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Revisiting Teachers' Complex Book Choice Decision-Making Processes

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How readers perceive and interpret text is a complex question, the response to which depends on the nature of the text and its message, the historical and cultural context it covers, and the purpose for reading it, among others (Lee & Goldman, 2015; McGrail & York, 2023). Importantly, like a text that “ always responds and relates to cultural and historical concepts, patterns and conventions” (Poyas, 2004, p. 64), so does the reader, who also engages in responding, interpreting and relating to the text and the social, cultural and historical concepts contained within the text itself and surrounding it, including the world of the reader at a given point of time as well. The view of the reader as such an active participant in the process of reading and interpreting meaning, including a literary text, has been embraced for some time now, especially with the reader response theory that has codified, popularized and made it more accessible to classroom teachers and students (Rosenblatt, 1978).

Sam, Boyd, and Cook’s article, “Complicated Positioning: Gender, Whiteness, and Teaching Sherman Alexie,” which is featured in this issue of the Research Strand of *Ubiquity* explores the complexity of the dynamic reader, text, and context relationship afforded by the emergence of the reports of author Sherman Alexie’s repeated sexual misconduct and the response by secondary English teachers about reading this author’s young adult text, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007), in light of this new information.

Specifically, Sam, Boyd, and Cook describe in a nuanced way teacher participants’ decision-making processes about including or excluding *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* in their curricula in the aftermath of the controversy surrounding Alexie and his work. Teachers’ expressions of approval or disapproval are interpreted and problematized through multiple theoretical lenses, including Critical Whiteness Studies, intersectionality, and positioning theory (for theory citations, please see the article). This multi-perspectival approach

revealed internal conflicts, self-censorship, and different stances among the teacher participants, stemming from the teachers' cultural knowledge and beliefs, gender and racial positioning, and considerations of the current climate, including the widespread book banning as well as the local, state, and school restrictions (Collins, 2023).

As such, the findings illustrate intricate ways in which “The meaning of a literary text is not perceived as embedded in itself and never changing, but rather constructed through a dialogic process between the text and the readers' diverse worlds” (Poyas, 2004, p. 63).

This well-written article will be a useful resource for researchers, doctoral students, and teachers interested in literature selection decision-making, language arts curriculum and instruction, censorship, and teacher identity and beliefs.

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Bio: Dr. Ewa McGrail is Professor of Language and Literacy Education at Georgia State University. In her research, she examines digital writing, multimodal composition, and multimodal assessment; copyright and meaning making; critical media literacy and social representations in mass media, popular culture and literature.