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Historical Traditions and Critical Perspectives: An Exploration of the Textual and Pedagogical Choices of Four Language Arts Teachers in an Urban, Diverse Secondary School

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Historical Traditions and Critical Perspectives: An Exploration of the Textual and
Pedagogical Choices of Four Language Arts Teachers in an Urban, Diverse Secondary
School

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all those who love, write, teach, and engage with the multitudes of stories in our lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank my passionate, brilliant, and dedicated co-researchers, without whom this study would not have been possible. Our collaboration, our reflection, our growth, as well as our respect and love for the work that we do has profoundly impacted me as both an educator and a scholar. Thank you for being so willing to be vulnerable alongside me as colleagues, researchers, and most importantly, as friends. Your love of literature, teaching, your students, and our community shaped every aspect of this research, and I remain grateful to have had the opportunity to share your voices through our work.

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HISTORICAL TRADITIONS AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES: AN EXPLORATION OF

THE TEXTUAL AND PEDAGOGICAL CHOICES OF FOUR LANGUAGE ARTS

TEACHERS IN AN URBAN, DIVESE SECONDARY SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

Even as current critical research in the teaching of English calls for a widening of

traditional secondary texts and curricula choices, the presence of certain district, local,

and state policies continue to permeate classrooms in extensive and oppressive ways that

have limited the literature, the instructional strategies, and the autonomy that teachers

bring into educational spaces. This qualitative study examines the pedagogical choices of

four secondary language arts teachers within the framework of both historical and critical

perspectives on the teaching of literature and within the realities of a high-stakes,

evaluative teaching environment. Utilizing participatory action research (PAR) and

collaborative inquiry, this community-based research at a highly diverse, urban high

school in the southwest examines the text selection of four practicing language arts

teachers. It analyzes whether the pedagogical choices of these teachers align with the

holistic goals of critical literacy or return to more historically traditional forms of literature instruction. Ultimately, this study seeks to add to scholarship within research and theory in the teaching of English by exploring how current secondary teachers choose and approach a variety of texts within a larger trajectory of shifting frameworks and methods for secondary literature instruction.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I remember the day Aaron told me he was planning on teaching James Baldwin's
Another Country (Baldwin, 1992) *to his 12th grade regular and Advanced Placement*
English classes. He was nervous about it. He had sent notes home warning parents
about content...about the novel's unflinching look at race, sexuality, suicide, and poverty.
Knowing little of the text beyond its title, I spent the evening on goodreads*, browsing*
through summaries, emotionally-wrought reviews, and both glowing and scathing
critiques of Baldwin's work. I felt anxious for Aaron—this was a daring and different
book choice, even at a school like ours where many English teachers bring nontraditional
texts into the classroom. Stronger than my initial reserve, however, were definitive
feelings of exhilaration and pride. "This is my colleague," I remember thinking.
"Twenty-five years into his career and he continues to make bold, intelligent choices
about the texts he shares with his students."

Making daily choices regarding literature and how it is taught is what we do as
teachers of English language arts. These decisions are influenced by a myriad of
traceable factors—our own personal histories with books and schooling, our relationships
with our students and our school community, our work with our colleagues and
administration, our professional development, and finally, top-down educational policy
that affects our teaching practice. In addition, choices we make as teachers of literature
are impacted by elements far more difficult to trace. These include tensions within the
larger, ongoing history of English education in the United States, the influence of current
research and theory in the teaching of English, and our relationship to and understanding
of how power and privilege operates in educational spaces. Seen in the light of all these

influential factors, the everyday decisions practicing language arts teachers make regarding literary texts and how to approach them are far from neutral (Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, & Petrone, 2014; Dyches & Sams, 2018), are highly meaningful, and deserve continued exploration.

As a high school literature teacher, I constantly ruminate on questions regarding the books I teach and how I teach them. I contemplate to what extent my colleagues and I think about our highly diverse group of students when we select a particular text. For instance, I wonder if we consider their potential reactions; I wonder if we anticipate the kinds of classroom conversations that will ensue from the reading of a specific novel; I wonder if we consider the effect that novel will have on these students; I wonder if our choices regarding literature illustrate fundamentally self-motivated decisions ruled by personal passions, familiarity, and comfort levels. In other words, I wonder how much the teaching of literature is almost a representation of self or instead an act of selflessness rooted in the needs of our students.

Because the books we decide to teach and the choices we make when teaching them are rife with meaning and consequences both for ourselves and for our students, we have a responsibility as English educators to question what it means to choose a text meaningfully and to teach it well. We also have a responsibility to investigate whether the day-to-day choices we make regarding literature and pedagogy are even our own. As I continually reflect upon my teaching practice, my students, and my deep love of literature, I have realized that we also maintain an intellectual and emotional responsibility to explore our own identities and choices as teachers of literature, as well as those of our colleagues. This study was part of my ongoing attempt to explore all

these facets of my profession.

      Just as my text choices and pedagogical approaches as a secondary teacher have been—and still are—shaped by my personal history with books and schooling, so, too, did that same relationship inspire this research study. Reflecting on my personal story as a reader, student, and teacher has proven essential to understanding the evolution of the research questions that were at the heart of this inquiry. Yet, before I dive into an exploration of my literary history, I must be transparent in acknowledging that the writing of my narrative, as well as my entire approach to this research study, derives from and arrives through the reflective lens of critical theory. Dominating my scholarship and research interests throughout my last five years as a doctoral student in Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies, this lens has become an integral part of my identity as a public-school educator and thinker. Exploring how and why knowledge is constructed and taught in the manner in which it is (McLaren, 2009), critical theory has allowed me to problematize my history with books and to question many of the pedagogical decisions I made regarding texts in my early years as an educator.

      In addition to the more personalized elements of reflection, critical perspectives have also granted me insight into the domain of education itself, helping me to recognize that schools are active, involved territories in a historical and ongoing struggle over what is accepted as legitimate narrative in institutional spaces (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009). These avenues of thought have aided me in acknowledging that the pedagogical choices we make in our classrooms are never neutral (Giroux, 2009). As a practicing educator, particularly as a language arts instructor, I understand that my past experiences with schooling and books, my selection of texts for my students, and my approach to

teaching these texts are all part of a continuous and often polarizing dialogue over what constitutes knowledge in school and is therefore accepted and what instead gets cast aside (Spring, 2016). Using a critical lens to reflect deeply and honestly on my early encounters with stories, schooling, and teaching has allowed me to more accurately comprehend how I arrived at the questions that drove this research and why these questions are important for current language arts teachers to explore.

Background to the Study

It is not books you need, it's some of the things that are in books. The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us.

—Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, 1953

I like to think I was born craving stories, almost as if there was some innate part of myself that longed for worlds that words could eventually weave together for me. I can say without any hesitation that my history as a child, an adult, a student, and a teacher has always been—and continues to be—rooted in books and little much else. In my favorite book, the dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451,* Bradbury (1953) makes two essential claims: that books and stories are a means of knitting together various experiences of existence, and that behind these books and stories are living, vibrant people whose voices demand to be heard. I first read Bradbury's novel in my early 20s, but even prior to that, my greatest passion has always been a desire to explore the stories of others in whichever medium I could find them. In part, such a desire was not only catalyzed by my will to understand the world around me as well as my own place within it; it also derives from a need to expose myself to experiences that stood in stark contrast to my own. Reading,

writing, and communicating gave me a place to do both from an early age, and even back then, I felt a strong, undeniable call to explore history, society, and identity through a variety of literature.

My earliest memories of reading stem back to about the age of four or five, when I can recall a stark contrast in the kinds of books to which my parents chose to expose me. My mother, a New Mexican who worked as an elementary school teacher, came from a family that immigrated from both Mexico and Spain and was raised to believe that speaking her native language was wrong. Like so many other minority students growing up in the 1950s, her schooling experience had been one in which students were indoctrinated with assimilation ideology from their early grades (Donato, 2007; Spring, 2016). She read to me from books that Grande (2004) and other critical scholars would refer to as "white-stream"; books like the *Berenstain Bears* (Berenstain & Berenstain, 1962) and *Angelina Ballerina* (Holabird & Craig, 1983)—books with happy endings, books that focused on small children playing with dogs and balls, books with upstanding girls and boys following all the rules. I remember enjoying these stories from afar, as if I was outside looking into a world foreign to my own.

Examining my experience with these texts from a critical angle has allowed me to realize that I could not read or understand the world of my childhood (Freire, 1983) with the words of these books. I grew up in a rundown neighborhood in what is now referred to as the "International District" of a metropolitan southwestern city. Back in the 1990s and early 2000s, it was known throughout the city as simply the "warzone." My neighbors were Vietnamese, Cuban, Mexican, African American, and Cambodian. Playing in the park behind my house, I saw drug deals, men beating their girlfriends,

gang members hanging maimed dogs from trees. I could not see myself, my friends, my family, or the people who lived around me in the books my mother would read to me. Moreover, we were also missing from the simple, overly moralistic stories in the skills-based readers given to me in my early elementary classrooms. At the time, a piece was absent in the puzzle of reading for me, an authenticity toward words and their meanings.

That absent element would eventually be given to me by my father through his deep passion for the ideas embedded in books. The long, hazy nights in which my father stayed up reading to me long after my mother had gone to bed are some of the most crucial, formative moments I can pinpoint in my own narrative of literature. My dad, a first generation American like my mother, grew up in New York City. The son of Irish immigrants, my dad was (and is) self-educated and as street sharp as a whip. He dropped out of high school, traveled around the country, and lived the self-chosen lifestyle of what he terms a "nomadic wanderer". He was also a staunch political activist, participating in various Civil Rights protests before settling in the state in which this study is located, where he became actively involved in protesting American involvement in Vietnam. There was no *Berenstain Bears* (Berenstain & Berenstain, 1962) or *Angelina Ballerina* (Holabird & Craig, 1983) with my dad. With him, it was passages from the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (X & Haley, 1992), his favorite quotes from the poetry of Sylvia Plath or Walt Whitman, chapters from Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* (1994), and lessons from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Douglass, 1995) and the American Transcendentalists. Nietzsche. Kant. Santiago Baca. Morrison. Camus. Rich. Woolf. I was too young to understand the facets of what was really at work in these various texts, but I had the deep-set conviction that they were *real* in some

way…that somehow, they connected more authentically with my lived experience and daily interactions with the world around me than anything else I had read or encountered in school at the time.

Despite my parents' contrasting choices in my reading material, I know now that I grew up amid a privilege not experienced by many of my friends and fellow students who lived in my community. I grew up with two parents who valued literacy, who read to me, and who encouraged my affection for books and stories. Primarily because of them, I entered my years of formal education as a voracious reader, a lover of a variety of different kinds of stories. Their value of literacy allowed me to approach school positively as a place where I would learn more stories, create my own stories, and be exposed to stories from different places, times, and groups of people. Beginning in late elementary school, I developed an inclination toward what is generally labeled "the literary canon" in both secondary and higher education, with "canon" referring loosely to a body of significant texts (Scholes, 1998). More specifically, the canon traditionally refers to the body of literary texts that have historically been preserved, reproduced, and taught in the schools (Guillory, 2013). Reflectively, I have realized that my fascination with this particular literary genre was instigated not necessarily by an independent pull toward "classic" novels but rather by the prevalence of these texts in the libraries and classrooms of my elementary, middle, and high schools. I was always looking for something more to read, and the canon is what was accessible to me within school spaces.

I distinctly remember telling teachers, relatives, and family friends of my love for reading, asking for recommendations, and being handed the works of Charles Dickens,

Harper Lee, Louisa May Alcott, and eventually, even Homer. In my zeal to read and internalize everything I could get my hands on, I never questioned why certain texts were recommended to me while others were not. As I dove into analysis of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Dante, Austen, Dostoyevsky, and Fitzgerald in my Honors and AP Literature courses, I complacently accepted these texts and many others as inherently valuable without rendering any modicum of critical inquiry into why and how they were taught to me. I loved these works of literature then and still love them now. I cannot discount their impact on me. I learned from them, and they in part shaped me into the teacher and thinker I am today. At the time of my initial exposure to the canon, however, I failed to understand that the accessibility of and emphasis on these particular books spoke to their role in establishing and upholding a certain set of values and ideas within my early education (McLaren, 2009).

Now, as a doctoral student looking back critically at my experiences in middle and high school language arts courses, I am able to see my years in formal secondary schooling as characteristic of what Freire (1970) would consider banking education. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) scathingly criticizes this passive, traditional form of classroom environment, in which an all-knowledgeable instructor—or 'sage-on-the-stage'—fills students' minds with an accepted narrative as if they were mere receptacles. Although I would not assume intentionality on the part of my language arts teachers to instruct this way, I also am aware that the primary method in which I was taught literature was through this banking method. Typically, my fellow students and I were assigned a canonical text to read, sat through lectures on the proper way to understand and analyze the text, answered copious amounts of reading questions on the

text, and took a summative exam on the text in which there were definitive right or wrong responses. The majority of my middle and high school English teachers taught literature through the lens of New Criticism, which posits the canonical text as a holder of meaning and the student as excavator seeking solely to extract already inherent ideas (Bertens, 2013).

