



Text Sets: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Literature

Greta G. Freeman

University of South Carolina, Upstate

Brooke L. Hardin

University of South Carolina, Upstate

Abstract: Text sets (also referred to as linked text sets, multimodal texts, thematic texts, multi texts, focus units, reading across texts, and paired readings or sets) are utilized in classrooms to promote reading, learning, and understanding of multiple perspectives. There has not been a thorough analysis of studies on text sets or on the wide-ranging effects of text sets. The purpose of this review was to conduct a comprehensive analysis of text sets and their effects on student achievement and growth. Several writings describing text sets and their development, as well as experimental studies reporting on the effects of text sets, were identified through a thorough database search. Findings from this review reveal that there are over 100 peer-reviewed journal articles, books, book chapters and theses related to text sets. There is evidence to support the use of text sets for helping young children to college age students gain multiple perspectives on a topic, become highly engaged and motivated, and improve critical thinking, comprehension, content knowledge, and social emotional skills.

Keywords: text sets, paired texts, multimodal, interdisciplinary, intertextual

Citation: Freeman, G. G., & Hardin, B. L. (2024). Text sets: A comprehensive analysis of the literature. *Current Issues in Education*, 25(2). <https://doi.org/10.14507/cie.vol25iss2.2122>

Accepted: 04/03/2024

Text Sets: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Literature

Instructional strategies are the techniques or methods that a teacher utilizes to meet the learning objectives of a lesson or unit-of-study. One such instructional strategy, known as text sets, are a purposeful and differentiated collection of resources (print, non-print, classic, contemporary, fiction, nonfiction) gathered on a topic, theme, essential question, or core conceptual (abstract) idea (Donham, 2013; Giorgis & Johnson, 2002; Kern, 2014; Moss, 2011; Young & Ward, 2010). The use of text sets in K-16 classrooms is considered an interdisciplinary instructional strategy, spanning multiple time periods and genres. Text sets offer choice, variety,

and multiple perspectives on a topic, allowing students to “read, learn, synthesize and deeply understand information” (Beck, 2014, p. 13).

Text set collections are often created by teachers (Elish-Piper et al., 2014) and employed in early childhood, elementary and middle school classrooms (Mathis, 2002; Souto-Manning, 2015). There is also evidence (Fernandez, 2000; Hynd, 1999; Porter, 2018; Tunnell, 1996; Twichell, 2018) of the benefits the use of multiple text sets provides at the high school and college level. McGlynn and Kelly (2019) state that “if students aren’t invested in what they read, they won’t remember it” (p. 36), however many classrooms continue to utilize the one-text model where students rely on a single textbook for information related to the subject area.

There is a substantial body of literature related to text sets. Books, journal articles, websites, blogs, and marketplaces, in addition to publishing, educational, and media companies, boast the effectiveness of text sets in increasing student interest and engagement, enhancing student achievement, and developing interdisciplinary skills. While Barzilai, Zohar, and Mor-Hagani (2018) and Reynolds (2022) provide valuable yet limited reviews of the literature, they recommend future, more widespread research, and reviews. Barzilai, Zohar, and Mor-Hagani (2018) specifically discuss the need for a comprehensive review of text sets and the diversity of terms depicting the concept. This group of researchers also suggest a review of the literature based on age group, discipline, and duration of unit of studies is necessary. Other important aspects of text sets underexplored in the literature include understanding assumptions behind models of text set construction (Reynolds, 2022), the need to understand how text sets support comprehension of challenging texts to build background knowledge (Lupo et al., 2017), and the relationships between text sets, instructional approaches, student learning, and feelings of teacher efficacy (Salerno et al., 2020).

Given the identified gaps and lack of a general review of the literature, an investigative review is necessary to present overarching themes, provide a comprehensive understanding of what is known and has been published, and guide future studies related to text sets. Considering the numerous pedagogical benefits of text sets, it is important to provide a review of the related information for those interested in learning about or utilizing this concept, or who are contemplating furthering the research on the topic. Therefore, the aim of this investigative review is to determine the scope of the information related to text sets available in the literature, and to document and merge that information into a single, pragmatic record. This comprehensive and systematic review of the literature and repository of core ideas and examples crystallizes the many instructional benefits of text sets and supplies a centralized review for those interested in this pedagogical phenomenon.

Accordingly, we reviewed over 50 years of literature (1970-2023), on text set history and instructional use in K-16 educational settings. This systematic analysis reports key terms, descriptions, instructional design and application, empirical studies, and informational texts, as well as the overall effectiveness of text sets on student achievement and engagement. The following research questions guided the review:

1. What are the trends in publications and research related to text sets?
2. What themes emerge in a review of the literature of text sets and related terminology?
3. How has the concept of text sets as an instructional strategy evolved over time?
4. What effects does the use of text sets as an instructional strategy have in K16 education?

Below we will offer background information by providing a historical and theoretical overview of text sets.

Historical Foundations

There is a wide array of terminology and descriptions surrounding the value of referencing one text versus a text set philosophy. An understanding of the historical underpinnings of texts and education can bring light to the decades-long discussion and evolution of the text set phenomenon. Reviewing this historical evolution of multi- and varied texts on a topic supports background knowledge and appreciation for the characteristics and themes presented in the results portion of the review.

