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Building Community Among International Students Through Purposeful Selection of Fictional Literature

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BUILDING COMMUNITY AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS THROUGH
PURPOSEFUL SELECTION OF FICTIONAL LITERATURE

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to the people who helped me along the way. A dissertation in practice is truly a collaborative effort. It takes a village. Thanks to Martha Chang and David Niu, who taught me how to break through barriers. To every student I taught in the Bronx, Abu Dhabi, and Manhattan. To my cohort at the University of South Carolina who accepted a Jersey boy as one of its own. To my colleagues in New York, whose inspiration and insight were at the heart of this research. To Bernadette Boden-Albala and Miryha Gould Runnerstrom, whose encouragement and support made this work possible. To Christopher Bogiages, without whom, none of this would have made any sense. And to my wife, Sharon. My constant friend, my faithful partner, and my one true love.

ABSTRACT

Purposefully selecting text is a longstanding challenge for teachers of multinational, adult learners enrolled at language schools. International students come from diverse cultural backgrounds, have been educated in different academic systems, are of different ages, and have separate interests; therefore, it is difficult for teachers to effectively select text to meet this disparate student group's needs. The purpose of this action research investigation was to identify an effective strategy to select reading material that fosters student engagement through a shared reading interest.

This action research investigation used exploratory qualitative methods in a constructivist grounded theory approach. I conducted semi-structured interviews using a modified Delphi method protocol. Four English language teachers participated in a series of interviews to develop a model that aligns fictional literature with an ESL curriculum. I uncovered the literature characteristics multinational students' teachers identify as important when selecting texts for adult English language learners: (a) ESL level, (b) the curriculum, (c) using modern, American English, (d) acculturation, (e) cultural sensitivity, and (f) student interest. I explored these characteristics regarding student learning and fostering community and discovered acculturation played a crucial role in connecting multinational sojourning students to texts. Upon identifying acculturation as a key result, I proposed how it could be used as a framework for several school initiatives.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A1.....	Low Beginner Level English
A2.....	High Beginner Level English
B1.....	Low Intermediate Level English
B2.....	High Intermediate Level English
C1.....	Low Advanced Level English
C2.....	High Advanced Level English
CEFR.....	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
EFL.....	English as a Foreign Language
ELL.....	English Language Learners
ESL.....	English as a Second Language
F1.....	U.S. Academic Student Visa
L1.....	First Language
L2.....	Second Language
MEA.....	Manhattan English Academy
SOC.....	Sense of Community
TESOL.....	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TOEFL.....	Test of English as a Foreign Language

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Multinational students enrolled at language schools share commonalities. They care about their homes, families, traditions, and beliefs. They care about their careers, value education, and come to the United States to learn English in search of more meaningful lives. Students come from all over the world to enroll at our New York City language school, which I will refer to as Manhattan English Academy (MEA) to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. English language instructors have the difficult tasks of creating a community with students representing different backgrounds and situations and bringing them together to read a fictional work they may all find relatable. Adem, an unmarried 28-year-old mechanical engineer from Turkey, told me his favorite book is *Sefiller*—a story about how governments treat the poor—better known in the United States as *Les Miserables*. Hailing from Colombia, Jessica has a bachelor’s degree in economics. Her favorite book is the psychological thriller *A Girl on a Train*, which she read in Spanish. In a thick Russian accent, 19-year-old psychology major Elena told us about Vadim Zeland’s *Reality Transurfing*, one of the top nonfiction bestsellers in 2005, only translated into English in 2008. Maki and Eriko are both mid-30s hairstylists from Japan who admit they have not read much. There is currently no formula for how instructors determine reading lists for international students enrolled in English language schools. Although some fictional works may be interesting for some students, others in the same classroom may not share those interests or understand the content.

MEA admits sojourning adult, international students who have come to the United States to study English. Our school uses the Cambridge Placement Package, a standardized assessment that evaluates students' ability to read, write, speak, and listen to the English language. This assessment allows administrators to effectively place these students in the same low advanced English as a second language (ESL) class. However, that assessment includes little else about the diverse student body. Students are at least 18-years-old but vary in ethnicity, nationality, and educational background. They are all nonresidents who have come to the United States to learn the English language. They are from distant corners of the world, and their cultural backgrounds are diverse. Their ages, educational experiences, and attitudes about learning are different. Their values, perspectives, and how they interpret the world are different. Their career goals and reasons for coming to New York to learn English are different. Because of these differences, teaching English to multinational students is perhaps more challenging than teaching traditional ESL, EFL (English as a foreign language), or bilingual classes in which second language learners (L2) typically share a common heritage and language.

Two years ago, in my role as the director of curriculum and instruction at MEA, I met with an experienced ESL instructor who wanted to read a work of literature with their class but was having trouble deciding which book to choose. We met several times to evaluate texts. We reviewed lists of books recommended for that reading level; however, we struggled to align literary works at a thematic level with our adult ESL curriculum. Works of literature written at a fourth-grade reading level employ elementary-school-level themes that are inappropriate for adult learners. Ultimately, we decided to use Nobel Prize-winning author John Steinbeck's (1947) *The Pearl*, a work I

remember reading in seventh grade. *The Pearl* (1947) is a story about a poor fisherman and his family and incorporates universal motifs such as greed, the nature of good and evil, and social justice. Although some language can be challenging for non-native English speakers, students at a high advanced ESL level would read the text with the preteaching of vocabulary and instructor guidance. We both decided it was a good fit for the class. However, the instructor quit the instructional unit after two weeks. When I asked him what went wrong, he explained it was a frustrating experience; some students found the reading too easy, others claimed it was too complicated, and most students were thoroughly disengaged. Many adult learners have already completed university coursework, and those students found the thematic content too simple. When surveyed, no students were highly interested. We had worked together systematically to provide our students with a book we felt would enrich the curriculum and engage our students in discussion, but it did not work. Our methods for selecting fiction were randomized, seldom aligned with students' proficiency levels, and rarely based on students' interests. The problem is instructors have no way of effectively selecting literature that aligns with the curriculum and is meaningful to students.

In November 2018, while conducting formal faculty observations, I observed two instructors who had selected and used their own reading sources. The first instructor was teaching a high advanced class and had selected reading from the 17th chapter of Tupper Saussy's (1999) *Rulers of Evil: Useful Knowledge about Governing Bodies*, which begins "Trier: 'Febronianism,' the philosophy of von Honthiem's book, contains the formula for administering Protestant America as Bellarminian commonwealth! Febronianism calls for decentralizing the Roman Catholic Church into independent national churches modeled

by the Church of England” (p. 158). When I spoke with the instructor afterward about why he chose that particular text, he explained he intended to show students the relevance of history even when it did not seem obvious. Although the instructor recognized his students were college educated, were high advanced English language learners, and selected demanding content, the English language was not relevant in their everyday lives. In another class, I observed a teacher who chose a newspaper article about a Somali pirate attack. When I asked the instructor why he chose that article, he explained he selected it because of student interest. However, there was no connection to the curriculum. The problem of practice was evident at MEA; instructors were capable but lacked the tools needed to select meaningful texts.

Problem of Practice

The curriculum describes how students perform in English at different proficiency levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This framework divides students into six scaffolded proficiency levels: Low Beginner (A1), High Beginner (A2), Low Intermediate (B1), High Intermediate (B2), Low Advanced (C1), and High Advanced (C2). However, it does not align any works of fiction with those proficiency levels. The CEFR is a framework for ESL instruction that allows educational institutions to build unique programs representing their students. Using charts provided with the CEFR framework, the instructor and I determined our high advanced students could comfortably read a text at a seventh- or eighth-grade U.S. reading level. However, when we reviewed that literature, we recognized the thematic content was not right for adults. The CEFR is a useful tool, but it does not provide a model for selecting adult learners’ texts. Because multinational students differ in age,

culture, and educational background, it is difficult to find appropriate books for all those students. As a result, students are unable to connect through a shared reading interest.

The CEFR accurately measures language knowledge and skills and is globally recognized and understood (Cambridge, 2011; Council of Europe, 2001). ESL learners progress through six specific levels (A1-C2) and acquire reading, writing, speaking, and listening abilities at each level. Though the CEFR separates skills into six distinct scaffolded levels and instructional textbooks with excerpts and short writing samples that align with the framework, there is no practical way to determine how to choose fictional literature for our students. Across the United States, educators have engaged in significant research to determine the appropriate reading levels of books and the thematic content that appeals to kindergarten to 12th grade (K–12) and university students (Crossley et al., 2007; Little, 2005; Sung et al., 2015). Language schools have not yet found a way to do this. Despite plenty of ESL textbooks precisely aligned to ESL frameworks for adults, no system exists to choose ESL learners' fiction. I ordered sets of books, and most instructors did not finish using these texts. Even though instructors understand the material and the individual ESL needs of their students, those who want to pair literature with curriculum encounter numerous difficulties because it is more complicated than readability. Content accessibility, language accessibility, visual accessibility, and cultural accessibility are just a few aspects instructors must consider (Vardell et al., 2006).

The problem of practice extends beyond English language learning. When instructors select literature at an unacceptable reading level, containing themes inappropriate for adult learners or not aligning with student values and interests, they fail

to achieve one of the most important purposes of reading a work of literature collectively. When students read a work of literature together and share their interpretations and unique perspectives, they form a community (Barstow, 2003; Ferguson, 2006; Gusfield, 1975; Harris, 2002; Laufgraben, 2006; Raphael et al., 1997). An absence of a classroom community inhibits learning in an ESL classroom. Selecting the wrong texts discourages learning and leads to disconnection, anxiety, and apathy. One common problem international students face in the United States is adjusting to an unfamiliar classroom environment (Gómez et al., 2014; Moua-Vue, 2017; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). International students at language schools face the difficulty of learning in a U.S. classroom setting, but unlike most international students who matriculate at a U.S. high school or university, these students have to connect with classmates whose cultures, backgrounds, and native languages are entirely different from their own and each other. Sojourning students enrolled at language schools come from various ethnic backgrounds, have been educated in diverse educational systems, and have different interests. It is not easy to locate literature that can nurture and promote a classroom community in which international students need to learn a new language openly and successfully. In effect, the problem of practice is a two-part problem. Student diversity complicates text selection. The lack of fictional texts makes it difficult to establish a sense of community (SOC). The lack of SOC makes it difficult to find texts. It is a recursive problem.

Theoretical Framework

To address the problems associated with selecting fictional texts for multinational adult learners, I chose to synthesize learner-centered ideology (Schiro, 2012) and SOC theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) into a theoretical framework for this study. The two

theories are interconnected and serve as the foundation for a text selection model developed to build community in the classroom while still addressing each student's individual needs.

First, learner-centered ideology informed this study. The learner-centered approach to curriculum involves an effort to create and use the curriculum so students' needs and immediate interests furnish the starting point of education (Schiro, 2013). Theorists John Dewey (1938), Jean Piaget (1957), and Lev Vygotsky (1978), whose works collectively focused on how students learn, have informed student-centered learning. Learner-centered educators see the world through the learners' eyes and strive to create and use a curriculum that addresses the learners' needs, interests, and concerns. In a learner-centered classroom, learning becomes more meaningful, engaging, and democratic (Bista, 2011; Marwan, 2017). The learning theory underlying learner-centered ideology is constructivism, the idea that students actively construct their knowledge and that learners' experiences determine reality.

Students matriculate at this school because they want to learn English. The curriculum is based on the CEFR and accurately measures students' performance in terms of skill using standardized benchmarks and summative assessments; however, lessons and formative assessments are deliberately student centered. Instead of designating a list of required readings instructors must teach students, we intended to provide a model so teachers can select books based on students' needs and desires. Because there was no model for selecting fictional texts, there was no practical way for teachers to choose fictional literature for their classes. Therefore, instructors could not develop a student-centered formative practice.

The second element of the theoretical framework is SOC theory, which establishes that people want to be part of a readily available, supportive, and dependable group (Gusfield, 1975). McMillan and Chavis's (1986) SOC theory serves as a theoretical foundation of this research. When a class collectively reads literature, the social fabric of that class can strengthen, fostering understanding and cooperation. Moua-Vue (2017) examined many challenges and obstacles international students encounter when studying in the United States. Like domestic students, international students face challenges in the transition to college, like adjusting to a new environment, being away from home for the first time, choosing a major, and developing effective study habits. However, they also face added challenges, such as language barriers, cultural differences, alternative academic teaching styles, classroom expectations, difficulty in developing relationships with domestic students, and a lack of social support. Research has shown classes that collectively read literature works build healthier classroom communities (Barstow, 2003; Gusfield, 1975; Harris, 2002; Laufgraben, 2006; Raphael et al., 1997). Common reading programs have been integrated into many university new student orientations to emphasize community building because assigning summer reading gives students from different backgrounds a shared experience (Ferguson, 2006). Moderated reading discussions recognize the variety of student perspectives and offer opportunities to model academic participation.

I integrated SOC theory into this study's theoretical framework because multinational students are unquestionably disconnected from their home lives, families, and cultures. As a result, these students are prone to culture shock, acculturative stress, and depression (Gómez et al., 2014; Moua-Vue, 2017; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). A

school is more than just a place of learning for international students. In many ways, the school takes the place of family for influence, integration, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connections (Schneider et al., 2012). Students who develop a SOC are happier, more confident, more motivated, and more likely to achieve their goals than students who do not. Classroom reading groups are a powerful and effective way to establish a classroom SOC.

Research Questions

The purpose of this action research investigation was to identify an effective strategy to select reading material and to foster student engagement for multinational adult learners enrolled at a language school. Four English language teachers participated in a series of interviews to explore this diverse group of students' shared interests. This study aimed to develop an instructional tool educators can use to purposefully select fiction. When an instructor selects a work of literature with an appropriate reading level, how can they be sure the content is thematically appropriate and culturally relevant for international adult learners? I conducted an action research investigation to discover the elements that would allow me to build a comprehensive model for selecting fiction. This study considered two research questions:

1. What characteristics of literature do teachers of multinational students identify as important when selecting texts for adult English Language Learners?
2. How do these characteristics regarding text selection contribute to a model in this context?

I developed these research questions to discover which elements were essential to creating a model to align fictional literature with our ESL curriculum. If my colleagues

and I were able to identify these characteristics, we could build a tool that would allow instructors to select a work of literature at the appropriate reading level that appeals to a wide variety of adult, international student interests. MEA's curriculum would become more nuanced because faculty would scaffold learning activities directly related to the literature. Curriculum would support students' learning experiences due to strengthening classroom communities by exchanging ideas and unique perspectives. As a result, students would read, listen, and speak the English language more fluently.

I selected an action research methodology to investigate the research questions because it balances inquiry used in a collaborative context with data-driven analysis to solve a problem (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Mills, 2018). Action research is an inductive process. Researchers collect data, identify patterns, and examine them to describe a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I collected detailed information from participants and analyzed patterns in the data to develop a model for aligning works of fiction with an ESL curriculum for international adult learners. The backgrounds and experiences of multicultural, multilingual sojourner students played an essential role in developing a model for selecting fiction. Though their cultures, languages, educational backgrounds, and experiences are unique, broad patterns emerged that united them as sojourning language learners studying in the United States. I then developed a model for aligning literature with an English language curriculum by analyzing these patterns.

Researcher Positionality

This study's research questions are concerned with how teachers can effectively select fiction for their students. The fiction teachers asked me to read when I was in high

school is not what I would choose for students. I grew up in a predominantly White, suburban, middle-class town in 1990s New Jersey. However, in most of my experiences as an educator, I have been a community outsider. My educational experiences include teaching English and film studies to Black and Hispanic students in an urban New York City public school in a poverty-stricken neighborhood in the South Bronx; teaching English at an all-boys public school in the rural desert community of Shahama, roughly 20 miles north of Abu Dhabi; and administering an ESL program for sojourning international students in the center of Manhattan. I have learned students must collaborate and contribute to the lessons based upon their unique experiences. That is why it is more important for instructors to select literature that resonates with students more than it does with their teachers.

Educators like me must reflect on our worldview because our fundamental beliefs and experiences affect how we examine and explore research (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Positionality reflects a researcher's race, gender, social class background, and sexual orientation concerning the study's context, the participant group, and the community (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers must be mindful throughout the research process because the researcher's position affects every phase—from constructing the research problem to inviting others to participate. The degree to which researchers position themselves as insiders or outsiders also determines how they frame epistemological, methodological, and ethical issues (Herr & Anderson, 2015). In this study, I acted as an insider in collaboration with four instructors who are also insiders. Insider researchers work together with other insiders to have a collective impact on the school setting and engage in a more democratic study. The aim of this research was to contribute to our

knowledge base about our ESL students, improve our practices for connecting literature to our curriculum, and transform our classrooms into more communal spaces.

In my role as MEA's director of curriculum and instruction, I am responsible for directly supervising faculty. In this role, I have taken an adaptive leadership approach: maintaining transparency, working to create an environment that embraces the diversity of views, taking into account others' feelings, and working collaboratively with my colleagues to solve problems and create positive organizational change (Heifetz et al., 2009). Reflecting this management approach, my role in this study was as a collaborator with my colleagues. I have worked with the four faculty members selected for this research for at least 3 years, and throughout this time, our relationship has been open, collaborative, and professional. Because of my leadership approach, I did not anticipate power relations to be an issue within this study's context.

