

2016

## The Usage of Young Adult Literature as a Vehicle to Teach Cultural Empathy

Samuelle Voltaire  
*University of Central Florida*



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorsthesis>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the UCF Theses and Dissertations at STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Voltaire, Samuelle, "The Usage of Young Adult Literature as a Vehicle to Teach Cultural Empathy" (2016). *Honors Undergraduate Theses*. 6.  
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorsthesis/6>



THE USAGE OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE AS A VEHICLE TO TEACH  
CULTURAL EMPATHY

by

SAMUELLE VOLTAIRE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Social Work  
in the College of Health and Public Affairs  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida.

Spring Term, 2016

Thesis Chair: Dr. Tracy Wharton

© 2016 Samuelle Voltaire

## **Abstract**

Social Work education is focused on helping students identify triggers and biases prior to entering the workforce, with an aim towards cultural competence. Class discussions and homework assignments are particularly intentional: through various assignments, students are urged to work on those issues before entering clinical practice. Young Adult (YA) literature has been successfully used in the field of Education to teach empathy and reflectivity regarding diversity to preservice teachers. The use of YA literature may hold promise for Social Work education as a teaching tool, but the extent of current use in Social Work education is unknown. An anonymous survey of Social Work faculty at Florida universities was conducted using Qualtrics. The survey was sent to approximately 250 instructors of undergraduate and graduate courses. Eighteen surveys were completed, and 17 were used in data analysis. It was found that the majority of respondents used non-textbook and print material at least some of the time in their courses. Of those who used YA Literature in their courses, more than half the time it was used to facilitate cultural and diversity learning. Based on the data, YA literature holds promises for social work education in the area of development of cultural empathy. This study lays the groundwork for further research on how YA literature can be incorporated into cultural competency coursework.

*Keywords:* cultural empathy, cultural competency, social work education, young adult literature

## **Dedication**

For the avid readers, those who have felt themselves come alive when reading a novel, and those whose lives were saved by reading a story.

For my mentors, Professor Wharton, Professor Chapple, and Professor Kaplan who taught me how impactful research can be.

For my mom-Helen and my sister-Adrine, for always being my personal cheerleaders and prayer warriors.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to take this time to acknowledge and share my gratitude to all those who have made this thesis possible. To my friends, classmates, and co-workers who would take time to ask me how my thesis was going, thank you! To Del, thank you for always being encouraging and supportive right from the start of my research process. To Professor Wharton, thank you for taking time to mentor me through this journey of undergraduate research and helping me find my voice in research. To Professor Chapple, thank you for helping me see things from multiple perspectives and believing in me as I embarked on this project. To Professor Kaplan, thank you for being passionate about English Language Arts and helping me be passionate about the power of books. To my sister Andrine, thank you for always being positive and hopeful. To my mom, thank you for always intervening in prayer during this entire process. You all have aided in planting a seed, and I am truly grateful that you all helped me blossom!

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	4
Young Adult Literature and the Field of Education .....	4
YA Literature in Social Work and Bibliotherapy .....	7
Social Work, Cultural Competency and Cultural Empathy .....	9
Combining the literature .....	11
Methodology .....	12
Survey Questions and Study Timeline.....	12
Recruitment.....	12
Inclusion and Exclusion Methods .....	13
Results .....	15
Discussion.....	17
Limitations .....	19
Implications for Practice and Future Research.....	20
Conclusion.....	21
APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER.....	22

APPENDIX B: TABLES.....	24
APPENDIX C: FIGURES.....	29
APPENDIX D: REFERENCES.....	38



## Introduction

The idea for this particular review stemmed from my own interdisciplinary background. Before entering the undergraduate School of Social Work, I was an English Language Arts major from the College of Education. In order to fulfill program requirements, I enrolled in a summer course entitled Survey of Adolescent Literature. Each week, students were required to bring in a Young adult book that we had either read or were planning on reading. In a classroom with more than forty students from varying demographics and life experiences, a common theme arose: many of these books that we brought in –many of our favorite books–were about main characters and storylines that tackled what we believed to be tough issues. At the very least, many of these books talked about topics that, although pertained to adolescence, were not ordinarily discussed in classrooms. At most, these books were treasured by the readers for the impact it had (and still had) on them. These were books that talked about human differences, which allowed for some to relate to the stories, and others, to learn about different lived experiences.

After that summer, I was admitted into the Social Work program, a program where our entire academic and professional viewpoints are rooted in understanding and embracing human differences. As Social Work students and practitioners, we are given the ethical responsibility to be well skilled in providing services for our clients –culturally competent services. Due to the sensitive nature of our careers, it is ingrained within our educational curriculum (and curriculum outcomes) the importance of being introspective individuals who are also accepting of human diversity, and possess a “heightened consciousness of how clients experience”

diversity personally and “within a larger social context” (National Association of Social Workers, 2001, p. 8).

Our programs aim to help Social Work students identify their biases before entering the field, acknowledging their triggers—“people, places, and situations” or associated memories that touch on “old, [emotional] wounds” –and (hopefully) working on those issues beforehand so that the social worker’s personal reactions do not impede the progress of the client-worker relationship (Carter, 2012). Assignments and discussions are particularly intentional; through classroom practices and in field experiences, we learn about ourselves and who our future clients are, with the end goal of understanding how we can best enter a “caring and respectful” professional helping relationship with our clients (National Association of Social Workers, 2001, p. 10). It is safe to conclude that the intention of social work education programs is to cultivate social work students who will become culturally competent practitioners.

One key component of cultural competency for social work practitioners is the movement from awareness of the practitioner’s own cultural heritage to awareness of the cultural heritage of other people (National Association of Social Workers, 2001, p. 17). I believe that one possible approach to this shift may very well lie within the usage of Young adult (YA) literature. The usage of Young adult literature has been gaining researchers’ interests within the field of Education (and the academic discipline of Teacher education) due to the benefits that such literature has had on preservice teachers in preparation for their professional classroom experience. Specifically, how these stories can facilitate personal introspective

reflection, creating empathy, and learning about diversity among preservice teachers. Social Work is on the move from emphasizing the mastery of cultural competency to cultural humility and genuine empathy, understanding that true cultural competence requires a dedicated and ongoing, “lifelong process” (National Association of Social Workers, 2001, pp. 11, 19). In order to understand the context of the research topic, a literature review was conducted to analyze the literature about young adult literature within the education discipline, social work’s relationship with books, and social work’s literature on cultural competency and cultural empathy education.

## Literature Review

### Young Adult Literature and the Field of Education

The usage of Young Adult (YA) literature is prevalent in the discourse of the field of Education, especially English Language Arts education. Several educators have advocated for and promoted its usage in the classroom, citing its academic purposes as well as therapeutic benefits as justification. Hughes-Hassell (2013) discusses how “multicultural literature can not only challenge the single story...but also encourage and empower teens of color and indigenous peoples to take action in their own lives and in the world around them” (p. 217). In this case, literature that is multicultural in nature, “can serve as a vehicle” to facilitating discussion amongst students (Hughes-Hassell, 2013, p. 221). The author notes how multicultural literature not only makes more relevant issues of oppression and victimization to cultural minority students, but students from the cultural majority are able to explore these issues as well. To quote the author, “it (multicultural literature) can show that racism and inequality still exist in contemporary American society” (Hughes-Hassell, 2013, p. 225).

