose to include in their classroom libraries activate students' thoughts and decisions. Having a range of books in a teacher's classroom library allows students to broaden a student's perspective and the ideas they can obtain (Capstone, n.d.). Students are provided with opportunities to make their own choices

and decisions when they are provided with multiple books that invoke these perspectives.

Teachers decide what to put in their libraries, but students are deciding what to take from them.

Diverse Classroom Libraries

Building diverse classroom libraries not only builds confidence in the learner who is reading the book but also builds self-esteem when they find themselves represented in a book (Capstone, n.d.). Classroom libraries should be representative of who students are in a classroom. A teacher can look at their population and make choices of what to include in their library. Students need to have access to texts in which they see themselves and their experiences (Blintt, J., 2020). These aspects of our books need to be authentic, and it is why having a diverse set of characters, a diverse setting, and diverse stories and authors adds to the value of to classroom libraries (Catapano, S., Fleming, J., & Elias, M., 2009). When you have a variety of books in the classroom, students can make better connections to the stories. When students create these connections and see themselves in their reading, we can build their self-esteem as a person and as a reader (Capstone, n.d.). The connection that occurs when diverse books are presented to students can be used to a teacher's advantage. There is a bond that the teacher and the student can hold on to as they learn and grow in that particular classroom through the books that are present in the classroom (Spika, J.,2022).

Books provide students mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. This concept was framed by Rudine Sims Bishop (1990). Books can be windows, giving individuals views of the world that are real or imagined but they can also be sliding glass doors as individuals can walk through and into the imaginations of what the author has created (Bishop, R., 1990). She continues to say that literature can also reflect to us as we see our own lives and lived experiences as part of a larger experience. Books inspire students and reading takes them to

places that encourage thinking and pushes them to find new perspectives. Having students explore books that can be windows, mirrors, or sliding glass doors (Henderson et. al., 2020) can create a relaxing safe space for students. Students also have the opportunity to share what they are learning from these stories and spread positivity within the classroom and in the school environment.

When teachers incorporate books that create windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors, our students then have a choice to create new learning pathways. Diverse books are important and reading these books is important. By reading diverse books aloud teachers give students the opportunity to make connections to the characters and allows them to find the parallels within their own lives (Maynard, J., 2020). Engaging with the text helps bring the lessons taught in the classroom to the next level when students can explore them in the classroom library. When discussions and activities are centered around what they are reading it can help students process the information brought to them from the books (Blintt, J., 2020). Having students' complete activities related to classroom library books can help other students understand their importance. The classroom library helps to bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world, allowing students to make real-life connections to what they are learning in the classroom (Maynard, J., 2020).

Teachers may lack books that provide students with windows and mirrors. In that case, more books are needed in teachers' classrooms that provide students the opportunity to understand gender identities, family structures, and disability experiences (Henderson et al., 2020). When students are presented with these ideas, they can build an understanding of topics they otherwise may not have been exposed to (Henderson et al., 2020).. Stories with diverse concepts add value to a student's education (Flannery, M. E., 2020). Teachers have the

opportunity to provide these concepts through books. Teachers need to know what books they have in their classroom libraries, and where they purchase their books from, and understand different awards that highlight diverse books (McNair, 2016). Knowing what they have in their classrooms can help them when purchasing new titles but understanding the content of the books is just as important. When teachers take time to learn about books in their classrooms, it will increase the likelihood that they will end up in that teacher's classroom.

Safe Spaces

Safe spaces are environments where students feel comfortable making mistakes without being judged and having conversations about topics that they might not be comfortable with (Fievre, 2021). Teachers can provide students with safe spaces by validating students' emotions and feelings towards topics with the understanding that disagreements can happen in the classroom (Flensner & Von der Lippe; 2029). Safe and inclusive environments encourage students to be open-minded and allow students to find security in their educational settings. Safe spaces, or safe zones, can encourage teachers to learn more about their students and be more culturally present, meaning teachers understand and know the lives of their students, in their lessons (Villegas & Lucas; 2022).

Safe spaces in the classroom allow students to open up to teachers and more willingly share their thoughts and ideas about who they are. Addressing issues of diversity, human rights, and social justice within the classroom is an important aspect of their physical curriculum as well as their hidden curriculum (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Meyer et al., 2015). Addressing these issues with students is important because it validates their emotions and affirms their experiences (Fievre, 2021), but students need an area where they feel comfortable doing so. When students are comfortable in the classroom, they are more likely to learn about

others, challenge and expand their viewpoints, and develop effective communication skills with other students in the classroom (Holley, L. & Steiner, S., 2005). Spaces like these encourage students to learn and grow because teachers and students work together to create an environment where all students are accepted, and ideas can be shared freely and appropriately (Kiedaisch, J., 2018).

Classroom libraries can help create a safe space for students with books that promote thinking and encourage students' questions. Teachers can use classroom libraries to create safe learning environments and are also for every kind of student that teachers have in their classrooms (Kiedaisch, J., 2018). When students feel overwhelmed, they can find the classroom library to be a place of calm, safe spaces that can provide targeted support for students where they can learn to deal with stress, conflict, and injustice (Gunn, J., 2018). The spaces that we use for our classroom libraries are places where students are comfortable and free to be themselves (Cellucci, 2017). When teachers choose to make spaces like these in our classroom, they allow students the choice to use them to feel comfortable and be themselves (Davis, S., 2019).

Legislation

Recent legislative action has been taken to make sure books that do not fit certain ideals and values are removed and inaccessible. States such as Texas, Florida, Missouri, Utah, and South Carolina led the way in book bans this past school year (Meehan, K. & Friedman, J., 2023). A new law in Tennessee makes it a felony for a book publisher, distributor, or seller to give books that are considered to have "obscene matter" to public schools (Lopez, S., 2023). Laws that have been passed in these states leave a vague understanding of what can stay on bookshelves or what needs to be removed, creating confusion about what it means for their classrooms (Treisman, R., 2023). In some states, educators feel the pressures from these laws

and fear punishment if they are not compliant with them (Meehan, K. & Friedman, J., 2023). Without clear guidance or with the lack of interpretation of the laws, districts have temporarily restricted or removed hundreds of books due to the pressures from different advocacy groups (Pendharkar, E., 2023).

In the state of Florida, the “Parental Rights in Education Bill” otherwise known as the “Don’t Say Gay” law (Diaz, J., 2022), and the “Individual Freedom Act” otherwise known as the “Stop WOKE” act (Reilly, K., 2022) have taken the forefront. The “Don’t Say Gay” bill limits classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in kindergarten through third grade and as students get older the topics are delivered in age-appropriate ways by state standards (Tolin, 2023). Individuals who are in support of this bill say that it is meant for parents to determine if and when topics such as LGBTQ can be introduced to students and give parents the option to sue if the policy is violated (Diaz, J., 2022). The “Stop WOKE” act prohibits teaching someone that they should feel guilty because of their race or their sex (Tolin, 2023). When Governor Ron DeSantis spoke about the bill, he stated that this law would make sure that students do not feel equal or shamed because of their race (Reilly, K., 2022). These legislative actions lead to educators losing their licenses for noncompliance and leave very little instruction on how these apply to books or libraries. Teachers in Florida have removed their classroom libraries or have stopped lending books to students due to these new state laws because they do not want to be in trouble for giving access to any of the books the state has banned (Griffith, J., 2023). The lack of interpretation of these policies led to many different types of books being removed from bookshelves to ensure that violations were not occurring (Lavietes, M., 2023).

The state of Texas leads the book ban movement and has already banned 801 books from libraries and schools (Meehan, K. & Friedman, J., 2023). Many of the titles that have been

banned from school libraries touch on topics such as race, racism, abortion, and LGBTQ representation (Lopez, B., 2022). Just recently, the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, signed a bill that bans “sexually explicit” books in schools and sets a new set of standards that school librarians have to follow when they add new books (Gore, H., 2023). School districts in Texas will have to report their content each odd-numbered year and submit compliance reports to ensure that all books follow state rating requirements. Librarians want to provide students with diverse content that shares the lives of others, but state legislators are removing these voices and censoring what students can read and cannot read (Hixenbaugh, M., 2022). There is much uncertainty in Texas as these new laws are going into effect (Schwartz, J., 2023).