Research Design

This action research design employed exploratory qualitative methods in a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Action research is a reflective, cyclical inquiry process that a researcher undertakes in collaboration with others to address a particular problem (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Rather than creating a model before the study begins and testing it *on* participants, this model was created *with* participants and evolved as my international students' understanding deepened. I organized and categorized data into patterns to produce a descriptive, narrative synthesis (Mills, 2018). Qualitative research is interested in learning about people's experiences and understanding how people construct and make sense of their world. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument in

data collection and analysis, the process is inductive, and a thick description characterizes the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of grounded theory is to discover emerging patterns in data and generate a theory from data (Walsh et al., 2015). I used emergent coding to identify themes and patterns that repeatedly appeared in the data (Maxwell, 2012).

As of February 2020, 1,100 multinational adult students from over 80 countries were enrolled at the MEA New York City campus. Faculty teach six levels of ESL in addition to Business English and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) courses. The school has 10 classrooms and is located on the entire second floor of a building in the center of Manhattan, steps away from Penn Station and a short walk from Times Square. Twenty instructors teach at MEA, all of whom have bachelor's degrees, New York State teaching licenses, teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) certificates, and at least 1 year of experience teaching ESL to adult learners.

Action research focuses on solving local problems teachers face in our communities. Action research is practitioner research; its purpose is to engage the researcher and participants in the inquiry process to solve a practical problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This research focuses on a specific problem of practice; is emergent; engages participants as coinvestigators; considers the researcher's role as an insider or outsider; and promotes collecting and analyzing multiple forms of data in a systematic, cyclical way. This research design promotes a collaborative dynamic between the researcher and participants to explore how teaching and learning practices can improve in a local community. All forms of action research can also advance social justice and make

an actual change for historically marginalized and chronically underachieving students. As such, this research should contribute to students' increased well-being (Kinsler, 2010).

Qualitative research is concerned with understanding how people interpret experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of this study was to create a model that aligns fictional literature with an ESL curriculum designed for multicultural, adult language learners, so I considered instructors' varied experiences teaching a unique student body.

The primary instruments in this study were qualitative interviews. These interviews were conducted individually in a virtual setting using semi-structured, open-ended questions to elicit participants' views and opinions. This method provides an understanding of participants' experiences from their perspectives because it allows them to voice their ideas, opinions, values, and knowledge on the topic (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The advantages of using interviews as the primary instrument are the researcher has firsthand experience with participants and can record information as it occurs (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In particular, semi-structured interviews were useful because as participants co-constructed the narrative, I explored their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about how students learn. Follow-up questions probed responses to encourage participants to extend and deepen their answers. I conducted the semi-structured interviews using a Delphi method protocol.

Action research is conducted in a local context to support educational reform; therefore, I only considered instructors who were teaching at MEA for this study. At the beginning of the study, I sent questionnaires to a group of instructors in a purposive

sample. The questionnaire's purpose was to identify expert teachers who had the knowledge, experience, and background to inform and contribute to creating the model. I identified and invited these experts to participate in a semi-structured interview process. Data were collected in a multistage process to collect informed opinions from experts and build a consensus using a modified Delphi method as the primary interview technique (Gordon, 2011; Skulmoski et al., 2007). The Delphi method represents a synthesis of opinions from a purposefully selected group and is especially well suited to research when there is incomplete knowledge about a problem or phenomenon. The Delphi method is based on the principle that knowledge from a group of individuals with expertise is more accurate than knowledge from a group without expertise. I designed interviews to elicit ideas important to subsequent analysis.

During the first round of interviews, I conducted semi-structured interviews with four ESL instructors using a modified Delphi method. Although I prepared a list of questions, semi-structured interviews allowed the flexibility to ask those questions informally and in any order (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used interview information to create and later revise the model, so the interview incorporated questions about the model's characteristics. Action research is inquiry done *by* or *with* insiders, but never *to* or *on* them; therefore, interview data informed adjustments to the model (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Zoom was used to record the interviews and provide a written transcription. As data emerged, I began to code and identified patterns and relationships, seeking to learn what this disparate group of students had in common and act upon that information to construct a model (Efron & Ravid, 2013). This study design was iterative.

Participants' responses affected how and which questions were asked and data collected from earlier interviews shaped later interviews.

Throughout and in between interview rounds, I analyzed participants' data from the previous round. I coded and interpreted data and identified themes used to develop a prototype model and questions for the second round of interviews.

In the second round of interviews, I introduced the prototype and asked participants for feedback. Again, I conducted semi-structured interviews using a modified Delphi method in search of an emerging consensus. I used controlled feedback to inform them of other participants' perspectives as I shared the model. In Delphi interviews, participants are encouraged to revise their earlier responses after considering the responses of the study's other participants (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). During this process, the answers' range decreased, and the group converged toward a consensus that allowed me to refine the prototype.

Once the interviews were complete, I analyzed data for broad themes and refined the prototype a second time; I then asked participants to test the model in class to affirm this study's work. After participants tested the model, there was a third round of semi-structured interviews to discuss implementation results.

Significance of the Study

I selected action research for this study because I aimed to improve practices at our school. Because I could not find a solution to our problem in the established research, I decided to take an innovative approach. Since insiders are involved in the inquiry setting and engaged in the study's context, a tremendous benefit of action research is this

research's findings will be directly applied and immediately improve the school's practice.

This study was conducted with instructors teaching in a language school, and results may not be generalized for traditional K–12 schools, university programs, or language learning programs. This research's stakeholders are not students who speak the same primary language; they speak many different languages and attend the same class. Local instructors at the school site were the intended audience for this study. As a result, they should have a way to choose works of literature for classes effectively. This study aimed to generate local, context-dependent knowledge, not to be generalizable or demonstrate external validity. However, New York City has dozens of language schools, and I expect this research to benefit other language schools in New York whose curriculum aligns with a similar framework.

This study offers insight for researchers who are interested in developing a model to align works of fiction for adults studying ESL. This research identified the importance of acculturation as a key finding. This is significant because instructors who consider literature selection through a lens of acculturation can choose works of literature for adult international students effectively. Instructors can deliver comprehensive English language instruction that is balanced, rigorous, and appealing to students. Works of literature can be appropriately scaffolded, so faculty do not reuse the same book at multiple levels. Teachers can strengthen SOC in classes with international students when they collectively read fiction.

This research is especially relevant for instructors of international students and students enrolled at language schools. Academia has mostly ignored this student

population. These are older students who have taken control of their education and are self-directing learning to improve their lives and the lives of their families back home. These students take significant risks both personally and economically by leaving their families. Language schools are expensive. Students on an academic student visa (F1) are not permitted to work in the United States and must show they can afford tuition and the cost of living while studying (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). Loans, grants, and scholarships do not exist for these students. There has been little research conducted on sojourning adult learners matriculating in language schools.

Limitations of the Study

This study's limitations are that it only aligns literature with a framework used in language learning courses in Europe but infrequently used in the United States. Results of this research can make an everyday impact on MEA's learning environment, curriculum, instructors, and students, and I hope other language schools, especially those who teach adult ESL students in New York City, benefit from this study. However, the literature with which students identify is entirely subjective. The works of literature students find meaningful might not interest students at other schools. Students who matriculate at the school in 10 years might not identify with the books students find meaningful today.

Nevertheless, because the research methods in this study are sound, the study should be able to be replicated to align fiction with curriculum and student interest in similar learning environments. To ensure this research's reliability, I have written a comprehensive analysis and justified the developed working model.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 served as the introduction to this action research study by including the problem of practice, research questions, the researcher's positionality, the study's significance, and brief discussions of the theoretical framework and research design. Chapter 2 provides the literature review that discusses the theoretical framework at length. Chapter 3 discusses methodology, the rationale for the methodology, research methods, participants, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 4 reviews the research findings. Chapter 5 discusses the implications for future practice and study limitations. Included at the end of the study are references and appendices.

Glossary of Terms

1. Acculturative stress: the psychological impact of adaptation to a new culture
2. Common European Framework (CEFR): a guideline used to describe learners' achievements in foreign languages. There are six levels of the Common European Framework: A1 (low beginner), A2 (high beginner), B1 (low intermediate), B2 (high intermediate), C1 (low advanced), and C2 (high advanced).
3. Culture shock: contact with or immersion in a different culture and loss of the safety net of predictable social roles, cues, and practices
4. English as a foreign language (EFL): the teaching of English to people living in another country who speak a different language
5. English as a second language (ESL): the teaching of English to people who speak a different language and who live in a country where English is the primary language spoken

6. F1 visa: student academic visa that allows international students to enter the United States as a full-time student at an accredited institution
7. Intensive English program (IEP): a specially designed program for international students who want to improve their English language skills
8. K–12: from kindergarten to 12th grade
9. Language school: a privately owned school that teaches ESL to international students and often maintains student nonimmigrant visas
10. L1 and L2 language: L1 language is a student's native language. L2 language is a student's non-native language.
11. Peer reading: a strategy in which students read aloud to develop fluency and build connection with each other and the text
12. Readability: how students interpret a text
13. Sense of community theory: maintains people in communities have a sense of belonging and commitment to each other that influences each individual's behavior
14. Sojourners: nonimmigrant students who reside temporarily in the United States.
15. Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) certificate: for teachers who work with non-native English speakers living in an English-speaking country. Teachers help students learn English to communicate in their daily life in an English-speaking country.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this action research was to develop a model for selecting fictional literature for multinational adult ESL students enrolled at Manhattan English Academy (MEA). Four English language teachers participated in a series of interviews to explore this diverse group of students' shared interests. When selecting fiction, considering the ability levels and educational backgrounds of students is crucial. However, perhaps more importantly, the experiences of multicultural, multilingual sojourner students also played an essential role in developing the model. Though students' cultures, languages, educational backgrounds, and unique experiences were different, broad patterns emerged that united them as language learners studying in the United States. The four instructional participants and I developed a model for aligning literature with an English-language curriculum employed across six different school curriculum levels by analyzing these patterns.

As I shared in Chapter 1, 2 years ago, I observed a high-advanced level English as a second language (ESL) class full of frustrated students struggling to read John Steinbeck's (1946) *The Pearl*. Their instructor and I had discussed incorporating a work of literature into this curriculum agreed *The Pearl* was an appropriate selection. However, the instructor quit the reading after just 2 weeks. There was no model for aligning English language fiction with an ESL curriculum that considered the reading ability levels,

educational backgrounds, cultural characteristics, and the unique interests of multinational adult language learners.

Two questions guided this action research investigation:

1. What characteristics of literature do teachers of multinational students identify as important when selecting texts for adult English language learners?
2. How do these characteristics regarding text selection contribute to a model in this context?

This literature review was an essential part of the research. A thorough literature review not only investigates current research but builds on it and allows discoveries to bring new insight and advances to the discipline (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The review frames the initial research, assuming it will continue as the research is carried out (Herr & Anderson, 2015). It grounds the proposed study. Also, it allows researchers to reflect on problems through other lenses (Mills, 2018). The literature review demonstrates underlying assumptions, proves the researcher has knowledge about the research, allows researchers to identify gaps in the body of literature, and helps refine research questions. The nature of qualitative research is exploratory. In this qualitative design, the literature helped substantiate the problem as I explored participants' distinctive views (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I managed and evaluated the review through reflective oversight, a continuous reflection process that regulates, assesses, and corrects the literature review process (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

This literature review provides a comprehensive understanding of the background of the problem of practice, the theoretical framework, and the methodological framework. I closely examined sources' credibility and focused on collecting primary sources (Efron

& Ravid, 2013). I collected research information from ERIC, EBSCO, PsycINFO, *The Internet TESL Journal*, Google Scholar, Mendeley, and textbooks from courses at the University of South Carolina.

Background on Problem of Practice

At the center of this study, the problem of practice is that I have struggled to find an effective way to select fictional texts for classes at our language school for multinational adult learners. The purpose of this action research investigation was to identify an effective strategy to select reading material and to foster student engagement for multinational adult learners enrolled at a language school. Four English language teachers participated in a series of interviews to explore this diverse group of students' shared interests. To understand the complexity of this problem, I examined two aspects of the problem. First, what is the importance of peer reading? Second, what are the unique needs of a sojourning multicultural student body?

The Importance of Peer Reading

Peer reading allows opportunities for active learning through shared learning and understanding. When done effectively, students report reading a broader range of material and employing more active learning processes through collaboration (Finlay & Faulkner, 2005; Lee, 2014). Lessons that provided opportunities for active participation through cooperative learning activities showed students valued these lessons, particularly the range of activities, the opportunities for small-group and full-class discussions, the strong emphasis on one or two main ideas, and the authenticity of the tasks (Cavanagh, 2011). Common reading programs explicitly designed for students show positive effects on modeling intellectual engagement, broadening perspectives, and creating connections

between students and the larger community (Edington et al., 2015). Although individual institutions develop programs based on institutional culture and available resources, certain factors have contributed to the program's overall performance, such as program schedules, book selection, discussion duration, and incorporation of unique discussion elements.

Collectively reading literature creates healthier classroom cultures (Boff et al., 2005; Kuh et al., 1994). Collectively reading literature is beneficial because of the potential to increase the engagement of students' learning experiences. Common reading programs that form learning communities based on the shared experience of reading a text have been integrated into many university new student orientations to emphasize community building (Daugherty & Hayes, 2012; Randall, 2016). These programs often anchor a college orientation because of the potential to bring different disciplines and college departments together in ways that extend student learning and engagement beyond the classroom. Assigning a book over the summer offers a shared opportunity for new students from different backgrounds (Ferguson, 2006). During orientation, moderated discussions of the reading introduce the diversity of student viewpoints and provide an occasion for modeling intellectual engagement.

The Unique Needs of Sojourning Multinational Students

Since the 1950s, the number of international students enrolled in U.S. universities and colleges has experienced steady and substantial growth (Zong et al., 2019). In the 1949–1950 school year, there were just 26,000 international students enrolled, and the number doubled every decade, reaching a record high of 1.1 million resident students in 2016–2017. International students also increased as a share of the total population

enrolled in U.S. higher education: from 1% in 1949–1950 to 5% in 2016–17. In 2016–2017, 33,000 students enrolled in ESL programs at universities in the United States. However, these numbers do not take into account the international students studying at English language schools. When combined, that number increases to more than 100,000 students enrolled in English language learning programs (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2018). Researchers have mostly ignored this large group of students.

Studies have shown international students face additional pressure and problems when they study in the United States: language barriers, cultural differences, alternative academic teaching styles, classroom expectations, difficulty in developing relationships with domestic students, and a lack of social support. Sojourning students encounter unique problems adjusting to different social, cultural, language, and educational systems associated with increased sociocultural, psychological, and language-related stress, such as loneliness, depression, culture shock, and acculturative stress (Dentakos et al., 2017; Lombard, 2014; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Szabo et al., 2016). Adjusting to a completely different classroom environment is just one problem international students face in the United States. International students at language schools are challenged with learning in an unfamiliar classroom setting. Unlike international students who matriculate at a U.S. high school or university, these students have to connect with classmates whose cultures, backgrounds, and native languages are all different (Moua-Vue, 2017). Acculturation models found language barriers, educational difficulties, loneliness, discrimination, and practical problems associated with changing environments were causes of acculturative stress (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Academic institutions that enroll international students must address this significant problem.

The majority of international undergraduates suffer from some degree of cultural stress, especially stress related to culture shock, homesickness, and perceived hate (Rajab et al., 2014). A sense of belongingness is central to international students' success (Glass & Westmont, 2014). Cross-cultural contact between international students is strengthened by a sense of belonging (Lashari et al., 2018). Programs can be improved and designed to assist international students in adapting to a new cultural setting, including promoting a sense of community (SOC) through intercultural interactions and encounters. Research has shown peer reading programs enhance a sense of belongingness, lessen the effects of racism, and provide a secure foundation for exploring cross-cultural relationships (Salisbury, 2011).

International students come from different ethnic backgrounds, have been educated in diverse educational systems, and have different interests. Collaborative reading interventions help language learners reinforce English language skills (Adesope et al., 2011). Peer reading also helps multicultural and multilingual students establish a SOC (Turner & Kim 2005). International students will openly and effectively learn a foreign language if teachers can find literature that will cultivate and foster a classroom community.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study, based on SOC theory and learner-centered ideology, explains the path of this research and grounds it in constructs.

Sense of Community Theory

SOC theory served as the theoretical foundation that informed this research. McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined SOC as the sense of belonging to a group, the

feeling that group members matter to each other, and the shared notion that the group meets a need. McMillan and Chavis established four elements to building a SOC: (a) membership, the feeling of belonging; (b) influence, a sense of mattering; (c) reinforcement, integration, and fulfillment of needs; and (d) shared emotional connection. A positive SOC is fundamental in what drives people closer together. So, developing a SOC strengthens the social fabric. SOC increases on campuses and in classrooms when mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation among group members increase. Educational institutions can minimize the unique problems international students encounter by creating a sense of community for international students on campus and in class.

