

**Multicultural Literature: Bridging the Gap Between  
Secondary Education and College  
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## Introduction

When I graduated high school, my goal was to become an English teacher. In a discussion with a former teacher, I told her my summer plan before college was to compose a list of all the books I felt “I should have read by now.” I felt that if I could accomplish this task, I would be better prepared to teach English. My former teacher told me she had done the same thing when she entered college. I was glad I was not the only person who experienced this feeling prior to entering the field of English secondary education.

In the fall I entered college with a preconceived idea that the courses I was going to take would reflect on and teach me how to teach the books I read in high school. I assumed these were very important texts because my teachers cared enough to assign them, and my classmates and friends read them. For the first course I took in college, the professor assigned *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. This compelling novel was one of my first real exposures to multicultural literature. The class analyzed the novel and discussed major themes and issues being addressed in the text. This book took me by surprise, and I questioned why I wasn't familiar with multicultural literature before.

As I reflected back to my secondary education, I thought about the literature I was taught. I read works such as *The Giver*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *Hamlet*. All of these texts are valuable and were a solid part of the curriculum, but I could not remember reading any texts besides the traditionally canonical works of literature. In college I continued reading books such as *Invisible Man*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *Tracks*. I was still reading books such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby Dick*, but my knowledge of literature

encompassed a larger field.

As my college career developed, I began to think about why I hadn't been exposed to multicultural literature in the past. I wanted to learn more about why I had experienced a gap between the literature I was reading in my secondary education and the literature I was reading in college. To better understand if a gap between secondary and collegiate curriculum exists in education, curriculum needs to be surveyed and analyzed to see what connections/disconnections exist between the two levels of education. As American culture has become heterogeneous, multicultural literature is one method of creating acceptance amongst people. This topic is relevant to any person involved in the field of education: parents, students, teachers, and administrators. As teachers practice lifelong learning and new teachers are being prepared to enter the field of education, they need to have the proper tools to succeed and meet the needs of the students and the standards of education. By using multicultural literature to bridge the gap between secondary and collegiate curriculum, educators are not only preparing students to succeed in college, but life beyond the educational field.

### **Defining Multicultural Literature**

It is important to distinguish between multicultural literature and multicultural education. Although these fields are related, multicultural education encompasses an extensive field of study. It looks at numerous aspects of education including teachers, curriculum, projects, environment, holidays, etc. Multicultural literature is just one avenue in the broader spectrum of multicultural education. To clarify, the movement towards multicultural education is a concept that encompasses the entire school

population and community to work together towards acceptance of all people. In the words of James Banks, “The major theorists and researchers in multicultural education agree that the movement is designed to restructure educational institutions so all students, including middle class white males, will acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world” (3). Multicultural literature is one facet in this movement. Multicultural literature is worked into the curriculum to help advance to overarching goals of multicultural education.

Multicultural literature is defined differently by researchers in the field. Jocelyn Glazier and Jung-A Seo use a simple explanation which states, “Multicultural literature is defined as literature that represents voices typically omitted from the traditional canon” (686). While this definition is direct and to the point, I feel it is still it is vague in providing a complete understanding. The canon can be seen as a vague term of what literature is included. In other words, there is not one composed list of canonical authors and often there is debate over which authors would be considered canonical. Kaavonia Hinton and Gail Dickinson provide a definition that is clearer which states that multicultural literature is, “Multicultural texts about the experiences in the underrepresented groups in the United States” (3). They worked around the ideas of Bishop who defined multicultural literature as “works that reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity that is characteristic of our pluralistic society and of the world” (Hinton and Dickison, 3).

By surveying the current definitions that are provided in this field, for the purpose of this paper, the definition is closely aligned to that of Hinton, Dickinson, and Bishop. It

is important to look at authors and texts that are being produced by groups that are currently underrepresented in American society. Hinton and Dickinson are emphasizing the main point of multicultural literature is not to stray away from what has typically been read for the last few centuries. Instead, the aim of multicultural literature is to focus, as Bishop says, on “works that reflect the racial, ethnic, and social diversity” (3). With the notion of multicultural literature, authors and groups of people who have been living in the shadow of the dominant culture can emerge and be recognized publicly. Daphne Muse describes multicultural literature as “groups that have been marginalized because of race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, age, social class, religion/spirituality, and/or sexual orientation” (qtd. in Landt 691). Multicultural literature encompasses a broad range of people and provides insight into different cultures for all people.

### **Why is Multicultural Literature Important?**

When reading a book, a person can become so involved with a text it is hard to distinguish between fiction and reality. The characters, setting, plot, and experience can all become real to the reader. According to Violet Harris in her article “Continuing Dilemmas, Debates, and Delights in Multicultural Literature,” “When individuals find literature that captures and sustains their attention, they have the opportunity to experience the world through the written word” (69). This encounter with the written word is very powerful and can begin to help people understand the human experience from different perspectives. Literature is a way for people to understand the world around them: the experiences, emotions, and events that other individuals live with each day.

America is a heterogeneous culture, and this is one of the main reasons why

exposure to different experiences through literature is an imperative part of educational curriculum. America is not a homogeneous culture of one dominant race. Look in classrooms across America and one will find students of all races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and cultures. In addition, there will be students who practice different religions and speak various languages. Students in the classroom come from different social classes and family structures. There will be students with disabilities and both male and female students. In order for there to be acceptance, the students must understand that not everyone in the class has the same background. Each person is different, and by exposing students to these differences, they can learn tolerance of other people. Educators can not assume America is homogeneous and must enlighten students to the surrounding culture.