In the state of South Carolina, there is a legal challenge occurring due to a book that was banned by a school board. The family and local NAACP chapter are suing the Pickens County School District, saying the school board’s decision was unconstitutional (Donovan, S., & Gregory, S., 2023). This is the first time that a book ban is being challenged legally in the state as 109 books are already banned across multiple districts (Meehan, K. & Friedman, J., 2023). House Bill 3728, or the “Transparency and Integrity in Education Act”, passed the House and will move to the Senate. This bill will prohibit certain topics such as teaching students that an individual’s race, ethnicity, color, or national origin is superior or that an individual is inherently privileged or oppressed from classroom discussions in South Carolina schools (Mondale, A., 2023). Those who support the bill state that instruction that occurs in the classroom needs to be unbiased and provide a broad scope of history (Mondale, A., 2023). While this bill is still making its way through the State Department, it is very unclear what this could mean for the future of education in South Carolina.

The state legislature has been impacted by advocacy groups such as Moms for Liberty, Citizens Defending Freedom, and Parents' Rights in Education (Factora, J., 2023). For example, the Moms for Liberty and Citizens Defending Freedom groups advocated for the expansion of the "Don't Say Gay" legislation in Florida and pushed for the removal of LGBTQ books in K-3rd grade classrooms (Chavez, N., 2022, Factora, J., 2023). Many of these groups describe themselves as defending parental rights and have shifted their focus to diverse books in classrooms (Harris, E., & Alter, A., 2023). The organizations want to give parents a say in what their children are reading in the classroom and push legislative actions in many southern states such as Florida, Texas, and South Carolina (Alfonseca, K., 2023).

Texas, Florida, and South Carolina are three states that have passed laws or have items that are on their way to becoming laws. Teachers are losing their jobs because they are using stories that address topics such as gender stereotypes and adaptations of topics such as Anne Frank's diary (Treisman, R., 2023). Legal action in many states is removing a lot of books from classrooms and libraries (We Need Diverse Books, n.d.). With the continued pressure of book bans, more groups and individuals are pushing back and trying to encourage individuals to read banned books. Pan American and Penguin Random House have filed lawsuits of their own against a district in Florida for how it removed books from libraries and is seeking to have those books put back on the shelves (Susskind, S., 2023). Groups such as We Need Diverse Books and Diverse Books for All are working to bring more literature that honors all individuals into the hands of students (Diverse Books for All, n.d. & We Need Diverse Books, n.d.). Book bans are taking diverse experiences from our students and legislative actions continue to make that possible.

Harm of Book Bans

When we ban books from classrooms and libraries, we harm the students who are represented in the stories. Book bans remove books that represent marginalized individuals and tell our students that they do not belong in the classroom or the school in which they attend (Perez, A., 2022). Removing these stories perpetuates negative ideas about the students that the school serves. The removal of books from libraries and classrooms is not random and takes books out of the classroom that share a specific idea or topic of information (Spika, J.,2022). When the books are taken out of the classroom, students are robbed of ideas or topics that they can relate to (Spika, J.,2022). When students who have specific connections to those stories see those stories removed, they watch adults criticize their unique experiences, which makes them feel unworthy (Alvarez, B., 2022; Spika, J.,2022). These students can also run the risk of not feeling valued in society when the books that represent them are not there for them to read (Bishop, R., 1990). When there is a lack of access to these books, we impact our students more than we think.

For students who do not see their experience, or the experience of others reflected in the books being banned, they lose the ability to learn empathy for issues that other individuals face daily or understand themselves (Spika, J.,2022). The books that could help someone understand what another person is going through are being removed. When we remove these books from the classroom, we are potentially creating gaps in knowledge for young learners (Alvarez, B., 2022). Diverse books are crucial to students who need to learn ideas from new perspectives, and they allow these students to learn about issues that others face daily (Spika, J.,2022). Books leave room to nurture a love of reading but also affirm multiple perspectives and expose them to the values, viewpoints, and historical legacies of others (McNair, J., 2016). The books that we want

students to read, the ones that are going to expand their ideas, are the same books that are being lost at an alarming rate. When we start removing books from the classroom, it impacts our students. School libraries are supposed to represent all students so they can explore diversity safely and positively (Davis, G., 2022). Censoring books denies students' knowledge that can help them to be successful out in the world as leaders, advocates, and allies in the community (IDRA, 2022). Removing books takes away the student's ability to understand themselves and who they are. When we remove these stories from the hands of students, we harm their education. When information is censored students end up with holes in their learning and with no understanding of other religions, cultures, and beliefs (Upham, B., et al., 2022). This prohibits students from becoming well-rounded individuals and forces them into a single mindset. Book bans do not help our students but push them to only think one way.

Summary of Literature Review

Books bans are occurring frequently all around the country, removing valuable books from classroom libraries and removing the value of diversity along with them. When a good book is in a classroom it can help students understand someone who may be of a different race, sex, religion, or socioeconomic status (Flannery, M., 2020). Authors who write many of the books that are taken out of the classroom are writing their truth and their existence in the world (Lyons, A., 2023). These authors want their voices to be heard and they want students to be able to learn from their experiences. Book bans are happening because these books tackle ideas that are different or tackle ideas that might be considered controversial. The authors that write these books are exposing their truths and proving the point that they need to be heard. Book bans take authenticity out of the classroom, meaning that students are not part of the typical mold or have

families that are different and are not represented in the literature that is in the classroom. We need students to create connections to stories and build their self-esteem.

Teachers can create comfortable and inviting classrooms for their students when they promote books that show different ideas. Having students explore books that can be windows, mirrors, or sliding glass doors (Henderson et. al., 2020) can create a relaxing safe space for students. Students also have the opportunity to share what they are learning from these stories and spread positivity within the classroom and in the school environment. Teachers choosing to read books that are different helps to create enthusiasm for reading but also can help students to seek books that they are also enthusiastic about (McNair, 2016). Books allow students to share their cultures and allow their readers to make connections to their own lives (Bishop, R., 1990). Those connections can foster a love for reading and a love for others in their classroom and out in their communities. When teachers select books that are different or books that represent someone else, they are telling students that it is okay to try new things or telling them, "I see you for who you are".

The current issue of book bans is a critical point in education and understanding more about what books are being banned or topics are banned can help teachers. Teachers need to be able to still make an impact on students and removing more books might lessen the impact that a teacher can have if students do not feel represented in the classroom. Our students need to feel represented and book bans take that away from them. When we allow students to become absorbed in the books that they read, we only enhance how students identify themselves and appreciate others who are different from them (Garces-Bacsal, 2022). Students need to get lost and go on adventures through what they read, and book bans make that impossible to accomplish.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this narrative case study is to understand the choices that teachers are making when considering what literature to put in their classroom libraries. This chapter includes the methodology of this research study to better understand how students are seeing different viewpoints in books and how they are represented within their classroom. This section will also describe the research questions, setting, and participants. The procedures of the research study are described so that the study can be replicated in other areas by other researchers. The data collection section describes how the data will be collected and gives specific details about how participants will be selected for the study. Lastly, the data analysis section describes how the data will be coded and analyzed to understand how teachers are making choices about the books that they are placing in their classroom libraries.

Research Design

Throughout this research, I used a narrative case study approach to better understand how teachers choose diverse books for their classroom library, and how laws impact these choices. This study also looked at how teachers provide students with opportunities to explore differing viewpoints through books. A narrative case study approach was selected because it will look at the experiences of teachers through their lived and told stories and identify a specific case that will be described and analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 67 & 97). The use of narrative case study research will help to build a deeper understanding of the subject being researched and will help to understand why teachers make the choices they do. The use of narratives helps to tell the story that teachers will tell about their lives and experiences (Bruner, J., 2004) creating classroom libraries and giving insight into the many choices that they make daily. By using a

narrative approach, the researcher will be required to be respectful to the participants and create a positive environment during the interviews, ensuring genuine narratives from the teachers (Woolhouse, C., 2023). Because narrative research is used to understand the experiences of individuals, the use of this qualitative approach will be best to understand the questions presented in this research study.