In a mixed-methods study, Kirk and Lewis (2015) discovered commuter students who are less likely to persist in their education and engage in campus activities are more likely to suffer from a lack of well-being. Similarly, Lee's (2014) multilevel study of 2,000 15-year-old students found a major predictor of academic success was emotional commitment or a sense of belonging. Capone et al. (2018) advocated the priority of social, group, and community interventions to promote individual well-being. Furthermore, Buckingham et al. (2018) found students tended to find more belonging in smaller relational communities like reading groups than in larger populated environments. Arkoudis et al. (2013) conducted research that contributed to creating the interaction for learning framework, which established basic curriculum design elements educators could use to inform how they can strengthen interactions in teaching and learning contexts among different student groups.

Institutions can assist in developing peer interactions among international students through building and maintaining SOC. Instructors play an important role in promoting a positive SOC in how they structure peer interactions. Buckingham et al. (2018) found small groups, such as classroom communities, were often critical to building positive SOC. Their research demonstrated what made it possible for international students to become members of a common group and included several factors: language, joint activities, shared beliefs and diversity, and issues unique to immigrants. Capone et al. (2018) studied the relationship between classroom SOC, perceptions of classroom climate, collective classroom efficacy in protecting students' rights, classroom perceived justice, and the impact of such variables on students' sense of well-being. Results of the study showed SOC was directly associated with collective efficacy. Furthermore, collective efficacy and SOC were directly related to students' sense of well-being.

Learner-Centered Ideology

Learner-centered or student-centered ideology is organized around the needs and interests of individuals (Schiro, 2013) and informed by theorists such as Dewey (1938), Piaget (1957), and Vygotsky (1978). Learner-centered educators see the world through the learner's eyes and strive to create and use a curriculum that addresses learners' needs, interests, and concerns. Learning becomes more meaningful, engaging, and democratic (Bista, 2011; Marwan, 2017).

The most difficult challenge with developing a model for multinational adults is the students' diversity. Learners need to make meaningful connections with the texts, but the diversity of international students makes selecting a meaningful text for all students complicated. Activities must balance challenge and support to develop students'

intercultural sensitivity (Apedaile & Whitelaw, 2012). Students need to engage in developmental activities focused on nonthreatening shared experiences, similarities, and commonalities. Once students have made connections, activities should shift to the introduction of differences. Research has identified several factors that contribute to intercultural sensitivity. In a quantitative study, Chocce and Bangkok (2014) determined seven critical recurring factors to consider: students' genders, nationalities, personal experiences, educational backgrounds, and foreign language ability; the length of time they have studied abroad; and their interaction with different cultures. Their study showed students' nationalities had the most substantial influence on intercultural sensitivity. Findings suggest educators should provide subject material to students to widen and enrich their worldviews. Courses should include cross-cultural activities and skills for coping with uncertainty and anxiety that enable students to go beyond superficial contact and encourage them to develop meaningful and long-lasting relationships with people from different cultures. The level of intercultural sensitivity among students is positively associated with students' level of ethnic-related diversity engagement (Tamam& Krauss, 2017). Creating a model for choosing literature supports ethnic-related diversity engagement related to interaction attentiveness, openness, and confidence dimensions of intercultural sensitivity.

Studies have supported that reading literature is an effective and powerful instructional method to improve language learners' literacy abilities and intercultural sensitivity (Bae, 2012; Salisbury, 2011). Students' global attitudes and intercultural sensitivity also increased after participating in literature circles because they are social experiences. Salisbury (2011) reviewed participants' literature circle discussions and

personal reading response journals and identified how students interacted with the text. Journal entries showed participants' global attitudes and intercultural sensitivity were positively affected by participating in these discussions. Teachers at every grade level can use globally significant literature and encourage literary exchanges to promote their students' cultural understanding. Reading global literature is an instructional method that significantly improves general literacy ability—especially text-level skills, such as fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing—and intercultural sensitivity in language learners. Teachers have had difficulty using global literature, including multicultural and international literature, because of deficiencies in their awareness of intercultural sensitivity and widespread ignorance of selecting diverse literature (Bae, 2012). However, teachers must recognize the social dimensions at the center of culturally sensitive teaching: identity, community, language, and relationships. Teachers who work with international students should recognize students' cultures are rich, unique, and complex; language is an asset; home environments have capital; and environment matters (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017). These are essential factors to consider when developing foreign language instruction.

Constructivism

A constructivist approach to language learning maintains learning is a social process in which students connect and collaborate. As related to language learning, constructivism postulates students construct knowledge, and language learners build understanding based on experiences with other people and with the environment (Aljohani, 2017; Applefield et al., 2000; Ertmer & Newby, 1993; Ruey, 2010). Teachers

who understand constructivist learning theory recognize their students' unique backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences impact learning.

The constructivist approach explains students learn by constructing an understanding and knowledge of the world by experiencing things and reflecting upon those experiences (Harasim, 2012). Knowledge exists independently, is created to fit reality, and emphasizes the individual's role in making sense of the world. Language learning is most often associated with social constructivism. According to Applefield et al. (2000), social constructivism affirms "the origin of knowledge construction is the social intersection of people, interactions that involve sharing, comparing, and debating among learners and mentors" (p. 38). Throughout this process, learners construct meaning and help others develop meaning. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of social exchanges for cognitive growth, and dialogue becomes the catalyst for knowledge acquisition. Exchanges facilitate understanding through "social interaction, through questioning and explaining, challenging, and offering timely support and feedback" (39). Therefore, the ideal learning environment for language instruction is a learning community. In a constructivist approach to learning, the teacher's goal is to stimulate thinking in learners, resulting in meaningful learning, deeper understanding, and transfer of learning to real-world contexts. The role of the teacher is to instruct the student on how to construct meaning and how to "effectively monitor, evaluate, and update those constructions and to align and design experiences for the learner so that authentic, relevant contexts can be experienced" (Ertmer & Newby, 1993, p. 59). A constructivist framework leads teachers to incorporate strategies that encourage knowledge construction through primarily social learning processes in which students

develop their understanding through interactions with peers and their teacher (Applefield et al., 2000; Huber & Moallem, 2000). As a result, the learner is no longer a simple passive receiver of knowledge. Instead, the learner is actively constructing knowledge.

In adult instruction, teachers must acknowledge and adapt to what learners bring to the classroom (Owusu-Agyeman et al., 2018; Zhang, 2008). Adult learning patterns are elaborate, complex, and reflective of their beliefs and their fully formed sense of identities (Kasworm, 2003). The constructivist approach for adult courses implies educational leaders should train English language teachers as effective problem solvers, active learners, and reflective thinkers on their learning and teaching (Ebrahimi, 2015). Adult learners require a flexible model that allows them to make choices and contextualize learning in a manner appropriate to their professional practice while also developing as members of their learning community (Busher et al., 2014; Chiu, 2009; Cornelius et al., 2011). Students and teachers often communicate in language classes on the periphery of lessons, at topic boundaries, at breaks, and after class. This type of talk is essential and needs to become more central in classroom discourse because student stories and experiences are often a part of ESL pedagogy and lesson planning (Simpson, 2011). Adult practitioners and educators also need to realize the importance of identifying adult learners' unique experiences and integrating them into classroom discussion (Chu & Tsai, 2009). The constructivist approach promotes learning through building on those experiences.

Shawer (2010) identified three curriculum creation methods: curriculum transmission, curriculum development, and curriculum making. Curriculum transmitters follow the curriculum but do not contribute to its development in any way. Curriculum

developers work with specialists to provide insight. Curriculum makers work with students to strengthen their curriculum. Teachers who employ a curriculum-transmission or a curriculum-development approach rely on constructivist teaching practices, but curriculum makers engage in authentic, constructivist practices and select topics in consultation with students to build and exchange knowledge. Structure still exists in this kind of constructivist learning environment. Once teachers understand students' needs, they organize lessons focused on explicit topics, tasks, or essential questions (Applefield et al., 2000). I developed the model in this study using this approach.

From a constructivist perspective, a student's individual development should focus on instruction, and learning is a facilitation activity in which students create meaning (Ebrahimi, 2015; Harasim, 2012). Both individual and environmental factors are crucial to learning because the specific interaction between these two variables creates knowledge (Ertmer & Newby, 1993). As a result, because the learner can interpret multiple realities, the learner can better deal with real-life situations. If students learn to solve problems, they can apply existing knowledge to other situations, which is the point of language instruction. Students need to be able to apply language skills learned in class to real-life situations.

Methodological Framework

The methodological framework describes the techniques used to collect and analyze the data in this study.

Grounded Theory Approach

Grounded theory is a methodology Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed to build theory from data. Grounded theory develops inductively throughout a study through the

researcher's constant interaction with their data (Maxwell, 2012). Theory is thus grounded in the data collected to drive the study. Grounded theory was essentially developed for theory building; theory continuously emerges from the data (Urquhart et al., 2010). A grounded theory should emerge without the researcher's interference with the information or the researcher's theoretical ideas (Dey, 1999). Instead, the researcher derives a theory grounded in participants' views (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The process involves multiple stages of data collection and refining data as they emerge. The researcher interprets the data without bringing assumptions, expectations, or ideas and lets data "speak for itself" by conducting several coding tasks to discover core conceptual categories and relationships. Producing a theory from data makes grounded theory especially useful in areas where little or no previous theory exists (Dey, 1999).

Grounded theory aims to identify a core category or a main conceptual element connecting all other categories. It must be central and must develop the theory (Charmaz, 2014); therefore, thick description is essential in grounded theory because it aims to discover emerging patterns in data and generate a theory from the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Walsh et al., 2015). A constructivist approach to grounded theory acknowledges how participants construct meanings and actions and recognizes the theory is an interpretation reliant on the researcher's point of view (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher constructs processes and products, which "occur under pre-existing structural conditions, arising in emergent situations, and are influenced by the researcher's perspectives, privileges, positions, interactions, and geographical locations" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 40). The researcher must recognize these conditions.

In this action research study, I focused on creating a model. The grounded theory that emerged was substantive rather than formal, focused on everyday real-world situations and thus practical. Theoretical sampling, in which the researcher compiles, codes, and analyzes data, guided my data collection. Sampling also helps the researcher decide what data to collect next and develop a theory as it emerges (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data are analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis. This method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences and identify patterns. The researcher arranges patterns in relationships with one another to build a grounded theory. A theory emerges through a close and careful analysis of the data.

Delphi Study

Dalkey and Helmer (1963) developed the Delphi technique to achieve a consensus about real-world knowledge. The Delphi technique is a widely used and accepted method for gathering data from participants in their field of expertise. It is an iterative group communication process that aims to achieve a convergence of opinions on a specific real-world problem (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). This technique allows participants to reassess their initial judgments and provides anonymity to participants through a controlled feedback process.

Okoli and Pawlowski (2004) developed a set of detailed guidelines for the Delphi technique. These guidelines form a systematic procedure that results in both theoretical and practical contributions. Phase 1 includes carefully selecting qualified experts for the panels. This phase is crucial because study participants need to understand the issues to contribute reliably to the later phases. Phase 2 consists of data collection. It takes place

through an asynchronous brainstorming process. Each participant anonymously lists suggestions regarding the problem from their perspective. Phase 3 is categorizing and forming consolidated lists of all responses. Participants again validate that list. Phase 4 involves narrowing down the lists by asking participants to choose the most critical factors. Phase 5 aims for a consensus. Panelists rank the factors and potentially argue for their categorizing. The researcher compiles these rankings and arguments, and participants review them for consensus. This process can take up to three rounds. As panelists remain anonymous throughout the procedure, the list of ranked, prioritized factors provides the experts' common opinions without distractions from their status, reputation, or organization. Three iterations are often sufficient to collect information to reach a consensus (Hsu & Sanford, 2007).

The Grounded Delphi Method

Grounded theory principles can enhance the efficacy of the Delphi technique in data collection and analysis phases. Päivärinta et al. (2011) contributed to the research method literature by proposing a 4-step data collection model and analysis for Delphi studies (see Figure 2.1). The grounded Delphi method model adopts principles from grounded theory for theory creation from the beginning of the research process and throughout the research design stage.

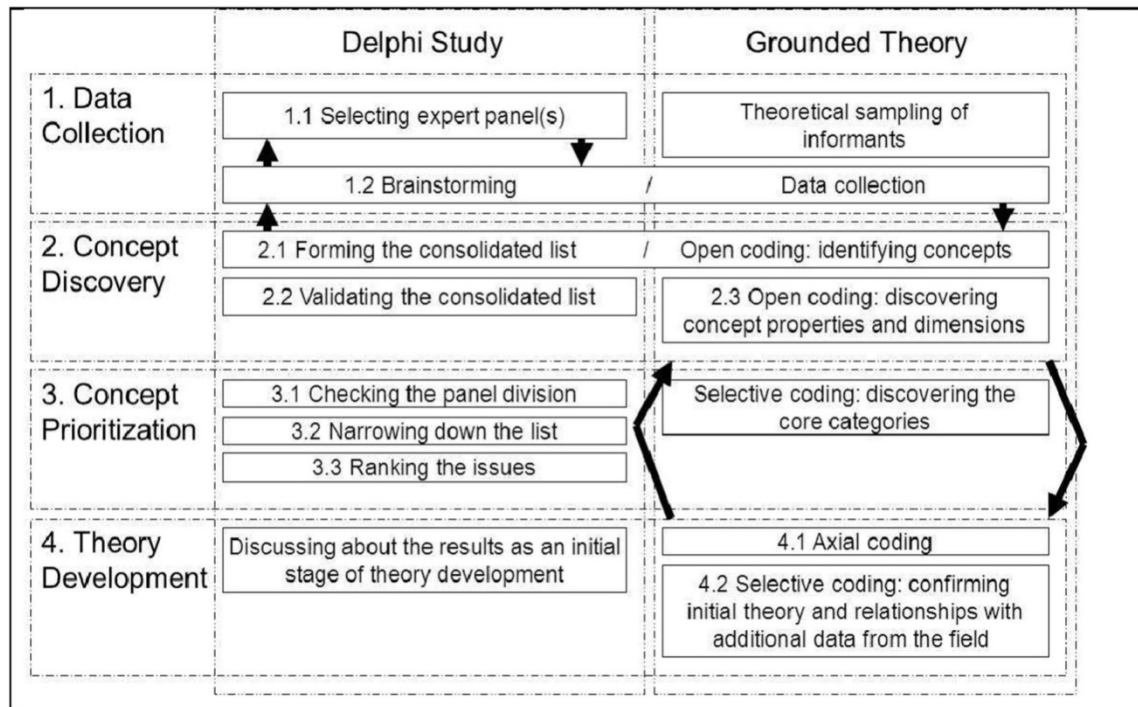


Figure 2.1 *Grounded Delphi Method*

Note. How the Delphi technique and grounded theory are used together. Reprinted from “Grounding Theory From Delphi Studies,” by T. Päivärinta, S. Pekkola, & C. Moe, 2011, p. 5, (<https://doi.org/10.1.1.665.3318>), with permission.

The grounded Delphi method consists of four Phases. In Phase 1, the researcher selects a panel of experts using purposive survey methods and interviews. Brainstorming follows as it forms the basis for data collection. In the Delphi method (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004; Schmidt 1997), researchers use the brainstorming phase to collect panel members’ responses and make a consolidated list. In Phase 2, both Delphi studies and grounded theory aim to form abstract classes of concepts. Delphi studies do this by analyzing results from the brainstorming and identifying a consolidated list of issues. In Phase 3, the researcher prioritizes concepts. Once the researcher creates and validates a consolidated list, participants begin to narrow the list of issues down to a manageable size

to rank them. Finally, in Phase 4, a theory is developed. The expert participants' concept prioritization indicates the most critical issues related to the concept categories. Those concept categories are selected for further theory development, and axial and selective coding steps can focus on the categories involved in prioritizing issues to form more detailed explanations and theories.

Summary

Aligning literature with an adult ESL curriculum is challenging because of a wide disparity between adult students' English reading ability levels and the thematic content in English language works of fiction. In the United States, frameworks that align fiction to reading level are designed for native-English-speaking students and/or young learners. Many English language learners enrolled in U.S. language schools are adults who have already completed university coursework in their home countries and quickly lose interest in reading about content irrelevant to their lives and experiences. At the time of this research, there were no models that align adult international students' interests with their English language reading capability levels.

Including works of fiction in an ESL curriculum will not only help sojourning students improve their English language skills, but it will also mitigate the unique problems these international students encounter and foster a SOC within the class. Sojourning students encounter specific problems adjusting to different social, cultural, language, and educational systems associated with increased sociocultural, psychological, and language-related stress, such as loneliness, depression, culture shock, and acculturative stress. One common problem international students face in the United States is adjusting to a different classroom environment. International students at language

schools face the difficulty of learning in an unfamiliar classroom setting. However, unlike international students who matriculate at a U.S. high school or university, these students have to connect with classmates whose cultures, backgrounds, and native languages are all different.