Literature is one way to provide students with exposure to other groups of people who are different from them. Multicultural literature allows students to see a broader view of the world around them. The educational process is one that students enter at a very young age and continually participate in until they graduate high school. When this is completed, most students enroll in a college, university, trade school, or they enter the work force. The education they receive at a younger age must prepare students for these different experiences in life. Connie Zitlow and Lois Stover explain why exposure to this literature is so imperative by stating, "The opportunity and ability to see how others experience life is especially important for young adults who are in the process of becoming independent participants in a world much larger than their own school and community" (qtd. in Landt 691). What students learn in school will continue to be a part of them after they walk out the door on graduation. Additionally, schooling provides

students with knowledge and demonstrates the process of learning that students will implement in their future. Multicultural literature, then, provides for students, as Susan Landt states, “not a static, narrow vision, but a spectrum of possibilities. [The] goal is to facilitate awareness and availability of quality literature that can provide young minds with a richer, clearer, and more accurate window through which to gaze” (691).

Along with students gaining exposure to the world around them, students can understand human experiences that are similar to their own lives. Susan Colby in her article “Heightening Awareness about the Importance of Using Multicultural Literature,” states, “Using multicultural literature in the classroom has become a focus in recent years as classrooms have become more diverse” (24). Colby focuses on the interaction students have with literature they are reading in the classroom. She claims in relation to students:

They are asked to connect to the world, other books, and their personal experiences. Unless books are carefully selected, we may be asking the impossible of some students. It is important that readers not only find characters to identify with, but that they can relate to situations found in the books they are asked to read. (26)

Colby is addressing the idea of making learning personal and meaningful in the classroom for each individual student. It is difficult for students to make connections to the text if there are not any characters in the text with whom they can relate. When students “are not able to find themselves or their lives reflected in the classroom literature, they are less engaged and interested in the reading process” (Colby 26). This element of connection is a large part of literature classes and the reading process. If

students can not make connections, literature will be less meaningful because they will not be able to find a direct and personal connection with the text. When students make these real life connections, the learning process is enhanced because students get a better understand of the meaning the author is trying to convey due to the fact they have experienced the situations in the books in their own lives.

Multicultural literature can provide real life connections and enriched exposure to other cultures that students can use to build understanding and acceptance. Landt states, "Rather than reading about cultures in a fact-filled textbook, students experience a culture through the eyes of other adolescents. They get to see people their age meeting challenges and solving problems" (691). In addition, Litchner and Johnson state, "Incorporating multicultural literature into the curriculum can expand students' awareness and decrease their negative stereotyping of individuals from other cultures" (qtd. in Jetton and Savage-Davis 31). Teachers can use multicultural literature as a facet in eliminating stereotyping and prejudice. Students can read a piece of literature about a culture that is different from their own and then apply what they took away from the text to their life. The learning process will be enhanced, and students will gain an understanding of people who are similar and different from them. In addition, multicultural literature is a great resource to open doors for student sharing and interaction. This happens when students make meaningful connections to their education, and multicultural literature promotes this kind of learning and experience.

Support for multicultural literature is coming from a national level including the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) (Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber 478). Standard one addresses the

issue of exposure to different cultures in school. The standard is as follows:

Standard one states students read a wide range of print and non-print texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and non-fiction, classic and contemporary works. (Greer, Smith, Erwin 19)

Literature needs to be representative of the culture of the United States. In *The Standards for the English Language*, Michael Greer, Rona Smith, and Lee Erwin discusses this standard by emphasizing:

The works that students read should also reflect the diversity of the United States' population in terms of gender, age, social class, religion, and ethnicity. Students' understanding of our society and its history--and their ability to recognize and appreciate difference and diversity--are expanded when they read primary texts from across a wide demographic spectrum.”  
(20)

The NCTE is providing the guidelines for how English curriculum should look across the United States. In order to create an understanding of American culture, students need to be given materials that are representative of the culture. It is through these experiences students can “discover the universality of the human experience that unites people of all backgrounds” (Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber 479).

Despite all the promising information about multicultural literature, the promotion of multicultural literature is still lacking in execution. According to McCarthy:

Against the tide of these currents of change, however, mainstream educational thinkers--particularly in the United States--have tended to draw down a bright line of distinction between the established school curriculum and the teeming world of multiplicity that flourishes in the everyday lives beyond the school proper. These educators still insist on a project of homogeneity, normalization, and the production of the socially functional citizen. This is true even of contemporary, progressive approaches to curriculum reform (such as multiculturalism) that have sought to bring the problems of multiplicity and difference into a framework of institutional intelligibility and manageability. (156)

Many teachers still believe that students all function under one cultural representation. Each student is part of the same human experience. This line, as McCarthy referred to the separation between homogeneity and multiplicity, is dangerous considering the composition of American culture. There are many people in the educational field promoting multiculturalism as a field of study. As Lisa Delpit states:

Black, white, Indian, Hispanic, or Asian, we must all find some way to come to terms with these two issues (power and otherness). When we teach across the boundaries of race, class, or gender--indeed when we teach at all--we must recognize and overcome the power of differential, the stereotypes, and the other barriers which prevent us from seeing each other. Those efforts must drive our teacher education, our curriculum development, our instructional strategy, and every aspect of the educational enterprise. (151)

This promotion of blurring the lines that divide people is very powerful and inspiring to those who have an investment in education. But why then isn't multicultural literature being taught in schools? Why are those boundary lines still bold and distinguishable when there is current and promising research development that show the benefits multicultural literature can have when students are engaged with it?

