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Up for the Challenge? A Phenomenology of Secondary English Teachers' Text Selection Experiences

by

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The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The College of Education will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

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DEDICATION

To Chuck and Emily, for their unwavering support and undying love when I was at my lowest and most unlovable. This dissertation reflects your sacrifice as well as mine.

Chuck, thank you for talking me off ledges and encouraging me to keep going when the stress seemed too much to bear. This is the last degree, I promise.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to describe secondary English teachers' experiences with text selection. Its first aim was to determine how secondary English teachers perceive the use of young adult literature (YAL) with adolescent students. The study also details factors that influenced teachers' text selections. Finally, the study describes how teachers' perceptions of administrative support influenced their self-efficacy.

The study was conducted using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative research method that employs in-depth, semi-structured interviews to develop descriptions of participants' experiences. Participants included six secondary English teachers from a school district in the southeast United States. Teachers completed a survey about their individual contexts and then participated in interviews.

The study revealed a number of findings. First, although participants view YAL as beneficial to adolescents, only half incorporated it in their curricula while all included canonical texts. Also, teachers considered numerous factors when selecting texts, including standards, skills, content, and time. Teachers' responses revealed feelings of guilt, shame, stress, and fear in relation to the texts they teach. Teachers indicated overall that they perceive having autonomy in text selection but doubt receiving support if those texts were challenged.

Finally, the study's findings indicated the need for support from educational and curriculum leaders. Leaders must be aware of best practices in selecting and defending texts for classrooms. Leaders must also provide preservice and inservice teachers training in selection and defense of texts that meet students' needs. Finally, leaders must work to ensure that the academic, social, and emotional needs of students and teachers are met so that the goals of their schools can be accomplished.

CHAPTER 1. PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE

The last several decades have seen an alarming decline in both reading volume and comprehension ability in adolescents in the United States (Cantrell et al., 2018; Spichtig et al., 2016). Regardless, many high school English teachers continue to assign canonical texts for their students to read independently despite the mounting evidence that students are not reading these classics that do little to engage teenagers in the 21st century (Glaws, 2021; Kittle, 2020; Wolk, 2010). The field of young adult literature (YAL), comprised of texts that do engage adolescents, has grown immensely in recent decades and attracted a fanbase of adolescents, adults, and scholars alike (Cart, 2016).

Despite the genre's popularity, however, many teachers shy away from bringing these texts into the secondary English classroom because they are often deemed unworthy for critical study (S. J. Miller & Slifkin, 2010) or too controversial in today's political climate (Connors & Trites, 2022). To combat these obstacles, curriculum leaders can work to ensure that preservice teachers (PSTs), practicing classroom teachers, and educational leaders have a clearer understanding of the value of YAL, the realities of adolescence, and the need for administrative support that empowers teachers to select texts that can leave a lasting impact on the students who read them (F. B. Boyd et al., 2015; Greathouse et al., 2017).

Background of Problem

It has long been understood that frequent and sustained reading has positive effects on students, including improved reading comprehension (Fisher & Frey, 2018), speaking, and spelling skills (Martin-Chang et al., 2020; Mol & Bus, 2011); higher grade point averages in high school (Ferguson, 2014); and increased enjoyment of reading (Mol & Jolles, 2014). Although these skills are increasingly important in an information-driven society, adolescents in the United

States are reading less today than ever before (Cantrell et al., 2018; Ivey & Johnston, 2018; Spichtig et al., 2016), particularly as they move up in grades in school (Darragh & Radmer, 2016).

One reason for this decline may be the increase in media consumption in recent years; for example, Nagata et al. (2022) found that adolescents between the ages of twelve and thirteen spent an average of eight hours a day on screens (e.g., videos, movies, games) during the COVID-19 quarantine, a trend that is expected to continue. Media, both print and digital, are often selected for their ability to meet needs that are not being satisfied in life (Ferguson, 2014), so students may also disengage from reading when they are not given opportunities to select the texts that interest them and meet their needs (Allred & Cena, 2020; Daisey, 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2018; Ivey & Johnston, 2018).

Another reason for the decline in adolescent reading is teachers' continued use of texts included in the traditional literary canon, which is "a collection of classic literary texts that are distinguished by overall literary quality, lasting significance, and a distinctive style that is worthy of study" that was "largely sanctioned by a few prominent literary critics from the 1930s" (Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016, p. 32). These texts often bear little to no resemblance to students' lives in the 21st century (Wolk, 2010) and present students with stories that privilege the experiences of White (Banack, 2021), heterosexual (Page, 2016), and able-bodied (Olan & Richmond, 2017) characters that do not reflect the diverse societies in which students live. In a now-famous metaphor, Broz (2011) described the phenomenon of students' refusal to read assigned texts as the "800-pound mockingbird in the classroom" (p. 16) as evidenced by his undergraduate English and literature students' admission of this stark reality. Kittle (2020)

echoes these sentiments as many of her undergraduate students confess to graduating from high school "without reading a single book" (p. 78).

Nevertheless, teachers frequently assign canonical texts that students either do not read (Glaus, 2014; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012) or that they skim in order to complete an assignment (Kittle, 2020; Wolk, 2010). Many teachers and preservice teachers read only canonical texts in high school (Olan & Richmond, 2017), many of which they themselves did not enjoy—if they read them at all—because they were forced to analyze them until the joy of reading was lost (Daisey, 2010). The texts they were assigned to read did not reflect the experiences and interests of most English teachers when they were students, yet they continue to assign them to adolescents despite the wide variety of alternative YAL texts available for classrooms (Olan & Richmond, 2017).

Instead of assigned canonical texts, adolescents need the ability to choose texts to which they can connect, those that include moral dilemmas and issues they face in reality, in order to be engaged readers (Ivey & Johnston, 2018; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). This notion is not new; in his works of the early 20th century, scholar and philosopher John Dewey (1897) advocated for curriculum that reflected students' experiences and interests rather than simply preparing them for their lives as adults. With this understanding, some educational professionals have realized the potential value of bringing YAL in the classroom for decades (Santoli & Wagner, 2004).

Young Adult Literature

Although books for adolescents were certainly published before the 1960s, it was not until novels such as Hinton's (1967) *The Outsiders* and Lipsyte's (1967) *The Contender* were published that the designation of young adult literature came to be (Suico et al., 2023). There are countless definitions of *young adult literature* with differences in the ages of young adults and the characteristics of the literature (Glaus, 2014). As it was first used in the 1960s, YAL "referred

to realistic fiction that was set in the real (as opposed to imagined), contemporary world and addressed problems, issues, and life circumstances of interest to young readers aged approximately 12-18" (Cart, 2008, Background section, para. 1).

Herz and Gallo (1996) expanded the description of YAL to include books that feature main characters who are mature, intelligent teenagers dealing with issues to which teens can relate; dialogue that reflects teens' language; outcomes that depend on the decisions and choices of the main characters; and the traditional literary techniques (e.g., well-developed plot and characters, engaging style, significant setting) used in adult novels. Others define YAL in much simpler terms. Crowe (1998) defines YAL as "all genres of literature published since 1967 that are written for and marketed to young adults" and that are "*intended* for teenagers" (p. 121, emphasis in original). A. Brown et al. (2014) describe YAL as being "written *about* teenagers, *for* teenagers, and within contexts that mirror the world of teenagers" (p. 6).

Within this study of high school English text selection, YAL will be defined broadly as texts that have been published with the adolescent reader (i.e., ages 12-18) as the intended audience. Such texts notably feature diverse teenagers as main characters who engage in the real-world struggles adolescents face today and speak in ways that teenagers understand. They engage students with relevant situations and complex characterization that help students to better understand themselves and those around them.

In recent years, the field of YAL has grown immensely and attracted a fanbase of adolescents, adults, and scholars with titles that appear frequently on national bestseller lists (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012; Suico et al., 2023). It has grown in popularity in secondary English classrooms, in part, because of its widespread incorporation in English teacher preparation programs (Strickland, 2021). YAL has proven to be a valuable resource in the English classroom

for a number of reasons. A major benefit for teachers is that students are more engaged (Glaus, 2014) because the content and characters are relevant (Ivey & Johnston, 2013) to teenagers' lives. When students are engaged in the texts they are reading, they are more likely to perform better academically (Darragh & Radmer, 2016) because they are able to build content and literacy skills when they are actually reading (Suico et al., 2023). It is crucial for curriculum and educational leaders to understand the immense value of diverse YAL in meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of students so that they can provide the training and support necessary for pre-service and in-service teachers to implement the use of these texts (K. Mitchell, 2023).

In many secondary English teacher preparation programs today, methodology coursework includes the study of YAL for a variety of purposes, including teaching preservice teachers (PSTs) to better understand the diverse adolescents they will teach, to engage in issues of social justice through YAL, to select texts to meet the needs of their students, and to defend their use of those texts (Glenn, 2014; Melilli, 2023; Pytash, 2013; Pytash & Hylton, 2021; Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016; Sarigianides & Borsheim-Black, 2022; Strickland, 2020, 2021, 2023). Despite this preparation, however, novice teachers often do not apply what they learned in coursework in their actual teaching, including teaching texts they deem important for students to read (Greathouse & Diccio, 2016), either because of a potential lack of understanding (Behizadeh et al., 2021; Donovan & Weber, 2021) or a perceived lack of support (Olan & Richmond, 2017).

Benefits of Young Adult Literature

As the quantity of novels published for young adults has increased in recent decades, the genre has "come of age in terms of its relevance to adolescents" (Soter & Connors, 2009, p.62), and the quality of the literature has been increasingly recognized (Cart, 2016). Modern YAL is now frequently accepted for its ability to meet curriculum standards, to serve as a bridge to

canonical texts, and to help students better understand themselves and their places within a diverse society.

Complexity and Standards. Many teachers and scholars are beginning to recognize that YAL texts are indeed complex with layers of meaning and sophisticated language (Connors, 2013; Glaus, 2014) and are ripe for literary analysis (Suico et al., 2023). Despite the inclusion of predominantly canonical texts in the list of exemplar texts provided by Common Core Standards (CCSS), YAL can also be used to effectively meet English Language Arts standards (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012; A. M. Smith et al., 2018). In fact, YAL texts may prove more effective in helping students to improve reading comprehension and literary analysis skills as they are written for 21st century adolescents and are more accessible for today's students (Sarigianides, 2012). These relevant, readable novels allow students to develop not only the close reading skills necessary for standardized testing but also the understanding of literary complexity that they can apply to their own writing (Glenn et al., 2009).

Bridges and Companions. YAL texts can also be used alongside canonical texts for analysis of both fiction (S. J. Miller & Slifkin, 2010) and nonfiction (Suico et al., 2023). For example, Banack (2021) paired Austen's (1813) *Pride and Prejudice* with Zoboi's (2018) *Pride*, a remix of the classic novel that features Black characters and modern settings, to allow students to examine both texts through critical lenses. Rybakova and Roccanti (2016) posit that canonical and YAL texts "are most powerful when they are connected rather than when pitted against one another" and that pairing them creates a unique opportunity for students to "navigate what it means to construct literary meaning" (pp. 31-32), including within the curriculum of AP English courses that frequently rely on classic texts (S. J. Miller & Slifkin, 2010).

Incorporating YAL in the classroom, however, does not mean that canonical literature must be removed altogether (A. Brown et al., 2014; A. M. Smith et al., 2018). Instead, young adult texts can serve as a bridge to canonical texts by "offer[ing] accessible language, parallel plots and themes, culturally and historically relevant settings, and opportunities for empathy through relatable characters" (Olan & Richmond, 2017, p. 23) that can prepare students to read more challenging, related texts (Glaws, 2021). YAL texts can also be introduced beside canonical texts required by a mandated curriculum to enrich those reading experiences (K. Mitchell, 2023) and deepen students' understandings of classic texts (Matey, 2021). If a teacher's goal is for students to read and understand canonical texts, introducing them to the themes first through YAL may help them to find the classic novels more accessible and relevant. For example, YAL texts such as John Green's (2005) *Looking for Alaska* can be paired with canonical texts such as Arthur Miller's (1949) *Death of a Salesman* or Kate Chopin's (1899) *The Awakening* to analyze the issue of suicide across time and text (Rybakova & Roccanti, 2016).

Introspection and Empathy. YAL also has the ability to help students better understand themselves and the experiences of others through diverse perspectives that are often not present in most canonical texts that are set in the distant past (Johnson et al., 2017; Pozzi et al., 2021). As students read about and connect with characters who are going through current issues similar to their own, they are able to understand that their thoughts and experiences are not unusual, and they can learn to accept themselves as they are (Del Nero, 2017). They are able to grapple with complex issues such as bullying and suicide in a safe space that allows them to explore human nature, contemplate the consequences of their actions, and discover ways others have developed solutions to problems (Pytash, 2013).

Since culturally diverse YAL privileges characters from traditionally marginalized groups and nontraditional family structures (F. B. Boyd et al., 2015), all students are afforded opportunities to find themselves and learn about others. Scholars are calling for increased diversity to include "Culturally Relevant Texts," which are "texts that were written about a culture by a cultural insider and engage students within that culture, who would not otherwise see their culture reflected in a book" (Bickmore et al., 2017, p. 49) as well as underrepresented facets such as disabilities (Donovan & Weber, 2021), rurality (A. S. Boyd & Darragh, 2022; Eckert & Petrone, 2013; Parton, 2023; Parton & Kuehl, 2023), and religion (F. B. Boyd et al., 2015).

As students read about characters who are similar to them in age but different from them in identity, they can learn to consider others' perspectives on personal conflicts and social issues (Ivey & Johnston, 2013), to understand the differences between people (Ginsberg & Glenn, 2019), and to change their own perspectives (Suico et al., 2023). Teachers can also present multiple texts showcasing varied voices within perspectives to avoid "the danger of [telling only] a single story" (Adichie, 2009) that creates an incomplete understanding and may perpetuate racial stereotypes (Ginsberg & Glenn, 2019; Stallworth et al., 2006).

Social issues and empathy. YAL also allows students to explore issues of social justice (Olan & Richmond, 2017; Suico et al., 2023) in order to foster empathy for others (Connors & Trites, 2022; Del Nero, 2017; Ivey & Johnston, 2018; Suico et al., 2023), disrupt commonly held assumptions about others (Ginsberg & Glenn, 2019), analyze the power structures involved in society (Chisholm & Cook, 2021), and develop appropriate moral stances on issues such as rape (Malo-Juvera, 2014) and homophobia (Malo-Juvera, 2016). Talking about what they are reading with their peers in book clubs, small groups, or whole-class discussions can help to develop and

reinforce students' understandings (Fisher & Frey, 2018) and empower them to own their learning by privileging their voices above the teacher's (Carnesi, 2018). Instead of avoiding controversial or uncomfortable topics, teachers can bring them into the classroom by using YAL as a springboard (Niccolini, 2015).

Challenges of YAL

Despite the numerous benefits of students reading YAL novels, however, many teachers shy away from bringing these texts into the secondary classroom and continue to assign texts from the traditional literary canon (Olan & Richmond, 2017; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012). While there are many reasons a teacher may select canonical texts, the most commonly reported are related to issues with the perceived complexity of YAL, the potential for challenges, and the presumptions adults hold about adolescents.

Complexity and Standards. Despite the research touting the complexity of YAL, many teachers feel pressured to use canonical texts to meet standards, especially since the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been adopted in many states (Glaus, 2014; Malo-Juvera, 2014; A. M. Smith et al., 2018). In a provided list of exemplar texts, the CCSS include only titles of classic canonical texts (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017); many teachers take this to mean that young adult texts, by default, are not complex enough to meet curricular standards, especially with a limited amount of time in the classroom (Martin-Chang et al., 2020; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012; A. M. Smith et al., 2018). With the expectation that students are being prepared to meet state or national standards and pass standardized tests, school districts and leaders may also erroneously take those lists at face value and discourage teachers' use of YAL in English courses (Connors, 2013).

Many teachers, curriculum leaders, and educational leaders also feel that YAL "lacks literary merit, sophistication, and value" (Darragh & Radmer, 2016, p. 19) for high school

classrooms, which is evident in the decline in the use of YAL from middle to high school (Glaws, 2021; A. M. Smith et al., 2018). YAL is often considered especially inappropriate for study in Advanced Placement (AP) English courses that focus on literary and informational texts that contain complex themes and structures (Glaws, 2021; A. M. Smith et al., 2018). Many teachers of these courses assign predominantly canonical texts, partly because the AP English Literature exam traditionally instructed students to write the open argument essay with a "work from the list [provided] or another work of equal literary merit" (The College Board, 2015, p. 4); the list of works provided included mostly canonical texts written by White male authors, which suggested to teachers that those were the best types of texts to use in the course (S. J. Miller & Slifkin, 2010).

Challenges and Censorship. Today more than ever, many teachers avoid incorporating YAL in their curricula because these texts are most often a target for challenges from the community, particularly those novels that contain profanity, drug use, sexuality, racial issues, and violence (Ferguson, 2014; Niccolini, 2015). These topics, rooted in students' daily reality, are the ones in which adolescents are often most interested and that may prove the most engaging (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020b), yet students are often prohibited from reading about them in school. The most frequently challenged books also contain LGTBQ characters or center around characters from other marginalized groups (Dallacqua, 2022; Thein, 2013).

Graphic novels are often targets of challengers as well because of the visual depictions of difficult topics that are sometimes more powerful or emotional than words (Dallacqua, 2022; Moeller & Becnel, 2020). For example, Spiegelman's (1973) graphic novel *Maus,* which depicts the holocaust with Jews drawn as mice and Germans as cats, has been used in English classrooms to expose students to varying perspectives and experiences (Olan & Richmond,

2017), but the text has been banned in school districts because of its use of nudity and language (Lowery, 2023). Despite the potential of these texts to engage students and help them to meet curricular standards (Eckert, 2013), teachers often choose to preemptively censor, or purposely not include, them out of fear of challenges from parents or backlash from administration (A. S. Boyd et al., 2021; Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2019; Thein, 2013), with the underlying fear being loss of their jobs (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020b).

Assumptions about Adolescents. Teachers also preemptively censor texts that contain content (e.g., sex, suicide, drugs, gangs) that they personally deem inappropriate for teenagers because of their assumptions about adolescents (A. S. Boyd et al., 2021; Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2019). This is often an attempt to protect students' perceived innocence (Connors & Trites, 2022) by shielding them from the realities of the world (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2019) coupled with the belief that youth are easily influenced or even corrupted by what they read (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020a; Knox, 2017; Niccolini, 2015; Sarigianides, 2012). This view is commonly held by adults and is one of the leading reasons for challenges from parents (Knox, 2019) who want to avoid exposing their children to disturbing topics in order to keep them safe (Knox, 2014). Teachers may also avoid these topics because they are uncomfortable discussing them with students (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020b; Niccolini, 2015), which may be one reason many teachers who include YAL in their classrooms do so only through independent reading or literature circles but not through whole-class study and discussion (Glaws, 2021; S. J. Miller & Slifkin, 2010; Wolk, 2010).

Teachers' implicit assumptions that youth, particularly those who are White, are unexposed to difficult realities (e.g., disability, racism, poverty) and need education about social issues may also lead to unfair selection practices (Sulzer & Thein, 2016). Teachers' perceptions

of adolescence tend to omit the diversity afforded adults and are developed from stereotypes that all teenagers are filled with raging hormones, are reckless and wild, and are too immature for serious content (Sarigianides, 2012). These assumptions position adults in a place of authority as moral leaders to students who rely on their guidance, and this can affect teachers' selection practices as they tend to provide students texts with protagonists who resemble their assumptions about adolescents (Sarigianides, 2012). Despite their young age, preservice teachers often have accepted the generalized negative view of adolescents (Falter, 2016), a practice that is likely to impact the texts they select and activities they assign in their future classrooms (Lewis & Petrone, 2010).

Statement of Problem

Despite the obvious benefits of incorporating YAL in the secondary English curriculum, the majority of texts students are exposed to in the classroom remain canonical (Banack, 2021; Dyches, 2018; Toliver & Hadley, 2021). Teachers report selecting texts for a variety of reasons, including personal preference, familiarity, and knowledge (Rush et al., 2013); curriculum goals or requirements, including standardized testing; and perceived literary merit or complexity (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Some teachers select canonical texts even when they recognize the potential value of YAL because the canonical texts are already available in their bookrooms or libraries (Friese et al., 2008), while providing YAL texts would require money out of their own pockets (Glaws, 2021; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). In an effort to standardize schools, some districts dictate the texts teachers may teach through approved lists (Darragh & Boyd, 2019), which causes many teachers to express concern about being forced to teach canonical texts that have been accepted as classic literature for decades (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015).

As the frequency of book challenges and legislation about what can be taught increases, so does the practice of teachers preemptively censoring texts as a measure to avoid controversy (Jacobson, 2016; Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2019; Lammert & Godfrey, 2023), a practice that is often hidden and therefore difficult to address (Fanetti, 2012; Sachdeva et al., 2023). Many teachers have also removed books from their classroom library shelves that they fear may be challenged or even cause them to be punished for providing students access to them (Lowery, 2023; Waters & Unsicker-Durham, 2023). However, these self-censoring practices come at a great cost as students' rights to access books that reflect their heritage and experiences are being restricted or denied (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2019; Jacobson, 2016). Adolescents need opportunities to read about how others overcome the challenges they are living through or to learn about the difficulties others experience (Jacobson, 2016). Teenagers need access to diverse texts to which they can connect personally to become engaged readers (Ivey & Johnston, 2018) and that encourage them to ask critical questions about the world around them (Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2019).

Students also need opportunities to read both deeply and widely in order "to develop stamina *and* strength" (Fisher & Frey, 2018, p. 95, emphasis in original) and become readers in "a pluralistic society where dialogue, questioning, and perspective-taking are essential to an informed citizenry" (Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2019, p. 343). Teachers can meet these needs by providing students with as many types of texts as possible so that they can learn from various perspectives and more fully develop their own (Knox, 2020). The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)'s (2019) Statement on Independent Reading affirms that English teachers should "recognize the importance of access to texts at a wide variety of reading levels, about a

plethora of topics and interests, that offer multiple perspectives in classroom libraries and school libraries" (Core Values section).

Clearly, text selection is no simple task; teachers must select texts carefully and intentionally to balance the requirements of the curriculum and to create an inclusive classroom (Donovan & Weber, 2021) that meets the needs of all students (F. B. Boyd et al., 2015). Teachers must let go of personal and political views (F. B. Boyd et al., 2015), assumptions about adolescents (Lewis & Petrone, 2010), and previous experiences with texts (Daisey, 2010; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015) when considering texts that can help adolescents to not only see themselves and others but to "*recognize* [themselves] *in* others, to understand [their] common humanity" (F. B. Boyd et al., 2015, p. 379, emphasis in original).

The importance of text selection, including the challenges it presents and the autonomy it provides for teachers, is often overlooked by curriculum and educational leaders (Friese et al., 2008). In the *Guidelines for Selection of Materials in English Language Arts Programs*, the NCTE (2014) recognizes the expertise of the English teacher and stipulates that "although administrators and school boards are often legally charged with the responsibility of selecting instructional materials, this responsibility should be delegated to English language arts professionals" (Responsibility for Selection section, para. 2). The ones who are trained to be the experts need to be recognized as such, and having curriculum and educational leaders who understand the complexity of their experiences can help to ensure that happens.

Significance of Study

Of the record number of books challenged in 2022, 58% were from school and classroom libraries (American Library Association, 2023). With the unprecedented rise in book challenges across the nation, primarily from conservative groups (Connors & Trites, 2022; Spilka, 2022;

Van Deventer, 2023), educators are understandably wary of using texts in the classroom that may draw scrutiny or even punishment. Many teachers believe in the power of YAL to engage students and bring change to their lives and the world, but they often feel forced to work in opposition to their beliefs, living with what Bullough (2008) deemed "professional schizophrenia," a condition that pulls teachers in "multiple directions by conflicting but always insistent claims" and makes their jobs "joyless" (p. 5).

To teach using the texts they know are best for their students, teachers need support from each other, from administration, and from research to validate their stance (Hayn et al., 2011). This study sought to discover the challenges teachers perceive as they select the texts they use in their classrooms and to provide research that can support their curriculum decisions about what is best for their students. While teachers rely on research when selecting texts, they also depend on the support of their administrative leadership to empower them to enact their curricular decisions (Jenkins, 2019). The results of this study therefore prove valuable for educating instructional leaders about the role they play in supporting teachers and students.

Although book challenges are becoming more prevalent in schools, there is still relatively little research on teachers' personal experiences with censorship (Sachdeva et al., 2023). This study's description of the lived experiences of teachers, those that might help to describe the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990) of selecting texts for their classrooms, in a district that is experiencing unprecedented book challenges can help to fill that research gap. The study sought to encourage teachers to think critically about how they select texts to meet the needs of all of their students and to inform leaders about the importance of supporting teachers as they do so. According to the NCTE (2018b), English teachers can and should foster "respect for the uniqueness and potential of the individual" (The Right to Read section, para. 7) by encouraging

students to select their own texts for reading and exposing students to the cultures of marginalized groups and worldwide peoples through literature. In light of this, the study illuminates the ways teachers select texts with or without administrative support and highlight the challenges teachers face that require attention from their administrations.

The results of this study also enlighten district and school administrators about the perceptions and needs of teachers who need support in a time when teacher shortages are a stark reality (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), when teachers who enjoy working with students are considering leaving the profession (Lowery, 2023), and when fewer students are going into teacher preparation programs (Kraft & Lyon, 2022). Teachers' perceptions of the support they receive from their administrators has been shown to affect their beliefs about their effectiveness in the classroom (Stipek, 2012), which makes it even more important for leaders to understand how they may support teachers as they select texts and face challenges if they arise. This is not always easy for leaders, especially during difficult political times. In fact, Ylimaki (2012) found that some principals were influenced to go against their previous beliefs because of strong political pressure. Students need teachers who can challenge the status quo and fight for their right to read, and teachers need administrators who will support them as they do so.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted with a small number (*n*=6) of participants and thus may not depict a wide range of teachers' experiences with the phenomenon under study. All participants were selected from the same school district, which was undergoing frequent challenges to texts by a political organization. This may have affected some participants' responses to interview questions as emotions (e.g., fear, anger) could play a greater role than they would in other contexts. While the findings are an accurate depiction of these teachers' perceptions of their

experiences during this time, they may not be generalizable to teachers in other contexts. The researcher is also an English teacher in the school district and, despite efforts to bracket, may have unintentionally introduced bias into the research.

Organization of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine secondary English teachers' perceptions of YAL, their experiences with selecting texts for their classrooms, and the extent to which administrative support in these practices affects their self-efficacy. Phenomenological studies focus on describing the experiences of a group of people who have experienced the same phenomenon, in this case text selection for high school English courses. The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews of six high school (i.e., grades 9-12) teachers, selected to create a heterogenous sample, in a school district in the southeastern United States. Interviews were conducted in-person and were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) approach to descriptive phenomenology to develop an account of teachers' experiences. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the use of young adult literature in the secondary English classroom?
2. Based on teachers' perceptions, what factors influence secondary English teachers' selection of texts for their classroom curricula and libraries?
3. Based on teachers' perceptions, to what extent does administrative support of teachers' text selections influence their teacher self-efficacy?

In order to address these questions, the study was grounded in Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, particularly as it pertains to self-efficacy, and Marks and Printy's (2003) integrated leadership theory.

Social Cognitive Theory

Previously known as social learning theory, social cognitive theory posits that people are actively shaped by the relationship among imposed environments, personal behaviors, and intrapersonal influences (Bandura, 2012); within this relationship, people are agents who influence the course of their lives through intentional actions (Bandura, 2001). Although people do not have control over their environments per se, they are able to decide how they interact with and respond to them so as to exert some measure of control (Bandura, 2012). The results of these attempts lead to the development of perceptions of efficacy.

Self-Efficacy

People frequently act with personal agency as self-reactive and self-reflective beings who make conscious decisions about their actions and evaluate their decisions (Bandura, 2001). The core of personal agency is self-efficacy, the belief that one is capable of achieving desired outcomes through personal actions (Bandura, 2001). A person's efficacy beliefs are developed from four types of information: performance accomplishments (master experiences), social modeling (vicarious experiences), social persuasion (verbal), and physiological (physical and emotional) states (Bandura, 1977, 2012). Depending on the context, these experiences exert varying amounts of influence based upon how the individual processes them cognitively, meaning that people may have varying levels of self-efficacy in different situations (Bandura, 1977, 2012).

Self-efficacy beliefs affect many aspects of a person's life, including attitude, motivation, expectations, decisions, and mental state (Bandura, 1977). People's interpretations of their environments, for example, influence their attitudes; those with low self-efficacy may see only insurmountable obstacles and succumb to pessimism while those with high self-efficacy may

optimistically see opportunities to overcome the challenges (Bandura, 2012). In the same vein, those with low self-efficacy may feel unmotivated to complete a task in which they believe they will fail, while those with high self-efficacy are motivated by the belief that they will achieve the desired outcome (Bandura, 1993). Self-efficacy also influences the challenges people are willing to accept, how much time and effort they will put into accomplishing them, and how resilient they will be in the face of obstacles and failure (Bandura, 2001). Those with low self-efficacy may experience anxiety and depression if they feel that their failures are a direct result of their inability to succeed (Bandura, 1993).

Teacher Self-efficacy

Through their experiences in the classroom, teachers develop perceptions of their abilities to produce learning outcomes with their students, known as teacher self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy plays a large role in the classroom from the development of the atmosphere to the outcomes of student learning (Bandura, 1993). Teachers with high self-efficacy enact better behavioral management, differentiate instruction based on student needs, and optimistically employ varied teaching practices (Zee & Koomen, 2016). They demonstrate higher instructional quality (Holzberger et al., 2013) and are also more resilient when facing challenges (Beltman et al., 2011). On the other hand, teachers with low self-efficacy often spend more time on nonacademic activities, allow more off-task behavior, and criticize students for incorrect answers (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Teachers' self-efficacy plays a crucial role in their classroom practices, and their school and district leaders' practices greatly impact teachers' beliefs about their abilities.

Integrated Leadership Theory

During the 1980s, the focus on creating effective schools led to the popularity of the instructional leadership theory, which placed the school's principal at the top of a hierarchy intended to improve student achievement (Hallinger, 2003). Principals who once sat in offices now found themselves responsible for developing or determining curriculum, assessing teachers' instruction, and creating a climate that fostered learning (Marks & Printy, 2003). This model was largely successful at improving student outcomes (Hallinger, 2003) but found criticism from those who felt the model was rather one-sided (Marks & Printy, 2003) and limited the necessary roles of the principal (Hallinger, 2003).

The 1990s saw a shift from instructional leadership to transformational leadership, as schools sought to restructure and incorporate educational trends such as teacher empowerment and collective learning (Hallinger, 2003). Transformational leadership incorporates a bottom-up approach in which the principal creates an environment in which leadership is shared with teachers, whose needs become the forefront of concern (Hallinger, 2003). The principal's primary role then is to motivate and inspire teachers to meet the curricular goals of the school within a culture that fosters growth, development, and collaboration (Marks & Printy, 2003). While this method has been shown to be highly effective for engaging teachers, it is not as effective in increasing student achievement as is instructional leadership (Aas & Brandmo, 2016).

Although instructional leadership and transformational leadership are each effective in their own ways, both have shortcomings that leave gaps in the needs of teachers and students. To fill these gaps, Marks and Printy (2003) developed the theory of integrated leadership to describe a model that combines the tenets of both shared instructional leadership and transformational

leadership. Integrated leadership maintains the effective aspects of both models to develop a highly effective teaching force that is motivated to work collaboratively to increase student achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003). Because each school context is different, no one approach will be effective; the extent to which leaders adopt instructional or transformational styles is dependent upon the needs of the students and teachers at their schools (Hallinger, 2003). This will be explained in more detail in Chapter II.

Theoretical Frameworks and Text Selection

Because of the controversial nature of YAL, school and district administrators often do not support teachers' desires to use texts that contain controversial material (Freedman & Johnson, 2000; Olan & Richmond, 2017); in fact, many school districts require a scripted or standardized curriculum that dictates what texts may be used in English classes (Olan & Richmond, 2017), and this practice is increasing (B. Smith & Banack, 2024). When teachers are assigned subject matter to teach, particularly in courses that involve high-stakes testing, they are more likely to experience higher stress levels and lower self-efficacy (Gonzalez et al., 2016); however, when school leaders value teachers' input and validate their abilities to make decisions in the classroom, teacher self-efficacy and satisfaction increases (Ahrari et al., 2021; Gonzalez et al., 2016). Teachers' perceptions of their administrators' support, especially in overcoming difficulties (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018), has been found to be the highest predictor of self-efficacy (Stipek, 2012); it is therefore critical for principals to adopt leadership styles that empower and encourage teachers to work toward the instructional goals of the school.

Overview of the Research Design

This study examined the phenomenon of secondary English teachers' selection of texts as a part of their classroom curriculum, using qualitative methods. In order to understand the factors that affect teachers' decisions as well as to interpret how these experiences impact their teacher

self-efficacy, interpretative phenomenological analysis was used. This design allowed the researcher to develop a thorough description and interpretation of the lived experiences of teachers selecting texts in environments that may restrict their autonomy and impact their perceived self-efficacy.

Qualitative Research

Because it is difficult to attach numbers to human experiences, qualitative research provides methods that allow researchers to examine the *how* and the *why* of a particular phenomenon (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999). Qualitative researchers rely on observations of people who have experienced the phenomenon so they can "describe, interpret, and explain the behaviors or events being studied" (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019, p. 23). Qualitative research methods allow researchers to examine events as they are occurring in order to understand the complex ways in which humans experience them (Sofaer, 1999). Thus, qualitative researchers are concerned with understanding the qualities of the experience rather than attempting to explain its causes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Through methods such as interviewing and observation, researchers are able to gather personal perspectives or even witness events first-hand, making it an important means of understanding educational issues (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019).

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that seeks to understand the experiences of people who have lived through a particular phenomenon by obtaining first-person accounts (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019) of those experiences. Data are generally collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that allow the researcher and participants to engage in a dialogue about their experiences (Larkin et al., 2006; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Phenomenology is a relatively recent addition to qualitative methodology, but it has taken numerous forms since that time, predominantly descriptive based on the theories of Edmund Husserl or interpretative from the work of Martin Heidegger (Suddick et al., 2020). Within the field of the social sciences, including educational research, phenomenology has become a common methodology (Ndame, 2023).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is especially useful for research that seeks to understand rather than merely describe the human experience (Crist & Tanner, 2003), especially when participants have undergone particularly meaningful experiences that affected them deeply (J. A. Smith, 2019). When using IPA, the researcher has two goals: to first describe the lived experiences of participants who have endured the same phenomenon (Larkin et al., 2006) and then to interpret the meanings the participants drew from those experiences to develop a deeper and more meaningful analysis of the phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This is achieved through a "double hermeneutic" (J. A. Smith, 2019, p. 171) in which researchers strive to interpret participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences in order to explain the phenomenon under study more fully.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Introduction

There is a vast body of research on the benefits of reading for adolescents and a growing body of research on the value of incorporating young adult literature (YAL) in the secondary classroom; however, additional qualitative research is needed to better understand why teachers incorporate or exclude YAL from their curricula (A. M. Smith et al., 2018). The research on how secondary English teachers select texts for their classrooms, particularly in the current political climate, however, is limited. Research on the impact of administrative support in the text selection process on teachers' self-efficacy is nearly nonexistent. While the previous literature does offer insights into how and why teachers incorporate YAL into their classrooms, an understanding of their actual experiences with selecting texts can help to explain the reasons for the predominance of canonical texts in today's classrooms despite the ineffectiveness of this practice evidenced in the research and illuminate how administrators' levels of support influence teachers' self-efficacy.