In language schools, classes with diverse international students who seemingly have little in common are typical. Students are unfamiliar with the United States and the English language. Also, students are unfamiliar with the languages, customs, and perspectives of classmates. Effectively selecting works of literature can have a significant impact on developing understanding and can lead to community building. It is crucial to select literature that leads to shared social and emotional connections to develop engaging classroom communities.

Educational institutions can minimize the unique problems international students encounter by creating a SOC for them on campus and in class. Institutions can help develop peer interactions among international students, and instructors can play an essential role in structuring peer interactions with students from diverse backgrounds to develop a SOC. For international students, reading groups would facilitate learning the English language and provide them with an open, accepting community far from home.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The purpose of this action research investigation was to identify an effective strategy to select reading material and to foster student engagement for multinational adult learners enrolled at a language school. Four English language teachers participated in a series of interviews to explore this diverse group of students' shared interests. This study aimed to develop an instructional tool educators can use to select fiction purposefully. Language schools enroll diverse groups of adult students with distinct native languages, cultures, and academic backgrounds. Some students' countries have excellent educational systems. In other countries, inequality, inefficient school networks, and a lack of qualified teachers plague schools. Some countries have no compulsory education at all. In English as a second language (ESL) classes at language schools throughout the United States, student ages can range from 18 to 80 years old in the same class. For instructors who want to integrate fictional literature into their curriculum, selecting a book is not as easy as choosing a reading level. Teachers must also consider vocabulary; readability; and students' nationalities, cultures, academic levels, educational experiences, and interests, among many other elements.

As the director of curriculum and instruction at a language school, I posed the following are questions to investigate this Problem of Practice:

1. What characteristics of literature do teachers of multinational students identify as important when selecting texts for adult English language learners?

2. How do these characteristics regarding text selection contribute to a model in this context?

This chapter provides a detailed description of how I designed, enacted, and analyzed this action research investigation. It includes a detailed description of the context, the teachers who participated in this study, and my positionality to provide the background necessary to understand the decisions I made regarding implementing a model for effectively selecting fictional literature for multinational students. I also provide an overview of the study's methodological design and rationale for why I selected this design to study the impact of using fictional literature to improve the sense of community (SOC) in a multinational classroom. This chapter concludes with a thorough and detailed description of how I implemented the intervention and analyzed its impact.

Context, Participants, and Researcher Positionality

This section discusses the context, participants, and my positionality within the study. The context provides the background of the research as well as insight into the research questions. I provide background information about the participants and why they were selected for this investigation. Finally, I give insight into my positionality and how my identity is positioned within the social context of this research.

Context

This study took place at Manhattan English Academy (MEA), a language school with 1,100 international students. Students learn ESL at this school using a language learning curriculum based on the Common European Framework (CEFR), which effectively divides ELLs into six proficiency levels. MEA's campus has 10 classrooms

on the second floor of a building in Manhattan. There is a whiteboard, a computer with high-speed internet access, and a large high-definition television in each classroom. Each classroom has enough room for approximately 20 students. All students are multinational nonimmigrant F1 visa holders who study English in the United States. An F1 visa allows international students to pursue educational opportunities in the United States. Students come here to study English for many reasons. Some students come to the United States to improve their English to find better job opportunities in their home countries. Others want to get a degree from an American university but must improve their English before being accepted. Students who want to learn English and wish to stay in the United States longer than a tourist visa allows enroll at MEA. No matter students' reasons, all are required to attend classes at least 18 hours per week. Students are not allowed to work in the United States and are permitted to study English at a language school for a maximum of 3 years. MEA has classes every day of the week.

Participants

Teachers formed the population of this action research study. The ideal sample consisted of four teachers selected using a purposeful sampling method. A maximum sample strategy enabled me to collect specific research data from the four teachers. Each teacher was a full-time (40 hours per week), American, native-English-speaking instructor with a bachelor's degree, a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) certificate, international teaching experience, and at least 18 months experience teaching at MEA. The four teachers selected for this study teach low advanced (C1) and high advanced (C2) ESL. Three instructors were men, and one instructor was a woman. Two instructors were Black, and two instructors were White. New York State caps class

size at language schools at 18 students per class, and instructors each had a classroom. Each section of ESL shared a vertically designed CEFR curriculum. Instructors of advanced-level students were selected for this study to avoid variables such as readability, students' discomfort communicating in English, students' reliance and overuse of their native languages, and the misunderstandings that can quickly occur when teaching lower-level ESL students.

Positionality

The role of the researcher is essential in action research. I have been working in the field of education for 17 years. I previously worked as a curriculum developer for a national for-profit company, a public high-school English teacher and arts-education liaison in the South Bronx, an ESL teacher and department coordinator in Abu Dhabi, and the academic director and designated school official for three language schools in New York City. In my current role, I needed to address challenges and biases during data collection. I hired two of the instructors who participated in this study, and all four report directly to me. These instructors are independent contractors who can be released from their contracts at any time, for almost any reason. I needed to be mindful of the interview questions I asked because these teachers might shape or change their responses to fit a perceived situation. Instructors might feel compelled to answer interview questions in a specific way to please me as their immediate supervisor instead of answering honestly. I sought to build relationships with faculty that allowed me to collect credible interview data. Everyone brings biases, predispositions, attitudes, and physical characteristics that affect the interaction and data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), so I needed to remain nonjudgmental, sensitive, and respectful throughout the research process.

Research Design

Historical Review of the Methodology

Action research is practitioner research primarily conducted by educators who want to improve their schools and practices and help students learn more effectively (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Mills, 2018). Action research takes place in schools and local communities, and the researchers directly involve themselves in the research (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Mills, 2018). Traditional research methods struggle to control all the factors that affect teaching outcomes without disrupting the natural classroom environment. However, action researchers acknowledge and embrace these complications as a natural part of classroom life and typically use research approaches that do not require them to randomly assign students in their classes to control and experimental groups (Mills, 2018). Action research adopts aspects of quantitative and qualitative research. However, action researchers differ from traditional researchers who study something other than their practices. Action researchers are committed to taking action and affecting positive educational change in their classrooms and schools based on their findings. Because the purpose of action research is to improve local contexts, this research is not meant to be generalizable beyond that setting. I followed five guiding principles of action research throughout this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016):

1. It focuses on a problematic situation in practice.
2. The design of the study is emergent.
3. Researchers engage participants as co-investigators.
4. Action researchers are community insiders.

5. Researchers collect and analyze multiple forms of data in a systematic way as the research process unfolds.

Although action research is seldom statistically generalizable, the generated knowledge can transfer beyond the research setting (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The knowledge gained in my study could transfer to others working in a language school with adult ELLs, a setting largely ignored in research. The model I developed with participants could inform other instructors who want to align fictional literature with their ESL curriculum.

Constructivist theory maintains knowledge exists independently; it is created to fit reality and emphasizes the individual's role in making sense of the world. In action research, researchers collaborate with participants as coinvestigators to construct knowledge. A constructivist approach is a social process that occurs when people connect and collaborate with others (Applefield et al., 2000; Ertmer & Newby, 1993; Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014). People construct meaning, and language learners build knowledge based on experiences with other people and the environment. Constructivist approaches are instrumental in grounded theory methods.

The methodological framework for this research employed a qualitative design that incorporated a constructivist grounded theory and a modified Delphi technique. In qualitative research, the collected data uses narrative, descriptive approaches to understand the way things are and what the research means from participants' perspectives in the study (Mills, 2018). I collected and analyzed qualitative data and developed themes to drive a model's development in this design.

Specific Research Design for the Study

There are four phases in this action research investigation (see Table 3.1), and the instruments used to collect data in this qualitative design were questionnaires and interviews. In Phase 1, I sent a questionnaire to a group of instructors to identify the study's expert participants. In Phase 2, I collaborated with ESL instructors to develop a prototype model for selecting fictional literature for adult learners. Once I analyzed data and created the first model, I collaborated with instructors in Phase 3 to review the model and make adjustments. Once the instructors tested the model, we met in Phase 4 to determine whether it was effective.

Table 3.1 *Data Collection Phases*

Phase	Purpose	Data source	Research question addressed	Instruments	Constructs measured
1	Expert participants identified	Nine faculty members received a questionnaire	RQ1	Questionnaire. The questionnaire used 5-10 short-answer questions	The questionnaire's unstructured responses were used to elicit authentic feedback to identify "expert" participants for this study
2	Data collected to build the model	Four advanced-level (C1 & C2) ESL teachers were purposefully selected and interviewed	RQ1	Interview. Individual, semi-structured, 10-15 question interview using a modified Delphi method conducted using Zoom	The first interview's purpose was to determine what elements (vocabulary, readability, student culture, student educational level, student interest) should be included in a model for sectioning fictional texts
3	Data collected to refine the model	Four advanced-level (C1 & C2) ESL teachers were interviewed a second time	RQ2	Interview. Individual, semi-structured, 10-15 question interview using a modified Delphi method conducted using Zoom	Data from the first round of interviews were analyzed, and a model was created. The second interview solicited feedback about the model by employing a modified Delphi protocol to build an "expert" consensus
4	Data collected to test the model	Three advanced-level (C1 & C2) ESL teachers were interviewed a third time	RQ2	Interview. Individual, semi-structured, 10-15 question interview using a modified Delphi method conducted using Zoom	After the second round of interviews, the instructors were asked to test the model The purpose of the third interview was to ascertain whether the literature selected using the model was effective.

Phase 1: Identifying Expert Participants

In the first phase, nine faculty members received a questionnaire. Seven faculty members completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire used 13 short-answer questions to elicit authentic feedback, and I used the responses to identify “expert” participants for this study (see Appendix A).

Phase 2: Data Collection to Build the Model

In Phase 2, I interviewed four advanced-level (C1 and C2) ESL teachers using a semi-structured modified Delphi method interview protocol (see Appendix B). This action research aimed to generate knowledge for the local community. Therefore, I worked with the teaching community, collaborating with faculty members to build the model rather than developing a model independently and distributing it. I interviewed four instructors individually to determine which text characteristics teachers of multinational students identified as necessary when considering fictional literature for adult ELLs. I designed the interviews to determine which elements (vocabulary, readability, student culture, student educational level, student interest) were needed in a model instructors could use to select fictional text for a diverse group of adult ELLs matriculating at a language school.

Phase 3: Authentic Collaboration

I analyzed data from Phase 2 to create a prototype model. Then, I interviewed participants again using semi-structured interview questions. I designed the interviews to present the model I developed and to solicit feedback.

Phase 4: Confirming the Efficacy of the Model

After I analyzed data from the second round of interviews, I asked instructors to test the model. The purpose of the third interview was to ascertain whether the literature selected using the model was effective.

Data Collection Measures, Instruments, and Tools

I collected qualitative data in this action research investigation. In action research, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Mills, 2018). Qualitative data are conveyed through words, and the data collection tools I used to record those words were questionnaires and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mills, 2018). Because I developed the model with participants, I used an open-ended questionnaire and flexible semi-structured interviews to explore participants' worldviews and the ideas generated to construct the model collaboratively. The selection of instruments and strategies was derived directly from the problem of practice and the research questions rather than from theoretical orientations (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Therefore, these data collection methods were selected because they are the most useful in understanding the research problem and answering the research questions. In the following section, I will discuss how I used each instrument in this research's four phases.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires allow researchers to collect large amounts of data in a short time (Mills, 2018). Questionnaires are a common and efficient way to collect information about people's opinions, perceptions, and attitudes (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Designing a questionnaire requires articulating its purpose, identifying the information that needs to be collected, determining the sample needed for the study, and developing a plan for

administering the questionnaire. Questionnaires are valid and reliable when they ask questions that measure what is supposed to be measured and when those questions elicit the same kind of information each time. Questionnaires can be distributed directly or indirectly by sending them to participants and collecting them later.

In this study, I used the questionnaire to record open-ended responses (Fraenkel et al., 2018). Open-ended questionnaires allow more freedom of response, are easy to construct, and permit follow-up by the interviewer. I used the questionnaire to identify four expert participants to participate in three rounds of semi-structured interviews to generate a model for selecting fictional text.

Interviews

Interviews provide researchers with an opportunity to engage in detailed conversations that can provide an understanding of participants' experiences from their perspectives (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The researcher can learn about participants' ideas, opinions, values, and knowledge about the inquiry. Interviews can be unstructured, semi-structured, or structured. This research implemented a semi-structured interview protocol in which open-ended questions were prepared before the interview. Interviews are considered trustworthy when a researcher uses thick description—a detailed and rich account of participants' perspectives in their own words. Interviews are usually conducted face-to-face but can effectively be conducted over the telephone and online. In this research, I used Zoom to conduct three rounds of semi-structured interviews.

In semi-structured interviews, the interview is guided by a list of questions that can be explored; however, questions can be used flexibly, and there is no predetermined wording or order (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semi-structured interviews allow

participants to co-construct the narrative and raise questions related to the study. Three rounds of interviews were conducted in this study, each with a different purpose. In the first round of interviews, I asked questions that helped me develop the model. In the second round, I asked participants to review and critique the model. In the third round, I asked participants about their experiences testing the model.

Research Procedures

As noted earlier, I collected data in four phases for this qualitative action research study (see Table 3.2). In Phase 1, I employed a questionnaire, and I used a semi-structured interview protocol in the next three phases. Before beginning, I requested approval from the University of South Carolina’s Institutional Review Board. Once the study was approved, I sent a questionnaire to nine current MEA instructors to identify expert participants who would contribute to the model’s construction. I analyzed the data and selected four instructors. MEA’s faculty employment agreement already stated classroom data may be collected and used for educational research; however, I distributed consent forms to ensure participants understood the study’s purpose and how I intended to maintain confidentiality. Participants were aware they could opt out of the study at any time.

Table 3.2 *Data Collection Timeline*

Phase	Time frame	Purpose	Data source
1	1 Week	Identify expert participants	9 faculty members received a questionnaire.
2	1 Week	Collect & analyze data to build the model	Four advanced-level (C1 & C2) ESL teachers were purposefully selected and interviewed.
-	1 Week	Build the model	

3	1 Week	Collaborate with experts and make adjustments to the model	Four advanced-level (C1 & C2) ESL teachers were interviewed a second time.
4	2 Weeks	Test the model	Four advanced-level (C1 & C2) ESL teachers were interviewed a third time.

This study lasted approximately 6 weeks and was conducted virtually using email, Google Forms, and Zoom. I distributed, collected, and analyzed the questionnaire during Phase 1 which lasted approximately 1 week. Once data were analyzed and four instructors were selected, Phase 2—the first round of 1-hour, semi-structured interviews—took place over 1 week. I analyzed data immediately after each interview and throughout Phase 2. Once I analyzed the first round of interview data, I created a model, taking approximately 1 week. Phase 3 then took place for 1 week as the second round of 1-hour, semi-structured interviews. This phase’s purpose was to employ a modified Delphi technique to allow instructors to review the model and add further input. I analyzed data throughout the week and adjusted the model accordingly. After Phase 3, I shared the model with the instructors and asked them to use the model to select a short work of fictional literature to integrate into their classes over 2 weeks. At the end of the second week, Phase 4 began. The final round of 1-hour, semi-structured interviews occurred. The purpose of these interviews was to determine the efficacy of the model.

Phase 1

I created a 13-question questionnaire using Google Forms to determine which instructors at MEA were most qualified to participate in this study. The study’s purpose required collaborating with instructors who could inform me about the model’s necessary components. I selected teachers who had an expert level of experience working with

multinational students to determine the characteristics of literature that multinational students identify as important. I wrote criteria questions that included participants' academic experience, overall teaching experience, experience teaching adult learners, experience teaching multinational learners, experience teaching ESL, how long they have worked at MEA, the specific classes they taught at MEA, and how regularly they used fictional literature in their classroom. A selection of experts was necessary because, in Phase 3, I employed a modified Delphi protocol to achieve consensus about the model. A Delphi protocol affirms group decisions as more valid than decisions made by one person and are especially sound if that group is comprised of experts (Murry & Hammons, 1995). I hyperlinked the questionnaire in an email to potential study participants with an explanation about its purpose. Google Forms organized and analyzed responses into color-coded graphs and charts. Once I analyzed the data, I selected four expert instructors, distributed and collected consent forms, and arranged an interview schedule.

Phase 2

Throughout Phase 2, I collected data individually from four instructors using semi-structured interview questions. Qualitative interviews took place online using a Zoom platform for over 1-hour. I designed these interviews to elicit the teachers' views and opinions regarding the components needed to create a model for aligning fiction to an English language curriculum for adult, nonimmigrant learners. The semi-structured interviews were guided by a flexibly worded list of questions that allowed me to respond to the instructors' worldviews and gather new ideas about the model. The purpose of the interviews was to take a grounded theory approach to discern what aspects expert instructors think were necessary for students to connect with a work of literature.

Grounded theory seeks not just to understand but to build a theory about a phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this action research study, I worked collaboratively with teachers to construct a comprehensive model. A central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality by interacting with their social worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The instructors' interpretation of student experiences with reading fictional literature was essential to the study. Sample questions considered the curriculum, language and vocabulary, multiculturalism, students' backgrounds, students' interests, and SOC. I transcribed and analyzed the semi-structured interviews. I coded data to identify themes and develop descriptions about which components need to be included in the model to align fiction to an established curriculum. Once I had coded and analyzed the data from Phase 2, I used the data to create the prototype.

