Young Adult Literature as a Catalyst for Preservice Teachers to Challenge Norms of the Secondary ELA Classroom

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Young adult literature (YAL) has the potential for transforming preservice teachers’ (PTs) practice as new English Language Arts (ELA) teachers (Flores et al., 2019; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013). Purposefully designed YAL curriculum in teacher education (TE) can affect PTs literacy identities (Spitler, 2009), support them in thinking critically about the effects of prevailing norms in secondary ELA classrooms, and provide experiences that show them the power and possibilities of representative and inclusive classroom texts.

While reading PTs’ final reflections from one such course, I noticed topics and patterns of disruption in their writing. I began an analysis of PTs’ final reflections to better understand these patterns, and which norms they had begun to challenge during the course. Poetic inquiry (Prendergast, et.al, 2009) was used as a data analysis technique to portray PTs’ reflections, ideas, and learning through their own words. This is a “methodological approach to qualitative research that utilizes the conventions of poetry as representational and presentational modalities” (Saldaña, 2018). After analyzing the data, PTs’ chosen topics and reflective writing were used to create found poetry.

**Literature Review**

**PTs as Readers**

While YAL has the potential for transforming teacher’s practice (Flores et al., 2019; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013), studies have also shown a lack of evidence of enthusiasm for reading and a lack of engrained personal reading habits amongst preservice teachers (Nathanson, et al., 2008). Additionally, since many PTs attended American schools, their view of reading can be standardized and impersonal. However, purposefully designed YAL courses could realign PTs’ enthusiasm for reading (Applegate & Applegate, 2004; Kerbs & Pule, 2023) by helping to shape PTs’ literacy identities (Spitler, 2009).
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Spitler defined PTs’ literacy identity as “a conscious and confident view of self as responsible for and in control of improving the literacy learning of self and the competency to enact engagements to guide the literacy learning of students” (pp. 129–130). A teacher’s literacy identity is affected by institutions they are a part of (Gee, 2000), and many PTs who grew up learning in American schools lack enthusiasm for reading (Nathanson, et al., 2008) or have a standardized view of reading (Cho, et al., 2020). The institutional norms PTs experienced in their secondary ELA classrooms become the norms through which they envision their future ELA instruction as teachers.

However, just as PTs’ views of ELA can be shaped by previous classroom experiences, they can also be affected by new experiences (Moje, et al., 2009) in teacher education courses. In YAL courses, these experiences can transform not only their literacy identities, but also how they view reading pedagogy in the classroom (Kerbs & Pule, 2023). Through positive literacy experiences using YAL, PTs are provided the space to challenge norms that affected their literacy lives and will affect their future students’ literacy learning.

**Challenging Text Norms**

Despite what we know about the power of representation and inclusivity in the classroom and through literature (Bishop, 1990; Gay, 2002), many classrooms still center on literature written by and about White people (Applebee, 1989; Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012); literature that perpetuates inequality and prejudice through a “limited inclusion and representation of people of color” (Glenn, 2014, p. 90).

Cherry-McDaniel and Young (2012) argue that PTs grew up in classrooms where they read and learned from canonical White, male authored texts and that their English classrooms were “colonized by these experiences” (p. 8). Additionally, for many secondary ELA PTs,
literature is their undergraduate major. This means that they continue learning in courses that have traditionally centered White, heterosexual, male texts that can perpetuate the same norms (Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012; Kumashiro, 2022). There are layers on which PTs’ beliefs of the secondary ELA pedagogy have been built, and it will take layers to challenge these normative ways.

One such layer is that many adults of historically marginalized groups (including PTs) did not see themselves in a book until after high school (Onyebuchi, 2019), which affects reading interest and motivation (Gay, 2002). Windows, mirrors, and doors (Bishop, 1990) are important for readers to find joy and purpose in reading, and it is never too late for this. In fact, when reading about going beyond diverse book collections by Heise and Torres (n.d., 1), if you replace the word children with PTs, it would read as follows:

[Preservice teachers] deserve to be seen and recognized for their full humanity, and they deserve to have their lived experiences affirmed on the pages of the books that we purchase, promote, highlight, recommend, read aloud, put into curriculum and share with them. This is the beauty and honor, and obligation, of the work that we do with [PTs]. Using books to build community also strengthens our relationships with one another, enables [PTs] to empathize and provides them with the tools they will need to thrive in a rapidly changing and expanding world.