Although formal education in the United States did not begin until the 1800s (Urban et al., 2008), information provided to children or students began earlier, by tutor, instructor, or parent. Eventually instructors used a sanctioned text in the 1700s and 1800s (called schoolbooks) in the form of the New England Primer and Webster's blue-backed speller (Wakefield, 1998). In the early years of formal education, written documents and texts were limited due to the lack of printing materials and machines available. Even after the printing press made such an impact, classrooms continued to utilize the single-text method for convenience (Hartman & Hartman, 1994).

The specific idea of multi-text classrooms, based on a topic or theme follows the initiatives put forth by progressive educators beginning in the 1930s, and goes back decades in academic literature (Harste et al., 1988). At the time, progressives argued that students were not seeing the full scope of a topic through a single text and encouraged the reading of several texts on a topic (Hatfield, 1935; Weeks, 1936). In a new English curriculum document (Hatfield, 1935), evidence emerged for an out-with-the-old, authoritarian style of teaching, and in-with-a-new experiential, imaginative, and connection-to-self and world ideal. Encountering a variety of texts on a topic to obtain multiple perspectives was one of the new teaching strategies promoted in the curricula. With a lack of resources, technology, and money, however, this idea soon faded, and the notion of the lone text continued to be the norm.

The multi-text teaching strategy was reimagined by Herber (1970) who discussed using a main text, supported by multiple interdisciplinary or subsidiary texts to promote a topic. The idea, however, fell short due to similar issues educators faced in the 1930s. Money for education was scarce and widespread computer technology was not yet on the horizon for educational institutions. In the 1990s the phrase "text set" began to take hold in the literacy classroom and the literature (Hamman, 1994; Hartman & Hartman, 1993), and the idea has intermittently alternated between trendy and antiquated over the past three decades.

Prior to and immediately after the turn of the 21st century, when text sets were gaining popularity, authors such as Opitz (1998), explained text sets as "collections of *books* related to a common element or topic" (p. 622). In 1990, Taberski wrote about a simple form of text set or paired text, where the teacher utilized one fiction and one non-fiction book read aloud together. Lewis and Walpole (2016), through a "four-text framework" (p. 34), suggested choosing texts for background knowledge and interest, information, content knowledge, and increased topic understanding.

Over twenty years into the 21st century the term *text* no longer refers to a single, written work (especially in reference to an academic textbook). Authors such as Rowe (1987), are finally seeing their multi-text notion realized, that texts are not only print sources [linguistic], but any source that communicates meaning [semiotic] (Giorgis & Johnson, 2002; Hartman & Hartman,

1993, 1995). Nichols (2009) states that “text should no longer conjure an image of traditional books neatly lining library shelves” (p. 34). It should move beyond a single book, and even beyond printed words on a page.

Texts in this context can include all or some of the following: books (including textbooks, picture books, reference books, narrative expository texts, explanation texts, how-to books, chapter books and novels); biographies and journals; field-guides; cartoons (including political); poems and song lyrics; documentaries, interviews, diaries, news footage or articles; public service announcements and propaganda; photographs, brochures, postcards, and timelines; artistic works such as film, performances, theatrical pieces, paintings, pictures, galleries and exhibits; digital texts such as webcasts, live feeds, podcasts, blogs, tweets, videos, and social media posts; field trips (in person and virtual); graphic organizers including charts, maps and graphs; data; digital essays; artifacts; and personal experiences (Balkus, 2019; Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2015; Ivey, 2002; Kern, 2014; Pytash et al., 2014; Tracy et al., 2016).

Today’s text sets contain a rich and complex main text, often called a launch text (Nichols, 2009), springboard text (Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2015), or anchor text (Folk & Palmer, 2016). The anchor text is supported by *subsidiary* or *elaboration* texts (Folk & Palmer, 2016), also known as a *document* or *information source* (Barzilai, Zohar & Mor-Hagani, 2018). Lewis and Walpole (2016) call these subsidiary texts, “knowledge builders” (p. 34), because they may also include instructional strategies, literacy lessons, or responses to the text set. Subsidiary texts provide scaffolds that support vocabulary and comprehension of the main text (Folk & Palmer, 2016). Supplementary texts should be “of high interest, short and accessible” (Pytash et al., 2014, p. 54), and support a “methodical order” (Babino et al., 2019, p. 50). Giorgis and Johnson (2002) add the texts should be varied in “genre, readability and content” (p. 200).

Theoretical Foundations

As with important historical information regarding text set evolution, reviewing the theory behind the phenomena moves the discussion forward, and supports the literature analysis. There are several theoretical frameworks that support the development and use of text sets in K-16 classrooms. Freire (1970, 1995) wrote about giving students input and looking beyond the text to see power structures and voices. He believed humans should learn to read the world with a critical eye and challenge the single story. Freire’s critical theory and critical pedagogy supports text sets, as the reader senses a broad view of a topic that spans culture, geography, and universal issues. Bishop’s (1990) theory of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors, also challenged the single story through the belief that employing a variety of texts allows the reader to not only view the lives of others through text, but to see ourselves in context (Tschida et al., 2014). Adichie (2009) expanded on the theories of Freire and Bishop with his “danger of the single story” presentation. He is quite direct in the belief that we must take information from a variety of sources to understand the different voices, perspectives and opinions.