In this study, teachers were interviewed in focus groups. Focus groups capitalize on the communication and interaction of individuals to gather data (Kitzinger, J., 1995). Focus groups are important to this study because teachers will be able to interact with each other and share their experiences. The purpose of the focus groups is to allow teachers to share information that they are comfortable with and will possibly give more than a one-to-one interview would yield (Krueger, R. A. & Casey, M. A., 2014). Focus groups were based on dates and times that teachers selected in a pre-study survey. Surveys sent out were for interest and scheduling purposes only and were not collected for data. During the focus groups, teachers will have the opportunity to share what choices they make with providing diverse books in their classroom library, how laws impact those choices, and what opportunities are being provided to students to see differing viewpoints through books.

Role of the Researcher

As someone who advocates equity in education, I am passionate about sharing the stories of those who are marginalized. I find myself represented by many of the books and stories being removed from classroom libraries and am passionate about the representation of diverse individuals. I am currently a practicing teacher and understand many of the laws and policies that are in practice today and the difficulties that surround them. I started teaching because I wanted to be able to help students feel comfortable in who they are as well as be represented within their

classroom. After reading article after article and hearing frustrations from other teachers, I wanted to understand more about how teachers are able to provide safe spaces for their students and also see what books they are putting inside their classroom libraries with the ongoing laws and policies. Through interviews with educators of varying grade levels and subject areas, I will be able to analyze and record the specific things teachers are doing or not doing to provide their students with opportunities to explore differing viewpoints through books in their classroom libraries. This research will also help to understand how they are providing safe spaces for students through classroom libraries and how laws impact what teachers are placing in their classroom libraries.

Qualitative research allows for the collection and analyzing of data to dig deeper into the problem that is being studied (Merriam & Tisdell, 2019). As the researcher, it is important to collect and analyze the data from the focus groups appropriately. I will design and conduct the study in a manner that will ensure that all participants are protected, and confidentiality will remain intact. The individuals for this study will be students who are attending a university located in the southeastern United States. I have no professional or personal relationships with any of the individuals being interviewed for this study. I am not in a position of power over any of the educators that will participate in this study. The data that will be collected in this research study will be used to help understand how teachers are providing students with opportunities to explore differing viewpoints through literature in their classroom libraries. The data will only be shared in the findings and discussion sections of this research study. Participants will be given pseudonyms to ensure their identity remains anonymous. To help monitor and reduce bias I will make sure the focus group questions are fair and that my own opinions are not influenced by them. I will report all of the data and results honestly regardless of the outcomes.

Trustworthiness

Within this section the multiple ways in which trustworthiness will be established within this study. Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are the four areas that should be addressed within qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The understanding of these four areas will show the authenticity of this research. Trustworthiness is beneficial to qualitative research and crucial to assessing qualitative research (Adler, R., 2022).

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research occurs when the results or findings from the research are congruent with reality (Stahl, N. & King, J., 2020). When credibility is maintained, it creates trustworthiness throughout the research study. To obtain credibility within this narrative case study, I used different locations and settings that are related to the environment (Guion, L., Diehl, D., McDonald, D., 2011). Due to the nature of this study, using environmental triangulation allowed me to understand if the same occurrences are happening in each school and grade level environment (Guion, L., Diehl, D., McDonald, D., 2011). After all of the focus groups were completed the individuals who participated were allowed to review recordings and transcripts to confirm that no mistakes were made, otherwise known as member checking (Lincoln Y. S. & Guba, E. G., 1985). The practices that are being used ensure that the information that will be presented is accurate and credible.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research is vital because it shows that the study can be replicated by other researchers (Lincoln Y. S. & Guba, E. G., 1985). In this study used a detailed interview protocol that used questions that were open-ended, digital recordings for analysis of the transcripts, and note taking through the focus groups.

Transferability

Transferability was established by providing readers with the findings from this study that can be transferred to other studies, topics, and situations (Lincoln Y. S. & Guba, E. G., 1985). I looked at my own biases as they relate to the topic of this research study to ensure that they do not influence the results gathered from the data. Thick descriptions were used to portray possible applications to others' situations and will contain contextual information about the areas in which teachers are working (Lincoln Y. S. & Guba, E. G., 1985, Stahl, N. & King, J., 2020). Environmental triangulation was used to establish validity within the study (Guion, L., Diehl, D., McDonald, D., 2011). It will be up to the reader to determine transferability from the findings that will be presented.

Confirmability

Confirmability shows that the findings of the study are shaped by the participants rather than by the researcher (Lincoln Y. S. & Guba, E. G., 1985). To gain confirmability within this study, I explained my own beliefs, values, and assumptions to minimize bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was also important to maintain the confidentiality of any answers that were given by the participants in the study by giving pseudonyms (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All the participants were allowed to review their interviews to confirm the accuracy of the data and findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify how teachers are providing students with opportunities to explore different viewpoints through literature in classroom libraries.

The three research questions that are being studied are:

RQ1: How do teachers provide students with opportunities to explore differing viewpoints through books in classroom libraries?

- If teachers choose to provide a classroom library, how do they give students opportunities to explore the books provided?
- How do they use the school library to help students explore differing viewpoints?

RQ2: How do teachers choose books and materials to create safe spaces for diverse learners through classroom libraries?

- If teachers do choose books and materials to create spaces through classroom libraries, how are they doing so?
- In what other ways are teachers creating positive environments for students?

RQ3: How are laws impacting how teachers select books to include in their classroom libraries?

Procedures

This section describes the steps that were used to guide the narrative case study. Included within these sections are the permissions that were obtained prior to the research being conducted and the study site and participant selection. Finally, information about the collection process and the data analysis process is described.

Permissions

Prior to any research being conducted, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Coastal Carolina University. IRB approval was obtained before permissions are gathered from the Dean of the College of Education and Social Sciences and the Coordinator for the Literacy Education program. The IRB letter and any other requirements were sent prior to data collection.

Study Site & Participants

During this study, teachers from various school sites and grade levels participated in the focus groups. The teachers that participated in this study were students who are part of a master's program at a public university located in the southeastern United States. The teachers that were interviewed work in schools located within multiple counties in the southeastern United States and teach grades pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. Therefore, the location of the teachers will vary. The individuals who are in this program are working towards a degree in Language, Literacy, and Culture with a concentration in Literacy. These specific individuals are teachers who are already in the classroom, but their years of experience will vary. The educators who are part of the program hold an interest in literacy and could provide valuable insight into the current issues within their area.

This study will concentrate on teachers who are located in the South where diverse topics are being heavily debated. Due to the tensions surrounding diverse topics in the area, teachers could feel hardships about what they can and cannot include in their classrooms (Mondale, A., 2023). Teachers who teach various grade levels will help give insight into the differences between grade levels. The difference in grade levels will provide different perspectives because of the age of the students that they teach. What occurs in an elementary classroom will be different than in a high school classroom. Regardless of grade level, teachers will be comfortable sharing with one another and will provide insight into what is occurring in their classrooms regarding their classroom libraries (Krueger, R. A. & Casey, M. A., 2014). The study will specifically look at how teachers in southern counties provide students with opportunities to explore differing viewpoints in books and how that can create safe spaces for diverse learners.

Data Collection

Consent was collected from the chair of the Literacy program as well as the Dean of the College of Education and Social Sciences prior to the interest survey being emailed to the educators within the program. Participation in this research study is completely voluntary and students will not be penalized for not participating. An interest email was sent to teachers who are part of the Literacy master's program. This email consisted of a short introduction to the purpose of the study as well as a link for an interest survey. The survey was used as a tool for educators who are interested in participating in the focus groups. Within the survey, they were asked to select their top three dates and times that they can participate in the focus groups. The purpose of the survey was for scheduling purposes only and was not used to collect any data or analyze it in any way. A total of nine teachers participated in the study to create three focus groups. Each focus group consisted of 3 teachers each. After interest surveys are collected the three focus groups were created based on the dates and times each of the teachers provided in the surveys. The participating teachers received an email after the creation of the groups to inform them of the date and time of their focus group interview. This email contained the date, time, and link for their online interview. The email also contained a link to a consent form for each educator to participate in the study and the recording of the focus groups.