By centering Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoC) authors, characters, and stories in a YAL course, it challenges the centering of the canon by looking to voices it has silenced (Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012). This allows PTs to read texts with multi-layered perspectives that will help them “fully conceptualize the varied ways to make sense of their worlds” (Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012, p. 10), including the secondary ELA classroom.
This work is situated within a combination of theories that emphasize the social, cultural, critical, and the potentially transformative aspects of preservice teacher literacy education.

The socio-cultural theory is based on the social aspect of learning and also on culture. As Au (1997) stated, “Socio-cultural research on school literacy learning attempts to explore the links among historical conditions, current social and institutional contexts, inter-psychological functioning [that which takes place between people], and intra-psychological functioning [that which takes place within the individual]” (p. 182). Because learning to read is connected to the social, cultural, and historical environment in which it occurred (Au, 1997), a person’s reading identity is connected to that environment. While this could be students’ homes, schools, or other spaces, for the purpose of this study we will focus on the school environment. If learning to read is connected to the environment, then for PTs, this adds another layer in that the social, cultural, and historical norms in which they learned to read can be connected to their literacy identities (Spitler, 2009). However, because a person’s identity is always in flux (Moje, et al., 2009), their literacy identity and any secondary ELA norms they may have internalized, can be challenged and changed for the positive through a new environment where PTs can experience different social and cultural ways of teaching and finding joy in reading.

In connection, another theory that supports this work is the critical literacy theory. This lens raises “awareness of and reflecting on systems of oppression in learner’s lives…and moving from there to transformative action” (Handsfield, 2016, p. 80) to make a change (Freire, 1970). To make that change, PTs must be able to recognize and think critically about norms in secondary ELA and whether they have taken up these same norms in their ideas about reading.
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pedagogy. When used as a central piece of the curriculum in teacher education, YAL can be a catalyst to help PTs challenge their internalized literacy beliefs.

This study is also situated in the view of PTs as transformative agents that have the capacity and intellect to not only critique societally normed spaces, but to also create pedagogy that supports students as active, critical citizens (Giroux, 2010).

Research Methods

As a final reflection for this course, PTs were asked to defend the literary merit of YAL. While reading students’ final reflections, it was noticeable that many chose to write about topics that disrupted traditional ELA norms. This happened despite (or maybe because) the final reflection prompt focused on the merit of YAL.

To better understand which disruptions PTs reflected on, their final reflections were analyzed and coded, and their most chosen topics were used to create found poetry. My research questions were: (1) Upon which topics of disruption did students choose to reflect? (2) What were the topical themes and trends of their reflections? To answer these questions, the data were analyzed using a poetic inquiry (Leavy, 2015) methodology.

The goal in using poetic inquiry as a research strategy was two-fold. First, I wanted the data of this study to continue to challenge the norms in education—to challenge the “fact-fiction dichotomy” and offer a more “evocative” way of seeing the data (Leavy, 2015, p. 78). Second, I wanted the topics PTs chose for reflection to be represented through their words. While researcher interpretation and influence are present, PTs chose these topics for reflection and their words are the focus of this study and the found poetry created from the data.

Researcher Positionality
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Due to the significance of my own culturally, racial, and gendered identities as a white, cis-female, I work to examine my privilege inside and outside of the classroom and to be honest with my students about my privilege while still working to de-center myself in the classroom. I am not always successful at de-centering myself but try to reflect on this and work to be more successful as much as I can.

I also work to build relationships with preservice teachers by admitting how I have contributed (and still) contribute to the systemic issues in education, hoping to create a space where they too can be honest about their bias and systemic contributions or the systemic harm that has happened to them. The focus of this research came about after this course to share which disruptions took place with this group of PTs in hopes that it can be duplicated and extended.