Regan and Page (2008) conducted a study with both academic and intervention measures in mind; they framed their study around the *circle of courage* model (a Native American “child-rearing values and positive youth development” method (p. 39). With graduate educators as participants, the researchers aimed to demonstrate how literature could be used “as a medium to connect with children and adolescents with an emotional or behavioral disability” and help said students with establishing coping skills (Regan & Page, 2008, p. 37).

While the aforementioned study focused on students, several studies have looked at the implication of reading and engaging with YA literature as a preservice teacher. Glenn (2012) pointed out how “nearly 85 percent of all secondary teachers are white, monolingual native English speakers, many of whom have had very little, if any, training in working with culturally and linguistically diverse learners” (p. 326). Drawing on that statistic, the study aimed to see “what effects...active engagement with examples of counter-narratives in young adult literature” would have on preservice teachers’ “understanding of race” (p. 327). The results and data analysis showed that several participants were able to view literature, especially counter-narratives, as an empathic bridge towards understanding students from another culture (Glenn, 2012). While some participants were not able to empathically connect, the study did demonstrate that reading counter-narratives of YA of color could aid preservice teachers in “not only question(ing) existing stereotypes of people of color” but also notic(ing) their personal biases “and culpability” in perpetuating stereotypes as well (Glenn, 2012, p. 340). The study also highlighted how counter-narratives created a safe space for the preservice teachers to explore race and race related issues.

Along the same lines of using literature as a tool for preservice teachers, Hughes and colleagues (2014) intended to address the anxieties that preservice general education teachers feel regarding students who are enrolled in special education. Using schema theory, the researchers conducted a study with two groups of preservice teachers to gauge their understanding of children who have an autism spectrum diagnosis before and after reading

relevant young adult literature. The results suggested that reading allowed preservice teachers to “accommodate new information about ASD to their existing schema” (Hughes, Hunt-Barron, Young Wagner, & Calvert Evering, p. 219). While according to the researchers, both groups of participants (control and experimental) learned information about autism, engagement with fiction literature provided for a more enriching learning experience for the experimental group when compared to the control group. It also created a space for preservice teachers to explore their soon-to-be roles as educators.

Young adult literature has also been used in the preservice teacher discussion regarding bullying and suicide awareness. Pytash, Morgan, and Batchelor (2013) found that reading young adult literature “helped preservice teachers think about bullying through the character’s eyes” (p. 18). Pytash also conducted a study with 22 undergraduate preservice teachers to determine if and how literature could be used as a means of understanding and increasing empathy in participants towards students who deal with bullying and suicide. While the participants did already have a predisposition to learning (since about half of the participants had life experiences that included suicide and bullying), by reading either one of two books: *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher (addresses bullying and suicide) or *Hate List* by Jennifer Brown (addresses bullying, suicide and school shooting), preservice teachers were able to not only explore these issues, but were also able to develop empathy for the characters. This, in turn, helped the participants begin to explore their roles as educators addressing and helping students who are dealing with suicidal ideation and bullying (Pytash, 2013).

### YA Literature in Social Work and Bibliotherapy

Within the field of Social Work, young adult literature, and books in general, have typically been used for bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is defined as “the use of literature and poetry in the treatment of people with emotional problems or mental illness” (as cited in Pardeck, 1998). With bibliotherapy, both fiction and nonfiction literature can be used in a client’s treatment under the discretion of any licensed mental health practitioner, including clinical social workers. In an exploratory study conducted on a randomly selected group of Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) on the usage of bibliotherapy, it was found that the majority of respondents had used bibliotherapy at least once. More than one-quarter of clinicians were also noted to have used a single book when practicing bibliotherapy. Typically, these books were self-help books. While results suggested that participants endorsed this method, there was strong concern noted by participants about their clients actually using the bibliotherapy materials (Vodde, Dixon, & Giddings, 2003).

Tussing and Valentine (2001) wanted to demonstrate how social workers could use bibliotherapy when working with adolescents whose parent(s) suffer(s) from a mental illness. The researchers saw bibliotherapy as a “non-threatening medium” to help adolescents deal with their emotions (p. 457). A major part of the study involved identifying books that could be readily used for bibliotherapeutic purposes. In order to meet the criteria, the books had to be: a fiction book written for young adult audiences that focused on parental mental illness, had to be accessible to the researchers, and published between the years of 1985-1999 (Tussing &

Valentine, 2001, p. 459). Based on the criteria for book selection, Tussing and Valentine (2001) found 7 out of 11 fiction books dealing with parental mental illness were deemed recommendable for bibliotherapeutic use (p. 451).

Discussing racial and culturally affirming bibliotherapy usage within the field of Social Work, one team of researchers emphasized how bibliotherapy can be a useful addition to the therapeutic process with clients' racial identity when chosen carefully. The researchers also emphasized the importance of the selection process for the books, as well as making sure that clients "identif(y) with the characters" and find the books realistic in nature (McCoy & McKay, 2006). Overall, the researchers point out how beneficial teaching bibliotherapy as a tool to the social work education curriculum can be for social workers in moving from theoretical to practical application of culturally affirming practice.

In contrast, Villalba et al. (2010) conducted a pilot study over eight weeks aimed to see if using *Cuento* as an intervention could help a group of middle school Latina/o youth address several inter and intrapersonal issues such as anxiety and self-concept. *Cuento* itself, according to Villalba et al., is a "culturally relevant form of bibliotherapy using stories to convey morals or themes" (2010, p. 26). By the end of the study, researchers concluded that the length of the intervention "may not have been enough time to produce significant changes" but did note that using *Cuento* could add to the school experience of similar participants (pp. 38,40).



### Social Work, Cultural Competency and Cultural Empathy

Addressing the topic of cultural competency in Social Work education and practice has garnered a variety of responses woven with interdisciplinary approaches. Using a clinical vignette involving a racial minority client as a backdrop, Dean (2001) breaks down four perspectives of cultural competence (modernist, postmodern view, intersubjective, and sociopolitical) (pp. 625-626). After describing the perspectives and applying them to the case study, Dean posits that it is “not so much knowledge” but rather “understanding” that is basic to successful” cross cultural clinical work (2001, p. 628). Dean further explains that while gaining information about cultural groups is important, gaining information should not “lead to a presumption of knowledge or competence” about the client (2001, p. 629).

Garran and Werkmeister Rozas (2013) take a critical look at the NASW standards of cultural competence and its associated perception that “once these culturally specific practices are recognized, a social worker’s sensitivity to her client will increase” (p. 100). The authors reason that cultural competence, and in particular, knowledge acquisition, has been the focus because of its ability to provide some form of measurement (Garran & Werkmeister Rozas, 2013, p. 101). Regarding intersectionality, Garran and Werkmeister Rozas also call for social work programs to “reformulate a definition of cultural competence that acknowledges power and privilege in relationships” (p. 108).

