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Erin O'Connor, Class of 2015

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Abstract

In this current issue of *Next Page*, Erin O'Connor, Class of 2015 and winner of this year's Silent Leader Award, tells us which influential courses and works inspired her to develop her own major, Diversity and Development in Education, what conversation she would like to have with Paulo Freire if given the chance, and which books are on her "To Read" list for after graduation.

Keywords

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Erin O'Connor, Class of 2015 and winner of this year's Silent Leader Award, talks about the books that have inspired her while she created her own major.

You just won the Silent Leader Award. Congratulations! What book or article has recently inspired you to take action (i.e., inspired change in educational path, travel to a new place, activism, etc.)?

Recently, the school counselor I am working with at Gettysburg Middle School for my senior capstone project suggested I read *Lost at School: Why Our Kids with Behavioral Changes Are Falling Through the Cracks and How We Can Help Them* by Ross Greene and *School Counseling to Close the Achievement Gap* by Cheryl Holcomb-McCoy. While I have just begun reading them, they excite me for my future as a school counselor and inspire me to incorporate social justice in my work in the schools.

Do you have a favorite book or literary character from your childhood?

As a child, the Frog and Toad stories were my favorite, teaching me about friendship from their adventures. I had one book that was a collection of all of the Frog and Toad stories by Arnold Lobel and I remember reading it so much that I am surprised it is still in one piece.

You developed your own major, titled Diversity and Development in Education. Is there a writer who has inspired your interest in social justice issues related to education?

I read Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's *Half the Sky* in my first-year seminar, The World's Children with Professor Cain, which was really influential in developing my individual major on education. This class and book really opened my eyes to the injustices around the world and demonstrated to me the transformative power education can have, especially for girls in the developing world. Education can help prevent and address many of the world's greatest issues that children face such as child marriage, sex trafficking, and child labor.

What have you recently recommended to a friend to read and why?

I recently recommended [A Path Appears](#) by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn to a classmate. She had read Kristof and WuDunn's [Half the Sky](#) in high school and had seen the [Half the Sky documentary](#). While I haven't finished the book yet, I had the opportunity to go to D.C. last semester to hear Kristof speak about [A Path Appears](#) (and have him sign my book!) and I have been watching the new PBS documentary this past month. This wonderful sequel provides examples of how individuals can get involved, help create effective solutions, and make a positive change both in the United States and abroad.

If you could meet any writer, dead or alive, who would it be? What would you want to know?

I would want to meet Paulo Freire. In Dr. Williams' Education for Social Change class, we read an excerpt from [Pedagogy of the Oppressed](#) and the book [We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change: Myles Horton and Paulo Freire](#) which solidified my passion for education and how education can empower individuals and create social change. I would be interested in what Freire would have to say about a school counselor's role in critical pedagogy.

How do you find time to read for fun?

I definitely do not get to read for fun as much as I'd like during the semester, but it helps that many of my assigned readings for classes really interest me. One of the best parts of my semester abroad in Denmark was the amount of time I had to read for fun. Each day on my 40-minute train ride to and from Copenhagen, I would read on my Kindle and ended up reading over a dozen books in my four months, in addition to all my school work!

What do you plan to read next?

I have a large stack of books that I plan to read once the semester is done and before I begin graduate school. I am continually adding to my "To Read" list which has a variety of genres from [The Hunger Games](#) to some Nicholas Sparks. On the top of my list though is to finish [A Path Appears](#) and [I Am Malala](#) by Malala Yousafzai.

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