Participants

This study took place at a four-year university in southeast Texas. Sixteen students enrolled in the undergraduate course and 14 students turned in final reflections. The student demographics closely mirrored the demographics of the university. Demographic enrollment of the university that semester was 41.75% Hispanic, 32.12% White, 8.76% Black, and 8.3% Asian (UHCL, n.d.). All students were literature majors earning a teaching certification in ELA grades 7-12. For all students this was their first course focused on YAL.

A limitation of this study is the lack of specific PT demographic data. Since this study was conducted after the semester ended, permission for demographic data was not able to be obtained. This is something paramount for future studies to truly honor PT voices.

Context of Course
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After an introduction to the genre and its importance in literature and schools (Bishop, 1990; Gay, 2002), students began to choose and read YAL. The course was composed of six book clubs (all student choice), each based on a different genre, topic, or theme (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**
Book Clubs and Student Book Selections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Club</th>
<th>Student Book Selections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genre Study: Novels in Verse</td>
<td><em>Apple: Skin to Core</em> by Eric Gansworth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Long Way Down</em> by Jason Reynolds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Shout</em> by Laurie Halse Anderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic: Intersectionality</td>
<td><em>Elatsoe</em> by Darcie Little Badger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Like a Love Story</em> by Abdi Nazemian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Slay</em> by Britney Morris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre: Nonfiction</td>
<td><em>Dear America: The Story of an Undocumented Citizen: Young Reader’s Edition</em> by Jose Antonio Vargas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You</em> by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>They Called Us Enemy</em> by George Takei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers</em> by Deborah Heiligman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme: Identity</td>
<td><em>Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe</em> by Benjamin Alire Sáenz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Far From the Tree</em> by Robin Benway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Juliet Takes a Breath</em> by Gabby Rivera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic/Format: Criticality and Graphic Novels</td>
<td><em>Guantánamo Voices: True Accounts from the World’s Most Famous Prison</em> by Sarah Mirk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Low, Low Woods</em> by Carmen Maria Machado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre Choices: Fantasy, Horror, Romance</td>
<td><em>Legendborn</em> by Tracy Deonn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>White Smoke</em> by Tiffany D. Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Frankly in Love</em> by David Yoon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Text choices centered historically marginalized voices, including BIPoC and LGBTQIA+ stories, characters, and authors (Ebarvia et al., 2020). To decenter White voices, I made the decision not to choose books that focused on a White voice or story that did not also include another facet of identity that has been excluded from normalized literature selections in ELA.
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classrooms. For example, *Shout* (2019) by Laurie Halse Anderson. This memoir features a White woman but is also about surviving rape and sexual abuse. Victims of sexual abuse have traditionally been silenced in our society, in classrooms, and in literature. While there are many YA texts published by White authors centering White voices worthy of reading, these books are (and have always been) readily available and will continue to be available due to the White-centered publishing industry and curriculums (Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012; Kumashiro, 2022). For this course (and I would argue in PT education overall), it was important PTs be exposed to books that enabled them to see themselves reflected in YAL (Bishop, 1990), challenge norms, and think critically (Ebarvia et al., 2020). To do this, BIPoC voices needed to be the center of the curriculum (Ebarvia et al., 2020).

At the end of the semester, students were provided the following prompt for their final reflection.

Literary Merit is something that has been debated for decades. What makes a good book, or really what makes a good story? And what makes a story worthy of reading in secondary classrooms? For this reflection, I want you to think about the merit of YA Literature for young adults and in secondary ELA classrooms. You decide whether YAL has literary merit for young people and in our secondary classrooms and why.

It is important to note that the final reflection prompt does not reflect the research questions of this study. These reflections comprise the data for this study, but the study was not planned prior to the course. The study came about after reading PTs’ final reflections and noting their arguments for merit were supported with topics of disruption.

**Data Analysis**
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Reflections were gathered after the semester had ended and were anonymous. Data were coded, then categorized, and then further analyzed using In Vivo codes. Each of these steps included three rounds of coding.

