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"Where I'm From": Utilizing Place-Based Pedagogy and Multimodal Literacy in a Graduate Children's Literature Class

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Abstract

In this study, I examined integrating place-based education pedagogy and multimodal literacies into a graduate level children's literature class. The findings suggest including place-based education pedagogy allows middle level graduate students to connect to geographically-based children's literature. The findings also propose that incorporating multimodal texts into classroom assignments expands graduate students' perceptions of text. Implications for implementing the assignment into 4-8 grade classes is discussed.

Introduction

In its May 2014 report, *Why Rural Matters 2013-2014,* the Rural School and Community Trust ranked the state in which I live and work as the state with the highest priority need for more effective rural education policy and practice (Johnson, Showalter, & Klein, 2014). In the report's state-by-state comparison, it is also ranked at the top for socioeconomic challenges and near the bottom for student performance on NAEP measures of reading and math (Johnson et al.). Comprehensive results of this report also suggest that improving the K-12 schools in the state requires urgent attention toward increasing teacher effectiveness with diverse student and family populations in rural settings (Johnson et al.). Research shows that the teaching force is a largely white workforce (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics School and Staffing Survey (2011/2012), there were 37,600 public school teachers with 73.3 percent of them self-identified as white, non-Hispanic and 25.0 percent of them self-identified as black, non-Hispanic in this state (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences [IES], National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011/2012). While the majority of the teaching force self-identifies as white, non-Hispanic, African Americans make up the largest subgroup of students at 49.34% (State Department of Education, 2015). As such, many of the teachers in the state report feeling unprepared for the reality that their cultural, racial, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds will differ from those of their students (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

Such cultural differences necessitate that teacher education programs in rural states address not only pedagogical content knowledge for literacy instruction, but also prepare teacher candidates to teach in culturally responsive ways to better meet the needs of their diverse student populations. Researchers have found that teachers need to understand the world in which their children live (Pransky & Bailey, 2002/2003). One way to do this is to introduce place-based education pedagogy in the classroom.

Place-based advocates posit that rural students are deeply tied to their own communities (Hutchinson, 2004). This "sense of place" is defined as a constructed reality which is "informed by the unique experiences, histories, motives, and goals that each of us brings to the spaces with which we identity" (p. 11). Rural School and Community Trust (2005) noted,

> The community provides the context for learning, student work focuses on community needs and interests, and community members serve as resources and partners in every aspect of teaching and learning. This local focus has the

power to engage students academically, pairing real-world relevance with intellectual rigor, while promoting genuine citizenship and preparing people to respect and live well in any community they choose. (n.p.)

Thus, in place-based education, learning is rooted in the local community and then expanded out to the global society (Smith & Sobel, 2010; Sobel, 2004).

Lester (2012) posited that place-based education is one way to improve literacy in rural schools. As noted by Sobel (2004), place-based education "often employs a process of re-storytelling, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their homeground" (p. iii). Personal experience can be used "as the impetus for good writing" (Brooke, 2003, p. 9) and allows students to write about something they know and then use the writing process to polish the piece. Teachers and students can expand as writers if they use their own place as a basis for their writing (Brooke). Ross (2003) found that secondary students use of writing helped them think about their places—family, community, city, and state. They were then able to compose writings, such as poems, about such places and their relation to them. Wilhelm (2003) found the writing prompts that she used to get her students thinking about their family heritage and their place were a successful tool in integrating place-based pedagogy with literacy instruction. Thus, as the literature shows, integrating writing pedagogy and place-based education allow students to explore and conceptualize their own sense of place—where they are from and how that makes them who they are.

Practitioners also need to explore how they conceptualize their own sense of place—where they are from and how that makes them who they are. This 'conceptualization of place' can be done by having practitioners incorporate geographically relevant children's literature, which is a component of place-based pedagogy, into their teaching. A diverse collection of

authentic literature can help students of all backgrounds perceive themselves as being represented in the text (Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2013). Glazier and Seo (2005) elaborate by encouraging teachers "to invite majority students—along with minority students—to consider not only different cultures but also their own" (p. 698). This consideration includes examining literature that is place-based.

While practitioners can incorporate place-based pedagogy through the use of traditional texts, they can also use multimodal texts in their classroom to accomplish the same thing. Draper, Broomhead, Jensen, Nokes, and Siebert (2010) define text as "any representational resource or object that people intentionally imbue with meaning, in the way they either create or attend to the object, to attend to a particular purpose." (p. 28). These include texts such as images, audio files, videos, maps, charts, and graphs. The New London Group (1996) noted that multiliteracies "focus on modes of representation much broader than language alone" (p. 64). As such, a pedagogy of multiliteracies includes three aspects of design that allow one to create meaning of a multimodal text—available designs—films, photographs, audio, design—existing designs to create a new product, and the redesigned—a newly created product (New London Group). Glogsters and prezis can be considered "the redesigned—resources that are reproduced and transformed through designing" (New London Group, p. 77). In a glogster or prezi, a creator can insert various texts into the template, creating a new product that students read to expand their understanding.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was threefold: 1) to examine how graduate students envisioned their own sense of place; 2) to examine if their sense of place helped them identify with the banned/challenged children's literature text they chose to use as their focal book in their text set assignment in the graduate children's literature class; and 3) to examine what the graduate students thought about

definition of text after completing a multimodal literacy project.

