It's not on the list: An exploration of teachers' perspectives on using multicultural literature

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English teachers must consistently design high-quality and balanced literature curricula that necessarily involve the purposeful integration of multicultural literature.

Multicultural education is not a remedy for social inequality, and it cannot guarantee academic success. At the same time, if one of the primary purposes of education is to teach young people the skills, knowledge, and critical awareness to become productive members of a diverse and democratic society, a broadly conceptualized multicultural education can have a decisive influence. (Nieto, 2004, p. 390)

Today's classrooms are microcosms of the larger society of the United States: a sea of faces representing a plurality of cultures, races, religions, and ethnicities. In the English language arts classroom, we must forge a sense of interconnectedness and community within this diverse student population so that the resulting classroom community is an inclusive one pervaded by attitudes of open-mindedness and mutual respect. The classroom community should afford all of its members the opportunity to be respected for their own unique sets of differences as well as encourage them to develop a respect and appreciation for those whose cultural and ethnic backgrounds are different from their own. A high-quality and balanced literature curriculum is vital to creating this inviting classroom community.

Although literature is only one strand of the English language arts curriculum, it is at the heart of everything English language arts teachers do in the classroom. Recognizing that students learn best when the strands of the English language arts curriculum are taught holistically, many teachers use thematic units as a means of organizing and presenting instruction. Frequently, various literary works provide an organizing framework for these units (Maxwell & Meiser, 2001; Milner & Milner, 2003), and students further hone their literacy skills through activities designed to elicit meaningful responses to texts. For these reasons, English language arts teachers bear the tremendous responsibility of selecting texts that speak to their students' cultural heritage and broaden their respect and appreciation of the heritages of diverse groups.

The importance of creating this type of inclusive classroom environment has been identified in the Standards for the English Language Arts (International Reading Association [IRA] & National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 1996), which states that students should read works that “reflect the diversity of the United States' population in terms of gender, age, social class, religion, and ethnicity” (p. 28) and that teachers should consider students' interests carefully when choosing works for inclusion in the curriculum. The Standards recognize that
multicultural literature and diversity in students' reading selections provide a means of helping students "build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience" (p. 29).

Promoting mutual respect, self-reflection, and empathy is an important goal as well, and multicultural literature can serve as a mirror of students' own cultures and a lens through which they can view the cultures of others. The Standards for the English Language Arts (IRA & NCTE, 1996) value language as a medium to promote understanding—a characteristic vital to students' success in today's pluralistic society. Through meaningful interactions with multicultural literature, students can discover the universality of the human experience that unites people of all backgrounds. Although many national organizations (e.g., IRA, NCTE) advocate the inclusion of diverse literary works, the practice of teaching a well-rounded and balanced literature program does not always reach English language arts curricula at the local level where numerous variables affect the curricular decision-making process.

For these reasons, this project began as a follow-up to Stallworth's (1997) study conducted to determine the extent to which English language arts teachers in one southern U.S. state's public schools integrate multicultural literature with the curriculum. The 1997 study was also a survey focused on teachers' integration of multicultural texts only. In the years following that study, the debate has continued because discussions and decisions about the content of English language arts curricula continue to be a complex process. But, if Bushman and Haas (2001) are correct, the inclusion of diverse literature in our 21st-century English language arts curriculum is crucial because facilitating students' development as lifelong readers and promoting global understandings are two of the most important goals for any public school.

This study extended the earlier investigation by again using a survey to ask teachers to identify the book-length works they include in their curriculum. The survey included open-ended questions designed to ascertain the teachers' reasons for including or excluding multicultural and young adult literature. Presently, we focus only on teachers' selections of book-length works and their perspectives on teaching multicultural literature versus traditional literature. In future publications, we will explore more fully their perspectives regarding young adult literature.

A brief review of the literature

Multiculturalism and the "good literature" debate

Many teachers subscribe to the notion that good literature is classic literature—traditionalist texts that have withstood the test of time. In a study done by Bigler and Collins (1995), many teachers worried that multicultural literature would not be in the same category as "good literature" and would not have "staying power" (p. 14). In this same study, other advanced-track teachers concluded that their college-bound students would "lose out" by not reading more traditional texts (p. 14). Most of these teachers defined good literature with the old adage, "I know it when I see it" (p. 14). Narrowly defining good literature as only the books that fit into the Western canon is troublesome. In fact, Bigler and Collins argued that this curricular framework serves the purpose of "disadvantag[ing] particular groups" by "the literature choices offered to students and the ways in which such selections are handled in the classroom" (p. 1).