Coding: First Round

The first round of coding and the first read of each reflection began with paper copies of the PTs’ reflections. As I read each reflection, I highlighted sentences and phrases indicating a disruption in students’ thinking about ELA norms to gain a general idea of what students were writing about. The data from the first round produced broad categories. Some categories showed up as patterns throughout the reflections and were kept broad, and some categories were narrowed in future rounds of coding. In this round of coding, I elected to double-code some of the data. I did not want to leave anything out that could refine future analysis.

At this point of the analysis, I noted in an analytic memo (Saldana, 2021) that the patterns I was finding in the data were closely linked to the topics and themes of the course book clubs. While I was not surprised by this, I noted that while the categories were not predetermined for this study, they were influenced by course content.

Coding: Second Round

The purpose of the second round was to “further manage, filter, highlight, and [focus] the salient features of the qualitative data record” (Saldana, 2021, p. 12)—to generate more precise categories.

As I read each reflection again, I determined if the first round of coding should remain or if any codes should be moved into new or different categories. I then copied and pasted the coded sentences and phrases into separate Microsoft Word documents titled for each category. I chose sentences and phrases at this level of analysis so that I would not miss any important or
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powerful words for the later In Vivo coding. I kept participants’ reflections separate using spacing in the categorical documents (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2**
Coding Sample from Categorical Document: PTs Personal Reading Journeys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Round Coding</th>
<th>Student Reflections</th>
<th>Third Round Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For sixteen weeks, I have been challenged.</td>
<td><strong>Challenged</strong> to read genres that I personally lack interest in and <strong>genres</strong> that I have <strong>never read before</strong>. Challenged to find unique ways to create lessons in the classroom. Will it work? How can I make it work? More importantly, how can WE make it work?</td>
<td><strong>“SIXTEEN WEEKS”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In these novels, I rediscovered my love of reading and the joy that comes from discovering new stories with which I can connect with and at the same time <strong>use in the classroom</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>“REDISCOVERED”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoyed the verse novel I read which was <strong>Shout</strong>. For someone who’s <strong>reading stamina</strong> has decreased over the years due to lack of interest and working, it was refreshing to read a book that wouldn’t take a huge toll on me. It was a heart-wrenching novel that moved me in many ways that other books have not.</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>“SHOUT”</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While I was an <strong>avid reader in junior high and high school</strong>…only for me to drop the hobby when I entered college and had to read <strong>textbooks and assigned novels</strong>. When I entered this class…I was given the opportunity to read just like I used to and was able to pick which book I wanted from a selection of <strong>young adult literature</strong> that Dr. Pule selected/recommended for us. While reading each piece of <strong>young adult literature</strong>, I</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>“AVID READER”</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://scholar.stjohns.edu/thereadingprofessor/vol47/iss1/9
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was able to experience perspectives and cultures that I knew nothing about and was able to empathize with the characters of each story even though I had nothing in common with them.

“YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE”
“EXPERIENCE PRESENTIVES”
“CULTURES”
“I KNEW NOTHING ABOUT”
“EMPATHIZE”
“CHARACTERS”
“STORY”
“NOTHING IN COMMON”

By moving the coded data from a PT’s reflection to categorized documents, I was choosing to combine the PTs’ reflections. While it would have been possible to create poems from certain student’s reflections, I decided to create the found poems from the community of PTs to garner a better view of “the heightened moments of social reality” (Leavy, 2015, p. 77) of the classroom community. This would answer the research questions in showing which topics were most chosen by PTs and how they wrote about each topic. The findings section delineates how many students’ reflections were coded for each poem.

Since the PTs chose topics to write about, some categories had multiple pages of reflections and some had fewer. At this point in the analysis, I refined the coding to ensure the coded pieces were an accurate representation of students’ reflections (see Figure 2).

After the second round of coding, the final categories were: PT’s Personal Reading Journeys, Perceptions of YAL, Specific YA Titles, Disrupting the Canon, Representation and Inclusion, Banning and Censorship, YA Genres, and Student Choice.