The use of focus groups is the most beneficial method for this research as it allows for themes to be shared and explored. Focus groups will allow teachers to shed light on this topic from their perspectives and their individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69). The use of focus groups will highlight the choices that are being made and having teachers from a variety of grade levels will help to provide perspective at different age levels.

A total of four focus groups were created and each group consisted of 1 to 5 teachers depending on their availability. Focus groups were used because they allow teachers to hear from others which could help bring up ideas and concepts (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 164). Each focus group was scheduled in the afternoon or evening after the school day to accommodate teachers' schedules. Focus group interviews were 30 minutes long. The teachers were not asked to meet during the school day to ensure it did not take away from student learning time. Teachers participated virtually using a video conferencing program to help teachers from traveling to participate in the focus groups. The video conferencing program also allowed for the focus groups to be recorded. From the recording, transcripts were generated from the video conferencing program that was used for interviews to be analyzed for themes.

An interview protocol was developed before IRB approval that outlined an introduction to the focus groups and outlined guiding questions for the teachers. The interview protocol contained questions that align with the research questions and allows for alignment with the study's purpose (Castillo-Montoya, M., 2016). At the beginning of each focus group, I reminded teachers that interviews were being recorded but pseudonyms will be used and reported in the final paper. Educators were prompted to introduce themselves by giving the grade level they teach, what subject(s) they teach, and a book that they love to read to students. Starting with the basic information helped as a warmup to build trust between myself and the interviewees (Jacob, S. & Furgerson, S. P., 2012). I served as a facilitator during the focus groups and allowed the teachers to guide the conversation. The questions that posed during the focus groups allowed for discussions between teachers and were organized in a way that aligns with the research questions (Jacob, S. & Furgerson, S. P., 2015). Teachers had the opportunity to share the choices that they

make on what books they include in their classroom libraries, how they provide safe spaces to students, and how laws impact what choices they make for their classroom libraries.

Focus Group Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to the group, including the grade level you teach, what subject(s) you teach, and give a book that you love to read to students.
2. Tell me about your classroom library.
3. When you use the school library, what types of books do you access for your class?
4. Describe how you find materials and books that meet the needs of all of your students for your classroom instruction and materials. Do you use those same methods when selecting your books for your library?
5. How do you create a classroom environment where students can study various viewpoints?
6. How do books help with this?
7. In what ways does your classroom library foster the exploration of different viewpoints?
If you don't have a classroom library, how do you expect that it could support students with this?
8. How do you or could you use the school library to give students the opportunity to study multiple viewpoints?
9. What laws or policies impact books or materials that can be placed in the classroom?
10. How are laws and policies impacting how you make selections of books and materials to include in your classroom library?
11. How does public opinion impact your selections?

12. Give any last details about the importance of your classroom library and the impact current legislation is creating in your classroom library.

Plans for Data Analysis

After focus groups were conducted, recordings were transcribed and cleaned to ensure accuracy. A transcription program was used to do the initial transcription. After the initial transcription, I went through and cleaned up any errors that were found by listening to the interviews. After the recordings were transcribed and cleaned, I coded the transcriptions and my notes from the focus groups. To code the transcriptions in vivo coding (Manning, 2017) was used to emphasize the spoken words from the teachers. By using in vivo coding, I was able to understand stories and ideas given through the words of the participants (Manning, 2017). In vivo, coding allowed me to interpret the participants' words and phrases in an analytical sense, take what they said at face value and discover emerging themes. The first round of coding discovered the initial themes and ideas. The first round of coding helped to bring initial codes to group specific words and phrases that relate back to the research questions. The second round of coding helped to find examples from the themes that were found in the initial round of coding. The second round of coding helped to find specific examples relating back to the research questions. In the third round of coding the themes and examples were organized using the research questions.

After analyzing all of the interviews and coding for themes, I was able to relate this information to my research questions. When coding, I highlighted and used specific colors to match each specific research question. This helped to organize the information that was given through the interviews. The notes that are taken during the focus groups were also be coded with the same colors to help organize themes and relate the information to my research questions.

Because in vivo coding was used during data analysis, specific quotes were taken from the transcriptions. Taking specific words from the teachers helped to create the narrative of the choices teachers are making. Through these focus groups, I was able to determine how teachers make choices about what books to include in their classroom library, how they choose safe spaces, and how laws impact their choices for their classroom library.

Summary of Methods

Chapter three presented a description of the research design and the narrative case study approach that will be used for this research study. Data was collected through focus group interviews. The researcher collected, analyzed, and synthesized data to show what choices are being made and how laws are impacting those choices in the classroom. Confidentiality was maintained through all of the interview and analysis portions of the research. Finally, all procedures were outlined to show how the research study will be conducted.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this narrative case study was to understand the choices that teachers are making when considering what literature to put in their classroom libraries. Books have the opportunity to give readers a deep understanding of other individuals and themselves, showing learners that students and their characters are connected in intricate ways (Sotirovska, V. & Kelley, J., 2020). This study used a narrative case study design to understand the choices teachers are making on what books and materials to include in their classroom libraries. A narrative case study was appropriate for this study because it was important to understand educators' stories and use a specific case to analyze how teachers are including diverse literature in the classroom (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 67 & 97). This chapter will describe the findings of the research study including participants and narrative themes and subthemes. The chapter will end with a summary of the section.

Participants

The participants who were involved in this study were given pseudonyms. Ten participants randomly signed up through an interest survey. Of the 10 participants, 9 of them were classroom teachers and 1 of them was a school media specialist. The 10 individuals who participated in the study were from various areas in South Carolina and teach grades PreK-12th. For this study, elementary school is defined as grade levels PreK-5th, middle school is defined as grade levels 6 –8th grade, and high school is defined as grades 9 -12. Quotes were used from each of the participants to share the significance of their classroom libraries and the pressures they feel to exclude diverse stories. Responses collected from each participant were included to

show the significance of their experiences and to solidify the themes and subthemes collected from the data.

Table 1

Educator Participants

Educator Participant	Grade Level
Nick	Elementary
Maggie	Elementary
Arizona	Elementary
Callie	Elementary
Nick	Elementary
Cristina	Middle
Stephanie	Middle
Meredith	Middle
Amelia	High
Owen	High

Results

This study used a narrative case study approach to understand how teachers are giving students the opportunity to explore different viewpoints through literature in their classroom libraries. This case study allowed teachers to share their thoughts on how they are encouraging students to see multiple views on different subject areas. Educators in this study also shared their frustrations with public opinions and how laws and policies have made their way into the classroom setting. The primary research questions and sub-questions that were presented previously focus on how teachers are providing different points of view to students, how their libraries create safe spaces, and how laws and policies are impacting what book selections can be included in their classroom library. The collection of data from the focus groups are direct

correspondence on the tough choice\ teachers are making to include diverse materials for their students while also staying clear of punishment from outside opinions. The data that was collected through focus groups was analyzed and coded which brought out specific themes to be presented.

Theme Development

During the coding and analysis, 4 major themes, 4 sub-themes, and 19 codes were identified from the 4 focus groups interviews conducted. Focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed. The researcher read the transcripts to determine what teachers said they were doing to promote the exploration of positive viewpoints through their classroom libraries. During the coding process, the major themes identified were welcoming classroom libraries, diversity in literature, and censorship. Important quotes were highlighted during the coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 194). Themes are not listed in order of significance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With each major theme identified, subthemes emerged that correlated with the major theme (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 190-191). Each theme and subtheme will be addressed further.