Content in Leadership

The goal of this literature review is to describe the current state of adolescent reading in schools to underpin the urgent need for increased engaged adolescent reading as a part of secondary English curriculum. There is also an explanation of how the views of YAL have changed as a result of scholarly research and teacher experience to demonstrate the value of incorporating YAL in secondary English curricula. Then there is a discussion of secondary English teacher preparation in the use of YAL and text selection and how this learning translates to practice. Also included is a discussion of secondary English teachers' text selection, which includes a description of the current challenges teachers and school districts face when

attempting to incorporate YAL, to illustrate the complex issues teachers face within this phenomenon. This is followed by an examination of the role of school and district leadership in the text selection process and how teachers' perspectives of their support influence their self-efficacy. Finally, as this study sought to understand teachers' lived experiences with the text selection process and how leaders' responses influence them, a background of self-efficacy theory and phenomenology methodology are provided.

The Current State of Adolescent Reading

Over the course of the last several decades, the amount of time adolescents spend reading for school or leisure has declined, along with their reading comprehension abilities (Cantrell et al., 2018; Spichtig et al., 2016). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), only 14 percent of 13-year-olds indicated that they read for fun daily, the lowest percentage since the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment has been administered, while 31 percent reported that they rarely or never read at all (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2023). The overall reading scores showed a decline since 2020, but it is important to note that those who reported reading for leisure more often scored better than those who reported rarely or never reading (USDE, 2023).

The data for high school and college readers is disappointingly similar. Only 13 percent of twelfth-grade students reported reading outside of school daily, while average reading scores declined with more students performing below basic levels than in the past (USDE, 2019). These reading habits and abilities then follow students to college. Kittle (2020) found that half of her college freshmen claimed to never read books while only ten percent claimed to read often (p. 77). At the collegiate level, reading is considered especially important as a means of learning outside of lectures and classroom activities, yet a majority of college students are unwilling or unable to complete reading assignments (Ritchey & List, 2022).

Reading Motivation and Engagement

As students move up in grade levels, their reading comprehension abilities impact their performance in most academic subjects, not just English classes, especially in the upper grades (Wigfield et al., 2016). Many students struggle with reading from an early age, and these difficulties are compounded as new skills depend upon prior learning, making it challenging for students to improve, especially if they lack the motivation to do so (Wigfield et al., 2016). As students become older, their motivation to read tends to decline (Mol & Jolles, 2014; Varuzza et al., 2014; Wigfield et al., 2016), which often results in the need for remediation when students get to college (Ritchey & List, 2022).

Students' reading motivation is directly correlated with academic achievement. For example, Mol and Jolles (2014) found that 80 percent of students in the lower achieving tracks did not enjoy reading or engage in leisure reading and often earned lower grades; students in the higher tracks who did enjoy reading often earned higher grades than those who found reading unenjoyable. They posit that "better skilled readers . . . are more likely to enjoy what they are reading, to continue reading voluntarily, and to increase their school performance" (Mol & Jolles, 2014, p. 1214). On the other hand, unmotivated readers, who do not enjoy reading, often engage in a cycle of reading avoidance (Broz, 2011) and low achievement (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2017). McGeown et al. (2015) found that adolescents' reading motivation and habits were predictors of their comprehension abilities and reading speeds, suggesting that "it is worthwhile identifying ways to boost adolescents' reading motivation and engagement in fiction book reading" (p. 566) in order to increase academic achievement.

Reading engagement, which includes interactions with texts in ways that encourage reading comprehension, knowledge construction, and social interactions (Guthrie et al., 2012), is often a result of motivation. Teachers can combat the natural decline in reading motivation and

increase interest and engagement by making reading relevant to students' lives (Cantrell et al., 2018; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012; Wolk, 2010), allowing students choice in what they are reading (Fisher & Frey, 2018; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Strickland, 2023), providing class time for independent reading (Chua, 2008; Varuzza et al., 2014; Yoon, 2002), making space for students to discuss their chosen reading selections (Varuzza et al., 2014; Wigfield et al., 2016), and helping students to develop self-efficacy (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2017; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Ortlieb & Schatz, 2020; Wolters et al., 2013).

Allred and Cena (2020) found that eleventh-grade students who were provided class time to read self-selected texts and discuss them in groups with their peers reported improved reader self-concepts, enhanced attitudes about reading, and increased reading value. English teachers can engage adolescent readers, foster an enjoyment of reading, and improve students' reading skills by incorporating diverse YAL in their classrooms and working with students to make curriculum decisions (Miller et al., 2020). When students have access to inclusive texts that relate to their identities and experiences outside of school, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged readers (Heineke et al., 2022).

Young Adult Literature

YAL offers a variety of positive outcomes in English classrooms, including the opportunity to engage adolescents with texts that can allow them to see themselves in what they read (Groenke et al., 2015) and better understand others and the world around them (Carnesi, 2018; Findora & Hammond, 2021; Johnson et al., 2017; Wolk, 2009). While many teachers and administrators still view YAL as inappropriate for the classroom, those opinions are slowly changing as scholars and educators alike discover the richness and complexity of modern YAL texts. Despite this, there are still challenges to incorporating YAL in secondary classrooms,

including many teachers' unchanging perceptions of its quality and value and the edgy content that some deem inappropriate for adolescents.

Challenges to YAL

One of the biggest challenges to using YAL in the secondary English classroom is the perception that it is not complex or challenging enough to be used in secondary curricula. Connors (2013) found that preservice teachers recognized that secondary students would enjoy reading YAL texts, but they were less certain about the ability of such texts to prepare students for the demanding reading they would face in college. According to Gibbons et al. (2006), many English teachers view YAL as beneficial for struggling readers or as engaging reading material outside of the curriculum but as inadequate for classroom instruction because it is not complex enough for study.

Some teachers who pair YAL with canonical texts report that they use the more accessible YAL texts to scaffold students' reading in order to prepare them for the more rigorous and literary reading they will do in canonical texts (Glaws, 2021; Toliver & Hadley, 2021). Some school districts adopt this view as well, discouraging the study of "easy" and "fun" YAL when there is a need for "rigor" and "challenging texts" (Darragh & Boyd, 2019, p. 68); these critics often view canonical novels as the only texts capable of providing the appropriate rigor (Miller et al., 2020).

A second significant challenge to studying YAL texts is that they often contain issues that may be perceived as controversial and are subject to challenge or backlash from parents, community members, other teachers, and administrators, leaving many teachers understandably hesitant to use them (Miller et al., 2020). In her analysis of the language of book challenges, Knox (2019) found that challenges are based primarily on similar themes, including "the moral

decline of society, the importance of institutional support for parenting, and indoctrination" (p. 29). The resulting climate creates a challenge for teachers who want to prepare students to live in the 21st century but cannot provide students access to books that reflect the complexity of their world (David et al., 2023).

This dilemma is becoming more problematic as book challenges are on the rise with challenges in 2022 being the highest ever recorded by the American Library Association (ALA) (ALA, 2023) with many being from groups involved in political movements (ALA, 2023; Buehler, 2023; Dallacqua, 2022) who are seeking political advantages (Connors & Trites, 2022). The books most frequently challenged are purported to include sexually explicit material, LGTBQIA+ content, violence, profanity, and drugs (ALA, 2023); they are also often the books that adolescents find most engaging (Niccolini, 2015). When educators fear the response of parents or administrators to the texts they have selected, they may choose to preemptively censor them, or exclude them despite their suitability for their students and curriculum (David et al., 2023; Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020b) and thus deny their students access to engaging, relevant texts.

Shifting Perspectives

Despite the potential issues some have with YAL, many educators recognize the value of incorporating texts that students actually want to read (Allred & Cena, 2020; Fisher & Frey, 2018; Gibbons et al., 2006; Guthrie et al., 2012; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Wolk, 2010). Glaws (2021) found that teachers' perceptions of YAL overall have increased in recent years, and even those who selected canonical texts for their classrooms admitted that YAL was engaging for students. Some English teachers are realizing the need to reflect on the texts they select in order to incorporate literature that centers equity and justice rather than the classics they have long

held dear (Hadley & Toliver, 2023). Educators are beginning to realize that YAL, including graphic novels (Eckert, 2013), is perfectly suited to meeting curriculum standards and requirements (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012), including those of AP English courses (Miller et al., 2020).

Scholars have also begun to recognize the value of YAL. In a study of scholarly works published between 2000 and 2020 that focused on YAL, Suico et al. (2023) found that content of the books has turned from surface level information (e.g., author biographies, teaching justifications) to analysis (e.g., criticism, theory). This shift in scholarly research suggests that there is YAL that is complex, well-crafted, and sophisticated (Connors, 2013) enough to be subjected to literary analysis in the same manner as canonical texts (Suico et al., 2023). In an era of accountability, this provides teachers who wish to use YAL within their instruction the ability to account for the texts' complexity in addition to their relatability to students (Connors, 2013).

Others (Appleman, 2023; Banack, 2021; Bissonnette & Glazier, 2016; Toliver, 2023) are calling into question the notion that the texts in the literary canon are representative of all students or are the best books for high school students to read. Many teachers select canonical texts with the belief that there are certain classics that students must read to learn literary skills, understand common literary allusions and tropes, and be prepared for college (Toliver & Hadley, 2021). In a study of preservice teachers' high school reading experiences, Toliver and Hadley (2021) found that students had been assigned a total of 220 different books with no single book being assigned universally, yet these students had obtained the literary skills necessary to survive college and the world. Similarly, Glaws (2021) found that, although canonical texts were more frequently assigned, there were 285 disparate titles, indicating that there is not "a traditional booklist used and commonly read by secondary students across schools and districts" (p. 30).

Another common argument for using canonical texts is the belief that students must read certain books as part of a "shared humanity" (Toliver & Hadley, 2021, p. 11) or a "background in the things that are part of our collective culture" (Glaws, 2021, p. 28); however, this argument assumes that all students experience humanity in the same way and through the same cultural identity (Toliver & Hadley, 2021). While canonical texts may allow teachers to fulfill their literary goals, there are other quality texts that may do the same while also engaging students by connecting to their identities and experiences. In fact, YAL methods courses that are more frequently becoming part of English teacher preparation programs require students to read YAL texts as a means of understanding their future diverse student populations in addition to preparing them to teach the literature (Strickland, 2021).

Benefits for Adolescents

Understanding the benefits that YAL can bring to adolescents is important for secondary English teachers and their school and district administrators, all of whom are responsible for curriculum decisions. English teachers often feel that it is their responsibility to "nurture a love of reading and create lifelong reading habits" (Glaws, 2021, p. 26), yet the persistent use of canonical texts instead "teach[es] kids to hate reading and to see education as irrelevant" (Wolk, 2010, p. 10). English teachers, instructional leaders, and curriculum specialists need to be aware that YAL can help students to develop the desired love of reading while also meeting the standards and objectives of the course—a win for both the students and the school.

Growing Adolescent Literacy Skills. Since the growth of literacy skills requires actual reading and YAL is engaging for students, young adult texts have a logical place within a secondary English curriculum as they can be used to foster reading that leads to growth and meets state and national standards (Owczarzak, 2023). According to the International Literacy

Association (ILA), literacy instruction must prepare students to read increasingly complex texts and contend with progressively complex issues that they will encounter in every course they take (ILA, 2019). Young adult texts are more than adequate to achieve these goals.

Students' reading and literacy skills are often measured by state or national standards, all of which require students to read, analyze, and respond to complex texts. Well-written YAL has been shown to possess the "literary sophistication and complexity" (Goering & Connors, 2014, p. 18) necessary to encourage growth in students' literacy skills and allow them to meet standards such as those put forth in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) (Glaus, 2014; Ostenson & Wadham, 2012) and Advanced Placement English courses (Miller et al., 2020). Providing time for students to read freely allows them to develop comprehension and vocabulary skills that translate to higher test scores (Owczarzak, 2023).

Despite the exemplar texts provided in Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) being primarily canonical, the sample performance tasks included in Appendix B can easily be adapted to young adult texts. For example, one suggested performance task is for students to "provide an objective summary of F. Scott's Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*" in which "they analyze how over the course of the text different characters try to escape the worlds they come from, including whose help they get and whether anybody succeeds in escaping [RL.11–12.2]" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, p. 163). This performance task could be applied to any number of YAL texts, such as Zentner's (2016) *The Serpent King*, Marquardt's (2017) *The Radius of Us*, or Benway's (2017) *Far from the Tree*. Each of these texts features accessible language, engaging plots, and diverse characters who attempt in some way an escape from their realities. They also involve complex literary structures that provide students

with the skills necessary to meet the standards, build reading stamina, and develop skills that will enable them to read increasingly complex texts (Shanahan et al., 2012).

Although the above performance task could have been accomplished with a number of canonical texts, an educator's choice to incorporate YAL that centers student voices rather than adult voices is more likely to support adolescents' literacy development (ILA, 2019). The resources and texts included in a curriculum indicate what is valued by the adults who implement it; thus, including diverse perspectives rather than only one dominant narrative contributes significantly to adolescents' literacy (ILA, 2019) as they are more likely to be engaged with texts that value their perspectives and identities. Educators who provide texts that center adolescents in authentic experiences send the message to students that they "have the ability to grapple with difficult issues," and these teachers "position youth as experts on their lived realities and empower them to become agents in their own lives" (Flores et al., 2016, p. 81).

Providing students with autonomy in selecting texts in addition to those chosen by the teacher also contributes to agency, engagement, and literacy development (Afflerbach & Harrison, 2017). In a study of 11th-grade ELA students, many of whom reported not enjoying reading, Allred and Cena (2020) found that providing students with choice in what they read helped them to remain motivated and engaged when reading in class. When teachers provide adolescents with more choices in what they read, students often "develop elaborate strategies for selecting books and are more likely to become intrinsically motivated readers" (Fisher & Frey, 2018, p. 91).

Ivey and Johnston (2013) spent a year examining eighth grade students' perceptions of the outcomes of reading self-selected young adult literature in their ELA class. They found that students, many of whom confessed to choosing not to read in the past, now considered

themselves highly engaged readers who connected with their YAL novels and discussed what they were reading with peers (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Students who are engaged readers often earn higher test scores than their non-engaged peers, but the real benefits of engaged reading that they discover are "agency around their reading, a greater sense of social and moral agency, the development of relationships, emotional and academic self-regulation, more positive outlooks on their futures, and even happiness" (Kittle & Ivey, 2019, p. 12).

Understanding Themselves and Others. Through their reading of diverse YAL, students can gain a better understanding of themselves and others who are different from them. Sims Bishop (1990) describes these texts as *mirrors* and *windows*. Mirror texts allow children, particularly those from minority groups, to see their cultures, language, values, and traditions reflected in what they are reading and see their lives as "part of the larger human experience" (Sims Bishop, 1990, p. 11). Equally as important for children's development, window texts provide opportunities for students from dominant groups to find value in cultures different from their own and to realize that the human condition extends beyond their existence (Sims Bishop, 1990).

Characters in YAL texts experience the same issues and undergo similar challenges as the adolescents who read them, including discovering their identities or dealing with conflicts, and students can identify with those characters and see how they may overcome their struggles (Gibbons et al., 2006). Students' identities can be reconstructed through critical examination of cultural media, including books (Huang, 2015), and reading YAL may help them to improve their identities as readers as well as their perceptions of themselves (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). YAL can also open doors for teachers to bring controversial topics (e.g., suicide, bullying, racism, sexuality) into the classroom (A. S. Boyd et al., 2021) and foster open, honest

conversations with students who have undergone similar challenges and may need avenues to talk about their experiences and emotions (Olan & Richmond, 2017).

Through reading about the experiences of characters whose identities are different from theirs, adolescents can also better understand others. When students read about characters who are experiencing situations such as bullying or discrimination, their ability to experience empathy and understanding increases because people respond to injustices in reading in much the same way as they do when witnessing them in real life (Connors & Trites, 2022). Similarly, Ivey and Johnston (2013) found that students who read YAL began to look at decisions through others' perspectives and to better understand people and their choices. Additionally, Huang (2015) found that discussing perceived stereotypes in media can help students to consider their assumptions about discrimination in society and the "irresponsibility of claiming ignorance of a group's predicament because of lack of group affiliation" (p. 333).

Increased Social Consciousness. Adolescents' increased understanding and consideration of others' experiences may lead to greater social consciousness. Because of its contemporary authorship, YAL reflects national events (e.g., mass shootings, political activity) and social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, #metoo) that are occurring in adolescents' lives, and these texts can provide teachers with opportunities to provide "culturally responsive and critical texts for students that encourage reading and interaction in their worlds" (Suico et al., 2023, p. 128). YAL publications are growing increasingly diverse and multicultural with texts that "represent different ethnic and cultural groups" and are "reflective of our ever-growing diverse society" (Gibbons et al., 2006, p. 56). Providing students with texts that reflect their experiences can help provide space for students to recognize and discuss complex social issues that affect them (Heineke et al., 2022).

Rather than avoiding the controversial topics that cause YAL to be challenged, teachers can incorporate them into classroom discourse in an effort to include all students and their communities (F. B. Boyd et al., 2015). Students who read YAL centered on social injustices reported reconsidering their moral stances on those issues, being slower to make assumptions about others, and desiring to prevent inequities in society (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Malo-Juvera (2014), for example, found that students who read Anderson's (1999) *Speak* and engaged in meaningful conversations about rape showed decreased levels of rape myth acceptance. Similarly, Ginsberg and Glenn (2019) found that after reading books that centered on Muslim characters coupled with carefully crafted instruction, students indicated shifts in their original assumptions about Islam and demonstrated empathy for characters who were unlike them.

Additionally, in a study of approximately 200 high school seniors, Findora and Hammond (2021) found that White students who read multicultural texts had similar experiences as their peers who read White-centered books; regardless of books read, students discussed them academically by focusing on literary elements, and students connected to the characters in their books. However, 90% of the students who read multicultural texts expanded their discussions beyond literary analysis to explorations of race and discrimination without teacher prompting and suggested themselves the "power of literature and how it can truly open [their] eyes to a whole new world" (Findora & Hammond, 2021, p. 12). Today's students live in an increasingly global society in which they must interact with others who are unlike them culturally, socially, and politically; providing students access to diverse literature can open the door for them to consider others' perspectives and to learn to interact with them (Lowery, 2023).

Secondary English Teacher Preparation

Although scholars of both literature and English curriculum have come to recognize the value of YAL in the English classroom, courses in YAL are often not required for preservice

English teachers and are not offered at all in some teacher education programs (Matey, 2021). The NCTE's (2018a) position statement on *Preparing Teachers with Knowledge of Children's and Young Adult Literature* charges teacher preparation programs with the responsibility of educating PSTs on the value of using YAL while providing the pedagogy to do so and inspiring them to become avid readers of literature for the adolescents they will serve. Many secondary English teacher preparation programs have heeded this call and offer courses in YAL alongside traditional methods courses. Strickland's (2020, 2021, 2023) analysis of syllabi from YAL courses within secondary English education programs revealed that these courses share some similar goals, including using YAL to prepare preservice teachers (PST) to teach reading and writing skills, to meet the needs of all students, and to develop PSTs' own reading skills.

YAL courses within secondary English programs are also preparing preservice teachers to better understand themselves and the students they will teach in the future. For example, Pytash (2013) required PSTs to read 10 YAL novels throughout a semester course. Many PSTs selected books that would help them to understand suicides that had affected their lives, and they were hoping to "learn something that would provide understanding, comfort, and a sense of peace" (p. 474). As PSTs developed a better understanding of the complexities of these situations, they also began to feel empathy for the book's characters and to consider how they might respond to their future students who have similar experiences. PSTs also gained understanding in how they could incorporate YAL texts in their future classrooms to engage students in critical conversations about these often-taboo topics that affect so many adolescents' lives (Pytash, 2013).

Additionally, Pytash and Hylton (2021) examined the effects of reading YAL and participating in a literature-based field experience at a juvenile detention facility on PSTs' social

perspective taking (SPT), or “a person’s ability to understand people accurately” (p. 27). They encouraged their PSTs to develop this disposition by reading culturally diverse young adult literature (YAL) and then considering implications of race, identifying personal and systemic biases, and adopting critical perspectives about social constructs (Pytash & Hylton, 2021). As a result, some PSTs found that the experiences helped them to better understand others by “providing a space for [them] to reconcile their biases in a nonconfrontational way” (p. 48).

Donovan and Weber (2021) examined the factors that influenced PSTs selection of YAL involving characters with disabilities for reading and classroom use. They found that PSTs’ reading experiences with YAL featuring characters with disabilities were limited mostly to special education courses, which influenced the texts they selected for reading (Donovan & Weber, 2021). Participants noted that the characters in the texts were often portrayed as those with disabilities trying to avoid discrimination or those without disabilities “trying to fix or protect” (p. 217); however, these realizations did not follow into their discussions of how they might teach these texts in a unit. Donovan and Weber (2021) suggest a “need to develop and connect PSTs’ critical thinking within and across coursework” and to provide “representations of disabilities in other courses” (p. 219) in order to help PSTs “understand disability in a sociocultural context” (p. 220).

Sarigianides (2012) asked PSTs in a YAL course to examine the ways adolescents have been and still are perceived and portrayed in texts, schools, and society before they begin reading course YAL texts. PSTs often note that adolescents are viewed as “reckless, overly emotional, and immature,” and this conception “allows them, as adults, to be positioned as authorities in relation to teens who need their guidance” (Sarigianides, 2012, p. 225). Sarigianides (2012) posits that PSTs and teachers should consider the assumptions about adolescents that they hold

as well as the stereotypes that are perpetuated in young adult texts. One way to begin is to view adolescence as “a social construct rather than a purely biologically or psychologically determined life stage” (Sarigianides, 2012, p.225).

Matey (2021) restructured her English education courses, which were comprised primarily of White females, to teach explicitly about race and provide the PSTs with not only the pedagogy necessary to teach young adult literature but also the ability to recognize racism and empathize with those who experience it (Matey, 2021). Through the course, PSTs came to understand that they have the ability to “meet state standards, prepare students for standardized testing, read YA literature, *and* accomplish the goals of reading for race and social justice” (Matey, 2021, p. 77). In a similar vein, Virtue (2021) advocated for teaching PSTs to plan lessons in which they engage their adolescent students in meaningful conversations about diverse literature. For discussions to be rich and authentic, PSTs were taught to develop awareness of the various types of diversity that will exist in their classrooms, to create inclusive environments that honor all voices, and to use student responses to guide discussions in meaningful ways (Virtue, 2021). Both Matey (2021) and Virtue (2021) began their courses by having PSTs explore their own biases about diversity and perceptions of the struggles of adolescence through activities that involve reflection and introspection.

Despite the training PSTs receive, however, many are unable or unwilling to implement what they studied previously when they have their own classrooms. For example, considering adolescents in ways outside of the traditional stereotypes requires the teaching of different texts, some of which may be considered controversial; the potential for parental challenges makes many teachers uncomfortable, especially those just beginning a career (Sarigianides, 2012), and thus novice teachers often disregard what they were taught in their preparatory programs.

Greathouse and Diccio (2016) found that PSTs who read LGBTQ texts in their YAL coursework adopted an ally-stance as a direct result of reading those novels, and they maintained that stance as they began their teaching careers. They also believed that students in their contexts could benefit from reading LGBTQ texts as well; however, they were unwilling to incorporate literature or discussions about LGBTQ issues in their classrooms because of the fear of backlash (Greathouse & Diccio, 2016).

Sarigianides and Borsheim-Black (2022) found that PSTs who studied antiracist literature instruction (ALI) in their YAL classes were mixed on whether they would pursue teaching it once they began teaching. Many students were hesitant to pursue ALI, despite believing that it is necessary, out of fear of parent or community pushback, feelings of ignorance about race and racism, and concerns "about being perceived as bringing a personal agenda to teaching about race and racism" (Sarigianides & Borsheim-Black, 2022, p. 18). Many students, though, committed to using ALI in their future work with students after feeling they had learned enough strategies to incorporate antiracist pedagogy, seeing their practicum teachers engage in ALI, and participating in deep discussions in class. Sarigianides and Borsheim-Black (2022) posit that PSTs need explicit instruction, modeling, and concrete examples to help them develop the skills and confidence to transfer their learning to practice.

These examples highlight the importance of incorporating YAL curriculum within secondary English teacher education programs for a variety of purposes, but they also reveal the problem of novice teachers' inability to transfer what they learned in college coursework to classroom curriculum. While some YAL courses do teach PSTs to defend their choices of YAL texts (Strickland, 2023), this is not always enough to combat the very real fear and pushback they face when they enter a classroom on their own (Darragh & Boyd, 2019; Watkins & Ostenson,

2015). Despite these challenges, English teacher educators must find ways to prepare PSTs for the work they will do with curriculum (e.g., text selection, meeting standards) while also finding ways "to instill in preservice teachers confidence in their text selections—to see themselves as trained professionals who have the skills and knowledge required to make choices that will meet their students' needs at academic, social, and emotional levels" (Darragh & Boyd, 2019, p. 70).

Curriculum and school leaders must also provide the support novice teachers need to develop the confidence to implement the critical understandings that may assist them with anything from "engaging the otherwise disengaged reader to promoting the social-emotional development of adolescent learners" and "to hold their ground and speak for those silenced by censorship" (Greathouse et al., 2017, p. 19). According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory (2012), novice teachers can be persuaded to believe in themselves, and the experience of overcoming obstacles and finding success leads to greater self-efficacy for novice teachers (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). School leaders, community members, and colleagues must foster environments where novice teachers can grow and succeed in their work with the support they need (Sarigianides & Borsheim-Black, 2022).

Text Selection

The texts selected for classroom study have a great impact on what students learn about themselves and the world in addition to the standards of the curriculum (Friese et al., 2008). The selection of texts is a political act with teachers or districts having the power to decide what is included and what is excluded, whose voices will be heard and whose will be silenced, whether the canon will be defended or disrupted (Toliver & Hadley, 2021). Every text read in a classroom "engages with one or more perspectives and suppresses others" (Schieble, 2012, p. 220), and what is left out of the curriculum by choice or mandate indicates what is valued by educators and districts as much as what is included (Niccolini, 2015). Those who develop curriculum have the

“opportunity to effect real change in the world by simply granting students the chance to step into the pages of a different kind of book” (Findora & Hammond, 2021, p. 16).

In many English classrooms, however, students are still expected to read predominantly canonical texts written predominantly by White men and about White characters (Findora & Hammond, 2021; Glaws, 2021; Olan & Richmond, 2017; Stallworth & Gibbons, 2012) either by choice or by mandate. Wolk (2010) posits that the texts students are assigned to read “appear to be designed to make reading painful, tedious, and irrelevant” (p. 10), a point that is supported by Kittle’s (2020) finding that many college students report graduating from high school “without reading a single book” (p. 78) and struggle to complete college reading assignments because of a lack of stamina.

Culturally diverse YAL will only be included in English curricula when teachers are allowed to “take control of the curriculum” and “employ [the] professional judgment” suggested in the Common Core appendix (Eckert, 2013, p. 43) and bring about change themselves (F. B. Boyd et al., 2015). Although the most frequently assigned texts remain canonical, multicultural, young adult, and contemporary literature are finding their way into English classrooms (Stallworth & Gibbons, 2012). Glaws (2021) found that 95% of middle and high school teachers reported using YAL in some capacity in their classrooms, although the higher grades, especially grades 11 and 12, report much lower use (Glaws, 2021; A. M. Smith et al., 2018). Only about half of the high school teachers interviewed used YAL for instruction, despite their years of teaching experience, degree attainment, and autonomy in text selection; others found YAL suitable for independent reading and literature circle selections rather than for instruction (Glaws, 2021). There are many factors that affect teachers’ decisions about including YAL that may help to explain this disparity.

Factors that Influence Text Selection

A variety of external (e.g., standardized testing, challenges, departments) and internal (e.g., perceptions of YAL, assumptions about youth) factors have been shown to impact teachers' decisions about the texts they use in their classrooms. Since the benefits of using YAL have been recognized by many teachers who choose not to include it in their classrooms, a look at these factors may help to shed light on why canonical texts remain at the top of teachers' selections despite the research supporting the inclusion of YAL. Understanding these factors may help curriculum and educational leaders to provide greater support to teachers who wish to incorporate YAL but do not feel empowered to incorporate such texts in their classrooms (Stallworth et al., 2006).

Testing and Time. Many English teachers select texts based on a variety of factors related to standardized testing, including meeting curriculum standards, text complexity, and time. Some teachers reported that they do not include YAL or even full novels of any type in their curricula for a variety of reasons, including not having time because of a focus on standardized testing (Glaws, 2021; A. M. Smith et al., 2018). Some who wished to incorporate YAL had difficulty in doing so because of the personal time investment required to read and locate appropriate texts that would meet both curriculum requirements and students' needs (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Others reported that using YAL took too much time to incorporate within instruction, so they used it only for read-alouds or literature circles (Gibbons et al., 2006). With a limited amount of time to plan, prepare, and teach within high-stakes testing environments, many teachers are unwilling or unable to use YAL to meet their curricular requirements.

Additionally, many teachers are hesitant to implement young adult texts because of the demands of testing and the perception of YAL's complexity. Many teachers still believe that YAL is not complex or rigorous enough to prepare students for standardized assessments or college (Glaws, 2021). Gibbons et al. (2006) found that teachers perceive YAL as lacking sophistication and literary merit and the qualities of canonical texts and are thus incapable of helping students meet curricular objectives; in their view, YAL is fun and easy reading that they may implement at the end of the school year if they have time.

This opinion still remains in many cases. Glaws (2021) found that teachers were more likely to use YAL in on-level English courses while canonical texts were used predominantly in honors courses. Teachers responsible for standardized test scores report not having time to spend on YAL because they are instead focused on preparing students for testing (Friese et al., 2008; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Although quality YAL can be used to meet standards and prepare students for testing, many teachers still question the quality and complexity of young adult texts (Ostenson & Wadham, 2012; A. M. Smith et al., 2018). Some teachers who wish to incorporate YAL, therefore, receive backlash from other teachers and leaders who believe canonical texts or textbooks are better suited for the secondary English curriculum (Toliver & Hadley, 2021).

Similarly, A. M. Smith et al. (2018) found that teachers who previously used YAL in their courses stopped doing so when they began teaching AP English classes where they viewed canonical works as more complex and challenging for study. Interestingly, over half of the high school teachers surveyed indicated that AP students could benefit from reading YAL as part of classroom instruction but, overall, still perceived it as more beneficial to lower-level students (e.g., those reading below grade level, multilanguage learners, or those with learning disabilities) (Glaws, 2021). Although perceptions have changed somewhat in favor of YAL, the ultimate

texts that teachers select indicate that they still rely predominantly on canonical texts for instruction, particularly in upper-level courses.

Departments and Schools. Many teachers have indicated that their school's English department was the most influential factor in their text selection process (Darragh & Boyd, 2019; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Darragh and Boyd (2019) found that veteran teachers felt more autonomy and confidence in their text decisions, while novices expressed frustration at feeling forced to use traditional texts when they wanted to select YAL texts instead. Other teachers indicated that they selected from established lists of texts that were taught traditionally at certain grade levels (e.g., *Romeo and Juliet* [Shakespeare, 1597/2005] for freshmen) in their schools; they felt these lists indicated what they should teach because other teachers were doing the same, and they also offered safety in terms of parental challenges (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Watkins and Ostenson (2015) also found that some teachers selected texts based on the content students were learning about in other classes within their schools.

Student Engagement. Numerous studies indicate that teachers take into consideration their students' perceptions of the texts they select. Glaws (2021) found that teachers reported using YAL because it engages students and motivates them to read, provides characters and situations students can relate to, and exposes students to diverse characters and authors (Glaws, 2021). Darragh and Boyd (2019) found that about half of the teachers in their study claimed that students' enjoyment has a large influence on their decisions.

In a study conducted by Watkins and Ostenson (2015), teachers repeatedly referenced their desires "to select the 'best' text to match their readers' abilities, interests, and needs" (p. 264) and were frustrated that they were unable to do so when having to choose books from district lists or from previously purchased class sets. Teachers frequently reported having choices

limited by access to copies of books (Glaws, 2021; Olan & Richmond, 2017; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015) or by a lack of funding to purchase newer, more relevant titles (Darragh & Boyd, 2019; Glaws, 2021).

Assumptions about Adolescents. Many teachers avoid including YAL that includes difficult and potentially controversial topics such as bullying, mental health, racism, sexuality, violence, and poverty (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020b) because of an assumption of adolescent innocence and immaturity, social ignorance (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2019), or impressionability and corruptibility (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020b; Niccolini, 2015). Sulzer and Thein (2016), for example, found that preservice teachers based their ideas about text selection on “the implicit assumption of a ‘normal’ adolescent, envisioned as a White, U.S. citizen of European ancestry, middle class, heterosexual, and abled” (p. 166). This view of the “hypothetical adolescent” (p. 163) led participants to consider texts that would enlighten students about topics with which they were assumed to be unfamiliar, such as poverty or disability. When texts were deemed too mature sexually for the hypothetical adolescent, who is assumed to be naïve and immature, participants suggested offering them as literature circle options or teaching selected excerpts of them (Sulzer & Thein, 2016).

In a similar vein, Hartsfield and Kimmel (2019) found that preservice and inservice teachers felt that difficult books were appropriate only if the content was already familiar to students and was thus not transformative in any way. Some teachers reported that although books that contain edgy material are appropriate for students, they could only support having students read them independently (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2019). Falter (2016) found, though, that, through analysis of and discussion about the portrayal of adolescents in YAL, preservice teachers can shift their thinking and even discover counter-narratives to the stereotypical portrayals of

adolescents. This may also be accomplished by introducing a youth lens (Sarigianides et al, 2015) in the YAL course and by positioning adolescents as experts who can teach the preservice teachers about adolescence (Petrone & Sarigianides, 2017).

School and District Administration. Teachers' perceptions of their school and district administrations' support of YAL varied widely. Darragh and Boyd (2019) found that some administrators were viewed as supportive by providing funding to purchase YAL texts while other teachers perceived that their administrators required teachers to perform so many other duties that they could not make time to consider incorporating YAL. Watkins and Ostenson (2015) found that district-approved lists were also viewed both positively and negatively. Some teachers reported being happy with the choices on the list and felt that they gave them autonomy since they had the final say in what texts they selected. Others expressed a sense of protection in selecting from a list that was approved by the district so that they could receive support if a parent challenged a book. Others were dissatisfied by the limits on their autonomy and perceived an expectation to teach canonical texts even if it was not directly stated (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015).

Glaws (2021) found that some teachers reported that their administrators were making it increasingly challenging for them to continue using YAL as part of their curricula, and Hartsfield and Kimmel (2020b) acknowledged that some school districts discourage the use of controversial texts. As a means of gaining administrative support, Miller et al. (2020) included their school's administrators in their discussions of text selections and explained how the YAL texts they chose met curriculum requirements, which allowed the administration to better support the teachers when parents raised concerns.

Fear of Reactions. One of the major factors at play when teachers select texts is the fear of pushback or backlash from parents (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2019), community members, colleagues, and administrators (Glaws, 2021). This fear is understandable as threats against teachers, schools, librarians, and school boards have increased immensely as parents and political groups ramp up efforts to remove multicultural books from libraries and classrooms (Connors & Trites, 2022). Many teachers find that it is difficult to find texts that are interesting to students and complex enough to meet standards yet also acceptable to parents (Darragh & Boyd, 2019; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015), so they resort to the traditional canonical texts that "have less objectionable subject matter as far as parents are concerned" (Stallworth et al., 2006, p. 484) and are thus less likely to be challenged (Darragh & Boyd, 2019) and even to avoid controversy altogether (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020b).