Theoretical Framework

This research was informed by literature on place-based pedagogy and multimodal literacy. Place-based learning is not a new concept; it was advocated by Dewey in the early 1900s. Dewey (1915) noted, "Experiences [outside the school] has its geographical aspect, its artistic and its literacy, its scientific and its historical sides. All studies arise from aspects of the one earth and the one life lived upon it" (p. 91). Place-based advocates posit that rural students are deeply tied to their own communities (Hutchinson, 2004). This "sense of place" is defined as a constructed reality which is "informed by the unique experiences, histories, motives, and goals that each of us brings to the spaces with which we identity" (p. 11).

One way in which we might describe our "sense of place" is through the creation of multimodal literacy product. Walsh (2010) defined multimodal literacy as "meaning-making that occurs through the reading, viewing, understanding, responding to and producing and interacting with multimedia and digital texts" (p. 213). Students are confronted with a variety of Web 2.0 texts on a daily basis. Today's students are able to navigate through such multimodal texts with relative ease (Gee, 2003; Prensky, 2001).

An example of a multimodal literacy practice is the creation of a glogster or a prezi. In a glogster or prezi, the author combines text with images, video, and sound bites and publishes a multimodal text—a glog. As posited by Mills (2010), "Teachers are being urged to include new literacies using digital media to make connections between the learning spaces of home and school" (p. 35). As stated by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2013), "The use of multimodal literacies has expanded the ways we acquire information and understand concepts" (p. 2). Teachers must become comfortable with such technologies

(e.g., Gloster, prezi) prior to implementation in the classroom or multimodal literacies may not be used in classroom instruction (NCTE). Therefore, as noted by Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu (2008):

> Literacy is no longer a static construct from the standpoint of its defining technology for the past 500 years; it has now come to mean a rapid and continuous process of change in the ways in which we read, write, view, listen, compose, and communicate information. (p. 5)

Specifically, this study was guided by the ways in which place can be conceptualized through a variety of texts and presented through a variety of platforms. Of particular importance to this study is the way that graduate students think about their own sense of place, how their sense of place helps them identify to a text based in the South, and how their creation of a multimodal text set helped them think about how to use multimodal literacy tools in their classroom as well as cause them to reassess their understanding of 'text.'

In summary, place-based pedagogy has been advocated by members of the educational community for 100 years. It emphasizes the importance of starting with the local and expanding outward when teaching children. This can be done through the use of multimodal literacy tools in classroom instruction. With these tools, students can envision their 'sense of place' and use a multimodal literacy presentation tool such as a Glogster or a prezi to create a presentation, which connects students' home and classroom environments.

Method

This was an exploratory, qualitative study that aimed to add to the knowledge base on place-based education pedagogy, multimodal literacy, and middle level children's literature. According to Jupp (2006), an exploratory study is a "methodological approach that is primarily

concerned with discovery and with generating or building theory" and is "wedded to the notion of exploration and the researcher as explorer" (p. 110). Exploratory research "seeks to investigate an under-researched aspect of social life" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 10). This research method is also known as discovery research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy). The point of this research method, as with all qualitative research methodologies, is to "unearth and understand meaning" (Hesse-Bieber & Leavy, p. 12) of a particular case, group, or experience. As such, I was interested in exploring the graduate students' sense of place, seeing how their sense of place helped them identify with the banned/challenged children's literature text that they used in their text set assignment, how they envisioned using multimodal literacy tools in their classrooms, and how they conceived text after exploring using multimodal texts in the class.

This study was the initial research into my idea of connecting banned/challenged text, place-based pedagogy, and multimodal literacy together. The findings from the study will help me in future planning of the graduate children's literature course. I was guided by the following research questions:

> 1. In what ways do the graduate students envision their own sense of place?
> 2. In what ways do the graduate students' sense of place help them identify with the banned/challenged children's literature book they chose to use as the focal text in their text set?
> 3. In what ways do the graduate students envision using multimodal tools in their classrooms?
> 4. How do the graduate students conceptualize text after engaging in a multimodal literacy project?

Context

The children's literature course that grounds this research is the only children's literature course offered to the graduate students in the

Elementary Education masters program and Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program at this particular university. The class is offered to both masters and doctoral students. Doctoral students who enroll in the class are expected to submit one of their course assignments—the interpretative essay—out for publication. This course had a critical literacy focus (Leland et al., 2013) and the graduate students completed a variety of assignments in which they had to examine literature through a critical literacy lens.

Course content included different genres of literature including traditional literature, historical fiction and contemporary realistic fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, evaluating children's literature, incorporating literature across the curriculum, and literary theory. Conducting research on pieces of literature was also a focus of the class. The class met for 10 weeks, for three hours and 50 minutes each week, during the summer. The first two weeks of the class focused on literary theories such as Feminism, Formalism, Marxism, Reader Response, and Post Structuralism. Then the graduate students spent five weeks learning about different genres of children's literature, how to evaluate children's literature, and planning a literature curriculum. In the remaining weeks, the graduate students examined various ways middle level students can respond to children's literature as well as how to teach challenged texts in their classroom.