Wineburg’s (1991) theoretical framework of historical reasoning involved the reading of several documents by historians to learn about, determine discrepancies, and identify similarities written about a topic. He discussed three methods in his structure including corroboration (comparing and contrasting documents), sourcing, and contextualization. This framework supports the idea of intertextuality, or “the process of making connections between other texts to facilitate the construction of meaning of new texts” (Pytash et al., 2014, p. 54). Kristeva coined the term and developed the theory of intertextuality (Zengin, 2016). Shanahan’s (2013) cognitive flexibility theory and intertextual model complements Kristeva’s (1980) theory of intertextuality

as support for multiple text use, where individuals understand information best through multiple representations.

Methods

Following the recommendations of Mertens (2023) this study adhered to a systematic review approach to gain insights into the concept of text set history, background information, and effects on student engagement and academic achievement through empirical research and practical instructional applications. An initial preliminary source search of EBSCO Host and World Wide Web (WWW) sites using the keywords *text sets*, *reading*, *interdisciplinary*, and *multiple texts* determined that there is much literature on the topic. Based on abstract examinations, it was found that none of the works initially reviewed included a complete review of the literature and many were missing important historical resources and material.

The initial search led to over 300 resources that were screened by the authors independently and collectively. From this initial screening, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to determine the next steps. It was decided that the final collection must include the term “text set” or a related term such as multimodal texts. All peer-reviewed publications were included. Non-peer-reviewed writings (e.g., articles, books, book chapters, theses, dissertations) that integrated instructional strategies and sample text sets, were also incorporated due to the practical application contribution. Blogs, magazine articles, teacher resource sites and opinion reviews were removed from the final list due to lack of academic rigor, time constraint, and relevance to the study purpose and research questions.

After the initial review, a new search was performed to include additional search terms ascertained from prior search publications (e.g., *multimodal texts*, *paired texts*, *twin texts*, and *intertextual*) and search databases (i.e., EBSCO Host Education, ERIC, Education Index Retrospective, Research Gate, Google Scholar, Academic Search Ultimate, Academic Search Premier, and ProQuest—including Dissertation Abstracts International). Reference lists from the first set of publications were evaluated to add to the updated library for more thorough review. The final review of the literature on text sets brought forth over 100 written works, of which were given an in-depth reading, and organized and evaluated using Zotero, a reference management software.

The screening process is illustrated in Figure 1. A notes editor through the Zotero software allowed for consolidation of themes, points of interest, direct quotation consensus, and metadata. Themes were identified, listed and color-coded in the note’s column of the software.

The authors worked independently via digital means, and met weekly for several months to organize, discuss, and evaluate the information. Prior to the final draft of the paper, themes were again evaluated. Some less obvious strands were folded into more prominent themes while others were deleted altogether to be discussed later in the recommendations section.

Figure 1
Screening Process

<u>Initial Review</u>	
EBSCO Host, WWW - “Text Sets” = Preliminary Sources (323)	
<u>Final Review</u>	
EBSCO Host Education, ERIC, Education Index Retrospective, Research Gate, Google Scholar, Academic Search Ultimate, Academic Search Premier, and ProQuest—including Dissertation Abstracts International - “Text Sets” or Equivalent Terminology = Peer-Reviewed or Edited Sources (110)	
<u>INCLUDED</u>	<u>EXCLUDED</u>
<u>Peer Reviewed Sources</u>	<u>Non Peer-Reviewed Sources</u>
Articles	Blogs
Book Chapters	Magazines
Books	Teacher Resource sites
<u>Non Peer-Reviewed Sources</u>	Websites
Articles	Opinion reviews
Books	
Book Chapters	
Theses	
Dissertations	

Results and Analysis

The results from this systematic review present information gathered from a total of 110 sources: seven books, 33 book chapters, 62 peer-reviewed journal articles, four master’s theses, two dissertations and two technical reports. Although there are hundreds of websites, blogs, and other online depictions of text sets, only published, peer-reviewed and edited sources are discussed in this context. Of the reviewed works, the following terminologies were discovered and interchangeable, as a means to describe a set of texts to teach a topic or theme: *text sets*, *multiple texts or intertextual integration* (Barzilai, Zohar, & Mor-Hagani, 2018; Lenski, 1998); *multimodal multi-genre texts* (Cappiello & Dawes, 2013); *paired texts, readings or sets, or twin books* (Gao & Bintz, 2015; Taberski, 1990); *tri-texts* (Ciecierski & Bintz, 2017); *quad texts* (Lewis & Walpole, 2016; Lupo et al., 2017); *alternative texts, conceptual text sets, thematic text sets* (Ivey, 2002; Tschida & Buchanan, 2015); *personal text sets, generative text sets* (Mathis & Giorgis, 1999; Souto-Manning, 2015); *reading across texts* (Hartman & Hartman, 1993); and *multiple perspectives, reading ladders or multimodal text scaffolds* (Witte & Rybakova, 2017). The phrase “text set” is applied throughout the results section to represent the comprehensive understanding of the concept exemplified by the previous terms and phrases. The concept of intertextuality, the belief that no text ever stands alone, or that every text is connected to another text, was the overarching idea that ran constant throughout the literature.

Thematic Arrangement

It is important to determine major themes found in a literature review to support a study’s purpose and categorize the information for quick reference. Through thematic coding, an analysis of the scholarly literature available on text sets brought forth several interrelated characteristics of text set information. These themes will support readers in a concise search for

specific information in a sufficient manner. The specific themes will also address gaps in the literature and guide future research.