Preservice and novice teachers reportedly fear this conflict (Darragh & Boyd, 2019; Greathouse et al., 2017) today more than ever as they are just beginning their careers and feel that they cannot voice their desires that may be in opposition to existing requirements (Olan & Richmond, 2017). This is understandable as teachers have found that fighting censorship is an exhaustive undertaking that requires courage, strength, and time—along with the potential consequences of standing up against powerful district leaders or community leaders (Revelle & Waugh, 2023). Today's polarized, politically charged climate has created a sense of fear in teachers at all stages of their careers as they decide whether to risk selecting texts they believe are best for their students or to give in to the pressures of challengers; either way, "the toll this work takes is steep" (David et al., 2023, p. 106).

Teachers may find that one way to alleviate concerns about censorship is to work in collaboration with other teachers and administrators. For example, Miller et al. (2020) worked

together to create a department-wide policy that outlined the texts students would study at each level of English to ensure that they were provided with engaging texts that reflected their experiences. This was made public as a unified departmental policy with administrative approval that was referenced when parental concerns arose. Additionally, in a study of how teachers considered teaching difficult topics in their classrooms, A. S. Boyd et al. (2021) found that teachers who were initially fearful of incorporating texts dealing with issues such as mental health, poverty, and addiction, such as Zentner's (2016) *The Serpent King* or Khorram's (2018) *Darius the Great Is Not Okay,* began to shift their perspectives and consider ways to incorporate the books after having critical conversations with colleagues.

Teachers need the support of others, including curriculum and educational leaders, to select texts that meet the needs of all students. This is especially true at the high school level, where the reading curriculum tends to stagnate with "only a few books each year . . . and all students read[ing] at the same slow pace" (Kittle & Ivey, 2019, p. 8). Bringing change of this magnitude to the secondary English curriculum cannot be accomplished by the English teachers alone, nor can teachers alone fight the censorship that pervades the high school. Curriculum leadership requires "addressing issues of the broader cultural political context and how the politics apply to particular school settings" (Ylimaki, 2012, p. 341). For the empowerment of the students and teachers, educational leaders may need to challenge policies that deny others the rights afforded to them.

Educational Theory

This study was grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory which posits that human behavior is the result of the intermingling of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors (Bandura, 2012) that allow people to act as agents who exert some sense of control over the

events in their lives (Bandura, 2011). People are agentic, for example, when they choose behaviors in which they engage, select, or create environments in which they can exercise control, or use their influence to exert control where they are able (Bandura, 2012). Agency requires cognitive processes that include intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, self-regulation, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2001). Self-reflection includes the most fundamental beliefs for the deployment of agency: self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, or people's beliefs in their abilities to achieve desired outcomes, can have both positive and negative effects on a variety of areas of human thought and behavior, including cognition, motivation, and emotion (Bandura, 1997). These beliefs are "the foundation of human agency" (Bandura, 2001, p. 10) because there is little incentive to initiate action or persevere through challenges if people do not believe that they can be successful following their attempts. On its own, self-efficacy is a critical factor for agency, but its effects on other important areas (e.g., goal setting, self-concept, mood) make perceived self-efficacy a powerful influence in human behavior.

People's self-efficacy can influence, for example, whether they are optimistic or pessimistic, the challenges they will take on and how long they will work to overcome them, and the types of environments they choose for personal development (Bandura, 2001). Self-efficacy directly influences people's motivation as they are more likely to act when they believe they will be successful in achieving their desired outcomes, and those whose self-efficacy is stronger are likely to set higher goals for themselves and to devise ways to overcome obstacles to success, while those with low self-efficacy are more likely to view obstacles as insurmountable and to give up if they engaged at all, particularly "in the face of pressing situational demands and failures that have social repercussions" (Bandura, 1993, p. 120).

Although people may believe that a particular action will result in a desired outcome, this knowledge is useless if they do not believe that they have the ability to make it happen (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is a constantly fluctuating set of beliefs that may be different for people in the same context or for one individual between different situations or settings (Bandura, 2012). Thus, a person's performance may be low, average, or high simply based on the personal perceptions of his or her ability to exert control or to perform in the environment at hand (Bandura, 1993); thus, "it is not just what you have but how well you orchestrate what you have that determines the quality of performance" (Bandura, 2012, p. 19). People who doubt their abilities or the results of their efforts at the onset of the situation are likely to have few results even if the environment provides opportunities, whereas those who believe in their abilities to persevere, regardless of the constraints of their environments, will often find ways to exert some measure of control (Bandura, 1993).

This is especially true when people face situations that have potentially dire consequences; those who doubt their abilities often avoid threatening experiences that cause feelings of anxiety, and they often magnify the threat beyond its reality (Bandura, 1993). Those with low self-efficacy can be encouraged to take on such challenges by watching others experience the same situation without harmful consequences or being encouraged in their coping abilities (Bandura, 1977). On the other hand, those who believe they can manage the challenges that arise are more likely to approach difficult situations calmly and confidently (Pajares, 1996) and often develop personally as a result (Bandura, 1993). Once people develop self-efficacy in one area, however, they generally begin to experience it in other areas where they previously struggled (Bandura, 1977) as they have learned to visualize scenarios where they are successful rather than focusing on what could go wrong (Bandura, 1993).

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is one of the few confirmed links between teachers' dispositions and student behavior and achievement (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Klassen and Tze (2014) found that teachers' self-efficacy (TSE) is strongly correlated with their teaching performance based on evaluations and modestly correlated with student achievement. A teacher's perception of his or her efficacy can directly influence the classroom atmosphere (Bandura, 1993), and those who perceive themselves as highly efficacious are more willing to value their students' interests and perceptions (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Gibson and Dembo (1984) found that teachers with high TSE provide students with more mastery experiences by devoting more class time to academic learning, providing better support for struggling students, and affording positive feedback and praise as opposed to those with low TSE who waste class time on nonacademic activities, give up easily on struggling learners, and criticize students when they fail. Teachers who have high TSE are more likely to consider new instructional strategies important, to implement new practices and learning from professional development, and to collaborate more often with other teachers to use data to drive instruction (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Having teachers with high self-efficacy has been shown to improve learning experiences for students at all levels (Bandura, 1993; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

In addition to its effects on teaching, TSE may also affect teachers' sense of well-being (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Research has shown a correlation between perceived self-efficacy and job-related stress for teachers: teachers with increased stress levels perceived lower levels of TSE (Gonzalez et al., 2016) while those with high TSE reported feeling less stress from their jobs and students (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Additionally, Ahrari et al. (2021) found that teachers who felt more empowered at school, including those with higher TSE, experienced less stress

and were more satisfied with their jobs. It seems reasonable then to conclude that teachers with high self-efficacy experience less stress and are therefore happier and healthier.

Collective Efficacy

While teachers do often operate within the confines of their classrooms, they also work within a group of other teachers and administrators who are responsible for educating the students within their school. In addition to TSE, teachers develop beliefs about the ability of the entire faculty to achieve the desired educational outcomes within their schools, or collective teacher efficacy (CTE) (Bandura, 1993). TSE and CTE exist in a reciprocal relationship, meaning that teachers' perceptions of their personal abilities to achieve their goals in their classrooms affect their beliefs about the faculty's abilities to do the same and vice versa (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Goddard et al., 2004).

Teachers' perceptions of collective efficacy can have a direct effect on the school's culture and function (Bandura, 1993) and on student achievement (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2000, 2004). As teachers' self-efficacy affects the performance of the students in their classroom, their collective efficacy affects the performance of students across the school (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). Bandura (1993) found that students achieved at the highest levels on nationally normed reading and mathematics tests when they attended schools with staffs who believed they could collectively motivate and educate their students, regardless of socioeconomic status or background.

The Role of Leadership

The leadership model to which principals adhere plays a major role in both student performance and teachers' perceptions of their ability to facilitate student achievement. Teacher self-efficacy and teacher collective efficacy influence one another (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018) and can have major impacts on student outcomes and teacher well-being. A leadership model that

supports both students and teachers according to the school context will be most beneficial, and integrated leadership has been shown to produce positive results.

Integrated Leadership Theory

The focus on effective schools in the 1980s led to the development of the instructional leadership model (Hallinger, 2003) in which the principal initiates actions (e.g., developing goals, evaluating instruction, hiring goal-oriented teachers) to directly and indirectly impact student outcomes (Printy et al., 2009), creating a top-down hierarchy in which the principal was often viewed as the main source of instructional expertise (Aas & Brandmo, 2016). Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, instructional leadership became the model of choice for schools looking to improve student achievement (Hallinger, 2003), and many schools did find the model to be effective (Heck, 1992); however, critics were quick to note its weaknesses (Cuban, 1984), including lack of support for principals who did not possess the necessary skills and the omission of teachers in the decision making (Marks & Printy, 2003).

The 1990s brought the restructuring movement in education and with it another shift in educational leadership (Hallinger, 2003). In reaction to the top-down approach of instructional leadership, transformational leadership embodies a bottom-up approach in which the principal is no longer the central figure making decisions (Hallinger, 2003). Instead, it is understood that the principal cannot create the learning environment alone; instead, leadership is shared with the teachers, and the principal focuses on understanding and meeting the needs of the teachers (Aas & Brandmo, 2016). Rather than directly influencing student achievement, transformational principals create environments where teachers thrive and work collaboratively to meet the academic goals of the school (Hallinger, 2003). Although transformational leadership proved to be an effective way to motivate teachers and create positive learning environments, it did have

weaknesses, including challenges for principals who struggled with how to share leadership (Hallinger, 2003) and a lesser impact on student achievement outcomes (Aas & Brandmo, 2016).

With the advantages and limitations of each leadership theory, ascribing to one alone is unlikely to meet the needs of every school context (Hallinger, 2003). In response, Marks and Printy (2003) advocated for the expansion of instructional leadership to *shared instructional leadership*, a model in which principals and teachers would work together in learning communities to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, thus acknowledging the expertise of teachers.

Marks and Printy (2003) analyzed the leadership models of 24 schools that were undergoing restructuring by measuring the relationship between shared instructional leadership and transformational leadership. The researchers found that the seven schools where transformational leadership was practiced by the principal and shared instructional leadership was practiced by the principal and teachers academically outperformed the other 17 schools, suggesting that an *integrated leadership* model is most effective (Marks & Printy, 2003).

Based on the research of Marks and Printy (2003), Day et al. (2016) developed a study to examine how "successful leaders combine the too often dichotomized practices of transformational and instructional leadership" (p. 221) in various school settings to foster student improvement. The researchers first administered a survey to principals and key staff at schools that had shown improvement under the same principal for the past three years and then conducted 20 in-depth case studies that included multiple visits and interviews.

Day et al. (2016) found that the most effective principals employed "different combinations of actions and strategies relating both to transformational and instructional leadership" (p. 244) that they applied based on the context of their schools. This included sharing

leadership with teachers, who were "supported in their decision making and encouraged to find their own solutions" (Day et al., 2016, p. 249), which in turn developed respect and trust. Within the realm of text selection, teachers who are unable to use their knowledge to find books that meet their students' needs are wasted capital in the classroom (Friese et al., 2008) and are less likely to act on their self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 2012). It is therefore critical for leaders to develop trusting relationships that allow teachers to employ their talents.

Similarly, Kwan (2020) examined the effects of both instructional and transformational leadership in 177 schools in Hong Kong, a context chosen specifically for this study to focus on an Asian rather than Western school system. Participants included assistant principals rather than principals in hopes that they might provide a more objective view of the principals' decisions who completed a survey of 25 items (i.e., 15 for measuring transformational leadership, 10 for measuring instructional leadership). Kwan (2020) found that instructional leadership alone did not facilitate student improvement "unless the principal [had] already made available a school environment in which teachers are competent and motivated" (p. 342), thus supporting the value of integrated leadership.

Leadership and Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teachers report that school and district leaders at all levels have the ability to influence their perceptions of TSE both positively and negatively (Gonzalez et al., 2016; Lambersky, 2016). For example, principals can have a direct impact on teachers' perceptions of their instructional abilities. In an analysis of survey data from over 100,000 teachers internationally, Bellibas and Liu (2017) found that principals' use of instructional leadership methods had a direct positive influence on teacher self-efficacy and posit that teachers develop higher self-efficacy in their use of instructional strategies and ability to motivate students when principals

support these efforts. This is especially important for secondary principals as Bandura (1993) found that teachers in upper grades “view their schools as declining in instructional efficacy” (p. 141). When people have low self-efficacy, they are less likely to achieve success when tasks become difficult (Bandura, 1993); it is no surprise then that teachers who believe that they are incapable of teaching their students may be wary of implementing new strategies and persevering when challenges arise (C. G. Brown, 2012).

During this time of a teacher shortage (Kraft & Lyon, 2022), principals should also be aware of the role TSE may play in teacher satisfaction and retention. Bandura (1993) posits that people who are more efficacious are more interested in their jobs and remain in them longer than those who are less efficacious. In line with this, Zee and Koomen (2016) found that TSE positively predicted elementary, middle, and high school teachers’ levels of commitment; those with higher TSE were more satisfied in their jobs and thus remained, while those with lower TSE were unsatisfied and ultimately quit. It is also interesting to note that teachers with higher TSE report being less satisfied with their salary but are willing to stay in their jobs when they feel satisfied in their positions (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

One area that leaders should examine is the stress levels of teachers, which has a direct impact on TSE and burnout. In a study of 145 elementary, middle, and high school teachers, Gonzalez et al. (2016) found that teachers perceived low TSE when their administrators overloaded them and failed to provide adequate support. Similarly, in a meta-analysis of 11 studies on teacher efficacy and burnout, C. G. Brown (2012) found that TSE is statistically correlated with burnout and emotional exhaustion in teachers. This is in keeping with Bandura’s (1993) findings that burnout is common in academia as a result of chronic feelings of stress and low self-efficacy. Leaders can exert some control over this phenomenon, however, by working to

ensure that teachers feel efficacious. In their meta-analysis of 165 articles on TSE, Zee and Koomen (2016) found that teachers who perceive high levels of self-efficacy experience lower levels of exhaustion and burnout.

School administrators can also foster high levels of TSE through shared leadership practices. Gonzalez et al. (2016) found that teacher TSE increased when leaders sought and valued teachers' input, validated their efforts, and requested their feedback on matters of curriculum and instruction. TSE also increased for teachers whose administrators encouraged them to engage in curricular changes through writing curriculum documents, discussing modifications, and collaborating within professional learning communities (Gonzalez et al., 2016).

Leadership and Collective Teacher Efficacy

Since teachers do not work in isolation, Bandura (1993) stresses the importance of schools having quality leaders in place who "excel in their ability to get their staff to work together with a strong sense of purpose and to believe in their capabilities to surmount obstacles to educational attainments" (p. 141). C. G. Brown (2012) found that leaders who develop a vision and goals that are shared by all teachers may increase both TSE and CTE within their faculties. Additionally, using teacher surveys from over 1,000 teachers in rural, high-poverty schools, Goddard et al. (2015) found that schools with high levels of instructional leadership were more likely to have teachers who work collectively to improve their craft and thus to experience collective efficacy beliefs which resulted in increased student achievement. Consistent with previous findings (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2004), schools with higher levels of CTE experienced greater levels of student achievement regardless of student socioeconomic status or background (Goddard et al., 2015). TCE is not developed easily, but it

may be accomplished by both transformational and instructional leaders (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018), suggesting the potential strength of integrated leadership.

Foundations of the Methodology

Qualitative research designs are used to examine phenomena in the words of the people who experience them, who are considered co-researchers, in order to describe the meanings people ascribe to those experiences (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). Qualitative studies seek to understand the complexities of society (Tuffour, 2017) by examining how people make sense of the world in their natural contexts and providing "rich descriptive accounts of the phenomenon under investigation" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 7). This allows researchers to better understand people's views, perceptions, values, and actions, particularly within social contexts (Hyde & Rouse, 2022). Qualitative studies have thus become increasingly useful in educational research (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019) to "explore new or underresearched areas" (Leavy, 2014, p. 2) of an ever-changing field.

Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that has its roots in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, who believed that "all knowledge begins with experience" (Husserl et al., 2001, p. 42) and that the best way to understand a phenomenon is by hearing first-hand accounts of those who experienced it (Suddick et al., 2020) with the assumption that there are shared aspects of these experiences from which the essence of the phenomenon can be understood (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). Husserl's descriptive phenomenological methodology thus seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon as individuals perceive it (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) with data that is not filtered through any theory (Tuffour, 2017).

Husserl's follower Martin Heidegger (1927/1962) expanded Husserl's descriptive methodology to take a hermeneutic, or interpretive, stance with the goal being not simply to

describe participants' experiences but to understand the individual's mindset during the experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) and to then derive meanings from the experiences (Suddick et al., 2020) in order to better understand "the human experience" (Crist & Tanner, 2003, p. 202). Within hermeneutic phenomenology, participants and researchers both play a role in developing the understanding of a phenomenon through dialogue and previous knowledge (Sorsa et al., 2015).

A more recent phenomenological framework proposed by Jonathan Smith (1996) is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which synthesizes Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and Heidegger's hermeneutics as a method for researchers to interpret participants' personal accounts of their experiences (J. A. Smith, 2019) in an "attempt to understand what it is like to stand in the shoes of their subject . . . and, through interpretative activity, make meaning comprehensible by translating it" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8).

IPA researchers seek to further develop understandings of people's lived experiences with the phenomenon under study rather than searching for causes, proposing solutions, or formulating predictions about the phenomenon (Crist & Tanner, 2003; Webb & Welsh, 2019). This involves first analyzing data from each participant independently within a "double hermeneutic" in which participants are "trying to make sense of their world [while] the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 53). The researcher may then consider what the participants' explanations of feelings and experiences mean in light of the situation as they perceived them (Larkin et al., 2006). Only after individual participants' perspectives have been understood does the IPA researcher search for patterns across the cases (J. A. Smith, 2017) and identify ways in which experiences and perspectives converge and diverge (R. Miller & Minton, 2016). In this

way, IPA research seeks not only to describe the phenomenon but also to understand how people in different contexts perceive their experiences with it.

The various phenomenological frameworks have grown in popularity in the social sciences, including education and psychology, in recent years (Ndame, 2023) because they allow researchers to better understand the human experience using an approach that is easily adaptable to a variety of research settings (Webb & Welsh, 2019). IPA in particular has become widespread in psychological research (J. A. Smith, 2011; Tuffour, 2017) because it allows researchers to work closely with participants to explore and understand their lived experiences (Alase, 2017) and to discover more deeply what those experiences mean within their worlds (Larkin et al., 2006). For example, Buckworth (2017) employed IPA methodology to better understand the experiences and perceptions of preservice teachers who failed a practicum course during their final year of college and to illuminate issues within their preparation programs and placements that can be addressed for future students.

Within the field of secondary English education, Glenn et al. (2018) employed IPA in a study of the experiences of five high school students who had been identified by their schools as struggling readers. The students were enrolled in both an elective YAL course and a required traditional English course. In three separate interviews, the researchers asked participants about their early educational experiences, attitudes about reading, and experiences in the YAL course to better understand how the students perceived their reading identities. Through the repeated in-depth interviews, Glenn et al. (2018) were able to better understand how and why the students maintained the struggling reader identity in the traditional English course but developed a successful reader identity in the YAL course and thereby broke free of the school-imposed label.

Summary

Over the past several decades, there has been a steady decline in adolescent reading for academic and personal purposes for a variety of reasons (Cantrell et al., 2018; Spichtig et al., 2016). One major reason is the canonical texts that students are being assigned to read in their English courses, classic texts that do little to pique students' interests and foster a refusal to read as opposed to an enjoyment of reading (Broz, 2011; Kittle, 2020; Wolk, 2010). To combat this trend toward aliteracy, teachers could incorporate YAL in their classrooms to engage students in texts about characters with whom they can relate and encourage dialogue about difficult topics that matter to adolescents (Niccolini, 2015). Many teachers, however, shy away from YAL for a variety of reasons, including fear of difficult conversations with students, misunderstandings about adolescent maturity, and perceptions that YAL is too simple for secondary English classrooms that must prepare students for the rigors of standardized testing and college (Glaws, 2021; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015).

Just as perspectives of YAL have started to shift in the eyes of scholars and educators, challengers too have taken notice of the content of these multicultural texts that threaten the dominant White narrative (Olan & Richmond, 2017). Their often loud and intimidating tactics have caused many teachers to remain in the safe confines of canonical literature, particularly when they perceive little to no support from their administrations (Friese et al., 2008). The perceived lack of trust in their decision-making abilities and loss of autonomy in curriculum-related decisions has the power to destroy teachers' beliefs in their abilities to be effective educators (Bandura, 2012).

School and district administrators, however, may adopt an integrated leadership model to foster teacher efficacy and provide support by sharing leadership with teachers, valuing their

expertise in curriculum-related decisions, and relieving stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Berryhill et al., 2009). In a study of teachers following the COVID-19 pandemic, Pressley and Ha (2022) found that teachers' perceptions of administrative support directly influenced their feelings of efficacy, along with levels of stress and burnout. Similarly, Jentsch et al. (2022) found that teachers who felt they had support and autonomy in their work experienced greater job satisfaction and lower stress levels. Teachers who perceive that their administrators respect them as professionals, trust their instructional decisions, and offer support when needed are more likely to continue working in their schools (Tran et al., 2023). The research is clear: the support provided by administrators is critical to developing and retaining a healthy, effective teaching staff.

CHAPTER 3. METHOD AND PROCEDURES

Study Overview

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the use of young adult literature (YAL) in the secondary English classroom. The study also examined the factors that influence how and why teachers select texts for whole-class study within their curricula and for inclusion in their classroom libraries. Finally, the study investigated the extent to which teachers perceive support from their school and district administrations when selecting texts for their classrooms. Understanding teachers' experiences with YAL, text selection, and administrative support can inform teacher preparation programs about equipping preservice teachers for curriculum development and provide educators with the tools to select the best texts for creating an inclusive curriculum. School leaders can also benefit from this understanding of how teachers' perceptions of support of their instructional decisions affect their individual and collective self-efficacy.

To that end, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the use of young adult literature in the secondary English classroom?
2. Based on teachers' perceptions, what factors influence secondary English teachers' selection of texts for their classroom curricula and libraries?
3. Based on teachers' perceptions, to what extent does administrative support of teachers' text selections influence their teacher self-efficacy?

Research Design

Qualitative research allows the researcher to examine the experiences of people in individual contexts in order to interpret their understandings of a particular phenomenon

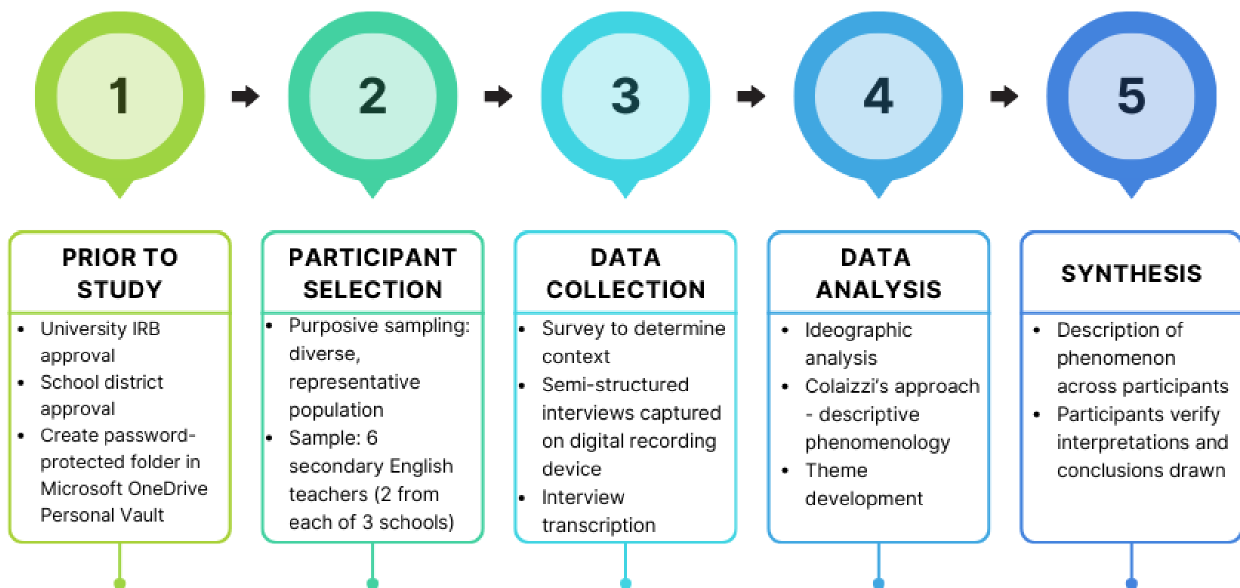
(Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). This research study therefore employed a qualitative design to explore the perceptions of teachers and their experiences with text selection. The study then interpreted meaning about the use of young adult literature (YAL) in secondary classrooms from the teachers' narratives and explored how the support of educational leaders played a role in their decision-making processes.

Since qualitative research focuses on describing and understanding behavior rather than determining numeric outcomes (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019), this design "infuses an added advantage to the exploratory capability that researchers need to explore and investigate their research studies" (Alase, 2017, p. 9) and was therefore advantageous for this study. A qualitative research design is especially fitting in the field of education because educational research is largely based on values and behaviors that need to be described to be fully understood (Tarozzi, 2022). In this case, it was necessary to describe teachers' experiences to understand the complex factors that influenced their decisions about texts and how their ability to make those selections affected their self-efficacy.

To explore teachers' experiences with YAL, text selection, and self-efficacy, this study was conducted using the qualitative methodology of phenomenology, which seeks to understand the essence of a phenomenon by understanding the perspectives of those who have lived through it (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019). To do this, the researcher's "role and responsibility . . . [is] to investigate and interpret the impact of the research subject-matter on the 'lived experiences' of the research participants" (Alase, 2017, p. 11). To move beyond mere description of the phenomenon, this study employed the methods of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) with the purpose of "exploring, describing, interpreting, and situating the means by which [the] participants make sense of their experiences" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 110).

Through the methods of IPA, this study examined the phenomenon through a social constructivist lens to understand the influence of context on teachers' perceptions and actions (Creswell, 2009). Participants' experiences were analyzed first in their individual contexts (i.e., school and courses taught) and then collectively across schools and the school district as a whole. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the implementation of IPA, which will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Figure 3.1



When employing IPA methodology during data collection, the researcher examines experiences solely through the world of the participants and seeks to remove all prior knowledge, biases, and assumptions about the phenomenon under investigation, a process known as bracketing (Alase, 2017). This allows the researcher to view participants' experiences "with

fresh eyes" (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022, p. 5) and to focus on the "human complexities . . . of the individual's life, his biographical history, and the social situation to be taken into consideration" (Tuffour, 2017, p. 3). It is, of course, impossible to remove oneself completely as the researcher is part of the world in which the phenomenon exists, but the researcher must strive to explore the phenomenon "*on its own terms* (i.e., not according to the imposition of any *preconceived* set of assumptions and expectations)" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 108, emphasis in original). Throughout this process, the researcher must adopt a descriptive attitude that seeks to describe the participant's experience with the intent of understanding it rather than attempting to explain it (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Field et al., 2016).

In recent years, phenomenology has grown in popularity as a research method in the social sciences, including the field of education (Tuffour, 2017). The qualitative methodology of phenomenology is well-suited to educational research in general and this study in particular. Phenomenological researchers seek to "[describe] a person's experience in the way he or she experiences it, and not from some theoretical standpoint" (Bevan, 2014, p. 136), which supports the study's aim to understand teachers' experiences with young adult literature, text selection, and self-efficacy.

The interview method of data analysis encourages participants to delve deeply into experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Bevan, 2014; Creswell, 2009), which was beneficial for exploring teachers' experiences and discovering "what is hidden in those experiences" (Zhou et al., 2022, p. 2) within their contexts, such as interactions with students, encounters with administrators or parents, and issues with censorship. This methodology was especially fitting for this study because it allowed the researcher, who is an English teacher within the context of the district, to remove herself as much as possible from the experiences of the participants and

view them from an outside lens to gain a better understanding of how teachers experience the same phenomenon.

Participants

In qualitative research, there may be any number of participants—even a single participant—as the concern for the researcher is not the number but the quality and validity of the participation (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). In interpretative phenomenological analysis studies, samples are expected to be small in order to be "rich and descriptively deep" (Alase, 2017, p. 13). Participants must be able to remember and describe their recent experience in detail and to express inner thoughts and feelings openly (Flora, 2017) for the researcher to achieve the in-depth analysis necessary to explain the phenomenon.

For this study, participants were selected using purposive sampling (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022) to develop a diverse sample that represented the population of teachers at large (Alase, 2017). This included six high school English teachers with varying years of teaching experience and who teach in varying contexts (e.g., grade level, course level) from a small school district in the southeastern United States.

Data Collection

To ensure a representative sample, secondary English teachers throughout the school district were asked to complete a survey that included demographic and contextual information, such as years of teaching experience, English courses taught, texts used in English classes, and perceptions of young adult literature. These responses were used to select a diverse population of participants from varying grade (i.e., 9-12) and course levels (i.e., CP, Honors, AP). Responses were also used to develop context-specific questions for semi-structured interviews that consisted of open-ended questions to encourage discourse and uncover the participants' perspectives (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

Initial interview questions followed a predetermined plan that provided the basic topics of discussion, and additional questions were developed for each participant according to his or her particular context (Bevan, 2014). J. A. Smith and Osborn (2015) encourage getting as close as possible to participants' thoughts by beginning with general questions that provide a "gentle nudge" (p. 61) for the participant to speak. Follow-up questions then encouraged the participant to explore his or her experiences more deeply using a dialogic interview approach (Flora, 2017). All interviews were conducted in person at participants' chosen locations, mostly in participants' classrooms, and lasted an average of one hour. Interviews were recorded using a digital recording device (Alase, 2017), and the researcher took notes to help develop follow-up questions, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Setting

The study took place in the Hemingford School District (pseudonym) (HSD), which is a small suburban school district in the southeastern United States. The district is part of a larger county that is divided into multiple smaller districts, each with its own superintendent and Board of Trustees. Board members are elected every four years, and the superintendent is selected by the board. As the district's legislative, executive, and judicial body, the board evaluates requests and proposals submitted by the superintendent, district employees, and community members and decides the district's yearly budget (HSD, n.d.-a).

The district, located in a suburban area, has a population of just under 60,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The surrounding community has a per capita income of just over $36,000 with nearly 12% of families living below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The majority of adult residents (87%) have earned a high school diploma, while few (28%) have

earned a bachelor's degree or higher; these statistics are on par with educational data of the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

The school district is comprised of 14 schools (i.e., 8 elementary, 3 middle, 3 high) that collectively serve nearly 11,000 students (Southeastern State Department of Education [SSDE], 2023a). Students are nearly evenly divided between male and female (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.), and the majority of students are White (76%) while the minority is comprised of Black (8%), Hispanic (10%), Multiracial (5%), and Asian (1%) students (Solution Tree, 2023). (See Table 3.1). Student needs are addressed through programs such as English as a Second Language (ESL), Gifted and Talented (GT), and Special Education (SE) (Hemingford School District [HSD], 2022) (See Table 3.1).

The SSDE measures poverty using its own index that takes into consideration students' living situations (i.e., transient, homeless, foster care) and eligibility for financial assistance (i.e., Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families); students who have experienced any of these situations in the past three years are included in the poverty index (Public Education Partners, 2023). According to this index, just over half of the district's students lived in poverty in 2023 (SSDE, 2023b) (See Table 3.1).

While the vast majority (93%) of the district's students graduated from high school in 2023, the number of students deemed College and Career Ready (CCR) by the state's assessment was far lower (35%) (SSDE, 2023a). Students are deemed *college ready* through their achievement on standardized tests (i.e., ACT, SAT, AP, IB) or performance in a college dual-enrollment course and *career ready* by their performance on a career-readiness assessment or completion of industry credentials or work-based learning programs (SS Education Oversight Committee, n.d.). A majority of students (75%) were deemed only career ready, while a much

smaller percentage (38%) earned the college-ready designation, which may be explained partially by the students' reading performance on standardized tests such as the ACT and state-developed assessments such as the English End-of-Course (EOC) exam (SSDE, 2023a) and SS Ready test (SSDE, 2023c) (See Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

School District Student Demographic Data

Characteristic	Percentage of students (2023)
Gender	
Male	51
Female	49
Race/Ethnicity	
African-American/Black	8
Asian	1
Caucasian/White	76
Latino/Hispanic	10
Multiracial	5
Included in SC poverty index	51
Served in ESL program	6
Served in GT program	22
Received SE services	13
Graduated from high school	94
Reading/ELA Assessments	
Scored C or higher on English 1 EOC	73
Met reading benchmark on ACT	39
SS Ready ELA (Grade 8) meets or exceeds expectations	68
At or above NAEP Proficient in Reading (Grade 8)	29
Deemed college and career ready	36
College ready only	38
Career ready only	76

In its efforts to prepare students to become college and career ready, the district strives to maintain a "tradition of excellence," which "begins with an effective board, a highly valued and retained leadership, and staff with stakeholders focusing on becoming the best for their students"

(HSD, 2022, p. 34). The school board is comprised of seven elected officials who serve four-year terms (HSD, n.d.-a) and who attend state school board professional development to understand "the roles and responsibilities for effective oversight of district operations" (HSD, 2021, p. 8). The district employs 657 teachers, the majority (64%) of whom hold advanced degrees (SSDE, 2023a). The district leadership works to recruit and retain qualified teachers (HSD, n.d.-c), which is evident with all certified teaching positions being filled by the start of the school year (HSD, 2022) and with an average of 90 percent of teachers returning to the district over the last three years (SSDE, 2023a).

Teachers employed by the district are expected and encouraged to develop professionally. All teachers receive ongoing professional development as part of the district's commitment to the professional learning communities (PLC) process, which has been implemented in all schools (HSD, 2021). The district's current strategic plan allocates funding for additional professional development for teachers and school counselors to increase student achievement in a variety of areas (e.g., SAT scores, AP courses) (HSD, 2022).

In efforts to improve reading scores, Southeastern State passed a reading act with the provision that the state's reading office "shall develop, implement, evaluate, and continuously refine a comprehensive state plan to improve reading achievement in public schools" (SSDE, 2014, Section 59-155-140). The law also requires all educators in the state to obtain an appropriate reading endorsement as part of their certificate renewal per the state's passed reading act (SSDE, n.d.). To promote 21st century skills, devices are provided to all students across the district for a 1:1 learning environment: K-8 students receive iPads while 9-12 students receive Chromebooks (SSDE, 2023a) that will enable the district to "ensure curriculum and instructional approaches include the use of a variety of concrete materials and technology tools to help

students explore connections, make conjectures, formulate generalizations, draw conclusions and discover new mathematical ideas" (HSD, 2022, p. 61).

In recent months, the district at large and school board in particular have been plagued with challenges against materials available in the elementary, middle, and high school libraries which has resulted in a recent revision to the policy on how objections to materials are raised (HSD, 2023). The district recently created an updated list of novels that are taught in each middle and high school English course and created school and district committees for novel selection, approval, and challenges. For the 2023-2024 school year, the district added a form to its website for parents to restrict access to the materials available to their children in the schools' libraries (HSD, n.d.-b).

Participants

The target population for the study was secondary English teachers from grades 9 to 12 who taught multiple courses and levels within the field of English. In HSD, English courses are offered in grades 9-12 at varying levels (i.e., English 1-4, College Prep, Honors, and Advanced Placement). The sampling frame was English teachers at all three high schools in the school district under study. To ensure a heterogenous sample that reflected the population of secondary English teachers within the district, proportionate quota sampling (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2019) was used. In the district at the time of the study, there were 25 high school English teachers. Demographically, 88% were female while 12% were male, and 100% were White.