Critical theorists would characterize such learning as passive, instead arguing that knowledge should be co-constructed through ongoing and equitable dialogue between teachers and students, with educational policies and practices stemming from the lived experiences of the people engaging with them (Freire, 1970; Morrell, 2008; Sosa-Provencio, Sheahan, Desai, & Secatero, 2018). When I reconsider my secondary language arts classes, I remember the varied and rich backgrounds of my fellow students. I wonder what our reading experiences would have been like if we could have seen ourselves—a group of diverse individuals from working-class families who spoke a variety of languages and self-identified in myriad ways—more clearly in the literature we read in school. I wonder, too, how our ideas about literature would have differed at the time if we had been encouraged to engage in the kind of shared dialogue advanced by Freire (1970), a conversationality in which our ideas about the books would have been taken at equal value as those of our teachers, as those in the canonical texts we read.

It was not until college and graduate school that my love for literature was complicated in these discomfiting yet simultaneously catalytic ways. Only within the last decade or so have I realized that to love something deeply also means one must interrogate it, speak back to it, and make it your own. Up until that point, I had yet to learn that my love of literature did not have to be a passive love, but that it could also be

"critical, challenging, and insistent" (Darder, 2009, pg. 568). In my late undergraduate years, I took many discussion-based seminars in philosophy, comparative literature, literary criticism and theory, and U.S. and Latin American history. It was amid such coursework that I initially experienced the type of emancipatory, authentic, and dialectical approach to knowledge upheld by Freire (1970) and many other critical pedagogical theorists (Greene, 1988; hooks, 1994). How I understood literacy was expanding, and I began to entertain the possibility that a passion for learning and stories existed in many spaces outside the borders of formalized schooling. I thought about how powerful such a passion could become if it was valued, capitalized on, and further expanded within school spaces as well. By my final year of college, I had become convinced that a zeal for reading, writing, and literature could be encouraged in all learners, provided they were given an open environment in which to develop this passion, and in which their own stories were valued as essential.

It was also around this time period that I began to question my decision to go to law school after graduating, and I became increasingly interested in teaching language arts—and particularly literature—at the high school or college level. As I mentioned at the beginning of my narrative, books have been integral pieces in the formative decisions of my life. My decision to become a language arts educator was no exception.

For me, this career choice was fully cemented the summer after I finished my undergraduate degrees in literature and history, for that was the summer I read Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). Bradbury's dystopian vision of a nightmarish future in which members of an unnamed city give up all political and intellectual agency in pursuit of mindless pleasure and entertainment haunted me. I identified strongly with

main character's driving desire to uncover the secrets of human experience that had been burned with the books so hated by those who controlled society. Immersing myself in the journey of Montag, Bradbury's protagonist, assisted me in understanding the powerful argument that real people exist behind words and language, dynamic people living a myriad of experiences voiced through their stories. To burn a book then—to discount a text in such a conflagatory manner—is to burn someone's story. Rediscovering the value and the need for stories was a truly transformative literary experience for me.

Equally transformative, however, was my own interrogation of a novel that inspired me and that I held dear. I questioned why the only books mentioned as valuable in the pages of *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 1953) were male-written Western classics. I wondered how the novel would have differed if it had been told from the point of view of one of the female characters...Clarisse, Montag's muse, or his wife Mildred. My interrogation of Bradbury's work, if nothing else, forced me to engage with it more critically, the process of which allowed me to realize that my true place was in a language arts classroom. I wanted to help students discover the importance of their own stories, and to make sense of how their stories interact with the world of texts around them. I wanted to show students that conversations about texts and stories could be authentic, engaging terrain for discussion, disagreement, questioning, and shared meaning-making. For the last nine years of my life, encouraging these textual discussions represents that which I have tried to accomplish as a high school language arts teacher.

When I look back on this experience teaching high school from my current position as a doctoral student and researcher, while I find moments that are painful to come to terms with, I also discern moments that are reassuring. The exposure to readings

on critical literacy and critical pedagogy that I have experience as part of my coursework over the last several years has shown me that I have had moments and days where I engaged my students in what Freire (1970) would deem "emancipatory" learning. I have always viewed my students as equals. I recognize that I have as much to learn from them as they do from me and I truly do believe that through our conversations about literature and language, many of my students have been able to develop a level of critical consciousness (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014) that they had not previously accessed.

Yet, I cannot deny that the pressures of standardized testing and increasing accountability measures for teachers has often resulted in my failure to provide students with a critical curriculum, and often caused me to backslide into a form of banking education, particularly when teaching required canonical texts. When faced with the daily stress of grading the work of over 150 students, the impossibility of bringing my students of varying reading and writing levels up to what my school district deems "grade level," as well as the lack of funding for new classroom texts, I realize that I have often resorted to what many overworked language arts teachers end up resorting to: I taught texts with which I was familiar and comfortable in the way they were taught to me (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006). Upon critical reflection, my initial years as a high school English teacher were marked by my tendency to teach through the lens of a traditional New Critical analysis that I critiqued earlier when detailing my own experiences with literature in secondary school. Even though I did help many of my students attain a greater personal understanding through their reading and discussion of literature, critical perspectives contend that individual consciousness is not enough. Indeed, texts must also serve as tools for students to utilize in social analysis and the

transformation of power and privilege within societal institutions (Janks, 2013; Luke, 2000). Looking back on my early years as an educator, I believe that was the piece most glaringly missing from my teaching of various literary works.

Integral to my own growth as a literature educator have been the courses I have taken for my master's and doctoral programs—classes which have given me the space to explore current perspectives emerging on pedagogy while teaching language arts full time. Particularly over the last five years as a doctoral student, I have become increasingly interested in critical theory and critical literacy as a framework through which to teach literature and as a lens to reflect on my own teaching practice. Immersing myself in postmodernism and critical theory research has also opened up an avenue for me to see research as a path to direct advocacy, change, and reflection at the school and community level (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Combining my interest in critical pedagogy with my passion for history and literature has allowed me to think about how literature has been historically taught in secondary schools and the ways in which critical perspectives shift and speak back to traditional forms of literature instruction. Reading and research I have done in critical theory has also caused me to question, problematize, and reflect upon both my own experiences with literature as well as my initial years as a language arts instructor. I remain curious as to why the English teachers I experienced in high school and college selected the novels they selected and how they made decisions about approaching these novels with their students. I question my own commitment to the literary canon as a staple of my early language arts curriculum. I wonder to what extent my colleagues and I teach both traditional and nontraditional works critically, and I wonder if our very diverse, multilingual students find any value, connection, or power

in reading these texts.

I have shared my experiences with literature as a child, student, and teacher because I cannot separate my relationship with language, words, and stories from the work that drove this research study. I actively recognize that understanding my past is paramount to my ability to understand myself and the world around me (Loewen, 2018). Looking back is vital to looking ahead, which is the purpose of engaging in critical research and deep reflection. My path as a doctoral student has led me to think about and define literacy in new ways, which has changed the way I approach my teaching of both traditional and nontraditional texts.

In the months prior to the design of this study, I found myself interested in exploring if and how critical perspectives impact the everyday teaching of literary texts in practicing teachers' language arts classrooms. I wanted to contemplate and question my own choices in text selection, as well as those of my colleagues, to thoroughly and collectively investigate how teachers choose to teach texts in increasingly standardized school environments. I desired a deeper understanding of the role of today's practicing language arts teacher within the larger trajectory that is the history of literature instruction in this country. And finally, I wanted to remind myself of the inherent belief I had even as a child: stories matter.

People's stories matter. Understanding how practicing teachers attempt to engage students from varied backgrounds with these stories can help us to understand our own histories, to criticize inequities we see around us, and, finally, to continuously reconstruct the world through shared dialogue and authentic learning.

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to explore the problems that arise from ongoing tensions between historical traditions in the teaching of literature, critical theory, standardization, teacher autonomy, and student diversity in relation to the textual and pedagogical choices of practicing teachers of literature. That English education is a field rife with conflict is no novelty. A general examination of the wider history of education in the United States reveals a constant struggle over the flow of ideas, voices, and stories within school spaces (Donato, 1997; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). By nature, literature is brimming with both spoken and unspoken ideas and values that emerge through the stories of characters, places, and events. Teachers of literature, then, are part of a larger, ongoing history of text selection and pedagogical choices that have never been and will never be objective or neutral. We are also tied to the undeniable fact that historically, schooling itself has disadvantaged and silenced students of marginalized communities of color and across class, gender, sexuality, ability, and language (Kliebard, 2004; Sosa-Provencio, Sheahan, Desai, & Secatero, 2018). Diverse communities within the United States have routinely experienced a curriculum of disconnectedness, invisibility, deculturalization, and accommodation within oppressive school paradigms that have failed acknowledge the funds of knowledge these students bring to classroom spaces (Darder, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 2009). Literature curriculum has been a vehicle for the oppression of the stories of both marginalized students and teachers (Spring, 2014). In addition, language arts classrooms have been used as a site for the transmission of dominant narratives via blatant or subtle ideological management (Spring, 2014). This has primarily occurred through the use of a body of texts—the literary canon—that has been historically preserved and taught in the schools (Guillory,

2013).

Keeping this history in mind, current language arts educators who are committed to equal and liberating educational experiences for students must intensely and unremittingly advocate for literary pedagogy which enables our students to understand, critique, and speak back to dominant narratives that have historically silenced some stories while upholding others. Critical pedagogy holds that educators must situate curriculum—even that curriculum which is rooted in oft-required dominant texts—as a means of counter-narrative, empowerment, and reclamation of voice (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Students whose school experience has primarily occurred within a banking model of education (Freire, 1970) have been taught to invalidate their own internal ways of knowing while always already being required to learn within a dominant tradition to which they neither relate nor with which they are provided the linguistic abilities to comprehend or critique (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Coates, 2015).

Critical perspectives, on the other hand, challenge educators to help students both understand and move beyond oppressive frameworks traditionally clouding diverse and marginalized groups by instead implementing curriculum that illustrates awareness of the political and cultural realities of varied communities (Antrop-Gonzalez & De Jesus, 2006; Barnhardt, 2009). Additionally, critical theory values pedagogies that position students and teachers as holders and creators of their own knowledge, allowing for opportunities of interrogating historical and current power structures (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Delgado Bernal, 2002). Such a mode equalizes the role of teacher and student in spaces of learning, positioning classrooms as dynamic environments in which students and teachers explore multi-literacies as a way of understanding, critiquing, and

transforming their worlds (Lewison, Flint, & van Sluys, 2002; Luke, 2000).

Proponents of critical multicultural pedagogy argue that a commitment to such emancipatory instruction aids language arts teachers in their work against some of the more oppressive, historical traditions in English education (Dyches & Sams, 2018). One key manner in which current teachers of literature can begin to catalyze such a shift is by providing diverse students with an authentic curriculum that connects with the everyday realities of their lived experiences, even when teaching units on required or self-selected texts within the dominant canon. Schooling activities associated with this type of culturally relevant teaching can allow for historically silenced knowledge and skills to be shared through talk, improvisation, and meaningful interaction with peers (Dixon, 1967; Gee, 1991). When working within a critical literacy curriculum, students are encouraged to drive inquiry and social action, designing and transforming the world around them as opposed to simply being excluded from it or adapting to it (Duncan-Andrade Morrell, 2008; Luke, 2000). Unlike historical models of literature instruction that value primarily the voice of the instructor or the text, critical literacy advocates for an intellectual, emotive, and lived commitment to critical teaching and transformative pedagogy which upholds the multiple voices, experiences, and needs of the varied communities in which we work while continuously acknowledging and critiquing the oppressive histories of our educational pasts.

Though these critical perspectives have been part of the conversation surrounding the teaching of English within higher education and academia for some time, much work remains in investigating how these perspectives are affecting the text selection and pedagogical decisions of practicing secondary literature teachers on a day to day basis.

More so than ever before, today's secondary English classrooms exist in an atmosphere of heavy contradictions. language arts teachers are expected to help their students meet common standards of reading and writing to be assessed on high-stakes tests and simultaneously, are encouraged to assist students in becoming critical thinkers and citizens in an increasingly global society (Janks, 2013; Luke, 2000; Morrell, 2005). Throughout my last nine years as a secondary language arts teacher in a public school district in the southwest, I have seen the presence of district, local, and state policy permeate the classroom in extensive and oppressive ways that have limited the variety of literature teachers feel comfortable bringing into classroom spaces even as current critical research in education calls for a widening of the traditional body of secondary texts (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Morrell, 2008). Combining with high dropout rates and lack of engagement in students from marginalized backgrounds, the increasing diversity of classrooms across the country demonstrates the urgency to provide students with relevant and varied texts and curricula.

For many teachers, though, these adjustments to tradition present unexplorable options. Although numerous secondary language arts educators who work within diverse groups of minority students are fully committed to teaching and exploring non-traditional, culturally relevant, pop-culture and/or young adult texts in their classrooms, the current realities of public-school budgets, mandated curricula stemming from legislation and national standards, and overemphasis on preparing for high-stakes testing often limit teachers from doing so.