### **Why Isn't Multicultural Literature a Classroom Focus?**

The first area that is impacting teachers' decisions is the literary canon. The canon is a collection of books and authors that have had an impact on society and been influential within a society for an extended length of time. Books that serve a purpose for society will be continually read and have an influence on people. Barbara Hernstein Smith claims:

An object or artifact that performs certain desired/able functions particularly well at a given time for some community of subjects, being perhaps not only 'fit' but exemplary--that is 'the best of its kind'--under those conditions will have an immediate survival advantage. (148)

Books that are chosen for the classroom must have a purpose. The books chosen help students meet the standards of the state and provide knowledge on society. There must be valuable ideas within the books that students can apply to life outside of the classroom. As Smith stated they will have a survival advantage (148). This idea of canonical books is one that is very influential within an educational system. Books that have been read for a long time have served a purpose for society. When a book becomes ineffective in providing students with an accurate portrayal of culture, it is time to determine if it is still meeting the needs of the society. When a society is changing

and growing, works that have been canonical (long time influential and representative of culture) may not be providing students with an adequate representation of the culture in which they are submerged. James Blaisdell points out in his book *Books that Don't Bore 'Em*, "The narrow range of human experience covered in traditional, canonical literature has typically been limited to what the late Ted Hipple, longtime executive secretary of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English, called DOWM or dead old white men" (22). The association with canonical works being written by dead, white men is one of the reasons why multicultural literature is important. The literature produced by these authors may not be representative of all cultures. The point is not that canonical literature should be erased from curriculum. The point is in the classroom there needs to be a variety of literature that is representative of the culture in which students are living. School needs to prepare students to be successful contributors to society, and they need an accurate picture of that society.

The discussion of canon has been taking place in college classrooms. Cameron McCarthy notes, "Such thinking is revealed most especially in the fratricidal wars taking place on campuses across the country over the question of canon versus multiculturalism" (157). Students look at the canon and look at the current literature that is being published and wonder where the canon is headed next. From my own experience as an English major, I have been involved in classroom discussions that look at the direction of the canon and who determines what books are put into the canon. We looked at how multicultural authors fit into the canon and the influence they can have on a society. This is promising information that future educators are thinking

deeply on the issue of canon and multicultural literature. If teachers are aware of the current movements surrounding multicultural literature, there is a chance, as long as they see value in this discussion, they will be promoters for curriculum change. On the other hand, as McCarthy declares, "Curriculum is organized around a Eurocentric notion of the canon which maintains a monological interpretation of culture and society" (158). There are teachers who continue to use the past as a representation of the future. As David Richter states, "Strong conservative forces--including the very idea of canon--operate to keep the canon constant. Institutional educators may be the strongest" (125). The material teachers have been teaching is what some educators continually want to teach. It is important to ask ourselves why teachers are continually turning to what used to work, instead of taking advantage of material that is representative of society and therefore beneficial to the students.

One of the reasons is the teacher demographics, in terms of race and age. In her book *Other People's Children*, Lisa Delpit addresses the idea that only around thirty percent of our teachers come from a minority background (105). Seventy percent of our teachers come from the dominant, white culture. It is unrealistic to assume that every teacher from the dominant white culture is sensitive to the diverse culture within the classroom. If teachers are focused upon their own culture as being representative of the student body, this can pose a problem with recognizing the significant impact that multicultural literature can have. With this data in mind, it is also relevant to address the idea that while the number of minority teachers is low, the number of minority students is rising (Delpit 105). In addition to the race of the teaching population, the age of teachers plays a factor in why multicultural literature may not be widely promoted in the

classroom. Gwendolyn Baker in her article “Multicultural Imperatives for Curriculum Development in Teacher Education” states, “Culturally integrated instructional materials have only recently been available and this too has posed a handicap. In general, there appears to be a need to provide multicultural in-service education for the trainers of teachers” (169). If teachers received their training when multicultural literature was not a focus then they might not be as sensitive to cultural differences. The movement towards multicultural education and literature is current. The older generation of teachers may not be aware, nor as sensitive, to the topic of multiculturalism. This can take time to develop and can be accomplished through training, in-services, reading current research, etc.

Another reason why teachers may not be incorporating multicultural literature into the classroom is lack of awareness about multicultural literature. According to Susan Colby and Anna Lyon authors of the article “Heightening Awareness about the Importance of Using Multicultural Literature, “The challenge is not only obtaining high quality multicultural texts, but the greater challenge may be creating an awareness among teachers of the important role multicultural literature plays in the lives of children” (24). If teachers are unaware of how influential multicultural literature can be, how can they take advantage of using it as a tool in the classroom? Exposure is one key factor in looking at how aware teachers are within the field. Part of exposure is the literature that is being assigned. In a study done by Arthur Applebee on literature in secondary schools, “Ninety-one percent of a representative sample of public school teachers reported using a literature anthology” (85). Applebee surveyed the anthologies that are being used. He comments, “Historically the high school literary canon has reflected a

mainstream Anglo Saxon tradition, but the past several decades have seen vigorous calls for broadening the canon with alternative literary traditions” (93). Did the anthologies respond? According to the data found, the anthologies did not respond to the call for more multicultural literature. In a chart that tracks seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grade along with a US and UK breakdown, on average 86.5 percent of the authors are white and 92.9 percent focus on North American and United Kingdom traditions (Applebee 94). Applebee comments, “Though representation of alternative literary traditions has increased, the amount of attention given to any one of these traditions remains very small” (114). This survey of anthologies, one part of the literature curriculum but a dominant one by 91 percent, demonstrates how teachers can be unaware of multicultural literature or aware but not committed to including it as a part of the curriculum.

Another reason why multicultural literature is not dominant in the classroom is teacher training. Susan Colby and Anna Lyon surveyed education students and questioned their beliefs on multicultural literature. According to their research, “It is not uncommon for preservice teachers to have unexamined beliefs about cultural diversity and to have little understanding of the impact of their beliefs on classroom interaction, discussion and practices” (Colby, Lyon 24). At the universities and colleges, students may not receive education on the teaching of multicultural literature. In turn, without the knowledge of multicultural literature, teachers can not implement the ideas.