Each school offered English 1-4 College Preparatory (CP), English 2-4 Honors (H), and Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and English Literature. Table 3.2 provides details about the district-selected curricula and grade level for each course. Within each course, English teachers have autonomy in text selection with resources including state-adopted textbooks,

novels provided by the school, and teacher-procured texts (e.g., articles from internet sources, short stories from former textbooks). The district has a recently updated list of approved novels, but there are no stipulations about which grade levels may incorporate the texts, meaning that each school offers different novels to students, sometimes in different grade levels.

Table 3.2

HSD English Course Offerings

Course	Curriculum	Grade level(s)
English 1 CP	Survey of Literary Genres	9
English 2 CP	Survey of Literary Genres	10
English 2 H	American Literature	10
English 3 CP	American Literature	11
English 3 H	British Literature	11
English 4 CP	British Literature	12
English 4 H	European Literature	11/12
AP English Language	AP English Language curriculum (generally nonfiction)	11/12
AP English Literature	AP English Literature curriculum (generally fiction)	11/12

To align with these demographics as closely as possible, six teachers were selected, two from each of the three high schools (i.e., Cardinal, Hannahan, Oak View); one teacher was male (17%) and five were female (83%); all six were White. Among the six participants, nearly every English course offered was represented; since most participants taught multiple courses, some courses were represented more than one time. Participants were selected based off of their responses to a survey that requested demographic information including race, gender, courses taught, and years of teaching experience along with other information necessary to understand their teaching contexts (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3

Teacher Participants' Demographic Information

Teacher names (pseudonyms)	Gender	Race	Years teaching	Course(s)
Austin	M	Caucasian	4	English 4 CP, English 3 H
Lily	F	Caucasian	1	English 1 CP, Adv. Theatre
Linda	F	Caucasian	32	English 3 H, English 3 CP
Mary	F	Caucasian	8	Eng 2 CP, Eng 3 H
Nancy	F	Caucasian	26	English 2 CP
Stacey	F	Caucasian	18	Eng 3 CP, Eng 4 H

This sampling method was advantageous because it allowed for the selection of a homogenous sample that was highly representative of the district's teacher demographic and allowed for multiple representatives of each course to discuss text selection at all levels within different contexts; for example, the two English 2 representatives taught at different schools, which allowed for a deeper understanding of experiences within and across contexts. This sampling method also allowed for a wide range of teaching experience, from a first-year teacher to a teacher on the verge of retirement, to be represented.

Although purposive sampling may generate a small sample, the six teachers in this study (nearly one third of the sampling frame) were an appropriate amount for conducting the in-depth interviews necessary for phenomenological studies (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The method also presents the potential for researchers to unintentionally introduce bias when deciding which participants to include or exclude as they meet the quota (Henry, 2004). For this study, however, selecting participants who most closely fit the demographics of the sample population helped to alleviate the possibility of researcher bias.

Procedure: Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection lasted from January to February 2024. To begin, I obtained approval from the Anderson University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). I then sent each participant an email introducing the research study (see Appendix B) and included a link to a Google Forms survey (see Appendix C) to collect initial demographic information related to their teaching contexts and beliefs about young adult literature (YAL). I used each participant's survey responses to prepare individualized questions for the in-depth, semi-structured interviews during which I gained a better understanding of each teacher's context. This is important for better understanding the meaning of the participants' experiences within their specific situations (Bevan, 2014; Seidman, 2006). Since the data collected from the survey was used solely to develop interview questions, it was neither recorded nor analyzed as part of the study.

Participants were contacted via email to schedule semi-structured interviews, which is the most common method used in phenomenological research (Creswell et al., 2007). Within the field of phenomenology, there is little specific instruction provided in the literature for how to conduct phenomenological interviews (Bevan, 2014). For this study, I used the guidance provided by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) and J. A. Smith and Osborn (2015) for developing an interview plan consisting of open-ended questions that helped participants to explore their interpretations of their experiences (see Appendix D). These types of questions begin with phrases such as "Can you tell me about . . .?" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 10) and "How do you feel about . . . ?" (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 59). Using these questions as a model, participants were asked, for example, *Can you tell me about how you selected the texts you teach in each of your courses?* and *How do you feel about the level of autonomy you perceive in your selection of texts?*

All interviews were conducted in person in a place of each participant's choosing for their convenience and comfort; most interviews occurred at participants' schools and lasted on average approximately one hour (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2015). Before each interview, I engaged in bracketing, which is the process of putting aside one's own prior knowledge or beliefs about the phenomenon under study in order to focus on the experience through the participants' perspectives (Chan et al., 2013). There is some debate as to whether IPA requires bracketing as descriptive phenomenology does (Chan et al., 2013; Sorsa et al., 2015) since it is impossible to completely dismiss one's prior knowledge (Koch, 1995; Larkin et al., 2006). To ensure that the participants' experiences remained the focus during data collection (Tuffour, 2017), I opted to engage in bracketing as much as possible to avoid interjecting biases into the participants' experiences and thus influencing the data (Sorsa et al., 2015). To do this, I established my presence in each interview as a researcher rather than an English teacher, refrained from engaging in discussion about teachers' responses, withheld personal experiences that related to participants' responses, and analyzed each participant's experiences according to his or her responses without interjecting personal opinions. This practice provided a measure of validity in that the data collected was wholly the participants' experiences (Bevan, 2014; Chan et al., 2013) and not a reflection of my preconceived notions or personal experiences.

During the interview, I referenced an interview plan (see Appendix D) that included questions that were directly related to the research questions and were designed to keep conversation flowing naturally (Chan et al., 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) so that the necessary data could be collected. The questions existed primarily to assist the researcher in "set[ting] the scene that allows the participant to talk and therefore gives [the researcher] access to the phenomena" (J. A. Smith, 2019, p. 171) and to encourage reflection of the participants'

experiences through questions that asked about feelings during experiences (R. Miller & Minton, 2016) or that prompted participants to share additional details (Sorsa et al., 2015; Suddick et al., 2020). In order to understand the participants' experiences as richly and deeply as possible from their perspectives, I asked open-ended questions that facilitated discourse (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022) and allowed for flexibility in the conversation (Bevan, 2014) as questions frequently arose based on participants' responses (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

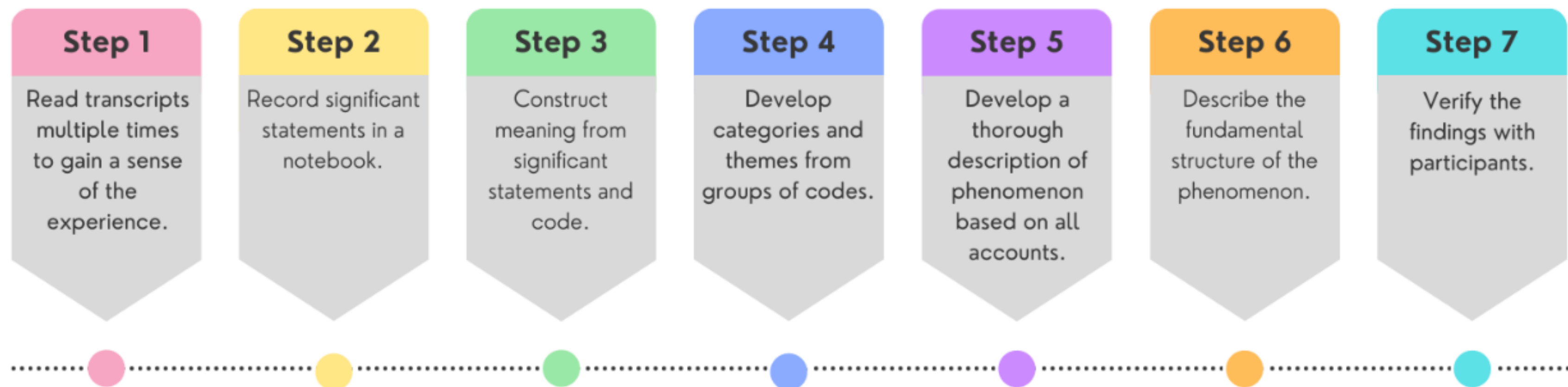
I recorded all interviews using a digital recording device, and I transcribed them using Microsoft Word. After the initial transcription, I replayed each interview while I read the transcript to ensure accuracy and increase the trustworthiness of the findings (Chan et al., 2013).

Data Analysis

Each interview transcript was analyzed as soon after the interview date as possible to ensure that each participant's experience was recognized independently within his or her individual context (Larkin et al., 2006) and analyzed ideographically, meaning that each case was examined individually for themes before patterns were identified across the cases (R. Miller & Minton, 2016; J. A. Smith, 2017). To analyze each interview, I followed Colaizzi's (1978) approach to descriptive phenomenology as explained in Shosha (2012) and employed in numerous studies (Abalos et al., 2016; Andales et al., 2022; Chan et al., 2013; Wirihana et al., 2018). Figure 3.2 provides an overview of this approach that will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Figure 3.2

Overview of Data Analysis Process



First, I read the transcript multiple times in order to gain a sense of the entire account and allow me to "step into the participants' shoes as far as possible" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 11). During this process, I considered the participant's statements, language usage, and initial interpretations of the experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) and recorded significant statements and emotional responses related to the phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) in a notebook (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Shosha, 2012).

Once the statements were recorded, I began to formulate meanings (Shosha, 2012) that I later used to develop emergent themes within the transcript; as I identified connections between themes, I grouped them into clusters and develop a list of themes and subthemes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I then used these findings to develop a thorough description of the phenomenon for the participant within his or context (Shosha, 2012) by listing each theme and providing evidence from the participant's interview (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

During this phase, I engaged in a double hermeneutic in which I attempted to make sense of how the participants made sense of their experiences (J. A. Smith, 2019); thus, both the participant and I interpreted the experience in search of its meaning. The description was then expanded to describe the fundamental structure of the phenomenon (Shosha, 2012), which was "a persuasive account that explains to the reader the important experiential items that have been found during the process of analysis" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 13). Finally, the findings were sent to each research participant to ensure that their experiences were reflected accurately in order to enhance the study's validity (Chan et al., 2013; Shosha, 2012) and credibility.

Instrumentation

The initial survey (see Appendix B) that was sent to teachers was a Google Form sent by email. The multiple choice and open-ended questions intended to gather demographic

information (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, teaching experience, education level, school setting, courses taught), classroom instruction experiences (i.e., texts taught, text selection, perceived autonomy), perceptions of using YAL in a variety of classrooms, and use of YAL in classroom instruction. The survey questions were based on surveys administered in text selection studies administered by Glaws (2021) and Watkins and Ostenson (2015) in addition to the considerations of the data necessary to answer the study's research questions. For example, Watkins and Ostenson (2015) requested teachers' years of teaching experience as part of their contextual information (p. 254), and Glaws (2021) asked about ways teachers use YAL in their classrooms (p. 34).

The interview plan (see Appendix D) developed for the interview process was a guide that was adapted as necessary according to participants' contexts and responses in the survey and was employed in a different order in each interview depending on the conversation (Chan et al., 2013; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Questions were developed using sample questions provided by J. A. Smith and Osborn (2015) and Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014). Following J. A. Smith and Osborn's (2015) model, prompts were also added under questions to be used if necessary to guide participants to discuss aspects related to the study's research questions. For example, a prompt for the question *How do you perceive your students' reactions to the texts you are using?* was *engagement* to guide participants to discuss this aspect if they did not do so on their own.

Ethical Considerations

Every effort was made to ensure the safety of each participant and his or her personal information. Before interviews began, I obtained approval and assurance of cooperation from the school district's assistant superintendent. Prior to each interview, participants were emailed a consent form (See Appendix E) through DocuSign; these forms were developed according to the form provided by the university's IRB. At the beginning of each interview, I made clear the

purpose of the study and explained that participants could opt out of any question that he or she did not feel comfortable answering.

Data (e.g., survey responses, interview recordings, notes, coding, themes) were stored in a password-protected Microsoft OneDrive vault on the researcher's personal laptop or in a notebook. The laptop was also password protected and accessible only to the researcher, and the notebook was stored in a location accessible only to the researcher. Once the dissertation has been successfully defended, all digital files will be deleted from the laptop's hard drive, all audio files will be erased, and all paper files will be shredded.

To protect participants' identities and well-being, the researcher did not include any identifying information (e.g., participants' names, schools, school district) in any written portions of the study, maintained confidentiality and privacy in regard to all survey responses and interviews, and did not share participants' personal data with anyone at any time. The researcher explained her position in the study as a researcher rather than a teacher to encourage candid responses; however, the researcher acknowledges that working as a teacher in the same school district with the participants creates a conflict of interest.

Summary

This study employed IPA methodology to examine and interpret secondary English teachers' experiences with selecting texts for their classrooms; specifically, the researcher sought to understand the factors that influence teachers' decisions about texts and how their decision-making abilities affect their self-efficacy. Participants were six secondary English teachers who consented to sharing their experiences through in-depth, in-person interviews during which the researcher bracketed as much as possible to focus solely on understanding participants' experiences. Immediately after each interview, the researcher analyzed the data provided by the

participant to develop an individual understanding of the experience; after all interviews were analyzed independently, the researcher sought patterns that existed among all participants' experiences to develop a more complete understanding of teachers' experiences with text selection. The researcher made every effort to conduct an ethical study, including obtaining permission from the school district and university IRB, acquiring consent from all participants, and safeguarding all participants' data.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

This phenomenological study had three main purposes. First, it aimed to investigate secondary English teachers' perceptions of using YAL in the classroom. It also sought to describe secondary English teachers' experiences with selecting texts for their classroom curricula and libraries. Finally, the study endeavored to discern the extent to which support of teachers' text selections from school and district leadership affects their self-efficacy. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers perceive the use of young adult literature in the secondary English classroom?
2. Based on teachers' perceptions, what factors influence secondary English teachers' selection of texts for their classroom curricula and libraries?
3. Based on teachers' perceptions, to what extent does administrative support of teachers' text selections influence their teacher self-efficacy?

The results of the study are presented in this chapter in four sections: (a) a description of each participants' lived experiences, (b) a description of participants' experiences based on context, (c) emergent themes that address each research question, and (d) a description of the phenomenon of text practices for Hemingford School District (HSD). This analysis will provide an understanding of each research question and how English teachers in this school district experience text selection.

Participants' Individual Lived Experiences

Six secondary English teachers, two from each of three high schools, were interviewed individually about their experiences with text selection and perceptions of administrative support for curriculum choices. Teachers' demographics were consistent with those of English teachers in the school district, and years of experience ranged from one to thirty-four. Across the sample,

multiple English courses were represented to gain an understanding of text selection in a variety of contexts. Table 4.1 provides an overview of each participant, including demographics and findings about experiences with YAL (i.e., whether the participant had a YAL course in his or her teacher preparation program, whether he or she reads YAL, and whether he or she includes YAL within the curriculum).

Table 4.1

Participant Overview

Name (pseudo-nyms)	Gen-der	Race	School (pseudo-nyms)	Years Teach-ing	Courses Taught	YAL Course	Reads YAL	Uses YAL in Curr
Mary	F	W	Oak View HS	8	Eng 2 CP Eng 3 H	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stacey	F	W	Oak View HS	18	Eng 3 CP Eng 4 H	No	No	No
Lily	F	W	Hannahan HS	1	Eng 1 CP Adv Thtr	Yes	Yes	Yes
Linda	F	W	Hannahan HS	32	Eng 3 H Eng 3 CP	Yes	No	No
Austin	M	W	Cardinal HS	4	Eng 4 CP Eng 3 H	Yes	No	No
Nancy	F	W	Cardinal HS	26	Eng 2 CP	Yes	No	Yes

Below, a description of each participant's experiences with text selection is shared as they were initially analyzed ideographically. This is followed by a description of participants' experiences by school and a description of teachers' experiences with the phenomenon of text selection across the district (R. Miller & Minton, 2016; J. A. Smith, 2017).

Mary (In-depth interview, January 25, 2024)

Mary, a White female, is in her eighth year of her teaching career, all of which have been at Oak View High School (OVHS). She currently teaches English 2 CP (i.e., a literature survey

course) and English 3 Honors (i.e., currently British literature). She defines a text as anything (e.g., printed or spoken) that can be read, analyzed, evaluated, and questioned in order to develop "deeper analysis thoughts" and have conversations. She explains YAL as "any novel or piece of literature that is written specifically for the adolescent," which is "middle school, high school age." In her context, Mary has full autonomy to select the texts studied in her English 3 Honors course, and she and her curriculum partner (i.e., colleague who teaches the same course) select the texts for English 2 CP.

In her teacher preparation program, Mary had a course in YAL, which had a profound impact on her teaching and text selection decisions. She feels that she learned more about teaching English in that course than she did in pedagogy courses that taught her to write lesson plans but not to actually teach. In the YAL course, the professor modeled how to use the literature to teach the content and skills in the lesson plans, and Mary believes that sparked her interest in using YAL in her classroom. She had not previously seen teachers use YAL in a classroom, so this was a revelation.

Mary does not remember any conversations in the YAL course about books she might use in her classroom being challenged, probably because she did not see challenges and bans as being an issue during that time. After taking this course, Mary became an avid reader of YAL; in fact, she rarely reads what she calls "adult books" anymore. While she still enjoys reading canonical books like *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813) for teaching, she has found that she has to slog through them, and she would often prefer to read easier, lighter, more enjoyable stories for her personal reading.

When Mary began to select texts for her English 3 Honors course, she first decided on some "classic pieces" that she knew she wanted to include because they had "good messages"

and “relevant things that we see today.” She soon realized, however, that the students “hated it” because “British lit’s just hard.” As students were reading the canonical dystopian novel *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932), she found that students did not find the content relevant to their lives or the world today. She started looking for other texts that would be more engaging for students, and she decided to try literature circles. She went to her librarian and asked for help; together, they developed a list of YAL dystopian novels that were relevant “in the moment.” They read all of the books and selected multiple books that would help Mary teach all of the skills that she wanted to. Eventually, she stopped teaching *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932) altogether because “what [she] got out of the young adult literature was better than what [she] was getting out of the canonical book,” including deeper analysis and writing.

Mary has also selected Shelley’s (1818) *Frankenstein* and Shakespeare’s (1623/2005) *Macbeth* for the English 3 Honors course because she enjoys both texts personally and because she believes they are valuable for students to know about as they move toward AP courses. She believes these students need exposure to more complex texts that require them “to think a little bit harder than they do sometimes with the [YAL] literature.” For AP Literature specifically, Mary believes that the students are most likely expected to be able to discuss canonical works on the exam while YAL would probably not be acceptable.

Mary followed a similar process for selecting texts in English 2, which she has always taught in collaboration with other teachers. The teachers select texts that will allow them to meet the standards to prepare students for their end-of-course (EOC) exam. Beyond this, the teachers decided that they wanted to develop a course where students would actually read to combat what Mary calls “the most heard phrase in [her] English classroom”: “I hate reading.” In their library’s book room, they found a selection of unused literature circle books and developed a unit based

on diversity in which the students read and analyzed their novels, short stories, songs, and other texts—with the YAL being the anchor text. Mary believes it is beneficial for the students to read diverse stories because they are able to see themselves in YAL, whereas "they don't see themselves in a lot of the 'old stuff' as they would call it."

In both courses, Mary perceives students as being highly engaged with the YAL they are reading. Her English 2 students "come in talking about how much they love their book," and students report that this is the only book they have actually read. She provides 15 minutes of reading time each day, and this semester, she has classes asking if they can have 20. The books in the English 3 Honors dystopian unit are all, by design, first titles in a series of books, and she finds that at least half of the students go to the library and check out the next book; many go on to read the entire series. These are sometimes even, she says, "students who have not read a book since third grade" by choice. She says that the honors students do have good conversations about the canonical texts (e.g., *Frankenstein* [Shelley, 1818]), but they require a good bit of scaffolding because the concepts often "go over their heads." When they have literature circle meetings, though, the students are more confident in their reading, and their conversations "just happen organically because they just really like the books, so they have opinions and things to say."

Mary believes that students in all grades (i.e. 6-12) and at all courses levels (i.e., CP, Honors, AP) can benefit from reading YAL as part of classroom instruction. She first notes emphatically that kids actually read the YAL texts, which makes instruction much easier as it can be tailored to what they read. When students don't complete assigned reading, Mary finds it particularly challenging to have discussions and develop skills. With YAL, though, the students are more likely to read, and she can "pull in those conversations about theme and figurative language with those books and have the same types of conversations about analysis and work on

those skills." When the students are developing their reading skills with YAL, they develop a "better foundation" for analyzing text that they can then apply to "more complex texts." If the focus of the teaching is on skills, she believes that any text can be used to accomplish the standards.

Mary believes this is especially true in a course that has an EOC. If students are actually reading the texts because they enjoy them, they are having conversations about them and developing reading and analysis skills. They can then take those skills they applied to the YAL texts with them to EOC, and "they will already know how to use those skills and apply them to any text because we've already done it and they understood it." Mary emphasizes the fact that YAL can be used in the same manner as a canonical text to teach the standards because the standards are skill-based rather than text-based. In her view, the standards do not dictate texts to be used, only skills to be learned, and "the skill is the skill, no matter what text you're doing it with."

This notion applies to writing as well as reading skills: "You put the same prompt to a young adult novel that you would put to any other novel. Analyze how the complex characters help develop the theme. There are complex characters in short stories, there are complex characters in young adult novels, there are complex characters in text from the 1800s." As with reading, the focus is on the skill being taught, which can be done with any quality text. And, Mary points out, the writing is better quality when students have actually read the text they are writing about as opposed to writing "a bunch of baloney" about a book for which they only read SparkNotes (if that).

In addition to learning skills, Mary sees personal benefits for students reading YAL. Students today are constantly connected through phones and Chromebooks, and their brains are

"going 800 different ways all the time." Reading YAL allows students to "take a break" and disconnect for a while and have a "moment where they're just sitting and not having to worry about anything else." With all of the pressure put on students today, Mary sees reading YAL as a time for adolescents to take some of that pressure off.

While reading YAL can help to disconnect students from technology and social media, it can also help them to feel connected to a community. She sees YAL as giving students, many of whom feel alone, an opportunity to see that there are others who are going through the same things and that their feelings are normal. The characters in books, although fictional, are realistic and are "not always the pretty filtered accounts that [students] see on social media." The characters and situations in YAL are more "raw and real," and students can be comforted in knowing that there are others who are like them. Mary says she sees this with the growing Hispanic population of students in her school, and she believes that providing those students with diverse texts that reflect their experiences helps them to cope with their personal situations. She also believes that having other students read about those experiences can help them to understand that not all of the Hispanic students who are in their school chose to be there.

When selecting texts for her classroom, Mary first considers the skills she wants to develop (e.g., theme, writing, character analysis). She then considers the relevance of the texts to the students and adds or changes texts as they become irrelevant or unengaging to students. For example, in the dystopian unit, she found that students were not engaged by *Uglies* (Westerfield, 2005), so she removed that book and added a newer title in its place. When she selects new titles, Mary considers the needs of her students as much as possible. She may, for example, offer texts in Spanish, texts that are more or less challenging, or texts that include specific types of diversity that may engage certain students.

Finding texts that "match" students is important to Mary. As she reads YAL novels at "almost 30 years old," she finds that she still relates to characters whose experiences mirror her own when she was an adolescent, "which is really cool." She mentions that her parents divorced when she was young, and she "still feels those feelings, even though . . . [she is] way past the point of living with [her] parents." Mary believes that helping students find connections like these with texts can help her to "reach them so [she] can teach them."

Another consideration is the availability of texts and when she needs them. She does visit her school's book room, which these days is peppered with sets of literature circle books, mostly selected by her and her curriculum partner, for various courses. If she does not find what she needs, though, her librarian "literally just says, 'What do you want?' and she buys it" because she is "very supportive of young adult literature in the classroom and helping us reach our students." Mary realizes that it is probably not this easy everywhere, but for her, the process of going to the librarian to discuss and select texts and then have them ordered is "pretty simple."

One of the biggest outside factors in the texts Mary selects is the time available for instruction. Since the district moved from an A/B schedule to a 4x4 block schedule, Mary has found that there is less time to read than before. Since she sees her classes for 90 minutes every day—and her classes are all large (i.e., average of 35 students)—she has found that she does not have time to provide feedback and prepare as much as she used to. She cut *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813) from her English 3 Honors curriculum because students could not read the heavy text as quickly as they would need to, and she cut *Night* (Wiesel, 1960) from English 2 CP because they had to read the entire book in class for students to complete the reading. She chose to keep the YAL as opposed to the canonical texts because she "felt the students were getting

better use of learning their skills out of [it] because they could actually discuss it because they actually understood it and could actually read it—or actually *would* read it."

Mary feels that the idea of challenges did not influence her text selection practices in the past when she focused on choosing texts she thought students would like and that covered the standards she wanted to address. She does feel that with the political group currently challenging texts in the district, it might be more of an issue for her in the future. She has become more aware of what is in the texts that she selects and considers whether someone might question why she has it in her classroom and forcing her to defend it. She does not want to have to do this "on top of everything else teachers have to deal with."

Mary has not removed any of the books from her classroom library, however, because students select those books to read on their own time. She also believes that providing choice in the YAL students read has kept those texts from being challenged. In fact, the only novels that parents have questioned have been canonical: *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde, 1890). Both times, Mary says she was supported by her principal, and the students did read the assigned texts. Even with students selecting the literature circle novels, though, Mary did have pause recently as she considered what might happen if she gave students a book with LGBTQ characters when they had not listed the title as their first choice. She ended up not having to give those books to students who did not request them, but she felt dismayed at having to consider the ramifications of doing so.

Mary feels that, although she does have autonomy in the texts she selects, she has less now than she did in the past. When she started teaching in the district, she was unaware of a district-approved list, and she chose whatever texts she wanted. A couple of years in, "suddenly teachers were asked to fill out complicated forms" for books they wanted to teach that were not

on a district-approved list that she had "never even seen." She became concerned about filling out the forms for so many novels, but the literature circle books ended up being exempt.

Currently, however, the list has resurfaced, and Mary has "mixed feelings" about it. On one hand, she believes that the district list was created with teacher input and is "very diverse." On the other hand, she would be unwilling to suggest teaching a title that is not already on the list because she would not "want to put [herself] in the line of fire" amid the district "controversy surrounding books." She believes that she would be supported by her principal during a book challenge, but she is far less confident about support from the district. She fears that "with this group going around trying to get books challenged," there will ultimately be "one list and that's it."

At the moment, all of the books Mary wanted to teach have been approved, but she feels that some autonomy has been lost since she cannot add books to her curriculum when she needs to. This makes her feel as though her opinions about text selection are not respected, despite having gotten bachelor's and master's degrees in teaching English and literacy, respectively. She perceives that political groups are insinuating that she doesn't "have enough knowledge or ground to choose what text that [she] teach[es]," and she feels this is "demeaning" to her as a professional. She points out that she is unaware of any other professions where people are questioned about their decisions because someone does not agree with "just one thing that's in there." She notes that she has become more careful about what she chooses to teach and even what she says while teaching; although she does not "push agendas on students, the assumption that [she] would makes [her] question everything [she does]."

Mary feels that her school administration is grossly unaware of the feelings of the school's English teachers during this challenging time. She says that "there are many people who

feel burned out" and have expressed their concerns to administrators; nevertheless, "nothing has changed." Mary feels "unheard and defeated" by this lack of effort by her administration to improve morale. She believes that she would be able to do her job better and "give more to the kids" if the administration took her concerns seriously. She feels that support is focused mostly on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and less on any other areas.

Despite these feelings, Mary does feel supported overall by both her school and district administration, but she wonders what that support will look like as "pressure cracks down on the district." Mary is aware of issues being faced by two teachers at another school in the district, and she wonders what would happen to her if she found herself in a similar situation. She once believed that the district was trying to give teachers choices in text selection by allowing them to add books to the approved list and asking them to serve on committees that decide what happens with challenged books, but she now wonders "if those things matter." She fears that books will be removed despite the district's policy to allow committees to make those decisions.

Mary admits that she would be less likely to incorporate YAL, despite her knowledge of its success with students, if she did not have the support of her administration. If that happened, says she would feel "defeated" and would wonder why her "*professional* opinions" with her certificate and degree are "not good enough." She feels certain that she would not want to continue "working in a place where [she] wasn't fully supported in what [she] wanted to teach." She does not feel that she would leave teaching altogether, but she would certainly look for another school or district if she needed to.

Mary supports the rights of parents to make decisions about what their children read, but she believes that they should be able to explain what specifically they object to in the text. Rather than challenging mass numbers of books, she would like for parents "to talk to her individually"

and discuss the text and options for alternatives if necessary. She also believes that parents should teach their children that "they can read books about issues they don't agree with" and that "reading a text does not mean that you have to agree with it." Her intention with a text is never to ask students to agree with what it is in but instead to "think about issues and themes critically and apply them to what they see in the world." When students need alternative texts for whole class novels, such as *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1818) in English 3 Honors, this is challenging because it requires Mary to locate alternate texts and develop materials for them. Literature circles, however, offer Mary an easy solution: "students can simply switch to a different book and complete the same assignments."

Stacey (In-depth interview, January 15, 2024)

Stacey, a White female, has taught both middle and high school in two states during her twenty-five-year career; she currently teaches English 3 CP (i.e., American literature) and English 4 H (i.e., European literature) at OVHS. She views a "text" as anything that is being studied in class, including fiction and nonfiction pieces. She describes YAL as literature that is "contemporary and current, "representative of today's youth culture, and including issues with which adolescents are familiar." Stacey's undergraduate teacher preparation program did not include a course on YAL, but she says that even if it had, the literature she studied "would no longer be relevant for her students."

Although she never studied YAL formally, Stacey does believe that students benefit from reading it because they are able to "see themselves in what they are reading and see how characters endure situations that they may also be facing." YAL also allows adolescents to "see how others overcome adversity" and give them "a positive outlook for their futures." Stacey believes that reading YAL also "builds teens' self-esteem and confidence" both in their life experiences and reading skills. It also allows students to read about different perspectives and get

a "well-rounded view of *all* people," which is important "in a school that supports equity and inclusion of all students."

When Stacey came to OVHS, she was not given a list of texts from which to choose or any indication of what texts were available or expected. She "used her knowledge of American literature" to select the texts she thought were most appropriate, and she had complete autonomy in those choices. She began with the selection of Native American texts "to be inclusive of all American literature." She then turned to the books available in the school's book room, which included canonical texts such as Steinbeck's (1937) *Of Mice and Men* and Fitzgerald's (1925) *The Great Gatsby*. She wishes that she had access to other texts that are more representative of diverse cultures (e.g., African American, Latinx) who are often "pigeonholed or omitted, especially in the canon." Despite this desire, Stacey has not requested that additional texts be purchased for her courses because she has recently gotten a curriculum partner and is teaching English 4 Honors for the first time this semester. The only whole-class novel she will be teaching for that course is Achebe's (1958) *Things Fall Apart*. In the future, she would like to look into adding more diverse texts to English 3 in particular.

Despite the lack of diversity, Stacey feels that the texts she uses in her classroom are enjoyable and "useful"; she just doesn't want those texts to be "all that [she is] able to offer." She perceives her students' reactions to the texts as "mostly positive," even those that are difficult for them to read. She does not currently use YAL in her classroom, but she appreciates how some of her colleagues utilize it through literature circles. She feels that she would "need to be more educated on current young adult texts" to be able to incorporate it in her curriculum; although she has read YAL in the past, she is not doing so currently and does not feel that she

knows enough contemporary titles to select them for instruction. She would like to "have the time to do the wide reading necessary to find the titles" she would use in her class.

She is also aware of a political group that is attempting to challenge texts within the school district, and she feels "ashamedly but truthfully" afraid to try to teach a text that causes the book and her "character as an educator" to be questioned. Those "outside influences" are "always in the back of [her] mind." She has heard that the State Department of Education is "introducing legislation to create reading lists for schools' libraries and teachers' classroom libraries." She has also heard that the state is considering purchasing classroom libraries for teachers in order to control the contents. She is "disappointed" and "angry" at the possibility of this type of legislation that "seeks to control the teaching of ideas and thought."

Because of the issues occurring in the district and state, Stacey removed about 2/3 of her classroom library, including in particular "texts that involved LGBTQ characters or issues of race." Stacy says that her "fear of [the aforementioned political group]" and their retaliatory methods keeps [her] from actually teaching some texts that may benefit [her] students more." She sees this as "heartbreaking" for her African American, Hispanic, and LGBTQ students who "often do not see themselves reflected in the literature they read in school." Often times, Stacey says, "the representations they see are of side characters for the Hispanic students or slaves for the African-American students." She recounted an experience with an African-American student who she felt might benefit from reading a book that reflected her experiences because Stacey can "only sympathize with what her life might be like." Stacey opted not to suggest a title for the student because she feared what might be said about her handing a book about race to a student.

Other factors that influence Stacey's selection of texts revolve around availability: budget to purchase copies, class sizes, and time to order. For example, to order a new text for English 3,

she must consider how many students are in *all* English 3 courses, not just her own; the costs to purchase so many texts at that number "would be astronomical," and the decisions may need to be made "before the number of copies that would be needed is even known." Time is also a factor in selection when she has only 90 days with her students, and she has to cover writing and communication skills in addition to reading. Since her students are juniors who take the SAT or ACT, she does not feel the pressure of preparing them for standardized testing, but these tests do take days away from her already limited instructional time.

When selecting texts, Stacey feels that her school administration is permissive about teaching materials but that at some point they might play a role in the process as they become more concerned about what is challenged. Stacey feels that this support has been stated but remains untested, and she has no intentions of selecting any texts that are not currently approved. Stacey is aware that two teachers at another high school in the district are currently facing intense backlash because of the aforementioned political group; while there are many unknowns, Stacey feels that "what is known intensifies the stress and fear." The whole situation has caused her to not "feel a high degree of self-efficacy" and, although the situation thus far does not involve her school's administration, it has caused her to wonder if she would indeed be supported if she were in a similar situation. In fact, she has come to doubt the support she would receive from her school and from the district, and this has caused her "to plan lessons and teach texts that are approved and will not draw attention."

While Stacey once thought of the autonomy she had in selecting texts as a positive aspect of her position, she says that making those choices now "feels like a burden rather than a freedom" and is "very frightening." She perceives that her administration does support her in areas such as student behavior and parent contacts, but she has witnessed other teachers who did

not receive such support, which she finds "troubling." Stacey's administration does not ask about how teachers are feeling, and this leaves her grappling with uncertainties about whether her administration is aware of the fear and stress teachers are experiencing—and "if they would care if they did know." Stacey asserts that this is "definitely a time of transition" as the atmosphere in her district "is a very real and intense strain" as she perceives herself an "easy target" with questionable support.

Stacey feels that parents have the right to make decisions about what their children are reading, but she disagrees with parents "making decisions about what other people's children are reading." If a parent challenged a text, Stacey would have "no problem" providing an alternate text or asking the parent to do so. Stacey "has kids of [her] own in high school in this district," so she understands the concerns parents have about what their children read and learn. She has never had issue with a text her children were asked to read, but she says that she has "taught [her] kids that they can read other perspectives and not agree with them."

Lily (In-depth interview, February 1, 2024)

Lily, a White female, is in her first year of teaching; she currently selects texts for English I and Advanced Theatre courses at Hannahan High School (HHS). Lily describes texts for English 1 as being "capital T" texts, which are major texts that she and her teaching partner agree on, and "supplementary texts" that they select on their own to teach the same skills. She explains YAL as literature "for students in grades five through twelve," when the texts begin to include "more mature" ideas because the "kids are becoming aware of so much more of themselves" and are going to "pick up on a little bit more content."