Moreover, many language arts instructors make the conscious decision to continue to teach works of the dominant literary canon as the staple of their curriculum.

In other words, though an extensive breadth and variety of reading materials exists beyond the dominant canon—materials that have the potential to engage students from multiple backgrounds in meaningful acts of literacy—the majority of language arts curriculum at the secondary level continues to be rooted in the same works of the Western classics that have been historically deemed worthy of focus (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006). This tense dichotomy alone calls for continuous exploration of the text choices and pedagogical decision-making of current literature teachers.

Particularly at urban public schools with lower socioeconomic populations of students, top-down policies have resulted in feelings of powerlessness and frustration in language arts teachers as well as a lack of knowledge of and support for pedagogical strategies that fall outside more limiting traditions of English instruction. Ideally, the field of English language arts should be one in which teachers are allowed to exercise a certain level of autonomy and intellectualism in their selection of texts and approach to teaching such texts. There is historical precedence for such personalized decision-making within the discipline (Applebee, 1974). However, this intellectual, historical tradition of teacher autonomy and flexibility has become complicated by the recent increase in test-driven standards and curricula as well as the subsequent de-professionalization of public-school educators (Ravitch, 2010). For teachers of English, this shift in standardization has occurred—and is still occurring—at the same time the student population within public schools continues to become increasingly diverse.

Top-down policies requiring standardization, high-stakes student testing, and heavy teacher evaluation have also resulted in a lack of opportunities for both diverse students and teachers to engage with texts in critical ways, texts and manners capable of

allowing students to see themselves as key players within meaning-making. More mandated curricula, budget cuts within public, urban schools, required standardized testing on a yearly basis, and higher teacher accountability through new evaluation measures (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2007) have caused a reduction in the body of literature we teach, a loss of autonomy in making decisions about how to teach that corpus, and a re-emphasis on a language arts pedagogy rooted in the literary canon that pairs with a focus on basic skill retention. Such shifts have resulted in prevalent tensions between historical traditions in the teaching of literature, critical theory, standardization, teacher autonomy, and student diversity. For language arts instructors, teaching the traditional literary canon, nontraditional texts, or a combination of both against the backdrop of increasing critical perspectives constitutes an emphasis on teaching all texts, keeping in mind both emancipatory goals and a sense of criticality while always already pursuing radical and subversive avenues that allow for the growth of critical consciousness in students of diverse backgrounds.

This type of classroom environment, however, is highly limited by the current contentious educational climate. Just as problematically, these limitations have also resulted in an utter lack of adequate space and time for practicing teachers to explore larger questions of English education, reflect upon their own practice, and make necessary changes to the way that they teach literature. This absence of space and time also creates difficulties in conducting ground-up teacher research that investigates daily decisions that practicing literature teachers make regarding to texts.

I am therefore passionate about and want to continuously investigate the ideological beliefs and pedagogical choices of practicing language arts teachers who

teach a variety of texts within that very milieu. The decisions these teachers render, their pursuits in the face of such societal discourses, served as the informative backbone for my research questions and catalyzed the driving force behind my research study, an investigation which revolves around exploring how and why current language arts teachers in diverse secondary schools choose to teach the texts that they do. From this conundrum manifests the necessary inquiry into how and where these current pedagogical practices fit within larger discussions on canonicity, historical traditions in the teaching of English, critical perspectives on literacy instruction, and teacher autonomy and intellectualism within standardized educational policy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the pedagogical choices of four secondary language arts teachers within a larger understanding of the current influence of critical perspectives on the teaching of literature and within the current realities of a high-stakes, evaluative teaching environment. Although current research within the field of critical literacy/critical pedagogy calls for the use of nontraditional, varied texts and critical instructional strategies within diverse classrooms as a means of resisting and speaking back to historically oppressive schooling, many teachers either continue to be required to focus on traditional methods and texts as the crux of their language arts curriculum or otherwise they make the conscious decision to do so.

Utilizing both participatory action research (PAR) and collaborative inquiry, this community-oriented research study at a highly diverse, urban high school in the southwest examined the text selection of four practicing, secondary language arts teachers, ultimately investigating whether the pedagogical choices of these teachers align

with the holistic goals of critical literacy or speak back to more traditional forms of literature instruction. Because the theoretical context in which educators teach literature is constantly changing and critical perspectives have emerged as an essential way to teach, exploring how practicing language arts teachers—particularly at highly diverse, urban schools—chose and approached a variety of texts within the larger trajectory of shifting frameworks and methods for secondary literature instruction remains essential. Finally, this particular study also investigated how these teachers make text and pedagogical choices within a current educational climate that limits both how and what language arts teachers teach and posits these teachers as implementers of content and pedagogy determined by policy makers and not by educators themselves (Brass, 2014).

Research Questions:

1. Why do practicing language arts teachers in urban, diverse secondary schools teach the texts they do, and what are the pedagogical choices they make regarding these texts?

2. How do relationships and interactions between historical traditions of literature instruction and critical perspectives impact instruction for these practicing language arts teachers?

3. How does the current evaluative environment for both teachers and students impact text choice and instruction for these practicing language arts teachers?

Rationale and Significance

The data, findings, and implications that emerged from an investigation into this study's research questions are relevant both to the field of research and theory in the teaching of English as well as to scholarship examining relationships between historical

traditions of and current perspectives on literature instruction at the secondary level. Because this study was rooted in examining the everyday praxis of teachers, it also holds significance for knowledge in the field of critical approaches to instruction and will extend upon critical literacy theory by exploring whether applications of critical, pedagogical concepts are happening in current language arts classrooms. This work, therefore, has the potential to aid teacher educators, researchers, and practicing teachers interested in exploring whether critical perspectives are being utilized as counter-narrative to traditional forms of text selection and instruction in language arts curriculum development and implementation in urban, diverse secondary schools.

Many teachers in urban schools struggle with maintaining engagement in diverse populations of low socioeconomic students. In this sense, my research holds practical significance for current secondary teachers by way of its attempt to investigate how practicing language arts educators help their students connect to literature in authentic and critical ways, even within the current high-stakes, evaluative educational environment that public school educators find themselves within.

Secondary language arts teachers interested in critical pedagogy could build upon my research questions and utilize potential findings within my research study to drive their own practitioner or school-based, community work. Finally, my research questions are of professional and personal significance to me due to my desire to continue my work with practicing language arts teachers and eventually in English/English education programs rooted in critical perspectives and research and theory in the teaching of literature.

Theoretical Framework

My research study was situated and analyzed within a broad understanding of research and theory in the teaching and learning of English, but more specifically within the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and in theoretical approaches to critical literacy in secondary classrooms. According to Luke (2000), a practical definition of critical literacy delineates a classroom in which students and teachers collaborate in understanding how texts construct their own worlds, but also strive to utilize texts as social tools to reconstruct these worlds (p. 453). It is this particular definition of critical literacy-rooted in praxis- that I used to inform and investigate the data collected from my research methodology. Critical race-gendered epistemologies also helped to create a context for my research that recognizes students and educators as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Because my research study was situated in the classrooms of language arts educators who are primarily teaching minority students, my work was constructed within critical theory frameworks that validate the experiences of students and teachers who have been marginalized by dominant narratives of education. In addition to considering these critical perspectives, a level of historical honesty was also integral to framing the context of this study as it was rooted in exploring the intersection between dominant traditions in the teaching of English and current critical scholarship.

Critical theories also hold the researcher accountable throughout the duration of the research process. According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), critical perspectives on qualitative research acknowledge that research fundamentally involves issues of power, and that race, gender, class, and other social identities are highly essential for understanding experience (p. 23). Critical approaches to conducting research, such as

critical praxis research, call for a high amount of reflexivity on the part of the researcher, challenging one to continuously scrutinize how autobiographical experience shapes interpretations of research findings (Kress, 2011). Exploring my research through the lens of critical theories was essential in examining the multiple subjectivities of both my co-researchers and myself as researcher, and allowed for me to include specific opportunities for collaborative and individual reflexivity within my research study.

Research Design Overview

I delineate and identify this research study as qualitative in nature, as it is rooted in community-based research which utilizes collaborative inquiry as a form of data collection and analysis. Though initially envisioned as a qualitative project combining elements of multi-case study with teacher research, the research design of this study organically evolved into participatory action research (PAR) throughout the data collection process. The evolution behind the choice of methodologies that inform this study will be expanded on in chapter three. Data collection in the form of semi-structured teacher interviews, classroom observations, and focus groups occurred over the course of a six-month period across the spring and fall school semesters (April 2018 - October 2018). Transcription of the data took place throughout data collection, with analysis of the data collection and write up of the findings happening over a three-month period following the conclusion of data collection.

Context and Participants

This qualitative research study was conducted in a highly diverse public school situated in an urban, lower socioeconomic environment in the southwest. The school sits at an enrollment of approximately 1,300 students, with 100% of the student body

qualifying for free or reduced-price meal rates. This research site is one of the oldest

standing high schools in this southwestern city and is highly known for its varied student

population as well as the diversity of languages spoken by the students who attend it

(currently over 28 spoken languages are utilized by students at the school). The diversity

of the student body and faculty within this research space generates a level of teacher

autonomy grounded in engaging various pedagogies that speak to the needs of such a

differing population. The co-researchers involved four language arts teachers (including

myself) that teach a variety of grade levels and have taught at the research site for

differing amounts of time. Participants were selected based on their expressed interest in

being a part of this research study, and due to their self-identification as teachers who

wanted an opportunity to engage with peers in a reflexive study of their own and their

colleagues' pedagogical practice. A short biography of the four teachers that were part of

this study—Aaron, Franny, Joaquin, and me (Annmarie) will be provided in the

methodological chapter of this dissertation.

Positionality

In delineating my researcher identity, it is essential to understand that how much a

researcher chooses to be involved in the community of the research space becomes of

paramount importance in the collection and analysis of data. I have used Glesne's (2016)

continuum paradigm to delineate my positionality in my research space as both an insider

and a researcher. This is due to the fact that my chosen research study involved work in a

community where I am a full member (a language arts teacher) and a doctoral researcher,

and also due to the fact that my study involved looking deeply into my own pedagogical

choices as well as those of my colleagues. I interact heavily with the other three

language arts teachers who were a part of this qualitative study daily through department meetings, professional learning communities, and whole staff professional development opportunities. My position as an insider and staff member at the research site but also as a researcher who is part of a doctoral program shaped my data collection, analysis, and write up of the findings, and it is essential to be constantly aware of how the many hats I wore within this qualitative study affected the outcome of it.

Limitations

The findings of this qualitative study draw from data collected as part of an examination of the particular text and pedagogical choices of four teachers (including myself) that participated in this research. Data analysis was limited to three semi-structured interviews, three focus group meetings, and three classroom observations of each teacher throughout the course of a six-month period. The participant sample was small and was selected through teacher interest and availability, and therefore provided conclusions drawn from a microcosm of language arts teachers who teach a variety of texts at secondary, urban schools. In addition, time restraints on this particular study limited data collection to a sixth month period only. Despite these limitations, I make no claim to the generalizability of this participatory action research study (or of any qualitative study) in terms of explanations to why most secondary language arts teachers at urban, diverse schools choose particular texts or whether they teach these texts in a manner informed by critical perspectives. Methodologically, the results from any participatory action research study might, by nature, prove inextricable from the specific community in which they originated. However, I contend that my work is representative of inquiry vital to continued exploration of the realities of English education as a

discipline. I offer up my research questions and the findings that resulted from an attempt to answer them merely as a means of further investigation into how practicing language arts teachers make selections in literary texts within the requirements and restrictions of the current educational climate, and how they pedagogically explore these texts with their diverse students.

Chapter Two: Review of Relevant Literature

Introduction

The work of language arts teachers is often dominated by the tasks of the every day. Lesson planning. Responding to student work. Phone calls home. Meetings with colleagues and administration. Implementing new initiatives. Preparing students for life after high school. It is therefore quite rare that teachers manage to divine the time or space to engage in any meaningful study of historical and current contexts of the discipline of English education, and it is perhaps even rarer that practicing teachers find gaps in schedules sufficient enough to reflect on questions that arise from exploring our relationship to these contexts.

Such scarcities also ring true when it comes to interrogating our own choice of texts and the ways in which we teach them. This particular qualitative study is thus rooted in my attempt to address the lack of time, space, and authentic professional development my co-researchers and I need to explore the larger questions of our discipline, as well as in my desire to enter this conversation as a teacher-researcher. It is driven by my intellectual interest in the history of my chosen profession, the changes that have taken place within it, and current theoretical and critical perspectives on the teaching of texts within diverse, urban settings.