Table 2

Themes Development

Theme	Subtheme
Welcoming Classroom Libraries	Explore Different Points of View Lack of Independent Reading Time
Diversity in Literature Windows and Mirrors	
Censorship	Age Appropriate Public Opinion and Policy

Welcoming Classroom Libraries

The first theme identified in the data was that each teacher prioritized having a welcoming classroom library and that their primary goal was to have students feel comfortable in their classrooms. Teachers who were interviewed found that creating a welcoming classroom environment and library was important to reach their students. Classroom libraries can include a wide range of books that can meet the needs of their students by expanding classroom content, showing different holidays, and giving them something fun to read. Teachers who were interviewed gave examples of how they are doing this in their classrooms.

A few of the teachers stated that they did not have classroom libraries in their current classrooms due to moving from one grade level to the other. Still, many of them stated that in their previous rooms when teaching younger grade levels their classroom libraries always ranged from engagement books to content-specific books. One of the teachers interviewed, Cristina, stated, "A lot of my classroom library books came from what I had accumulated over the years from various teachers or donations from parents... and ranged anywhere from picture book read-aloud for hooks or engagement, content specific things, or novels to engage higher level readers." The wide range of books included in her classroom library encourages students to find books that they are interested in. Classroom libraries hold value for teachers at all grade levels and give students the opportunity to explore. Arizona, who was interviewed finds books about holidays to include in her library. She also included touch-and-feel books and books that hold student interest to meet the needs of all of her students. Arizona states "I have books such as that (black history month books), just different ranges depending on what we have going on." Having very young students doesn't stop her from including books that her students are interested in regardless of the level of the book. Middle school teachers talked about including

content-specific books about the water cycle and in math, Stephanie stated that she includes Pi Day books. Finally, in the high school setting, students can explore higher-level research materials but also enjoy books ranging from *My Little Pony* to *The Hate You Give*. The materials teachers place in their classroom libraries are specific to their students and encourage them to explore. For example, Amelia, stated, "I've been creating a collection of banned books for my classroom library. So, I pull up the list of banned books and I try to add to it every year and now I have a whole section." Educators are creating multiple learning opportunities for students and allowing them to find joy in reading.

Teachers use classroom libraries to help students expand their reading, but when what they have isn't enough, the school library can often be a good resource for them. Nick stated, "I will often pick a lot of non-fiction books [from the school library] because I don't have access to that in my classroom." Nick finds that being able to supplement his fiction books with non-fiction text helps students in his classroom. Having access to both types of books in his classroom creates experiences for students that they might not normally have. Nick is using his classroom library as a way for students to explore the world around them. Maggie and Levi stated that the school library has been a good place for them to find materials for projects that they work on in the classroom. Maggie stated, "When we do research projects, that's been the biggest time that I'll go and utilize the library." Teachers use these moments to help students build on their reading and research skills. Callie, a school librarian, stated, "Teachers will come in and ask for specific books or just ask to browse books for read-aloud in their classroom." She further stated that teachers will often come to find books on a particular subject to display in their classrooms for the month. Teachers are finding ways to include different types of books to go with topics that naturally occur each month. Educators explore ways to include as many

materials as possible to meet their students' needs. Classroom libraries, along with school libraries, create immersive educational experiences for learners.

Explore Different Points of View

Educators encourage learners to share their points of view and learn from others. Point of view is a critical skill for students to explore at multiple grade levels. In a higher-level learning environment, this gets expanded. Owen stated, “We have to talk about perspectives that are in conflict, aspects in disagreement perspectives, and how that enriches the conversation.” Multiple perspectives are helping to expand students’ thinking. Many of the teachers shared in their focus groups that the curriculum lends a hand to help students learn about the importance of point of view. Meredith explained that they are working on an argumentative unit and students must see an argument from both perspectives. Meredith said in her focus group, “They learn about the bias and looking for bias, seeing both sides of the argument and being able to evaluate both sides, so see it from both perspectives and then not if they agree or disagree.” She also stated that most of the viewpoints they discover are standards-based. Meredith isn’t the only teacher who praised their curriculum and instruction for teaching students about multiple points of view. Stephanie stated teachers should “Be open to guide students to see all the perspectives so that they can learn that there are different points of view and it’s okay to agree and disagree and go through the emotions with them.” The curriculum that educators use encourages students to understand that we all have different points of view.

A teacher’s classroom library can also promote this type of learning and instruction. Amelia discussed the books that she has within her classroom library, especially the banned books. She said that having banned books in her classroom allows for students to explore diverse viewpoints that students in her school haven’t experienced or been exposed to. She

stated, "I try to encourage kids to read things that would help them see different viewpoints in life. That way they can build empathy and understand how to help others when the time comes." Another example of this comes from Nick who encourages students to pull any book off the shelf in his classroom library. He explained this by saying, "If I have a book about something they want to read, by all means, read it. I give them the opportunity to read whatever they want to read." The openness of his classroom library is a freeing experience for students where multiple points of view and perspectives are available for all students. From a school librarian's point of view, Callie finds that promoting books encourages students to read different types of books. She stated, "I try to display different authors that they may not be familiar with." She also went on to say that she would bring students to different parts of the library to show them books that are similar to the ones the students are reading. When Callie is taking students to different parts of the library they are being exposed to new materials and ideas. When these new materials are then checked out by the students they are gaining a new perspective about a particular topic. The exploration of multiple perspectives is being encouraged in classrooms.

Independent Reading Time

Positive reading opportunities can occur during independent reading time. 6 teachers said students can go to the library and check out books to read for independent reading. Middle school teachers stated that during their homeroom time students can read if all of their work is completed. Stephanie stated, "I currently allow my students to read their books in the morning during advisory or on their computers." She went on to say that students love to come in and read and explained that "Even being a math teacher I'm definitely open to reading for pleasure. Enjoy it." Cristina also stated that students get to go to the school library every few weeks to pursue what appeals to them. All of the middle school teachers I interviewed stated that they

have a difficult time finding other opportunities for students to read independently and wish that they were able to allow students to do it more often. In the younger elementary grades, independent reading time is often included during workstations. Maggie stated that when she taught first grade, she had a station for students to pick out a book and read. Maggie stated, "Part of their workstation was just reading where they had to go pick out a book and read it and there was a listening center so they could flip through the book while they listened to the story." She teaches 4th grade now and still encourages her students to read but now she has more chapter books for them to read in her classroom. Arizona, a PreK teacher, mentioned, "Based on the color of the basket that they see they know where to get a book that they want." Arizona is using the colored baskets as a focal point to encourage students to pull books out and read. Arizona is using colored baskets to help her young students find books that they can flip through and explore literature on a topic that interests them even at a young age.

Diversity In Literature

The literature that can be found in the classrooms creates places for students to explore different people and places around the world. Amelia described the diverse books in her classroom library as banned books. Amelia stated, "I've been creating a collection of banned books for my classroom library. So, I pull up the list of banned books and I try to add to it like every year and have a whole section." She said many of the diverse books that she has been able to bring into her classroom are ones that include topics such as LGBTQ, hate crimes, or books about a specific culture. She also explained that these books help to get students interested in reading and encourage her students to take them home to read. She explained, "I encourage kids to pick books off of it and take them home and read them on their own or if we have downtime in class, they are welcome to grab any book." Nick considers his students in the classroom as he

selects books. He has a bilingual student who is always trying to find books in both his languages. He stated, "I've had children of Indian descent and found books on their holidays and different celebrations that are culturally relevant to his own home life, his own background."

Maggie and Levi also explained that they have books in their classroom libraries that are in all Spanish or in English and Spanish. Having something students can relate to when they walk in the door is important to many teachers.

The characters and situations that characters are faced within books can help students relate to others. Levi, a middle school teacher, stated, "I think having books that face issues that they overcome but I also think it's about the diversity within the characters of the books." He goes back to when he was in high school and read his first book with a gay character and remembers how seen it made him feel. Books can create opportunities for students to feel seen and valued. Callie expressed that books are out there so students can experience other people and other places that they might not have the chance to go to. Nick described that same thing when he talked about the little exposure his students have had to things. "Books are the best way for them to explore their world, at home or in my classroom.", stated Nick. New perspectives are right around the corner when students can pick up books.