Coding: Third Round

For the third round of coding, In Vivo codes were used to “prioritize and honor the participants’ voices” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 138). For each category I highlighted In Vivo codes and transferred these codes to a column to the right of the PTs’ reflections (see Figure 2). I extracted single words and short, powerful phrases that depicted the PTs’ reflections about each category.
After moving the In Vivo codes into the right column, I read them again to make sure that they portrayed each PT’s reflection as precisely as possible—adding and deleting words that did not.

The last step of this coding round was to copy and paste the columns of In Vivo codes into new, categorized Microsoft Word documents. These combined lists of codes would be used to create a found poem for each category. The purpose of moving the final round of In Vivo codes was to avoid direct influence by any singular reflection, instead working to create poems that portrayed the disruptions most chosen and reflected on by this group of PTs.

**Creative Methods**

As Patrick (2016) states, research poets must “strive to stay faithful to the participants’ words and the themes in the data, all the while balancing [their] poetic writing process” (388) and must explain their creative methods.

I sat with each categorized list of In Vivo codes separately and read the data a few times. Then, on a printed copy I started creating the found poems by transcribing, combining, and moving words. While doing this I paid close attention to repetition, figurative language, and the spacing of each poem to accurately portray the feelings, emotions, and ideas of the reflections. After a poem draft was created for a category (working on one category at a time), I then transcribed the poem draft into another Word document. At this point I read the poem aloud multiple times, made revisions, and then closed the document. After some time away from each poem I printed each one and read it aloud, continuing to revise. Sometimes an entirely new poetic structure was created and sometimes I changed smaller devices: a line break, spacing, capitalizing specific words, or adding italics for emphasis. At this point I did eliminate three categories for lack of data and low student selection: YA Genres, Student Choice, and Banning and Censorship.
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It is important to note that the In Vivo Code list for each topic was extensive. Not every
PT’s exact words were able to be used in each poem. To mitigate misrepresentations, I worked to
notice patterns in PT reflections and codes and tried to create found poems that represented most
of the data for each category.

Findings

The following are the found poems created from student reflection data. Each poem
represents a different category from the PT reflections.

PT’s Personal Reading Journeys

Come Down off the Shelf

I had lost my way
Years in high school
Hating
Dreading
Quite frankly
Sparks-Noting
Not reading

Enter college textbooks
Assigned novels
Nothing in common

Six book clubs
Fifteen weeks
Explored YAL
Genres
Formats
Characters
Opportunity to Discover
Stories
Cultures
Perspectives
These books spoke to me

First time in my reading life
Stories of people of color
Stories of queer people
Stories of Latinx people
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Stories echo my own

Choice
Conversations
Share Ideas
Develop new ones
Meaningful relationships
Not just your teacher
Your classmates
Coming together
Community
Safe space
The wonders of reading

Dust myself off
Come down off the non-reader shelf
Rediscover
Love
Joy
Empathy
Hope
My students feel the same

Ten of the 14 PTs reflected on their personal journey through YAL. Some of the PTs, despite being literature majors, did not enter this course as readers in their personal lives—nor did some value the required reading in high school. The stanzas in this poem show the distinct before and after of PTs’ exploration of YAL during this course.

This found poem shows that through their experiences reading, discussing, and learning about YA texts, PTs were able to disrupt normalized negative associations with reading (Nathanson, et al., 2008), especially in school reading (Duke et al., 2006). The YA texts read in this course provided literary mirrors (Bishop, 1990) that helped these PTs feel recognized for their full humanity and their lived experiences affirmed (Heise & Torres) showing that university courses still have the potential to motivate readers (Applegate & Applegate, 2022; Kerbs & Pule, 2023).

**Perceptions of YA**
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Perceptions Change

At first
Nothing more than
Ridiculous romance
Teenage angst

But perceptions change

YA lit is
Overlooked passion
but
More raw
More real

Something extraordinary
Complex

YA Authors value
Inspiring
Young Readers

Students
Explore themselves
The world

A safe space for changing lenses
Classrooms resonate

Diversity
Relationships
Empathy
Injustices
Passion
Merit

Matters more than ever

Nice to be proven wrong

Eight of the 14 PTs reflected on their beginning beliefs and their journeys of understanding of YAL. When the class began, most of the PTs had a singular narrative of YAL. The poem portrays PTs shift in thinking about YAL from *angsty* and *ridiculous* to “a safe space for changing lenses.”