Grounding this intellectual interest, however, is my practical focus on the contextual understanding this history can provide for current language arts teachers who implement literary pedagogy within a constantly shifting educational environment. As discussed in the introduction to the present study, I use my work as an investigation into how secondary language arts teachers choose and teach both canonical and nontraditional

works in restrictive, policy-driven environments. At the same time, I seek to explore

whether the teaching of these texts is in line with current critical perspectives on literature

instruction. Because of this, it is essential for me to understand how critical perspectives

differ from historical, often oppressive epistemologies that surround the teaching of

literature (and other school subjects) in the past, to look deeply at how critical pedagogy

and critical literacy change the nature of what it means to teach literature, and to examine

how current teachers choose and teach texts through the lens of critical theories.

Moreover, it is of relevance to my study to look at examples of the precedence for

teacher autonomy in text selection and choice of pedagogical methods, particularly in

light of recent neoliberal, standardization-based reforms that directly lead to the

devaluing of the professionalism and intellectualism of practicing secondary teachers

(McNeil, 2009; Ravitch, 2010). These so-called "initiatives" particularly affect schools

such as the one my co-researchers and I teach in—schools in low-income, high poverty,

linguistically diverse communities (Au, 2016; Stovall, 2013). My co-researchers and I

therefore enter into dialogue with the relevant literature presented below knowing that we

have an active, living role in the history of the discipline of English education and

knowing that we can interrogate such history through our daily decisions regarding text

and choice in the classroom. These decisions reflect not only our exercise in autonomy

when choosing texts and methods that are in the best interest of the diverse students we

share space with each day; such choices also reflect our inherent, organic intellectualism

as professionals within our discipline (Levins Morales, 2001).

The current overview of relevant literature provides insight into the subjects with

which my qualitative study enters conversation: the colonizing epistemologies that

comprise the larger arena of the history of education in the United States, the history of literature instruction at the secondary level, the interrogation of the literary canon and traditional literary teaching methods by critical theorists, and current critical trends in the teaching of texts within urban, diverse classrooms. In addition, my co-researchers and I strive to add to the discussion of what teacher autonomy looks like in neoliberal educational climates that limit both the pedagogical choices and inherent intellectualism of practicing teachers and their students (Ravitch, 2010).

Historicizing Education Through a Critical Lens

Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away.

—Atwood, *Cat's Eye,* 1988

All knowledge is created within a historical context and it is this historical context which gives it life and meaning.

—Darder, "Buscando América," 1995

Situating my teaching and professional scholarship within the larger narrative of historical forces functions as part of the consciousness I attempt to cultivate as a critical educator, an element that is essential to the ongoing work of helping students, my colleagues, and myself develop an understanding of our ever-shifting roles in interconnected and ongoing historical paradigms. Via this mentality, I approach my study from a framework of critical perspectives that problematize a neutral and apolitical narrative of education's history in the United States, perspectives which prove

concurrently capable of unpacking the pedagogies that sustain power and privilege within white, dominant society (Donato, 1997; Gonzalez, 1999; Sosa-Provencio et al., 2017). Because my co-researchers and I teach within a school primarily attended by students of color, a commitment to healing, critical, and emancipatory education (Freire, 1970) is something I continuously work toward as an educator teaching across and within communities of marginalized youth. This commitment is both a passion and a responsibility that I share not only with my co-researchers but, indeed, with all critical educators who seek to value the complex identities and lived experiences of the students in our classrooms (Sosa-Provencio, Sheahan, Desai, & Secatero, 2018).

Critical theory calls for an intellectual consideration of present-day manifestations of the oppressive and silencing trends in American educational history, holding that such consideration is necessary for educators invested in moving away from dismissive, incomplete, and inauthentic schooling (Wrigley, Lingard, & Thomson, 2012). In order to construct curricular and pedagogical frameworks that aim for positive and healing outcomes in the education of students of color, educators who teach with critical perspectives in mind must struggle and reconcile with a national history rooted in the deculturalization, segregation, dismissal, and management of the minds and bodies of diverse communities (Donato, 1997; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Moreno, 1999; Valencia, 2011). Viewing both the history of education in the United States and the history of English as a discipline from a critical framework allows me to conceptualize liberating, transformative pedagogy as essential for the present-day amelioration of the wounds wrought by historical schooling, particularly across communities of marginalized youth (Alim & Paris, 2017).

A recurring and irrefutable part of this history of schooling in the U.S. involves ongoing conflicts in the search for democracy and equality within educational spaces (Donato, 2007; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Spring, 2014). From colonial education to the common school movement and beyond, schooling was both denied and forced upon marginalized people(s), resulting in the social control, cultural erasure, removal, segregation, and assimilation of the Indigenous, immigrants of a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds, Mexican-Americans, African Americans, individuals with special needs, women, and the poor (Donato, 2007; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Spring, 2014; Watkins, 2001). By positioning as backward or limited the epistemological ways of knowing of predominantly non-White, non-English speaking populations, public schooling systematically discounted and continues to dismiss the voices of minority students within educational spaces (Gonzalez, 1999; Sosa-Provencio, Sheahan, Desai, & Secatero, 2018).

One of the great ironies of the educational history in the U.S. manifests through the tendency of policy-makers and pedagogical architects to espouse a rhetoric of equality of opportunity, nationalism, and basic natural rights for all students while simultaneously engaging in an agenda of discrimination, cultural genocide, and ethnic and religious intolerance (Spring, 2016). The clash of democratic ideals with racist tendencies both in action and in policy results in the violence and discrimination that is inseparable from America's legal, political, socioeconomic, and educational history.

Understanding how the seemingly contradictory beliefs of democratic republicanism and naturalized racism are compatible in the policy of U.S. educational architects is, as Spring (2014) claims, "key to understanding American violence and the

often-tragic history of education" (pg. 8). Often couched in the rhetoric of progress, nationalism, and the "common good" of America, members of the historically dominant ruling class used education as a site of ongoing ideological management, an opportunity to mask racial accommodation as progressive "reform", as a means of colonization and deculturalization of marginalized people(s), and as an industrial training ground for cogs in the American corporate and economic machine (Donato, 1997; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Watkins, 2001). The language arts classroom—with its reliance on text as a means to explore ideas and beliefs—is often utilized by pedagogical architects as a tool for ideological control, colonizing epistemologies, and instilling rote skills in students of color for the goals of capitalist economic gain (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Spring, 2014).

To combat an inherited educational history of marginalization and oppressive curricula, current critical perspectives call for a focus on authentic, culturally relevant pedagogy both within teacher education programs and within the spaces of our own diverse classrooms. Critical frameworks posit emancipatory pedagogy as a necessary step toward healing the wounds of past educational trauma that harmed diverse communities of students (Duran & Duran, 1995; Gomez, 2008). However, a desire to teach critically loses potency without teacher willingness to understand that a history marked by conflict, oppression, and dismissal permeates the schooling spaces we inhabit, the curriculum we teach, and the policy which characterizes the experiences we have as both students and educators (Sosa-Provencio, Sheahan, Desai, & Secatero, 2018). Critical perspectives on pedagogy are grounded in the view that "all knowledge is created within a historical context and it is this historical context which gives it life and meaning"

(Darder, 1995, p. 330). Practicing educators inherit this historical context whether they want to or not, and a level of honesty about the history of our discipline is therefore crucial if we strive to address the dismissive and damaging schooling of the past with our current approaches to pedagogy in our diverse classrooms.

As a teacher-researcher committed to critical, transformative pedagogy, I continually position myself, my students, my colleagues, and my curriculum as playing an active role within an ongoing historical narrative, one that stresses the "breaks, discontinuities, conflicts, differences and tensions in history" (Darder, 1995, p. 330). For teachers of English language arts, this means adopting an attitude of historical acceptance of the previous and current state of our discipline, acknowledging that conflict over what texts to teach and how to teach them is an inherent aspect of the tradition we inherit as literary educators (Arnove & Graff, 1992; Donelson, 1982). These issues have circled the discipline for nearly 200 years and, as Margaret Atwood (1988) suggests, "Nothing goes away" (pg. 3).

Secondary Level Literature Instruction: A Brief History

Because of the fluid, dynamic, and ever-present role that history continues to play in the educational environments of the present, it is essential that teachers who support critical perspectives explore the interwoven connection between the history of schooling in the U.S. and its current manifestations in education. This is particularly true for language arts teachers, who have historically taught literature embedded with a dominant ideology in non-critical, dismissive, and damaging ways or, just as damningly, in ways that refuse to lay bare the politicized nature of teaching text (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Spring 2014). Although education is cast as the indiscriminate equalizer—

dominant discourses, educational policy, and the rhetoric behind high-stakes testing position schooling as politically neutral (Brayboy, 2005; Cross, 2003; Kumashiro, 2008)—the teaching of literature has been and continues to be a political act. Investigating the history of English education in America from this angle allows me to historicize the teaching of literature within larger dynamics of power and privilege (Sheahan, 2016; Sosa-Provencio, Sheahan, Desai, & Secatero, 2018) and has deep implications in how I connect to this history of my discipline through this particular research study.

As discussed in the introduction, books for me existed in a vacuum for much of my early life as a student and as a reader. They floated in a certain air of sanctity...neutral, accessible to all, and entirely unrelated to larger questions of historicity, dominant social objectives, and power. As a practicing teacher and doctoral student, I know now what I didn't know then and what I often failed to acknowledge during my initial years as a language arts educator: that the reality of books is much more complex than I ever realized, that choices regarding the texts we teach and the way we teach them are far from neutral, and that pedagogy in the sphere of secondary English education is always connected to a larger social, political, and ideological agenda (Spring 2014). Realizing and acknowledging these problematics proves instrumental in my desire to understand the role my co-researchers' and I play as practicing teachers of literature within the larger narrative of the history of English education at the secondary level.

The history of literature instruction in schools—a history which proves integral in driving my research study—is often difficult to summarize without resorting to sweeping generalizations, in part because it is so varied in nature. Indeed, scholars who attempt to

define what such a tradition looks like at any given moment find themselves forced to turn primarily to rough snapshots comprised of book lists and textbooks across various time periods and locations (Applebee, 1974; Flood, Lapp, Squire, & Jensen, 2003; Squire, 2003). As Applebee (1974) argues, though scholars can identify larger trends in the history of secondary English instruction thoroughly and accurately, knowledge of the finer details of everyday pedagogical decisions within past classrooms is more difficult to pinpoint and elucidate. Applebee (1974) also notes the lack of organized exploration of the history of the teaching of English, offering his work as an attempt to remedy the shortage of such scholarship. Though many of the changes that occurred within the discipline of secondary English education since the early 1970s are examined through scholarship on specific movements (i.e. Reader Response Theory, Critical Literacy Theory, etc.), Applebee's assertion continues to ring true: gaps remain within the systematic study of the history and evolution of English education in secondary public schools, particularly since Applebee's seminal text *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English: A History* (1974).

Conversely, an abundance of scholarship exists and is still produced on the history and evolution of English and literary study as an accepted subject at the university level (Graff, 2008; Guillory, 2013; Scholes, 1998). Much of this scholarship seeks to define and understand the creation of what we now identify as the literary canon, or, more precisely, the body of works that is historically established, reproduced, and often considered as the crux of literary curricula within higher educational environments (Guillory, 2013; Scholes, 1998). These lines of thought also attempt to trace changes within literary criticism and theory as well as evolving definitions of what counts as

literacy within academic spaces (Gee, 2000). Graff's (1987) work, in particular, looks at the history and teaching of literature in college English departments. Although an understanding of the historical changes of literature instruction at the college level is vital to a generalized knowledge of the discipline of English education, an exploration of the pedagogical changes within secondary schools is of equal importance, particularly for current language arts instructors. Indeed, it is essential that we know the history of our profession as well as our place within it. As Donelson (1982) argues, knowing our profession's history allows us to realize that what happened in the past directly results in the discipline we have today.

Though there are discontinuities in systematic studies of the teaching of literature in secondary schools, critical scholarship problematizing the general history of literacy education in public schools exists and continues to be expanded upon. For example, Spring (2014) engages in critical analysis of the history of education across the United States in order to speak back to the distribution and perpetuation of dominant ideology through educational institutions, arguing that such ideology was historically embedded throughout curricula—and English language arts curricula in particular—over the growth and establishment of American public schools.

Critical perspectives also explore how the dissemination of ideas through school institutions reflects struggles over hegemony and an upholding of the dominant narrative in spaces where such dominance feels threatened (Donato, 1997; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Spring, 2014; Watkins, 2001). For instance, Spring (2014) tackles ideological management as one of the primary thematic threads in the history of U.S. education, exploring how political, economic, and moral concerns of the ruling classes

throughout American history determined particular ideas spread to individuals through the institution of school and, in particular, through the literature curriculum in English classrooms. The control of public thought through language arts curriculum was synonymous, in the past, with educational spaces since schooling in the colonial times, during the common school movement of the 19th century, and throughout the dehumanizing experiences of diverse individuals whose backgrounds differ from white Christian, capitalist viewpoints. Works of the dominant narrative were historically designed to teach appropriate behavior in a developing industrial society with increasing concentrations of wealth and expanding social divisions between the rich and the poor (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Spring, 2014). Spring (2014) highlights the issue of how the reading of dominant texts distributed to students reinforced subordinate, secondary roles of women and minorities in society and solidified capitalistic emphasis on charity as a means to justify the widening gap in wealth between the rich and poor. In line with this view, Aston (2017) argues that classrooms were historically used for the indoctrination of society through texts upheld by institutions and people in power. To illustrate the idea that literature curriculum is never neutral, critical scholars continue to examine how canonical and dominant texts were and are still used (Dyches & Sams, 2018), an examination that convincingly exhibits how literature instruction in the 19th century and beyond trained individuals outside the dominant culture to accept their social position, to reduce antagonisms between social classes, and to reject their own cultural backgrounds for an upholding of a white, Protestant, corporate culture that silenced or dismissed them to semi-citizen status (Donato, 1997; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Spring, 2014).