Phase 3

In Phase 3, I conducted the second round of semi-structured interviews with the same four expert instructors using a modified Delphi method protocol. The Delphi method is a communication tool designed to encourage debate, independent of personalities, to reach consensus among experts on a given topic (Howard, 2018). It is based on the concept that the collective wisdom of a group reduces ambiguity and increases accuracy. During Phase 3, participants reflected on their contributions to the model and had the advantage of reviewing and commenting on other participants' contributions. Throughout this phase, I asked instructors specifically how the characteristics regarding text selection contributed to the model. After Phase 3, I coded and analyzed the data to refine the model. Once I finalized the prototype, I distributed the

refined model to the four teachers and asked them to use the model to select a short work of fiction to use in a 2-week session and test its efficacy.

Phase 4

Once the model had been tested over 2 weeks, I met with instructors for one final round of semi-structured interviews to determine the model's efficacy. These semi-structured interviews were guided by a flexibly worded list of questions that allowed me to respond to the instructors' experiences about whether the model was effective.

Qualitative validity means the researcher checks for the findings' accuracy by employing specific procedures and indicates the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Validity is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the researcher's, participants', or readers' standpoint. Action researchers are encouraged to use multiple sources to triangulate data. Triangulation involves using different methods as a check on each another to determine if methods with different strengths and limitations all support the same conclusion (Maxwell, 2012). Triangulation reduces the risk the study's conclusions will reflect the biases of a particular method and allow researchers to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Ethical Considerations

Collaborations were authentic. I worked within the community, collaborating with faculty members to build the model rather than developing a model on my own and imposing it on them. This action research aimed to generate knowledge for the community from which it derived. Throughout the process of developing a model, I took several steps to establish ethical guidelines. I obtained permission from the language

school, teachers, and students to conduct the study. I guaranteed participants' rights by ensuring the confidentiality of colleagues and students. I collected informed consent, and I made participants aware they could stop their participation at any time. I showed respect toward the research site, and regular coursework was not interrupted to conduct this study. I provide an accurate interpretation and presentation of the data in Chapter 4.

One potential ethical issue that needed consideration was my role at the language school, the study site. I was the director of this language school in New York. I directly supervised the faculty who participated in this study, and I needed to make it clear participation was optional. Faculty members were not coerced into participating.

Treatment, Processing, and Analysis of Data

I used Google Forms to analyze the questionnaire. I recorded whether instructors returned the survey and demographic data. I conducted a respondent/nonrespondent analysis and found no response bias (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I developed an approach that provided a descriptive analysis of data for all independent and dependent variables in the study. I presented my analysis in tables and interpreted the results at the end of the data collection period.

From the transcription and review of the recorded interviews, I developed a codebook to analyze qualitative, narrative data. I constructed categories to build the model and developed and reviewed the categories while the interview process was ongoing. I analyzed interview data immediately so previous interviews could inform future interview questions.

Summary

This chapter explained why I selected action research for this unique problem of practice, how I developed the instruments used in this investigation, and how I planned to analyze data. Chapter 4 summarizes the collected data and explores the results of this action research.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this action research study was to create and test a model for effectively selecting fictional literature for multinational adult English language learners (ELLs). Four English language teachers participated in a series of interviews to explore this diverse group of students' shared interests. This action research intervention was conducted to discover elements teachers should consider when aligning fictional literature with a curriculum for adult language learners and to test whether a model built using those elements is useful for learning and building community.

In this action research investigation, I surveyed my colleagues at Manhattan English Academy (MEA) and used a modified Delphi technique to interview four long-term “expert” instructors. I defined expert instructors by their academic backgrounds, how long the instructors had been teaching ELLs, how long they had been teaching at our school, whether they were currently teaching advanced level courses, how often they integrate literature into their courses, and whether they had overseas teaching experience. I collected data and conducted analysis simultaneously in an iterative grounded theory process to learn what elements should be incorporated into a model for selecting compelling fiction for ELLs. Ongoing analysis and reflection are a vital part of the action research process (Mills, 2018). Throughout three iterative interview phases, I winnowed and aggregated the data into six themes. During each phase, I took notations to become

familiar with the data, identify themes, examine the data in-depth, and, finally, categorize themes that contributed to understanding the phenomena, which became the model. The model addresses the primary questions of this research:

1. What characteristics of literature do teachers of multinational students identify as important when selecting texts for adult English language learners?
2. How do these characteristics regarding text selection contribute to a model in this context?

In this chapter, I present and interpret my data and discuss the general findings and results. I analyze the data based on the research questions and provide a supplementary data analysis.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

I collected descriptive, narrative data in a systemic process throughout this research. In the follow section, I explain what I needed to learn, what I learned, and the key takeaways from each research phase.

Finding Expert Participants

This study aimed to develop a working model for instructors at our school to select literature effectively. Action research is a cyclical, iterative process that allows teachers to *take action* and effect positive educational change in our schools based on investigative, analytical, and evaluative research. It is a collaborative effort that uses the expertise of participants to foster sustained dialogue among educational stakeholders (Hendricks, 2017; Mills, 2018). The first step in this process was to identify expert instructors for this study. Instructors needed to have significant experience working with our unique student body at MEA, so only instructors who had at least 3 years of

experience were invited to participate. To determine possible study candidates, I emailed a questionnaire to nine instructors at MEA in November 2020, and received seven responses. Action research is insider research conducted among educators to develop practical solutions to local problems, so only instructors who work at MEA received the questionnaire. Candidates selected had from 4–10 years of experience, so they are individuals who genuinely understand our student body and our students' needs. I analyzed the questionnaires, and selected four candidates for this study based on the class level they taught, their experience teaching ELL students at MEA, and their previous experiences working with foreign language students. This study employed a modified Delphi technique. The purpose of a Delphi technique is to determine how experts agree about a given issue and with each other, and in areas where they disagree to achieve a consensus opinion (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Päivärinta et al., 2011). The Delphi technique relies on a panel of experts, in this case, with relevant knowledge and experience working with our unique student body. This study was developed to use three candidates, but because of the widespread impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, I selected four candidates. I took into account that participants, their families, or their students could get sick at any moment. I was sympathetic of the mental and emotional stress participants were experiencing. Because new international students were no longer coming to the United States, our student population sharply declined. I was concerned classes could be combined or eliminated and participants could lose their jobs. Fortunately, all four participants contributed to this investigation throughout the first two interview phases as I collected data to build the model. One participant could not

participate in the third interview because she left her position to take a full-time job. I used pseudonyms to ensure the participants' confidentiality.

Working Together to Build the Model

In Phase 2, I met with participants to determine what characteristics were important to consider when selecting fictional literature for MEA's students. In the following sections, I discuss what I needed to learn, what I learned, and how I interpreted the data.

What I Needed to Learn

Once I selected participants for this study, I developed questions for a semi-structured interview process to determine characteristics deemed necessary by multinational students' instructors when selecting fiction texts. I anticipated discovering the commonalities of a diverse group of students would be complicated. MEA students hail from different countries, have different cultural backgrounds and educational experiences, and vary in age, resulting in different needs and interests. The purpose of the first round of interviews was to learn what these students had in common, if anything, and ultimately uncover a solution to unite them in their educational outcomes.

Reese, a middle-aged teacher who has been working at MEA for 9 years, confided student interest is an integral part of any ELL lesson because education, especially for adults, takes an active will to learn; if students are not interested, he could not make them read. He shared, "I have to make you want to learn. We cannot treat adult learners the same way that we treat children." As an instructor, he tries to gauge student interests. When it comes to selecting fiction, he first asks students what they like to read and what topics they like to discuss. Jamie, an instructor in his 20s who has been working at MEA

for 4 years, reported part of the challenge of selecting literature is instructors cannot assume it is going to be easy to find something that motivates everybody because it is such a large group. Jamie currently teaches 40 students. An additional challenge in today's virtual learning environment is online learning makes finding commonalities more difficult due to the lack of social interactions that would reveal individual personalities. Blake, a 40-year-old teacher who has been at MEA for 8 years, agreed one challenge is having such a large group of multinational students: "Their interests are all over the place. People are in different frames of mind and different, you know, different ages, different moods, different cultures." We agreed the challenges of finding commonalities in such disparate groups of learners were real.

What I Learned

In their interviews, participants initially focused on the ELL level of students. MEA students take the Cambridge Placement Exam, an assessment based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) that evaluates students' four English language learning modalities: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This exam determines a student's English ability level and places them in the appropriate course. In their ELL courses, they learn grammar and vocabulary and take weekly standardized assessments to learn English. Before determining what motivates students to read, they need to understand the page's words. The selected texts need to align with the CEFR and a similar level as the texts in their Cambridge classroom textbooks.

In this phase, the study participants recommended selected texts to be at students' CEFR level or even slightly below that level, but never higher than their level. Instructors

reported when they selected fictional texts that were too difficult, students quickly lost interest. They did not have success when reading the fictional text became a chore. Instead, instructors could use text to reinforce and supplement learning when the text was at or slightly below students' current ESL level.

Reese reported, "Obviously, I am not going to give you something too low. But at the same time, I'm not going to give you something that's too dense, and maybe what I'll do is (ascertain) whether I think they should be able to understand it. If they can, then I look a little below their level."

When I asked Leslie—an instructor in her 20s who has been teaching at MEA for 5 years—about selecting a text that was challenging for students' reading levels, she responded:

[09:28] **Leslie:** I've found that to be counterproductive. Okay, my high advanced students perhaps have a greater vocabulary and perhaps have a greater range of expressions that they can use in a greater degree of comfort and day-to-day.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that their use of nuance and their understanding of nuance and complex verbiage and all of that is so remarkable that I could give them any text, and it would be fine.

I think there has to be a balance in the text itself. If it's too easy, I think students will read ahead and get bored, and if it's too difficult, they'll check out.

Both Reese and Leslie agreed fiction needed to align with students' current level. At MEA, the curriculum follows CEFR guidelines and uses a core textbook complemented with group work, experiential learning activities, and films. Every curriculum unit covers a biweekly thematic topic that includes vocabulary and grammar on which students are tested at the end of each week. Study participants recognized the selected work of literature must be aligned with the curriculum.

Reese noted he uses the curriculum as a guideline. However, he communicated the curriculum often is not enough. An ELL class can be 4 hours long, and many classes

are 4 days a week. Fictional literature was one way he liked to supplement the curriculum. Blake reported he looks at the curriculum to see what is required and then uses that as a “base floorboard for jumping off” and selected readings to complement it: “What you want, you know, obviously, is to tie what you’re reading into the curriculum somehow, and you want to use that to get them to learn the English language.”

Study participants recognized most students matriculate at MEA to learn the English language needed to communicate in their everyday lives. They learn English for a practical reason; they want to communicate with their neighbors, get a job, return to their home country and use English for employment, or attend a U.S. university. MEA students are not interested in learning the English language that is overly technical, lyrical, metaphorical, poetic, or outdated and historical. Reese reported he once selected reading from a translated old Greek text. According to Reese, his students did not relate to the text because they did not connect with the language. Upon reflection, he recognized the importance of the connection with language: “I don’t look at a text, as you know, this is above your level, but the language has to be something that students know and want to use.”

[07:12] **Leslie:** I had forgotten about the words that are used in the story, or not, especially in *Of Mice and Men*. They’re just not current words that Americans use in day-to-day dialogue. So, I was trying to push through that; we started the book, we have to finish.

And then after about the fourth chapter, I thought, you know, then I was asking the students like, how are you guys feeling about this? Trying to feel out like where they were at, and I was sensing that most of them are frustrated because there are a lot of sayings, there’s a lot of jargon that’s just out of date.

And some of it, I didn’t even know how to describe because that’s not in my vocabulary. Never has been, probably never will be. So I started to kind of change my mind about those texts.

This study was conducted as a grounded theory study, but as educators, we shared foundational assumptions and were unsurprised by some of what we discovered.

Everything previously noted seems obvious. These are factors that apply to ELL students at schools across the United States, regardless of age or origin, for both sojourning students and permanent residents. However, as the conversations became more detailed, I uncovered the student population's unique needs that distinguished them from other ELL students. This idea is acculturation. Each person interviewed mentioned the challenges the population faces as nonresident students coming to the United States for short periods. For example, when I asked Reese about such challenges, he replied:

[16:16] **Reese:** Well, I think the biggest thing that international students are challenged with is that they are alone. They are here with no one in particular, especially in New York City, where, and even within their national community, so to speak, they're alone. So, when you see it, let's say, a Russian, Russian guy living in the Russian community and you think, oh, he's at home. They're not really because he doesn't know those people or are familiar with their customs.

But he or she still may not feel attached to their new environment. And a lot of people struggle with that. They look for friends, and then obviously, here in New York, it is very difficult to make friends. And keep friends, or one little spasm next thing I don't like this person anymore, and it's because it's so many options.

It's difficult to develop relationships that have that last long term. So, I think that the biggest struggle is loneliness. And the challenge of coming from an environment where you may have been that, that was probably predicated on community support coming here and seeing that you may be being thrown in the water here, and I'm just saying because of that, okay, because they feel alone.

Reese mentioned a distinct need for community support. The most consistent thing he noticed is many of his students simply move into areas where their entire community speaks their native language. As such, he selected readings about cultural experiences that would benefit all of his students. However, with such a disparate group of students, how are these cultural experiences similar? Blake suggested relating a story to "immigrants, for example, some of the struggles immigrants have to deal with.

Language barriers, discrimination, limited opportunities, stress.” Leslie also suggested the importance of the immigrant story.

[16:34] **Leslie:** You know, I think the immigrant story is appealing for them because it’s something that, no matter where you are, you’re like, okay, there’s something that I can relate to about this character.

I think it has to be something that appeals to them, and the fact that they’re all in, that’s an instant bond. So, if there was something that revolved around immigration or moving to a different country or the struggles of starting your life over, I think that would appeal to anybody in a similar situation.

Once we recognized the students’ experiences in common, the conversations turned toward talking about some things teachers did to mitigate those circumstances. They spoke about the need to build a classroom community. A strong classroom community is essential for students everywhere, but perhaps more critical in classes with international students who have no other support. According to Reese, “we just exchange and experience things to a point where we feel as if we’re small, I won’t say family, but the community, let’s say.”

[16:18] **Reese:** If you have an off day, I’m not going to sit up here and say, hey, why don’t you answer? I’m not going with that. I may even come to you and say I noticed you were quiet today. Is everything all right? Do you need to talk about anything? Try to at least be an outlet where they can say; I’m not saying I can solve your problems, but at least perhaps I can refer you to someone who could or, you know, at the least, at least you notice someone is listening. A lot of people just want to get things off their chest.

What is the purpose of learning a language? It’s to create a deeper connection between you and someone else; it’s to communicate with someone; it’s to make a connection with another living, breathing human being. They might be in these disparate communities, you know, these cultural communities, but they’re still going to feel isolated from what it’s like to be an American until they find a place where they can kind of connect. Literature is one of these bridges.

Instructors were asked whether they felt a responsibility to build a community:

[09:42] **Jamie:** I can’t say if it’s the responsibility of the school, but I’ve taken it upon myself as an educator to make my classroom a place of community for my students because they need each other for resources, assistance, advice, all sorts of

things to get through this time. You know, are we teaching the students English but are we teaching the person as a whole?

These are poor people probably from countries that they had to leave because there were no economic opportunities. They're trying to do better for themselves and are thousands and thousands of miles away from everyone.

Instructors responded that they try to create an environment where students are comfortable participating. Blake recognized students do not share the same first language and "there is some subject material that I won't get into with my students just out of our religious or cultural difference." There's a certain point where an instructor may have a story or an idea they are personally passionate about and want to present to the students:

[16:18] **Blake:** Yes, this is something that may occur in society through this fictional work, and then you could kind of expand on that through some other readings.

It just enriches their understanding and enriches their ability to relate to certain situations (in the United States) that you know they can refer back to and kind of get it. I guess a deeper understanding of the culture of the country and how it affects them. So, for example, since we're in New York, trying to find a fiction story that takes place in New York.

I learned important information about our students during the first interview phase. As I collected the data, I wrote memos noting repetition, commonalities, and connections that might help with classifying the information into themes I could use to develop a model.

Key Takeaways

Based on what I learned in the first round of interviews, my interpretations led me to identify two key takeaways: (a) instructors focused on overseas teaching experiences, rather than academic qualifications when introducing themselves, and (b) instructors frequently mentioned the following seven elements: ESL level, curriculum, acculturation, modern language, student interest, community building, and exposure to U.S. culture.

Ongoing analysis and reflection are a natural part of the action research process (Mills, 2018). As a result, I took time to reflect on the data throughout the process to focus on the various ideas and stories. I used the data to guide subsequent interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, so I created a list of 20 questions but only used 10. As the interview process progressed, those 10 questions evolved. The reflection helped guide my efforts and allow for impressions about what I was uncovering. Anderson et al.(1994) suggested

stopping periodically in the data collection process also allows you to see if you have any gaps in the data, holes where you need data to answer the questions. Seeing this early on in the research allows you to develop the correct techniques for a complete study. (p. 156)

Interpretation involves finding meaning in the data. Throughout the first round of interviews, I reflected on how these characteristics regarding text selection contribute to a text selection model in this context. I conducted data analysis by following three iterative steps: reading/memoing, examining the data in-depth and categorizing and coding the data, and grouping data into themes. It was a process of reviewing the contents of the interviews and locating common threads.