Others like Godina (1996) equated good literature with the term contrapuntal analysis, which endorses the reading of both traditional and nontraditional texts. Godina asserted that students will gain a better insight and cultural understanding of their pluralistic society if Western ideals coincide with the teaching of multiculturalistic perspectives. In other words, multiculturalists are not asking teachers to stop
teaching traditional works; instead, they ask teachers to extend their current reading lists to be more reflective of America’s growing diversity. This will help to unlock the “multiple voices and perspectives” (Banks, 1993) of minority authors, not dilute the educational value of school-based curricula. By moving voices from the margins to the center, students can embrace and celebrate that which is all around them. No longer would students read a restricted canon based on “the works of ‘dead white guys,’” especially when they inhabit a world that is “no longer predominantly white and male, and certainly not dead” (Robinson, 2001, p. 69).

Multiculturalism in practice

Classroom research reveals the need for teachers to contextualize multicultural literature as we have always done with traditional literature. That is, the integration of multicultural literature into the curriculum will not be successful if teachers do not help students situate the literature into larger literary traditions. In this way, students can recognize the importance of the history the literature represents (Jupp, 2000). Furthermore, Allender (2002) suggested that students are better able to “locate” themselves in, appreciate, and enjoy diverse literature when they are exposed to broad representations (e.g., mythology, non-fiction, poetry, short stories) of those cultures. Multicultural literature can provide mirrors through which students can read about situations that resemble their own worlds and discover the richness of cultures other than their own while learning to appreciate and respect differences.

Good teaching must be present if multicultural literature is to be a valued and “normal” component of the secondary English language arts curriculum. As Auciello (2000) pointed out, the curriculum must be challenging and engaging, but the curriculum is no substitute for good teachers who facilitate students’ positive experiences with literature, greater desire to read, and more thoughtful frames of mind. In Robinson’s (2001) urban high school, for example, the English department decided to engage their 94% white student body in multicultural literature conversation. Robinson and her colleagues realized this need when a student asked, “Do you mean that there are writers who are considered great who write in a language other than English?” (p. 69). In an effort to enlighten their students about contributions of authors from various literary traditions, the English department exchanged a number of “traditional” texts for multicultural texts. Not only were there positive responses from the students themselves, but also the parents in the community supported the department’s successful curriculum change. Teachers must purposefully provide opportunities for students to read extensively and use literature as one way to think deeply and critically about their own worlds as well as the worlds of others. Good teachers who read widely themselves and create rich literacy communities where students do the same are more able to contextualize and teach multicultural literature well (Miller, 1997).

The study

Participants and setting

This study involved 142 English language arts teachers employed in 72 different public secondary schools in Alabama, a state located in the southeastern United States. The state’s total population is approximately 4,600,000. The most recent available data show that 739,678 students are enrolled in public K–12 schools in the state, of which 50.1% are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003). The racial makeup of the public school student population is 60.2% white, 36.3% black, 1.8% Hispanic, 0.9% Asian, and 0.8% American Indian. The per-pupil expenditure is US$6,029 (NCES, 2003). There are 867 public secondary schools (Alabama State Department of Education, 2004). Table 1 details the demographics of the teachers who participated in the study.
**Procedures**

Two research questions guided this study: (1) What are the book-length works most frequently taught in the state’s public secondary schools? and (2) What are English teachers’ reasons for including or excluding multicultural literature in their curricula? A survey that was both quantitative and qualitative in nature was created to investigate these questions. The teachers were asked to list the book-length works for each grade level they taught during the 2002–2003 school year and the 2003–2004 school year. The qualitative section focused on teachers’ responses to the following open-ended questions about their reasons for including or not including multicultural literature in their curricula: (1) Do your selections include writers from diverse backgrounds and experiences and if so, how? and (2) Do you include book-length works from authors of non-European descent? Why or why not? Which authors of non-European descent do you include?