Influential Traditions in the Emergence of English Pedagogy

Even before English emerged as a recognizable secondary subject in the late 1800s, three specific traditions were already at work that impacted the teaching of texts within school spaces and continue to influence present-day instruction: ethical, classical, and nonacademic (Applebee, 1974). The goals of the ethical tradition—a framework emphasizing moral and cultural development—were embedded within early elementary school texts at lower grade levels (Spring, 2014), texts including *The New England Primer* (Cotton, 1991), Webster's *Grammatical Institute* (Webster, 2010), and the *McGuffey Readers* (McGuffey, 1982). Critical scholarship often questions the goals of the ethical tradition, demonstrating that such texts held larger social aims besides the teaching of basic reading and writing skills for moral and cultural growth. Spring (2014) illustrates this through his specific analysis of *The New England Primer* (Cotton, 1991) and the *McGuffey Readers* (McGuffey, 1982). He argues that while Cotton's *New England Primer* (1991) aimed to prepare readers to submit to family, religious, and governmental authority, the stories in *McGuffey Readers* (McGuffey, 1982) of the 19th century were populated by a plethora of moral and ethical lessons "designed to teach appropriate behavior in a developing industrial society with increasing concentrations of wealth and expanding social divisions between the rich and the poor" (Spring, 2014, p. 154).

While the ethical tradition thus emerged primarily in elementary school reading materials, secondary schools and colleges initially embraced a more classical tradition of literary study that had its roots in the exploration of classical languages and which advocated primarily for intellectual discipline and close textual study of grammar, rhetoric and oratory, and literary history (Applebee, 1974). This classical tradition

attempted to establish the study of English as equally intellectual and as rigorous as the study of the classics, arguing for organization, rules, and the promotion of disciplined mental training. Any textual analysis or examination of literary history within this tradition, however, was designed and carried out in the service of rhetoric, oral presentation, and composition, and did not value the reading of literature for its own sake (Applebee, 1974; Scholes, 1998).

Described by Applebee (1974) as a nonacademic, nontraditional approach, the third instructional tradition—emergent beyond the boundaries of the ethical and classical models—is the only one of the three stressing literature for its personal and inherent value. Though it had no place in the classical curriculum of colleges or preparatory secondary schools, the nonacademic tradition established a practice of appreciating literature that would influence progressive approaches to literacy in the next century, and would eventually allow for curriculum rooted in personal discovery through the reading of literature (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002; McConn & Blaine, 2018; Oliva, 2005; Shiro, 2013). Even if such a perspective was not initially valued as a means of teaching literature within school spaces, this nontraditional approach to the instruction of literature set historical precedence for teacher and student autonomy in the selection of texts that allow for individual connection to and growth through reading.

Aside from Applebee, other scholars have documented similar traditions in instruction that historically influence not only the teaching of text in classroom spaces but which also impact discussions in research and the teaching of English at a more holistic level. In *Growth Through English: A Record Based on the Dartmouth Conference,* for instance, Dixon (1967) offers three models for understanding English as a discipline,

models that bear some semblance to the instructional traditions Applebee (1974) argues were already entwined in both educational spaces and the study of English by the late 1890s. Dixon (1967) identifies his three models as the skills model, the cultural heritage model, and the personal growth model, with the skills model and cultural heritage model relating most closely in aims to the ethical and classical traditions Applebee (1974) discusses. Foreshadowing the imminent heavy criticism wrought by critical pedagogues of the ethical and classical traditions of instruction that would arise following the publication of Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Dixon (1967) and other Dartmouth Conference participants problematized the limitations inherent within the skills and cultural heritage models. Such critiques centered on a reduction of the complexities of language and text resulting from these two models, with the skills model primarily focused on written correctitude and the cultural heritage model leading to an overemphasis on traditional, canonical texts (Zancanella, Franzak, & Sheahan, 2016).

As a clear continuation of the philosophies driving the nonacademic, nontraditional paradigm of instruction Applebee (1974) chronicles, Dixon's (1967) personal growth model positions experience with text as inherently student-centered and developmental in nature. Unlike the nonacademic tradition of English studies that relegates the reading of literature primarily to extracurricular spaces (Applebee, 1974), however, Dixon's (1967) personal growth model situates reading as integral to both individual and academic growth, viewing English curriculum which focuses on student needs as "state-of-the-art English teaching" (Zancanella, Franzak, & Sheahan, 2016, p. 15). In similar ways to the nonacademic tradition of literature instruction discussed above, the personal growth model further instigates a form of teacher and student

autonomy in selection of text rooted in both the individuality and needs of particular groups of students. Text selection, in other words, need not be universal or standardized but should instead remain specific and intimate.

Although the ethical, classical, and nonacademic instructional traditions Applebee (1974) discusses initially included English studies as only a secondary part of larger educational curriculum and goals, he convincingly argues that all three of these models eventually unified under the single branch of English as the subject we understand it as today. This unity, however, is far from harmonious, and the question of purpose with regards to English and textual studies remains just as contested today as it was during the emergence and adoption of English as a sound subject of the secondary curriculum. Dixon's (1967) overview of the Dartmouth Conference, for instance, illustrates this contested nature of the discipline, documenting how attendees from the United States championed English curriculum rooted in the skills and cultural heritage models, while those from the United Kingdom leaned more heavily toward a personal growth model. Questions of text selection, of specific pedagogical models, even of English as a subject are, therefore, neither recently manifest nor perhaps even capable of being answered.

Indeed, English educators are today making decisions across and within a discipline that inherits and is heavily influenced by these traditions and contested models of educational and English pedagogy. Familiarity with the practices and paradigms that shape the teaching of texts allows us to historicize our profession, generating a capacity to identify when we are teaching within and against these traditions and further enabling us to understand the notion that tensions surrounding how and what to teach in regards to literature are part of an ongoing conversation upon which we are constantly expanding

and to which we are always already contributing (Donelson, 1982; Zancanella, Franzak, & Sheahan, 2016).

The Development of English Education in the Secondary Schools

Integral to historicizing our profession as English educators is also an understanding of the emergence of English as a serious subject in public secondary schools. As Donelson (1982) points out, American secondary education in the late 1880s and early 1890s was marked both by chaos and many institutional changes that would eventually allow English to develop as a major school subject. For instance, as college entrance requirements began to receive codification during this period, these specifications served as catalysts in the acceptance of literature as an important subject of study in high schools as literature often provided the basis for compositions required by colleges. However, despite the universality of such demands, each college ultimately set its own requirements for examinations, thus resulting in no set canon of texts on which to base the examinations. High schools protested both the flood of titles coming in from various colleges as well as the lack of separation of literary requirements from those for composition (Applebee, 1974).

Though not unique to English as a discipline, the sense of frustration regarding the dissemination of multiple college entrance requirements culminated in the National Education Association's appointment of a Committee of Ten to address secondary school studies, a process that directly resulted in the formation of English as a serious subject of study within schools (Applebee, 1974; Donelson, 1982). The 1894 document derivative of the Committee of Ten unified the many aspects of English together under a single subject and equated the importance of the discipline with that of the classical subjects.

Alongside the formation of The National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English that occurred during the same year, the work of the Committee of Ten raised the level of respect for English as a high school subject (Applebee, 1974; Kliebald, 2004).

As a caveat amid these developments, however, it is important to note that *The Report of the Committee of Ten* (1894) was written primarily for students who planned to go to college and therefore did not provide an overarching goal of subject-area guidelines for all students (McConn & Blaine, 2018; Myers, 1996). Additionally, after 1894, the questions surrounding the discipline of English education at the secondary level shifted primarily from *whether* it should be taught to *how* it should be taught. Such questions remain integral in ongoing research and theory in the teaching of English today.

The High School Literary Canon: Origins

Because the *how* of English instruction in secondary schools is so wrapped up in the selection and the teaching of literary works, it is essential to briefly examine the kinds of literature traditionally valued in school spaces. Historically, literature curriculum at the secondary level was strongly rooted in dominant works of the western narrative both in terms of text selection as well as the pedagogical choices surrounding those texts (Squire, 2003). Scholars document that, until the first quarter of the 20th century, secondary language arts content focused on 'major' literary works deemed suitable to prepare students for college entrance exams as well as to indoctrinate them into mainstream values (Piche, 1967; Rosewall, 1965; Squire, 2003). A study conducted by Smith (1941) in the late 1930s illustrates that text selection in the early years of the teaching of literature at the secondary level was dominated by the anthology as a single

resource while pedagogical choices centered on what was popular within university scholarship at the time: literary history or the backgrounds of literature. Both Applebee (1974) and Searles (1942) attest to this emphasis on the anthology as the crux of secondary school English classrooms since the formation of the common school, illustrating that the comprehensive use of these anthologies provided for a relatively uniform national curriculum in literature in grades 7-12 before paperback editions of various texts began to appear more widely in secondary schools after World War II. The widespread manifestation of college entrance examinations alongside their accompanying prescribed texts paved the way for the development of these anthologies; but, perhaps more problematically, these anthologies also arose as a by-product of the brevity in which English evolved as a major school subject—a brevity which more often than not resulted in a lack of teachers trained to teach English and literary studies as a discipline within secondary schools (Applebee, 1974).

The rise of uniform requirements for English as a discipline, the use of anthologies, and the focus on annotated classics as preparation for college examinations raise questions about the early formations of the high school canon. Applebee (1974) cites the influence of Milton and the Augustans from early rhetoric and grammar texts, the Latin and Greek epics, and a tradition of Shakespearean criticism on early anthologies and curriculum in mid-to-late 19th century English classrooms. However, he also argues that there is no easy or simple answer as to whether the emerging lists of more heavily taught texts were shaped primarily by high schools or colleges (Applebee, 1974). In part, this is because there was little discussion or consensus between the two over specific works to be read but also because the tradition of classics in the classroom was

established through sources such as "Franklin's 'best' and Harvard's 'standard' texts" (Applebee, 1974, p. 35).

Though the primary determinant of the origins of the high school literary canon is still a point of contention, educational history scholars do not deny that by the late 1800s, a set of prescribed texts—encouraged by policy and standards that normalized college entrance requirements—begin to appear in English classrooms across the nation (Applebee, 1974; Aston, 2017; McConn & Blaine, 2018; Squire, 2003). As Aston (2017) argues, the more these texts were used in literature instruction, the more they established authority through recurrence in the history of teacher practice and pedagogy. He claims that these prescribed texts, including those by Shakespeare, Dickens, and Homer, are still actively taught today, illustrating that one inherited element of English education is a culture of an innate, set of texts that reaches back over a century (Aston, 2017). This immutable tradition holds both obvious and underlying implications for practicing language arts teachers today.

Literary Pedagogy: Educational Theory, Standards, and Conflict

The traditional use of anthologies and prescribed texts (i.e. the western canon) as a primary and/or single resource in literature instruction is heavily complicated and continues to be interrogated today, particularly by critical scholars and critical literacy theorists who call for a decolonizing and restructuring of the dominant body of literary works historically taught in secondary schools (Aston, 2017; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Dyches & Sams, 2018). Current scholars and teachers must continue to asses and problematize the history of literary pedagogy to better understand conflicts that have arisen in the teaching of literature since the late 1890s after the emergence of English as a

main subject of high school study.

McConn and Blaine (2018) attempt to contextualize the history of English pedagogy through examining the tensions between four schools of educational thought and through analyzing ten historical documents related to the teaching of literature, of which the aforementioned *Report of the Committee of Ten* (1894) is a key player. According to McConn and Blaine (2018), philosophies of education such as essentialism and perennialism are conservative in nature, and situate the language arts teacher as the crux of decision-making and knowledge in the classroom. Historically, essentialist concerns regarding the teaching of English discuss pedagogy as the means of providing students with basic academic skills necessary to function within a society and advocate curriculum as a means of preserving society instead of changing it (Bagley, 1934). Within an essentialist ideology, literature exists in the classroom solely as a catalyst for advancing functional literacy. The literature teacher, then, reduces the act of reading to skills learned piecemeal through a teacher-directed process that upholds comprehension and analysis of a text by asking basic questions directed at skill-retention (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002; Shiro, 2013). A close partner of essentialism, perennialism holds language arts teachers as the main authority of epistemology within the literature classroom, positing that the purpose of pedagogy resides within ensuring the endurance of great ideas of Western Civilization (Shiro, 2013). Rooted in both the ethical and classical traditions of education discussed by Applebee (1974), perennialism views the teaching of literature through a cultural literacy lens and prioritizes creating shared cultural knowledge that all American students need to know (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002; Hirsch, 1987).