Even if teachers are aware of multicultural literature and have received training on how to make it an inclusive part of the curriculum, many teachers may be reluctant to include it as part of the curriculum. Teachers may not feel comfortable with the topic

themselves. Teachers may feel uncomfortable addressing differences amongst race, culture, gender, class, disabilities, etc. The issue of censorship also arises. Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber explain the concern an eleventh-grade teacher had with censorship when she stated, "I don't use any works other than the classics because they just seem to have less objectionable subject matter as far as parents are concerned" (484). The topics addressed in multicultural literature may be difficult to discuss and present to the students. By avoiding these topics, teachers avoid potential conflict with the community. In addition, teachers may not feel comfortable determining what multicultural literature is worthwhile to spend time on in the classroom (Landt 691). In addition, teachers lack the supply of books, support material, and time to gain the awareness (Athanasios 17). Classrooms may not have the materials needed to provide multicultural literature. This may be in part to classroom anthologies not including multicultural material. In addition, teachers may not have the time to familiarize themselves with the material when they are being held to a strict curriculum and mandated literature. If a teacher is using his or her time to prepare to teach the curriculum that is already in place, the additional time needed to prepare a multicultural piece of literature might be lacking. Teachers are focused on numerous aspects of their teaching and when it comes to putting in extra effort to find the supplemental material, there isn't always enough extra time. Teachers would need the support of administrators and curriculum coordinators to change the current curriculum to include multicultural literature. Until curriculum is adapted, teachers are responsible for choosing and including multicultural literature as a part of their class.

## Current Curriculum

In 1993, Arthur N. Applebee, in conjunction with the National Council of Teachers of English, conducted an extensive study of the secondary education literature curriculum in the United States. Although his book, Literature in the Secondary School: Studies of Curriculum and Instruction in the United States, was written in 1993, numerous authors who write about multicultural literature refer to this source as the basis for content analysis of secondary school curriculum. Applebee's study is the most recent in terms of a large scale content analysis in the United States. In the introduction to his book, Applebee comments on the lack of a "solid base of evidence about the characteristics of literature instruction as it is currently carried out in American schools" (1). Numerous people had questioned the curriculum structure of literature classes.

When writing the book, Applebee worked off a set of questions including:

What goals do teachers propose to guide their teaching of literature?

What selections do they use? How are these selections presented? To what extent are curriculum and instruction individualized for students of differing interests or abilities? (1)

These were the driving questions for the research that was to be conducted in secondary schools. The study was conducted by the National Center on Literature Teaching and Learning. The committee would visit schools which were "selected for the excellence of their English programs" (1). The study included surveys which questioned the "content and approaches in the teaching of literature in public and private schools" and analyzed "popular literature in anthologies" (1). Applebee works through the data and provides a solid foundation for people to build on when discussing literature that is

being studied across the United States.

At the end of the introduction, Applebee provides a short background as to why this is an important topic of study. He introduces three main traditions of literature that are called into question. The first is the “importance of a common cultural heritage to both the growth of the individual and the preservation of national values and traditions” (3). This idea is one that is supported by many as people call into question the foundations and beliefs of our country. Many people believe students need a strong background in traditional literature as part of their educational background. The second tradition that Applebee addresses is the “development of essential language skills” (3). Practical reading skills prepare students for a life outside the classroom walls. Grammar would also be a focus in this tradition. The third tradition that Applebee draws attention to is placing emphasis on “the child rather than the subject” (4). Student interest is the focus in this tradition, and books are chosen to tap into those interests. Experience and involvement are the key areas of focus.

Four different surveys were conducted, each varying in terms of data being looked at and the participants. Study number one looked at literature programs in seventeen schools across the United States (12). The second study surveyed book-length works that high school students “were required to read for their English classes” (12). A total of 543 schools provided reports for this survey. The third study included 650 schools and focused upon current practices in the teaching of literature. The fourth study was “an analysis of content and teaching suggestions in high school literature anthologies” (13).

Applebee starts his analysis by looking at the demographics of different schools

and teachers in terms of gender, teaching years, student class size, etc. He moves on to a discussion of how much time is spent in the literature classroom. Applebee found that “approximately fifty percent of high school English class time is devoted to literature” (55). When looking at literature, the surveyed schools took college preparatory classes into account. The results found that college preparatory classes spend more time on literature than non-college preparatory classes by thirteen percent (see table 1). The time allotted for literature in both college and noncollege preparatory classes is at least ten percent greater than the time spent on any other aspect of English.

**Table 1: Time Allotted to Major Components of English, by Track**

	Non-college Preparatory	College Preparatory
Literature	39%	52%
Language	19%	10%
Writing	29%	27%
Speech	6%	6%
Other	8%	5%

Source: Arthur Applebee, *Literature in the Secondary School: Studies of Curriculum and Instruction in the United States*, (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993) 36.

Applebee moves beyond looking at how much time is devoted to literature and focuses on what literature is actually being read. An overwhelming amount of literature was written by a white, male author (see table 2). In fact, only four percent or less was written by an author not of white descent. Books from the North American tradition are the most frequently read, followed by books from the United Kingdom. Fewer than ten percent of books are from the European tradition, and less than two percent come from other traditions. The data that is being represented shows that white, male authors from North America or the United Kingdom are the most commonly read books in classrooms.

**Table 2: Characteristics of Authors and Selections, Public Schools by Grade and Track**

	Grade Level			Track		
	7-8	9-10	11-12	Non-College	Mixed-Ability	College Prep
<b>Author</b>						
<b>Male</b>	70.3	82.6	89.4	77.9	82.5	85.3
<b>White</b>	95.9	98.2	98.5	96.5	97.7	98.4
<b>National Tradition</b>						
<b>North America</b>	75.4	57.0	59.5	74.0	63.0	56.3
<b>United Kingdom</b>	17.1	34.7	30.8	20.4	29.4	33.2
<b>Europe</b>	7.4	8.1	7.9	5.3	7.1	9.2
<b>Other</b>	.1	.2	1.8	.3	.5	1.3

Source: Arthur Applebee, *Literature in the Secondary School: Studies of Curriculum and Instruction in the United States*, (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993) 62.