Throughout the course of the semester, the students read quality children's literature, including banned and challenged literature that has been used in middle grades classrooms. One of the banned or challenged texts read in the class formed the basis of their text set assignment, which was one of the data sources for this exploratory study. Many of the banned and challenged texts the graduate students read are commonly taught in this particular state. Other assignments included an authenticity analysis assignment where the graduate students examined a text with a historical or cultural focus and engaged in research about the topic to

determine its authenticity and accuracy. They also looked at a piece of literature through one of the theoretical lens discussed in class and composed an interpretative essay. Further, the graduate students also wrote an application essay in which they described how they would use the knowledge they learned in the course in their own middle grades teaching the following year.

Participants

The data reported in this study were collected from graduate students enrolled in my graduate level children's literature class held over a 10-week summer session at a large, rural, public University in the Southeastern United States. Six of the seven graduate students in my class elected to participate in the study and provided me with consent to analyze class documents and interview each participant (see Data Sources and Analysis for more information). Four of the graduate students were working on a masters degree in Elementary Education and two of the students were pursuing a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Literacy (see Table 1). All participants were assigned a pseudonym.

Table 1
Student Demographics

Students	Graduate Level	Gender (Self-Identified)	Ethnicity (Self-Identified)
Allyson	Doctoral	Female	White
Becky	Masters	Female	White
Catherine	Masters	Female	White
Kate	Masters	Female	White
Mattie	Doctoral	Female	White
Susie	Masters	Female	White

Allyson and Mattie were both from communities near the Delta region of the state. Susie and Catherine were from the northeastern part of the state, not far from the state line. Becky was from the north central part of the state and Kate was from a small town in a neighboring state. Each graduate student attended rural K-12 public schools. While they all attended rural schools,

every single one reported that they felt underprepared to teach in the state's rural schools because of the cultural, linguistic, racial, and ethnic background differences, which reinforced Brown-Jeffy and Cooper's (2011) findings.

While all of the graduate students self-identified as white, non-Hispanic, which reflected the make up of much of the public teaching force in the state (National Center for Educational Statistics School and Staffing Survey, 2011/2012), they primarily had taught, either during internship or in their years of teaching, in school districts with high populations of African-Americans, who made up the largest subgroup of students in the state (State Department of Education, 2015). Allyson, Becky, and Mattie had all taught in rural elementary (K-6) or middle schools prior to starting their graduate work. Allyson and Mattie's school district where 49.84 percent of students were African-American (State Department of Education, 2015). Becky taught in a school district where 89 percent of the student population was African American (State Department of Education, 2015). Allyson and Mattie taught sixth English/Language Arts and Becky taught fifth and sixth grade all subjects.

Catherine, Kate, and Susie did not have any teaching experience other than their internship for their undergraduate degree in Elementary Education. Their internship experiences occurred in school districts with high African-American populations. Catherine and Katie completed their internship in a school district where 65% of the students were African American and Susie interned in a school district where 89% of the student population was African-American (State Department of Education, 2015). All three started the Elementary Education masters program right after they completed their undergraduate degree.

As the professor of the class, I utilized convenience sampling, which meant that the participants were easily accessible since they

were in my class (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). In convenience sampling "a case is chosen simply because one was allowed access to that case" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 279). In order to avoid professor/researcher conflicts, I did not ask the graduate students for consent to participate in the research study until final grades were posted for the course. I did not want any of the graduate students to feel like they had to participate in the voluntary study because I was the professor of the class. I also did not want them to think that their grade might be tied to their participation. Therefore, I did not analyze the data until after the semester was over and grades were submitted to the Registrar's Office. One graduate student in the class elected not to participate in the study.

Data Sources

I collected course documents (see Table 2) over the course of the semester. In the graduate children's literature class, the graduate students were required to create a text set revolving around a middle grades banned/challenged text that was based in the South such as *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis, and *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* by Mildred Taylor. The text set included the main banned/challenged text and six multimedia texts, which included songs, movies, websites, speeches, video clips, cartoons, comic strips, graphic novels, historical documents, or photographs that they could use to accompany the teaching of the banned/challenged text in their fourth to eighth grade classrooms. Specifically, the text set description in the syllabus read:

Select a children's literature or YA book subject to censorship (e.g., challenged or banned), read it, determine how you could use it in the classroom. The book must be a book that is set in the South or where the family travels to the South in the text (e.g., *To Kill A Mockingbird, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*), then, create a text set—a set of multimedia materials that support the teaching of the book. A minimum of six multimedia materials should be found; options include, but are not limited to: songs, movies, websites, speeches, video clips, cartoons, comic strips, graphic novels, historical documents, or photographs. Present a summary of the book and multimedia findings to the class via a multimodal literacy (e.g., glogster, prezi). With this assignment, you will also create a "Where I'm From" poem to accompany your text set.

The graduate students created a multimodal presentation (e.g., Glogster or Prezi) of their text set and presented it in class. They also composed a "Where I'm From" poem, which the graduate students created in tandem to the text set and provided insight into their own backgrounds. I collected the place-based texts (e.g., the text set, the "Where I'm From" poem, and reflection on the experience) as well as conducted interviews with the graduate students. The interviews consisted of questions about their choice of banned/challenged text, why the book appealed to them, how they identified specific multimedia texts for their text set, and how they envisioned using the text set assignment in their future teaching practice.