All of the reviewed works had some type of definition or description of text sets. Eighteen percent of the representative works shared background information including historical evidence and/or theoretical foundations. Eighty-eight percent of the readings shared the value for utilizing text sets in a classroom setting (categorized by student engagement, motivation, literacy and reading comprehension, benefits of multiple perspectives, critical thinking, and social emotional support). Seventy-four percent presented instructions for developing text sets, and approximately twenty-five percent of the works included full examples of text sets. The final review revealed the following key themes: background information (provided in the introduction of this paper for reader orientation and context); student engagement and motivation; literacy and reading comprehension; multiple perspectives and critical thinking; social emotional support; guidelines for development; and sample educator and student created text sets. Each theme is presented in an autonomous section, followed by a short discussion and analysis.

Student Engagement and Motivation

Text sets have been used for several decades to support student engagement and motivation of reading as well as to encourage excitement for content (McGlynn & Kelly, 2019; Monobe & Turner, 2018; Tovani, 2004). When students have a choice, and see themselves in the text, they are motivated to continue the discovery. Students are engaged and motivated when they are interested and see relevance in a topic or see the ability to transfer information to their own lives. Single textbook reading has been reported by students and teachers as “too difficult, too boring or both” (Ivey, 2002, p. 20) as well as “too broad and prescriptive” (Lent, 2012, p. 146) and “not student friendly” (McGlynn & Kelly, 2019, p. 37). They have also been said to be encyclopedic (Haley, 2016), mundane, and disconnected from events they portray (VanSledright & Kelly, 1998).

Beck (2014) claims that “readers must be able to understand and process what they are reading” (p. 12). If this becomes difficult or the texts are boring, there will be a lack of motivation and engagement. Text sets support motivation and engagement in high school English courses, while students read a book from the Canon along with more engaging supplementary texts (Wold & Elish-Piper, 2009). Witte and Rybakova (2017) never use the term *text set*, however, describe the same concept under a different name - *reading ladders or multimodal text scaffolds*. They use the concept of text sets but utilize the required canonical texts supplemented with contemporary texts related to a theme. When students encounter an interesting text that is on their reading level, it may encourage them to read more difficult texts on the topic. Ward and Young (2008) believe teachers should include a range of levels in a text collection so that students can experience a variety of topics and themes, making research and reading more engaging and rewarding.

Textbooks provide basic information. They often fail to engage students on a deeper level and make connections to their lives. Text sets support student engagement through reading levels (Giorgis & Johnson, 2002), relatability (Haley, 2016), and multiple genres and complexities (McGlynn & Kelly, 2019). Coombs and Bellingham (2015) share a set of ideas for having students engage in text set development and usage. They share that when authentic texts through text sets are discovered, students ask and answer tough questions, and improve their knowledge of a topic. They also learn how to honor differences (Benner, 2018; Clark-Alexander, 2018; Dimitriadou et al., 2011; Fleischaker, 2018; Kelewae, 2018; Lacina & Griffith, 2020), increase

background knowledge (Leland & Harste, 1994), make connections to their own lives, and improve reading, writing and collaborative skills. Hawkinson and Freedman (2012) support this in their statement that “background knowledge increases” with exposure to “far ranging visuals and concepts” included in text sets (p. 2).

All students deserve to be in classrooms that are interesting, relatable, and engaging. Oftentimes students who are non-English speakers or bilingual, are in classrooms where they fail to see and read about people like themselves. A feeling of disconnect may contribute to a lack of engagement. Through text sets students are able to learn about the world, rather than only gaining information about local communities. Researchers (Anokhin, 2018; Bintz, 2018; Bintz et al., 2018; Culp, 2018; Dowdy & Fleischaker, 2018; McCaffrey & Corapi, 2017; Scullin, 2018; Tan, 2018; Werner, 2018) report that multicultural and global text sets motivate and engage students because they are able to see a variety of cultures, settings, genres and formats from around the globe.

Babino (2019) believes that through text sets, multilingual students are able to see themselves and connect with the literature. Creating captivating text sets that allow students to employ “their entire linguistic repertoire is a practice in social reflexivity for educators” (Babino, 2019, p. 48). Young (2018) communicates an example of this type of connection when she shares how a kindergarten student connected to a book because she saw herself and her family in the images of the book characters. This supports and builds on Bishop’s (1990) mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors theory where students see themselves in texts (mirrors), the lives of others in texts (windows), and have the ability to walk through real life into the imaginary (sliding glass doors).

Students are engaged if they can relate to what they are reading. Tracy et al. (2016), discuss the importance of diversity of interests and texts to promote student engagement. Older students, as well as young people of various ages, are not always readers. Text sets support these students and increase their reading habits. Elish-Piper et al. (2014), believe that text sets “help high school students choose to read” (p. 573). Other authors (Borgerding, 2018; Foraker, 2018; Hair & Fleischaker, 2018; Krasniq, 2018; Lee, 2018) support a multicultural, multidisciplinary set of texts to learn about self and others. With such a large amount of literature boasting the benefits of text sets on student engagement and motivation, it is deduced that text sets should be a fundamental and core instructional strategy in K-16 education.