Windows and Mirrors

Rudine Sims Bishop framed the idea of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors when she said that books reflect someone's own life, allow another to be seen, and encourage readers to walk into someone else's imagination (Bishop, R., 1990). Windows and mirrors in books allow teachers to give new experiences. Nick stated, "Books really are windows for those children to see into places they normally wouldn't see." He continued by saying, "Them [students] reading a book, maybe the closest they get into their adult life to get to the beach, to

seeing the sand, feeling the breeze on their skin.” A few of the teachers interviewed said they work at small schools or in small areas where diversity is limited. Amelia states, “They are able to read about other situations and other problems that other kids are going through, that they might not have ever thought of before or thought would really apply to them, but they see it as interesting.” The windows and mirrors students find spark interest that allows them to find new interests. Callie shared with the group that books need to be windows and mirrors where students are not only seeing themselves, but they are also learning about other perspectives from the books they read. She explained, “There is a big phrase in the librarian world. Books need to be windows and mirrors. So, we don’t want books just where kids are seeing themselves or their own experiences cause while that’s great, they’re not going to be able to explore other opportunities.” Students having access to books that give multiple perspectives gives them new experiences and opens their eyes to new ideas. Cristina expressed that she believes many middle school teachers try to fill their classrooms with books that reflect both windows and mirrors for their students. Many teachers said that if they could have more books that gave windows and mirrors for students without backlash, they would include them more often. Stephanie stated that in middle school, students are learning to understand themselves and if they were able to include books with windows and mirrors for students, we could let the students see themselves to help them understand who they are.

Censorship

The biggest theme that was found through these focus groups was how teachers are feeling censored about what they can and cannot have in their classrooms. Three teachers who were interviewed expressed the lack of censorship or pressure from policy while the other seven teachers expressed frustration with the policies that hinder their choices. Many teachers who

were interviewed stated they were hesitant to put certain books in their classrooms because of backlash from their districts. Some teachers didn't feel that pressure and that was due to working at a charter school which offers more flexibility or because of the grade level at which they teach. Arizona, the PreK teacher who was interviewed stated that her students were not aware of certain topics and used what they liked at the time. She also stated she has not felt any pressure from her parents or her district with what she has placed in her room. One of the high school teachers I interviewed said his students are guiding the conversation rather than him and are choosing a lot of what they read. Owen stated, "I let the students navigate their own what is appropriate for them as reading." The pressure of what students can read isn't on him because his students are making the choices.

When speaking to some teachers, it was mentioned that their schools have committees monitoring the books being bought for the school library. When the librarian wants to purchase new books, this committee meets and uses specific guidelines set by the county. Other teachers also stated that they knew of a committee and were supposed to look through their personal libraries to ensure there were no controversial books. Levi said, "I feel like controversial is a very big umbrella that includes a lot of things that probably shouldn't be controversial." Books that could be helpful for students are removed because the district thinks it is "controversial." Amelia spoke of her time in a previous district and mentioned how restricted she felt. She says, "Whenever they started passing laws about what we can and cannot be taught in the classroom, we were given a list of books and texts we could teach. We were not allowed to teach anything that was not on that list." She followed by stating in her current school, she can teach whatever she wants to. She continued to say it helped her gain the attention of her students and engage with them.

Age Appropriate

A few of the teachers that I spoke with about their classroom libraries talked about how diligent they are to make sure all of their books are age-appropriate for their students. Meredith stated, "I have to watch and make sure things are age appropriate." She expands on that by giving a story about a time a student brought a book that was not age-appropriate to her attention. Even when books are being purchased for her classroom, she always has her librarian check the book to make sure it is safe to put in the classroom library.

Callie mentioned that she must be careful in the books she is choosing for her school because what might be appropriate for one age level might not be for another. She said, "Go in with care and caution, but not necessarily be like we're never going to talk about this but approaching it in a way that is age-appropriate for them." Though no examples were given, Callie understood that there is a way to include certain material but knew that there is a fine line that some have to walk with what they have in their classrooms. Again, no specific examples were given, but Nick said it is important for him to choose age-appropriate books and that he knows there are specific topics he does not need to discuss with the students.

Public Opinion & Policy

Teachers interviewed feel they often struggle when buying books and materials for their classrooms. Maggie shared in her group that she worries that a student will read something, and a parent will be upset because of what the student read. Maggie shared, "I would direct them to our media specialist, and if there is something that she thinks relates maybe she can help the student find it." She stated that she doesn't want to have any books in her classroom that could lead to that and stated that she would rather have the librarian handle that type of situation. Levi stated in his focus group that he feels like there is a big public opinion on what can go in our libraries

whether that is in the classroom or the school. Levi mentions, "I've thought about putting an LGBTQ book in my classroom because I want those kids who might need that book, but I just can't bring myself to it." He does not want to get in trouble or face a lawsuit because of the one book in his classroom library.

Nick told his focus group, "I don't think about it, I just buy it because I feel like it's relevant for my children." Nick said that if he feels like it is relevant for his students, then he is going to put it in his classroom. Amelia gave details on what she is doing to help bring parents into the conversation with the stories that they are reading in the classroom. She stated, "I try to send home letters before we start reading a specific section of a book." She also stated that she tries to encourage parents to have conversations with their children. She followed by saying she wants students to understand a different perspective rather than whether or not parents are approving of what they are reading in the classroom. Stephanie wants to be able to incorporate more books in her classroom library but feels that the district puts pressure on what she can or cannot include. She said, "I feel like we're put into a box specifically from the district of what we can have or can't have, and that's limiting us to have different perspectives." Cristina also said something similar, "There have been times where I shy away from things just out of fear of backlash." Meredith found that many books have been taken out of the curriculum from the district because of it being too controversial for the classroom. She said that over the years she has noticed more things disappearing from their curriculum. Callie said that she has noticed public opinion and that there are people around the state who are worried about losing their jobs because of the books they have. One teacher, Nick, said, "There's a lot of politicians and people who support those politicians that have a lot to say about education, but they have never been in the classroom."

Two of the teachers that I spoke with didn't find that there was any concern based on the current state of their teaching and their classroom. Owen said he sends out a weekly email addressing everything discussed for the week. All his readings are in this email, so parents and students know exactly what will happen each week. Owen expressed, "Maybe part of it is parents and students always know what the readings are in my class in advance I haven't had any issues in that area." He credits that as why he does not have any issues. Arizona stated that with her young students, she does not worry about parents being concerned about what they are reading. She said that parents worry about their children being successful in the classroom and at a young age diverse books are not as prevalent. Arizona explained, "I don't have that problem at this point with parents because they are just so little, there are not so many choices you can pick." For Arizona, the lack of diverse books for students at younger ages ensures that parent concerns are not a factor.

Conclusion

This chapter provided the results of the data collection and analysis. The data collected was coded and analyzed. The following themes emerged from the coding procedures: welcoming classroom libraries, diversity in literature, and censorship. The themes presented align with how teachers use their classroom libraries for students to explore multiple viewpoints in books and how laws impact their selections.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this case study was to understand how teachers are choosing books to support diverse learners and how laws and policies are impacting their choices. The narrative case study was conducted using the following research questions:

RQ1: How do teachers provide students with opportunities to explore differing viewpoints through books in classroom libraries?

- If teachers choose to provide a classroom library, how do they give students opportunities to explore the books provided?
- How do they use the school library to help students explore differing viewpoints?

RQ2: How do teachers choose books and materials to create safe spaces for diverse learners through classroom libraries?

- If teachers do choose books and materials to create spaces through classroom libraries, how are they doing so?
- In what other ways are teachers creating positive environments for students?

RQ3: How are laws impacting how teachers select books to include in their classroom libraries?

The data collected from focus group interviews allows for research questions to be reviewed.

This chapter will consist of the discussion and interpretation of findings, implications of findings, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

The data collection was conducted by focus group interviews with educators who teach ages PreK-12th grade. The data described the struggles that teachers are facing with choosing to include multiple viewpoints in their classroom libraries and materials or books to include. The

following themes were found from the data: welcoming classroom libraries, diversity in literature, and censorship. This case study was guided by three central research questions and four sub-questions. The themes and sub-themes found from the data are significant in answering the central research questions and four sub-questions.