Table 2

Research Questions and Descriptions of Data Sources from the Participants

Questions	Data Sources
In what ways do the graduate students' envision their own sense of place?	Interview "Where I'm From" Poem
In what ways do the graduate students' sense of place help them identify with the banned/challenged children's literature book they chose to use as the focal text in their text set?	Interview
In what ways do the graduate students envision using multimodal tools in their classrooms?	Interview Multimodal Literacy Project
How do the graduate students conceptualize text after engaging in a multimodal literacy project?	Interview

At the end of the semester, I discussed the research study with my graduate students and asked for consent to examine their classroom documents for research purposes. I also asked to interview the graduate students about the text set assignment, the "Where I'm From" poem, and the class. I included questions such as: "Why did you choose your specific book for your text set assignment? What connections can you find in your own poem and the book you chose to use for the text set project? Why is it important to remember where we came from? What is your definition of text? Has it changed from the start of the semester? If so, how has it evolved over time?" Interviewing, as noted by Merriam (2009), "is the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals" (p. 88). Interviews are necessary to find out information we cannot directly observe in the context of the study (Patton, 2002). I interviewed the graduate students and transcribed the interview data. Once the interviews were transcribed, I sent the interviews to the graduate students for member checking.

Data Analysis

I applied a systematic procedure for data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The analysis began with repeated readings and open coding which is considered "a a priori non-content specific scheme" (Schwandt, 2015, p. 31) where the data was broken down into individual units for each participant and then the codes were collapsed into categories. I analyzed each case individually and through cross-case analysis and descriptive categories were developed. For each participant, I created an excel spreadsheet where I included my interview quotes, specifics from the "Where I'm From" poem, and details from the text set assignment, my codes, and whether the data addressed research question 1, 2, 3, or 4. Further, in regards to the multimodal texts, I complied a list of multimodal texts the graduate students used and included those in the spreadsheet for each participant. I kept a running total of the different types of texts on the spreadsheet and looked across the participants to see which texts were included most frequently.

Once I coded my data using open coding, I transferred my codes to a word processing document and grouped the codes according to a similar topic (see Table 3). A series of cross-case analysis procedures, which allows an individual to search for patterns, compared the students across the individual experiences (Patton, 2002). These analyses facilitated my organization of the identified patterns into themes. Cross-examination of multiple sources of evidence from student assignments and interviews fortifies the trustworthiness of the findings.

Table 3
Example of Cross-Case Coding

Participant	Data Source	Code
Susie	Using a variety of multimodal texts such as images, audio recordings, and videos will allow me to differentiate my instruction in my classroom. I am able to provide my students with texts at their level.	(Re)imagined definition of text
Catherine	[Through the multimodal literacy assignment], I corrected my preconceived notions that text sets were just kind of like an additional set of books that students could refer to if they wanted more information, but now I see that a text set should serve the purpose of adding to instruction. Students can respond to songs and videos and pictures just like they can to books—they are just a different representation of texts	(Re)imagined definition of text
Allyson	This assignment showed me that I can incorporate a variety of texts into my classroom instruction. Although I certainly got a little carried away, I learned the value and importance of a variety of sources to enhance both engagement and instruction."	(Re)imagined definition of text

Limitations

As a qualitative researcher, I must address the limitations of my study. I am the main instrument in the study and therefore, the threat of researcher bias exists (Patton, 2002). In order to eliminate the potential risk of bias, as well as to increase my internal credibility, I utilized member checking and established an audit trail (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A member check is a common strategy for ensuring credibility; in a member check, the participants examine the interview transcripts as a way to rule out misinterpretation (Creswell; Merriam). After I transcribed each interview, I asked my participants to read over the transcripts to ensure that my transcriptions were accurate. I also told the participants that as they read their transcripts, they could make any alterations (e.g., add additional thoughts, modify thoughts, or delete thoughts) as they deemed necessary.

Qualitative researchers examine phenomenon to find meaning or make sense of a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The findings of my study are also limited in their generalizability, though partial generalizations to a similar population may be possible (Myers, 2000). As Erickson (1986) noted, "Since the general lies in the particular, what we learn in a particular case can be transferred to similar situations" (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 51). For example, similar findings may be discovered in a similar graduate student population. The graduate students represent small samples of the teaching population. Therefore, the findings found in my study cannot be generalized to the greater teaching population.

Findings

In this section, I present the three themes that emerged from data analysis.

Theme One: Family and Community Encompassed their Sense of Place

In their poems and during each interview, the graduate students reiterated that their family and community helped mold them into the people they are today. They noted when they thought about their place in the world, their

family and community immediately came to mind. Allyson believed that it is imperative to possess a strong sense of self in order to succeed in life and that your family and community help develop one's sense of self. Allyson wrote:

> *I'm from an unincorporated community and the blinking light*
> *where friends become family*
> *and Karen's burnt biscuits are considered a delicacy.*

She further explained, "I live in a small community where friends become family. The combination of being born into a good ole country family and raised in the only store in a small community created deep ties to my home." Allyson still lived in the same community, with the one blinking light, in which she grew up. She strongly identified with the people in that community and there was a deep sense of pride evident in her voice when she talked about her upbringing.