Throughout the interview process and after each interview, I read and wrote memos to get an initial sense of the data. I wrote notes in the margins and highlighted sections that seemed essential to the model and to keep a record of my initial thoughts. Then, I described the data based on the interview. Finally, I classified the data. I examined and compared similar ideas and formed categories. At this stage, I reflected upon the learning and meaning I was deriving and compared newly uncovered information to initial notes. What did I learn from doing this? What meaning was derived

from comparing these elements? Moreover, did the information I kept uncovering compare with my initial notes?

In this grounded theory study, I collected and analyzed qualitative data to produce new knowledge from the emerging analysis. Several of the elements were expected. The text level was evident. If students cannot understand the words on the page, then everything else is meaningless. The text would need to be aligned to the curriculum in some way. It was also clear the language would have to be the modern English used to communicate in everyday life. However, I recognized I could include these elements in a model for any ELL student, whether they are young or old, from one country or from mixed nationalities, sojourning students, or permanent U.S. residents. I realized I could group these three elements and use them in a model for all ESL learners, but the question at the center of this study was how can I select literature for MEA's multinational, adult, sojourning students?

When the interviews began, I asked about each instructor's background. Each went into depth about overseas teaching experience, much more than their time in college. Most indicated a motivation to keep teaching English as a second language (ESL) because of the connection with international students. Reese talked about having been a foreigner in another country: "I know what they're going through; maybe that's why I can relate to their plight, so to speak." Reese spent time in Italy. Jamie talked about his experiences in Spain, Blake in China and Hong Kong, and Leslie in Cambodia and Japan. It was essential to everyone that they talk about these experiences.

Interestingly, participants did not talk about previous work experiences, what colleges they attended, or their education level. It was the work they did overseas that

made the most meaning to them as ESL instructors. They also spoke about the challenges of teaching multinational adult learners. They spoke about the stresses students face, their lack of support groups, and the need to make classrooms feel like a family. In short, they talked about acculturation. Due to this recurring theme in the instructor interviews, I needed to add an acculturation element to the model.

Community building was also important; the idea of free-flowing discussions where students would be comfortable speaking English, not be afraid to raise their hands because they were embarrassed by their accents. They talked about building that SOC.

Student interest was also significant. Clearly, students are interested in many areas; instructors responded they had to get to know students to gauge their interests, and that was an essential part of the texts they would select. For example, Blake mentioned he taught a small class of mostly older women, which shaped how he selected his texts. He selected a different reading in a larger, more diverse class.

Finally, all instructors mentioned their interests were vital. Each felt passionate about teaching and Reese and Jaime both described a teacher's role as an actor or someone on center stage. They acknowledged if they were not passionate about the work, it would be challenging to make their students interested and equally passionate. When it was a lesson students could relate to personally, they were more engaged.

Arriving at a Consensus: Focusing and Refining the Model

In Phase 3, I met with participants to discuss the prototype I developed using the data collected in Phase 2. The purpose was to build an expert consensus and refine the prototype so it could be tested. In the following sections, I discuss what I needed to learn, what I learned, and how I interpreted the data.

What I Needed to Learn

I analyzed the interview data I collected throughout the first round of semi-structured interviews and began categorizing the data into themes. The coding process allowed me to identify which literature characteristics teachers identified as important when selecting texts for multinational adult English language learners. In the first model prototype, I identified recurring data patterns in seven themes: ESL level, curriculum, modern language, acculturation, community building, student interest, and exposure to U.S. culture. The important takeaway from data analysis was the importance of acculturation, and I took time to reflect and conduct further research on the acculturative stress our students experience. Berry (2006) described four types of strategies immigrants use to adapt to a new culture: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Students who integrate maintain their own cultural identities while participating in U.S. culture. Students who assimilate give up their identities and become absorbed in a new culture. Some students choose to separate themselves, maintaining their cultural identity and rejecting involvement. Some students are marginalized, not identifying with either their home or the new culture.

I took these themes and developed a prototype model to share with participants in the second round of semi-structured interviews (see Figure 4.1). I needed to learn whether these characteristics regarding text selection effectively contributed to a model for text selection.

Following the Delphi technique, based on the data collected from the first round of interview questions, I dove deeper into themes to clarify specific issues. Once again, I analyzed and summarized the results, removing irrelevant material and looking for

common ground. I needed to learn whether an expert consensus could be achieved on the elements in this model. I considered what needed to be kept, what should be discarded, and how this model could be refined to serve its purpose in classroom instruction.

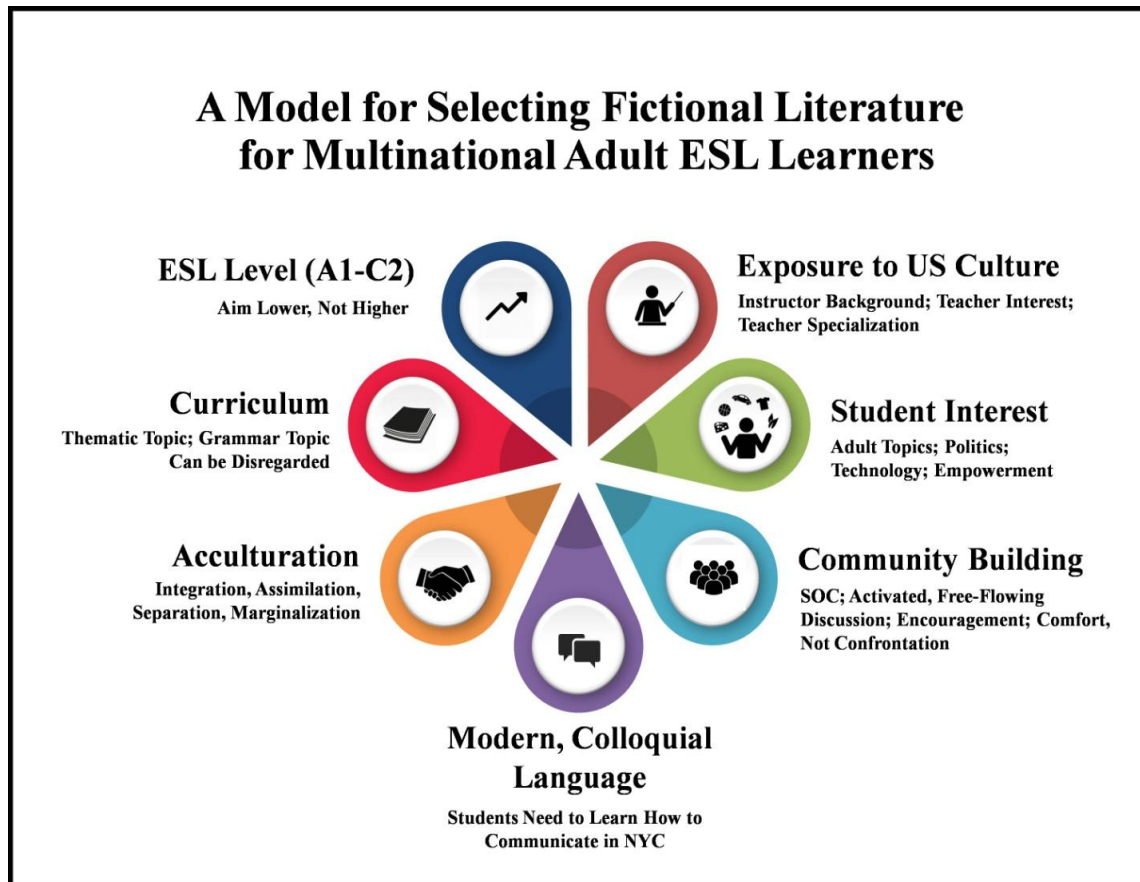


Figure 4.1 *First Prototype*

What I Learned

I sent study participants the prototype of the model several days before our second interview so they would have an opportunity to review it. I began the second round of interviews, asking for a general impression of the model, and their feedback was positive. All four participants agreed the model’s visual approach was appealing and would help

them select their students' literature. However, I wanted to take the time to address each element individually to learn how this model could be refined, simplified, and reorganized.

Participants agreed the ESL level must be included in this model. Leslie concurred the reason ESL level is "number one is that even if everything else is aligned if they don't understand it, it does not matter." I investigated whether there was a consensus that the fiction selected should be at or slightly below students' ESL level. There was consensus among participants:

[15:53] **Reese:** I would not encourage the whole scope or whatever you're trying to present them to be above their level. If they can use context clues and they can just say, hey, what's this word mean? What's that word mean? You're teaching vocabulary. Great. What you don't want is for half your class to just not get the gist of what's going on because then they're going to shut down.

[09:04] **Jamie:** Yes, it's better to go low and differentiate up than to go high and then differentiate down. I'm just talking about the actual ESL vocabulary and grammar and how students understand the words and sentences. Not the content.

Okay, we're talking about just essentially with extensive reading you want to be at a comfort level with it where you can just dive in and rely on context clues for all the vocabulary that students don't know. And of course, if my students don't know, I would take the time to address certain words that I feel are important or that there's no way for us to understand otherwise, but it's that ability to just really allow yourself to get absorbed into a story that is important for them. It's as if we're facilitating fun group reading.

Now, this doesn't mean that we want to give them lower-level skills; that's not it at all. We just don't want them struggling with the language to get them to have great conversations.

Blake agreed the purpose of introducing fiction would be to reinforce what students were learning, not to "teach from scratch and challenge them in that way."

There was also consensus that curriculum alignment must be considered in any model. At MEA, the curriculum is composed of thematic content, vocabulary, and new grammar topics. Participants spoke about the importance of including the theme to build

a connection between the curriculum they must teach and the literature they wanted to introduce. Each unit includes vocabulary, so aligning the theme to the literature would reinforce the vocabulary by teaching vocabulary in context. However, everyone agreed grammar should be excluded when considering a fictional text. For example, Reese shared:

[16:01] **Reese:** I think you'll pull your hair out trying to find a book focused on a specific tense. Most stories are told in the past, so if you're looking for a future perfect continuous, that's not a way to go about it. Even if you were teaching that you could just take a paragraph from the literature and say take this and now rewrite it in the future perfect.'

Blake agreed, saying, "Overall, you can get back to the grammar later on and give examples by just referring to the topic that was discussed in the story by using text or whatever grammar point you need to teach."

I asked whether it was important that fiction we selected use modern, colloquial spoken English students use to communicate every day in New York City. Participants discussed their failures using literature, and a recurring pattern was the problem of language that was not approachable or modern enough. ESL instructors do not typically use Chaucer's or Shakespeare's works in their lessons because the English language is too archaic. However, students reportedly struggled with *The Catcher in the Rye*, even though its protagonist the story takes place in 20th-century New York City. For ESL students, the English language needs to be something students use in their everyday lives.

[09:13] **Jamie:** Um, I tend to also lean that way that it should be modern, it should be relatively colloquial, the possible exception that I'm thinking of is like if there is ever a text that is a little bit antiquated perhaps has some grammatical tendencies in English, that aren't here anymore, like the reversal of subject and verb placement, things that we used to do that we don't do anymore. Oddly, I have students, especially Turkish and Spanish speakers, who traditionally make these errors, where they're replacing a subject and verb, for example, the order in a sentence like in older English.

[16:20] **Blake:** It's just not going to resonate; it's not going to help them become better speakers, they might be interested, but it's not going to engage them the same way that something modern that could help them in a restaurant setting, for example.

Acculturation was the centerpiece of what I learned about ESL students during the first round of interviews. Participants agreed acculturative stress was something all of their students experienced, whether as a mother leaving her family behind in Turkey, a Chinese student hoping to earn their way into City College, or a Ukrainian looking for a way to escape injustices in his country. Jaime noted the psychological challenge with culture shock, with "people commenting on your accent without wanting to embarrass yourself in a conversation with a native speaker, all these things that keep students behind." Reese cited this stress as why foreigners, "regardless of where they are in the world when it comes to a country, they tend to tend to gravitate towards each other." He elaborated:

[17:46] **Reese:** So, you'll see a guy from Turkey hanging out with a Russian, just because they're both foreigners, and they both are experiencing the foreign perspective here. So, they will gravitate toward each other just because they're foreign.

Four significant areas define acculturation: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Sojourning multinational adult learners are dealing with these four acculturation experiences, so I asked the instructors whether literature should address one of these four topics because students will have some experience and relate to these areas.

Blake explained:

[16:17] **Blake:** I don't think it should be limited to just one. They can relate to all these topics. You know, there may be some students who can relate more to one issue, more so than the other.

I think the thing that was so difficult because, you know, they're coming from different ages, different educational backgrounds, different parts of the

world, different cultures, different religions. But this is something they all know. This is something they all experienced in one form or another.

I discussed community building with participants and whether instructors should use literature to cultivate a SOC in their classrooms. Were there topics or language that should be avoided? Reese made it clear he did not think instructors should avoid talking about specific topics. From Reese's perspective, if instructors do this, then,

[16:16] **Reese:** We're not going to progress. And if you're just going to keep avoiding difficult subjects, then you're going to smile in each other's face and tell each other what they want to hear. They say you can't achieve; you can't move towards equity, social justice, inclusivity if you just avoid difficult discussions.

However, the group consensus was community building needed to be considered because of many cultural sensitivities, and it should, as Reese explained, "At least enter your thought process that I'm selecting this book and it's not going to offend a certain cultural group or racial group or a certain group." Blake noted that:

[16:29] **Blake:** One of the interesting aspects is it's a great big city but is one of the main things it's kind of lacking is that sense of real community, right, like in other parts of the United States, or in the world when you have that small-town feel, we have kind of a lot of people with their guards up. And so, having space where your students can speak and share their experiences and their frustrations and share their thoughts and opinions is important.

I coded two categories that did not build consensus: student interest and exposing students to U.S. culture. Participants acknowledged students need to have interest in what they read. However, participants questioned how this could be defined given the diversity of MEA's student body. There was also no consensus achieved about whether exposure to U.S. culture was an important factor when considering the selection of text.

Furthermore, several participants questioned whether it was necessary to take into account an instructor's interests because instructors are naturally not going to teach with materials they do not like.

Key Takeaways

I identified two key takeaways from my second round interview interpretations: (a) the model needed to be refined to identify what our unique student body had in common, and when that happened, (b) acculturation emerged as an element that was more significant than others.

My participants and I achieved strong consensus around the first three elements of the model: ESL level, curriculum, and modern American English. Upon reflection, I recognized these three themes fit into a category of their own: what is necessary to consider when teaching an ESL student. These elements should be included in a text selection model for all ESL students: young or old, in a group of single-language or multilingual students, whether they were first-grade or first-year university students. Although important and necessary to include in the model, none of this was information tailored to MEA students' needs.

However, when the conversation turned to acculturation, there seemed to be a change in how instructors spoke. They became increasingly animated. Rather than talk about what students needed academically, we began to discuss what students needed emotionally. Acculturation itself seemed to be the key finding in this research.

Acculturative stress connected students.

Testing the Model and Making an Important Discovery

In Phase 4, I met with participants after they tested the model to learn whether it was effective. In the following sections, I discuss what I needed to learn, what I learned, and how I interpreted the data.

What I Needed to Learn

After the second round of interviews, I used the data to refine the prototype and create a working model used to select text (see Figure 4.2).