Regarding how to implement training in this area both academically and in a practical (hands on) manner, Fisher-Borne and colleagues (2015) delved into this issue by taking a brief

overview of the progression of cultural competence across different disciplines, including the field of social work. The authors take a critical approach to cultural competence, stating that “the practice of training practitioners for working with diverse clients often treats the process in a linear fashion that often suggests that ‘knowing’ about group differences alone is a sufficient strategy” (Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015, p. 168). They address the concept of cultural humility, stating that it “takes into account the fluidity of culture and challenges both individuals and institutions to address inequalities” (Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015, p. 171). The researchers suggest cultural humility as an alternative due to the emphasis on accountability on undoing inequality versus mastery of different cultures.

Although it is essential to Social Work practice, little research has been done regarding empathy (Gerdes & Segal, 2011, p. 142). Empathy, or the ability to identify with someone’s emotions, is considered “an asset to practitioners,” according to Gerdes and Segal (2011, p. 141). Due to the limited research within social work, Gerdes and Segal (2011) look to several interdisciplinary readings, from the fields of primatology, socio-cognitive neuroscience, and psychology, to find information on empathy. From their readings, the researchers concluded that empathy can be taught and that it is possible for clinicians to become more skilled in empathy (Gerdes & Segal, 2011, p. 143). Gerdes and Segal also note that while perspective taking and self-reflection is not new to social work, these things have yet to be “identified as critical to developing practitioner empathy” (2011, p. 144).

In an earlier study, Gerdes and Segal (2009) posit that “the lack of a concrete conceptualization of empathy” as the reason why there is so limited research on empathy within the field of social work (p. 115). Speaking to the issue of conceptualization, after describing what is known about empathy in other fields (specifically developmental psychology and cognitive neuroscience), Gerdes and Segal create a social work model of empathy. This model consists of three components: affective response (involuntary reaction to emotions), cognitive processing, and conscious decision making (of particular interest to social workers regarding advocacy work). It is of particular interest to note that the use of role play is listed as a way to develop cognitive processing of empathy, as the research in education with preservice teachers and YA literature also included how preservice teachers were able to place themselves in the role of an educator when reading YA books. (Gerdes & Segal, 2009, p. 120).

#### Combining the literature

Based on the influence that YA literature has had in the field of Education and preservice teacher education, YA literature may be a beneficial learning tool to incorporate into Social Work curricula when teaching cultural empathy to social work students. I hypothesize, however, that most faculty teaching social work courses do not use Young adult literature in the classroom to teach cultural empathy. In addition, I hypothesize that faculty who do not use YA literature in the classroom have not ever thought of using YA literature to teach cultural empathy, but may use other forms of supplemental instruction, such as YouTube clips, films and movies, newspapers, blog posts, and non-textbook books.

## **Methodology**

As there has been no research on this topic in the field of social work, this is an exploratory study. A survey was conducted online using Qualtrics software across one state with faculty in CSWE accredited Social Work programs.

### Survey Questions and Study Timeline

Data were collected through the online survey only. The data included participants' demographics, including race and gender, professional title, years of teaching experience, course levels taught, types of courses taught, and survey responses to questions about supplementary materials used in their courses, the purpose of the supplementary materials used, and the frequency and usefulness of supplementary materials used, in particular Young Adult literature. The survey was sent out via email immediately after IRB approval, and closed on February 29, 2016.

### Recruitment

Based on the faculty and staff pages of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited Schools of Social Work in Florida, there are 266 publically listed Social Work faculty members. It was estimated that there may be up to 350 faculty members across the state (listed and unlisted faculty) that fit the participation criteria, since many schools do not list adjunct faculty, lecturers/instructors, or graduate teaching assistants. The target goal was at least 30 participants. A convenience sampling method was used to try to obtain at least 30, but no more than 350 participants. Accredited Schools of Social Work were identified from the CSWE

webpage, along with departmental contacts. Since colleges and departments usually maintain an internal email list of their faculty, administrative staff at each school were sent an email and asked to forward the email to their faculty, rather than sending an email to each individual faculty member across the state. This method was also used because it would allow the survey information to be received by faculty who are not listed on the departments' websites, or whose email addresses may have changed from the public listing.

After IRB approval was obtained, an email was sent out to the listed contact persons of all accredited Schools of Social Work within the State of Florida. This initial email included information about the study, along with the link to the study, and a request that the email be forwarded to all social work faculty or instructors within their respective Social Work departments. A second email was sent approximately 4 weeks after the initial email with a reminder to forward the email, along with the link and study information. A final email was sent to thank the departmental contacts once the survey closed.

#### Inclusion and Exclusion Methods

On the first page of the survey, the explanation of research was displayed, along with a statement of consent. By reading the explanation and clicking the box next to the consent statement on the explanation page, participants indicated their consent. The submission of a complete or partially complete survey indicated the participant's ongoing consent. Participants were not required to answer each question in order to move onto the next question, and were able to skip questions that they did not wish to answer. The email text and explanation of

research on the opening page of the survey stated that this study was intended only for individuals who teach in Schools of Social Work, and that participants were required to be 18 years or older to participate. The exclusion criteria included: individuals who do not teach in accredited Schools of Social Work, or individuals under the age of 18. No other inclusion or exclusion criteria applied. Only surveys with more than half of the total questions answered were used in the final analysis, and a final notation of how many non-completers engaged initially with the survey is included in the results.

## Results

Based on the data, my hypotheses were supported, however not enough respondents were acquired to make generalizations. Eighteen people completed the survey; of the eighteen, seventeen completed surveys were used. One survey was taken out since the respondent did not teach in the specified state. The majority of respondents identified their gender as female (76%), followed by male, and one undisclosed gender. More than half of the respondents identified as White (65%), followed by Hispanic or Latino/Latina (17%), African American or Black (12%), and unidentified/prefer not to answer (6%). The majority of the respondents hold positions as Assistant Professors (41%), followed by a smaller number who hold positions as Lecturers, Instructors, Adjuncts, or Teaching Assistants (29%). An equal amount of respondents hold positions as Associate Professors, or an unlisted title.

Most of the respondents have been teaching for at least seven or more years. Specifically, 47% of respondents have been teaching for ten or more years, 12% for seven to nine years, 23% four to six years, and 18% for up to three years. In regards to supplementary material usage, YouTube clips and films/movies were used the most as supplementary material in practice and field courses, followed by policy and macro-practice social work courses. It is interesting to note that YouTube and films/movies were used more in research courses than newspapers and books that were non textbooks. News articles were used the most in policy and macro courses, which makes practical sense, given the nature of those courses.

Except for research courses, the number of respondents were almost even for non-textbook book usage. While some faculty are using blog posts across the curriculum (with the exception of research courses), the numbers are significantly smaller than that of the other supplementary materials. Non-textbook books are used more frequently than news articles across the curriculum. Films and movies are used as supplementary material more than YouTube clips. However, in total, films and movies, followed directly by YouTube clips, are used almost twice as much as news articles and books, and about six times more than blog posts across the curriculum. These responses correspond to my second hypothesis regarding the types of supplementary materials used by faculty.

In regards to YA literature usage, six respondents indicated that they have used books but not YA literature, while four indicated that they never used books outside of the assigned course textbook. Seven respondents indicated that they have used YA literature in their courses, with three respondents indicating that they have used entire novels, and four respondents indicating that they have used excerpts. These results echo my first hypothesis in that faculty who do not use Young adult literature slightly outnumber the faculty who do use YA literature.