Lily's teacher preparation program did not include a required course on YAL; she chose to take an elective English course that "covered both children's and young adult literature." Because the course was not geared toward future English teachers, Lily does not feel that the

course influenced her text selection decisions in any way; instead, some of the practicum education classes she took impacted her more. For example, she took a cultural diversity course in which students "discussed the purpose behind selecting certain texts" and "considered diverse texts and how [they] might incorporate them in the classroom." Throughout her education courses, however, she was only required to read one YAL text; for most assignments, she could include classic texts or books she "might want to teach some day without having read them at this point."

When Lily and her teaching partner selected texts for English 1, they began by considering the major novels that they would teach. They selected Cisneros' (1984) *The House on Mango Street* and Spiegelman's (1986) *Maus* because Lily had taught them previously in a placement at a different school. She wanted to include *Maus* "because it is a graphic novel that will allow [the teachers] to work visual analysis in with literary analysis," and it builds on their students' prior knowledge of the holocaust and "fits into [their] unit on propaganda and rhetoric."

They selected *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984) as an introduction to their poetry unit and as a "representation of a diverse perspective." Neither Lily nor her teaching partner wanted to teach Lee's (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which had been taught previously in English I at HHS, since "there is so much controversy surrounding the text," particularly "the teaching of a book about race by a White woman." To obtain their desired texts, they spoke to the school's librarian; Lily says they "did not check to see that they were on an approved list, but [they] assumed that [the librarian] did since she ordered them."

They selected the canonical works *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1597/2005) and *The Odyssey* (Homer, ca. 800-600 B.C.E./1999) because they perceived those texts as being

"required for English 1" courses based on their previous experiences with student teaching. The materials shared with them by their colleagues also suggested that these texts were expected at HHS.

Lily has mixed feelings about the students' reactions to the texts she is teaching. Overall, she is happy with using *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986) in the course; students have been engaged and have learned that "graphic novels are more complex than they originally thought." They also have had conversations about book banning and "seem intrigued to read a book that is 'new' to the curriculum" at the school. Interestingly, one class questioned why they were reading the book at their school if it was banned elsewhere, but other classes questioned the practice of banning books. Lily perceives that many students "who do not enjoy reading" seemed engaged, especially with the historical aspects of the book. She also enjoyed teaching *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare, 1597/2005), and "the kids were engaged in getting up and acting out the play with swords—paper, of course."

She has not been as pleased, however, with teaching *The Odyssey* (Homer, ca. 800-600 B.C.E./1999) or *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984). Neither Lily nor her teaching partner, also a first-year teacher, "understand why [they] are teaching *The Odyssey* (Homer, ca. 800-600 B.C.E./1999)," and they had difficulty engaging students with the text. If their purpose is "to teach the concept of the epic hero, the tragic hero, or the hero's journey," Lily believes they "can use any number of relevant texts to do so." She would "love to not do it again," but she feels that "there was definite strong encouragement" to teach it because students in a later course read *The Iliad* (Homer, ca. 800-600 B.C.E./1998). No one has told her in which course they read *The Iliad* (Homer, ca. 800-600 B.C.E./1998) or why they would need to read *The Odyssey* (Homer, ca. 800-600 B.C.E./1999) first in ninth grade, but she feels unable to stop teaching it.

She “did incorporate a graphic novel version” that has helped with student engagement. She has also found that the students at her school do not relate to *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984) as the students in her former placement did. She knows that many English 1 classes teach *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945), but she is “not super pumped” about the prospect of using that text.

Lily believes that YAL can be used effectively at all levels in English classes. She knows of a teacher who taught Collins (2008)’s *The Hunger Games* in both CP and Honors classes “but scaffolded the analysis each class did with the novel.” She would be “very interested” in replacing *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984) with a YAL text because “the kids connect to it so much better” and become “super engaged in it because they relate to the characters [and] see themselves in the characters.” In her teacher education program, Lily “learned about mirror and window texts” (Sims Bishop, 1990), in which students might see themselves or understand the perspectives of others better. This is Lily’s “perspective about young adult literature,” and she would “like for [her] students to take that perspective as well” while reading YAL.

For the Advanced Theatre course, Lily selected plays that “highlight different, unique aspects for theatre,” including *Antigone* (Sophocles, ca. 441 B.C.E./2013), which she chose because “it is a classic Greek play with a teenaged protagonist” to whom she felt her students could relate. She also selected plays that would expose students to a variety of genres and styles. For example, *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett, 1954) shows students “an example of absurdism as well as how Avant Garde came about in theatre.” Cariani’s (2007) *Almost, Maine* is a “contemporary play made up of vignettes,” and A. Mitchell’s (2021) *Hadestown* is a musical that they will read while listening to the soundtrack to analyze “how music is intertwined with the dialog.”

When selecting texts, Lily says she felt that she "surprisingly had more autonomy in [her] English decisions" because those books were pre-approved, but she was the first person to teach the Advanced Theatre course at the school. Since she is aware of what is happening around the country in regard to book challenges, "especially with . . . stories that come out about first year teachers in particular," Lily wanted to obtain administrative approval for all texts she included in the course. Her school formed a team that included "members of the administration and the librarian" to decide which plays would be approved for the course.

While Lily expected some of the plays to be cut from the list, she was "surprised at the reasons" for some of the decisions, especially in light of the "content of some of the novels that are pre-approved for English courses." For example, she was most surprised about the decision to cut *The Sparrow* (Matthews et al., 2007), "a coming-of-age play about a teenage girl" who is the sole survivor of a bus crash that killed her classmates. She later discovers that she has telekinetic powers that caused the crash, and she experiences internal conflicts about causing their deaths while also realizing that it ended their bullying. Lily believes that "her students would have found the play relevant and engaging," and she was planning to use it as a competition piece later in the year.

She feared that it could be cut "because one of the characters has an inappropriate relationship with a teacher, although it is not graphic and is looked down upon by her peers." The play was cut, however, because the administration felt that "it promoted school violence" and "reflected . . . the mindset of someone who was vulnerable to harm students at school." Lily was surprised at this reasoning when "students read Shakespeare plays that contain violence, yet the character in this play was regretful of her unintended actions." Although she found the result

“surprising and frustrating,” she is content with the plays that she was allowed to use in the course and feels “confident and comfortable” because she has the support of her administration.

When considering her text selection practices overall, Lily first considers her familiarity with the text. She needs “to understand it and feel comfortable with it” before she can teach it in a classroom. She then considers student engagement and “how [she] can engage them if it is a more complicated text.” She also considers the skills she needs to teach and how each text will fit into her curriculum plan. She has heard “whisperings” of groups in the district challenging texts, and this “definitely affects [her] selections.” She has heard of “first year teachers getting in trouble . . . getting fired or getting put on administrative leave” for actions committed from a lack of experience, and she is willing to look for books that are not on the challenged lists that teach the same skills. This is not difficult to do, she says, since “these people aren’t reading these books so there’s books that teach the same things that are not titles they know.” As a precaution, she did ask the librarian to look at the books in her classroom library, and the librarian regretfully “pulled several titles that she said were going around on the lists.”

Lily finds the book challenging issue “frustrating” since she “spent five years of [her] life earning a bachelor’s degree and master’s degree in teaching English but is still not trusted to make those decisions.” She is also frustrated that the group of people who want to make the decisions are not in the classroom with the students and seeing what she sees. She feels that she “should be given that agency to choose what [students are] doing in the classroom since [she’s] working with them . . . trying to build their skills and . . .seeing maybe some gaps there and ways it could be better.”

Lily encourages parents, especially those of students in ninth grade, to be involved in what their children are doing in school. For that reason, she lists all of the major texts they will

be reading on her syllabus, along with Good Reads summaries of each. She "wants parents to feel included" but also "wants them to realize that she has sound educational reasons for every text [she] includes." Although she has not experienced any issues with challenges, she feels supported in her decisions by other teachers and the administration. She feels that if she did not receive that support from a school, then it "wasn't the right place for [her]." She even asked during job interviews about how the administration supports teachers if parents challenge their teaching decisions, and she believes her school "will do just that if the need arises."

Linda (In-depth interview, January 20, 2024)

Linda, a White female, has taught both middle and high school during her thirty-four-year career. She currently teaches English 3 Honors (i.e., British literature) and English 3 CP (i.e., American literature) at HHS. She teaches both courses are taught chronologically, using textbooks as a guide for the order of texts. She views texts as "readings that are standards-based" and "required for [her] course" as opposed to readings that are selected by students. She views YAL as being "written for students in 6th through 8th grades and in 9th through 12th grades." She separated the grade levels because she believes that there is "literature that is developmentally appropriate for middle school, and literature that is appropriate for high school." Linda previously taught middle school for many years, both within her current school district and in a neighboring district.

Linda did have a YAL course in her teacher preparation program, and she earned her master's degree in reading; however, these courses occurred in the mid-1990s, so the "young adult literature then was not what it is today." She remembers titles such as *The Chocolate War* (Cormier, 1974), *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (O'Dell, 1960), and *The Outsiders* (Hinton, 1967), but "there was no talk of building units around YAL in high school courses." Instead, they talked

about “what literature might be brought into the classroom alongside other texts such as *Macbeth*” (Shakespeare, 1623/2005).

When Linda taught middle school, they had Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) and Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) time, during which students read choice books from the teachers’ classroom libraries. At her first middle school, there was no district-approved list for teachers to use. When she “came to a middle school in [her current district] in 2004, there was a list that contained books such as *The Chocolate War* (Cormier, 1974), *My Friend Flicka* (O’Hara, 1941), and *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (O’Dell, 1960).” She remembers that *Twilight* (Meyer, 2005) was a popular book during this time, and she “had multiple copies of it in her classroom.” There was a person at the district office “who was over secondary curriculum at that time.” She emailed him “to ask a question about something,” and he sent her an unexpected and “strongly worded email,” along with a photocopy of a page from the novel, in which “he questioned [her] decision to have this book in [her] classroom.” This incident left her “disillusioned with trying to have choice books.”

Although she maintained a healthy classroom library when she taught middle school, Linda no longer has a library in her room. She “does not have space to house books at this time,” and she feels that the school’s library offers students a large variety of YAL novels to check out physically or on their Chromebooks. She believes that reading is important for students because it “increases your vocabulary, increases your independent thinking, widens your horizons, [and] does all those things that give you the warm fuzzies.”

Linda feels that YAL novels today have become so “issue based” that many students have a hard time relating to them like they could with previous novels. She does support having students read YAL, and she believes that her school’s librarian “does a great job of

recommending books to students." The librarian will also order copies of books for teachers if she knows well ahead of when they are needed. Linda feels that teachers "have to rely on the librarian" now to be aware of current YAL because "teachers are not exposed to it like they used to be." Teachers are "too busy now with PLCs and standards and meetings and doing lunch duty every three weeks" so that they do not have time to go to conferences and be part of organizations that introduce them to current literature. If teachers want to know what literature is available, "they have to do that on their own time now," which is why they rely on their librarian.

When Linda chooses texts for her classroom, she relies primarily on what has traditionally been in the textbook and what is on the district-approved list. For English 3 Honors, selections include British texts such as *Beowulf* (ca. 701-800/2001), *Canterbury Tales* (Chaucer, 1476/2011), *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1623/2005), and *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1818); this year, Linda and her curriculum partners also incorporated some Sherlock Holmes stories. She also recently replaced *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad, 1902) with *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1818) because she "wanted to teach something new," and *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1818) "encompasses things for AP" and is a piece of "quintessential British literature."

For English 3 CP, selections include American texts such as *The Crucible* (A. Miller, 1953), *The Scarlet Letter* (Hawthorne, 1850), and *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925). With only 90 days in the course, Linday says they "never get past Gatsby." Linda feels that the time constraints make it difficult to cover everything that is in the standards; for example, they "did not have time to read post-colonial literature" in the British lit course, although they had planned to read Adichie's (2003) *Purple Hibiscus*. With multiple teachers teaching each course and needing to agree on texts, there is a "give and take" about which texts will be selected. They also

select texts that they can use to meet the standards, and she “feels good about the texts” they have selected.

Linda perceives that students “have a difficult time relating to much of the literature they are reading.” For example, when students read *Beowulf* (ca. 701-800/2001), many seemed “unable to grasp the idea of a hero,” and their responses to reading it were “flat.” They also need “a great deal of frontloading” to have the background knowledge they need to understand and to get “hyped up about” what they are going to read. She wonders if students’ “lack of exposure to things today” is impacting their reading of texts.

She also notices that “kids today are far busier than kids in the past”; she feels that “jobs, sports, social media, video games, and other things are taking away from their interest in literature.” Despite this, the teachers in English 3 H and English 3 CP do not offer independent reading time during class. During What I Need (WIN) time, which is time for students to receive tutoring and other supports, Linda thought students would enjoy having time to read. She created a “Relaxing Reading Room” where any student could bring a book and read, but she found that “few students who signed up actually came to read.” Many “simply wanted to talk to friends or play on their phones,” so Linda changed from a reading room to a time where students could watch the television show *The Gilmore Girls*. Linda has also seen students who were supposed to be reading literature circle books in the hallway “sitting on their phones instead.” She feels that “students’ interest in reading just does not seem to exist anymore.”

Although her courses do not incorporate YAL or choice reading, Linda is aware that the English 4 CP (i.e., British literature) class is using contemporary YAL novels that are not content-related in literature circles. Linda previously incorporated literature circles in an English 3 course when a colleague wanted to try them, and they saw them as “a way to foster a love of

reading in [their] students." They offered several choices, along with choice board activities; soon after, however, COVID hit, and they had to stop using the literature circles. After COVID, they did not use them again. Linda "would not mind trying them again now," but she sees potential challenges "with the current focus on standards and PLCs" in her district. She also is unsure about whether the other English 3 teachers would agree to use them. She feels that the curriculum is "set" and that there is :not enough time to add in these types of activities." Since the district moved to a 4 x 4 block schedule, meaning that each course is completed in only one semester, they "no longer have time to breathe and have to leave each day ready for the next."

Linda is very aware of current issues with challenging books in the district. Her school had a "fiasco" involving their school library that "put some people on edge" and made her "fearful for sure." She is concerned that "not exposing adolescents to books that can help them cope is dangerous for their futures when they will encounter difficult things." She remembers how the book *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (Blume, 1970) was "life changing" for her, and she understands how YAL novels "can help adolescents to understand that the things they are going through are normal." She also believes that her school's English curriculum needs to incorporate more diverse literature because they "just kinda teach old dead white guys." She feels that the issues in the district, however, could make her administration wary about incorporating these texts because they are often challenged.

Linda says that she was "shocked" when she recently saw the district's approved reading list and realized that "the same books were on it from when [she] first came to the district." She feels that there "seems to be little cohesiveness about what is taught" within the district as each school selects its own texts. Linda believes that she does have support in her selections as long as she is "teaching what's OK," and she trusts "the administrator over [her] department" to be

supportive. Linda feels that, overall, teachers do not receive the support they need; they only receive support "when it's convenient or it's the easy thing to do." She believes that teachers "are like flowers expected to thrive without being fertilized or tended to." She says that her administration makes no effort to monitor how she or others are feeling, but she believes she would be a better teacher if they did.

If Linda were to incorporate any new texts that might be challenged, she would "seek support from the district first and foremost" because of the "current climate." She feels that texts that have profanity in them would certainly be an issue, "although what they see on TV and play on their phones is probably much worse." She also believes that with texts today "being more gender-based" or based on "issues," she could "get in trouble" for using them. She does not fear this with what she is currently teaching (e.g., *Scarlet Letter,* [Hawthorne, 1850], *Frankenstein* [Shelley, 1818]) because "three teachers agreed to select these texts from the district-approved list." YAL, however, contains "language and issues that would not bother students but that would certainly concern their parents," who "do not understand that their children are doing those things."

When it comes to support for texts, Linda feels uncertain about whether she would receive much from the school or the district administration. When she taught AP Literature years ago, she was told that if she wanted to teach Morrison's (1970) *The Bluest Eye,* which another teacher in the district was told not to teach, she would "have to jump through numerous hoops" to attempt to get it approved. She decided not to, "and [she hates herself] for not standing up for things like that." Based on recent events with teachers at another school in the district, however, Linda says that she "would not attempt to teach any novel that is not on the approved list at this time" because she does not believe she would be supported if she did. She opted not to speak

about how the district administration is supporting teachers in regard to the issues being created by a political group, "given recent developments in our district regarding outside influences." She does believe that making decisions about texts in the future "will become more challenging" and that teachers "will be more micromanaged and political input will be considered."

Besides perceiving a lack of support, Linda also feels that there is not enough time to incorporate a variety of texts. If she wanted to include multicultural YAL in her courses, for example, she "would have to cut another text because of time"; she wonders which part of the curriculum she would "cut out" and how she would justify that decision. She ponders "whether YAL should be incorporated in courses that are supposed to prepare students for college" and whether or not it "fits in with the content" (i.e., American or British literature) of the courses she teaches.

Linda also believes that parents have "every right" to be involved in what their children are reading. Recently, she had a parent who did not want a student to read *The Crucible* (A. Miller, 1953) because it "contained witches." Although the parent was "misguided," Linda provided the student with an alternate text because "that's the parent's right." Linda feels that what is not within the parents' rights, however, is "dictating what other people's children can read or what the teacher can teach in the classroom."

Austin (In-depth interview, January 16, 2024)

Austin, a White male, is in his fourth year of teaching at Cardinal High School (CHS), within the district where he went to school. He currently teaches English 4 CP and English 3 Honors, both of which include British literature. He defines a text as "any piece of literature or information with which students interact and think deeply about," such as poems, online articles, or choice readings. He defines YAL as "literature that appeals to young people and is relatable to them" as opposed to the older novels they are reading in classes. It also "pushes the boundaries"

and so is a “touchy topic” today. For that reason, he selects only “classics” for instruction in his classroom and does not keep YAL in a classroom library. If there are any YAL books in his classroom, it is “only because a student left it” in there.

Austin’s undergraduate teacher preparation program had a course in YAL that involved “reading a book each week for a 14-to-16-week period,” which he says is not “doable in any course.” The course did not have any effects on his current text selection practices as he does not incorporate YAL in any class. He used to read YAL, but he no longer does so because he “is not a young adult” and so does not find it engaging. He also generally does not have time to read it since he “wants to read books that [he] enjoys outside of school,” just as he encourages his students to do. The “agenda that [he] push[es] is to tell students they should read whatever they want to because they are in charge of [their] own reading.”

Austin incorporates sustained silent reading (SSR) time in both of his classes and uses it “for whatever students need to be reading.” For example, students in English 3 H may need to catch up on assigned reading, or students in English 4 may need to read a selection from a day they were absent. If students do not have reading to do for class, Austin “encourages them to select their own books” for independent reading. He recommends books to students when he knows of one someone may like, and he relies on the librarian, whom he views as “an expert in young adult literature,” to make recommendations.

Austin is very aware of issues going on within the district and state as they relate to book challenges and teachers losing their jobs, and this current situation has caused him to be cautious about the texts he selects. He is concerned about “being the cause of the problem” or “rocking the boat,” especially so early in his career. As a product of the district in which he teaches, he believes that “the district silences issues” by forcing people to “resign.” He also “knows of

teachers being put on reevaluation plans or being put on probation for poor choices that have been made," including those about books that are being challenged. He is also aware of political organizations that are "striving to discredit media specialists [and] educators" who are trained to select texts for classrooms; this conflict is causing teachers to feel "a little bit more defeated" each day. Two teachers at his school are currently facing backlash because of the issues occurring in the district. His perception of the district administration's handling of these issues is that they are "tiptoeing" around them, with that term "being generous" in his opinion.

As a result of these issues, Austin selects texts "only from the district-approved reading list or from the state-adopted textbooks." He admits that he teaches the classics because "he is too scared not to" in this current political climate; he feels "genuinely terrified" of what someone would say about a text read in his classroom. He believes that this is "not good practice" because the texts are "old" and "not fun," but these texts provide a measure of safety that "allow [him] to sleep at night." He does not believe that he would be supported if he attempted to teach a text that is not on the district-approved list; therefore, he would "not even suggest having one added to the list" at this time.

Austin respects the rights of parents to ask for alternative texts if they do not approve of what their children are asked to read. He does "not want to step on any parents' toes" because that keeps parents and teachers from being "a united front for the student." He also believes that parents should be aware of what their children are reading, along with what they are watching on their phones (e.g., TikTok videos, Instagram reels). He contends that "parents who are expending energy on challenging books should expend the same amount of energy on monitoring their children's phone and internet usage" because their children are being "exposed to much more through technology than through books."

Now that he is in his fourth year of teaching, Austin is ready to consider using texts other than the ones he is currently using (e.g., *Lord of the Flies* [Golding, 1954]), and he will look to the district-approved list for additional titles. For example, he has considered teaching Orwell's (1949) *1984*; this change would mean "taking a leap" to new topics and potentially encountering parent complaints when leaving the "safe" text *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954), which contains "nothing that parents have been bothered by." In fact, many of the parents of his students attended the same high school and read the same books when they were teens; Austin feels that this makes parents less concerned about the texts he teaches. If he had the ability to choose any texts without concerns about censorship, though, he believes that his students would have "the most positive outlook on reading." His eyes light up at the prospect of being given such freedom. He would choose books that are "fun" like *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997), *Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954), and "books that are currently banned, books that are new and relatable to students" and that would get them talking about "real issues."

Austin feels that the books that he teaches, such as *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) and *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813), have themes that are relevant to adolescents; however, he does not believe that students "get as much out of books that were written for past audiences." He believes that students could get the same lessons out of books that are published today, along with even more relevant ones for living in their diverse societies. He sees current YAL as having themes for today's students just as canonical texts had for their audiences; for example, he sees Collins' (2008) *The Hunger Games* as today's students' version of *1984* (Orwell, 1949). Current YAL novels involve "real issues that are relevant for students," issues that he wants to be able to discuss with them as they are preparing to enter the world.

Although he does not select the texts he would prefer to teach, Austin does feel supported by the school and district administration. If he did not, he says he would "find a different profession in which [he] did feel supported." He believes that his school administrators "are doing all they can while it is not their jobs to make sure that their English teachers are happy." He is, in fact, happy because he follows the district-approved list and so has had no concerns about texts; because of this, he feels supported by his administration. He feels that there is always "invisible support" that is "unwavering," and he believes he can go to his administration with any concerns that arise. He feels that his school's administration does make some attempt to understand teachers' feelings, but additional support could include conferences and "mental health days." If leaders focused on how he was feeling, he believes his self-efficacy would improve and thus make his instruction better.

He feels that he has some autonomy in what he chooses to teach, but even some texts that are on the district-approved list are not books he feels that he can "actually" teach. If he did, it "would not go well," which means that his autonomy is "in some way secondarily squished" by outside forces. Austin finds this frustrating when it comes from parents "who do not face such scrutiny on their jobs" and seem to not trust his expertise, and it is hurtful from people inside education "who should understand that [his] intentions are not to indoctrinate or groom children." He believes that English teachers are "burned out" and "tired" from dealing with these issues when "people should be allowed to read a book or not read a book," and "teachers should not have to expend all of their energy defending their choices."

While Austin does select texts from the district-approved list, there are factors he considers when deciding which texts to use from the list. He considers the overarching themes that will get students talking in class; he never wants students "to read a text and then not talk

about it together." He selects texts that students can make connections to their own lives with, such as navigating living through adolescence in *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954) or how to treat women in *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813). He also considers including books that appeal to a variety of students, ones that they can "breathe life into" and enjoy.

Austin makes sure to include British texts in courses that are deemed British literature, despite some discrepancies on the district-approved list; he does not feel that texts outside of the "designated content" belong in a course. He also chooses books that allow him to "teach the skills necessary for reading more difficult texts in the future," such as marketing textbooks in college. In English 4 CP, he also includes frequent shorter texts, such as poems and short stories, to engage the seniors who he believes are "ready to graduate" and are thus less enthusiastic to read longer texts. He believes that it's "not what you read or how you read it" that matters, but "it's the skill" that students need to master in order to read later in life.

Nancy (In-depth interview January 22, 2024)

Nancy, a White female, has been teaching for 31 years; she currently teaches English 2 CP, which is the only English course with an EOC exam, at CHS. She considers a text to be "anything [e.g., excerpt, novel in verse, textbook selection] that students read independently or with the class for the purpose of analysis." She defines young adult literature as "a text that is written with the adolescent reader in mind." She also notes that many of these texts feature first-person, teenaged narrators.

When selecting texts for the English 2 course, Nancy relies on the textbook, even though some view it as "old school" because the textbook "provides a variety of types of texts written by a variety of authors," and she selects texts that allow her to meet all of the standards and prepare students for the EOC. This includes fiction and nonfictions selections as well as *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1623/2005), which students read primarily in class. Nancy wonders if she should

continue to spend the amount of time it takes to read all five acts of *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1623/2005) in the class. She begins the course with a study of poetry, along with the YAL novel *Long Way Down* (Reynolds, 2017). She has found that "this text engages students because it is written in verse, and they can easily understand and enjoy the plot." She believes this is partly because author Jason Reynolds "really thinks about how young adults think and how they approach the world," and as a result, students like to and "*will* read his books."

In the second quarter of the semester, she has students read YAL texts in literature circles to give them a chance to have some choice in what they are reading and to allow them to "read about current issues and things that they're interested in," which are often things that they would "not have time to address in class." Literature circles also allow students to read about uncomfortable topics such as "racism and abortion and the LGBTQ community," topics that "may not get discussed in class but that adolescents are aware of and relate to." She has also found that students appreciate having time to discuss their novels. In their groups, which are formed based on the novels they chose, they often interact with students they did not previously know well, and she sees that "students who are unwilling to speak out in whole-class discussions are able to talk in their small groups."

Nancy finds that students are more willing to read their literature circle novels outside of class; when she asks them to read the canonical texts, even if it is just finishing a chapter, "about half of them are likely to do so." She believes that students find YAL "easier to read," and students who claim they have not read a book since middle school often discover that they do like reading when they can choose a book they enjoy. When students read, "they build the stamina and confidence they need to read more difficult texts or to get through the reading on the EOC." Nancy sees great benefit in incorporating YAL in grades 6-10 and in CP courses;

however, she feels that the demands of upper-level courses (i.e., grades 11, 12, Honors, AP) do not allow time for the inclusion of YAL. She perceives their curricula as “more demanding” and “less flexible,” and these students need “a lot more background knowledge of the classics or the canon.” She believes that “advanced students are more likely to read outside of class,” which gives them an opportunity to read YAL on their own time.

Nancy ends the English 2 course with a whole-class study of *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945), which she believes “kids should not leave high school not knowing about.” She connects the novel to students’ lives through current events and discussions of exercising rights to help students understand its importance. The students “need a good bit of scaffolding in the beginning,” but once they understand the novel’s allegory, Nancy believes “they appreciate it.” She has found that “students today no longer relate” to some of the books she has taught in the past, such as *A Separate Peace* (Knowles, 1959) and *Fallen Angels* (Myers, 1988). She notes too that “since students are exposed to so much on the internet today and are able to develop such wide interests,” it is challenging to find “one novel that all students will be interested in.”

Nancy feels that she has autonomy to select the texts she deems best, even in an EOC course, as long as she is “guided by the standards” and her scores “remain good.” She also feels supported in the choices she has made, partly because she has never had a book directly challenged but mostly because she selects texts from the textbook and the district-approved list. *Long Way Down* (Reynolds, 2017) was not originally on that list, but she was able to have it added. Another reason Nancy believes she has not had a book challenged is that she incorporates most of the YAL in her course through literature circles where students choose their texts.

Nancy feels that her administration “approves of [her] curriculum and reading selections,” which is evidenced by their willingness to “answer parent questions without

questioning or challenging [her] methods, strategies, and curriculum choices." Nancy feels that the support she receives from her administration gives her "confidence as a classroom teacher and encourages [her] to push students to achieve." She does not believe, however, that she would be supported if she chose a text that is not on the district-approved list "based on the experiences of colleagues." She believes that the district "could take a stronger stand to prevent outside groups from influencing the curriculum and book selections [teachers] teach and the books available in [the] school libraries."

Nancy does not currently read YAL during her personal reading time. She relies on her librarian to select the titles for the literature circles "because she is an expert, and she knows the latest young adult authors and titles." The librarian purchases copies of the texts Nancy uses in her literature circles, which include popular novels such as Jackson's (2018) *Monday's Not Coming* and McManus's (2017) *One of Us Is Lying*. Nancy has found that students are also likely to read novels by Alan Gratz, whose books they first encountered in middle school. Some of the popular books that Nancy offers as literature circle choices, such as *Monday's Not Coming* (Jackson, 2018) and *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), are also known to appear on frequently challenged lists.

These challenges affect Nancy's decisions of what texts to include in her curriculum, and she ensures "that she could defend a book's value" if she is going to include it. She is concerned about the current situation in which the district is "allowing voice to small groups that really are not professional and haven't been trained in how to choose and select text for students," and she is cautious about her selections. She would not be willing to risk her career by fighting for the inclusion of a text, so she believes it is important for administration to have "conversations not just with parents but with teachers" and to "support teachers in their choices as professionals."

She feels confident in the texts that she has selected for her course, and she believes that she would be supported by her school administration “because they came from the district-approved list or the textbook” and because she offers students choices in the texts that “might be objectionable.” She does, however, wonder if she would “receive the level of support [she] would like from the district administration” during this current climate.

Nancy supports the rights of parents to have input on what their students are reading, and she is “happy to know that parents are paying attention to what their students are reading.” If a parent objects to a text, she would always be willing to provide an alternative, but she would “like the opportunity to explain the value” she sees in the text and why she selected it to the parent. This conversation, she says, “does not always happen.” She remembers a teacher some years ago who had a parent challenge a text in an AP course, and “the book was pulled after the class had started reading it.” Nancy recently had a parent who mistakenly purchased the graphic novel version of *Long Way Down* (Reynolds, 2017) and objected to her child reading it because of the violence it portrayed, “which is the opposite of the novel’s purpose.”

Nancy believes that parents or political groups “often don’t really know the whole story or the theme or the purpose. They pull something out of context and focus on that.” In this case, the parent went directly to the district office instead of talking to Nancy and learning the truth. Nancy allowed the student to select another novel in verse and “purchased a unit for the student to complete.” This speaks to another benefit of literature circles in Nancy’s thinking about selection: Providing an alternative text for one student for a whole-class novel requires her to create or purchase new material, but “literature circles allow the student to simply change to a different text.”

Participants' Shared Experiences Within Their Contexts

Since there are no uniform requirements for texts taught across the district, the experiences of teachers at each high school have similarities based on their context. A description of experiences with text selection at each school then helps to develop a more thorough understanding of text selection throughout the district and explain some of the differences experienced by participants. Therefore, a description of text selection experiences at Oak View, Hannahan, and Cardinal High Schools is provided below.

Oak View High School (Mary and Stacey)

At Oak View High School (OVHS), teachers work in professional learning communities (PLCs); thus, teachers who teach the same course are expected to plan and teach similar content as curriculum partners. Mary and Stacey teach one course with a curriculum partner, meaning two teachers have to agree on the texts selected, and one course independently, meaning that they have full autonomy to select the texts. Mary and Stacey feel that their administration is permissive about the texts they can teach, although they feel that their autonomy has been limited in recent months because of the book challenges within their district. Both teachers consider the skills they want to teach and the themes they want to address when selecting texts. They believe that canonical works contain themes that are relevant to students today and assign them in their classes. Both also consider student engagement and inclusivity as important factors when selecting texts. Stacey and Mary agree that YAL is valuable for adolescents as mirror and window texts (Sims Bishop, 1990), as a means for social and emotional learning, and as confidence and self-esteem builders. Mary and Stacey also view time as a limiting factor when it comes to selecting texts, with 90 days being far too little time to incorporate the texts they would like while also teaching the reading and writing skills necessary for their curricula.

While they share many similarities and common beliefs about YAL, Mary and Stacey differ widely in their willingness to incorporate young adult novels in their classrooms. Mary chooses to incorporate YAL within both of her courses through literature circles, which she developed collaboratively with her school librarian. Although Stacey mentioned appreciating how her colleagues use literature circles and the ability to go to her librarian for assistance, she has chosen not to select YAL texts for her curricula, despite her stated desire to include more diverse texts in her English 3 course. Additionally, when the political book challenge issues began in the district, Stacey almost immediately removed a number of books that the group could potentially find troubling. Mary, on the other hand, refuses to remove books from her classroom library, instead believing that students' ability to choose through literature circles and from the bookshelves offers a measure of protection.

The disparity in Mary's and Stacey's text selection decisions may be explained, both directly and indirectly, by their perceptions of administrative support and teacher self-efficacy (TSE). Both believe in the value of incorporating YAL, yet only Mary believes she has the agency to do so. Her knowledge of YAL, gained initially in a teacher preparation course and continually through personal reading, gives her a measure of TSE in selecting new books for her courses. Stacey stated that she would need current training on using YAL and time to read widely to determine the best texts for her courses. Since she is not comfortable teaching texts she has not read, even in literature circles, and receives no time or training to locate such texts, she does not experience the same agency as Mary, the avid reader of YAL.

Additionally, the participants' perceptions of the support they would receive from administration for their text selections may also help to explain these choices. Both teachers discussed a perceived lack of administrative support as affecting their decision-making and self-

efficacy; however, Stacey indicated a direct effect on her TSE since two teachers at another high school have recently received backlash. Mary stated that she would stop using YAL if she did not receive support from her administration; she believes that this decision *would* decrease her abilities as a teacher and most certainly lower her TSE *if* it occurred. Stacey, however, expressed an increase in feelings of stress and fear following the recent events involving two teachers at another high school and stated that these events have *already* lowered her TSE.

Although Stacey's feelings of agency and confidence seem to have been more affected, both teachers pointed out that English teachers are feeling stressed and burned out—feelings that have been largely ignored by their administration. Gale et al. (2021) found that feelings of unrelieved stress coupled with doubts of support can lower teachers' self-efficacy. Although both initially stated they feel supported overall, their further discussion reveals that their feelings of TSE could be improved by the actions of their administrators, either in providing confidence in support for their decisions or in demonstrating concern for their feelings as school leaders' response to teachers' psychological needs create a strong school climate that helps to curb teacher burnout (Ford et al., 2019).

Hannahan High School (Lily and Linda)

At Hannahan High School (HHS), teachers also work in PLCs and therefore are expected to plan together and provide similar teaching and common assessments. For Linda, this means selecting texts for both of her courses (i.e., English 3 Honors, English 3 CP) with other teachers. Lily, on the other hand, selects the same anchor texts (i.e., novels, plays) but potentially different smaller texts (e.g., poems, songs) with her English 1 curriculum partner; for her theatre courses, she selects texts independently. This pair of participants is the most disparate in career experience, with Linda potentially retiring at the end of this school year and Lily just beginning.

In many ways, Linda’s and Lily’s experiences in selecting texts are similar. Both indicated that they feel some measure of support for their text selection decisions from their school’s administrators. Although they both believe that literature circles can be valuable in their classrooms, neither are currently using them, although for different reasons. As a first-year teacher, Lily does not feel prepared to take on the work of managing them, while Linda wonders if the three curriculum partners could agree on this as part of their curriculum. Both stated that they consider the skills and standards they want to teach when selecting their texts; these choices were also influenced by expectations they perceived for their curricula. Although both teach canonical texts, they believe that the curriculum should be more diverse and engaging.

From here, the experiences of these participants become markedly different, likely because of their years of experience. Lily, an avid YAL reader and recent college graduate, believes that young adult texts are highly engaging for adolescents and provide mirrors and windows (Sims Bishop, 1990) for students that allow them to connect with what they are reading. For this reason, she incorporates YAL and graphic novels in her classroom, and she is seeking more engaging texts to replace those that have not gone over well with students this year. She has a small classroom library that she hopes to grow during her career; she asked her school librarian to check it for titles that could be potentially troubling because she is concerned about getting in trouble due to her inexperience. She also asked the librarian to order approved titles for English 1, and she sought administrative approval for all plays she would teach in Advanced Theatre. Lily started her career with a master’s degree in teaching and feels frustrated that she perceives a lack of trust in her ability to make the decisions that are best for her students.