Both essentialism and perennialism have historical and current manifestations within conflict and reform in the teaching of English at the secondary level. With their clear emphasis on teacher-driven instruction, these two teaching philosophies are problematized by critical ideologies that place student experience, historical context, and the investigation of social disparities as the purpose behind literature instruction. One such critical ideology, for example, presents through the movement of progressivism which places the focus of language arts pedagogy on the learner, with progressivists arguing for literacy as personal discovery and ongoing dialogue between student, peers, teacher, and text (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002; McConn & Blaine, 2018). As a literary pedagogy, progressivism maintains obvious ties to philosophies behind reader-response theory (Dewey, 1916; Rosenblatt, 1982), with both relying on the cultural and experiential background of a reader as integral to their encounter with text. Pedagogically, teaching literature through a progressive lens prioritizes student choice, process-based instruction, and use of student experience to understand and challenge the world through and beyond a particular text (Oliva, 2005; Shiro, 2013). Critical aims in the teaching of literature locate their home in the pedagogical ideology of reconstructionism (Brameld, 1977), which, like progressivism, argues for a student-centered focus on literacy but goes beyond progressivists' call for literature as self- and social examination by explicitly laying bare power dynamics within language (McConn & Blaine, 2018).

In addition to various philosophies of thought influencing English education, Squire (2003) argues that pedagogical choices involving the teaching of literature in secondary classrooms were and are shaped by university scholarship, particularly work

done by the New Critics in the mid-twentieth century. Focusing solely on the text itself, the work of New Critics was furthered in secondary schools by the introduction of the Advanced Placement program in literature which called for a study of canonical literary works in depth (Squire, 2003). The heavy regard and almost exclusive concern for text demonstrated by theories of New Criticism is disrupted both by reader-response theories to literature (Richards, 1929; Rosenblatt, 1982)—which focus primarily on the reader's experiences when interacting with text—as well as by critical perspectives which problematize the overemphasis of traditional instruction and traditional texts in increasingly diverse secondary classrooms (Dallacqua & Sheahan, 2019; Morrell, 2008). These critical perspectives prove crucial in framing and understanding my research study.

Critical Perspectives on Literature Instruction

In terms of functionality, current critical research in English education calls into question the sacredness of the literary canon, inquiring deeply into whether these texts of the dominant narrative perpetuate the ideological management, oppression, and silencing of nontraditional narratives historically associated with the schooling of students from diverse backgrounds (Aston, 2017; Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, & Petrone, 2014; Dyches, 2017; Spring, 2014). Unlike traditional forms of literary instruction—forms that assume and attempt to perpetuate a level of neutrality in the teaching of a dominant body of texts—critical perspectives reject any level of objectivity associated with the literary canon, including the instruction that surrounds and proliferates it (Morrell, 2005; Janks, 2013). Going beyond the New Critical emphasis on the text as holder of all meaning (Bertens, 2013), and even beyond reader response theories of literature that locate meaning-making within the reader (Rosenblatt, 1982), these critical discourses push for

the recognition that all texts are inherently situated and taught within a historical, social, political, and gendered context and, therefore, that all texts should be constantly interrogated to expose the power dynamics at work both within and behind them (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Rooted in the theoretical underpinnings of critical pedagogy, such critical lenses demand that educators remain ever-cognizant of the fact that, historically, schooling itself perpetuates wounds amongst marginalized communities of color and across class, gender, sexuality, ability, and language (Osborn & Milbank, 1987; Sosa-Provencio, Sheahan, Desai, & Secatero, 2018). Acknowledging and realizing the value of multiple identities and varied experiences of students and teachers, such pedagogy maintains a critical approach that has potential to heal the very wounds schooling often inflicts (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994).

The value of multi-faceted pedagogy was, historically, ignored within educational spaces (Spring, 2014), spaces which were used as a vehicle for the transmission of dominant narratives via ideological management. Indeed, communities of color within the United States routinely experience a curriculum of disconnectedness, invisibility, deculturalization, and accommodation within oppressive school paradigms that fail to recognize the social capital and funds of knowledge these students bring to classroom spaces (Darder, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 2009). Such a duality of sociocultural dictation and silencing often occurs within language arts classrooms in which the dominant ideological values inherent within many canonical texts fail to be interrogated by those teaching or learning such works (Morrell, 2008; Spring 2014). Critical pedagogy therefore demands language arts educators end this

complacency and instead speak back to these texts through situating curriculum as a means of empowerment and reclamation of voice. Committed to a liberating educational experience for students, critical educators must intensely advocate for meaningful and authentic pedagogy which enables students to become active members within the communities to which they belong (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006). In these ways, teaching from a critical perspective calls for the validation of silenced cultural and social identities, provides students with culturally relevant and rigorous curricula, and celebrates student agency and knowledge, thus always pushing toward a more hopeful academic and social future for students of historically marginalized communities (Acosta, 2007; Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

These critical necessities, however, are immediately problematized by students whose primary school experience occurs within a banking model of education (Freire, 1970), that space in which they learn to invalidate their own intellectualism while simultaneously encountering knowledge of the dominant tradition that they neither relate to nor are given the linguistic abilities to comprehend. Critical perspectives, therefore, hold that critically conscious teachers and teacher educators must strive to understand, critique, and move beyond these oppressive frameworks for diverse and marginalized groups through implementing curriculum, courses, and standards that illustrate political and cultural realities of varied communities (Antrop-Gonzalez & De Jesus, 2006; Barnhardt, 2009).

The goal of this type of critical pedagogy resides within positioning students as the holders and creators of their knowledge, catalyzing opportunities amongst communities of color for the development of a critical intellectualism that speaks back to

historically oppressive schooling (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Delgado Bernal, 2002). It also equalizes the role of teacher and student in spaces of learning, advocating for classrooms as dynamic environments in which students and teachers explore multiple literacies as a way of understanding, critiquing, and transforming their worlds (Bomer & Bomer, 2001; Dallacqua & Sheahan, 2019; Luke, 2000).

A commitment to critical pedagogy, then, necessitates that educators provide diverse students with an authentic curriculum immersed in the everyday realities of their lived cultural experiences regardless of whether they align with dominant narratives of knowing. Schooling activities associated with this type of culturally relevant teaching allow for historically silenced knowledge and skills to be shared through talk, improvisation, and meaningful interaction with peers (Dixon, 1967; Gee, 1991).

Thus, these types of authentic curricula and activities speak back to traditional models of pedagogy rooted in "dummy run" exercises; exercises which, at best, abstractly imitate real-world communication and, at worst, reduce the purposes and complexities of language and knowledge to "a simple formula—a lump sum view of inheritance" (Dixon, 1967, pg. 4). When working within a curriculum rooted framed by critical perspectives, students are asked to drive inquiry and social action, designing and transforming the world around them as opposed to simply being excluded from it or adapting to it (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Luke, 2000). Speaking back to the damaging and painful accommodations diverse people(s) have to make within educational spaces (Dubois, 1926), a critical curriculum strives to create agency in students through the building of positive social identities and an understanding of oneself as an active participant in the creation of more loving lands (Pendleton-Jimenez, 2014, pg. 125).

Understanding how critical perspectives related to literature instruction differ from more traditional models of teaching requires educators to weave a knowledge of U.S. educational history with a dedication to the theory and practice of critical, culturally relevant, and emancipatory pedagogy. Thus, such perspectives hold that educators not only continuously acknowledge and critique the oppressive histories of our educational pasts; these methods also call for the undertaking of an intellectual, emotive, and lived commitment to critical multicultural teaching and transformative pedagogy, a pedagogy that upholds the multiple voices, experiences, and needs of the varied communities in which we work (Nieto, 2010).

The recognition that contemporary education exists neither within spaces of neutrality nor within an ahistorical vacuum proves essential to healing the wounds that schooling as an institution inflicts on communities of marginalized people(s). This necessity is particularly essential for language arts teachers who continue to teach works of the dominant narrative, whether due to the nature of top-down requirements or due to their personal, conscious choices. Because current educational policy continues to reflect and reproduce the same inequities and hierarchical stratifications of larger dominant sociohistorical forces, the urgency to nourish, substantiate, and create spaces for the voices of marginalized, silenced, and invalidated youth is more relevant now than ever (Fine, 1995; Foster, 1995; Sosa-Provencio, Sheahan, Desai, & Secatero, 2018). By supporting, validating, and building an interwoven tapestry that presents legacies of struggle and counter-narratives of survival amongst those whom traditional forms of education harm the most, critical teaching has the power to challenge inequities and historical frameworks of educational oppression.

Yet even as critical perspectives call for educators to pour hearts, minds, and professions into ensuring pedagogies of healing for the communities we work and exist within, these lenses also call for a commitment to moving away from the oppressive history of our educational past that goes further than simply acknowledging that history's existence and ramifications in contemporary spaces of schooling. In other words, critical perspectives demand a movement beyond limited pedagogies of multiculturalism, for while these pedagogies celebrate diversity, they remain narrow-sighted, never questioning why exactly educational systems that resulted in the marginalization, deculturalization, and silencing of diverse people(s) evolved in this country, whom those systems served, and whom they continue to serve.

Finally, these perspectives call for educators to constantly strive to understand the varied individuals we work with and their communities not as *objects* of an oppressive educational history, but as active *agents* in their own legacies—legacies characterized by survival, resistance, and the indomitable will to live and thrive beyond the reach of oppression (Anzaldua, 1987; hooks, 1993). Rather than remaining or even becoming further mired in the past, critical lenses thus emphasize present and future potentialities of communities and the individuals therein.

Situated amid this framework of history and present potentiality, amid rigid indifference and inclusive dynamicism, as an attempt to further challenge the inequities of educational oppression through critical perspectives, the current qualitative study explores how and why practicing secondary language arts educators make the choices they make regarding both text selection and pedagogy, investigating furthermore whether the pedagogical perspectives of said educators align with critical teachings called for by

critical perspectives.

Therefore, it makes sense to ground my research in theories of critical pedagogy and literacy that center on the reading and writing of texts for individual analysis, social critique, and eventual transformation. Critical literacy, as defined by Luke (2000), encompasses a classroom environment in which students and teachers come together both to explore how texts shape their worlds and to use texts as a tool for understanding and reconstructing these worlds (p. 453). Rooted in the work of Paulo Freire, critical literacy eschews the banking model of education, one in which knowledge is simply handed down from teacher to student in a way that merely teaches the student to adapt to their situations rather than challenge the situations that oppress them in the first place (Freire, 1970). Critical literacy upholds classroom practices that encourage students to utilize language for the comprehension and questioning of their everyday world, to investigate the connection between language and power, and to analyze popular culture and media (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008). Teaching students through a critical lens involves helping them recognize that language is, in fact, never neutral but rather inherently positions individuals as particular kinds of human subjects (Janks, 2013).

At the heart of these critical classroom practices, then, resides a pedagogical philosophy that pursues developing critical consciousness in students by disclosing and challenging the reproductive roles institutions play in political and cultural life, a philosophy that is committed to social transformation in solidarity with historically marginalized groups (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Critical pedagogues and critical literacy theorists and practitioners including Freire (1970) imply a process of critical literacy education in their work, one that involves "problem posing and the

positioning of students as teachers and intellectuals involved in intense dialogic exchanges and continual interrogation of the world around them" (Morrell, 2008, p. 55). Freire charges literacy education with the responsibility of humanization, requiring all teachers to acknowledge that the decisions they make in how and what they teach have significant social, political, and psychological consequences for their students. The power of an English language arts education situated in critical literacy is that it enables young individuals to read both the world and the word (Freire, 1983) in relation to power, identity, difference, and access to knowledge and resources.

A critical reading of both the word and the world is accomplished through the teaching of a variety of texts but often calls for the use of nontraditional texts, specifically young adult literature—texts rooted in the experiences and thoughts of adolescents. Critical perspectives argue that sharing with secondary students texts in which they can see both themselves and their worlds provides a basic framework through which they can critique language, structures of power, and their own positionality in a larger society.

One tenet of teaching critically arises within the idea of remembering that words and texts offered to students should be laden with the meaning of the students' existential experience rather than the teacher's (Freire, 1983, p. 10). Morrell (2008) explores this concept in his work with urban youth, claiming that the starting point to a critical literacy education is a focus on the lived experience of everyday people (p. 54). Throughout the process of building critical awareness, exposing students to literature beyond that of the dominant narrative reflects an understanding of the need to relate to situations and characters that mirror individual experience (Sheahan, 2016).