The results show that 31% of professors used YA literature to teach about a specific population or issue, 26% used YA literature to teach about different cultures, another 26% for a case study or role play, followed by 17% who used YA literature as an introduction to a class discussion. The majority of respondents found YA literature very useful, and the majority of respondents indicated that they were very likely to reuse YA literature.



## Discussion

In practice courses, social work students learn the practical skills and methods needed to work with a diverse range of clients; field classes are the support courses offered in conjunction with field placements-agency based internships for social work students. In the field classes, students learn and explore specific skills and situations as it relates to the students' internship experiences. As noted in the results section, YouTube clips and films/movies were used the most as supplementary material in practice and field courses, followed by policy and macro-practice social work courses.

Since most films tend to be fictional, it can be surmised that the reason films are the most popular is that it allows the audience to be connected to characters, stories, and situations while still remaining in a safe space in a classroom of peers, similar to that of the preservice teacher groups reading YA literature (Pytash, 2013). Movies may allow students to see different perspectives without the students themselves being put on the spotlight. YouTube may be a very close second due to the short nature of YouTube clips, as well as the breadth of material and subject that can be found on this web based social media platform. Assistant Professors were less likely to have used YA literature while Lecturers, Instructors, Adjuncts, and TA's were the most likely to use YA literature.

It was interesting to find that a little under half of the faculty surveyed have used Young adult literature in their courses. Less than twenty percent of the time, YA literature was used to introduce a class discussion. An equal amount of faculty have been using YA literature as a way

to engage in role play or case studies –activities that require imagination, taking on a role, and essentially placing oneself in another’s shoes –and to teach about different cultures. In both instances, YA literature seemed to demonstrate potential for enriching the academic experience.

The most popular use for YA literature was to teach about a specific population or issue. The engaging nature of YA literature may have very well facilitated skill development, connection, and empathy formation for the students in these courses, similar to that of the preservice educators in Pytash’s (2013) study. It is clear to see that Young adult literature is being used mostly for diversity and culture awareness education (57%), specifically for: teaching about different cultures and teaching about specific populations or issues. In addition, more than half of the faculty who have used YA literature in such a manner indicated that they have found YA literature very useful and that they are very likely to use again.

## **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. Due to how the survey was distributed, there was no way of knowing if every point of contact emailed, and every faculty at each School of Social Work, received the survey. The target sample size was thirty but only eighteen people completed the survey by the pre-established deadline. Also, the study only surveyed faculty in one state. In addition, one question apparently did not reliably display on the survey; as a result, no information was recorded about what certain respondents' reasoning was for not using YA literature in their courses.

## **Implications for Practice and Future Research**

This study may be of interest to Social Work researchers and educators particularly in the area of facilitating learning on cultural empathy. Young adult literature may not only be a successful vehicle to teach about diverse cultures, populations, and issues across the Social Work curriculum, but also can enrich class experiences –particularly for discussions, case studies, and role play experiences. Young adult literature can also be used as a tool for creating safe spaces for developing students’ cultural empathy skills in Social Work courses. In addition, Young adult literature is a relevant and accessible tool that can help further Social Work’s commitment to ethical and competent practice with all people.

From the results of this study, several aspects can be focused on for future research. The study could be replicated on a larger scale, with a larger sample size, and possibly across several states to see if the results obtained during this study are reflective of social work faculty practices throughout the country. In addition to replicating the study, data could be collected on the types of young adult books being used by surveyed faculty [including the authors and specific books used by the faculty]. The use of films in classrooms and the types of films watched in social work classrooms could be investigated alongside social work practitioner identity formation. A case study could also be conducted: what would the results be if researchers were to implement YA literature into a Social Work course curriculum? Just as well, research on cultural empathy and empathy formation for Social Work students is an area that would hold promise in the new era of social work education.

## **Conclusion**

As a field, Social Work is striving for solid student education that results in strong cultural empathy. Connecting with our clients in order to complete the work at hand is one of our primary priorities. YA novels have potential to be an effective tool for transforming social work education to focus on cultural empathy and building an openness to listening to our clients from different cultures and groups share their story. This study adds to the current research on Social Work education by presenting some insight on Young adult literature usage as it relates to cultural competency and empathy.

## **APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

## Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Tracy C. Wharton, PhD** and Co-PI: **Samuelle Voltaire**

Date: **January 19, 2016**

Dear Researcher:

On 01/19/2016, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: The Usage of Young Adult Literature as a Vehicle to Teach Cultural Empathy  
Investigator: Tracy C. Wharton, PhD  
IRB Number: SBE-15-11829  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kanille Chay" followed by a horizontal line.

IRB Coordinator

## **APPENDIX B: TABLES**



Table I

Demographics of Respondents-Race

<b>Title</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
	<i>Hispanic/Latino(a)</i>	<i>African American/Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Other Race</i>
<i>Assistant Professor</i>	0	1	6	0
<i>Associate Professor</i>	0	1	1	0
<i>Professor</i>	1	0	0	0
<i>Lecturer/Instructor/Adjunct/TA</i>	1	0	4	0
<i>Other Title</i>	1	0	0	1

Note: The survey coded for several racial groups and ethnicities. The racial groups listed in this table correspond to those who completed the survey.

Table 2

Demographics-Years Teaching

<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
0-3 years	3
4-6 years	4
7-9 years	2
10+ years	8

Table 3

Cross-Tabulation of Courses Taught and Supplementary Material Used

<b>Courses Taught</b>	<b>Types of Supplementary Material Used in Classes/Courses Taught</b>				
	<i>YouTube Clips</i>	<i>Films/Movies</i>	<i>News Articles</i>	<i>Blog Posts</i>	<i>Books (non-textbooks)</i>
<i>Research</i>	4	4	2	0	3
<i>HBSE</i>	8	9	4	1	6
<i>Practice/Field</i>	11	11	4	3	7
<i>Policy/Macro</i>	10	9	6	2	7
<i>Other classes/electives</i>	7	8	5	1	6

*Note:* The respondents were able to select as many courses and supplementary materials as it applied to their classroom history.

Table 4

<i>Have you ever used Young Adult (YA) literature (including fiction, nonfiction, problem novels, etc.)</i>					
		Yes, entire novels	Yes, but only excerpts	No, I've used books but not YA	I have never used books (besides textbooks) in my curriculum
<i>What is your title?</i>	Assistant Professor	0	2	3	2
	Associate Professor	1	0	1	0
	Professor	0	0	1	0
	Lecturer/Instructor/ Adjunct/TA	2	1	1	1
	Other (please specify)	0	1	0	1