Literacy and Reading Comprehension Skills

Literacy skills such as print and phonological awareness, vocabulary, and writing, support student’s grasp of important concepts, allow for critical thinking as well as fluent and comprehensive communication, and permit students to gain a deeper understanding of their world. Research (Babino, 2019; Balkus, 2019; Cervetti et al., 2016; Folk & Palmer, 2016; Tracy et al., 2016; Strop & Carlson, 2010) has found that text sets support literacy skills and provide choice. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) demonstrate that choice increases motivation, which in turn enhances literacy knowledge (Gambrell & Morrow, 1996). Lieberman and Looney (2013) found that when text sets are selected and implemented carefully, they strengthen literacy development.

The use of text sets is a multimodal strategy, referring to definition, and literacy experts and researchers provide a rationale for their use in classroom settings to support integration among content areas (Balkus, 2019; Barzilai, Zohar, & Mor-Hagani, 2018; Batchelor, 2017). Balkus (2019) demonstrated cross curricular teaching in her research thesis by utilizing text sets to connect literacy and social studies. Multimodal texts vary meaning through words, illustration,

design, genre, readability and content and provide a range of perspectives for the reader (Balkus, 2019). Batchelor (2017) believes that “without this synergy and interaction, a true understanding of the reading would be incomplete” (p. 15).

Students who struggle with reading and learning often have difficulty with single-text, one-size-fits-all instructional practices (Beck, 2014). Teachers who utilize the single-text model may leave some readers behind due to reading level and lack of personal connection. All students are individuals with different background knowledge and expectations. Text sets reinforce concepts (McCaffrey & Corapi, 2017); support acquiring background knowledge for new concepts (Ciecierski & Bintz, 2017); and make content accessible to all students (Lent, 2012). By adding to the schema of children, text sets support students with or without prior knowledge about a topic (Soalt, 2005). Wold et al. (2010), believe that linked text sets provide students with distinguishable reading opportunities because in selecting texts all reading levels are recognized and students with different backgrounds and knowledge can find success.

It is important in any 21st century classroom to have a variety of texts for different reading levels and in different languages. Lupo et al. (2017) believe a variety of reading levels in text sets are important so that students can have a mix of difficulty in their reading, and struggling readers and English learners are supported in the process. Ogle and Correa-Kovtun (2010) share the importance of repeatedly encountering content-specific terms (as would take place through text sets) to support building vocabulary. Fernandez (2000) discusses the importance of text sets for English language learners, and state that a combination of prior knowledge on a topic together with new knowledge gained from text sets will “activate their reading schemata and aid their comprehension” (p. 743).

Students may read words fluently, but they may not always understand what they are reading. Researchers (Babino, 2019; Balkus, 2019; Cervetti et al., 2016; Ciecierski & Bintz, 2017; Lieberman & Looney, 2013) have found that text sets support the building of comprehension skills and background knowledge. In order to enjoy what is read and make connections, students must have good comprehension skills. When a student is comprehending what they are reading, they are understanding the meaning and merging it with what they already know and understand. Soalt (2005) found that background knowledge and vocabulary can improve comprehension skills, especially if explored in a variety of contexts such as through text sets.

Teachers often search for new ways to help students comprehend what they read. Ivey (2002) suggested different reading materials to build comprehension and interest. Cervetti et al. (2016) determined that focusing text sets on concepts improved student comprehension, knowledge and vocabulary, and Batchelor (2017), agreed that through text sets reading comprehension is improved and history comes to life.

Standards-based teaching and high stakes accountability measures is a paradigm shift in K-12 education beginning in the 1980s and, although under constant debate, remains a fixture in schools across the globe. When educators develop new instructional strategies or ideas, they often link them to state and national academic standards. Balkus (2019) speaks of the changes that came with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). With these new standards came stricter requirements to integrate content areas such as social studies and literacy, and text sets make it easier to integrate subject areas. A large number of works reviewed explicitly refer to specific standards such as the ILA/NCTE, and CCSS (Donham, 2013; Finley, 2015). If text sets support literacy and reading comprehension, as the literature has defined,

utilizing this instructional strategy regularly could possibly lead to higher academic achievement and test scores.

Multiple Perspectives and Critical Thinking

Using one text to tell a story or learn a concept in history or other area of social science often only provides one perspective which can lead to stereotypes and a lack of character's voice. It can also turn students off reading when they fail to see different perspectives or make connections to their own lives. Hartman and Hartman (1993), state "Just as a camera lens magnifies details to the point of blurring the background, so can one text be magnified to the point where its context becomes a blur" (p. 110).

Crawford and Zygouris-Coe (2008) share the importance of students learning about "complex issues" (p. 199) and hearing different perspectives from multiple texts. When students start to review several texts on a topic or theme, they are able to witness different interpretations and points of view, inconsistent information, and changes over the course of history (McCaffrey, 2014). Balkus (2019) states, "Each text has made its own decisions about what should be included and what should be left out, creating its own interpretations" (p. 32). This helps them to evaluate the credibility of a text, determine multiple biases, understand issues, and draw reasonable conclusions (Barzilai, Zohar & Mor-Hagani, 2018). They must make an ultimate decision on what is the best and most accurate information. As students read and collaborate with classmates on a variety of texts related to a topic, they begin to think critically about what might be missing from the reading, and identify elements to promote understanding (Brugar, 2015; Hynd, 1999; Scales & Tracy, 2017). They also develop questions that "lead to critical inquiry processes and engaging class discussions" (Bersh, 2013, p. 49). Barzilai, Zohar and Mor-Hagani (2018) describe this as rhetorical transformation, or the production of new text structures that connect ideas and transfer to a new dimension.