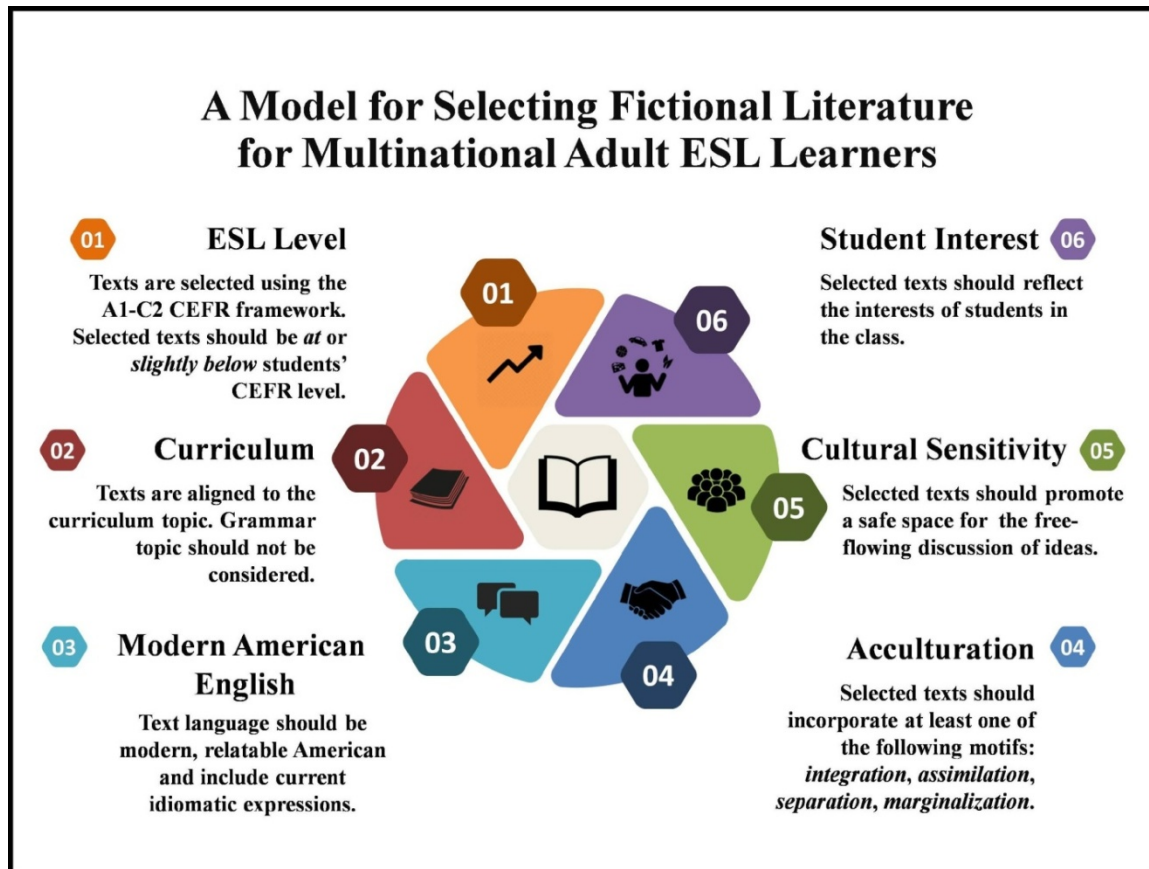


Figure 4.2 *Second Prototype*

I used this model to refine and formalize the language in several themes where we had already achieved a strong consensus and little change was needed: ESL level, curriculum, and acculturation. The modern, colloquial language was changed to modern American English to eliminate any confusion about what is meant by colloquial. Instructors wanted to make it clear “slang” was not being taught as ESL English.

Community building was renamed cultural sensitivity because this was at the center of selecting the text—not whether instructors could build a community, but whether they could select culturally sensitive texts. By choosing culturally responsive texts, they could create an inclusive community organically. Finally, I synthesized student interest and exposure to U.S. culture into one theme, and it broadly states instructors would consider their students’ interests as they understood them.

I distributed the model to three of this study’s participants (Leslie left her position and would not have an opportunity to test it with the students). I asked instructors to use the model to select a fictional work to incorporate into a lesson. Through this exercise, I aimed to test the model.

What I Learned

The three instructors used the model to select the following texts:

- *1984* by George Orwell (1949): A dystopian science fiction novel about an imaginary future of perpetual war, severe nationalism, government surveillance, and propaganda
- *Cellists* by Kazuo Ishiguro (2009): An American woman pretends to be a world-famous cellist and agrees to tutor a promising young Hungarian in her hotel room in an Italian city.
- *The Veldt* by Ray Bradbury (1951): A short story in which two children become fascinated with a virtual reality room called the nursery, where they can create any place they can imagine.

I created semi-structured interview questions divided into three groups: the process of text selection, the lesson, and overall feedback.

Text Selection Process. Reese used the model, carefully considering each theme before selecting *1984*. He considered students' ESL levels and determined the language was lower, not higher, than students' reading levels. He recognized there were new vocabulary words but the overall understanding was not going to be a challenge for his students. His unit's curriculum theme was social engineering, and he made an explicit connection to one of the text's central motifs. He reviewed the language and found it was written in approachable, modern vernacular. He considered acculturation and thought each of the four elements could be applied to *1984*. The novel's motifs could be connected socially and culturally with what was happening in the United States presently, so he knew students would be interested, sharing, "At least in the initial hour of class, we discuss what's going on, what's changed, what has changed when we go back to class." He also considered cultural sensitivity in selecting this novel and wanted to ensure any similarities of a student's home country and culture were not represented in the futuristic novel, causing undue stress or an unintentional emotional trigger.

Jamie chose *Cellists* because the language was "very clear, linguistically" in modern American English. The characters, like our students, were expatriates, and the dialogue fit in with the curriculum.

[19:20] **Jamie:** Because the language was formal, generally speaking, and not Tolstoy or Tolkien or anything like that. I knew that it was going to challenge them. But also, be right at their level of what they're expected to know through our curriculum. Also, the sentences I found were relatively short. This author doesn't use a lot of exposition. So, it wasn't like we had to parse through tons of lines of subtext. So, I thought it was, I thought, that it applies well to their language level and their ESL level. And you just flip through the ESL level curriculum and the fact that it was aligned to modern American English. So, three right there.

The instructor also addressed the concern of cultural sensitivity and student interest,

[19:30] **Jamie:** So, the main character has a relationship with a bunch of performers on the street in Venice, and an American woman who comes up to give him advice essentially and insinuate that he's not meeting his potential and that only someone like her can help him do that. And he has no idea who she is. There is a sort of power imbalance there because she's passing herself off as someone who's very legitimate and very important in that field. And he has no idea because of her background. So, I thought that was relevant on that level. And that plays right into cultural sensitivity and student interests.

Where our reality meets someone else's, and we have to decide if it's really real or if there's something to learn there. I thought it was relevant, especially to a bunch of language learners.

Blake's curriculum topic was "strange events," and he explained although there were a couple of words students would have to look up, the Bradbury story was right at students' reading levels. When it came to acculturation, Blake reasoned,

[10:10] **Blake:** You can be in different places, and you can be from all over the world. So, I thought that that had a relationship that was sort of at least had the students think about themselves being different in a different environment.

How the Lesson Went. In Reese's class, students were eager to participate. He had students take turns reading a paragraph, and

[17:02] **Reese:** People were eager to say, "I'll read next. I'll read next." Class participation was, I don't want to say, intense. That sounds like it's too aggressive. But there was a vibe that struck a nerve. So compared to a typical lesson, there was more participation... It was more opinionated. Interactions were more opinionated. And I did see that most of the students could form opinions that mirrored each other's thoughts.

Jaime also confirmed that there was heightened student interest in the lesson.

[19:40] **Jamie:** Were they interested? Yes! Beforehand I brought up a topic. Has anyone ever challenged you? Has anyone ever challenged you on something that you have spent a lot of time and effort on, you know, learning as a skill and that you felt that you had mastered? And at first, it was like a total blank. And then one person said something, and then everyone sort of realized, OK, in my language journey, I have tons of these situations where I think I've done all the work or at least a ton of work, and someone comes around and says, I can't even understand you. So, that allowed us to understand this.

Overall Feedback. In Reese's opinion, the model is best for the teacher. It helps the instructor integrate essential elements into the lesson plan and serves as a reminder of

elements that need to be considered. Reese suggested no changes to the model: “I’ll probably put posters up on the wall somewhere. Just as a visual reminder of when you are developing things or when you are introducing literature, have those things in mind.”

Jamie agreed with Reese’s sentiment that the model should not be changed and explained why the model supported his obligation to his students and confidence in his selection:

[17:55]**Jamie:** So, I felt yes, it did take me a longtime to select the reading, 45 minutes to 1 hour, but yes, I’m also generally looking for good material. Think is accessible. And I think my students enjoy and that I feel is relatable to them. And there’s a certain professional obligation that I have to make aligned with the curriculum or the theme. Right? So, I felt that it served all of those obligations.

[17:90]**Jamie:** And so I think that this allowed me to really make sure that what I was picking with something that will have a greater sense of confidence before even starting the class that this would work out well. Yeah, I had all the confidence in the world.

Key Takeaways

I identified two key takeaways from the third round interview interpretations: (a) when instructors used the second prototype to select a work of fiction, students were more engaged with the reading and with each other, and (b) the model would need to be refined again with acculturation at the center (see Figure 4.3).

A Model for Selecting Fictional Literature for Multinational Adult ESL Learners

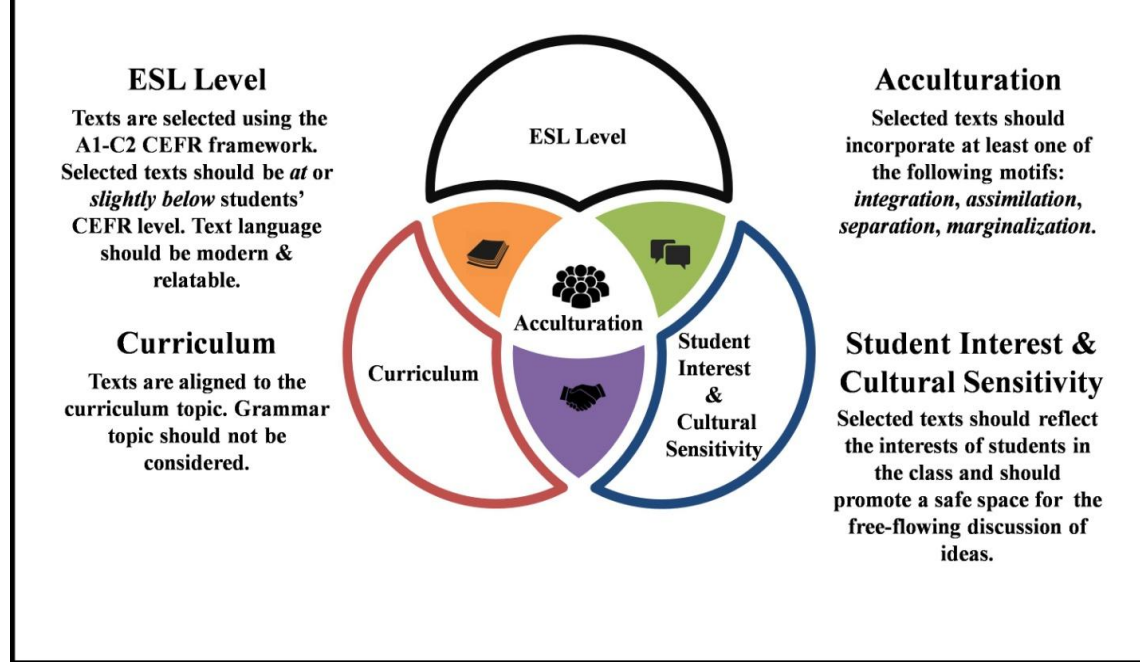


Figure 4.3 *Final Model*

When students connect through peer reading, they engage in active language learning through shared understanding. Collectively reading works of literature builds healthier classroom communities (Boff et al., 2005; Kuh et al., 1994). However, identifying what connected such a disparate group of students was a challenge. Acculturation was the most significant finding of this study; we discovered going through the acculturation process is one thing students have in common. No matter where students were from or their ethnic, cultural, or religious backgrounds, every student had faced acculturative stress and had a shared connection with feelings of integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. Though we recognized our students faced

acculturative stress, this study revealed how this stress in itself could unite our students through a shared reading experience.

This understanding began to unfold during the first round of interviews; when I asked our instructors to describe themselves, I found it interesting that no one mentioned their academic background. No one felt a need to tell me about where they went to college. Instead, each participant focused on their experiences overseas, which in their own words, were transformative. Everyone who participated in this study has first-hand experience managing acculturative stress.

[15:42] **Reese:** I lived abroad in Italy for 12 years. Living abroad, I had an education, and I guess, an introduction to another culture. I do speak another language as well. I started my teaching career in Italy. I would teach, just to have something to do and get involved with the culture over there.

And our students also come from personal multicultural experiences, because they're coming into our country. And they're bringing in their characteristics, culture, knowledge, wisdom, and way of doing things behind the outside of just me of presence here. So, just seeing that and being around that. It's always been very stimulating for me.

And it, so it's not necessarily I'm driven to be around it, I think I'm more. I'm just attracted to it was almost like a magnet, I'm just drawn to it naturally at this point, to the point where, if I do interact with someone who's not cultured, who's not cultivated, it almost as if I can't even relate to you anymore so maybe it's just more of this is my, this is an extension of my identity.

[09:13] **Jaime:** I spent a semester teaching in Spain. I love doing that with adults; I love a free-flowing discussion of ideas and an engagement with people's motivation, with what helps people live a healthy and empowered life as an individual that's always sort of guided me.

[16:04] **Blake:** After university, I went out east to China to teach ESL for a year, came back to the States, and I had culture shock coming back. I was like, okay, I need to leave again. I went back to Hong Kong for a couple of years and taught there as well.

[07:06] **Leslie:** I decided to take a two-month vacation tour of Southeast Asia, which made a huge impact on the direction I was going because at that time, I decided that I, well, I fell in love with Cambodia, and I didn't want to leave.

But my visa expired, so I did have to leave, and I got home, and I was determined to figure out a way to get back there, and one of those ways was to

teach English, and I had never thought about being a teacher. My parents are both teachers, and I felt like that was the only job I never wanted to do. But in order to live in Cambodia and support me financially. I could teach English, so suddenly I was open to the idea. I contacted a principal at an international school and expressed my interest.

And lo and behold, she offered me a job to teach third grade at an International School in Phnom Penh, the capital. And that experience put me on the trajectory of teaching English as a second language, so at that point, I packed all my stuff, I moved abroad for a year, and I just loved it; I loved everything about it. I loved being in a different culture; I loved communicating and learning about very different people.

Like these instructors, I also spent several years teaching in a foreign country, and I can speak from experience that teaching overseas is a fundamentally different experience from teaching in the United States. Teaching and lesson planning often becomes secondary to adjusting to vast cultural differences and confusing administrative policies. These experiences shape us as teachers; they teach us to be more flexible, adapt to new environments, and communicate with others despite language barriers. Like students at MEA, all participants in this study have first-hand experience managing acculturative stress. That stress would need to be at the center of the model.

Summary

In this action research study, I asked and answered two questions. First, the literature characteristics teachers of multinational students at MEA identified as necessary for selecting texts for students are (a) ESL level, (b) the curriculum, (c) using modern, American English, (d) acculturation, (e) cultural sensitivity, and (f) student interest. After a thorough analysis of the data, I discovered each of these characteristics regarding text selection contributes to a model in this context. However, what is significant is each one must be viewed through a lens of acculturation. The emergence of acculturation as students' common bond and its importance on students' lives is the key

finding of this study. I will elaborate on the importance of this discovery and how this revelation will impact MEA's school community in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of an action research study should inform the practitioner–researcher’s work going forward. Based on key findings discussed in Chapter 4, this chapter will explore my reflections on action research and describe the implementation plan for the changes I will enact in my continuing practice. The purpose of this action research inquiry was to create a model for effectively selecting texts for multinational, adult English language learners (ELLs) enrolled at Manhattan English Academy (MEA), a language school in New York City. When an instructor selects a work of literature with an appropriate reading level, how can we be sure the content is thematically appropriate and culturally relevant for international adult learners? With a model in place for selecting texts, there is an effective way for instructors to choose fictional literature for their classes. However, because multinational students differ in ages, cultures, and educational backgrounds, it is challenging to find appropriate books for such a diverse community of students. As a result, instructors have selected fiction indiscriminately, leaving many students disconnected from the literature. Many MEA students cannot connect with the readings and with each other through a shared reading interest.

I conducted an action research investigation in collaboration with colleagues to discover a solution to our faculty’s everyday, real problem. The purpose of this action research investigation was to identify an effective strategy to select reading material and to foster student engagement for multinational adult learners enrolled at a language

school. Four English language teachers participated in a series of interviews to explore this diverse group of students' shared interests. This study aimed to develop an instructional tool teachers can use to purposefully select fiction. The qualitative investigation employed an interpretive, naturalistic approach from expert ELL instructors' perspectives to discover the elements needed to build a comprehensive model for students enrolled at a language school in New York City. I addressed two questions:

1. What characteristics of literature do teachers of multinational students identify as important when selecting texts for adult English language learners?
2. How do these characteristics regarding text selection contribute to a model for text selection in this context?

Chapter 4 outlined three rounds of semi-structured interviews using a modified Delphi technique to determine the elements needed in a model for effectively selecting fictional text. I asked key questions and collected and coded data to identify themes. Through collaboration with study participants, I discovered six themes: ESL level, curriculum, modern American English, acculturation, cultural sensitivity, and student interest. Acculturation was the critical finding in this investigation; the study participants agreed international students, no matter their age, culture, educational background, or how they identify, had experienced acculturative stress as a student living in the United States. Acculturation became the cornerstone of this model.

In this chapter, I discuss the implications of this study and my reflection on key findings in Chapter 4, including why it is crucial to consider essential factors that impact acculturation when selecting text for our student body. I also include a reflection on action research and how systematic data collection helped solve the problem of practice. I

provide a detailed description of how MEA will implement this model, facilitate collaboration among instructors, and develop a more robust curriculum. Finally, this chapter will conclude with how the action research process allowed me to engage with participants in a deliberate, solution-oriented investigation that generated knowledge. The research process enabled me to make an informed decision that would improve MEA's instructional practices and increase student achievement, interest in their learning, and communication with each other.