Because this was a statewide survey, the names of all secondary public schools in the state were retrieved from the state department of education. This comprehensive list was first divided into four distinct regions (north, south, east, and west) to ensure a geographically representative sample. Then the schools within these regions were categorized by school size (determined by student population) to ensure representation of small, medium, and large schools. Within our six school-size groupings for each of the four geographical regions, three schools were randomly selected, yielding a final total of 72 secondary public schools. Two-hundred and sixteen surveys were mailed, an average of three per school, and 142 completed surveys were returned, equaling a return rate of 66%. To get a more varied response from the schools surveyed, each department chair or senior teacher was asked to distribute a copy of the survey to a teacher for each grade level, which included grades 6–12.

**Analysis**

The quantitative data were analyzed to determine which book-length works were taught most frequently in order to develop the lists of top 10 works. The qualitative data were studied to determine emerging patterns and trends using the constant comparative analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984). This analysis included careful reading and re-reading of all the teachers’ relevant responses by the members of the research team. After examining the data that were collected, recurring themes were noted. During subsequent readings, a matrix was developed using the themes. A table was created to code the frequency of the references made about uses (or lack thereof) of multicultural literature. Quotations that were representative of the themes that emerged from the data were selected. To produce an accurate representation of the research findings, as well as to control for researcher bias, data were triangulated across the members of the research team.
Results and discussion

Qualitative results are organized around the following themes that emerged in the analysis of the teachers’ responses to the open-ended questions: (1) Traditional Stability, (2) The Evolving Nature of "The Classics," (3) The Issue of Censorship, and (4) Other Obstacles. Discussion and critique of the teachers’ perspectives are interwoven throughout the section.

Traditional Stability

Although this study yielded a wide variety of texts (nearly 320 different book-length titles) the frequency with which English language arts teachers taught certain books or plays resulted in two very similar top 10 lists as shown in Table 2.

According to Applebee (1996), the reading lists now found in state departments of education evolved from Harvard’s English department and a few other American colleges. They produced a required reading list from 1874–1883, which included 15 different authors such as William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, John Milton, and Washington Irving. Authors like Shakespeare and Milton were part of this original list because of their familiarity within the academic community. Books that were less well known, but perhaps equally as good, did not make the cut. Lists such as these have intrigued researchers for decades because of what they reveal about the stability and changeability of cultural traditions. This reliance on tradition within the academic community is noted by McLaren (2003), who stated that “these works are revered as high-status knowledge since purportedly the force of history has heralded them as such and placed them on book lists in respected cultural institutions such as universities” (p. 186).

Although these two lists reflect a traditional pattern and promote a Eurocentric and patriarchal bias, there is an evident shift from what is now known as a "classic." Classics, as defined by Downs (1978), include writers and thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles, Saint Augustine, and Machiavelli. Down argued that these men penned works that changed the world. Yet, according to this research study, as well as Applebee’s (1989) research, Plato and company

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<td>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</td>
<td>Wuthering Heights</td>
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<td>Animal Farm</td>
<td>A Raisin in the Sun</td>
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<td>A Separate Peace</td>
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no longer find themselves atop school-mandated reading lists. For many secondary school teachers, teaching about the ancients has lost its present-day appeal. In fact, 14 of Shakespeare’s plays were listed as must-reads by American colleges in the late 19th century. In 2004 that number dwindled to 3—Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, and Julius Caesar. Of course, Shakespeare’s prolific writing habits allowed him the ability to lose more titles from reading lists than authors of one or two significant works. Yet there lingers one question: If the canon continues to be transformed by teachers and administrators, how long will Shakespeare continue to be a part of the high school English curriculum in the United States?

As we move into the 21st century, and move another century away from Elizabethan England, the chance for inclusion of more contemporary and modern titles becomes stronger, while traditional texts may fall by the wayside. In fact, Applebee (1996), who argued for the broader conversations of social justice, made the following assertion: “It simply does not matter if twelfth graders in one school read Othello and those in another read King Lear, and it does not even really matter if twelfth graders read Shakespeare at all” (p. 99). What does matter is that English language arts curricula include literature that appeals to students’ interests and relates to their lives, the kind of books that will foster lifelong reading habits and nurture students’ interest in reading. For this reason, the practice of teaching a static literary canon works against this goal (Gallo, 2001; Hipple, 1997).