Experts in the concept of text sets (Beck, 2014; Elish-Piper et al., 2014; VanSledright & Kelly, 1998), have found that using text sets in classrooms support critical or deep thinking, problem solving and inquiry. Students utilize critical thinking skills as they integrate knowledge and ideas through texts that are based around the same theme. VanSledright and Kelly (1998) performed a research study with 5th graders exposed to multiple texts on a topic and determined critical thinking skills increased as well as historical understanding. Text sets support deep thinking as students read with an inquiry stance, identify with characters, understand difficult issues, make discoveries about themselves and others, translate sign systems, and have a general understanding of authors purpose and point of view (Elish-Piper et al., 2014; Pytash et al., 2014; Nichols, 2009).

Social Emotional Support

Collaboration is an important 21st century skill. Students at all levels need communication and collaboration to support positive social and emotional behaviors. Opitz (1998) supports this by stating that text sets allow students to learn from one another through discussion and idea sharing. He states that "text sets cultivate and support a social learning environment, an atmosphere where students can think and learn together" (p. 14).

Young people have always dealt with challenging and even threatening life issues: bullying, violence, discrimination, death, politics, sexuality, friendships, physical appearance, and an array of other social, emotional, and traumatic issues. Text sets can be developed to

support almost any difficult or controversial life issue as well as promote character traits such as empathy, perseverance, caring, kindness, understanding, thoughtfulness, honesty, loyalty, responsibility, curiosity, bravery, sharing, tolerance, and respect.

Tschida and Buchanan (2015) promote text sets for supporting controversial issues, or “conflicting points of view and longstanding social debates related to a theme, event or experience” (p. 43). Text sets should be used by teachers to promote advocacy, support social justice issues, and disrupt the single story (Dodge & Crutcher, 2015; Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2014; Moran & Keith, 2016). For example, Bersh (2013) shares a text set for discussing bias related to immigration. Having a variety of perspectives through a multitude of texts supports marginalized students in making connections to their own lives and finding their voice.

Generative text sets are created based on themes of conflicts and anxieties and are “designed for equity and universal access” (Souto-Manning, 2015, p. 80). Text sets allow students to feel a sense of belonging and offer a “non-threatening environment from which children can explore and resist daily challenges” (Babino et al., p. 45). Martin (2018) suggests the use of blues music as a part of a text set to promote understanding.

Guidelines for Development of Text Sets

In the review of the literature, many of the readings share instructions or ideas to support teachers and students in the development of text sets (Hartman & Hartman, 1993; Lent, 2012; Tschida & Buchanan, 2015). The main goal is to determine a topic or idea and choose an anchor text followed by several subsidiary texts. Due to the large number of sources including text set development guidelines, the authors felt this should be included as an important theme running throughout the literature.

Tschida and Buchanan (2015) share a four-step process for creating text sets: 1) Identify the topic; 2) Recognize multiple perspectives; 3) Locate suitable texts; and 4) Select texts. Once texts are chosen, Babino et al. (2019), believe each subsidiary text should be presented in a prescribed order to support the topic. Hartman and Hartman (1993) share strategies for arranging texts by type and structure. Arranging texts by type focuses on theme, whereas arranging texts by structure focuses on the structure between texts. To build on their 1993 strategies, Hartman and Hartman (1994) later came up with four questions to support text set development: 1) What types of texts can be used? 2) What are ways to arrange texts? 3) In what activities can students engage? and, 4) How can outcomes be represented?

In searching for the types of texts that are available and can be used appropriately in text sets, Hoch et al. (2019) believed creators must organize texts based on themes and questions and locate sources that are easy-to-challenging. Donham (2013) discussed that texts must include a range of complexity, style, or genre. In addition, Lupo et al. (2017) suggested a variety of easy-to-challenging texts, especially including more interesting ones to help motivate students to persevere through the difficult ones. Generative or personal text sets are “generated from the interests, tensions and realities of learners” (Souto-Manning, 2015, p. 79). Multimodal, multi-genre text sets include texts from a variety of sources and genres. Thematic text sets cover a topic and span reading levels and genres. Intertextual integration refers to the requiring of activation of information read from another text. Paired texts, readings or sets and twin books generally utilize two books on a topic, whereas tri-texts include three, and quad texts include four texts. Reading ladders or multi-modal text scaffolds focus on a theme and build from one text to another framing information along the way.

The search for the perfect anchor and subsidiary texts takes time and effort. Fortunately, there are hundreds of previously created text sets available online and in books or digital libraries. Lent (2012) explains that to create text sets one must begin by determining what questions they wish to answer before beginning the search for texts. Hawkinson and Freedman (2012) also support asking essential questions before creating text sets. An essential question related to civilizations would be related to what elements make a civilization.

Griffith (2018) coined the phrase “constantly curating” or constantly searching out and adding new texts to sets or creating new text sets (p. 39). He explains that as teachers we know our topics and are constantly locating resources to add to our teaching toolbox. For example, he states, “when a song I’m listening to connects to a book I’m teaching, which makes me think of an image that would help tie the two together, I’m curating a potential text set for my students” (p. 39). Fernandez (2000) supports Griffith’s concept of constantly curating in that text sets should be “defined to be flexible and the addition or subtraction of materials is likely to occur over time” (p. 742).