The structure of the poem also shows PTs’ reflections about young adults. The poem can be read as one, but the reader can also find and read two columns, one about YAL and one about young adults. By re-thinking YAL and its demographic, PTs were able to challenge their
internalized bias and think of other ways this genre and age group can be characterized and understood (Ebarvia et al., 2020; Glenn, 2012; Sarigianides et al., 2015). The last line of the poem is powerful on its own because it shows that many PTs are open-minded and ready to unlearn and learn in teacher education.

Specific YA Titles

Grounded in Reality

Grounded in our reality
Long Way Down
Hooked me
Powerful
Effortless verse
Sticking with you
Long after the book is finished

Real Setting
Drove the story home
They Called Us Enemy
Guantanamo Voices
People forced to live
Within and outside
Walls
Dear America
Mexicans aren’t the only undocumented
Citizens
Needed to know more
Stamped
Taught me America
More truth
Than any book or class
Ever.

Racism prevalent
In communities I love
Slay
Unapologetic Blackness
Love
Blossoming
Aristotle and Dante
Two Mexican boys in love
Queer identity
Queer community
Like a Love Story
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Three beautiful friends
Navigating       Questioning
Protesting       Silence

*Shout*
*Low, Low Woods*
Sexual abuse
Should be discussed although       Heart wrenching
The horror
*White Smoke*
Insight into communities
Solving murders
*Elatsoe*
Lipan Apache girl
Modern mystery
Where magic and fantasy are fact not
Fiction
Stories
Tools
To teach students
Real world issues
Grounded in their reality

This poem shows the power and learning that each book held for eight of the fourteen PTs. At first, I treated PTs reflections of each title separately, but through rereading and revision, I started noticing how the different books, topics, and ideas were interwoven. To show this connection I structured the poem so that the similarities of different texts lead the reader from one title into the next.

As a PT reflected, these books “spoke” to them. Each book the students reflected on was different but important for its specific representation and inclusion (Bishop, 1990; Gay, 2002; Heise & Torres), for the social issues it grappled with, and for its resonation with readers.

Students recognized the centering of historically silenced voices (Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012; Ebarvia et al., 2020) and reflected on this through characters, settings, themes, and ideas.
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These YA stories, when viewed through a critical lens (Ebarvia et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1995), became “tools” for learning.

**Disrupting the Canon**

*Past and Present*

Before this class  
My impression of  
Good  
Was simply  
Classic  
But

Literature is more than forced  
Jane Austen  
Emily Brontë  
Furthering ideals  
Of that time period

Literature can reflect  
The world we live  

Students need  
to see themselves  
to connect  
to think  
to digest  
to analyze  
Stories  
Written for,  
That speak to  
Young hearts and minds

Readers need  
YA Lit

This poem, created from seven of the fourteen PTs reflections, is short because students’ thinking and beliefs were similar but it is no less powerful. At the beginning of the semester, many students were under the impression that they were only allowed to teach the canon in secondary ELA—a norm still followed by many schools and teachers (Cherry-McDaniel &
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Young, 2012). In opposition to this, many PTs found purpose in finding books that would act as windows, mirrors, and doors (Bishop, 1990) for their future students. By looking for books their future students might “need,” PTs were challenging the norms of “colonized” (Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012, p. 8) classrooms.