Central Research Question 1

How do teachers provide students with opportunities to explore differing viewpoints through books in classroom libraries? The theme, diversity in literature, and the subtheme windows and mirrors aligned with this research question. The teachers who were interviewed during the focus groups expressed how books give students the opportunity to gain new perspectives from diverse books in their classroom libraries. Nick shared in his focus group that his students do not have a lot of opportunities, such as experiencing the beach, accessible to them, so being able to include books in his classroom offers those students a chance to see, hear, and feel different places and perspectives. Along with Nick, Amelia, Stephanie, and Meredith are choosing to incorporate as many diverse materials as they can within their curriculum and within their classroom libraries. Classroom libraries hold the potential for positive learning outcomes (Neuman, S., n.d.). When books hold multiple perspectives, they can target diversity (Capstone, n.d.). Four of the teachers stated that with the push in districts to hold less diverse books teachers are shying away from having them worried they will get in trouble. They choose to not include certain titles but state that the stories that those titles offer bring diversity to students and should be available in the classroom. Levi stated, "I feel like the type of diversity that we should expose the kids to, or at least give them the opportunity to be exposed to or have it available to students." There is an importance to having diverse books and characters in classrooms (Catapano, S., Fleming, J., & Elias, M., 2009).

Sub-Question One

If teachers choose to provide a classroom library, how do they give students opportunities to explore the books provided? The theme of welcoming classroom libraries aligns with this research question. Teachers with classroom libraries are doing what they can with their curriculum and libraries so that students can explore literature. This aligns with previous research in that teachers are exposing students to literature to build on their love for books and increase reading achievement (Coppens, 2018). The teachers spoken to during the focus groups showed they allowed their students to get involved in the books going into the classroom library. Amelia stated, "I had each kid pick out whatever book they wanted on thrift books, and I ordered it. I didn't ask questions that enriched their choice. I just went ahead and bought it for them." This was a common practice that was shared by a few of the teachers. Getting students involved in the process of choosing books enriches the library by giving students a voice. This correlates with previous research, stating that when students are involved in the decision-making process it improves the content that is in the classroom library and encourages students to read different genres (Jones, 2006; Wolpert-Gawron, H., 2015). Each of these teachers found that if students were involved in the process, they were more likely to use the library. Teachers who are in elementary-level classrooms are promoting literature by displaying books in their classroom libraries. Books related to the topic or theme for the month are displayed for students to easily access when independent reading time occurs in the classroom. Maggie stated, "I had set books that we pull out every month, and these were read-alouds there we were going to do in the month, and they could also choose to read them on their own." The use of multiple books and different topics helps students learn new things throughout the entire year (Catapano, S., Fleming,

J., & Elias, M., 2009). Teachers at multiple grade levels give students the opportunity to be involved but also promote them for students.

Sub-Question Two

How do they use the school library to help students explore differing viewpoints? The theme that aligns with this research question is diversity in literature. Teachers use the school library to supplement what they do not have in the classroom. Maggie stated, "If a student were to come up to me looking for a certain book, I would direct them to our media specialist or librarian." She stated she was more comfortable sending students to the librarian regarding certain topics, but did not expand on what those topics were. This piece of data sheds new light on how teachers are shielding themselves from the uncertainty of laws and policies. Having their librarians handle specific requests relieves some of the pressure from laws and policies that can make teachers uncertain about what they can and cannot have (Meehan, K. & Friedman, J., 2023). While Maggie uses her librarian as a shield, Stephanie is using her librarian to bring more literature into her classroom. Stephanie stated, "I always try to ask my librarian how math people can get in there. In the elementary world, we were pulling books all the time and it had to do with social studies or science." Stephanie was using her school library to supplement content-specific topics and to diversify what her students were learning about. The use of books helps bring content to students and allows them to process the information in different ways (Blintt, J., 2020).

Other teachers mentioned that they have found books disappearing from the library or the book fair. Levi mentioned, "The Heartstopper series was part of the book fair last year. I remember because I saw it at the book fair, it's such a great book and the main characters are gay. And they pulled it out." When he questioned why the book was removed, he was told it was

because of the gay characters. Because of the diverse characters in the book, it was then removed from the shelves because it was found to be inappropriate. This matches with current data and findings stating that because of the diverse content of the book is it removed from the hands of many students (We Need Diverse Books, n.d.). Maggie discussed with her focus group the library committee that must meet each time the librarian wants to purchase new books. She said, "I don't know if the county had those guidelines or if the state of South Carolina sets them, but there is a big list of guidelines that you have to follow and make sure each book goes along with them." Each time new books are purchased the books are vetted to ensure that they are not controversial. This too coincides with what has already occurred in many states, and if a book does not fit a certain idea or value, it is being removed from the hands of students (Meehan, K., & Friedman, J., 2023).

Callie, a librarian in a small rural district, stated, "Teachers come in and ask for specific books or just browse for read-alouds." With small budgets and being in a small district she often will have to refer them elsewhere, "We currently don't have books and as always, budgets are pretty small, so it's a lot of referring them to online resources or connecting them to a public library." With younger students, Arizona finds that her student's likes and dislikes are always changing. She said, "Depending on them and where they stand that day in that moment is what we are going to go with." The library is a good option for Arizona to keep new books in her student's hands.

Conclusion of Research Question One and Sub-Questions

Research question one and its sub-questions addressed how teachers are providing students with multiple viewpoints through books in their classroom libraries and school libraries. Teachers are finding it difficult to keep certain books in their classrooms due to laws and policies

but want to provide students with as many different viewpoints as possible. Diverse classroom libraries help students to spark interest in new topics and ideas and makes their learning personal (Blintt, J., 2020). Two of the teachers who spoke during focus groups shared that their students have a heavy hand in what is included within the classroom library. Keeping students involved in the decision-making process encourages students to read. When teachers allow their students to be part of the process, they gain confidence and allow for exposure to different types of books (Jones, 2006). Teachers are also finding that books are disappearing from the shelves of their school libraries. The school libraries can be a place to supplement what teachers are already doing in their classrooms but when items are removed, they struggle to make the content relatable. Overall, the teachers who were interviewed understand that their classroom libraries are a focal point for students to see diverse literature and characters.

Central Research Question Two

How do teachers choose books and materials to create safe spaces for diverse learners through classroom libraries? The theme that aligns with this research question is welcoming classroom libraries. Teachers from the focus groups stated having books in their classroom libraries that were relevant to their student populations was important. Teachers also found that having books ranging in reading level was important because all students were on different journeys. Amelia stated, "I had each kid pick out whatever book they wanted. I didn't ask questions. I have a lot of books that I pick up at thrift stores that I think the kids would be interested in." Amelia found that working with her students to find appropriate materials for their classroom library helped students to feel accepted (Holley, L. & Steiner, S., 2005). Amelia found that it was important for her students to know their voices were heard in the making of her classroom library. Meredith stated, "When we have a book fair, I ask my kids to tell me their

choices. If I have money to purchase the books, I then display them for the kids to check out and I encourage them to do that.” Cristina talked in her focus group about the books that she chose for her classroom. She stated, “My new titles, mainly ones that I had picked up from the book fair, are historical fiction, but also just some titles that I felt like my kids had enjoyed in the past or had been drawn into such as the I Survived series.” She tries to keep books in her classroom that would be relevant to her students. Callie finds that as the school librarian, it was important for her to find new books when she was hired. “When I came into my school this year, the collection was very outdated. So one thing we have been working on is not just diversifying it, but getting more relevant books for students,” Callie stated. Nick finds that including books about his student’s culture helps to create positive learning environments. He says, “I found books on their holidays and different celebrations that are culturally relevant to their home life.” He understands that each of his students is different and stated, “I don’t want to be caught empty-handed for that child, I want them to have something they can relate to any time they walk into my door.” Levi finds it important to have a range of books in his classroom. He stated, “It ranges from low-level bedtime stories to the Percy Jackson or Harry Potter series.” He also finds that having books that the library is getting rid of also helps him build his classroom library. Each of these teachers described the way in which they are creating a safe environment for their students by including books that represent their students. They ensure that each student is represented, and the environment is comfortable for learners to be themselves (Cellucci, 2017; Davis, S., 2019; Gunn, J., 2018).