Linda, on the other hand, does not read YAL and believes that current titles are based on social issues that no longer connect with students. She does not incorporate YAL in any of her

curricula, nor does she have a library in her classroom. Her text selections are based predominantly on the content of her courses (i.e., American and British literature); she sees this curriculum as set to be taught chronologically as outlined in a textbook. She was troubled by the English 4 CP teachers' inclusion of YAL novels written by non-British authors in a course that should be only British literature. All texts Linda teaches are canonical or textbook-based, despite her belief that the curriculum is devoid of the diversity it should have. She believes that CP students need to be taught the basic skills to pass tests, and Honors students need to learn skills with more advanced texts. Even though Linda perceives that her students are not engaged by the classic texts she assigns, she indicated no plans to locate more engaging texts to replace them.

Despite the extreme differences in Lily's and Linda's text selection practices, a common issue holds them together as teachers at HHS: underlying fear that affects their TSE. Lily seeks approval for every text to which she exposes students, including those on her classroom library shelves. Although this made her feel supported in many ways, in other ways it caused her to feel devalued as a professional. Linda stated that she was afraid of doing something that would get her in trouble, and she expressed having no confidence of receiving support from the district if she did. With her recent training and enjoyment of reading YAL, Lily has some agency in selecting texts for her course that her students will find engaging, even stating that she could choose novels that the political group was unaware of to avoid trouble. Linda, on the other hand, discussed feeling out of touch with YAL with the district's focus being solely on PLC; her lack of knowledge in this area has made her uncomfortable with selecting texts that contain potentially controversial issues in the current political climate of the district. Lily's and Linda's experiences align with Bandura's (2001) assertion that a person's sense of agency is dependent upon her beliefs that she has some control within a situation.

Both teachers could benefit from training in YAL that could help them to select texts with which they are comfortable and that would be engaging for students; along with the professional development, their administrators must provide their support of the choices, along with the necessary resources. Providing Linda and Lily with opportunities to increase their agency would benefit the school as “efficacious teachers more often work with colleagues to improve and increase the use of data-driven decision making” (Zee & Koomen, 2016, p. 991), which is one of the main goals of a PLC. This is a prime example of an opportunity for the PLC process to work as it should and help to develop collective teacher efficacy within the entire English department. It is the responsibility of the educational leaders to “build collective efficacy,” which will strengthen “teaching strategies and have a positive impact on student learning” (DeWitt, 2020, p. 91) and teacher commitment to teaching with fidelity (Cansoy et al., 2020).

Cardinal High School (Austin and Nancy)

As in the other schools in the district, the teachers at Cardinal High School (CHS) are expected to work within PLCs; however, neither Austin nor Nancy work with other teachers to select texts for their courses. They both perceive that they have what appears to be complete autonomy that would in reality be hindered if they wanted to teach certain texts, particularly those not already on the district-approved list. Both Austin and Nancy expressed feeling supported overall by their school administrators; Nancy specified that this is partly because she has never faced a challenge to test that support. Both select texts that they can use to teach the skills their students need to be successful, and both consider how students will engage with texts they select. Austin teaches only classic texts, but he selects those that he believes the students will find relevant. Nancy includes some classics because she believes that they are important for

students to know about; she tries to connect those to students' lives with current articles related to the books' themes.

Both teachers specifically mentioned being "careful" or "cautious" multiple times throughout their interviews, often by mentions of feelings such as being afraid, burned out, and unwilling to fight. Unsurprisingly, all texts they select for whole-class study come from the district-approved list or the textbook. Austin expressed the importance of this decision as it allows him to sleep at night. Nancy feels that the district could do more to stop the current issues with book challenges and is uncertain that she would be supported at the district level if she were to have a challenge. She is, however, willing to incorporate YAL in her curriculum, both with a whole-class novel study and through literature circles. No matter the text, Austin and Nancy expressed a willingness to provide alternate texts if there were a parent complaint; only Nancy has had to do so, and it was over a mistaken book.

Despite their underlying desires for caution, Nancy and Austin indicated feeling more support than the teachers at the other two high schools. Interestingly, it is Nancy's and Austin's school where the teachers have faced intense backlash because of the book challenge issues in the district. Their sense of security even while they have concerns may be explained by the steps taken by their administrations to listen to the teachers' concerns and attempts to meet their needs. Austin indicated that the administration at CHS takes steps to monitor how teachers are feeling and that he trusts their decisions, even when he is unsure about them. Nancy indicated that the administration is responsive when she expresses concerns or asks for help and that their support makes her feel validated both as a professional and as a person. Although these teachers arguably have more to fear than the other schools, their teachers are the most satisfied with their perceptions of support. This makes sense when viewed in light of Ford et al.'s (2019) findings:

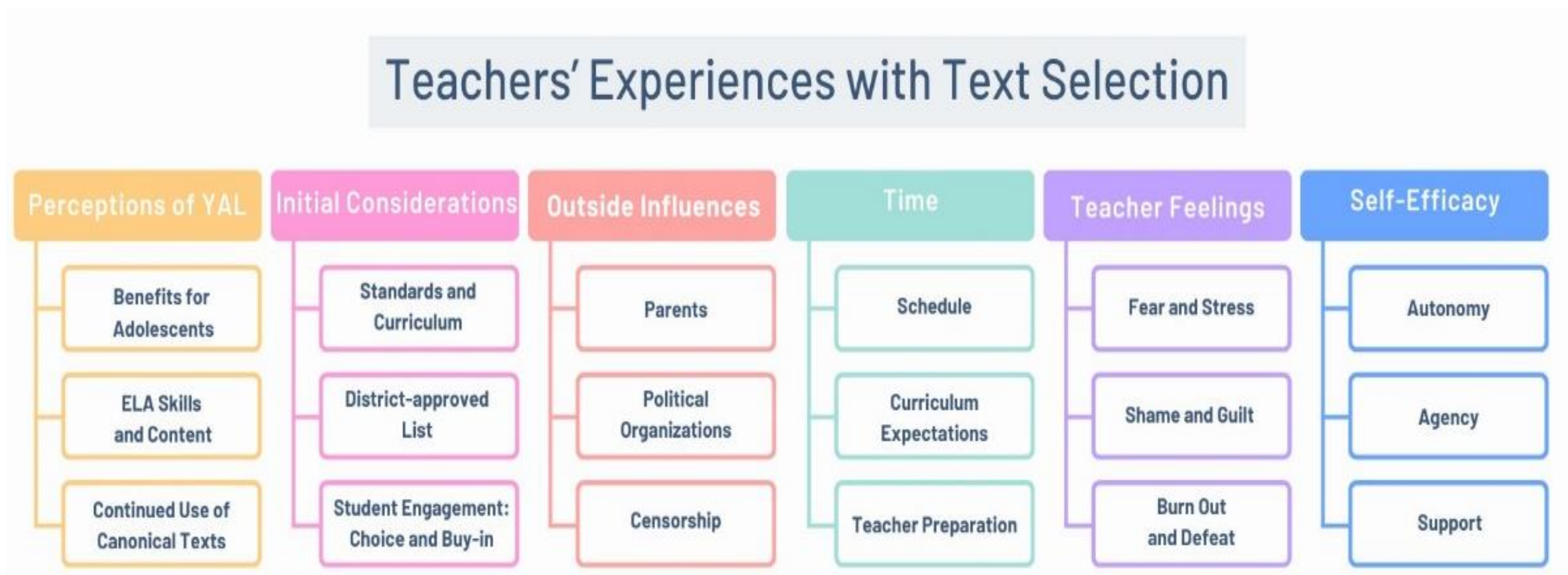
when teachers feel that their administration cares about their needs, they are more satisfied with their jobs and experience greater feelings of TSE.

Participants' Shared Experiences Across Contexts

Participants' experiences within their individual contexts revealed that teachers' self-efficacy was affected in different ways depending on their school; this aligns with Gale et al.'s (2021) finding that teachers' circumstances play a significant role in the measures that affect their self-efficacy. However, when participants' interviews were compared, a number of subthemes emerged across multiple experiences throughout the district, which were grouped into six overarching themes: Perceptions of YAL, Text Selection, Time, Teacher Feelings, Outside Influences, and Support. It is important to note that the themes Outside Influences and Time also contribute to the theme of Text Selection. Figure 4.1 provides an overview of these themes and subthemes, which will be explained in relation to each research question in the following paragraphs, beginning with an explanation of how themes were developed.

Figure 4.1

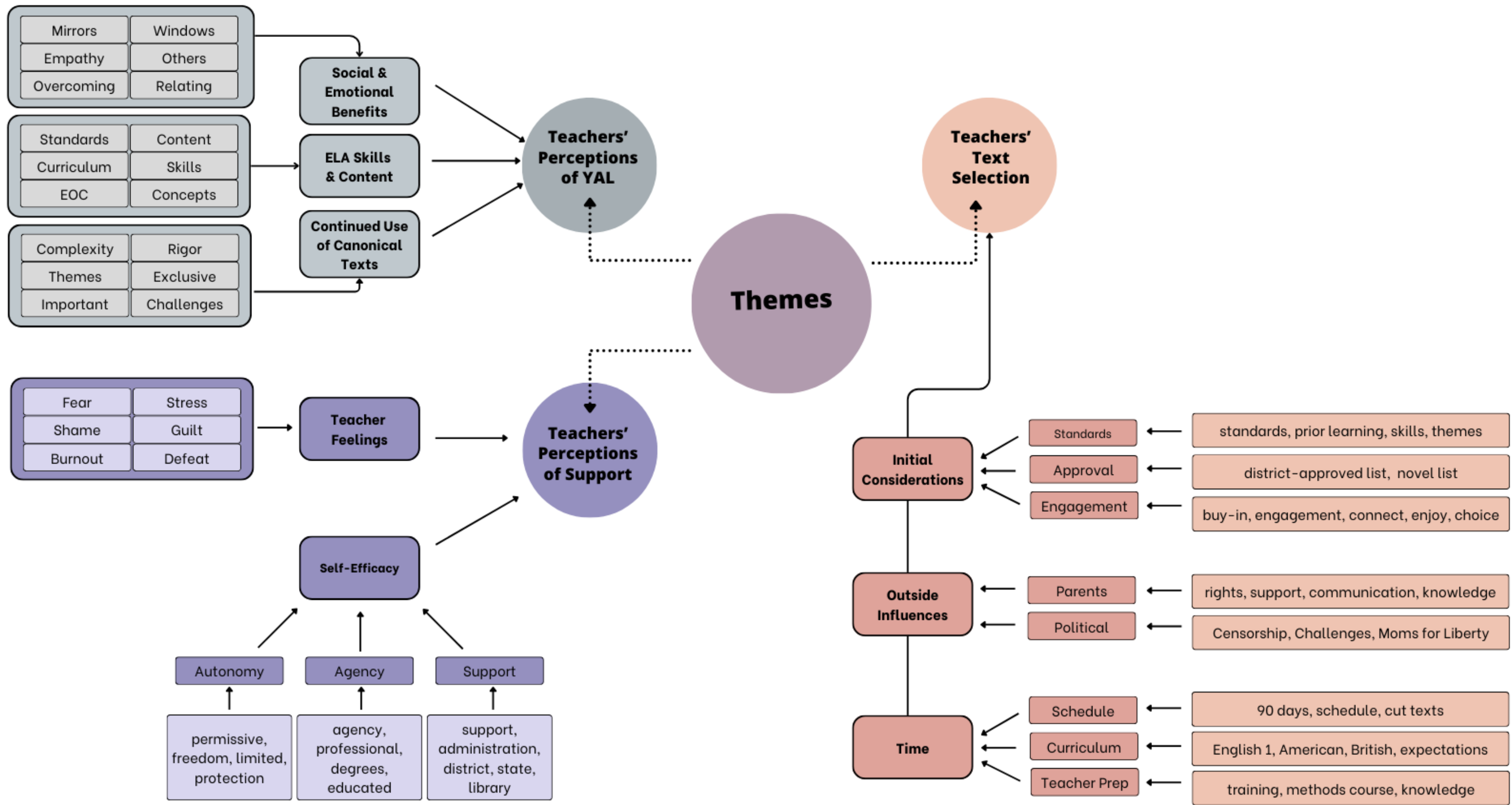
Emergent Themes and Sub-themes



I used Colaizzi's (1978) recommended approach to develop a phenomenological description, which guided me to create codes and develop subthemes and themes based on the patterns of codes across participants. Figure 4.2 provides an overview of the process of theme development, which is explained in detail in the following paragraphs and tables.

Figure 4.2

Theme Development Process



I began this process by reading each participant's interview ideographically and recording significant statements in a chart that included the statement, the meaning constructed from the statement, and a code(s) that represented the meaning. I then re-read the interview multiple times to update statements, meanings, and codes as necessary until I had a thorough understanding of the participant's experiences. I repeated this process for each of the six participant's interviews; see Table 4.2 for an example of how I developed meaning from and coded a participant's statements. After I finished coding each interview, I recorded codes on a separate page so that they could be compared once all interviews were analyzed.

Table 4.2

Data Analysis Charting and Coding Example

Statement	Meaning	Code(s)
Based on my student teaching experience, based on her student teaching experience, you are almost . . . it's kind of the attitude that you're expected to teach *The Odyssey* and *Romeo and Juliet.*	She believes that she has no choice but to teach certain canonical texts as part of her curriculum.	Expectations Canon
It's frustrating, especially you know I have my undergraduate degree, I have my master's degree, and ohhh OK well we don't really trust you to make that decision even though you spent like 5 years of your life studying and learning about this.	She fees that her education has prepared her to make educated decisions for her students, but she is not trusted by others to do so.	Agency Stress

After I analyzed and coded all six interviews, I looked for codes that were repeated throughout participants' responses, particularly those that represented a majority of participants or represented findings related to the research questions. Table 4.3 provides a list of the codes that appeared most frequently, grouped by research question, that I used to develop categories and subthemes.

Table 4.3

Frequently Appearing Codes

Code	Sources	References
Teachers' perceptions of YAL total	6	113
Challenges (canon)	4	6
Complexity	4	5
Concepts	3	5
Content	3	13
Curriculum	6	8
Empathy	3	3
End of Course (EOC)	2	4
Exclusive (canon)	3	5
Mirrors	4	8
Others	3	4
Overcoming	4	4
Relating	6	20
Rigor	4	5
Skills	4	8
Standards	4	4
Themes	4	4
Useful/important (canon)	3	3
Windows	3	4
Teachers' text selection practices (total)	6	193
Approval	6	16
Censorship	6	37
Challenges	6	17
Engagement	4	20
Expectations	5	20
Parents	6	22
Prior learning	5	7
Schedule	5	14
Standards/skills	6	26
Teacher prep	4	8
Themes	4	6
Teachers' perceptions of administrative support (total)	6	128
Agency	5	13
Autonomy	6	15
Burnout	4	8
Defeat	2	2
Fear	6	32
Guilt	2	3
Shame	4	5
Stress	4	4
Support	6	46

Codes were grouped into subthemes according to the research questions: teachers' perceptions of YAL, teachers' text selection, and teachers' perceptions of support. Table 4.4 provides a description of each subtheme that illustrates its development from the initial codes.

Table 4.4

Descriptions of Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Description
Teachers' Perceptions of YAL	Social and emotional benefits	Teachers stated direct social and emotional benefits students could receive from reading YAL, including finding window and mirror texts, learning how to overcome obstacles, relating to characters and situations, and developing empathy.
	ELA skills and content	Teachers discussed how YAL could be used to teach ELA skills and content, including the standards and curricula of courses such as English 1, concepts such as character and symbolism, and skills such as close reading and writing.
	Continued use of canonical texts	Teachers explained that they use canonical texts for a variety of reasons: their rigor and complexity, their usefulness in the curriculum, and the themes they contain. They also provided downsides to canonical texts, including their lack of ability to engage or represent their students.
Teachers' Text Selection	Initial considerations	Teachers considered what texts could provide students academically, including relation to prior learning and applicability to ELA standards and skills. They also considered whether texts were on the district-approved list of novel and their ability to engage students.
	Outside influences	Teachers cited political concerns, including the group Moms for Liberty and their challenges in the district, as being influential on their selections. Parents were also highly influential, and teachers indicated a desire for parent communication and support in text decisions.
	Time	Teachers referenced time as a major factor in text selection, particularly the notion of having courses for only one semester. Many teachers indicated they had cut texts they previously taught to save time; others felt that specific texts should be taught in their courses (e.g., American or British), which left no time for YAL. Teachers also referenced a lack of time to prepare professionally to use YAL.

Theme	Subtheme	Description
Teachers' Perceptions of Support	Self-efficacy	Teachers described their self-efficacy through discussions of autonomy, agency, and support. *Autonomy* includes references to freedom and limits to it. *Agency* includes references to making decisions as professionals, degrees earned, and education. *Support* includes that teachers perceive from administrators, librarians, the district, and the state.
	Teacher feelings	Teachers expressed feelings (e.g., fear, stress) related to their selection of texts, their perceptions of community responses to texts, and current challenges to texts

From these subthemes, I developed themes for each of my research questions, which are explained in the following paragraphs.

Research Question 1: Teachers' Perceptions of YAL

The first research question was intended to gather data on how English teachers perceive the use of YAL in the secondary English classroom. Although only half of the participants incorporated YAL in their classrooms, all of them spoke positively of YAL and its benefits for adolescents who read it. Participants also discussed the applicability of incorporating YAL for teaching course skills and standards. Finally, many participants made comparisons between canonical and YAL texts that help to illuminate their decisions when selecting each type of text.

Social-Emotional Benefits for Adolescents

YAL was viewed by all participants as beneficial for adolescents' social and emotional development in various ways. First, YAL provides students with mirror and window texts (Sims Bishop, 1990) that allow them to see themselves reflected in what they read and to realize that they are not alone in their experiences. Mary explained what she perceives when her students read YAL for her course:

> A lot of students feel alone, and to see that they're not alone—even if they're fictional characters they're . . . based on actual things that could happen—they feel like they see

> themselves in literature, and it's not always the pretty filtered accounts that they see on social media. It's more, like, raw and real, and they can see themselves in that and know O. K., I'm not completely alone and they can be comforted in the fact that there's something, somebody out there that understands that even if it's not a person they have to talk to because it could be something they don't want to talk about but they can find it in a book.

Linda talked about how that moment happened for her when she was in seventh grade and read Blume's (1970) *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. She describes the experience as "life changing" as a moment where she finally understood that what she was going through as an adolescent girl—changes that her "mother talked to [her] about"— was "normal."

Participants also commented on how YAL allows students to better understand others, especially their peers who may be different from them. Stacey explained, "Part of the relevance of YA is not just so students can see themselves but so that students get a well-rounded view of all people and can develop those sympathies and capacity for empathy." Mary, who has a large number of Hispanic students in a class of predominantly White students, believes that providing all students with diverse books may help them to "realize that it isn't always a choice for students that end up in our school. . . . Having the ability to include that and have students read about it lets them see different experiences that they may not have considered before." Lily expressed her desire for her students to understand the value of reading texts as windows:

> You're looking at someone else's life. You're observing how they behave and how they act and how they're treated, and both of those experiences can happen in the same classroom and how maybe you're a little bit of both. And so just inviting them to kind of take that perspective when we're reading these books you might not see yourself, but

> you're learning something new or, you know, vice versa, and so that seemed to resonate with actually a few of them . . .

Linda mentioned an experience she had when teaching Adichie's (2003) *Purple Hibiscus* in which a Nigerian student in her class talked to her peers about her culture and brought in food for them to taste. She described it as "a great learning experience, for the kids and for me . . . It was one of those golden moments that you're like 'I became a teacher for this reason.'"

Additionally, reading YAL allows students to read about topics and issues that are important to them and that they find engaging but that may not be talked about in their classes. For Nancy, this is one of the main reasons that she incorporates YAL through literature circles with her tenth-grade students:

> [YAL novels] address topics like racism and abortion and the LGBTQ community. A lot of those things that we kind of wouldn't discuss in class necessarily but that the kids know are out there and that are issues that kids relate to. And they're willing to read those things."

Stacey believes that reading about these difficult topics benefits students socially and emotionally because they "see characters dealing with . . . situations that are difficult and [watch] them overcome that adversity." Students, she says, benefit "from seeing even the psychological aspect of how do characters get out of situations or how would [they] have done it differently." Austin pointed out that the books that deal with potentially controversial topics are the ones that are banned, which is a disservice to students because "what is found in actual bound book that [students] cannot escape is probably the more safe place to learn about things."

Participants also noted that reading YAL can provide students an enjoyable escape from the world where they are mentally taxed with constant connection to devices. Linda remarked

that "it should always be an escape . . . to go read." Mary explained that with the expectations for students to perform socially and academically, they "need that moment where they're just sitting and not having to worry about anything else . . . I feel like we put a lot of pressure on students, and it takes some of the pressure off." Nancy has found that when her students read the YAL texts in her course, "they realize that they actually enjoy reading,"

ELA Skills and Content

Throughout the interviews, participants pointed out that YAL texts can be used in English classrooms to teach the skills, themes, and concepts of any curriculum. Nancy, whose students take a standardized exam at the end of her course, touted the use of YAL to help prepare students for the reading they will be expected to do:

> Young adult literature is important to get kids to read and to help them realize they can read a book and that they can analyze a text, and then we go to something a little more difficult. . . . It builds their confidence to be willing to try more difficult texts. . . They can apply those same skills [and] build reading stamina which is essential for them to read through those passages for the EOC.

Mary, who also teaches the EOC course, agrees, but adds that YAL is more effective in teaching students skills because the students are engaged and actually read the text:

> The text doesn't matter as much as the skills that go with the text. You can analyze any text. You can look at it, and you can talk about what the author wants you to get out of it. You can talk about similes and metaphors, and it's the skills that they need. And if I can get them to read something and actually enjoy it and want to talk about it and take those skills and apply it to the young adult literature when they're given something on the EOC, . . . they will already know how to use those skills and apply them to any text

because we've already done it and they understood it and knew they were talking about content-wise with the other literature.

Mary also noted that the students in her honors course became more confident in their class discussions after reading YAL because they were engaged by what they were reading and understood the texts.

YAL can also be used to teach the themes and content ideas in any curriculum. Austin noted that "there are timeless themes in every book" and books today are "going to be someone else's classic at some point." To illustrate his point, Austin compared the classic novel *1984* (Orwell, 1949) to *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008), both presenting dystopian worlds that are based on the times in which they were written. He also described *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813) as "the original Kardashian clan," explaining that "our Kardashians now…that's the Bennett family…a novel about people talking to people and just drama." Although his last example was somewhat in jest, his point was clear: modern YAL texts can be used to teach the same themes as canonical texts, and students will find the ones based in the world they know to be far more engaging. He believes that when teachers decide to start teaching the modern texts over the classics, "that's when kids are going to start reading again." Lily added that concepts such as the epic hero could be taught through more modern examples than *The Odyssey* (Homer, ca. 800-600 B.C.E./1999), which her students found completely unengaging.

Continued Use of Canonical Texts

Among participants, views of canonical texts varied; regardless of their personal opinions, all six participants use canonical texts in their classrooms, including the teachers who also incorporate YAL. For example, Nancy teaches the YAL text *Long Way Down* (Reynolds, 2017) and YAL-based literature circles, but she also uses *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1623/2005) and *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945) because she believes that "*Animal Farm* is something that kids

should not leave high school not knowing about." She explains her purposeful selection of both canonical and YAL texts:

> I think parts of the canon are really important. There's a reason it's part of the canon. It addresses the human condition and, you know, just being able to see a connection between the things that Jason Reynolds writes and the things that Shakespeare wrote and how each of them are talking about truths about human nature and being able to make that connection. I think it's important to use both.

Stacey, who teaches only canonical texts, feels that "the themes and characters [in canonical books] are still relevant today." She feels that her students find *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925) and *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937) engaging and that these texts are "useful" in her teaching.

Many participants expressed the perception that canonical texts are more complex and rigorous and are thus more appropriate than YAL for honors and AP courses. Mary explains her choice to include canonical texts in addition to YAL in her honors course:

> The course that my kids take, usually they end up in AP Literature at some point, and on the AP exam, I know they have to have a repertoire of books . . . And I want to expose them to more complex texts because the young adult literature books are really good. But a lot of them are very simple and their plot structures are not as complex, and with *Frankenstein* and *Macbeth*, they get exposure to different types of genres and works, and they have to think a little bit harder than they do sometimes with the other literature. My perception would be that AP probably expects them to be able to reference those classic pieces of literature, and they probably would not be as accepting of young adult.

Other participants mirror Mary's thoughts. Nancy perceives honors and AP courses as requiring "a lot more background knowledge of the classics or the canon. . . . I think their curriculum is more demanding, less flexible probably." Linda noted a willingness to incorporate literature circles in a CP course but not in an honors course: "[Another teacher] wanted to try lit circles, and I'm like you know what? This is not an honors class. It's a CP class. We want these kids…we wanna foster a love of reading in these kids." The participants' responses suggest a perception that YAL cannot be complex or rigorous enough to challenge advanced students and meet the demands of honors and AP courses.

Participants also noted some potential drawbacks to teaching canonical texts. Austin, who teaches only classics, said about the books he teaches, "No wonder kids aren't reading any more. . . . You're making us read boring books. Mary reflected on a time in her life when her reading experience probably mirrored that of many of her honors students who are assigned canonical texts:

> I read the whole Harry Potter series and thought, . . . I kind of like how not complex the structures and the ideas are in young adult literature. It's just very straightforward. Like, this is what's happening. There are inferences you make, but it was just easy to read. And I just wanted more easy-to-read things. . . . At that time, I was rereading *Pride and Prejudice* because I was teaching British lit, and I loved it. But it was just so heavy. And the language was hard to decipher, and I enjoyed it, but it took a long time. And I just remember thinking, I just want to sit and read and have fun.

Stacey pointed out that, while she finds the canonical texts she teaches "useful," she does not want them "to be all" students are exposed to. She noted specifically that African American and Latinx cultures "either get pigeonholed or omitted, especially in the canon." Linda commented

that the curriculum at her school consists of "old, dead White guys" and lamented the lack of diversity pointed out by a fellow teacher: "Where are these [diverse] authors? Why are they not represented in our curriculum because we have Latinx students, we have African-American students, we have students from different cultures . . . Why are we not representing these kids?" Interestingly, despite their desire for more diversity in their curricula, neither Stacey nor Linda use YAL in their courses.

A list of all whole-class full-length texts taught by all participants (see Table 4.5), developed from titles provided in interviews, reveals the predominance of canonical titles taught in the district. It is interesting to note that only one of these titles was published in the 21st century.

Table 4.5

Overview of Whole-class Novels and Plays Taught in English Courses

Title	Year Published	Author Ethnicity	Author Gender
Animal Farm	1945	W	M
The Crucible	1953	W	M
Frankenstein	1818	W	F
The Great Gatsby	1925	W	M
The House on Mango Street	1984	H	F
Long Way Down	2017	B	M
Lord of the Flies	1954	W	M
Macbeth	1623	W	M
Maus	1986	W	M
Of Mice and Men	1937	W	M
Pride and Prejudice	1813	W	F
Romeo and Juliet	1597	W	M
The Scarlet Letter	1850	W	M
Things Fall Apart	1958	B	M

A closer analysis of the publication dates and author demographics of the novels taught (see Table 4.6) is even more telling.

Table 4.6

Statistics of Whole-class Novels and Plays Taught in English Courses

Characteristic	Data
Year Published - Median	1941
Author Ethnicity (%)	
Black	14
Hispanic	7
White	79
Author Gender (%)	
Female	21
Male	79

The median publication date for the novels taught is 1941, while the students reading them were born, on average, in 2008. Only one novel, *Long Way Down* (Reynolds, 2017) was published during the students' lifetime. The vast majority of texts (79%) were written by White males despite the district's student population being comprised of 49% female students. Although the ethnicities of the authors do align nearly identically with the student population's demographics, the majority of texts assigned do not expose students to the diverse perspectives of people with whom they will live and work.

Research Question 2: Teachers' Text Selection Practices

The purpose of the second research question was to determine the factors that most influenced secondary English teachers as they selected texts for their classrooms. Common elements initially considered by teachers included the state standards or skills they need to cover, the text's place on the district-approved list of novels, and how students would likely react to the text. Participants also strongly considered the weight of influences outside of their control, including parents, political organizations, and censorship at large. Finally, participants expressed

the importance of time, both within the classroom and for their preparation, as being important considerations.

Initial Considerations: Standards, Approval, and Engagement

All six participants referenced the English Language Arts standards for their state or the skills they wanted to teach as being a major consideration for the texts they selected. Lily said she and her curriculum partner think about whether a text is "going to help us teach the skills we need to teach . . . the standards and the essential skills we're trying to cover…Is it going to lend itself well to our curriculum plan?" Lily said they also consider the students' prior learning, both in their course and in their middle school curriculum, to help select texts. For example, they chose the graphic novel *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986), in part because "80% of [their students] in 8th grade read *Diary of Anne Frank* so [they're] already building on that prior knowledge."

For her English 2 CP curriculum, Nancy explained that she "pick[s] and choose[s]" the texts she will cover by determining which ones she can "apply the standards to, to make sure [she] cover[s] all the standards." For English 3 CP, Stacey said that she and her curriculum partner "first determine the essential standards for [their] unit" and then select the texts that will best help students master them. When asked about what she considered first when selecting a text, Mary stated without hesitation, "I definitely start with the skill I want to work on, based on the standards for my course. Do I want to look at theme? Do I want to look at writing? What do I want to focus on? I start there and then decide which texts will work best to teach those." Linda viewed the selection of texts based on standards as a means to an end for her courses: "You have to teach them what they need to know so they can pass your PLC standard for your [teacher evaluation goal]."

Multiple participants specifically mentioned selecting texts that fit within a desired theme or unit that allows them to change the texts if they wish. For example, Lily explained that

she and her teaching partner selected *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986) to fit within their propaganda and rhetoric unit and *The House of Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1984) as an introduction to their unit on poetry so that "a lot of the things we are looking at in the poetry unit after that [the students] have already had practice with during *Mango Street*." For her English 3 Honors course, Mary developed a unit on dystopian literature through which she incorporates YAL literature circles along with supplemental texts such as "short stories and excerpts from canonical novels."

In one way or another, each participant mentioned the existence of a district-approved novels list, with half stating specifically that all texts are chosen either from the list or from a state-adopted textbook. Linda, who has worked in the district the longest of all participants, remembered seeing the list when she arrived in the district and then not again for several years. She explains how the list has resurfaced in recent years:

> When I came [here], there was a list. And it was pretty much *The Chocolate War*, *My Friend Flicka*, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. And then a couple years ago, maybe even last year, we took a look at another reading list because of the Moms for Liberty, and the same novels…like nothing had changed. And I'm thinking, holy cow, who is in charge of making these decisions?

In fact, the list was updated only because of the political situation in which the district found itself. Stacey said that she was not given a list to select from when she came to the school district several years ago, but she was made aware of it when the issues in the district started. She noted that all of the texts she teaches "are safely on that list, probably because they are all from the literary canon." Lily explained that she had not personally seen the list, but she trusted that her librarian "checked the list before she ordered the books" for her courses.

Multiple teachers suggested that students' engagement or buy-in were important considerations when selecting texts. Even when teaching only canonical texts, participants expressed a desire for students to connect with and enjoy what they are asking them to read. Lily said that she thinks about whether "the kids are going to engage" with a text she is considering and how "she can make it engaging" with freshmen if she needs to. Stacey said that she specifically considers "what student buy-in would be" as she selects texts for her courses.

Some teachers talked about selecting new texts because the ones they were using no longer engaged students. Mary incorporated YAL in her honors and CP courses in an effort to get students interested in reading:

> The more I started diving into British lit with the kids, the more I realized they hated it, like British lit's just hard because of the language on top of it being just English. That's why I started using the dystopian lit circles books. And that led to lit circles in English 2. My curriculum partner and I really just wanted to find a way to get the kids to read because every single kid said, 'I hate reading.' That's probably the most heard phrase in my English classroom, that 'I hate reading,' and we wanted to figure out a way to get them to like reading.

Nancy also discusssed selecting more modern YAL texts to encourage student buy-in so they would actually read the books they are being asked to read. After 26 years of teaching, Nancy has found that students are no longer engaged by books they found interesting in the past, such as *Fallen Angels* (Myers, 1988) or *A Separate Peace* (Knowles, 1959). She explains the challenges in selecting one text that all students will enjoy:

> Because of social media and the Internet, they're exposed to a lot more things. So it's hard to pick one big thing that everybody is really interested in. Like, even their favorite

> artists and musicians…the list is just so long now because they're exposed to so much more than even 10 years ago. It was easier to choose things that related to the majority of the classes in some way.

Nancy responded by incorporating *Long Way Down* (Reynolds, 2017), for which she has had "100 percent buy-in" based on feedback she receives from student surveys. She also instituted literature circles to provide students with choices of what will interest them. Interestingly, four teachers proclaimed the value of providing students a voice in what they read, but only Mary and Nancy allowed students to select texts, which they did only within their literature circle units.

Outside Influences: Parents, Politics and Censorship

Although no participants initially mentioned parents as part of their considerations for text selections, all discussed the influence of parents' approval of what their children read for their classes. Without hesitation, all six participants indicated that parents have the right to be involved in the decisions about what their children read and welcomed parent involvement in their students' reading lives. Lily expressed the most effort in reaching her students' parents:

> I make sure to include everything on my syllabus, which I require [the students] to get signed so I know [the parents] have at least had it in their hands. And so I put a book list. I don't just put the titles; I'll go on Good Reads and get the summaries because I want them to know what we're reading. I try to encourage parents to be involved in education, especially in high school and 9th grade when there tends to be a sudden lack of communication from school with parents. . . . . I think they should be included in the conversation.

Nancy stated that she believes parents should "have input on what their students are reading," and she added that it makes her "happy to know that parents are paying attention to what their students are reading."

Participants also stated that they would respect parents' wishes by providing alternate texts when requested. Austin expressed empathy and understanding for parents' concerns:

> I would never, in a million years, expect a kid to complete a piece of schoolwork if a parent had a problem with that. I would never expect that. Because if that were my situation, I would expect the response from my teacher, or my student's teacher, to be like, I totally understand. I get that. Here's an alternate thing. I never want to step on toes because at the end of the day, if we're stepping on toes, we're not a united front for the student. And that's just not good practice.

While they are willing to provide alternative texts, some teachers mentioned the burden that this could create for them. Nancy recalled a time she had to provide an alternate text that she had never taught, so she "purchased a unit from Teachers Pay Teachers for the student to complete" out of her own pocket. Mary also mentioned the challenge of finding a suitable alternate text when she "barely [has] time to prepare for the text" the rest of the class is reading. Mary and Nancy also noted that literature circles provide a simple solution to this problem because students can simply select one of the other texts already offered if there is an issue.

Participants also discussed parents' censorship of their children's reading. Two participants indicated that they would like parents to allow their children to read texts that expose them to differing viewpoints or that they can relate to, even if the parent disagreed with the content. While Mary was willing to provide alternate texts, she would instead prefer parents to be more open:

> I definitely want the parent support, but I also want kids to be exposed to other perspectives and events that happen in the world that they may not ever hear about unless they read about it. Parents have a say in what students are learning, but it's also up to

> them to parent their kids in a way that their kids know that they don't have to agree with everything that they read.