Like Allyson, Susie felt like her hometown helped sculpt her into who she was as a person. Even though she had not lived in her hometown for a number of years and after graduate school she was moving out of state, Susie still felt like she was connected to her hometown because it played such an important part of helping her become the woman she is today. Susie posited, "The places I described in the poem are part of me because I am from there." In her poem, Susie emphasized how her own hometown was one the driving forces of her identity. She described food, events, and scenery from such places; all which molded her into the person she is today:

> *I am from white, massive, black-shuddered, columned, antebellum home (Old, beautiful, it looked like it should be in a Southern Living magazine).*
> *I am from the pink, red, and green Caladium Bulbs,*
> *the tall Magnolia trees who's twisted and intertwined branches I remember climbing to escape from imaginary pirates.*

> *I am from the gluvine wine served at Christmas.*
> *I'm from fried deer and beer-braised bratwurst.*

Catherine echoed this sentiment. Like Susie, she had not lived at home for a number of years due to schooling, however she still felt deep ties to her home and her experiences there. As with Allyson, Catherine was full of pride when she spoke about her hometown and what made it different from other places in the state. She explained,

> I am close to my family and value the church I grew up in. I want them [readers] to picture themselves in the poem as a little girl who looked up to her big sister. Also, I want people to wonder so much about what a Slugburger is to the point to where they Google it. This will lead them to discovering something unique about the town I'm from. I love my town, so I wanted to include something about it that made it stand apart from others.

In her poem, she wrote:

> *I am from Slugbergers and Christmas pajamas,*
> *Rolls and deviled eggs, biscuits and hash.*
> *From my sister swinging on the swing set my father built,*
> *The [family name's] hardware store that held the doorframe with our measurements.*

Like Catherine, Kate also emphasized that her family and church community influenced who she has become. She wrote:

> *I am from the house in the neighborhood with two Italian cypress trees*
> *each unique in its own way.*
> *I am from the camellia,*
> *the southern longleaf pine*

> *I am from the Baptist church a mile or
> so from my house.
> Getting fully immersed in water to
> signify the giving of my life to Jesus
> and singing joyfully in the youth choir.*

She explained, "My home is a place where my family members live and the experiences I have gone through in my home that makes me who I am." Like Susie and Catherine, Kate had not lived in her hometown in a number of years. Since it was in another state and she was only able to go home and to her home church a few times a semester, she was active in the Baptist organization on campus. When she went home, however, she went back to her home church. Her beliefs were one of her main identifying characteristics and she gladly shared her beliefs with others.

Every one of the graduate students held strong ties to their homes, whether they still lived in their hometown or had not lived there in a number of years. Their family members, friends, and experiences they had growing up all helped shape them into the women they were and each graduate student was proud that her hometown influenced her sense of place.

Theme Two: Students Identified with the Characters in the Banned or Challenged Text

All of the graduate students noted they chose their particular banned or challenged text for their text set assignment because they related to characters found in the text. Susie said she connected with both Jem and Scout in *To Kill A Mockingbird* because, like Jem and Scout, she does not have a mother. However, she further explained that while she identified with Scout, she truly related to Jem because like Jem, she "gets mad that her mother got taken away from her at a young age and she vividly remembers her mother, whereas Scout does not remember much about their mother."

While Susie related to Jem, Allyson connected with Scout. She posited:

The character of Scout is being raised by her father Atticus in a small southern town where everyone seems to know one another. This is very similar to my childhood. The only girl, being raised in the country with two older brothers, demanded a certain tomboy persona much like that of Scout. My brother was also my best friend and playmate on many childhood adventures. Jem and Scout had a similar relationship in the text.

In her poem, Allyson wrote about her brothers:

> *I am from monster noises down a dark
> hall during serious games of hide and
> seek
> From a home full of loud conversations
> and endless movie trivia with the scent
> of fresh laundry and home-cooked
> meals, courtesy of Mom
> From "If you play with dirt, you get
> dirty."*

Becky also made a connection to one of the main characters, Joetta "Joey" Watson, the most religious child in the Watson family in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*. Becky expressed how her faith shaped her identity. In her poem, she wrote:

> *I am from parsonage made into home
> (Small, cozy, it felt like fuzzy pajama
> pants)
> I am from rose bushes, hilly pastures
> filled with cows and horses.*

She further explained,

My dad was and still is a pastor. Therefore, I moved around a few times and always lived in church parsonages. I feel that a relationship with Jesus Christ has been what truly has shaped me and that is what I am most proud of when thinking about where I'm from.

Mattie posited that she also chose the text *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* because the description of the "Weird Watsons" in the text reminded her of her own family. She said:

> Curtis presents a tight family unit who has strange quirks and a brown bomber car with a brand new record player. To me, it seemed similar to my crazy, backwoods family with their dump trucks, ditch diving, and wild antics. The "Weird Watsons" are traveling back to their roots in Alabama. My poem helped me travel back to my roots of bank robbers, European runaway name-changing minister, ditch diving for cookie jars to remember Nanny. In both families, the Watsons and mine, people are playful yet cling together when times are tough.