## **APPENDIX C: FIGURES**

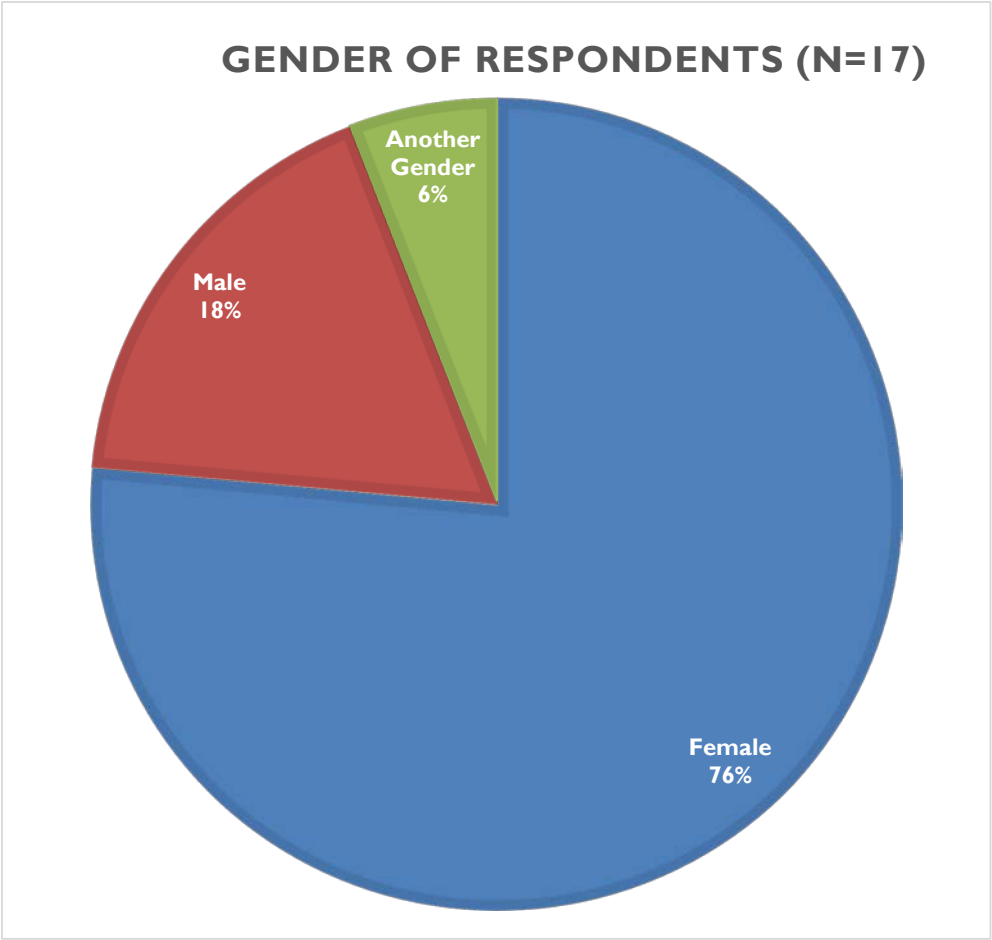


Figure 1: Gender of Respondents

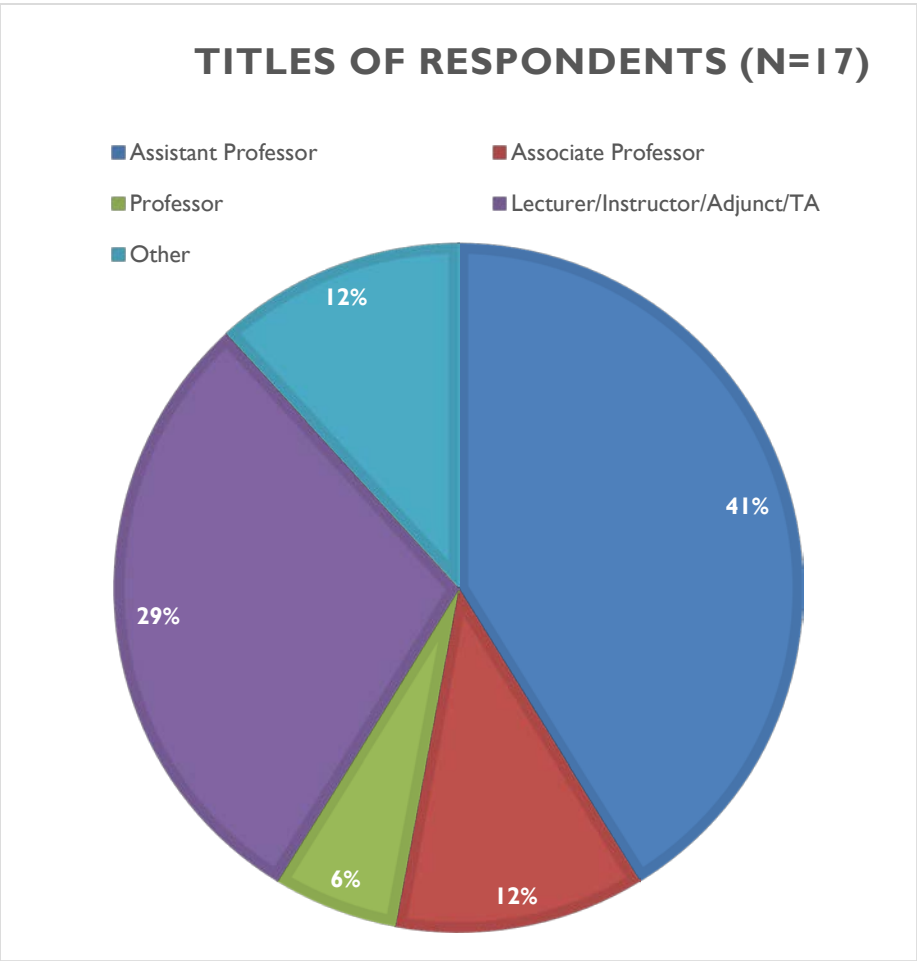


Figure 2: Titles of Respondents

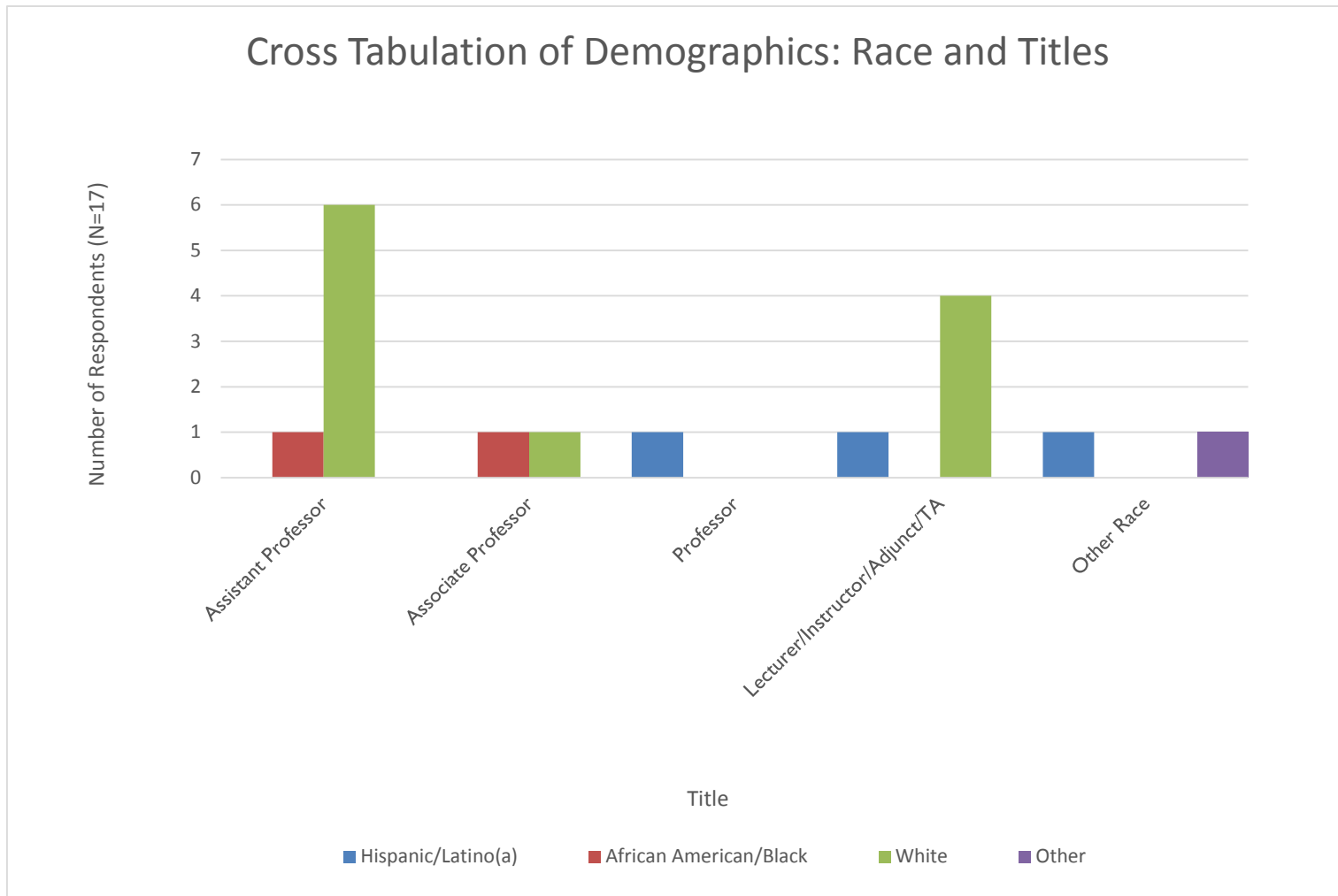


Figure 3: Demographics of Respondents-Race



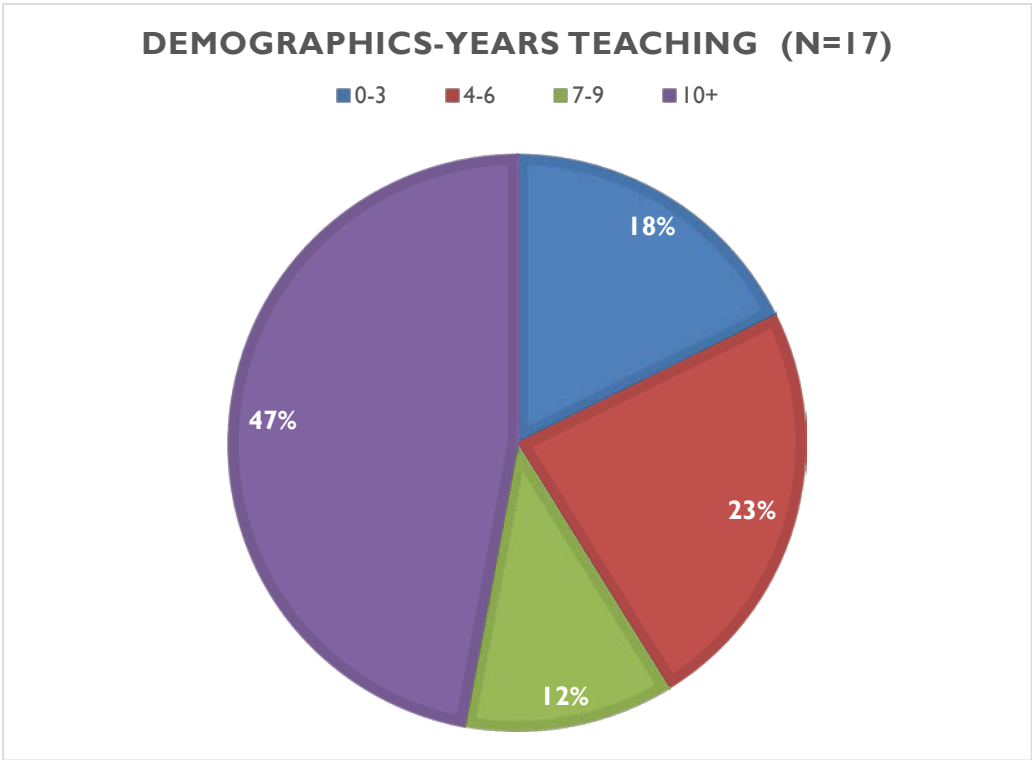


Figure 4: Demographics-Years Teaching

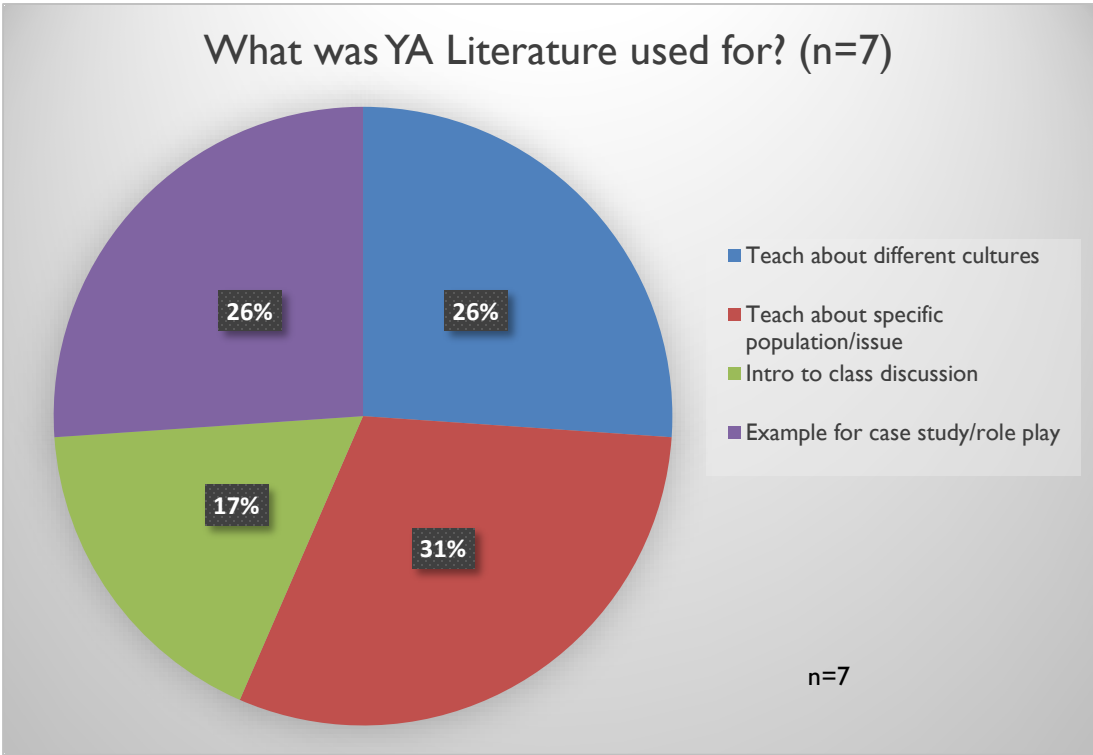


Figure 5: YA Literature Uses

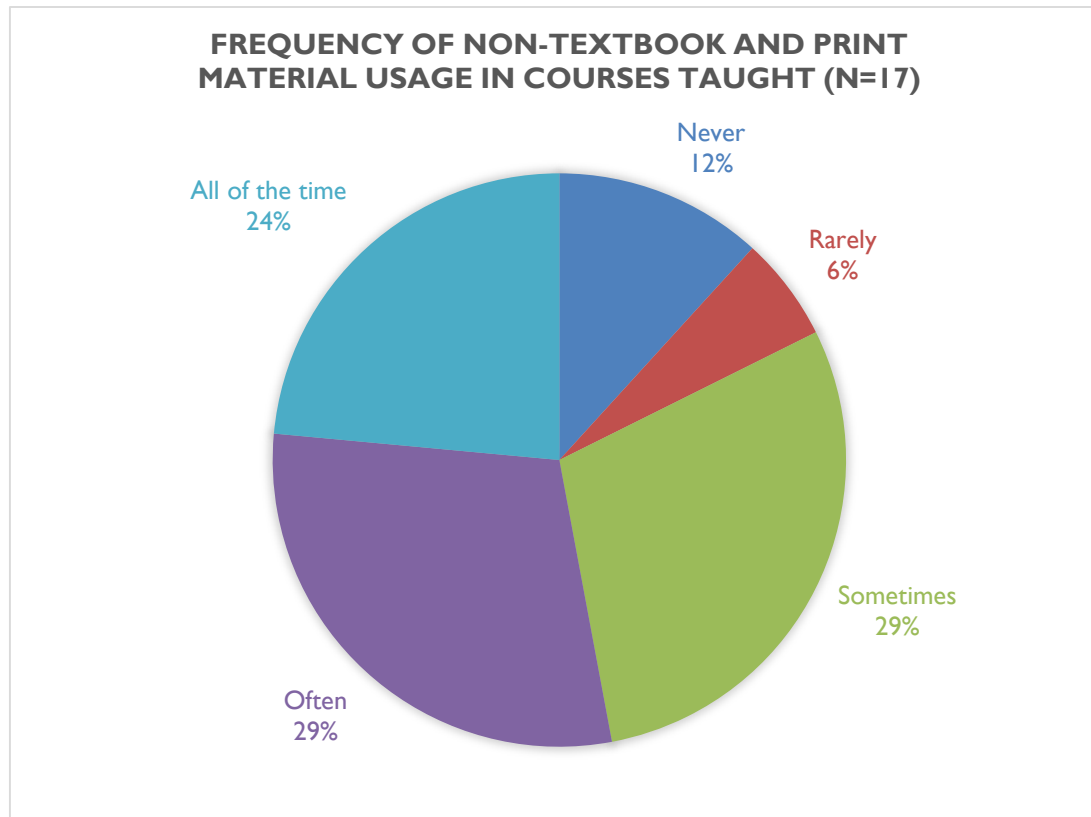


Figure 6: Frequency of non-textbook and print material usage in courses taught

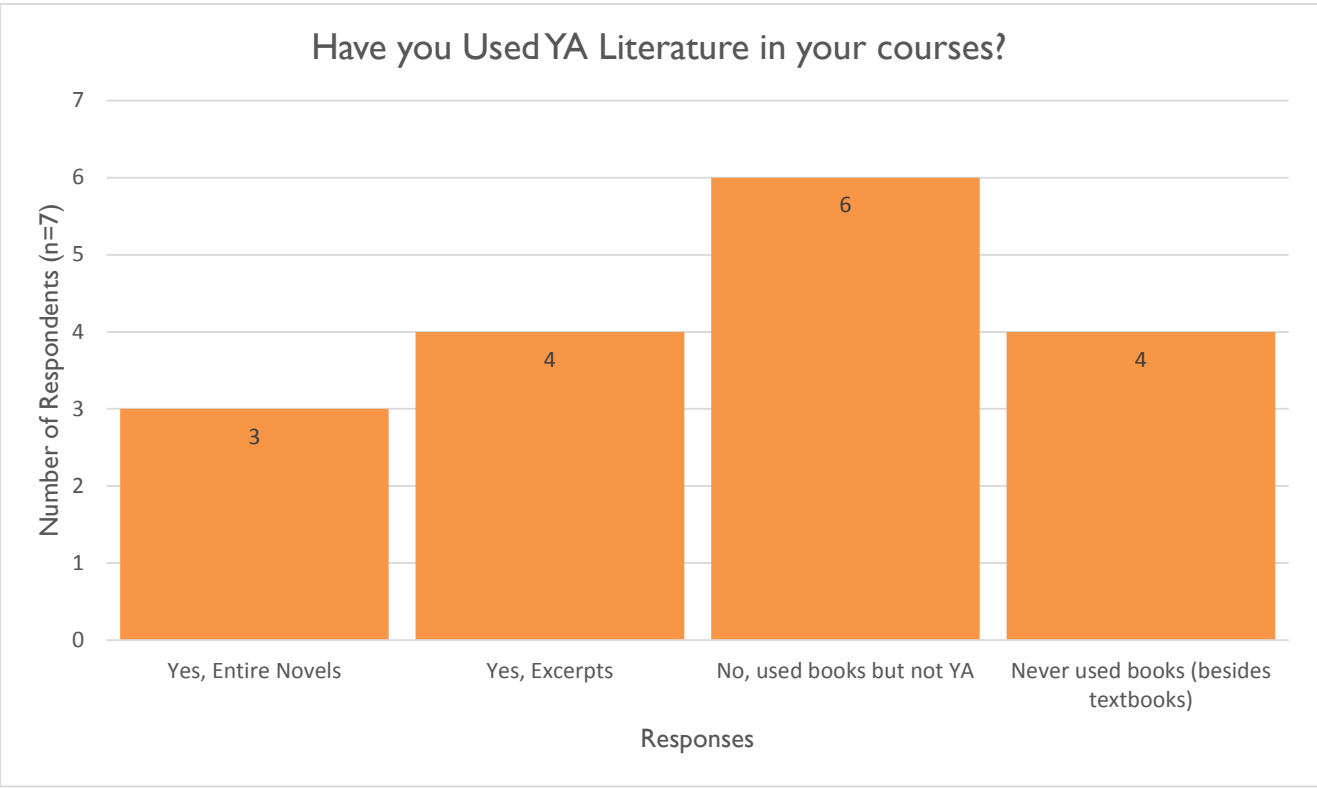


Figure 7: Responses to Using YA Literature

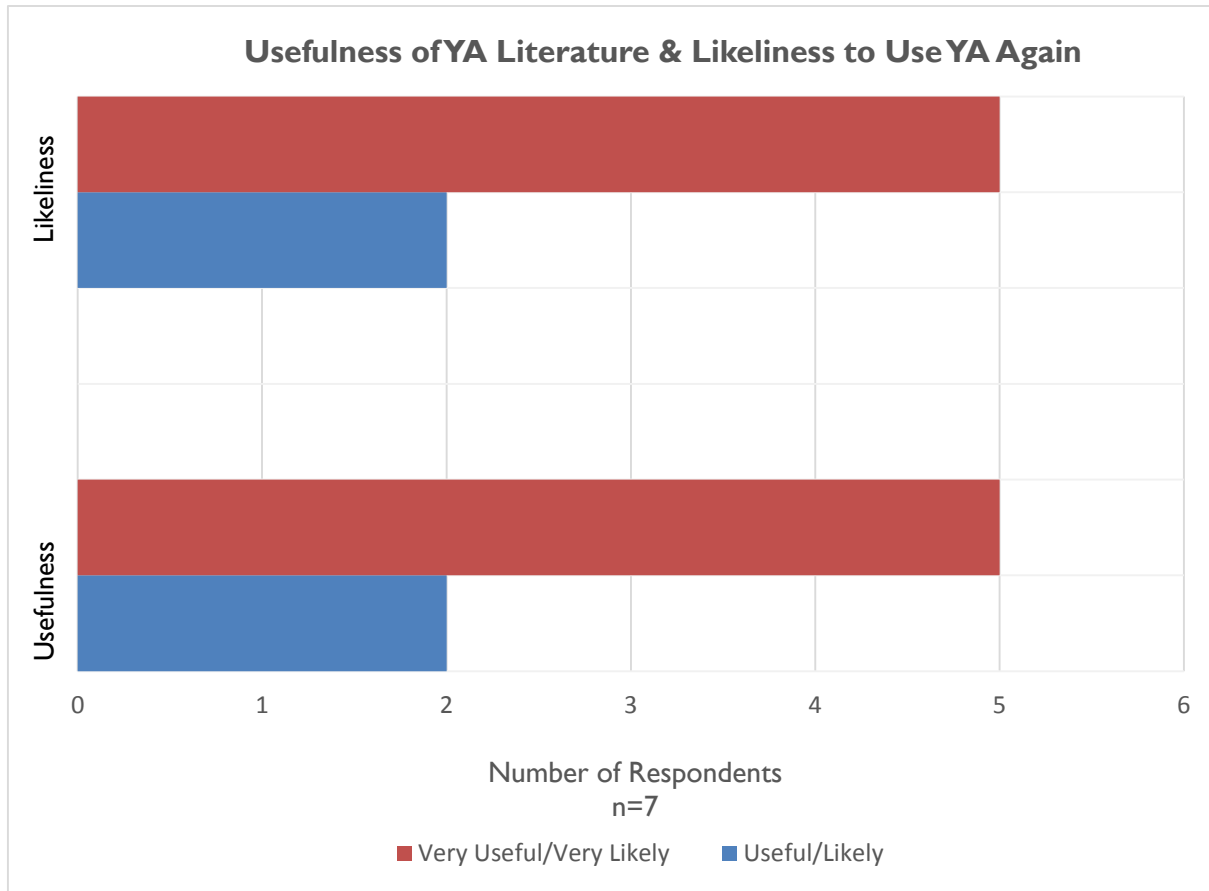


Figure 8: Usefulness of YA Literature & Likeliness to Use YA Again

## **APPENDIX D: REFERENCES**

## References

- Carter, J. (2012, March 3). Understanding your triggers - a way out of emotional reactivity and addiction. Retrieved from <http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/counsellor-articles/understanding-your-triggers-a-way-out-of-emotional-reactivity-and-addiction>
- Dean, R. G. (2001). The Myth of Cross-Cultural Competence. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 623-630.