The Evolving Nature of “The Classics”

A second theme that became obvious in data analysis was the idea of an evolving definition of “the classics” and what teachers considered quality literature. So often, quality is narrowly attached only to the classics, those works that are part of the great canon. But what titles belong in that canon? In 1994, Bloom suggested that the canon is Plato and Shakespeare because the canon is the art of memory and foundational to cultural thinking. He focused on 26 authors who, according to his perspective, are most representative of the canon. Conversely, others (e.g., Bushman & Haas, 2001; Fadiman & Major, 1997) have argued that more extensive use of diverse titles must be evident in the curriculum for a plethora of reasons all focused on higher student achievement and more exposure to a variety of perspectives so that students are empowered to be more respectful, accepting, and astute members of a global society.

The selections among the teachers in our study suggest an evolving notion of the classics and thus what might constitute quality literature. For example, absent from the top 10 lists were more traditional classics like Beowulf or The Iliad, both of which appeared on Smith’s 1932 list of great works (as cited in Applebee, 1996) and on Bloom’s 1994 list. Rather, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Great Gatsby, and The Scarlet Letter appear among the top 10 in this current study as well as in Stullworth’s 1997 study and Applebee’s 1989 study and seem to indicate a movement toward slightly more modern titles constituting the classics. As a case in point, one teacher stated in her reasoning for not including multicultural works: “I focus more on classics like The Scarlet Letter.” This teacher didn’t list, for instance, The Faerie Queene (Edmund Spenser, circa 1590) as an example of classic literature but instead listed a book written in 1850.

Even though only one work by and about people of color, A Raisin in the Sun (Hansberry, 1994, Vintage) written in 1959, appeared on the 2003–2004 top 10 list, it was also the 13th-ranked title on the 2002–2003 list. Furthermore, Their Eyes Were Watching God (Hurston, 1998, HarperPerennial), written in 1937, was cited 4 times on the 2003–2004 list and 7 times on the 2002–2003 list. Things Fall Apart (Achebe, 1994, Anchor) was cited 4 times on the 2002–2003 list and 9 times on the 2002–2003 list. Perhaps these and other diverse works like The Joy Luck Club (Tan, 1990, Ivy Books), cited only once, will be taught more frequently as teachers’ definitions of
quality literature move beyond a narrow list of the classics and continue to metamorphose toward more modern and contemporary works. This is especially important because literature of the 1960s onward is characterized by an acknowledgement of diversity and cultural differences (The Norton Anthology of American Literature, 2002).

Another related finding was the kinds of selections listed by teachers with one to five years of teaching experience. Those teachers more frequently listed multicultural titles including Things Fall Apart, Their Eyes Were Watching God, and A Raisin in the Sun. According to one such teacher, “It is imperative that teachers make more of a concerted effort to teach various literature from different ethnic backgrounds.” Another teacher in this demographic commented, “I use diverse literature because I was not exposed to diverse writers until I got to college. I teach multicultural literature because I want my students to be exposed to all kinds of perspectives.” Conceivably the curriculum will continue to become more diverse as more teachers graduate from teacher education programs that intentionally include multicultural perspectives.

The Issue of Censorship

Few words in the teaching profession engender more trepidation among English language arts teachers than the term censorship. Many teachers who may otherwise want to include noncanonical works will not because they fear the potential (real or imagined) problems when parents, colleagues, administrators, students, and the community disagree with the content of the literature curriculum. Certainly this fear was evident in our study as teachers commented on censorship concerns. For instance, one 11th-grade teacher stated, “I don’t use any works other than the classics because they just seem to have less objectionable subject matter as far as parents are concerned.” The teachers’ perspectives are consistent with what Ketter and Lewis (2001) found, in that not all English teachers believe they are empowered to make decisions about the literature they use in their classrooms: The status quo is safer. These teachers will continue to teach only from a very narrowly prescribed list of novels because they do not believe updating the curriculum with diverse titles is worth the potential negative outcomes, especially when they do not have the support of administrators who cannot or will not support teachers when angry parents demand the removal of books. This point is well illuminated by another teacher who noted, “Parents in the community complain, and the administration listens when any content is the least controversial. Addition multicultural literature is sometimes just not worth the effort because parents will always win the argument.”