The graph also provides information about college preparatory classes versus non-college preparatory classes. In a college preparatory class, approximately eighty-five percent of authors are male and ninety-eight percent are white. In comparison, non-college preparatory classes surveyed seventy-eight percent of authors as male and ninety-six percent as white (see table 2). Although the gap between numbers is not of great significance, there still is a pattern that shows college preparatory classes are promoting a greater number of white, male authors. There is an interesting comparison when looking at the difference between different National Traditions. Non-college preparatory classes had a slightly higher percentage when choosing books from the North America and United Kingdom tradition. On the other hand, college preparatory classes had a slightly higher percentage when choosing books from the European and Other categories under National Tradition. The difference between college preparatory classes and non-college preparatory classes when viewing selections from the North

American and United Kingdom tradition is roughly five percent (see table 2). This number is a small percentage that would be reflected in the literature choice. What this data is showing is that non-college bound students are studying more minority and women authors who are from the North America and United Kingdom tradition.

College-bound students are more likely to read white, male authors and have a smaller exposure to female or minority authors. Why are the college-bound students reading white, male authors when the non-college bound students are reading the female and minority writers?

In the introduction to the chapter on “Selections Chosen for Study,” Applebee comments that in the 1960's there was a push for “including more selections by women and minority authors, to better reflect the diversity of American culture” (58). Applebee continues by stating that in the 1980's, “a strong set of countervailing pressures” came about to “ensure that students read and study the great books of the Western literary tradition” (58). Did the movement of the 60's have an effect upon the literature being taught, or did the movement of the 80's overpower any progression the United States was having in literature exposure? According to the surveyed data, there was a decline in the number of assigned white, male authors between the years 1963 and 1988 (see table 3). In addition, data found that the number of books from the North American tradition rose between 1963 and 1988, but there was a significant decline in books from the United Kingdom tradition. Books from the European and Other traditions rose. The data proves that since the year 1963 there has been an increase in exposure to women and minority authors, even if the number is very minimal at two percent.

**Table 3: Changes Since 1963 in Characteristics of Required Book-Length Works**

	Public (7-12)	
	1963	1988
<b>Author</b>		
<b>Male</b>	84.6	82.8
<b>White</b>	100.0	98.1
<b>National Tradition</b>		
<b>North America</b>	40.3	61.9
<b>United Kingdom</b>	55.0	29.2
<b>Europe</b>	4.7	8.0
<b>Other</b>	0.0	0.9

Source: Arthur Applebee, *Literature in the Secondary School: Studies of Curriculum and Instruction in the United States*, (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993) 63.

Applebee turns his focus to specific authors and book titles that are being read in schools. Some authors have a percentage greater than 100 because “rankings are based on the cumulative percentage of schools requiring titles by each author, so that totals greater than 100 could occur for authors with more than one frequently taught book” (Applebee 66). All of the “most popular authors” are white and almost all male with the exception of Harper Lee, the only woman on the list. All of the “most popular titles” were written by white, male authors and are considered canonical works (see table 4). The data for the popular works speaks largely for itself. Shakespeare is by far the most read author, and three of his plays are on the most popular list. In the follow up discussion of authors and book choice, Applebee addressed the idea of minority and women authors being read in classrooms. He stated, “In the random sample of public schools (Grades 7-12), the most frequently required minority authors were Lorraine Hansberry and Richard Wright” (73). Applebee discusses that although Hansberry and Wright appear on the list and “suggest teachers are making some changes in required book-length works in response to the perceived background and interests of their

students,” change is coming about slowly, and it does not reflect any major movement towards multicultural literature (73).

**Table 4: Most Popular Titles and Authors of Book Length Works**

Titles		Authors	
Romeo and Juliet	84%	Shakespeare	364%
Macbeth	81%	Steinbeck	150%
Huckleberry Finn	70 %	Dickens	91%
Julius Caesar	70%	Twain	90%
To Kill a Mockingbird	69%	Miller	85%
Scarlet Letter	62%	Orwell	70%
Of Mice and Men	56%	Lee	69%
Hamlet	55%	Hawthorne	67%
Great Gatsby	54%	Hemingway	60%
Lord of the Flies	54%	Fitzgerald	54%
		Golding	54%

Source: Arthur Applebee, *Literature in the Secondary School: Studies of Curriculum and Instruction in the United States*, (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993) 65, 66.

Applebee’s discussion moves towards looking at anthologies that are being used in the schools. His main question was, are teachers limited to certain authors and works due to the resources available to them? Statistics show that ninety-one percent of public school teachers use an anthology (Applebee 85). Sixty-three percent of teachers said that anthologies are their main source of literature for the classroom (85). The anthology surveys found that approximately eighty percent of authors are white, and twenty percent are from another race or ethnicity (94). In addition, thirty percent of authors in anthologies were women (94). In terms of what “National Traditions” books are being chosen from, approximately eighty percent are from North American and United Kingdom traditions, and twenty percent are from Western Europe, Russia and Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America (94). In addition, Applebee totaled how many times different authors appear in anthologies. Dickinson, Frost, and Shakespeare were the top authors (105). This data demonstrates a female author at

the top of the list of authors that appear in an anthology. Langston Hughes appears in the middle of the list, representing an author from a non-white descent (104). This data demonstrates that anthologies are beginning to include female authors and authors from non-white nationalities. On the contrary, as Applebee states in his concluding section, teachers are not promoting the reading of these authors even if they are in the anthology (115).

Applebee also conducted research that questioned teachers' freedom in the curriculum and attitude towards books and works from non-white male authors. Approximately thirty percent of teachers felt they had complete freedom of choice in choosing their literature (Applebee 76). Almost forty percent felt they must teach to a certain core curriculum (76). Only five percent of teachers felt they had no leeway at all in choosing their classroom literature (76). When teachers were asked what influenced their book choice, the most commonly chosen answers were: "literary merit, personal familiarity, likely to appeal to student, availability of texts, and departmental syllabus" (79). One last area that was surveyed was teachers' attitudes. Research found that teachers felt most comfortable teaching great works from the western canon and were least comfortable with works outside the western canon (81). Data also showed that teachers preferred teaching works inside the western canon because the lesson was more effective than teaching works outside the canon (81). This data should be viewed very critically. If teachers do not feel comfortable teaching works outside of the literary canon, chances are very high that the results of teaching these authors are low due to insufficient knowledge of these works. This relationship is one that is highly discussed in reasons why teachers do not teach multicultural literature. They do not teach it because

they are uncomfortable with the material.