Although initially the domain of academia, critical pedagogy and critical literacy

theories are now receiving increasing attention, specifically with regard to utilizing

critical approaches as components of secondary and urban school reform. If teachers are

to prepare students for life in a globalized, new world order, focus must shift beyond

traditional literacy practices and incorporate critical textual practices as well (Morrell,

2008). Promoting meaningful social change and, at the same time, allowing for a life of

personal freedom through identity exploration, a critical literacy education

simultaneously strives to create spaces for the type of evolved society discussed by

Cammarota and Romero (2014)—a society in which people are not told who they are and

what they have to offer but rather one in which individuals have control over

understanding their identities and potentialities (p. 7).

For English language arts teachers at the secondary level, providing students with

a critical approach to learning is thus two-fold: focusing on the essential role critical

reading and writing plays in comprehending and reconstituting the self, and allowing for

opportunities to use this reconstitution of self to re-envision the world around them

(Morrell, 2008). The question then becomes how to select and teach texts that will allow

for this examination and reformulation of self. In order to answer this question, the types

of texts that teachers are currently teaching in the classroom must be examined.

Why the Canon? What the Scholarship Says about Traditionally Taught Texts

Regarding text selection, many tenets of critical literacy argue that that the goals

of critical pedagogues should reside within emphasizing both canonical and postcolonial/

pop-cultural texts. Rooted in the belief of critical practitioners who feel strongly that

critical literacy demands "a knowledge of and facility with the language of power"

(Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), such a claim can support English language arts

instruction of the dominant canon within secondary schools, assuming that studying canonical texts serves as a critical strategy for understanding the values and ideologies of dominant groups at varying historical points (Dyches & Sams, 2018).

According to Freire (1997), studying dominant classic texts in this manner proves significant in the development of a revolutionary consciousness for both students and teachers. Many scholars continue to develop methods of teaching the canon critically, from the successful pairing of canonical texts with non-traditional or young adult texts in secondary classrooms (e.g. Lycke, 2014; Smith, 2014) to the creation of a framework for interrogating works of the dominant canon critically (Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, & Petrone, 2014).

Critical perspectives hold, however, that to only critically examine works of the dominant canon is not enough, and a critical approach to teaching language arts demands that these traditional texts be paired with more contemporary texts of popular culture that mirror students' existential experiences. According to Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008), the development of academic and critical literacies involves the teaching of canonical literature that is heavily complemented by a use of popular cultural texts from music, film, mass media, and sports (p. 51). For critical pedagogues, it is imperative that these popular cultural texts include young adult fiction, contemporary works, and non-traditional texts as well. Because my qualitative study is rooted in investigating how the text selection and pedagogical choices of practicing language arts teachers fit within a larger discussion of critical perspectives and literature instruction, it is essential to understand why critical literacy advocates call for the critical teaching of both dominant and nontraditional texts.

Despite these necessities, and even with the multitude of interesting, relevant, and engaging young adult literature, contemporary literature, and non-traditional texts currently available to students and teachers, the majority of secondary language arts instructors continue to teach the traditional Western canon. Such resilience makes sense because, as Allen (2011) acknowledges, the canon consists of works considered to be models of literature—works that have stood the test of time through selection by influential writers in the field. Historically, those who hold position in this particular field choose the texts that become canonized. Yet, the canon is always at least one generation behind (Guillory, 2013), and, because of this latency, fails to take into account the breadth of contemporary and multimodal texts that could be powerful if utilized in the classroom (Dallacqua & Sheahan, 2019; Perry & Stallworth, 2013).

The conundrum of why English teachers continue to build their curriculum upon the classics remains highly relevant and therefore necessitates continuous examination, particularly by researchers such as myself who are interested in text choice at the secondary level, particularly when that text choice is so historically dependent upon trends dictated by forces outside of public education. Indeed, Santoli and Wagner (2004) argue that the tradition and familiarity of the canon leads to the fear that a de-emphasis on teaching the classics will result in an uneducated society, and thus, teacher guides traditionally subjugate the use and exploration of young adult novels. Because of the canon's honored, historical, and highly-emphasized place in literature instruction (Perry & Stallworth, 2013), many English teachers often do not (or choose not to) utilize nontraditional texts because these works do not yet belong to a body of texts considered worthy of students' attention (Santoli & Wagner, 2004).

The reticence to consider young adult literature, contemporary literature, or nontraditional texts as worthy of study also manifests in teacher education programs insofar as these programs lack critical perspectives for pre-service and in-service language arts teachers, many of whom are initially hesitant in relinquishing the belief that anything beyond the canon represents a legitimate and thriving genre (Stallworth, 2006). In addition, many current English instructors attribute their uncertainty in using nontraditional texts to a lack of teacher knowledge or understanding of this resource (Dallacqua & Sheahan, 2019; Stallworth, 2006). Many language arts teachers feel uncomfortable teaching topics in which they lack expertise, and therefore teach what is familiar and safe, perhaps the texts they themselves were taught in both high school and college English courses (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006, p. 484). This cycle of familiarity is discussed by hooks (1994), who claims that many teachers are educated in classrooms upholding a singular notion of truth and knowledge, and thus end up believing that such notions should be continuously and universally taught. Because it is highly difficult to escape "the cookie-cutter mold of traditional pedagogical methods" (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006, p. 486), many secondary English teachers continue to teach the same canonical works within a similar pedagogical framework in which they remember being taught.

Lack of availability of nontraditional texts and related materials in many middle and high schools also helps explain a heavy reliance on those canonical texts so easily accessible to teachers. Textbooks often remain a staple in the English language arts classroom, and selections of class novels are often limited to what is available in school libraries and book rooms. Therefore, teachers who want to incorporate whole-class or

even individualized reading of nontraditional texts have to purchase these texts themselves or have to ask their students to purchase their own copies, which is often impossible to do in lower socio-economic schools where doing so would be a financial burden on students and their families (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006).

Systematically ensuring the perpetuation of a non-critical curriculum, Common Core State Standards, in conjunction with increasing accountability placed on teachers to demonstrate student's growth in literacy skills and high-stakes required testing, also cause English teachers concern over losing time by trying to add the reading of nontraditional texts to their curricula (Au, 2007; Santoli & Wagner, 2004). When so much of their yearly evaluations is rooted in student test scores, many teachers remain concerned that novels outside of the traditional canon are not rigorous enough to allow students to develop the reading and writing skills they will eventually be tested on, demonstrating powerfully that external tests influence both the teaching and learning of literature (Anagnostopoulos, 2003).

Whether the hesitance to teach nontraditional texts within the secondary literature classroom draws from the lack of personal or professional knowhow, a scarcity of funding for such texts, or top-down system reform, critical perspectives in education demand that teachers challenge, against all odds, a singular tradition of canonical texts within literary curriculum. By pairing works of the dominant narrative with nontraditional texts—texts such as young adult literature that more intimately reflect the lived experiences of students—teaching within framework of critical literacy provides students with access to both an understanding of dominant groups at different points throughout history while always already giving to those same students the tools necessary

to critique tradition and create for themselves a now and future legacy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Dyches & Sams, 2018).

Conclusion

My co-researchers and I situate this participatory action research study within a long-standing history of what it means to choose and teach a variety of texts amid a constantly shifting landscape of literary traditions. As educators who are committed to adopting a level of historical honesty toward the hegemony of the Western canon, the four of us recognize the inherent forces of ideological management within many of the works we teach. We seek to reflectively understand just how these forces of canonicity had impacted our own teaching and, moreover, whether or not we ourselves continue to perpetuate an unexamined and unquestioned dominant ideology as it pertains to the teaching of texts. These colonizing epistemologies are consistently called into question by critical perspectives which are gaining traction as essential lenses through which to view and teach literature.

It is within these evolving understandings of how literature should be approached that my co-researchers and I ground our work, knowing that both historical traditions as well as the current climate of critical perspectives influence our daily work with texts whether acknowledged or not. By recognizing our part within this ongoing dialogue of changing approaches to literary pedagogy, my co-researchers and I aim to contribute an investigation into our own perspectives on selecting and teaching texts. Indeed, much of the research conducted concerning the analysis of text choice within secondary classrooms does not necessarily build from the work of practicing teachers. As part of our contribution, then, we seek to not only wrestle with how these intersections of

tradition, criticality, and teacher agency impact the four of us as practicing teachers of literature but to also infuse a powerful practitioner-driven *praxis* into ongoing understandings of our profession. Adding a set of more authentic voices to research and theory performed in the teaching of English, we strive to be active agents in our designing and undertaking of this collaborative study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction and Overview

Investigating the relationships between text choice, teaching methods, historical traditions, and current critical perspectives on literature instruction, this qualitative study was designed to focus on how the day-to-day pedagogical decisions of practicing language arts teachers play out. The structure of the study also reflects my co-researchers' and my desire to create a space that would allow us to explore larger inquiry related to English education as a discipline in which we should have an active voice as both practitioners and intellectuals. In order to address whether our text and pedagogical choices were aligned with traditional methods of literature instruction or with those of current theoretical constructs of critical literacy, we strove to create a study as part of my dissertation research that would prioritize collaborative inquiry and discussion as a means of investigating and reflecting on practice for eventual growth.

The purpose of this participatory action research project was to examine the pedagogical choices of practicing secondary language arts teachers within the framework of critical perspectives concerning the teaching of literature specifically within the current realities of a high-stakes, evaluative teaching environment. My co-researchers and I aimed to engage in a collaborative investigation of our own textual and pedagogical practices in order to reflect on whether our teaching choices aligned with the holistic goals of critical literacy, spoke back to more traditional forms of literature instruction, or encapsulated some combination of the two. In order to do so, we designed an open-ended qualitative study that would allow for honest discussion over how we choose and teach a variety of texts in a trajectory of shifting frameworks and methods for secondary

literature instruction and within a current educational climate that often attempts to limit both what and how we teach.

Overview of the Chapter

The present chapter provides an overview of the methodological structure of our research study as it is situated within the qualitative traditions of insider research, collaborative teacher inquiry, and participatory action research. Through a narrative of the evolution of both the design and nature of the study itself, the following pages also delineate the necessary flexibility for which must be allowed in any qualitative study. Although initially intended as dissertation research grounded in teacher research and multi-case study, my co-researchers' desire to have greater involvement in both the research design and subsequent data analysis catalyzed a natural shift toward a project inherently rooted in community-based, collaborative inquiry. Following a recognition of the significance such flexibility in design held for my co-researchers' and my work, this methodological chapter will proceed to detail my research sample and population from which it was drawn, a brief biographical sketch of the participants of the study and research setting, and the data collection methods chosen as fundamental to the design of this research study. Finally, this chapter will summarize the procedures my co-researchers and I used to analyze and synthesize collected data, ultimately concluding with an overview of how I addressed ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations and delimitations in the methodological structure of the research study itself.

Evolution of the Research Project: Flexibility in Qualitative Design

Though the nature of this study significantly changed from its original design in my dissertation proposal to the finalized design delineated within this chapter, it is

important to note that I have always grounded the project within a qualitative tradition of research. According to Kress (2011), the qualitative research process is characterized by its descriptive and naturalistic process-based approach to inductive meaning-making and thus remains always directed toward the goal of understanding the lived experiences of individuals (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Even in the earliest stages of envisioning what form my research study potentially might take, I sought to center my work in the thoughts, experiences, and actions of the practicing English teachers I worked alongside every day. The qualitative research process—with its focus on the importance of context, setting, and participants' frames of reference—gave me a clear structure through which I could explore the textual and pedagogical decisions of these teachers, while ensuring that I privileged their voices and stories (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

With these considerations in mind, knowing that the daily and long-term work of practicing teachers is both time-consuming and fully encompassing, I initially designed a qualitative study which positioned me as the primary researcher responsible for data collection and analysis, a decision due in part to my high rapport and relationship with the three teachers who eventually agreed to participate in the study as well as my desire to respect their limited time. In its original form, I structured the research project around both a multi-case examination of my colleagues' textual and pedagogical decisions as well as a practitioner study that examined my own choices as an English educator. In an attempt to alleviate the time demanded of my colleagues, I intended to shoulder most of the research responsibilities: crafting all interview and focus group questions, designing the format for classroom observations, and conducting data analysis.

With my original research design in place, I conducted one semi-structured

interview and met soon after with all three participants to discuss how I intended to use and interpret this initial data. At that point, I was primarily concerned with questions of ethics, credibility, and dependability inherent in a singular collection and interpretation of data and wanted to gauge just how comfortable my colleagues would be with member-checking my data coding and synthesis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2012). However, as our discussion concerning the need for member-checking advanced, it became clear to me that the participants sought a far larger role in the research study than I had originally allowed for, a desire evidenced by their interest in going beyond member-checks to assist me in setting further interview questions and focus group protocol. One participant, Aaron, suggested focus group meetings as a space in which we could comb through interview and observation data together, exploring potential findings as a collaborative group. Stemming from Aaron's idea to use focus groups as a site of collaborative data analysis, another participant, Franny, proposed that classroom observations be conducted by all four of us, instead of just by me. Finally, Joaquin, the third participant, suggested we use the entire research project as a form of collaborative professional development, and as a way for all of us to investigate and improve our practice of teaching literature. By the conclusion of the meeting, it had become evident to me that the very nature of my research design would need to shift substantially.