As Agee (1999) suggested, a dangerous outcome of censorship is the silencing of teachers. Teachers will invariably not speak out against censorship or become proactive. One 10th-grade teacher summed up this perspective with the following statement:

The novels we teach at our school tend not to include as much diversity as they should. This is still the rural South, and students and their parents are accepting of diversity only up to a point. I probably should try to include more variety, but I don’t want to “rock the boat.”

This teacher seems to grasp the importance of updating the literature curriculum, but her fear prevents her from even considering change.

Other Obstacles

Research (e.g., Agee, 1999; Godina, 1996; Ketter & Lewis, 2001) has revealed certain obstacles to the implementation of multicultural literature in the secondary classroom including the teachers’ perceived lack of knowledge in teaching works by authors of color and a plethora of perceived impediments to teaching noncanonical texts. Most teachers teach what they consider familiar and safe—what they themselves were taught. They do not know how or where to begin looking for literature beyond the Eurocentric perspective. This current study supports these findings from previous research.
Lack of resources. Another theme that emerged from the teachers' responses was that the scarcity of materials and resources that many teachers face prohibits them from including works of multicultural literature in their curriculum. For example, one teacher of 11th and 12th graders wrote that she did not include multicultural literature because it was not available: "My selections are limited to the class sets in the library." Working around the limitations posed by a scarcity of resources, a teacher of 10th, 11th, and 12th graders reported that out of financial necessity, she has had to ask her students to purchase their own texts: "Some years I have selected works from authors such as Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison, but I have to ask students to buy their own copies because these novels are not in our text." This teacher's experience mirrors that of teacher-researcher Godina (1996), who overcame similar obstacles by purchasing the multicultural texts he needed with his own money.

While purposefully integrating multicultural literature into the existing English language arts curriculum is an important and worthwhile goal for all teachers, an absence of funds with which to purchase additional instructional materials makes this kind of curricular change extremely difficult for many teachers in this state's less affluent districts. For this reason, a lack of adequate funding can have a powerful influence in driving the curricular decision-making process. In recent years, the state's teachers typically have received US$500.00 per academic year to purchase instructional supplies and materials. With a portion of that amount automatically allocated for necessities such as office supplies and photocopying, the individual teacher usually is left with a substantially lower amount for classroom resources. Although some of the more affluent districts provide teachers with additional financial supplements, that practice is the exception rather than the norm. Thus, a teacher's option of purchasing sets of trade books or other materials to supplement the literature anthology often is cost prohibitive, and, for some students, having to purchase their own materials would be a financial burden.

For this reason as well as others, textbooks remain a staple in the English language arts classroom, and practice reflects what research has found to be the norm: Teachers rely heavily on textbooks for teaching (Banks, 2003). It is clear that the literature textbook remains a staple in the English language arts classroom, and many teachers integrate the multicultural selections that are available in their class literature anthology.

Lack of expertise. Loewen (1995) wrote, "Teachers cannot teach that which they do not know" (p. 287). The teachers' narrative responses echoed that sentiment and revealed their lack of expertise about multicultural literature as a major prohibitor to the diversification of their literature curriculum. This lack of expertise theme emerged from two categories of responses: (1) teachers who admitted that they knew little about multicultural literature, and (2) teachers who claimed to include multicultural literature, but the titles they listed indicated that they did not understand the characteristics that qualify a work of literature as multicultural.

In response to a question asking them to explain whether they included book-length works from authors of non-European descent, several teachers reported that their own lack of knowledge about multicultural literature restricted their curricular choices. Such a claim has been made by Nieto (2004) who believed "teachers' pedagogy is also influenced by their lack of knowledge concerning the diversity of their students and how cultural and language differences may affect learning" (p. 107). For example, an 8th-grade teacher at a large-sized urban school stated, "I'm not as familiar with non-European authors." A 10th-grade teacher at another school explained, "I have not read very many myself, and there are not many available at my school." A 9th-grade teacher voiced the concern that she knew of "no non-European writers who would be appropriate for a ninth-grade audience," then added, "Also my exposure is weak." Another teacher commented,
“Honestly I’m not as familiar with non-European authors.” The teachers’ responses indicate a limitation on what is taught and how it is taught within the classroom environment.