Like Mattie, Catherine made connections to the family depicted in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* to her own family. She noted:

> I am very close to my family, just like Cassie was. Also, my family consists of hard workers like Pa. My mother stayed home while we were younger and went back to work when we got older. When I was in elementary school, though, my mother did quite a bit of substitute teaching, which relates back to Cassie's mom being a teacher.

Kate explained that one of the connections she made to her book, *Because of Winn-Dixie*, was the focus on religion. Although her father was not a preacher, like Opal's was, she religion is an important part of her family and her life. She also connected to Opal's desire of belonging. She posited:

> Just like the main character in my text set, Opal, she wanted to find the belonging in the town she just moved to. Eventually, she found the belonging she had been looking for. Just like Opal, I

feel that I can belong in the town where I am from.

Allyson, Susie, Becky Mattie, Kate, and Catherine explained that they were initially drawn to their focal text because of the connections they had with the main characters (e.g., Scout, Jem, Joey, Opal, and Cassie). Each graduate student connected with a particular character's upbringing, family morals and values, or their rural or small town context. They noted that they had read their selected text before in school (either as a student or teaching the text to students) and had immediately identified with a character or characters in the text; because they related so well to a character or characters in the text, they said their particular text was one of their favorites.

All of the graduate students found themselves making text-to-self connections to their banned or challenged text. The graduate students conversed extensively about the importance of family and how the main characters in their banned or challenged texts—either one character or more than one character—resonated with them. Allyson and Susie both noted how they could picture themselves as Scout and Jem in *To Kill A Mockingbird* as they read the novel. Kate also could see her self as Opal in *Because of Winn-Dixie*. Likewise, Mattie and Catherine identified with the entire families in their texts. As they read, they thought about their own upbringings and how the families in the texts related to their own life experiences and family members. While Becky did not imagine herself in the role of Joey Watson while she read *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963*, she did make connections to the religious aspects of the novel. The connections to the characters became the driving force behind their multimodal text set project.

Theme Three: Multimodal Literacy Allowed for (Re)imagined Texts in Classroom Instruction

The graduate students noted that the multimodal literacy requirement of the class

altered their perception of text in classroom instruction. At the start of the semester, the graduate students had a more limited view of text. Specifically, they held a more traditional view of text—text consisted of children's literature books, textbooks, and worksheets. At the end of the semester, the graduate students all discussed how they could use multimodal texts in their own classroom instruction as a way to meet the needs of their students, for differentiation purposes and for motivation and engagement purposes. Susie noted, "Using a variety of multimodal texts such as images,

audio recordings, and videos will allow me to differentiate my instruction in my classroom. I am able to provide my students with texts at their level." Kate echoed Susie's thoughts. She said:

> I look forward to incorporating a variety of texts into my classroom instruction. I know that some of my students learn through print-based texts and others learn better through visuals. The multimodal project allows me to meet all my students' needs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Because of Winn-Dixie Glogster

Allyson posited:

> This assignment showed me that I can incorporate a variety of texts into my classroom instruction. Although I certainly got a little carried away, I learned the value and importance of a variety of sources to enhance both engagement and instruction.

Allyson's Glogster included many different sources including a virtual field trip website, speeches, videos, and images that she planned to use in her sixth grade Language Arts classroom in the fall (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. To Kill A Mockingbird Glogster

Like Allyson, Catherine's view of "text" was also altered in class (see Figure 3). She explained:

> [Through the multimodal literacy assignment], I corrected my preconceived notions that text sets were just kind of like an additional set of books that students could refer to if they wanted more information, but now I see that a text set should serve the purpose of adding to instruction. Students can respond to songs and videos and pictures just like they can to books—they are just a different representation of texts.

Figure 3. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry Prezi

Becky reflected on her own previous teaching of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* and concluded that the multimodal component (see Figure 4), with the (re)imagined texts requirement, would have provided her students with a solid understanding of the "historical aspect that was rooted in the story." She illuminated:

> So many times, my past sixth graders did not seem to truly understand that the events described in the book were actually true events. If I had included the other texts that I found by doing this assignment, then my sixth graders would have gained a greater understanding of the history described in the novel. In the future, I plan to actually use the text set I created from this assignment. By providing my future students with historical texts (e.g., videos, songs, images) I would also be addressing social studies standards and creating meaningful discussion about past social experiences in the South.
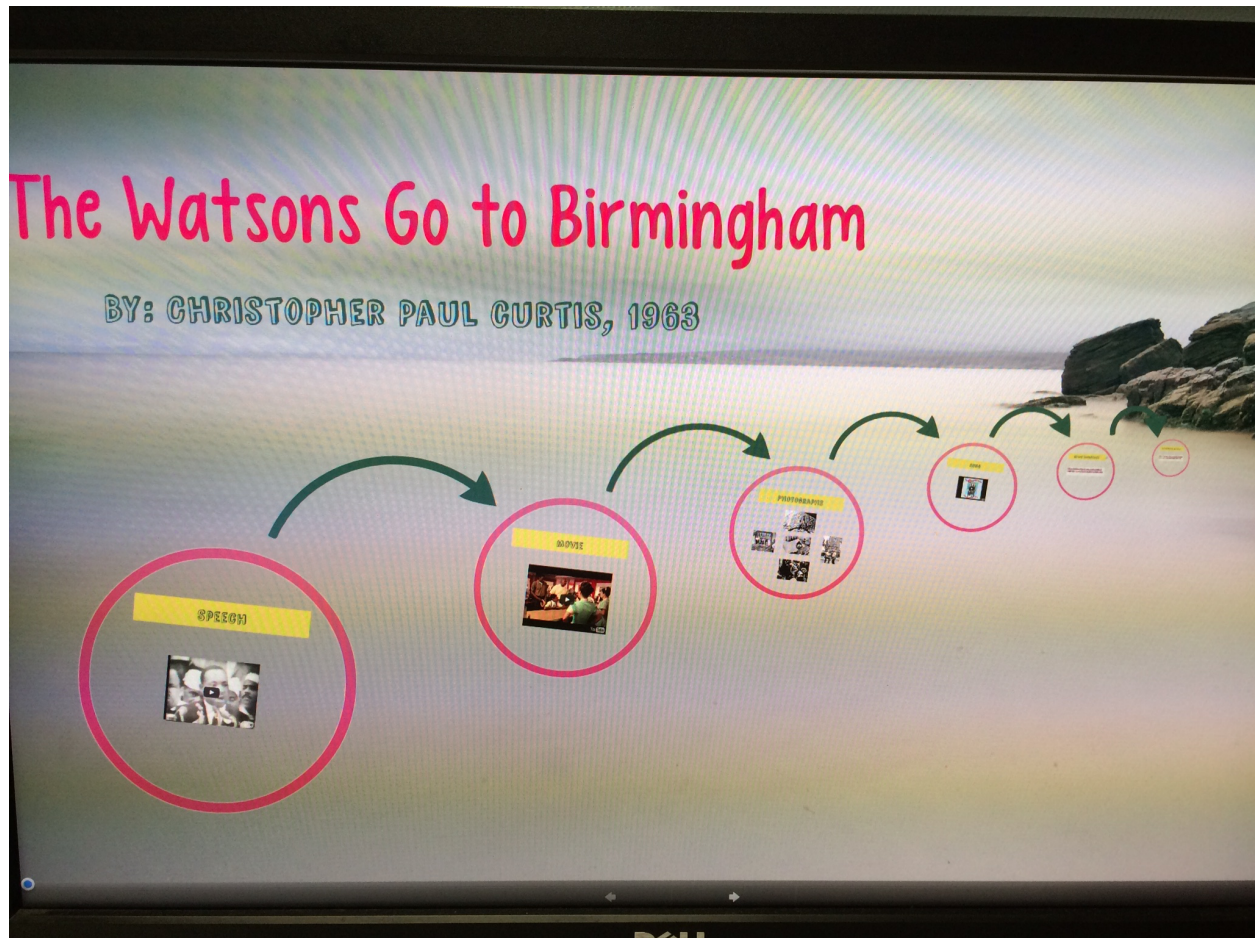

Figure 4. The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963 Prezi

Mattie noted that her multimodal project could be a wonderful resource for teachers in her school. Since she was a library/media specialist, she hoped that her teachers would see the multimodal text set as resource when they taught *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963 Glogster

In analyzing all of the different multimodal texts the graduate students used in their projects, it was apparent that many believed that video was an important text to use with their students. While, Mattie and Becky each incorporated video from the Birmingham church bombing in their multimodal presentations, Allyson and Kate linked a significant video clip from the movie version of their book to their multimodal presentation. Allyson noted:

> I wanted to show one of the court scenes from *To Kill A Mockingbird* because I believe it's such an important part of the movie and the scene represents a key part of American history. I want to show my students how courtrooms were segregated and how African Americans were treated unfairly even in a court of law that was supposed to be 'blind'.

Another multimodal text that was plentiful throughout the multimodal presentations was primary sources—images, speeches, cartoons, quotes, or newspaper clippings. The graduate students discussed how they could incorporate their text sets into their social studies instruction using primary sources as a springboard for activating background knowledge (e.g., cartoon strip or image) or having the students analyze the sources like a historian. Becky stated:

> When I teach *The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* again, I plan on showing my students the images, videos, and the other primary sources that I found for my text set assignment. I think the different mediums will help my students understand the events that take place in the novel.

Five of the graduate students also addressed how the text set project encouraged them to think about their own place and reflect on how such texts could help them teach topics that might be hard to address in the classroom. For example, Mattie said that the teachers that she worked with sometime struggle with teaching state history because of challenging topics and lack of relevance. However, through the use of the additional texts, such as the videos in her multimodal text set, she believed her the students might view the children in the book as children just like them, thus connecting to the text and seeing the relevance in teaching the Civil Rights Era.

After completion of the multimodal text set project and their recognition that text can be more than traditional texts, all of the graduate students reflected on the assignment and how it opened their eyes up to an expansive list of resources they could use in their classrooms. They also noted that the variety of texts allowed them to differentiate instruction by providing different modes of information to their students.