- Fisher-Borne, M., Cain, J. M., & Martin, S. L. (2015). From Mastery to Accountability: Cultural Humility as an Alternative to Cultural Competence. *Social Work Education*, 34(2), 165-181. doi:10.1080/02615479.2014.977244
- Garran, A., & Werkmeister Rozas, L. (2013). Cultural Competence Revisited. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 22(2), 97-111.
- Gerdes, K. E., & Segal, E. (2011, April). Importance of Empathy for Social Work Practice: Integrating New Science. *Social Work*, 56(2), 141-148.
- Gerdes, K. E., & Segal, E. A. (2009). A Social Work Model of Empathy. *Advances in Social Work*, 10(2), 114-127.
- Glenn, W. J. (2012, July). Developing Understandings of Race: Preservice Teachers' Counter-Narrative (Re)Constructions of People of Color in Young Adult Literature. *English Education*, 44(4), 326-353.

- Hughes, E. M., Hunt-Barron, S., Young Wagner, J., & Calvert Evering, L. (2014). Using Young Adult Literature to Develop Content Knowledge of Autism for Preservice Teachers. *The Teacher Educator*, 49(3), 208-224. doi:10.1080/08878730.2014.917754
- Hughes-Hassell, S. (2013, July). Multicultural Young Adult Literature as a Form of Counter-Storytelling. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 83(3), 212-228. doi:10.1086/670696