Following a cycle of familiarity is not a new concept. In fact, “most of us,” as hooks (1994) postulated, “were taught in classrooms where styles of teaching reflected the notion of a single norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal” (p. 35). Being immersed in such an environment, teachers sometimes have difficulty escaping the cookie-cutter mold of traditional pedagogical methods. Furthermore, there is a strong connection between how we learn to teach and what we learn to teach. In other words, if preservice English teachers remember reading texts like Moby Dick, The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables, Paradise Lost, and so on in high school, then they will be more likely to repeat the teaching of these novels in their own classes. Given more experience, time, and resources, some teachers are able to break this cycle by implementing more progressive content and methodology than would be found in a more traditional environment where canonical works are the norm.

That said, many teachers responded yes, that they were including multicultural selections. Yet many of the works and authors they listed are not normally considered multicultural literature; rather, many were works long established in the literary canon. For example, one teacher concluded, “Yes, I include authors who write about people and cultures from three different centuries: 17th, 19th, and 20th. Also, we use different regions of the United States: the rural South, the Midwest, and the Eastern shore areas.” Another teacher’s response indicates that she equates different backgrounds with multiculturalism: “Yes, we study authors of different backgrounds. For instance, early in the year we read The Crucible by Arthur Miller, who was a suspected European communist.” Another teacher who said that she included multicultural literature provided the following list of authors that she taught: “Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Arthur Miller, John Steinbeck, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edith Wharton, Joseph Conrad, Mark Twain, William Faulkner.”

While it can be argued that the study of writers from multiple centuries and geographical areas should be part of a literature curriculum, one issue still remains: If the selected writers represent only one racial or ethnic group, only one gender, or only one social class, then the cultural plurality is superficial.

**Time constraints.** An analysis of the teachers’ responses revealed that the scarcity of instructional time factors into their text selection process and presents an impediment to teaching multicultural literature. Many of the more experienced teachers have a long-established literature curriculum that they follow, and they feel obligated to teach those particular works. The teachers’ responses further affirmed that time limitations were a factor in their text selection process. For example, a 12th-grade teacher who has been teaching for more than 20 years indicated that he does not include multicultural selections because he feels constrained by limitations on instructional time as well as bound to his existing literature curriculum: “One reason is that there is a time factor, and I’m not willing to sacrifice any that I presently teach.” Another teacher echoed this idea, responding that she did not include multicultural selections because “there is barely enough time to do the ones that I do,” indicating that she feels bound to an existing literature curriculum as well.

Other teachers’ responses were more specific in identifying the underlying causes of the time limitations they faced. For example, this 9th-grade teacher’s response indicates that she feels bound to covering selections in the anthology during the term: “Our trimester system does not permit time to include any more than are in our daily literature textbooks.” In addition, a 12th-grade English teacher stated, “The block schedule is limiting in terms of the number of books that can be read in one term. My choices are based on grade 12 curriculum (British literature) and what many
students will encounter in college (Southern literature)," citing an established literature curriculum as well as scheduling limitations as barriers to her inclusion of multicultural literature.

Although block scheduling enables teachers to have longer sustained periods of time to interact with their students, some schedule configurations have resulted in a net loss of instructional time compared to a seven-period day schedule where the students attend the same classes for the entire 175-day academic year. For example, changing from a seven-period day to a four-period block schedule results in a net loss of 350 minutes of instructional time. In a similar manner, 110 minutes of instructional time are lost with the change to a trimester system. For teachers who believe that they must teach the works that are already established in the curriculum, and that works of multicultural literature cannot displace those established works, limited instructional time is a barrier that is not likely to be overcome at the classroom level.

Conclusions and implications

Our study revealed a degree of confusion among many teachers about the teaching of multicultural works. For instance, one teacher noted that she wasn't a historian and felt unprepared and ill-equipped to discuss the non-Eurocentric cultures in her class. For a variety of reasons, others did not see the relevance of updating reading lists and teaching from multicultural perspectives. Still others listed titles they considered multicultural that were clearly written from a European perspective and represented diversity only in terms of chronology. These teachers are not bad teachers, nor are they intentionally subverting the notion of diversity in the curriculum. They are teaching in an era of mandates, standards, inadequate funding, and high-stakes testing with the pressures of censorship and with their own cultural encapsulation. If some revisions are to occur, involving ourselves as teachers and learners in conversations at all levels is one starting point.