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this article is to share my experience implementing a place-based pedagogy tied to a multimodal literacy text set assignment in my graduate children's literature class. As this study focuses on a small sample of graduate students, caution must be exercised in overgeneralizing the findings to the larger teacher education population. However, this study does offer insight into the graduate students' understanding of their sense of place and offers an example assignment that teacher educators can implement into their own classroom instruction, targeting both sense of place and multimodal literacy practices.

In regards to the first research question, the graduate students noted, during their interview as well as their "Where I'm From" poem, that their family and the community they grew up in comprised their sense of place and helped mold them into the people they are today. Brown (2003) found that community morals and values are more impactful on rural populace than those who live in urban areas. Further, "communities are an essential aspect of human life [and] compris[e] an important component of personal identity" (Brown & Schafft, 2011, p. 35). The creation of the "Where I'm From" poem provided insight into the lives of rural students

and communities (Corbett & White, 2014). Further, through the poem, the graduate students were able to "connect their literacy to the world around them—to the places, people, and interests that make their world personally meaningful" (Bangert & Brooke, 2003, p. 23).

In relation to the second research question, the graduate students also saw themselves in the texts they read specifically relating to the characters in their Southern texts. This cultural literacy is one component of culturally responsive teaching pedagogy (Pewewardy &Hammer, 2003). Hardré (2012) found that making content relevant was an effective strategy to use to motivating rural students. My findings showed that incorporating place-based education pedagogy, such as the "Where I'm From" poem and geography-specific text set assignment into the classroom created a sense of relevancy among the middle level graduate students. They were connected to the material, which researchers noted can increase student motivation and student ownership (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Hardré & Reeve, 2003). In addition, incorporating a "Where I'm From" poem in the classroom allowed the students to tap into their own virtual school bag of personal experiences (Thompson, as cited in Leland et al., 2013, p. 73).

Further, the findings emphasized the importance of reader response theory of literature (Rosenblatt, 1978). Each of the graduate students talked extensively about their text-to-self connections, how they related to a character or characters in their chosen novel, and it was because they related to a character or characters in the novel that they chose that text as the focal text in their multimodal text set. Reader Response Theory notes that a text can mean something very different to one person as it does to another because of the personal experiences and background knowledge that each person brings to the text (Rosenblatt). While two of the texts (*The Watsons Go to Birmingham-1963* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*) were used by two different graduate students, each graduate student identified with the text

differently because of their own background and life experiences.

In regards to the third research question, this assignment opened my graduate students' eyes up to the fact that multimodal texts can help teachers differentiate instruction in the classroom. Kalantzis and Cope (n.d.) posited that one way to differentiate instruction is to include multimodality in the classroom. They also realized that using a variety of texts in classroom instruction may also serve as a motivating factor for their students (Callow & Zammit, 2012; Gaines & Lapp, 2010). These findings substantiated what the International Reading Association (2012) posited—students deserve access to multimodal texts as well as differentiated instruction to meet their specific needs. In addition, Kendrick and Jones (2008) found that rural Ugandan girls' photography images "provide a window on the interface between local and global literacy practices" (p. 371). Likewise, the multimodal literacy project did the same thing for my students; while they were focusing on a more local context, the fact that they used an Internet-based multimodal literacy tool, they were able to reach a global audience as well.

Finally, in respect to the fourth research question the findings of this study also revealed the graduate students' views of text evolved over the course of the semester from a more traditional view of written or typed words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages (Draper et al., 2010) to a more modern view, which included incorporating a variety of sources (e.g., images, videos, audio files). Draper and colleagues define text as "any representational resource (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) or object that people intentionally imbue with meaning, in the way they either create or attend to the object, to achieve a particular purpose" (p. 28). At the start of the semester, the students had a more traditional view of text; however, as the semester went on, the students embraced a (re)imagined view of text because of the multimodal literacy aspect of the assignment. As noted by Jewitt (2008), "The current pedagogies built on

multiple literacies encourage teachers to build classroom work on students' knowledge, experiences, and interests" (p. 255). This study reaffirmed this pedagogical move in the literacy community.

The place-based text set assignment in this study may serve as a model assignment in a children's literature class. In addition, this assignment can easily be incorporated into a K-12 classroom as well as a springboard for educators who embrace place-based education pedagogy and multimodal literacy in their classroom instruction. As noted by Smith and Sobel (2010), "Place can be drawn upon to teach any subject area" (p. 23).

Conclusion

As teachers and teacher educators, it is our job to meet the needs of our students. One way in which this can be done is through incorporating place-based education pedagogy and geographically-based text sets into the curriculum. Further, introducing place-based multimodal literacy tools and (re)imagined texts into the classroom also provides opportunities to tailor curriculum to address our students background knowledge and experiences. In line with previous research (Azano, 2011; Green & Reid, 2014), I believe that it is important to study place and that place-based education pedagogy is an important component in teaching. In addition, researchers (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004; NCTE, 2013; Walsh, 2010) have found the use of multimodal tools in the classroom serve as a way to engage students and these "multiple ways of knowing [...] should not be considered curricular luxuries" (NCTE, 2013, n.p.).

A future study might be following the graduate students into their classrooms and observing their incorporation of their multimodal text set assignment into their classroom teaching. Additionally, in the future, I plan to have the graduate students create a multimodal text set unit based around a local text (either informational children's literature or fiction). ❖

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