Overall, Jocelyn Glazier and Jung-A Seo sum up Applebee's case when they state, "In the case of literature curriculum, canonical literatures and stories representative of white, male, middle class perspectives are privileged still" (qtd. Applebee 1993). Not only does Applebee's work look at curriculum in schools, but other authors reflect these same trends in curriculum. Dwight Burton in his book Literature Study in the High Schools, provides a curriculum outline for secondary education. His outline includes different authors such as John Steinbeck, Jack London, Willa Cather, Hemingway, George Orwell, Shakespeare, Guy de Maupassant, and Carson McCullers. This outline provides two female authors, but still does not represent minority authors.

The trend of white male authors being taught in schools is very powerful when surveying the curriculum being taught in secondary schools. It is important to keep in mind the publication dates for these surveys. Applebee conducted his surveys and data collection in 1993. Burton tallied his data in the 1970's. Through an email conversation with Arthur Applebee, I asked if, "[Mr. Applebee] could guide [me to] any resources that would provide an extension upon [his] work in *Literature in the Secondary School: Studies of Curriculum and Instruction in the United States*--more curriculum surveys or data that is more current?" (Applebee 1). His response was, "This question comes up a lot, but I do not know of any more recent surveys" (Applebee 1). Even though Applebee's work is the most recent in curriculum surveys, many changes have come about since 1993, which is evident in different publications. The National Council of Teachers of English Standards were published in 1996. These standards provide guidelines for preparing students for a future in a diverse world through literature. In

addition, numerous authors are presenting research on the benefits of incorporating multicultural literature. Belinda Louie, in her article "Guiding Principals for Teaching Multicultural Literature" written in 2006, states, "Multicultural children's literature has burgeoned in the last decade" (438). The quick growth that multicultural literature has made does not erase the fact that it is a long and slow process before any kind of significant transformation can be made. Susan Landt expresses this idea; in an article written in 2007 by stating, "The slow progress of incorporating a richer, broader range of literature into curriculum required focusing on 'alternate' (non-mainstreamed) authors" (19). The process will develop as more and more research is provided on the benefits of including multicultural literature into curriculum.

It is very promising that a lot of information is being published about multicultural literature. There are a lot of resources and anthologies that discuss good multicultural literature and authors to include in classrooms. Some of these books include: Arlette Willis' *Teaching and Using Multicultural Literature in Grades 9-12: Moving Beyond the Canon*, James Blasingame and Gary Soto's *Books That Don't Bore Em*, Kaavonia Hinton and Gail Dickinson's *Integrating Multicultural Literature*, and Frances Ann Day's *Multicultural Voices in Contemporary Literature: A Resource for Teachers*. These books all have publications that date after 1999. In addition, numerous articles were published more recently from 2006 that focus on creating awareness, teacher knowledge, and how to implement change. Most of the articles focus on how to change and experiments that are being done to see the effects of multicultural literature and education in the classroom. As the field develops further, teachers can implement the ideas in the classroom. Incorporating multicultural literature can start off as simple as

including the books as a part of the classroom library and build to become an influential part of school curriculum. These are the beginning stages of creating a better education for students.

One place multicultural literature is being promoted more is within the college curriculum. Back in the early 1960s, a survey was done on works being taught in an American Literature College class. In the anthology American Literature: A College Survey, written by Clarence Brown and John Flanagan, the authors represented are all white and male with the exception of three, white, female authors. Since then, colleges have changed in terms of the literature assigned to their students. Applebee is a strong voice for providing background to college curriculum in his book Curriculum as Conversation: Transforming Traditions of Teaching and Learning. Written in 1996, Applebee focused on curriculum as two different kinds of models, knowledge-in-action versus knowledge-out-of-context. He promotes knowledge being used in action as “knowledge that arises out of participation in ongoing conversations about things that matter, conversations that are themselves, embedded within larger traditions of discourse that we have come to value” (3). This idea connects to multicultural literature because using knowledge-in-action looks at different aspects of culture and larger traditions, which is one of the grounding ideas of multicultural literature.

Applebee comments that, “Although analyses of the college curriculum have been less detailed, surveys carried out by the Modern Language Association show a similar stability to that of secondary education curriculum; again, secondary education curriculum that focused on white, male authors and a Eurocentric focus” (Applebee 28). Applebee does comment that “most departments have responded to new movements in

the field by adding additional courses--in feminist studies and African-American literature, for example--" but the courses are limiting because they are courses "that students are not required to take" (28). This is a start in the movement towards multicultural literature in the college curriculum. This provides students with an exposure that they are not getting elsewhere in their secondary education.

Another article by Debra Humphreys entitled "Diversity and the College Curriculum: How College and Universities are Preparing Students for a Changing World," discusses the advancements college across America have made towards incorporating multicultural literature into the curriculum. Humphreys claims, "America's colleges and universities are educating a larger and more diverse group of students than ever before" (1). One of the reasons for diverse populations is that students can apply to any college they wish. In secondary education, students are held to typically one school that is located in the same region as their home. Students can travel all over the country for college, which leads to a very diverse population. Humphrey emphasizes that, "Professors are utilizing new texts and teaching techniques designed to prepare students for increasingly complex and diverse communities and workplaces" (1). This is important for students who are entering a diverse working world after their college education.

A survey of sixty-five colleges and universities across the country found that sixty percent "had instituted requirements that students take at least one course addressing diversity" (1). Another survey of 196 colleges and universities found that "thirty-four percent had a multicultural general education requirement, thirty-three percent offered course work in ethnic and women's studies, and fifty-four percent had introduced

multicultural material into their departmental course offerings” (1). These numbers are very encouraging that colleges and universities are adapting multicultural curriculum standards and integrating them as part of the curriculum. This increases the opportunities students have to exposure to multicultural literature. Many schools are not ignoring the traditional and canonical curriculum but incorporating the multicultural and canonical texts together to create an enriched curriculum. Students can see how they work hand in hand, not as two separate categories. This is an effective way to look at multicultural literature so that students are accepting of both categories together, not as two separately functioning aspects of literature.