Burke (2003) commented that professional development in the form of professional discourse is one very useful strategy for improving practice. Therefore, teachers can facilitate their own professional development in the area of curriculum change and improvement, with a specific focus on updating and revising the literature curriculum, by talking, reading, critiquing, and sharing as a community of learners.

In addition, all teacher education programs have the responsibility to facilitate preservice and inservice teachers’ abilities to teach with and from multicultural perspectives (Chevalier & Houser, 1997). Specifically, English teacher educators must expose preservice and inservice teachers to diverse literature appropriate for the secondary classroom and facilitate their abilities to create curricula where diverse voices and stories are mainstreamed rather than marginalized (Burroughs, 1999).

Yet caution should be taken in the selection process of multicultural works. Some texts considered multicultural contain racial stereotypes. Take for instance, Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (1995, Signet) and Richard Wright’s Black Boy (1998, HarperPerennial Modern Classics), which, according to Applebee (1989), are the only two multicultural texts consistently shelved in school libraries (as cited in Godina, 1996). While both stories are engrossing and timely, it is troubling that they may be the only representative literature about black experiences that students in most high schools will read. It would be similar to having Huck Finn as the single spokesperson for the white experience. The idea is to have a solid mixture of experiences so that no single story speaks for everyone in that particular group. Therefore, as English teachers and teacher educators work together to create a more integrated and diverse literature curriculum, balancing works that portray a range of people with different characteristics is perhaps a feasible approach to positively affecting the literary experience.

Of course, change takes time, and teachers’ reluctance to revise their literature curricula is no
exception (Godina, 1996). But one teacher quoted in a recent newspaper article reminded us, “Teachers are increasingly turning to contemporary literary fiction and non-fiction [because] times have changed—high school has changed” (Toppo, 2004, p. 106). As English teachers continue to think consciously and intentionally about the best ways to meet students’ interests and needs, the curriculum will become more culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 2001), even among the teachers in this small southern U.S. state. As one of our doctoral students who always seeks opportunities to diversify the curriculum at her small rural school concluded, “By becoming armchair travelers in the English classroom, teachers and students can use multiple perspectives to view other cultures and can learn to appreciate the idiosyncrasies of other cultures even as we learn more about ourselves” (Raughton, 2004, p. 47).

**Recommendations**

Based on the conclusions from this current study, other research, and our own teaching experiences in rural, suburban, and urban areas of this particular state as well as our interactions with inservice teachers in our roles as teacher educators, we believe that there are immediate steps and long-term plans for effecting positive change toward a more balanced and representative literature curriculum that is not simply change for its own sake. We conclude with some ideas for fellow teachers.

1. Reading new titles to expand our knowledge is a simple activity that is enjoyed by most English teachers. Summer is an ideal time to engage in reading beyond our comfort levels.

2. Becoming comfortable with reading and using research in teaching and learning is crucial for teachers not only in expanding curriculum options but also for adding credibility to teachers’ curricular decisions.

3. Developing rationales for titles before teaching those works is part of the curriculum planning process. Teachers must always be proactive and purposeful.

4. Finding opportunities to share diverse titles with parents and other groups may lead to expanded perspectives among key stakeholders in the school community. Asking parents to read along with their student as the class reads a multicultural text and inviting parents and other community members to open sessions organized around student-led book talks provide ways of encouraging stakeholders’ involvement.

5. Using thematic approaches naturally allows for a variety of curriculum materials. Even on the block schedule, thematic teaching is feasible and, when done well, calls for multiple representations of different concepts and invites teaching with and from multicultural perspectives.

6. Intentionally exposing ourselves to people, ways of thinking, and events that are different from our own experiences stretches us. Teachers could include the Civil Rights Institute or the Holocaust Museum in their vacation itineraries.

7. Devoting time to finding sources of funding for books is a worthwhile commitment to our students’ academic success. Teachers must be creative and look to local sources like the parent–teacher association, community members, and neighborhood businesses; area institutions of higher education; state departments of education and other state organizations; and national agencies or organizations that provide grants including the NCTE, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, and the National Education Association. In addition, parents, university professors, yard sales, and used book stores provide other means for gathering books and resources. All of these resources are excellent ways for teachers to build diverse classroom libraries.
REFERENCES


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