Implications: Reflection on the Key Findings

This action research investigation led to creating a model that allowed instructors to select texts for multinational adult learners purposefully. Once the problem was identified, I used an iterative process of systematic data collection, reflection, analysis, and action. Through this process, I learned six elements needed to be considered when selecting fiction for our multinational adult learners: ESL level, curriculum, modern American English, acculturation, cultural sensitivity, and student interest. Before this model was created, teachers had no purposeful way to select texts, often relying on instinct and experience rather than research or analysis. The lack of a model often caused a gap in student learning. When instructors select literature at an unacceptable reading level, that contains thematic content too immature for adult learners, or does not align with student values and interests, they fail to achieve one of the most important purposes of reading a work of literature collectively as a class. When students read a work of literature together and share their interpretations and unique perspectives, they form a community. A lack of classroom community inhibited learning in an ESL classroom. When instructors selected the wrong texts, it discouraged learning. It led to

disconnection, anxiety, and apathy, exacerbating rather than mitigating one of the most common problems international students face in the United States: adjusting to an unfamiliar classroom environment. Because we developed this unique model, MEA's teachers now have a research-based approach to select a text effectively. Consequently, students' English lessons will be supported by appropriate literature that considers their academic abilities and their unique needs as sojourning multinational learners.

Each element in the model was informed by my understanding of the problem of practice. When selecting text, teachers must consider students' academic needs and their unique needs as isolated foreigners studying in New York City. Based on grounded theory methodology that saw the construction of a model through the collection and analysis of data, the four participants and I identified six unique elements that must be considered when instructors select fictional texts for their students. It is perhaps apparent this model had to take students' ESL level and the school's curriculum into consideration. Perhaps also evident is that selected texts would need to be written in modern, American English, rather than outdated language ESL students would not use to communicate in their daily lives. However, these three elements are instrumental in a model for selecting fiction in any ESL program, whether it is for first-graders or first-year college students, whether the class has students from one culture or many, whether students were learning English for a job or an interest. This study's real purpose was to determine what type of literature with which *our* multinational, sojourning adult students in New York City would have a connection. The key findings in this study that were essential in creating a useful model were acculturation, cultural sensitivity, and student interest.

The ESL language school employs many part-time instructors, and faculty turns over much more frequently than at a traditional K–12 school or university in the United States. Part-time instructors find full-time work. In my position, I am responsible for hiring, training, and managing our instructors. Several years ago, when I first needed to hire instructors, I reviewed applications highlighting candidates' academic qualifications. The first three teachers I hired had prestigious academic backgrounds, all of whom had college teaching experience. These hires were not successful, and the instructors only worked at the school for about a month. Students complained their new instructors were indifferent and uncompromising; the new instructors felt overwhelmed. Despite their qualifications, the instructors had trouble connecting with their students. I quickly learned academic qualifications were not the metric I needed to hire effective ESL instructors. I learned in my role that the best metric for hiring was whether candidates had overseas teaching experience. Upon reflection, I recognize this shared understanding of acculturative stress and how this experience bonds not only faculty to students but also students to each other. This research made me recognize my hiring practices needed to change, and our school's onboarding and professional development sessions needed to change to address acculturative strategies.

The impact of this research on the school, teachers, and students is consequential. The curriculum is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) and includes weekly textbook assignments with vocabulary and grammar lessons. However, students studying ESL in the United States on F1 visas must attend class at least 18 hours per week. Our full curriculum must reach beyond 18 hours of textbook instruction to include constructivist teaching practices with group work,

experiential learning, and fictional texts supporting and stimulating our students. Students will improve English and increase a SOC by engaging in a learner-centered ideology in which students can focus on nonthreatening, shared experiences, similarities, and commonalities in a constructivist process. The classroom's social fabric will be strengthened with the development of SOC. On campuses and in classrooms, when the SOC is strengthened, a sense of belonging develops and mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation increase, which are essential parts of education for students with little support in the United States.

This research was local knowledge I am confident will have an everyday impact on MEA's learning environment. I hope other language schools, especially those teaching adult ESL students in New York City, benefit from this study. This research investigation was intended to solve a problem at a local language school, and this study should be transferable to other language schools in New York. The transferability of action research largely depends on whether the research user can identify with the setting (Mills, 2018). Research methods in this study consisted of a systematic process of data collection and used rich, descriptive text in its analysis; therefore, the study could be replicated to create a model that would allow instructors to select fiction for sojourning students in other language learning environments. Transferability differs from reliability (i.e., the degree to which the data measures what it is meant to measure) and external validity (i.e., the degree to which study results are generalizable or applicable to other settings and contexts). However, "the power of action research is not its generalizability; it is in the relevance of the findings to the researcher or the audience" (Mills, 2018, p. 162).

Personally, this work will have a significant impact on my position moving forward. As a director of curriculum and instruction and as a member of the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation, I will investigate whether this model is, in fact, transferable and whether a similar systemic process for developing a model can be used in other language schools throughout the United States.

Reflection of Methodology

Action research is practitioner research, and its purpose is to generate knowledge that will improve our students' and our communities' lives. It is primarily conducted by educators who want to improve their schools and practices to help their students learn more effectively. Action research has been defined as inquiry conducted by educators in their settings to advance their practice and improve their students' learning (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Traditional educational research is generally conducted by researchers from outside of an organization who try to remain objective, minimize disturbances, and offer generalized truths. However, teachers know it is difficult to control all of the factors that affect lessons' outcomes. When conducting action research, results are relevant to the local setting. Action researchers commit to taking action and effecting positive educational change in schools based on what we learn. Although traditional educators can share the conclusions of their studies, it is up to us, as action research practitioners, to improve student outcomes and the lives of everyone involved.

There were four phases in this action research investigation, and the qualitative instruments used to collect data were questionnaires and interviews. I sent a questionnaire to a group of instructors to identify expert participants for the study. Next, I collaborated with ESL instructors to collect data. I analyzed, categorized, and reflected upon my data

to develop a prototype model to select fictional literature for adult learners. Finally, the model was tested by three instructors to determine its effectiveness.

In this study, I developed six categories that comprised a model for selecting compelling text. However, others may have constructed different interpretations. An action researcher's task is to read through all notes and interview transcripts and categorize the meanings that emerge from the data. The categories I developed provided the structure of the model. The categories identified by a different action researcher might not be the same. There is no correct way to organize the data, and different researchers may produce different interpretations based on their biases, personal interests, style, and interpretive focus (Mills, 2018).

One unexpected challenge that profoundly impacted the study was the COVID-19 pandemic. In New York, students at our school have been required to engage in virtual learning since April 2020. Language learning, a community-based endeavor, is more difficult in a virtual platform where accents can be confused. For many students who do not have access to technology or live in tiny New York City apartments, this is frustrating. When I asked whether they could sense a greater SOC and discussion among students, instructors told me it was challenging to ascertain on a virtual platform. Action research is meant to improve practices and stakeholders' lives, and perhaps it is difficult for instructors to focus when there are seemingly larger problems.

Because of COVID-19, participation attrition occurred during this study. One participant left MEA to take a full-time teaching position in another school, and she could not test the model in her classroom. It occurred to me that sickness was a concern because of the pandemic, and it would affect gathering research data. I had prepared for

this unexpected consequence by selecting four instructors rather than three, as I had initially intended. There was also concern the school might close for a short- or long-term period. COVID-19 has had a relentless impact on many small businesses in the city, and international student education has been significantly affected as an industry. At the beginning of 2020, MEA had 1,600 students matriculating across two campuses. A third campus was accredited in January 2020, and expectations were high. At that time, MEA employed 40 staff and faculty members. By the end of 2020, only one campus of 10 staff members with about 450 students remained. All full-time instructors were reduced to part-time positions, and they all had to supplement their incomes with part-time work outside of education. At the outset of the pandemic, many students returned home. Most international students have been prevented from traveling and studying in the United States.

I adjusted the methodology of this action research study because of the pandemic. Initially, rather than conduct the third round of interviews asking instructors how their students responded to the text, I would have observed those students myself, adding another instrument to the study and additionally triangulating the data. Also, I would have surveyed students to learn directly about their thoughts of the selected text, the lesson, and whether they felt an increased SOC.

Implementation Plan

The action research investigation has provided the school with a working model to incorporate in the curriculum design so instructors can effectively select fictional text. In Chapter 1, I described a cyclical conundrum. The diversity of our students makes text selection challenging. The lack of fictional texts inhibits a SOC. The lack of a SOC

complicates text selection. Now that we have created and tested a model, instructors can select appropriate fictional texts, continuing to strengthen their classrooms' SOC.

There are several ways MEA is planning to distribute and implement this new information. Before using the model, instructors would receive professional development to learn how to apply the model effectively. In collaboration with faculty, MEA's administration intends to create a virtual library of texts. A virtual platform has been established where teachers post reviews of the texts they have selected and can upload notation cards that illustrate how each element of the model is addressed. Other instructors would then be able to review the information on these notation cards, making it easier for them to decide whether to incorporate that work of fiction in their lessons. These texts would then be added to the full curriculum to strengthen it beyond traditional ESL textbook, grammar, and vocabulary exercises to reflect the robust, learner-centered curriculum we have constructively developed. Perhaps more importantly, students would also have access to this virtual library to have a recommended reading list, appropriate for their ESL level, that they could use to select works of fiction to improve their English skills.

I discovered in this dissertation that practice extends beyond the problem of practice that engaged us in this action research study. I learned the acculturative experiences international students face when they come to the United States were the key finding when we began to examine what this disparate group of students had in common. Integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization are part of a reality every student understands, and these acculturation experiences are an integral part of their everyday experiences as sojourning students in the United States. Also, we recognized

these experiences connected students and their American teachers who shared similar experiences in foreign countries. Acculturation should be considered the key for effectively selecting the text and creating curriculum, developing faculty, and developing a sense of student community on our campus.

Conclusion

Action research has enabled me to translate my experience and skills as an educator into an action-oriented outcome in the school where I work. This model for selecting texts is a practical tool that addresses a significant problem. It will help everyday instruction and improve the lives of students. Furthermore, action research has empowered me as a practitioner-researcher, further professionalizing my work through the design and enactment of this research. Because this was a collaborative process done with participants instead of *on* them, instructors used their experiences to help develop this model and engaged in shared decision making. Participatory decision making provides valuable insight that helps effect change in schools because instructors become part of the process.

The action research process has generated knowledge for everyone who participated in this research. This dissertation's readers should follow the methodology to create a working fiction selection model that will engage multicultural students in their unique classroom environments. This research is especially relevant for instructors of international students and students enrolled at language schools. Even though more than 1 million students study at language schools in the United States on F1 visas, the research gap on these schools and this student population is immense. F1 language learners are generally older students who have taken control of their education and are self-directing

their learning to improve their lives and their families' lives back in their home countries. These students take significant risks both personally and economically by leaving their families and lives to move to the United States.

Language learners have also been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic—perhaps more than any other group in the United States. Although F1 visa holders are not permitted to work in the United States, many international students use the visa as a pathway to work illegally in New York, a sanctuary city whose restaurant industry is dependent on undocumented workers (Kharbanda & Ritchie, 2005). Despite being a critical part of this industry, these students received no help from the U.S. government or their employers when the pandemic shut most restaurants down. Thousands of students lost their jobs overnight, with no chance of relief from the government, and many were forced to return home if they were able. Educators must continue to conduct action research to address the needs of vulnerable student populations the traditional academic research commonly overlooks.

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APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is to collect information about participants for a research study that involves multinational adult learners. All information will be kept confidential.

1. Please tell me about your academic background. What schools did you attend, what degrees have you received, and your major/minor?	
2. Overall, how many years have you been a teacher?	
3. How many years have you taught ESL to adult learners?	
4. In what settings have you taught ESL to adult learners?	
5. Please describe those settings in further detail. How long were the lessons? How many students were in each class?	
6. How long have you taught ESL at MEA?	
7. What classes are you currently teaching at MEA?	
8. What levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced) have you taught at MEA, and for how long?	
9. Do you use fictional literature as part of your instruction at MEA?	
10. If you use fictional literature as part of your instruction, how do you select texts?	
11. How would you describe your overall success using literature in class? Please be specific.	
12. Do you have any overseas teaching experience? If yes, please describe.	
13. For this research study, a multicultural, multi-gendered cross-section of participants is important. Please indicate your preferred race, gender, and nationality.	

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 1

I am studying fictional literature use in classrooms with multinational adult learners enrolled at ESL language schools. *I will use this information to build a model for choosing texts.* What you have to say is of great interest. I purposefully selected you for this study because of your experience working with adult language learners. I am interested in your experiences, and there are no right or wrong answers. I have a series of questions I can ask, but the odds are I will not need to ask them as you tell the story.

Background Information	
1. Tell me about your background (academic/personal) and experience (work).	
2. Tell me how you came to work at a language school.	
3. What drives you to do this work?	
4. What is your level of satisfaction?	
5. Please describe your relationships with students.	
What characteristics of literature do teachers of multinational students identify as important when selecting texts for adult English Language Learners?	
14. Tell me about the fictional literature that you have selected in your classes.	
15. How do you select fictional texts?	
16. How do you find them?	
17. Tell me about the importance of using fictional literature in your class.	
18. What effect has the curriculum had on your selection of literature?	
19. Tell me about the advantages and disadvantages of using fictional literature in your class.	
20. What other learning goals, other than learning English, do you have when you purposefully select a text?	
21. Tell me about the criteria you use to choose a work of literature.	
a) English language ability? Tell me why this is this important.	
b) The difficulty of the work? Tell me why this is important.	
c) Educational background? Tell me why this is this important.	
d) Age? Tell me why this is this important.	
e) Gender? Tell me why this is this important.	
f) Culture? Tell me why this is this important.	

g) Interests? Tell me why this is this important.	
h) Work? Tell me why this is this important.	
22. Why is (X) more important than (Y)?	
23. In your opinion, how would you list these criteria in order of importance?	
24. What is the longest work you have been able to read with your class?	
a) Tell me about the challenges of reading a work of fiction over a long period.	
25. How do you know if your students are connecting with a work of literature?	
a) What are discussions like in your class?	
26. Describe the dynamic in your classroom. How comfortable are students with each other?	
a) How comfortable are your students discussing controversial topics?	
27. What motivates your students?	
28. What are some of the unique challenges that nonresident, international adult students face?	
29. What are some of the challenges of teaching these students?	
Finishing Up	
30. Thank you for all that valuable information; is there anything else you would like to add before we end?	

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 2

Thank you for meeting with me and providing the information that I needed to develop a model to align fiction to our ESL curriculum. Your expert insight was valuable. I have taken your contributions and created a prototype; now, I would like to know your thoughts.

What Characteristics of literature do teachers of multinational students identify as important when selecting texts for adult English language learners?	
1. What are your first impressions of this model?	
2. Let us discuss the elements one at a time. I will briefly describe each one, and I would like you to interpret, add information, and critique.	
a) ESL Level (A1-C2)	
b) Curriculum	
c) Acculturation	
d) Modern, Colloquial Language	
e) Community Building	
f) Student Interest	
g) Exposure to US Culture	
3. How could we better define X?	
4. Please rank these elements in order of most important to least important.	
5. The purpose of this model is to be an effective solution for teachers to select literature. Which, if any, elements could be removed from this model?	
6. Is it clear how you would use this model to select fiction?	
Finishing Up	
7. Thank you for all that valuable information; is there anything else you would like to add before we end?	

APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 3

Thank you for your participation in this study. Now that you have had an opportunity to test the model in class, I would like to know your thoughts. As always, your comments are strictly confidential, and none of your remarks will be associated with you by name.

Using the Model to Select a Text	
1. What text did you choose?	
2. Briefly describe your steps of how you used the model to select a text.	
3. How easy was it to use the model to select text?	
4. How long did it take?	
5. Were there any challenges you discovered?	
6. Did you encounter any difficulties in regard to any of the particular elements? Was one element more challenging to address than another?	
The Lesson	
7. Briefly describe the lesson.	
8. How did students respond to the text?	
9. Did they connect with the text? Were they interested?	
10. How would you describe class participation during this lesson? Compared with a typical lesson?	
11. How would you characterize students' interactions with each other? Compared to a typical lesson. Were they more in-depth?	
12. Did students interact with other students that they had not before?	
13. What do you think students learned from this lesson?	
14. Was this lesson in any way different from a typical lesson?	
15. Was there anything that happened that was particularly encouraging to you in using the model?	
16. Was there anything that happened that was particularly discouraging to you in using the model?	
Overall Feedback	
17. Overall, how would you characterize using the model?	
18. What needs to be added or changed?	
19. Is this model a practical tool for ongoing text selection?	
20. Final thoughts. Is there anything you would like to tell me about this study as a whole or this model in particular?	

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT CODEBOOK

This is a list of codes with definitions that I used to organize this study's interview data.

Code	Description
1	ESL Level/CEFR
2	Curriculum
3	Unit Topic/Theme
4	Vocabulary
5	Grammar
6	Modern English Language
7	Acculturation
8	International/Multinational Students
9	Adult Learners
10	Students' Academic Backgrounds
11	Students' Ages
12	Students' Work History
13	Student Interest
14	US Culture
15	Teacher Interest
16	SOC