College campuses and universities demonstrate more change in curriculum over time compared to curriculum in secondary schools. One of the reasons for this may be due to earlier college entrance exams. Back in the late 1800's and early 1900's, colleges had very regimented and specific entrance exams. Schools such as Harvard had a required list of books that students must read prior to entering college. This affected the curriculum that secondary schools taught. As Applebee states, “The practice spread rapidly, and the authors and titles that formed the high school curriculum were soon determined in large part by college entrance requirements” (26). This concept only makes sense if students had to read a set of required texts to enter college, and secondary education should be preparing students for life after high school. Why wouldn't the teachers focus the curriculum on these demands? Despite changes in college curriculum, many secondary schools are still practicing a traditional curriculum that has been in effect for a very long time.

Another reason why colleges and universities promote multicultural literature is

because college professors may choose to specialize in certain areas in their higher education work. Specialized areas may include: feminist movements, African American studies, Native American studies, etc. If an institution allows professors the freedom to choose the literature for a course, these specialized interests could be reflected in the course syllabi. In turn, professors, if their specialization is applicable to multicultural literature, can share their knowledge on the subject with students. Most institutions allow their professors a lot of freedom in choosing texts (Gwinner 1). For example, Aurora University has a set of learning outcomes for the English department (“Learning Outcomes” 1). The professors in the English department can use their “professional judgment” to choose texts that will provide students with the necessary material to achieve the outcomes (Gwinner 1). Some universities have a “common text or short list of options” that their professors may choose from (Gwinner 1). Regardless, even if a class has a reading list, often universities are providing more class choices for students that promote the ideas of multicultural literature.

Colleges can offer specialized classes. Even if enrollment numbers are low, colleges can afford to hold the class. Students are very strong promoters of different classes. If a group of students who takes a feminist rights class promotes the class to its peers, it may very well continue to be a part of the curriculum. Through discussion I have had with different secondary education teachers, it's evident they have attempted to include a multicultural literature classes. Offering these classes at the secondary level is dependent on student enrollment. If students do not sign up for this class, the school can not host this class with out a certain enrollment number. This effects how much students at the secondary level are being exposed to multicultural literature. If

students are not signing up, then the school can not host the class. At the collegiate level, there is more opportunity to hold small classes for students' interest.

### **Education Students- The Bridge**

The bridge between secondary education and college education can begin with the students who are currently being taught the art of teaching. If students are educated that multicultural literature is a necessary and beneficial adaptation to curriculum, then these students can begin pushing for curriculum change. Curriculum can not be adjusted and changed overnight. It takes time for a school to adjust the curriculum. If teachers are promoting multicultural literature and can demonstrate that it is an integral part of curriculum that prepares students for the world beyond the classroom, then change can come about. The problem is that many education students are unaware of how beneficial multicultural literature truly is to the curriculum. Many students leave the secondary school and come to college without a great deal of exposure to multicultural literature. When exposed in college, many students are shocked and need time to see how secondary education students can grow and develop into critical thinkers and active contributors of society by reading multicultural literature.

In a study done by Susan Colby and Anna Lyon, the objective was to gain a better understanding of education students' reactions towards multicultural literature in the classroom (25). The premise of the study was based on an article by Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) in which the authors discussed "the importance of children relating to characters and situations found in books reflective of their own culture" (qtd. in Colby and Lyon 24). Colby and Lyon had student teachers develop a written response in reaction to this article. A coding process was done and "responses were

read and notes were made in an attempt to gain a perspective on the attitude and beliefs of preservice teachers and their understandings about using multicultural literature in the class” (Colby and Lyon 25). As a result of the data, five major categories were discovered: “it opened my eyes, finding yourself, opening their minds, not just African-American, and it's my responsibility” (25). Colby and Lyon discuss each of these categories and include student reactions to the article.

Many students were completely unaware that students of different ethnicities may not have literature to read that they can relate to on a personal level (25). Banks, Cochran-Smith, Lawrence, Sleeter, Wiggans, and Follo address this issue: “Scholars discuss the lack of awareness that many white students, teacher and teacher educators have regarding their own 'whiteness' and the privileges their skin color has granted them” (qtd. in Colby and Lyon 25). Many students are unaware of the power of whiteness, but that is why multicultural literature is such a valuable tool in the classroom. Exposing students to different ways of life only brings acceptance and understanding of ways of life that are different from one's own. Students were expressing these ideas in their responses. An African-American student responded, “As an African-American I don't remember reading or learning about my culture in school. What I learned about my culture was taught to me at home by my parents or elderly relatives” (Colby and Lyon 25). After reading the article, many students gained a better understanding of ideas like this one expressed by the student. One student wrote, “We should not just be reading books with black main characters, and books written by black authors just because black students are feeling left out, but because all students should be subjected to books by authors of every race and culture” (Colby and Lyon 26). The

students gained a better understanding of what should be happening in schools after reading one article. When students are exposed to multicultural literature in their college education courses, they can gain a better understanding of its benefits. In addition, teachers need to demand acceptance in their classroom, and it is their responsibility to promote acceptance in the classroom. To ensure students are prepared to handle these issues, students need to be educated on different methods to use in the classroom, for instance multicultural literature.