A variety of authors (Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2015; Shanahan, 2003; Tracy et al., 2016) provide activities and creation of steps for immediate implementation of text sets. Lupo et al. (2019) provide a framework for creating text sets based on motivation, complexity, challenge, and comprehensibility.

There are several projects, and activities shared in the research for how to represent text sets and outcomes from their representation. Inquiry, digital learning, writing, collaboration, reader’s theater, character maps, biographical sketches, and letter writing (Hoch et al., 2019; Smolen et al., 2008) are a few examples provided in the literature.

Educator and Student Created Text Sets

There are complete text sets and activities for all age levels on internet sites and published in books and peer-reviewed journal articles. There were over 150 text sets discovered in the review of the literature. Themes surrounding the human story (i.e. heroes, family, character traits, celebrating differences, rights, identity, and growing up) are highlighted by a number of researchers (Bersh, 2013; Coombs & Bellingham, 2015; Dodge & Crutcher, 2015; Dunkerly-Bean & Bean, 2015; Elish-Piper et al., 2014; McCaffrey & Corapi, 2017; Nichols, 2009; Tracy et al., 2016; Ward & Young, 2008; Wold et al., 2010). There are a number of text sets based on academic content especially in the social sciences and literacy areas (Batchelor, 2017; Brugar, 2015; Cappiello & Dawes, 2013; Cappiello & Dawes, 2021; Crawford & Roberts, 2016; Fernandez, 2000; Folk & Palmer, 2016; Giorgis & Johnson, 2002; Haley, 2016; Kimmel, 2019; Lendak, 2018; Lent, 2012). Many of the text sets that fit into the content area category have a multicultural theme running through them (Kurkjian et al., 2004; Robb, 2002; Rodesiler, 2017; Smolen et al., 2008; Witte & Rybakova, 2017). Although this article cannot focus on the specific elements in each of the text sets discovered in the literature, it is worth knowing there are endless resources available for teachers wishing to utilize text sets.

Discussion and Analysis

The results from this comprehensive review of the literature on text sets provide readers with over twenty interchangeable terms or phrases depicting a set of texts on a topic or theme and used in an educational setting. Findings also include a thorough historical and theoretical

foundation in support of the text set phenomenon. A variety of reasons for creating and using text sets in a classroom were discovered through this review. With eighty-eight percent of the publications reviewed for this article sharing values and rationale for utilizing text sets, it is obvious that this is seen as an important instructional strategy. In addition to a thorough historical and theoretical foundation, findings include themes alluding to the important outcomes from the use of text sets in classrooms to support student learning and growth. Effective text sets engage and motivate readers (Balkus, 2019; Giorgis & Johnson, 2002; Lent, 2012); build prior knowledge (Balkus, 2019); support comprehension (Beck, 2014; Coombs & Bellingham, 2015); improve writing skills (Coombs & Bellingham, 2015); teach vocabulary in context (Balkus, 2019); allow students to explore a topic in-depth and gain a wide-ranging perspective (Coombs & Bellingham, 2015; McGlynn and Kelly, 2019; Tatum et al., 2009); support collaboration where students learn from one another and gain new insights (Beck, 2014; Opitz, 1998); support all reading levels and struggling readers (Giorgis & Johnson, 2002; Lent, 2012); and deepen student thinking on a topic (Balkus, 2019; Beck, 2014).

It was found through the review of the literature that text sets are appropriate for early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school classrooms, as well as two- and four-year colleges and universities. Young children benefit from being exposed to multiple texts on a topic. In the 21st century young children have an abundance of picture books and other texts to support multi-perspective learning. Batchelor (2017) supports the idea of using text sets with young children and shares several text sets utilizing picture books. Opitz (1998) describes the importance of young children's exposure to a wide variety of texts, and states that text sets allow all children to be exposed to real information at an early age. Older students at the elementary level also benefit from text sets. At this age, students are becoming abstract thinkers. Tschida and Buchanan (2015), and Ebbers (2002) believe text sets allow for a "historical thinking approach" by elementary students (p. 42). Text sets also provide an interdisciplinary approach, for example teachers can encourage connections between literacy and science inquiry (Ebbers, 2002).

Hynd (1999) promotes the use of text sets in middle and high school classrooms to encourage students to think like historians. In the high school setting, English teachers must teach a required canon (Tatum et al., 2009) which can be challenging when it comes to student engagement. However, teachers have utilized text sets as a strategy for keeping the interest of students through supplemental, enriching texts, while still teaching the required canon (Witte & Rybakova, 2017). Babino et al. (2019) shares strategies for locating "compelling" anchor books such as checking out award winners, talking to librarians, and looking at literacy related websites and social media accounts. Fernandez (2000) shares text sets for use in a community college developmental reading course. She explains that textbooks for community college students may be too easy or too difficult, but with text sets she can have a variety of resources related to a topic and all students at all levels can be successful in learning the content.