Sub-Question Three

If teachers do choose books and materials to create spaces through classroom libraries, how are they doing so? The theme that best aligns with this research question is windows and

mirrors. Teachers who were interviewed found that books allow students to explore topics and places they might not have access to. Nick stated in his focus group, “Books really are windows for those children to see into places they normally wouldn’t see.” He expressed that books can show students new experiences. Ones that they might not have the chance to do or see. This creates new learning pathways for students and allows them to make connections with their own lives (Maynard, J., 2020). Callie discussed having books available to students that show other perspectives. She says, “Books need to be windows and mirrors. We don’t just want books where kids are seeing themselves or their own experiences because they are not going to be able to explore other opportunities.” Giving students the opportunity to read books about other places can open their eyes. When books provide windows and mirrors for students, they are able to learn about different perspectives and experiences (Bishop, R., 1990)

Sub Question Four

In what other ways are teachers creating positive environments for students? The theme that best aligns with this research question is welcoming classroom libraries. Teachers who create welcoming classroom environments for students want them to try and make mistakes. Levi and Maggie both found that having a sense of community in the classroom is important. Maggie stated, “Having that sense of community within the classroom so that they are comfortable enough to speak about their feelings.” Levi shared with his focus group, “I think it’s the classroom environment, establishing an environment where kids feel welcomed, safe, and accepted to make mistakes.” These teachers validate the emotions of their students and teach them how to be open-minded with other students (Flenser & Von der Lippe, 2019). Teachers feel that students need to feel comfortable to speak their own minds and have their opinions heard. Amelia uses her classroom library to build book love. “I encourage kids to pick books off and

take them home and just read them on their own.," Amelia stated. Amelia wants students to go into the classroom library and find new inspirations. Meredith creates a positive environment by allowing her students to be part of the classroom library. She stated, "I ask kids to tell me their choices." She encourages them to give suggestions of books they want to see in their classroom library. Teachers can choose books for their classrooms that have relatable characters to help students develop a sense of community and support their learners through reading.

Conclusion of Research Question Two and Sub-Question

Research question two and its two sub-questions addressed how teachers are providing safe spaces for their students. It also addressed how teachers are creating positive environments for students. Teachers stated in focus groups that they want students to feel welcomed when they come into their classrooms. Many of them stated that their classroom library helps to create an environment where students feel represented, and their voices are heard. These research questions helped to identify how teachers are creating a sense of community in their classrooms.

Central Research Question Three

How are laws impacting how teachers select books to include in their classroom libraries? The theme that best aligns with this research question is censorship. Teachers who were interviewed for this case study revealed their concerns with including diverse books in their classrooms. Many of them expressed fear of backlash from parents or their district for having a book that could be labeled as controversial. Levi discussed wanting to include a pride book in his classroom library, but he said, "I just can't bring myself to it because I don't want to get in trouble. I don't want to face a lawsuit because I have some book that has a rainbow on it." This aligns with previous research in that teachers are feeling pressure from the policies because they fear there will be punishment if they do not comply (Meehan, K. & Friedman, J., 2023). Because

of district policy, teachers are frustrated with the limited access to books in the classroom but also fear backlash from parents over certain titles. Many teachers also stated they have noticed more and more titles being removed from the curriculum each year. Callie discussed that age-appropriate conversations in the classroom are important, and a balance of caution and openness must be considered when discussing diverse topics in the classroom. These books being removed from classroom libraries takes important ideas and topics out of the classroom (Spika, J., 2022). While some teachers are worried about parents and their district two other teachers shared that they are buying materials and books for students regardless. Nick and Amelia both feel that if it meets the needs of their students then they purchase it. One teacher has a whole shelf in their library of banned books. Students have the ability to read them and share ideas about them. They share that if it is age-appropriate, students should have access to it.

Conclusion of Research Question Three

Research question three discussed the impact that laws and policies have on books that teachers can and cannot put in their classrooms. The teachers that were interviewed found that they are hesitant to put certain books out because they do not want to get in trouble. There is frustration from teachers because books and titles are disappearing, and they are beneficial to students and their learning. The books that are being removed from the classroom are important to the growth of students. It was also found that there are a few teachers who do not care and put books in their classrooms anyway. These two teachers feel that students need to be exposed to certain types of literature.

The data that was collected throughout shows that teachers truly care about what is in their classroom libraries and they want to put what is relevant, but many of them are uncertain about what books are going to be considered appropriate. It was also very evident that the

teachers genuinely care about their students and want them to be successful in the classroom. Allowing students to choose what they want to read can be very beneficial and give them the motivation to read more stories. What was found through these focus groups was teachers willing to do whatever they can to help their students understand themselves and their classmates.

Implications of Findings

Glaser's choice theory (1999), was used as the theoretical framework in this study and states that we choose everything we do. This approach worked well with this study due to the choices that teachers are making regarding the books that they are selecting for their classroom libraries. The theory suggests that teachers are taking in information constantly from district policies and public opinions and having to make choices based on the information they are receiving (Glaser, 1999). The choices teachers make are a direct reflection of the information they are taking in. These pieces then translate into the books that teachers are including in their classrooms. The findings from this study align with choice theory (Glaser, 1999) in that teachers' choices are being impacted by policies and outside opinions which is limiting students' ability to explore diverse points of view in the classroom through a classroom library. Choice theory also aligns with the two teachers that did not limit their choices. These teachers are still making the choice to include the diverse materials in their classroom libraries to meet the needs of their students. The teacher who had the younger students found that the choices she is making for her students were more related to their age than the material. Overall, the teachers who participated in the focus groups are still making a choice in what to include in their classroom libraries which aligns with the theory. Many of the teachers who were interviewed stated that they make choices that are best for their students and want to support their students' learning

needs. Choice theory helps us to understand that the teachers who are making these choices are making them for their students. The decision of what books to include in their classroom library stems from the decisions that districts are making. Teachers then make the decision on how that impacts their own classroom.

Diverse books in the classroom benefit students but teachers are having a hard time keeping them in their classroom due to laws and policies. The shared experiences of the participants confirmed that book bans and policies in districts make it difficult for teachers to choose diverse books to include in their classroom libraries. This research supports that books that include diverse topics allow students to feel represented in the literature and give windows and mirrors for the exploration of new ideas is vital to students learning (Bishop, R., 1990; Henderson, J., et al., 2020; & Prescott, 2022). All study participants shared their frustrations with book banning and restrictions in the classrooms. In addition, they all advocated for diverse books for students to access in the classroom and learn from them. This matches with previous research about classroom libraries and diverse literature allows students to see the importance of reading and build relationships with students (Weetman, N., 2023). The teachers that were interviewed shared that books allow students to see different perspectives, but they are being removed from libraries and the curriculum each year. Book banning efforts hinder the education that students are receiving, and it fails to provide students with valuable information.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this narrative case study, recommendations for future research have emerged. A replication of this research study using a larger sample size and teachers from other states where book bans are rising will help strengthen the conclusions. Although this research focused on all grade levels, there could be an investigation on each specific grade level

to see their experiences at a larger scale. Research should be done in states where book bans are high and where book bans are lower to see the comparison on what books can be included in the classrooms in each of the states. Also, research can be completed in geographic areas that hold more diverse populations to determine if it impacts what choices teachers are making for their students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to understand how teachers are providing students with opportunities to explore different viewpoints through literature in classroom libraries. This study used Glasser's choice theory (1999) to understand why teachers choose specific books and materials to create safe spaces and how laws and policies are impacting how teachers choose to include books in their classroom libraries. Educators were interviewed in focus groups during this study. The data was analyzed and coded into four main themes: welcoming classroom libraries, diversity in literature, windows and mirrors, and censorship. The most important takeaway from this case study is teachers understand the importance of including books in their classroom libraries and that they provide students with multiple perspectives but are careful with their book selections due to policies and backlash.

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