- McCoy, H., & McKay, C. (2006, October). Preparing Social Workers to Identify and Integrate Culturally Affirming Bibliotherapy into Treatment. *Social Work Education*, 25(7), 680-693. doi:10.1080/02615470600905895
- Mlcek, S. (2014). Are we Doing Enough to Develop Cross-Cultural Competencies for Social Work? *British Journal of Social Work*, 44, 1984-2003. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct044
- Nadan, Y., & Ben-Ari, A. (2013). What Can We Learn from Rethinking 'Multiculturalism' in Social Work Education? *Social Work Education*, 32(8), 1089-1102. doi:10.1080/02615479.2012.723686
- National Association of Social Workers. (2001). *NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*. DC, Washington: NASW Press. Retrieved 2015, from <https://www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/NASWCulturalStandards.pdf>
- Pardeck, J. T. (1998). Chapter 1. An Introduction to Bibliotherapy. In J. T. Pardeck, *Using Books in Social Work Practice: A Guide to Bibliotherapy* (pp. 1-15). Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Press, Inc.



- Petticrew, M., & Roberts, H. (2006). Starting the review: Refining the question and defining the boundaries. In M. Petticrew, & H. Roberts, *Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide* (pp. 38-41). Blackwell Publishing.
- Pytash, K. E. (2013, March). Using YA Literature to Help Preservice Teachers Deal With Bullying and Suicide. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 56(6), 470-479. doi:10.1002./JAAL.168
- Pytash, K. E., Morgan, D. N., & Batchelor, K. E. (2013, March). Recognize the Signs: Reading Young Adult Literature to Address Bullying. *Voices from the Middle*, 20(13), 15-20.
- Regan, K., & Page, P. (2008). "Character" Building: Using Literature to Connect with Youth. *Reclaiming Children & Youth*, 16(4), 37-43.
- Tussing, H. L., & Valentine, D. P. (2001, December). Helping Adolescents Cope with the Mental Illness of a Parent Through Bibliotherapy. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 18(6), 455-469.
- Villalba, J. A., Ivers, N. N., & Ohlma, A. B. (2010, March). Cuento Group Work in Emerging Rural Latino Communities: Promoting Personal-Social Development of Latina/o Middle School Students of Mexican Heritage. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 35(1), 23-43. doi:10.1080/01933920903463502
- Vodde, R., Dixon, D. R., & Giddings, M. M. (2003). Booked for the Week: A Survey of the Use of Bibliotherapy by Licensed Clinical Social Workers. *Advances in Social Work*, 4(2), 94-114.