**Representation and Inclusion**

*Reflect the World*

The world is not  
All white  
Cookie cutter cutouts

No wonder kids stop reading  
Feel they don’t belong

The world is  
Black with voluminous curls  
Hispanic with curves  
LGBTQIA+  
People with disabilities  
Mental health struggles  
Immigrants  
Varying abilities  
Cultures  
Traditions

In YA  
Students find  
Inclusion  
Representation  
Students find themselves

Connections spark curiosities  
Emotions  
Perspectives  
Outside a single story  
Inside a book

Stories show students  
They are not alone  
We see them  
They matter
PTs reflections (eight of the fourteen) showed that the representative YA texts they read during the semester had an impact on how they view stories for their future students. Multiple students, in their writing, reflected on the idea that the literature taught in classrooms is dominated by White-narratives and does not reflect the world—or even their communities. Therefore, the poem starts with that belief and moves into the possibilities of representative and inclusive texts. I chose to end the poem with their reflections that moved these ideas to their future students—alluding to PTs transformative agency (Giroux, 1985). They recognized that while this was not the norm for them in school (Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012; Onyebuchi, 2019), through YAL they can show students that “they are not alone, they are seen, and that they matter.”

**Discussion and Significance**

This study supports the idea that YAL, when used as a central piece of the curriculum in teacher education, can be a catalyst to help PTs rethink secondary ELA classroom norms. Just as importantly as others seeing PTs as transformative agents, they saw themselves as future teachers who can choose texts that support students as active, critical citizens (Giroux, 2010). Through the commonalities in their final reflections, a discourse was developed through found poetry that “unite[d] the language of critique with the language of possibility” (Giroux, 2010, p. 39).

By pushing against the classroom and societal norm of being non-readers, they were able to reflect on their personal reading journeys through YAL and this course. They reflected on their literacy lives and the “love, joy, empathy, and hope” that comes from student choice and connection with texts (Kittle, 2013). This shows that in teacher education we still have a chance
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By centering Black, Indigenous, and voices of color, including the LGBTQIA+ community (Ebarvia et al., 2020), PTs experienced the importance of windows, mirrors, and doors (Bishop, 1990) and how books could speak to them through different stories, cultures, and perspectives many of which are silenced by traditional ELA norms (Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012). PTs also chose to reflect on their changed perceptions of YAL, young adults, and the literary canon. It is important that teacher educators create space for PTs to look inward (Ebarvia et al., 2020) to their personal beliefs and bias in order to challenge norms in an institutional setting.

Many of the PTs took a non-neutral stance (Giroux, 2010) in regard to the canon and the colonization of ELA classrooms (Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012). Their reflections on the power of representative and inclusive literature to disrupt the canon show their understanding and critical thinking about White-centered classrooms and the deficits to students when this norm is perpetuated. Their reflections show recognition that classrooms need to mirror students’ worlds to show they are seen, accepted, and to learn about others.

YAL has the potential for transforming the practices of new ELA teachers (Flores et al., 2019; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013), but because pedagogical transformation is only possible when teachers inherently believe in a practice and embed that practice in who they are as an individual (Spitler, 2011; Alsup, 2006; Richardson & Anders, 1994), this work must be experienced in social, cultural, and critical ways in literacy teacher education (Au, 1997).

While it needs to be acknowledged that my voice (as a White cis-female) had an impact during the course and on the data analysis and found poetry—it is also paramount to
acknowledge that these were the topics PTs chose to write about for a final reflection that did not specifically ask for these ideas. PTs as transformative agents defended the merit of YA texts by choosing to reflect on topics that push against the dominant norms of secondary ELA classrooms.

Many ELA teachers find their way to challenging the normative ways of the ELA classroom at some point in their careers—but when does this happen and should it be by chance? The work of disruption (Ebarvia et al., 2020) needs to start in teacher education (Cherry-McDaniel & Young, 2012; Flores et al., 2019; Glenn, 2012; Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013; Hays, 2021; Herb & Betts, 2022; Sarigianides et al., 2015; Wolk, 2009). When this happens, PTs will be intentionally prepared to center their students’ humanity (Heise & Torres (n.d.), and their own. By providing tools (YAL) and spaces (TE courses) where PTs can begin disrupting internalized ELA norms, they will be empowered to continue this work in K-12 spaces.
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https://www.follettcommunity.com/s/article/Going-Beyond-Diverse-Collections


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Young Adult Literature as a Catalyst for Preservice Teachers to Challenge Norms of the Secondary ELA Classroom


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**Young Adult Literature**


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