The idea of text sets as an instructional strategy has recently seen much publication and classroom use, based on the increase in technology access, however there are still teachers who are hesitant about the text set notion, due to their feelings about time constraints in creating them (Doolittle, 2016). Dunkerly-Bean and Bean, (2015) dispute this argument by stating that, "the ease with which they can be constructed and utilized has made them much more attractive and pragmatic for classroom use for both critical literacy and standards-based purposes" (p. 3). Findings from this study demonstrate a large number of pre- designed text sets and guidelines for creating text sets, making their construction and classroom utilization less cumbersome for teachers. With hundreds of text sets created and available on the Internet, through teacher

resource sites and books, there finally seems to be a real paradigm shift taking place, moving away from the single text paradigm (Hartman & Hartman, 1994) to the multi-text, multi-genre text set paradigm. Today the concept is widely known in the education community and is a staple in many K16 classrooms.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The idea of text sets has been around for decades, but only since the ease of access with technology has the concept been able to move forward in production and implementation. The peer-reviewed literature and research available on text sets show they are valuable for supporting multiple perspectives, as well as literacy, comprehension, collaboration, and content skills. Much of the literature has ready-made text sets for use in K-16 classrooms. Several of the articles reviewed are older and a large number of resources have been developed or published since the time of publication, however with additions of more current texts, they can be utilized in modern classrooms. Based on the findings of this systematic literature review on text sets, the authors envision text sets being used in K16 classrooms and across all content areas to support student engagement and motivation, academic achievement, critical thinking, multiple perspectives, and social emotional skills.

Although the authors have completed a thorough review of the available literature, there are limitations to this systematic analysis. Search databases are selective about the journals and topics they include so there is possibly more information available that has not been included in this paper. Time and space are a limitation on the part of the authors and publishers. The authors performed a comprehensive review of the literature, however given more time, additional publications and categories may have been included. Journals have restrictions on space; therefore, a limitation is that some important information could have been left out. New information is continually added to websites and publications; therefore, a final limitation is that as this paper is published, new literature may become available.

Implications for Future Practice

This review supports a deeper understanding of the text set phenomena and has initiated a valuable collection of information, ideas, plans, and guidelines for practitioners. To optimize text set classroom applications, the following recommendations are presented. First, available text sets should be identified by grade level(s), and new sets should be planned and developed to include missing topics and state standards. The current literature on text sets indicates variety in text set creation, arrangement, and implementation. Following the advice of Donham (2013), the focus of these newly identified text sets should follow the various components of current sets and should be conceptual. Texts should represent dimensions of a topic (for example immigration). Dimensions of this topic would include the why and how, as well as the impacts, challenges, external characters, and destinations related to the topic of immigration.

Practitioners could also follow the ideas of Hartman and Hartman (1993) who discussed dividing the support texts into categories: companion, complementary, synoptic, disruptive, and rereading. Companion texts are by one author; complementary texts are by a variety of authors; synoptic texts give different versions of the same idea; disruptive texts give a different outcome of an event; and rereading is reviewing the texts a person has already visited.

Finally, with hundreds of text sets available it is recommended that available text sets be reviewed, and a repository established for teachers and categorized by grade level and theme or topic. Many educators are not allowed access to scholarly publications that higher education students and faculty are given. To obtain the full benefits and variety of available text sets, the authors recommend a dissemination of curated research outcomes and practical application examples via social media and other digital means to reach a more diverse audience. There are multiple curriculum standards, topics and themes that need text sets created for them. Ultimately, text sets support teachers and students and will most likely grow in popularity and volume in the future.

Implications for Future Studies

Based on the findings, the authors propose several implications for future research to address the limitations of the available literature. The authors agree with Barzilai, Zohar, and Mor-Hagani (2018), Reynolds (2022), Lupo et al. (2017) and Salerno et al. (2020), that future, specialized studies should be conducted. Specific research should address age group, discipline, duration of unit of studies, models of construction and instructional approaches, support of challenging concepts, student learning, and feelings of efficacy. It is also suggested for further research and review to study connections between text sets and academic achievement or assessment results. In addition to McCaffrey's (2014) findings that the exemplary text sets of the Common Core State Standards are not diverse enough to engage all learners the authors believe there must be additional text sets created by teachers to supplement the CCSS sets to make sure diverse learners are considered. Research related to CCSS, and diverse text sets are recommended.

Last, we advocate for future research curation of text set studies and practical applications. This should come from peer-reviewed, non- peer-reviewed and edited literature. It may also be beneficial to review and publicize text sets available on websites. Curation will lead to diversity of audiences obtaining the information, and more practitioners and researchers understanding and using the concept. This could lead to higher academic achievement, test scores, and positive social emotional responses. Dissemination through online communication channels can help mobilize research on a global scale. Conversations and collaborative efforts could move the conversation and important instructional strategy elements to a larger audience.

Ultimately, our research has unfolded an expansive conversation on the text set phenomenon. Text sets as an instructional strategy have value for a variety of educational stakeholders including students, teachers, administrators, and curriculum coordinators. The conversation should continue to develop so the benefits reach a wider audience. Professional development and curriculum materials could further the knowledge and background information as well as general understanding of the concept.

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Author Notes

Greta G. Freeman

ORCID: 0000-0003-4986-2675

University of South Carolina - Upstate

freemang@uscupstate.edu

Brooke L. Hardin

ORCID: 0009-0009-7815-4476

University of South Carolina - Upstate

bhardin2@uscupstate.edu



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