When working with education students, the bridge between secondary education and collegiate curriculum can form. The result is encouragement of education students to take action in secondary schools to implement curriculum change. When they are taught the benefits that multicultural literature can have in the classroom, then they can take the next step in the movement towards implementing change. One way teachers can introduce students to multicultural literature is through the syllabus. Margie Kitano, in her article "What a Course Will Look Like After Multicultural Change," writes:

Syllabi generally list required and supplemental texts, readings, and other instructional material and resources. The syllabus can demonstrate multicultural change through materials that include women authors and authors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, authors who present alternative perspectives, and authors who address critical issues related to diversity. (32)

When students are exposed to the multicultural literature in the curriculum, the goal is for the students to become comfortable in including it in their own classrooms. There are different degrees as to how comfortable teachers will feel including this material in

the classroom, but with a solid foundation to build upon the students are making further progress compared to if they had not been exposed at all. In addition to syllabi change, colleges and universities can offer classes on multicultural literature. At Aurora University, there is currently a class on multicultural education. The goal is to expose students to multicultural literature and look at how teachers include it in the classroom. The class also looks at the different issues that can arise when teaching multicultural literature. At Benedictine University there is a class entitled “Young Adult / Multicultural Lit in the Secondary Curriculum: Identity, Diversity, Communication.” Students who are offered classes that focus upon multicultural literature have the exposure they need to further their understanding of the topic.

The concept of including multicultural literature in the curriculum can be very overwhelming for students, teacher, and current teachers, but that is why education courses and teacher training is valuable. According to Susan Landt, “Teachers may not feel that they are sufficiently knowledgeable to select appropriate multicultural literature for their students” (691). Through education, teachers can be shown how to seek out and find appropriate literature and how to encourage curriculum change within their district. When this process happens, they can begin to become confident in their knowledge of multicultural literature. There are many different ways to learn more about multicultural literature and become confident in the material. Many teachers become a part of a book club (Athanasios 18). Book clubs discuss literature and any discussion and focus on multicultural literature helps a teacher become familiar and comfortable with the material (18). In addition, schools can form partnerships (Athanasios 18). For example, a college can pair with a secondary school. Through workshops, both levels

of schools can broaden their knowledge of multicultural literature (19). Secondary school teachers can learn about different books, resources, and tools to implement in their classroom, gain the expertise, and then apply the ideas in the classroom. Colleges can learn what secondary schools are currently practicing and develop their curriculum to expand their students' education.

If education students are a key in creating a bridge between secondary education and collegiate level education, one may question current teachers' involvement in bridging the gap between a traditional canonical curriculum and an inclusive curriculum. Current teachers need to stay up to date with practices and movements in the field of education. Taking courses at a college helps them learn how to implement change. In addition, consulting colleges and librarians as well as browsing available resources all help to keep teachers current with curriculum practice (Lutzker 12). It should be the goal of every educator to be a life long learner, who is constantly trying to better him or herself to provide the best education for students possible.

### **Inclusion**

As multicultural literature becomes a part of the curriculum, one idea that is important to keep in mind when merging a traditional curriculum with multicultural literature is inclusion (Landt 19). Teachers do not want to separate multicultural literature and traditional literature. Rochman calls attention towards this concept by stating:

There's no doubt that some kinds of Eurocentric books have dominated the mainstream for a long time and that some cultures have been largely ignored. But the best way to promote them is together: not patronizingly as

something cute and exotic and apart, but as good books. (qtd. in Landt 19)

Incorporating multicultural literature would not be effective if the classroom teacher separated multicultural literature from other books. This would demote the purpose of including it into the curriculum. Concepts that students should be learning from multicultural literature are acceptance, togetherness, and tolerance. Students should see multicultural literature as a tool that prepares them to become successful members of society. If multicultural literature was separate, students would view the literature as distinct from the literature they typically read. As Chris Crutcher states, "Here's how I think multicultural works should be treated in the classroom: the same as any other works. There shouldn't be a multicultural unit. Every unit should be multicultural" (qtd. Landt 19). The different stereotypical lines that are drawn between groups of people who are different should be erased. European-American will no longer be the dominating race, and the classroom will promote literature of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds as just that: literature.

An example of how multicultural literature can become an inclusive part of the curriculum is by pairing texts. James Blasingame and Gary Soto are promoters of pairing a canonical work with a multicultural/young adult work. Blasingame and Soto claim, "It's a matter of instructional approaches that will help students bridge the difference in complexity, style, and subject matter of the two literatures by capitalizing on the thematic, topical, and archetypal ways that are similar" (33). If students are struggling to understand literature content that requires higher level thinking skills, then pairing texts can increase understanding and interest. The format for pairing would be a canonical work with a multicultural book. Similar themes and concepts would be

addressed, but students can relate to multicultural text easier than canonical the reason being that students make connections to characters who are similar to them.

Multicultural literature provides these characters and situations where students find meaning. The canonical works often address the same themes, but students struggle to relate because the characters and setting are from a different time period, one with which they are unfamiliar. By demonstrating how these ideas are similar, even years apart, teachers can effectively use two books to address major themes. In addition, students will make connections to the text and relate the events to modern society which multicultural and young adult literature often does (34). By incorporating this method into curriculum, students will not only benefit from exposure to new literature, but in addition they will be reading classic works that are important for students to be exposed to also.

An inclusive approach to curriculum provides students with a solid foundation of exposure to literature that prepares them for the world outside of the classroom. Not only does it prepare students for the heterogeneous society they live in, but it provides great literature exposure that will help students meet the goals and standards of education. Through the inclusive pedagogy, students are not only gaining a better understanding of who they are but learning about their peers and classmates' lives. This exposure will promote acceptance, understanding, and tolerance in classrooms. As the population's demographics are changing, students need to be ready to contribute. That is the job of teachers, to prepare students and provide them with the skills necessary to be successful in society. Multicultural literature is one promising facet in meeting these goals.

## Conclusion

As I reflect upon my own education and see how far I have come as a student of English, I am hopeful that I can implement the ideas of multicultural literature into the curriculum I will teach in the future. I want my students to be well-prepared to enter the world outside of education. There is great, enriched literature that provides valuable insights into other cultures students will not have experienced. This knowledge can blur those lines between the established curriculum and the multiplicity of the world (McCarthy 156). If future curriculum can become an inclusive model of traditional literature and multicultural literature, students' education will be enriched, and they will experience what the American culture truly is for each individual who lives in it. Students can see where our country has evolved from and what our country has become in today's modern society.

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