Stacey was reminded of a situation with a former student and remarked, "I would be heartbroken if the parent of an LGBTQ child said they couldn't read a book that might be beneficial to them, but that's their right." Multiple participants also referenced parents censoring their children's reading material while ignoring the media they are consuming on their phones and the internet. Austin found the perceived contradiction frustrating:

> But at the end of the day, . . . parents can't sit here and tell me that they are watching every Instagram reel or Tik Tok on their For You page that their kid is watching. . . . Therefore, do not keep the same energy when it comes to reading if you're not going to mandate cell phone policy or Internet perusing the way that some parents are tackling the reading challenges that our society has currently found itself.

Similarly to Austin, Linda candidly pointed out the ignorance she perceives from parents about the content of young adult texts versus the reality of their children:

> When it comes to young adult literature, it doesn't matter to the kids all the [profanity] or all the issues that are going on, but it does to parents. And parents are like, 'Why are teachers letting my kids read this or making my kids read this?' You don't understand, we're not; your kid does that stuff. Sorry.

Overall, participants indicated that they desire support from parents, especially their trust that the teachers are making professional choices about what they are providing their students to read. Their statements indicated that they perceive some parents' concerns about texts to be misguided when the teachers, according to Austin, "are just trying to get these kids to read."

Ultimately, while participants all supported parents' rights to choose what their own children read, they indicated that those rights end there and are not extendable to other children. Stacey explained matter-of-factly:

> Parents have rights when it comes to what *their* children are reading. They have every right to know about the books and decide that their children can't read something. I don't disagree with that. What I do disagree with is parents deciding what *other people's* children can't read.

Linda, who had recently provided an alternate text for a student whose parents did not want her to read *The Crucible* (A. Miller, 1953), voiced a similar sentiment. While she understood the parents' decision for their child based on religious beliefs, she believes that "when [parents] start infringing on the rights of others' kids, we need to stop and say . . . your voice is for your child, not for the teacher or the entire classroom." Several participants expressed frustration with the ways parents have gone about voicing their concerns about texts, particularly when they have gone to administration to complain rather than talking directly to the teacher. Nancy, who had a parent complain to the district office about a book, said,

> I would like the parent to have a conversation with me before they objected to something and went to an administrator to complain. I would want to be able to explain what I saw as the value of that text and why I selected it, but that isn't always happening.

Participants were clearly not upset with parents wanting to have a voice in what their children were reading; instead, they were frustrated with how some of the situations have come about.

This frustration may stem greatly from the book challenge issues the district is currently facing. All six participants specifically referenced the Moms for Liberty, the political group who has presented the district with numerous blanket book challenges and publicly accused librarians

and teachers of providing harmful material to children. Austin described the group's activities as "striving to discredit . . . media specialists, educators, [and] school districts." Stacey claimed that the "primary influence [on her text selections] outside of the school community is a group called Moms for Liberty" who are "attempting to censor those texts which can be taught . . . and most of their censored texts involve YAL." She also mentioned that this group specifically targets books that deal with "issues of race and sexuality," which was the reason she pulled one-third of the books from her classroom library. Lily asked her librarian to check her classroom library specifically for titles "that are going around on those Moms for Liberty lists," which she then removed. Linda explained, "Of course [the current challenges situation] influences my decisions, and I try to make sure that when I choose a book that I could defend its value in the classroom." Clearly, the political message of this group has had a direct impact on the texts teachers have chosen to include in their classrooms.

Although the idea of book bans and challenges is not new, the recent wave of legislation about books in schools across the country has brought the issue to the forefront of teachers' minds. Mary said that the idea of books she chose being challenged never affected her decisions in the past: "I would just pick things that I thought the students would enjoy, things that fit the standard I was trying to cover, and I didn't think as much about it." In addition to the issues being caused by the political organization, most participants expressed concerns about censorship in general, whether they had experienced it previously or not. Stacey provided some context for her decisions to remove books from her classroom library:

> Knowing what is happening and how our state is trending, I went ahead and removed all literature that I felt could possibly be challenged . . . characters who were LGBTQ . . . what it's like to be Black in the US.

She expressed extreme disappointment in this turn of events and stated that, “We are on the cusp of what seems like censorship to me.” Nancy noted that she believes the canonical text *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945) also “might be challenged eventually” because of its political nature.

Half of the participants mentioned the censorship of YAL texts specifically; the two who incorporate YAL through literature circles stated that this is something they are concerned about when using these texts. Nancy said that she is “not surprised” to hear that many of Tiffany Jackson’s books are being challenged nationwide (Pen America, n.d.) “because it seems like there are just so many things that are being challenged right now.” She pointed out that another of her literature circle selections, *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), is also being challenged in places because it references rape. Mary explained that although the possibility of challenges does play a factor in the texts she selects for literature circles, “giving kids somewhat of a choice has helped [her] get around it and not be as stressed about it.”

Despite the clear concerns about censorship expressed by participants, few had actually dealt with the issue. It is interesting to note that the majority of participants who dealt with censorship did so because of parent challenges to canonical texts: Mary’s parent complaints about *Brave New World* (Huxley, 1932) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde, 1890) and Linda’s parent request for an alternate text for *The Crucible* (A. Miller, 1953). Although Nancy’s parent complaint led to her providing an alternate text, it was actually not about the book she was teaching. Most of the participants’ concerns stemmed from what they have heard about challenges and experiences of teachers in other places. Lily expressed such concerns: “I keep hearing about all these first-year teachers getting in trouble or getting fired or getting put on administrative leave or like their addresses are popping up now and people know where they live . . .” Austin also indicated fear based on the experiences of other educators:

> When I see other people in our state being ousted or voted off of school boards or just fired for random reasons or being put on probation or having to go through the [teacher evaluation] rubric again and I go back and I do some digging, it's normally about this issue of books that have been banned or poor choices that were made.

Based on the fear that is prevalent in the district's teachers at all three schools, it is evident that direct experience is not necessary for an issue to affect teachers' text selection practices.

Time: Scheduling, Expectations, and Teacher Prep

The four teachers who have been teaching the longest mentioned time constraints as being a major contributor to the texts they select. Three specifically mentioned the difficulty created for English courses when the district moved from a year-long A/B block schedule to a semester-long 4x4 block schedule. Linda expressed her frustration with the change in schedule and how it affected her courses: "They've cut us down to 90 days, and it's like literally we've got…it's like this much time [holds up fingers to indicate a very small amount] to read this much stuff [holds out arms to indicate a large amount]." Linda also stated that she perceives that teachers at her school do not incorporate more diversity in the curriculum because there is not enough time to fit it in.

Despite still having "90 days" with students, as all four referenced, participants explained that having students every day instead of every other day forced them to cut down on the number of texts they read with students. Stacey noted that she had to start teaching only excerpts of *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925) and supplement with the film version for her English 3 CP course. Nancy questioned whether or not she should devote the time it takes to read all of *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1623/2005) with her English 2 CP students. Linda, who expressed a desire to incorporate more diversity in her courses, cited time as the reason she has not done so:

"The time's not there. We'd have to seriously cut out another novel I would think to fit it in." Mary explained how the change in schedule affected her selection of texts:

> It's just—we just don't have time to cover everything, and a lot of activities I would love to do also take a lot of feedback and looking at things and getting it turned around for the next day, and the class sizes are also really large, which makes a difference.

As a result, she cut *Night* (Wiesel, 1960) from her English 2 CP curriculum and *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813) from English 3 Honors.

Multiple participants cited perceived curriculum expectations as dictating their text selections. For example, despite never being told what should be in the English 1 CP curriculum at her school, Lily and her curriculum partner felt compelled to teach specific canonical texts:

> Based on my student teaching experience, based on her student teaching experience, you are almost…it's kind of the attitude that you're expected to teach *The Odyssey* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Based on both of our placements we had, that was what English 1 does. So that is what we did.

She also felt pressure to teach *The Odyssey* (Homer, ca. 800-600 B.C.E./1999) because she was led to believe that students needed to read it in ninth grade because they would read *The Iliad* (Homer, ca. 800-600 B.C.E./1998) in a future course; she could neither name that course or point to a person who told her this was the case.

Three participants who teach American or British literature specifically referenced the expectations of their courses when selecting texts. Stacey uses only American literature in her English 3 CP course but focused on ensuring that she included Native American texts to be "inclusive of all American literature." Linda was concerned with incorporating texts outside of the parameters of British literature and commented that English 4 teachers in her school were

"using literature circles with YAL texts that are not British literature." When she selects texts for her courses, she looks specifically at "what is representative of American and British lit." Austin also mentioned that there were books on the district-approved novel list that were recommended for British literature courses that were written by John Steinbeck, "who [he] do[es] not believe was British." Out of the four who teach American and British literature, only Mary incorporates texts that are outside of the expected curriculum with her dystopian literature circles, and she is the only one who uses any YAL texts in British or American literature courses.

Participants' time spent in training and preparation for teaching English in general and YAL in particular sheds some light on teachers' selections. Mary is the participant who most purposefully selects YAL for her courses. She describes the YAL course she took as part of her teacher education program as being extremely influential in her teaching practice:

> We had a whole course dedicated to young adult literature where we had a selection of books that we read and we did different activities with them, and I actually learned how to teach English more in that class than I feel like in any of my other courses. And it sparked my interest for using young adult literature to teach some of those language arts concepts. In my other prep courses, I feel like I got taught how to write a lesson plan, and that was really it. And I had English classes, but they were just straight English classes. They were not how to *teach* the English. I got how to write lesson plans and teach concepts, and then I got the English content and had to figure out how to put it together. I thought that young adult class did both of those things and put them together.

Mary learned to teach English through a young adult literature class, which she perceives is the reason she so readily turns to YAL to teach in her courses. She also became an avid reader of YAL, and she claims that today that is primarily what she reads "other than the Bible."

Nancy, who took a YAL course as part of her teacher education program in the 1980s, said that she distinctly remembers reading "a lot of the current young about literature" of the time, which "were just a little bit on the edge of what's culturally acceptable for social practices of that time period. You know, like smoking pot and sex, things that are still considered a little edgy." Although the novels were "edgy," she explained that they got parents' permission for students to read anything that might be questioned. These early experiences with "edgy texts" and informing parents about their content may explain her willingness to incorporate YAL in her courses today. Although she does not read YAL herself, she firmly believes in its value for her students.

The other four participants either did not have a course in YAL in their teacher education programs or did not express any influence on their teaching because of one. Lily, who graduated in May of 2023, stated that her YAL course was an elective within the English department at her university and so was not geared toward teaching English. In fact, throughout her time earning a bachelor's and master's degree, she "was only ever required to read one young adult book" in any of her education courses. She was always able to use any book she was aware of or wanted to use someday, regardless of what it was or whether she had actually read it. Her desire to include YAL texts in her courses came from her student teaching experiences where she collaborated with teachers who did so.

When asked about having a YAL methods course in his teacher preparation program, Austin noted that he did take one, but his only comment was that "it looked like us reading a novel every week. . . .You're not going to be able to do that." His response suggests that his course did not prepare him to teach YAL, nor does he read it on his own. Neither Stacey nor Linda had YAL courses in their teacher education programs. Stacey noted that even if she had

studied YAL "umpteen years ago when [she] graduated with undergrad, that literature is no longer relevant." She went on to say that she "could still use a course on young adult literature for the literature that's popular now." None of these three participants directly incorporate YAL in their curricula, which suggests that they could greatly benefit from training in how to do so.

In fact, Stacey and Linda both talked about the need for time and training to be able to select current YAL texts for their classrooms. Stacey expressed a desire to incorporate YAL in her classes but indicated that she does not currently have the knowledge to do so: "I would have to be more educated on contemporary YAL to talk about which works I might use or which authors might lend themselves to classroom instruction." This is also an issue of time because she "would need to be constantly reading and developing an awareness," and she "would love to have all the time available . . . to read and determine the texts that would be good to use in the class."

Linda expressed a similar desire to bring more diverse texts into curriculum but described another barrier to doing so. She feels that the district's current focus on PLCs has taken away the exposure to current YAL that she received in years past: "I used to be able to tell you all sorts of novels when I was in the [Southern State] Reading Association. And it's just something that we're not exposed to" She said that if teachers want to have knowledge of current texts now, they have to do it on their own, which is a challenge "because we're so busy doing other things, like PLCs and standards and meetings and doing lunch duty every three weeks." Stacey's and Linda's experiences suggest that teachers desire and could greatly benefit from having training in selecting YAL texts and from being provided time to read it.

Research Question 3: Teachers' Perceptions of Administrative Support

The purpose of the third research question was to gain an understanding of how teachers feel that their school and district administrations are supporting them and the effects these

perceptions have on their self-efficacy. The first theme that emerged from participants' responses was the feelings that they have experienced as a result of the book challenges that continue in the district. Resulting from those feelings, another theme emerged around teachers' perceptions of autonomy, agency, and support.

Teachers' Feelings: Fear, Shame, and Burnout

At some point in their interviews, half of the participants directly referenced feeling genuine fear about selecting texts or the ramifications of doing so. Participants expressed feeling both fear and stress about having their professional character questioned, feeling like they were being watched, and becoming a topic of discussion on social media, all of which had already happened to the three high school librarians in the district. Each of the three librarians had emails that were obtained via Freedom of Information (FOIA) requests published online, along with links to their personal social media accounts. One librarian also had an article published that claimed she had a room of pornographic books for teachers in her library. In addition to the possibility of being challenged being "always in the back of [her] mind," Stacey expressed fear about "trying to teach something and then having not only the book itself but then [her] character as an educated questioned." As the situation in the district has worsened, her concerns have directly influenced her text selections:

> I feel the most threatened from the Moms for Liberty group which is not an entity within the school, yet it is a group concerned with what is going on in the schools as a means for political gain. Education has been weaponized, and this particular group is known for censorship.

Stacey went on to describe her perceptions of specific incidents that had recently occurred within her district involving "two very accomplished and decorated teachers," which have "intensified the stress and fear" she feels. She believes that as a newer member of the district, she "would

make an easy target" for this group, and she admitted that her "fear of them and their retaliatory methods keeps [her] from actually teaching some texts that may benefit [her] students more."

Linda, whose library had experienced the aforementioned public "fiasco" that was part of the issues plaguing the district, spoke to the paranoia that she now feels: "It scares you to think that you've got somebody watching you . . . we all are kind of second-guessing things now that we do just to make sure because you don't want it on the media." Austin easily expressed the most fear about the texts he selects. He first indicated that he teaches only canonical texts because he is "too scared not to." He later expanded upon that when he said, "I'm genuinely terrified of what somebody could say about . . . what we read," which could result in punishment, public reactions, or job loss.

Because of these feelings, most participants also expressed the idea of being "careful" and feeling "safe" with the texts they have selected. Linda remembers that when she first started teaching in middle school, "the novels were safe." She compares that to today's novels, which she perceives as "being more gender-based" or about "issues," and she fears that she would "get in trouble" for teaching those that are not "safe." Nancy remarked that teachers in the district "are all careful," which is why they "pay attention to the district-approved list." Austin echoed this sentiment when he facetiously stated, "I'm happy because I'm sticking to the district approved reading list, and I know that when I go to bed at night, I'm like, 'You're fine. You're not teaching Colleen Hoover . . . You're safe.'"

As a measure of safety, Lily sought approval for the plays that she would teach in her Advanced Theatre course. When asked if someone told her that she needed approval, she indicated that she did so on her own as a measure of safety:

> I try to stay up to date with what all is happening around the country right now with books, especially with multiple stories that come out about first-year teachers in particular. I just wanted to kind of get ahead of everything and make sure I crossed all my t's and dotted all my i's and had paper proof of [administration's approval] I before I taught any new material in the classroom.

Mary and Nancy also mentioned that providing student choice within literature circles provides a measure of safety because the student is responsible for the content of the book, and a student who has an issue with a book can select another one in place of it.

In some way, half of the participants expressed feelings of shame, guilt, or regret as a result of their text selection process. Austin admits that his methods of selecting texts that even he finds "boring" is "not good practice, but he does so anyway and finds a "tradeoff" in his feelings of safety. When Stacey expressed her fear about having books challenged, she stated that she felt this way "ashamedly but truthfully." Linda expressed guilt over an incident involving teaching *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1970) in her AP Literature course:

> I was told basically that if I wanted to teach it, I needed to fill all this paperwork out and do all these different things. And I didn't. And I hate myself for not standing up for things like that. Toni Morrison is one of those authors that should be read, especially in upper-level courses like that.

This incident had occurred years prior, yet Linda's feelings about her unwillingness to fight it were still strong. Interestingly, the three participants who expressed feelings of shame or guilt teach strictly canonical works in their classrooms despite their beliefs in the value of YAL for adolescents.

Multiple participants expressed feelings of burnout or defeat as a result of book challenges. Austin, whose school has faced more direct issues with the challenges than the other two in the district, painted a grim picture:

> The [teachers] who've been taking [the book challenges] seriously . . . are burned out. They're tired. They're not happy coming to work, and I don't think a lot of people, especially at the district, realize that that's happening for the majority of English teachers here.

Mary echoed Austin's depiction of teachers in the district: "I think there are many people who feel burned out . . . Many of us feel unheard and defeated." Linda raised the question that plagues many teachers who are exhausted from dealing with potential book challenges: "When you've got so many other outside forces telling you what you can and can't do, it's almost like do you want to fight it or you do you just want to, you know, keep the status quo?" Nancy indicated that she is feeling defeated and has already decided her answer to that question: "I'm not going to find a fight that I feel like I couldn't win. I wouldn't want to jeopardize my career." From the feelings participants expressed throughout their interviews, it is evident that the challenges they are facing—or even perceive that they *might* face—are taking a toll on them emotionally and professionally.

Teacher Self-Efficacy: Autonomy, Agency, and Support

Despite the political pressures from outside forces and the feelings of fear, teachers expressed overall satisfaction with the amount of autonomy they have in their text selections. Stacey felt that her school has "a very permissive administration as far as teaching materials go" because teachers "get to choose whatever [they] want to teach as long as [they're] teaching the standards." She also noted that the administration does not need to play a role in her curriculum development because she "goes by the district-level lists," but she conceded that "they probably

would at some point" because "they want to make sure that we're on sound ground." Overall, Stacey said, "I actually have no problems with the amount of autonomy I have."

Karen echoed Stacey's sentiment of having autonomy to choose texts "even in an EOC course." She explained, "If you're guided by the standards, I still feel like we have a good bit of freedom." Mary stated nearly the same idea: "We have a lot of autonomy in what we pick from. The district technically has an approved list, but we really get to choose whatever we want to teach as long as we're teaching the standards." Austin felt that his autonomy was somewhat limited when he explained that, although teachers in the district do have a good bit of autonomy "on paper," the reality is that selecting certain texts from the list might not "go well" for the teacher if there were an issue. All five participants who were not first-year teachers indicated that they felt they have less autonomy now than they did in the past, but none expressed any particular concern about this. None perceived the district-approved list as limiting their autonomy; in fact, most were happy to choose from it because of the protection they perceived it afforded.

Although they felt mostly supported by their school and district administrations, participants overwhelmingly expressed frustration at perceiving that their professional opinions about text selection were being questioned by outside forces. Mary, who earned a master's degree in literacy and has been teaching for eight years, explained how the book challenges have made her feel about her professional agency:

> I feel that my opinion of what is best for the students is not respected . . . I mean, I went through four years of school, and I have a master's degree as well, just to be told that I don't have enough knowledge to choose what texts I teach is demeaning.

Although she is only in her first year of teaching, Lily has already started to feel the effects of perceiving that her abilities are being questioned as well:

> It's frustrating. I have my undergraduate degree, I have my master's degree, and now it's 'Oh, OK, well, we don't really trust you to make that decision even though you spent like five years of your life studying and learning about this. You know this other group of people has to make that decision.' Well, those people aren't in the classroom. *I'm* in the classroom with these kids, and while they still might be closely connected to schools, they're not spending the exact same time with students as I'm spending. And they're not seeing the exact same things I'm seeing. So I feel like I should be given that agency to choose what we're doing in the classroom since I'm working with them.

Stacey, who has a master's degree and has been teaching for eighteen years, said, "Having my abilities as a professional educator questioned by people who have never taught—and the potential that they will be listened to instead of me—is insulting." Participants' feelings of frustration at their perceived lack of agency were caused solely by their perceptions of the issues within the district. No one reported any instances where school or district administrators questioned their abilities.

In fact, all six participants expressed perceptions of support for their text selections from at least some of the administrators at their schools, although many admitted that they could not be certain that the support would be there if they needed it. Stacey believed that if she wanted to teach a particular text, she could approach her principal and make a case for it:

> I feel like as long as I can demonstrate a text's validity with sound reasoning, state-supported standards, and even perhaps other schools that currently use that same text, that

> gives me a stronger case for the legitimacy. . . . if I were able to do what I've just said, they would be willing to support me on that.

She also noted that her principal might read the book himself to form an educated opinion. Although he "has verbally stated words of support" for books, Stacey realized that she "has not tested him on that." Despite his desire to provide support, Stacey indicated that she is uncertain that she would receive it from him; she is even less certain that she would receive it from the district. Mary also expressed feeling supported by the school's administration, especially after her principal did support her when she had parents question books several years ago, but she wonders if "it would turn out the same way today with all the challenges out there."

Austin expressed feelings of overwhelming support from his school administration for the four years he has been teaching. He said that his principal and assistant principals are willing to "sit down with [him] to go over concerns" when they arise. The lack of support he perceives is not from the school or district but from the state, where he believes politicians are supporting challengers instead of teachers. When this happens, he says, "it really puts a lot of stress on school districts and teachers" because they want to feel that they are backed by the officials at the highest levels. Nancy, who teaches at the same school, agreed that the administration of the school is extremely supportive of her decisions: "Administrators approve of my curriculum and reading selections . . . [and] support my efforts to help students succeed. . . . Administrators answer parent questions without questioning or challenging my methods, strategies, and curriculum choices." She does note, however, that she does not believe she would be supported if she attempted to teach a novel not on the district-approved list as "colleagues' experiences have shown that teacher choices may certainly be challenged by parents and literally removed from the classroom at a parent's request."

The participants who indicated real concern about receiving support for a challenged book perceived that they may not receive any from the district. Stacey, who said that she closely follows events happening across the country, stated that she is "currently re-evaluating how [she] would be supported if there were an issue." She admits that she "does not have a high degree of confidence anymore." Similarly, Mary said that although she believes she would be supported by her principal, she "cannot speak confidently either way about the district level." Nancy noted that she would feel more supported if the district would "take a stronger stand to prevent outside groups from influencing the curriculum and book selections [teachers] teach." Austin explained his perception of what could happen if issues were taken to the district office: "I know how things roll. You don't hear things in our district. . . . You just see that someone resigned, and you don't ask questions." Linda felt that she would receive no support at all from the district if she faced a challenge, stating that "it would be hushed, it would be silenced because they don't want to deal with stuff like that."

All participants expressed feeling supported by their school librarian in various ways that involve YAL, including helping teachers select texts for classroom use, recommending books to students for independent reading, and purchasing YAL texts for literature circles. Nancy stated that she relies on her librarian to select her literature circle novels because she is an expert "who knows the latest young adult authors and titles." Stacey commented that her librarian is "wonderful" and that she "could ask her for opinions and guidance" on YAL texts to use in her classroom. Since she feels that teachers are no longer exposed to YAL through conferences, Linda said that teachers "are having to really rely on [their] librarians because they go to conferences and are aware of what's out there." Mary talked extensively about working with her school's librarian, who is "very supportive of young adult literature in the classroom and helping

[teachers] reach [their] students, to select and order titles for literature circles. Even though librarians are not administrators, these findings are noteworthy because this support provided participants with the feelings of safety that all mentioned when selecting texts.

Participants' responses indicated that their perceptions of the amount of support they receive significantly influence their self-efficacy and, in turn, affect their students. Mary said that her administration's trust in her abilities to develop her curriculum makes her "appreciate being seen as capable and competent in [her] area of expertise." Linda succinctly stated, "Administrative support enables teachers to better support students." Nancy elaborated on this idea: "This support gives me confidence as a classroom teacher and encourages me to push students to achieve because I feel the work I am doing is worthwhile and appreciated." Stacey notes that her self-efficacy influences her perceptions of support:

> I do not feel a high degree of self-efficacy. This has nothing to do with my building-level administration but with what I see going on around me. In fact, it may be affecting my perception of the support I would receive if I were in the situation of the other two teachers [who are facing issues over book challenges].

This suggests that the relationship between support and self-efficacy is interdependent where one may influence the other depending on a person's perception of a situation.

Participants who expressed feelings of frustration at not being trusted to make decisions perceived a lack of support from the community and even parents. Since most perceived that their administrations supported them, they talked about how they believed they would feel if they did not. Mary felt certain that she would change her text selection practices if she did not perceive that her administration supported her:

> If I didn't have the support, I would be less likely to use [YAL]. . . . I would definitely be more likely to follow a provided textbook word for word or be less likely to try new texts that may offend people in any way.

Nancy expressed similar thoughts about how not feeling supported would affect her teaching and influence her students:

> A lack of support or questioning of my professional judgement would make me feel less motivated to promote my curriculum with students and, honestly, less motivated to engage with students to ensure success. I would feel defeated in my endeavors to instill in students a love for learning and for literature.

Linda stated that "morale would be rock bottom" at her school if people did not feel supported, and as a result, "everyone would be doing their own thing" instead of working together for their students. Based on teachers' perceptions, it is clear that they desire the support of their administration and believe that it greatly impacts their ability to work with their students.

Chapter Summary: The Phenomenon of Text Selection in HSD

Teachers in HSD perceive that young adult literature is beneficial for adolescents' social and emotional growth. They see the potential for YAL to offer students texts in which they can see themselves and also learn to develop sympathy and empathy for their peers. Teachers also believe that YAL offers adolescents a safe space to learn about difficult topics and a break from their constant connectedness in the world. In their view, YAL is engaging and relevant for adolescents, especially in comparison with canonical texts with which many students struggle. Overall, teachers in HSD view YAL as suitable for study in some courses, but many feel that YAL does not contain the complexity and rigor necessary to be used for instruction in upper-level courses, especially AP English.

A number of factors influence teachers' selection of texts in the district. One of the main considerations is the standards or skills being taught and which texts might be used to teach those in the limited amount of instructional time available. Another major consideration is the expected curriculum of the course, particularly in American and British literature courses that are taught chronologically by most teachers. Some teachers also consider student engagement, even when using canonical texts, by selecting those they perceive will get the most student buy-in. The current climate in which books are being challenged by political groups also plays a role in the texts teachers select for their courses and classrooms. This is evident as few incorporate YAL in their classroom curricula despite their perceptions of its value to their students. Those who do use YAL for instruction mostly do so through literature circles in which students choose the texts they read because this allows student voice and provides a measure of protection for the teachers.

For the most part, teachers in HSD feel supported in their text selection decisions by their school administrators, although the experiences of other teachers in regard to book challenges has made most participants uncertain about whether they would actually receive that support if a text they taught were challenged. The teachers perceive the support of their principals mostly because they have selected texts from the district-approved list of novels. Teachers perceive that having the district-approved list and perceived support of their administration gave them autonomy in their text selections, although they feel that they have less autonomy now than they did in the past. The majority of teachers do not perceive that their administrators make efforts to understand how they feel, especially as a result of the book challenges, and they believe that they would be better at their jobs if leaders addressed their concerns.

The perceptions of support at the district levels are divided. The pervading sense is that the district administration is attempting to support teachers on some level but that leaders could

do more to support teachers rather than listening to the voices of a political group. Teachers feel uncertain that they would receive the support they desire if they were to have a text challenged during this time of political pressure. Teachers perceive that the challenges to the books they teach are insulting, as though their professional opinions about texts are not respected, and they are frustrated by the continuation of the political group's activities. The uncertainty of administrative support teachers perceive suggests that school and district leaders have done little to assuage these feelings.

HSD teachers value and desire the support of their school and district administrations, librarians, and parents. The level of support they perceive impacts their self-efficacy as they feel unable to act with agency when selecting texts and admit to experiencing feelings of stress, guilt, and burnout as a result. Although most teachers believe they could still perform their jobs as teachers without the support of their leaders, they feel that they would not be able to meet the needs of their students as well, especially without being able to select texts their students could most benefit from. Teachers would like more training in current YAL texts and time to read them so that they are better prepared to select those beneficial texts for their students. A majority of teachers would look for positions in other schools or districts if they perceived that they were not supported at all.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Research (Cantrell et al., 2018; Spichtig et al., 2016) suggests that adolescent reading is in decline, and growing numbers of students graduate from high school without having read a single book (Kittle, 2020). This knowledge has caused many secondary English teachers to shift their text selection away from a focus on traditional canonical works to the inclusion of current, relevant YAL that engages adolescents (Glaws, 2021; A. M. Smith et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2022). Many teachers, however, are wary of these changes as questions of text complexity remain and book challenges are on the rise. Political forces from both sides of the aisle "have complicated and challenged the teaching of literature of all educational levels. . . . Recent challenges to both familiar classics and newly published works have cast a troubling shadow on the teaching of literature" (Appleman, 2023, p. 24-25).

Curriculum and educational leaders can help to block this shadow while building the confidence and agency of English teachers who desire to do what is best for their students. By increasing their understanding of the value of YAL and current texts available (K. Mitchell, 2023), leaders can support teachers in the work of guaranteeing inclusion and representation in curriculum. Teacher educators can prepare future teachers to "read, teach, and defend YAL in their curricula, bookshelves, and communities" (Van Deventer, 2024, p. 39). Supporting teachers and treating them as partners in instructional leadership creates strong schools (Printy & Marks, 2006) with teachers who are willing to work together to overcome obstacles (Bandura, 1993).

To understand teachers' beliefs about YAL, their considerations when selecting texts, and their perceptions of the support they receive, teachers' experiences were examined through three research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the use of young adult literature in the secondary English classroom?
2. Based on teachers' perceptions, what factors influence secondary English teachers' selection of texts for their classroom curricula and libraries?
3. Based on teachers' perceptions, to what extent does administrative support of teachers' text selections influence their teacher self-efficacy?

A discussion of the findings and conclusions is presented in this chapter in five sections: (a) summary of key findings for each research question, (b) recommendations for text selection, teacher preparation programs, and educational leadership, (c) limitations, (d) recommendations for future research, and (e) closing thoughts.

Summary of Key Findings

The findings from the study's three research questions were used to develop a description of the phenomenon of text selection across the Hemingford School District (HSD). Responses from the first research question helped to describe how teachers view YAL, along with canonical texts, for use in secondary classrooms. Data from the second research question helped to delineate the factors teachers consider when selecting texts. Findings from the third research question helped to explain how teachers' perceptions of administrative support influenced their self-efficacy.

Research Question 1: Teachers' Perceptions of YAL

Teachers in HSD believed that YAL is beneficial for students' social and emotional learning because it provides students with window and mirror (Sims Bishop, 1990) texts that allow them to see themselves and their experiences while also developing empathy for others who are different from them. They also felt that YAL allows students to read about difficult topics that interest them (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020b), particularly those that may not be

discussed in their classes, and thus was a way to engage students and motivate them to read. Teachers also viewed YAL as a vehicle for adolescents to escape from their situations and disconnect from their busy lives. Some also mentioned that YAL is frequently challenged, particularly texts involving LGBTQ+ characters or Black experiences (Donovan et al., 2024).

Whether or not they use YAL in the classroom, teachers believed that it can be used to teach ELA skills and concepts in the same way canonical texts are (Friese et al., 2008; Suico et al., 2023). Teachers reported using YAL texts to teach literary analysis and writing skills. The two tenth-grade teachers felt that YAL is appropriate to prepare students for their state-administered exam; however, most teachers felt that it lacks the complexity and depth necessary for honors and AP courses. Teachers only incorporated YAL in ninth and tenth grade courses, which supports A. M. Smith et al.'s (2018) finding that YAL is used predominantly in lower grades. This aligns with previous research indicating that teachers and districts often feel that YAL texts are not rigorous enough for upper-level courses (Darragh & Boyd, 2019; Glaws, 2021; A. M. Smith et al., 2018; Watson et al., 2022).

Additionally, although teachers overwhelmingly felt that canonical texts are less engaging and inclusive than YAL, they all incorporated canonical texts in their curricula. Some viewed YAL as a bridge to helping students better understand canonical texts (Toliver & Hadley, 2021). Teachers who had a meaningful YAL course in their preparation program were more likely to incorporate YAL, which supports Liang et al.'s (2023) finding that teachers who had taken a course in children's literature were more likely to select and use multicultural literature in their classrooms. Half of the teachers incorporated YAL alongside canonical texts, which is similar to the findings of Glaws (2021). Teachers who use YAL as part of instruction incorporated whole-class novels or provided students with choices of texts through literature

circles. Many teachers who did not incorporate YAL expressed a desire to incorporate more contemporary and diverse titles in their curricula, which aligns with current research on text selection (Nam, 2023; Watson et al., 2022).

Research Question 2: Text Selection Practices

Teachers in HSD discussed a number of prominent factors that influence the texts they select for their courses. Most began by considering the standards or skills they wanted to teach and then selecting a text that would allow them to do so. Many also considered a theme or unit (e.g., diversity, rhetoric, dystopia) into which they would like a text to fit. Most teachers considered the engagement or perceived buy-in of their students when making selections (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Those who incorporate YAL often did so because they believed their students could relate to the situations in those books and were more inclined to read them (Glaws, 2021). Only two teachers, those who incorporated YAL through literature circles, referenced student choice in the text selection process (Watson et al., 2022).

Teachers also discussed the impact of influences outside of their schools on their text selection practices. They expressed a desire to communicate with parents who have concerns about texts their children are reading for their classes. They overwhelmingly expressed beliefs in parents' rights to make decisions about what their children read and would provide alternate texts if necessary. They felt that parents' requests for books to be removed from other children's access, however, is beyond the rights of individual parents and is a form of censorship. They were most concerned about the political group Moms for Liberty's attempts to remove texts from their school and classroom libraries. Overall, the teachers had little to no personal experience with book challenges or censorship, but the effects of the challenges within the district and the news around the country had a large impact on the texts they were willing to select.

Most teachers also discussed the influence of time on the texts they select. With the district's move to a 4x4 block schedule, where students have classes for only eighteen weeks, teachers felt pressured to select texts they could get through quickly, and many cut full-length texts to save time, which supports Watson et al.'s (2022) finding that teachers felt that "a squeezed curriculum limits their ability to teach full/long texts" (p. 351). Teachers also felt that they did not have the time necessary to become aware of and read current YAL titles that they could select for their curricula (Glaws, 2021; Li et al., 2024; Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Some teachers expressed feeling limited by the texts available in their schools' book rooms (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015; Watson et al., 2022), while others noted that their librarians would purchase necessary resources. Even so, some noted the challenge of finding texts that relate to all students in a classroom of students with diverse interests and backgrounds (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015).

Many teachers selected texts because of expectations of content (i.e., American or British literature) or level (i.e., ninth grade, honors). Some teachers selected canonical works because of a belief that students need exposure to certain texts in high school (Glaws, 2021; Li et al., 2024) while others felt that certain texts were expected to be taught at a certain grade level (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). The prevalence of these factors supports Pozzi et al.'s (2021) finding that "books used or taught in classrooms tend to persist year to year" (p. 3). In fact, titles of the texts selected by teachers in HSD mirror the findings of previous studies that indicate that not much has changed about what is taught in high school English classrooms (Glaws, 2021; A. M. Smith et al., 2018; Stallworth & Gibbons, 2012; Wolk, 2010).

Research Question 3: Support and Self-Efficacy

Teachers articulated feelings of fear and stress as a direct result of the escalating book challenge issues facing the district and nation. They expressed concern about having their character and professionalism questioned because of texts they select, and many described

feeling paranoid about being watched by administrators or challenged by parents (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2019). Some also mentioned being afraid of getting in trouble because of texts they chose, which is a growing concern for teachers across the nation as legislation is enacted that is aimed at ending critical discussions and punishing teachers for doing so (Nam, 2023; B. Smith & Banack, 2024; Waters & Unsicker-Durham, 2023). In fact, the participants' state school board of education recently passed a regulation that greatly limits books that can be used in schools, both canonical and current, and outlines consequences for districts or individuals who fail to comply (Southeastern State Board of Education, 2023). Participants cited specific concerns about the political group Moms for Liberty, a group whose actions have caused schools, librarians, and teachers in the district and around the country to face backlash from their communities by claiming that schools are exposing students to pornographic or indecent materials (Buehler, 2024).

These concerns have led teachers to act with caution and to select texts that they feel are safe. All teachers referenced selecting texts from the district-approved list of texts or from the state-adopted textbook, which provided them with some measure of safety if there is a challenge (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). Some teachers also reported removing titles from classroom libraries or not offering libraries in their classrooms at all, which supports Lowery's (2023) finding that "classroom teachers have taken to clearing their classroom libraries of book titles that parents and political factions may challenge" (p. 44). Teachers also expressed feelings of shame, guilt, and regret for not selecting or fighting for texts that they believed would be beneficial for their students (Donovan et al., 2024).

All teachers felt that they have autonomy in selecting the texts they teach, but they recognized that this autonomy was actually limited by the recent need to select from the district-

approved list. Despite the restriction on their freedom, teachers were overall happy with the texts they could select (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015), although some noted that adding new texts to the district-approved list in the future would likely be difficult (Nam, 2023). Some expressed frustration at not having the agency to select texts that they believe are best for their students. When teachers talked about autonomy and agency, they tended to do so in the collective (Watson et al., 2022); this may partly be because of the teachers' curriculum partners, but it also suggests that teachers in HSD perceive their experiences with text selection as being similar to those of their colleagues.

Overall, teachers felt supported by at least one administrator in their schools, which led some to feel a high sense of teacher self-efficacy as they perceived they were viewed as competent and capable. These teachers also noted that their administrations attempted to understand how they were feeling and to address their concerns. Most, however, did not perceive that their administrations were concerned about their feelings and were therefore likely to be less supportive; these teachers did not express high degrees of self-efficacy. The differing perspectives of the teachers align with Goddard et al.'s (2004) finding that the context of a school, including administrative support of instruction, has been shown to influence teachers' individual perceptions of their efficacy. At some point in the interview, every teacher discussed being fully supported by their school librarians, who would recommend YAL titles, order materials, and work with students to select texts (Watson et al., 2022). This support relieved some of the teachers' concerns about having time to read and locate YAL and also helped to lessen teachers' fears as they found an ally in text selection (Falter & Mackenzie, 2024).

Many teachers admitted, however, that they were uncertain about how much support they would receive if a text they had selected were challenged. As the book challenge issues in the

district have worsened and teachers perceived a lack of support from the community and parents, they also wondered if their leaders would stand behind them. As a result, some teachers have experienced a decline in self-efficacy as they felt that either they are not trusted to make the best decisions for their students or that they would not be supported if those decisions were challenged. This supports Gale et al.'s (2021) finding that feelings of unrelieved stress coupled with doubts of support can lower teachers' self-efficacy.

Most participants expressed doubt about receiving support from the school district if they wanted to teach a text that had been challenged or that was not currently on the approved list. These doubts are not limited to this study alone. Falter and Mackenzie (2024) found that teachers across the nation had similar feelings. A teacher in their study expressed similar beliefs to those in HSD: "If a parent were to have an issue with a text selected, the district would let the teacher take the full hit . . . so they trust us to make the call, but we don't trust them to have our backs" (p. 57). Without the support they need, teachers suggested that their abilities to meet their students' needs would be greatly diminished, and most would look for positions elsewhere.

Recommendations for Leadership

The results of this study indicate that more must be done to prepare and support future and practicing English teachers for the difficult work of providing their students access to the texts they need during times of political challenge and discomfort. This section outlines suggestions for teachers and leaders involved in curriculum development as they stand on the front lines of the political battlefield and grapple with the decision of teaching what they believe is best or what is safe. Recommendations are also provided for English teacher educators who have the opportunity to provide future teachers with the agency to select the difficult texts they believe their students need. Finally, there are recommendations for school and district leaders

who bear the responsibility of meeting the needs of both students and teachers in order to create schools that are safe and inclusive for all stakeholders and to retain English teachers who are willing to join them in the endeavor.

Leadership in Curriculum Development: Text Selection and Defense

Those responsible for text selection, including teachers and instructional leaders, may benefit from being aware of best practices in selecting texts for today's adolescents. Although most teachers still select classic texts from the traditional canon, the fact is that these texts do not "reflect the cultural dynamics of current classrooms" (Pozzi et al., 2021, p. 2). This does not mean that canonical texts are no longer valuable for classroom instruction; rather, texts should be selected that meet the needs of the curriculum and that are representative and inclusive of all students in the context in which they will be read (Appleman, 2023; F. B. Boyd et al., 2015; A. Brown et al., 2014; Falter & Mackenzie, 2024). This may mean letting go of favorite texts that teachers have been studying since they were themselves high school students in order to select texts "that actually help [them] do the work [they] say [they] want to do with and alongside students" (Hadley & Toliver, 2023, p. 29).

Text Selection

To select new texts, teachers and curriculum leaders will need to spend time reading and researching titles that are relevant to the cultures and interests of the students who will read them. One way they may do this is to consult lists of diverse titles that have won awards (F. B. Boyd et al., 2015), such as the Coretta Scott King Book Awards or the Stonewall Book Awards, or by consulting resources that offer curated titles, such as *We Need Diverse Books* (https://diversebooks.org) or lists created by the American Library Association (n.d.-b). Selecting texts that go beyond the traditional "'single story' and the 'all-white world of children's books' is crucial to shaping a broad collection of books that reflect the multiple ways that students can

experience the world to find themselves, and others, in the books they read" (F. B. Boyd et al., 2015, p. 385). Teachers and leaders must be cognizant of reasons texts are excluded from selection; if a text is left out because of fear of discomfort or controversy, the curriculum has fallen prey to preemptive censorship (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2019; Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2019; Searcy et al., 2023).

In contexts where selecting diverse texts is difficult because of required reading lists or texts, issues with challenges, or local or state legislation, teachers and curriculum leaders can still find ways to incorporate diversity. Within a required or restricted curriculum, for example, teachers can incorporate supplementary texts such as articles, video clips, poems, documentaries, or art works that reflect the diversity of their classrooms (K. Mitchell, 2023; Nam, 2023). Curriculum leaders can also design learning experiences that incorporate student choice of texts (Allred & Cena, 2020; Nam, 2023) from shorter pieces such as articles and poems to longer pieces such as novels taught within literature circles. When teaching canonical texts, teachers may encourage students to read with them through traditional literary analysis but also against them (Janks, 2019; Nam, 2023) by including lessons that encourage students to consider the characters, situations, and themes critically.

Defense of Texts

Once texts are selected, teachers and curriculum leaders must also be prepared to defend against challenges. Although YAL is currently receiving attention for book challenges, canonical texts are still frequently challenged as well (Li et al., 2024). The first step in preventing challenges is to communicate with parents about the texts that have been selected and the planned curricular goals they are intended to accomplish (Dobbs et al., 2024; Walter & Boyd, 2018). Teachers may opt to include choices of texts that parents can work with their children to select (Cesari, 2022). Studies have shown that parents tend to be supportive of challenged texts

when they understand teachers' curricular goals and how they will discuss potentially controversial topics (A. S. Boyd & Darragh, 2019) so that they can discuss the issues with their children (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2020a).

To prepare for potential challenges, teachers and leaders should be familiar with existing policies for selecting texts (Hartsfield & Kimmel, 2019) and for challenging them, along with understanding the history of challenges in their area (Dobbs et al., 2024) and the tactics of political groups (Pérez, 2022). They should also be prepared to respond in the case of a challenge with their reasons for the selection of a text and potential alternative texts if necessary (Dobbs et al., 2024; Searcy et al., 2023). Teachers and leaders across schools or districts could work together to develop rationales for teaching texts (Searcy et al., 2023) and talking points for addressing the issues behind many of the challenges, such as misunderstandings of youth maturity and the power of diverse YAL to engage students and develop empathy (Connors & Trites, 2022). Teachers and curriculum leaders should also build a community of support that includes local advocates (David et al., 2023) and national organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), American Library Association (ALA), and Project LIT that champion intellectual freedom and students' rights to read (Dobbs et al., 2024). Through these organizations, leaders can find support including book rationales (NCTE, 2024) and resources to help educators prepare for and fight challenges (ALA, n.d.-b).

Leadership in English Teacher Preparation: Coursework and Community

This study reveals a clear need for preservice teachers (PSTs) to receive training in the value and use of YAL in the future English classrooms no matter the grade or level. Although most English education students today accept that YAL is a rich and complex source of scholarly study in the high school classroom, many begin their degree programs prepared to teach what they read in high school: the classics (Hill, 2023). With many teachers still assigning

predominantly canonical texts and the growth of YAL as its own entity, the need for a stand-alone course in YAL methods has become abundantly clear (Strickland & Bickmore, 2023).

YAL Methods Coursework

The participants' experiences in this study overall reveal that even when their college education courses included a study of YAL, those courses were either not required or were not always impactful. To prepare PSTs for the realities of teaching, YAL methods courses should continue to prepare students to read diverse texts that help them to understand their future students and develop a knowledge of current YAL so that they can better understand and meet the needs of all students (Donovan & Weber, 2021; Glenn, 2012; Hughes et al., 2014; Pytash, 2013; Pytash & Hylton, 2021; Strickland, 2020, 2021, 2023; Wolney & Boyd, 2021). Preservice teachers should be encouraged to explore their own beliefs and biases (Matey, 2021) and to evaluate the "balance" (Van Deventer, 2023, p. 51) of their personal reading and text selection choices and how those are influenced by their identities (Van Deventer, 2024). They should also be taught how to understand the context in which they teach (Walter & Boyd, 2018) and to select the most appropriate texts for their students based on the context (A. S. Boyd & Darragh, 2019).

Even though many PSTs learn about and understand the benefits of teaching YAL, they often indicate that they are afraid to teach potentially controversial texts when they have their own classrooms (Greathouse & Diccio, 2016; Sarigianides, 2012; Sarigianides & Borsheim-Black, 2022; Van Deventer, 2023). To provide PSTs the agency necessary to follow through on their beliefs, the YAL methods course should "[help] them understand the nature of the challenges they will face and how to potentially navigate those challenges" (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015, p. 263). PSTs also need to be taught how to become aware of the school and district policies surrounding text selection and the handling of challenges (Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2019) before they begin the process of selecting texts. Educational leaders must ensure that PSTs

understand these policies and prepare them to select texts that align with both educational policies and their training as future English educators.

Teacher educators should also prepare their students to justify their text selections to administrators, parents, and community members and to respond to challenges should they arise (Greathouse et al., 2017; Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2019). Students could be taught, for example, how to respond to parent complaints or requests for alternative texts or how to write effective letters requesting parent permission for students to read YAL texts (Van Deventer, 2023). They may also be taught how to support their decisions with professional reviews from respected publications (Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2019).

As part of their coursework, students should read YAL that has been challenged or banned to gain an appreciation for the diversity it affords and to consider how they might use the texts in their own classrooms (Barker et al., 2023; A. S. Boyd & Darragh, 2019). Many PSTs will teach canonical texts, whether by choice or by force, so methods courses should prepare them to teach both with and against texts (Janks, 2019) by looking at the stories' traditional ideas and then examining them through critical lenses (Van Deventer, 2023) and counter-stories (Bissonnette & Glazier, 2016; Hughes-Hassell, 2013) that amplify the unheard voices in the texts.

Finding Community

Once PSTs become novice English teachers in a sea of veterans, many of whom may not support the use of YAL, they may feel isolated and give in to expectations of teaching canonical texts (Van Deventer, 2023). To prevent this, English educators should help PSTs to establish communities that can provide support, both local and national. Future teachers may be guided to national advocacy groups such as the American Library Association (ALA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN) of NCTE or

grassroots organizations such as the Freedom to Read Foundation, We Need Diverse Books, or the National Coalition Against Censorship (Barker et al., 2023; Darragh & Boyd, 2019; Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2019). They may also study and follow the work of activists and YAL authors or be encouraged to create communities of their own within their schools to find support in the future (Kimmel & Hartsfield, 2019; Van Deventer, 2023). PSTs may also be taught to develop relationships with parents who should be viewed as partners rather than enemies in their children's education (A. S. Boyd & Darragh, 2019).

Leadership in Educational Settings: Student and Teacher Needs

Educational leaders are responsible for the wellbeing of those in their charge, including both students and teachers. While the benefits of YAL for adolescents have been clearly established, it is important to note that teachers are not solely responsible for ensuring that it is included in their classrooms. Educational leaders must work with teachers to do the difficult work of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the school's curriculum and provide the necessary training and support they require to do so.

Student Needs

Educational leaders are responsible for ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to learn at high levels in their schools. They must work to intentionally provide students of all cultures and backgrounds (e.g., socioeconomic status, race, gender, sexual orientation, disability) with access to an education that honors their voices (Boscardin, 2005; Gabriel, 2017). Understanding the value of diverse YAL and advocating for its inclusion within the English curriculum (K. Mitchell, 2023) can help leaders to advocate for the needs of their students and prepare them to navigate the diverse contexts where they live, work, and learn.

Since the curriculum offered reflects what the adults in the school value (DeWitt, 2020), encouraging YAL sends the message that the school is welcoming to all students, regardless of

background, lifestyle, or ability. Thus, when instructional leaders actively encourage YAL as part of the established curriculum, they play a major role in allowing students to feel that they are a part of their school's culture. In turn, when students feel connected to the school and its staff, they are likely to perform better academically (Dodd, 2017). It is logical to conclude then that implementing YAL in the secondary English curriculum meets two major goals of educational leaders: creating a positive school climate in which students thrive and designing an inclusive curriculum that encourages student growth (Van Deventer, 2024).

Teacher Needs

In addition to meeting the needs of the students in their charge, educational leaders must also focus on the needs of the teachers in order to retain highly effective educators who can foster student growth and learning outcomes. The actions of principals affect teachers' emotions and morale, both positively and negatively (Lambersky, 2016), so it is important for leaders to listen to teachers' perceptions of the censorship issues that are negatively affecting their feelings (Nam, 2023). Principals should seek to understand teachers' feelings individually and collectively by having regular authentic conversations with them.

Taking the time to ask how teachers are feeling demonstrates concern for developing a supportive environment (Stipek, 2012) and can help to build a school culture in which teachers feel that their work is valued (Ford et al., 2019). Lambersky (2016) found that teachers' emotions should "have a central place in understanding school operation" and must be "at the heart of school leadership" (p. 400). In fact, listening to teachers' concerns and validating their feelings is a major step in helping to develop teachers' self-efficacy (Stipek, 2012).

After hearing teachers' concerns about the challenges they perceive, leaders must work to alleviate their fear and stress (Lambersky, 2016) by providing clear, actionable support that helps to increase their self- and collective efficacy and prevent burnout. Cansoy and Parlar (2018)

found that teachers whose leaders provided support in overcoming challenges were more satisfied in their jobs and had a greater sense of efficacy. The current challenges facing teachers are "the most difficult to navigate" (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015, p. 263), meaning that teachers need the support of their leaders even more now as they attempt to make the best decisions for their students amid the "feeling of encroaching doom" (Honore, 2023, p.29) that pervades their schools. When district leaders do not take action to support teachers, the effects are often seen in teachers' feelings, which can have an indirect influence on student achievement (Adams, 2020).

To combat this, districts can work to develop trust by involving teachers in making decisions and supporting agency (Adams, 2020; Chhuon et al., 2008). When teachers feel that they are powerless to make curricular decisions or impact student outcomes, their lack of efficacy can lead to individual burnout or a collective lowering of morale (C. G. Brown, 2012; Lambersky, 2016). Leaders can empower English teachers by providing them autonomy in the selection of texts and backing them up if they are challenged. When administrators' actions indicate that they trust teachers with pedagogical and curricular decisions, teachers have stronger beliefs in their abilities and increased motivation to do the difficult work of teaching (Adams, 2020). Allowing teachers to select texts for their classrooms allows them to enact agency (Friese et al., 2008) as trained professionals who are trusted to do what is best for their students.

Leaders can also support English teachers by providing access to professional learning that helps them to develop the confidence to make informed decisions that lead to desired student outcomes (K. Mitchell, 2023) and reach students (Lambersky, 2016). Practicing teachers have demonstrated an interest in and need for professional development or coursework in selecting and implementing diverse YAL in their classrooms (Li et al., 2024). Nam (2023) found that "teachers, especially white teachers, need development in growing their personal knowledge,

skills, and dispositions in using diverse text to teach critical social issues" (p. 14-15). Educational leaders can support English teachers' desires to grow and innovate in their curriculum (Sterrett & Richardson, 2020) by providing time and funding for quality professional development. Leaders should also make efforts to stay cognizant of current trends in literacy and legislation to demonstrate true understanding of the purpose of using diverse YAL and build connections and trust with English teachers (K. Mitchell, 2023).

Once teachers have selected texts, educational leaders must provide support for their implementation and defend against challenges. K. Mitchell (2023) posits that it is the job of the administrator to "shield teachers from the various barriers that may prevent them . . . from including diverse literature in a way that is relevant to students and honors the voices of the authors and characters of diverse books" (p. 46). Leaders can help to prepare teachers to deal with challenges by encouraging conversations among departments and schools, fostering the development of text rationales, and working together to prepare responses to challenges (Honore, 2023; Sachdeva et al., 2023; Searcy et al., 2023). When teachers have the support of administrators who trust their professional decisions and expertise, they are able to spend their time preparing lessons that meet their students' needs rather than worrying about the potential challenges they may receive (Falter & Mackenzie, 2024).

Ultimately, supporting teachers and attending to their needs is a critical component of retaining them in a school. When English teachers do not perceive that they are receiving administrative support or concern for their needs, they are more likely to leave a school (Ford et al., 2019; Hancock & Scherff, 2010). The reality is that, during this time of great unrest in English education, "educational systems are failing to support teachers in integrating diverse literature in their curricula" (Nam, 2023, p. 14). This lack of support affects teachers' emotions

and can create feelings of stress and burnout (Ford et al., 2019; Lambersky, 2016). As challenges and legislation have continued to worsen, English teachers who do not receive the support they desire have been forced to make the difficult decisions to leave their schools or districts or the field of education in general (B. Smith & Banack, 2024).

Limitations

While these results provide meaningful insights, it is important to acknowledge some limitations. The participants in this study were six teachers who represent the entire school district; a larger sample size could provide more perspectives based on experiences and curricula. The participants are also from one school district in one southeastern state; although their experiences are similar to findings from studies around the country, these results cannot be generalized to other populations of teachers. These results also represent only one moment in time, which was approximately two months. Because of events that have occurred in the school district since the interviews occurred, teachers' responses today may differ from those they provided during these interviews.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since the issue with book challenges is ongoing and has increased in significance for teachers even since the interviews conducted for this study, future research should continue to focus on the perceptions of teachers as they navigate this new terrain in education. There is still little empirical research that explores the experiences of teachers who have faced book challenges and censorship (Sachdeva et al., 2023), yet teachers long for their voices to be heard (Lambersky, 2016). Additionally, research exploring the effects of the numerous instances of legislation passed could shed light on its effects on both teachers and students.

An additional area of increased exploration is the effects of incorporating YAL within curricula on today's adolescents. While there is significant research explaining the benefits of

students reading YAL, there are few empirical studies that provide teachers with direct evidence of the results on students' development. Such research could provide teachers and educational leaders with support for including diverse YAL in the classroom despite the objections of challengers.

Conclusion

Approximately two months after the final interview for this study was conducted, an English teacher at one of the district's high schools resigned, presumably as a result of issues surrounding the actions of the Moms for Liberty. This was a chilling echo of Austin's claim that in this district "you just hear that somebody resigned, and you don't ask questions." Many of the events leading up to the resignation were made available on social media platforms and news websites, along with district employees' names, emails that were obtained via numerous Freedom of Information Act requests, and personal social media accounts. It did not matter that the exact details of the resignation were unknown; the fact that it occurred at all was enough to create a visceral response as this is not an isolated incident in today's climate (Waters & Unsicker-Durham, 2023).

As a teacher, I witnessed the fear of my colleagues who wondered how this could have happened to a decorated veteran in education. As a parent and member of the community, I witnessed the frustration and anger of parents whose children were deeply affected by this teacher and the events that transpired. I believe that if I could interview the same participants again, many of their responses would likely change as fear continues to increase while efficacy decreases with no communication from the district leadership. Nam (2023), who conducted a study of English teachers' text selection in Texas just months before "the assault on books in Texas fully launched" (p. 17), also believed that teachers would have vastly different responses once they were in the middle of the firestorm.

The voices of the challengers who scream from every social media and news platform they can find seem to be heard loud and clear. But the voices who *need* to be heard, the ones who are doing the difficult and life-changing work of helping students to figure out and become better versions of who are they are, remain unheard. They are silenced by fear—fear of losing a job, fear of being threatened, fear of public scrutiny and scorn. Until this situation reverses and teachers feel free to stand up to censorship and allow children access to the books they need, there will likely be fewer and fewer who are up for the challenge. Sadly, the voices that may be heard least of all are those of the students—who have never even been invited to the conversation.

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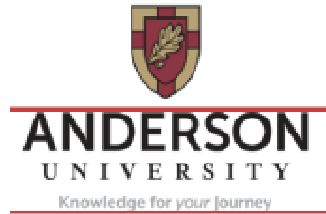
APPENDIX A. APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH (IRB)



Human Subjects Committee (HSC)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Dear Selene McAlister,

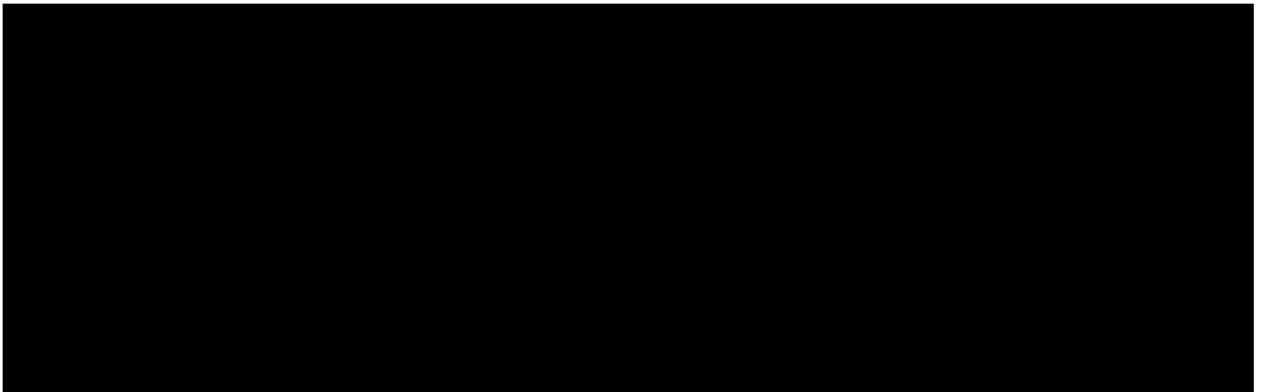
Proposal Title: Up for the Challenge? A Phenomenology of Secondary English Teachers' Text Selection Experiences (ED.D. Dissertation)

Submission date: Wednesday, November 29, 2023. 10:01 PM

The Human Subjects Committee (HSC) has received and reviewed the above-titled research proposal. I am happy to inform you that AU's IRB has voted to **APPROVE** your above-mentioned proposal. Your approval number is **AU202342IRB**. Please, whenever you contact us about this proposal, use your IRB approval number.

Also, be reminded that if at any point during the research, the risk level to any human subjects involved changes, either physical harm or loss of anonymity, or should you find it necessary to make any adjustments to the study as approved, please contact the HSC/IRB Chair in advance of implementing such changes. This may require that you submit an IRB Modification form.

We wish you well in your research.



316 Boulevard | Anderson, SC 29621 | 864.231.2000 | andersonuniversity.edu

APPENDIX B. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear [English teacher],

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine secondary English teachers' perceptions of young adult literature (YAL), the factors that affect how they select texts for their classrooms, and how this process affects their teacher self-efficacy. This study poses no health risks and will help me to learn about the role of leadership within the secondary English curriculum. You were selected as a possible participant because you teach secondary English courses.

This study is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation by Selene McAlister, an English teacher at Palmetto High school and a student enrolled in the Ed.D. program at Anderson University, under the supervision of English Education professor Dr. Hunter Strickland.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a brief survey to collect demographic and contextual information that will be used to develop a sample that is representative of the school district's secondary English teachers. You will then be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview at your convenience in the manner of your choosing (in-person or online). This interview will consist of questions to explore how you select texts for your classroom. You will also be asked to review the findings after the data have been analyzed and to provide feedback if necessary to ensure that your experiences have been reported accurately. Your participation should take approximately one to two hours total, depending on the length of the interview.

There are no expectations of what texts teachers select or how they do so; this information is being collected solely to describe teachers' experiences, not to evaluate them. Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain anonymous. Information collected through your participation will be used to complete a dissertation in the Ed.D. program and may be published, in part, in a professional journal and/or presented at a professional meeting in the future. If so, none of your identifiable information will be included.

If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty, and you may withdraw any data which has been collected about you, as long as that data is identifiable. Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Anderson University or Anderson District One.

If you have any questions, I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later, I or Dr. Strickland will be happy to answer them. You can reach me by telephone at [redacted] or through email at smcalister201@andersonuniversity.edu. Dr. Strickland may be reached through email at hstrickland@andersonuniversity.edu.

You will be provided with a copy of this form to keep. For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Chairs of the Human Subjects Committee/Institutional Review Board by phone or e-mail. The HSC Chairs, Dr. Joni Criswell and Dr. Robert Franklin, can be reached at (864) 231-2000 or through email at hsc@andersonuniversity.edu.

If you are willing to participate in this research study, please download the attached form, sign it, and return it to me at smcalister201@andersonuniversity.edu. Alternately, I can provide you with a paper copy that you can sign and return to me at your convenience.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Selene McAlister
Anderson University Ed.D. Student

APPENDIX C. INITIAL DEMOGRAPHIC AND CONTEXT SURVEY

INFORMED CONSENT
If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "Disagree" button.

- o Agree
- o Disagree

Are you currently a high school English teacher in the Anderson 1 School District?

- o Yes
- o No

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
The following questions ask about your teaching experience and context. When answering each question, please refer to your current teaching position in the 2023-2024 school year, including both fall and spring semesters.

What is your gender?

- o male
- o female
- o other: ____________________
- o prefer not to answer

What is your race/ethnicity?

- o American Indian or Alaska Native
- o Asian
- o Black or African American
- o Hispanic or Latino
- o Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- o White or Caucasian

Not including this year, for how many years have you been teaching?

- o 1-5
- o 6-10
- o 11-15
- o 16-20
- o 21-25
- o 25+

What is your highest education level?

- o Bachelor's degree
- o Master's degree
- o Doctorate degree

What is the approximate population of your school?

- o fewer than 500
- o 500-1,000 students
- o 1,001-1,500 students
- o 1,501-2,000 students
- o 2,001-2,500 students
- o 2,500+ students

How would you describe your school setting?

- o rural
- o suburban
- o urban

What course(s) do you teach? Select all that apply.

- o English 1 CP
- o English 2 CP
- o English 2 H
- o English 3 CP
- o English 3 H
- o English 4 CP
- o English 4 H
- o Advanced Composition
- o AP Literature
- o AP Language
- o Other: ____

In your teacher preparation program, did you take a course on young adult literature?

- o Yes
- o No

CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

Directions: The following questions ask about the book titles you currently are using as part of classroom instruction. When answering each question, please refer to your current teaching position in the 2023-2024 school year, including both fall and spring semesters.

What novels are you teaching as part of your classroom instruction during the 2023-24 school year? List all of the books you will be teaching as part of any course.

How are the novels you teach *typically* selected? If more than one answer applies, please select the choice that best fits your context.

- o I can select any novels that I would like to teach in my class.
- o I select the novels I teach in my class from an approved list.
- o I, along with the other teachers teaching the course, collectively select any novels we would like for each grade level/course.

- I, along with the other teachers teaching the course, collectively select the novels for each grade level/course from an approved list.
- The English department collectively decides which novels are taught at each grade level/course.
- The English department chair decides what novels are taught at each grade level/course.
- The school level administration decides what books are taught.
- The district level administration decides what books are taught.
- I do not teach novels in my classroom.
- Other: ____

How much autonomy do you have on what novels are taught in your classes?

- I have complete autonomy. I am able to select the novels that I want to teach in my classroom.
- I have a lot of autonomy. I am mostly able to select the novels that I want to teach in my classroom.
- I have some autonomy. I am able to select some of the novels that I teach in my classroom, but my selections are limited in some capacity.
- I have little autonomy. I am able to give input on what novels I would like to teach, but ultimately the decision on what books I teach is not solely my own.
- I have no autonomy. The novels that I teach in my classroom are selected by someone else, and I am not able to provide input on what novels I may teach in my classroom.
- I do not teach novels in my classroom.
- Other (please explain): ____

How would you describe your current feelings about the autonomy you have to select the texts you use in your classroom?

- I have more autonomy than I did in the past.
- I have the same autonomy that I have had in the past.
- I have less autonomy than I did in the past.
- Other (please explain): ____

PERCEPTIONS OF YAL

Directions: The following questions ask about young adult literature (YAL). For the purpose of this survey, YAL is defined as books written for young people aged 12-18.

Which grade levels do you think benefit from reading YAL *as part of classroom instruction*? Select all that apply.

- 6th grade
- 7th grade
- 8th grade
- 9th grade
- 10th grade
- 11th grade
- 12th grade

Which grade levels do you think benefit from reading YAL *for enjoyment/independent reading*? Select all that apply.

- o 6th grade
- o 7th grade
- o 8th grade
- o 9th grade
- o 10th grade
- o 11th grade
- o 12th grade

Which students do you think benefit from reading YAL? Select all that apply.

- o Students currently achieving at grade level
- o Students currently achieving below grade level
- o Students who are identified as gifted and talented
- o Students with identified learning disabilities
- o Students who are Multiple Language Learners (MLLs)

Which of the following course levels do you think benefit from reading YAL as part of classroom instruction? Select all that apply.

- o Advanced Placement courses
- o Honors courses
- o College Prep courses
- o Remedial reading courses
- o Intervention reading courses
- o Elective reading courses
- o Other: ____

In what ways do you include YAL in your classroom? Select all that apply.

- o I have YAL available in my classroom library.
- o I allow students to choose YAL books for independent reading.
- o I use YAL books for whole-group instruction.
- o I use YAL books for reading groups, book clubs, or literature circles.
- o I do not use YAL in my classroom.
- o Other: ____

YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE AND CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

The following questions ask about your use of YAL in your classroom instruction. For the purpose of this survey:

- Young adult literature (YAL) is defined as books written for young people aged 12-18.
- Classroom instruction is defined as the books you assign as part of your prepared lessons, not books that students select for independent reading.
- Please refer to your current teaching position in the 2023-24 school year (both semesters).

Do/will you use YAL in your classroom for classroom instruction?

- o Yes
- o No

If YES, why do you include YAL in your classroom instruction? Select all that apply.

- o I do not include YAL in my classroom instruction (skip to next question).
- o Reading YAL is motivating and engaging for students.
- o Students relate to the characters in YAL.
- o Students relate to the content and themes in YAL.
- o Diverse characters and authors are represented within YAL.
- o I include YAL in my curriculum because I enjoy reading it.
- o YAL is mandatory in the curriculum I teach.
- o Other: ____

If NO, what are the reasons that you do not include YAL in your classroom instruction? Select all that apply.

- o I do include YAL in my classroom instruction as answered above (skip to next question).
- o I am unfamiliar with the genres of YAL.
- o I do not like YAL.
- o I do not think that YAL is challenging enough for my students.
- o I do not think the content of YAL is engaging for my students.
- o I think the content of YAL is inappropriate and/or should not be taught in a classroom setting.
- o There is not enough time to include YAL in the curriculum.
- o I would receive pushback from parents, community members, or administration if I taught YAL in my classroom.
- o I would like to include YAL, but the curriculum I am required to use restricts the novels that I am able to teach.
- o I think that canonical texts are better than YAL for classroom instruction.
- o Other: ____

Please provide any additional comments that you have about the books you use in your classroom or your thoughts on using YAL.

APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW PLAN (FLEXIBLE)

1. I am studying the text selection process of English teachers. In your classroom, what do you mean by the word “text”?
2. How would you define “young adult literature”?
3. In your survey response, you indicated that your teacher education program did/did not include a course on teaching YAL.
   If yes: Can you describe the content of the course and how it has influenced your teaching (if at all)?
   If not: Do you feel this course would have been beneficial in preparing you to teach? How so?
4. Can you tell me about how you selected the texts you teach in your courses? Take me through the process as best you can.
   Prompt: Why these novels versus others?
   Prompt: What factors most influenced these decisions?
5. How do you feel about the texts you are using in your courses?
6. How do you perceive your students’ reactions to the texts you are using?
   prompt: engagement
   prompt: connection
7. How do you believe YAL benefits students as part of instruction? [adapt question based on survey responses]
8. How do you believe reading YAL outside of the classroom can benefit students? [adapt question based on survey responses]
10. [Based on survey responses] How do you incorporate YAL in your curriculum? Why do you not incorporate YAL in your curriculum?
11. Have your perceptions of YAL changed during your career? Explain.
12. Do you read YAL? Explain.
13. What do you feel are the biggest influences on how you select texts?
    prompt: challenges/local issues/
    prompt: administration
14. Please describe the autonomy you have in selecting your texts. [adapt question based on survey responses]
15. How does this perceived autonomy make you feel as a teacher? A professional?
    prompt: self-efficacy
16. What is your perception of the support of administration (school and/or district) in your text selections?
    Prompt: How do you know you are being supported?
    Prompt: How do you wish you were being supported?
17. How important is the support of your administration in regards to your beliefs about your ability or desire to do your job?
15. Does your administration take steps to monitor how teachers are feeling?
    prompt: How do they? How could they?
    prompt: How does/could this affect your self-efficacy?
16. What do you believe is the role of parents in text selection?

APPENDIX E. PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FOR
Secondary English Teacher Text Selection Study

You are invited to participate in a research study to examine secondary English teachers' perceptions of young adult literature (YAL), the factors that affect how they select texts for their classrooms, and how this process affects their teacher self-efficacy. This study poses no health risks and will help me to learn about the role of leadership within the secondary English curriculum. You were selected as a possible participant because you teach secondary English courses.

This study is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation by Selene McAlister, an English teacher at Palmetto High school and a student enrolled in the Ed.D. program at Anderson University, under the supervision of English Education professor Dr. Hunter Strickland.

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If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty, and you may withdraw any data which has been collected about you, as long as that data is identifiable. Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Anderson University or Anderson District One.

If you have any questions, I invite you to ask them now. If you have questions later, I or Dr. Strickland will be happy to answer them. You can reach me by telephone at or through email at smcalister201@andersonuniversity.edu. Dr. Strickland may be reached through email at hstrickland@andersonuniversity.edu.

You will be provided with a copy of this form to keep. For more information regarding your rights as a research participant you may contact the Chairs of the Human Subjects Committee/Institutional Review Board by phone or e-mail. The HSC Chairs, Dr. Joni Criswell and Dr. Robert Franklin, can be reached at (864) 231-2000 or through email at hsc@andersonuniversity.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

________________________________ ________________________________

Participant's signature Date Investigator's signature Date

________________________________ ________________________________

Print Name Print Name