Though I was excited and deeply humbled by my colleagues' willingness to take on larger roles in the research study, I also remember feeling intensely overwhelmed as I left this meeting. Rather than allowing myself to feel frustrated, however, I was reminded of the need for flexibility in the research design of any qualitative study. As

Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out, qualitative researchers must build flexibility into the

creation and unfolding of any project, with Marshall and Rossman (2016) also arguing

that the researcher reserves the right to change implementation of methods even during

the data collection process of the study. Additionally, Milner (2007) reminds qualitative

scholars of the importance of researcher sensitivity to the setting and needs of the

participants, emphasizing the notion that an inherent feature of qualitative design is its

consideration of unseen factors that may arise throughout the research process. Keeping

in mind the call for change and flexibility in qualitative design provided by these

scholars, I allowed the study to evolve into a different genre of design that more

adequately accommodated my colleagues' desires for collaborative partnership, a form of

reflexivity that would position them in the roles of co-researchers instead of participants.

Delineation of the Study

I identify this research study in its final form as a participatory action research

(PAR) project situated in collaborative inquiry, insofar as my fellow co-researchers and I

proceeded on equitable footing as we entered this research space together, engaged in

focus groups together, and observed one another in our classroom environments. As

defined by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), participatory action research is a social

process of exploration conducted by researchers within a particular community who enter

an investigatory space on equitable footing, signifying that no single researcher holds a

larger stake in findings than any others; all are co-researchers (Kress, 2011).

('Community,' within the context of this study, refers to the population of teachers and

students who inhabit this particular research space). Marshall and Rossman (2016)

discuss hallmark features of participatory action research, namely identifying such work

as that which is primarily rooted in the full collaboration between researcher and participants in positing questions to be explored and in gathering data to address them.

Participatory action research also involves a research-based investigation of *actual* practices instead of *abstract* procedures within a given community, allowing the community to directly benefit from research inquiry and potential findings (McTaggart, 1994). Challenging the notion that researchers should be neutral and objective in their approach to a study, action research is centered in full, collaborative inquiry by all participants, aiming toward change within a particular community and thus destabilizing traditional research that devalues findings primarily beneficial to local contexts (Guba, 1981; Singer & Moscovici, 2008). As seen in analyses and narratives of participatory action projects in a variety of contexts (Maguire, 2000; Putney & Green, 2010; Titchen & Bennie, 1993), such research involves a cyclical process of research, reflection, and action rooted in critical perspectives of emancipation (Freire, 1970). Ideally, participatory action research blurs all lines between researcher and participants, instead creating a space where experts can collaboratively inquire into aspects of practice and use discoveries to enact changes within their professional worlds (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005; Sagor, 2005).

Although the current study serves as my dissertation research, as called for by the collaborative nature of both practitioner inquiry and design, my co-researchers were equally involved in the collection and analysis of data. Moreover, my co-researchers also conducted critical member-checking throughout to not only ensure validity of our analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) but also to reinforce the ideological underpinnings of teacher research that devalue the notion of research subjects and instead champion the

involvement of equitable co-researchers who share balanced stakes in a particular research study (Mills, 2011).

Critically Framing the Methodological Design

Stemming from my use of critical perspectives as the theoretical framework through which I situated my research questions, literature review, and qualitative design, I ground my researcher identity as one who is committed to ongoing criticality in my work. According to Willis et al. (2008), critically conscious research seeks to understand intersections of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation within particular contexts, challenging the status quo in research that ignores and marginalizes oppressive institutions and traditional abuses of power within research spaces. Critically conscious language and literacy research also calls for researchers to be more self-reflexive and to work in cooperation with participants and co-researchers in spaces that attempt to counter the exploitation and hegemonic issues associated with traditional research (Willis et. al., 2008).

Historically, research within the field of education has set aside/disregarded/subjugated the voices of teachers, despite the expertise exhibited by those same teachers in pedagogical practice, the spaces they teach, and their close relationships with diverse students they encounter every day (Kress, 2011). Positioning teachers as researchers the fact that, traditionally, teachers' voices have typically been absent from larger discussions about educational change and reform (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). This genre of research argues for a shift in focus from integrating the findings of outside research within a classroom to conducting inquiry, data-driven research and reflection within one's own classroom and school community thus giving

teachers strong voice and authority in how their research findings are utilized. Such research, often explicitly emancipatory and ideological in nature (Freire, 1970), is geared toward critiquing and changing fundamental educational structures to re-envision ownership over the educational research process (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As such, I am well aware of the absence of teacher-driven scholarship in traditional qualitative research, and this is one of the many reasons why I self-identify as a researcher committed to collaborative teacher research.

As Glesne (2016) points out, teacher research is most effective in backyard settings due to the collaborative nature of the work and the agreed upon purpose of teachers involved, a purpose which is consistently oriented toward change in pedagogical practice. As a researcher committed to intentional and constant inquiry into the teaching and learning of literature within the secondary school where I teach, teacher research therefore proved an appropriate methodological framework within which to situate my qualitative study. Because my project was informed so heavily by critical perspectives, conducting teacher research enabled my co-researchers and I to engage in a participatory action study rooted in collaborative inquiry that aligned with a strong history of scholarship disrupting research within schools deemed unethical, unusable, or disconnected. The shift in ownership from outside research to research conducted primarily by practitioners within a given community coincides with a commitment to legitimizing experiences of marginalized student and teacher populations (Campano, 2007).

It is important to note, however, that my qualitative study goes beyond the bounds of critically conscious teacher research, a form which is rooted in an individual teacher

investigating his or her own practice in order to increase instructional effectiveness, reflexivity, and efficacy (Comber & Woods, 2016). Once this study moved away from a multi-case, teacher-research based study and became instead a collaborative, participatory action inquiry project, it simultaneously no longer felt reasonable to identify it as *merely* teacher research. Though I originally intended to observe the classrooms of three participants, facilitate focus groups, and conduct semi-structured interviews, ultimately, all co-researchers, through their equitable involvement in data collection and analysis, investigated their own literary instructional practices. Therefore, to delineate this particular qualitative study solely as "teacher research" fails to holistically encompass the collaborative, participatory nature of a study rooted in a community of teachers. Fundamentally, then, in its final form, this project synthesized elements of critically conscious teacher research, collaborative inquiry, and participatory action research to address my research questions aimed at investigating practices of literary text selection and pedagogy.

Context and Positionality

As I walk through the halls of the high school I have come to know as home—the school in which I chose to conduct my research study—I am constantly aware of the multiple identities I have inhabited and continue to inhabit in this space. A Hispaña bisexual female student, unaware of how to carve a place for herself amongst traditional educational norms, but a passionate lover of words, books, and stories. A new teacher, blind to her own use of oppressive teaching strategies that served to maintain the same dominant status quo to which she herself had been subjected time and time again. A graduate student, dealing with the shock and turmoil that accompany the cognizance of

discovering for the first time the necessity of casting a critical lens on her own teaching and that of the larger historical narrative. And now, a doctoral candidate repeatedly pulled between, on the one hand, the realities of teaching at a diverse, urban high school in the current educational climate and, on the other, the demands of academia, research, and the pressure to publish, all of which exists alongside the uncertainty that comes with trying to co-exist in these two very different worlds.

To delineate my researcher positionality in this particular educational space as "insider" takes into account that I work and research within a community where I am a full member (Glesne, 2016), and yet, this term still simultaneously fails to convey the deeply emotional and familial ties that accompany teaching and researching in a school where I was once myself a high school student. Memories from my own experiences as a student—both positive and negative—follow me as I lesson plan in the library, walk alongside the dusty shelves of the book room, step before a sea of unfamiliar student faces on the first day of a new school year, talk with my fellow language arts teachers over their most passionate teaching moments. To only label myself as an "insider" also falls short of fully encompassing both the heart and the intense effort I have poured into the last nine years of teaching, coaching, and collaborating at this particular school. I am not—and cannot pretend to be—a neutral researcher in the space I chose for the research setting of this study. To claim neutrality in a community where I have strong autobiographical connections would inject into my work a level of inauthenticity with which I am highly uncomfortable. Bearing this reticent cognizance in mind, I knew when designing this research study that it would prove essential for me to continuously reflect upon how exactly my personal memories, past and current teaching experiences, and

assumptions about my research community would ultimately affect how I interacted with my co-researchers, analyzed collected data, and attempted to understand what this data demonstrates.

When I initially began to craft and structure this research study, I considered my passions: teaching; literature; critical, culturally relevant pedagogy; collaboration; and reflecting on my practice to better serve the diverse students I learn from and interact with every day. I also thought deeply about the ethical implications of research that will involve looking deeply into my own pedagogical choices as well as those of my colleagues. Indeed, the subjects of this project are not unfamiliar to me, for, through department meetings, professional learning communities, and whole staff professional development opportunities, I engage with the other three language arts teachers (who also participated as co-researchers in this qualitative study) daily. As such, I was hyper-aware of what my autobiographical connections to my research space and my deep friendships with my colleagues might mean in terms of bias and subjectivity within my study.

Therefore, I have no desire to claim objectivity, for I know that doing so while researching myself and my colleagues in a space wherein I am a member proves not only impossible but can even result in inaccurate understandings of observations and interviews (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). Indeed, those who conduct insider research must continuously evaluate their positionality in relation to their research participants and/or co-researchers and research sites because such positionality may hold a strong influence on their work. However, it remains equally important to argue for the validity of member research, recognizing that such deep familiarity with a research space and the individuals who inhabit it can result in the collection of sound, rigorous research data that can benefit

said community (Kress, 2011). Oftentimes, rather than skewing or polluting, the lack of distance catalyzed by member research enhances and humanizes a research study, as I hoped it would accomplish with my project.

For my co-researchers and me, the methodological design for this qualitative study had its roots in our passion for teaching literature and our deep desire to constantly improve the criticality of our practices. It stemmed from my experience working with the diverse high school students I have spent the better part of the last decade learning with and from, and from my collaboration with my fellow language arts teachers who have constantly demonstrated both ongoing reflexivity and intense commitment to their students. Our interest in inquiring into our own pedagogical philosophy and practices— and that of our colleagues—stems from the knowledge and passion I gained for teacher-driven research during a course on practitioner research that I took early on in my master's program. Prior to taking this particular class, I remember being constantly frustrated by what I believed to be inauthenticity in educational research. Articles I encountered in graduate classes I was taking focused on ivory-tower academics entering a school community as an outsider for a given amount of time, and then using findings to publish. I distinctly recall feeling frustrated that such findings didn't seem to help the school community in any way. In addition, I was attending district and state-mandated professional development regularly during my initial years as a high school teacher. At these sessions, educational research was presented in the form of "best practices" championed by for-profit business organizations where researchers had little to no experience teaching in a public-school setting or working with populations of marginalized students (Lipman, 2009).

Delving into inquiry rooted in my own daily pedagogical practice saved me from the disillusionment I was feeling toward educational research, and I am indebted to it for the creation of this qualitative study. Within my practitioner research course, we read articles and case studies of teachers driving their own research in their classrooms and school communities, and this inspired me to conduct a year-long teacher-research study into my own teaching practices that would eventually become my master's thesis. Teacher research is directly geared toward authentic reflexivity and change in pedagogical practice, and thus, speaks to two of my interests: constantly reflecting on my teaching praxis and instructing in emancipatory ways that speak to the needs of the diverse students my colleagues and I teach (Freire, 1970). When I begin to think about designing this particular qualitative study, however, I knew I wanted to go beyond using teacher research to investigate my own teaching practice—I also wanted to investigate the practice of my colleagues and have them investigate mine. My desire to highly involve my colleagues in my study evolved into their own desire to be highly involved in the work as well. Such a shift toward inclusivity derived not only from the cooperative and tight-knit nature of the English department to which I belong but also from the inherent value my co-researchers and I perceived in exploring, reflecting, and growing from investigating our own literature pedagogy.

In an effort to embrace these more intangible potentialities, critical praxis research (CPR) also proved formative in shaping my understanding of researcher identity and positionality as I engaged in project design, redesign, data collection, and analysis alongside my co-researchers. According to Kress (2011), critical praxis research is defined as a form of investigation created and enacted by practicing educators whose

primary desires lie in addressing the lived realities of their students, their schools, and their own practice. Similar to participatory action projects, in its call for critical consciousness in researchers, critical praxis research is influenced heavily by the work of Freire (1970) and thus commits itself to investigation that promotes social justice, emancipatory pedagogy, and reflectivity on the part of all participants involved. Additionally, through acknowledging that studies conducted by these practitioners cannot and should not be considered beyond the context of what it means to identify as an insider in a particular place and time, the critical praxis style of examination embraces the insider positionality of practicing teacher researchers (Kress, 2011). As Freire (1970) might suggest, my co-researchers and I, fundamentally, were curious and wanted to engage in research together. In line with traditions of critically conscious teacher and action research, this form of practitioner research simultaneously rejects the notion of political and personal neutrality within the investigative process (Kincheloe, 2008), asking researchers to examine and deconstruct bias rather than attempting to control it.

As practicing teachers who were also learning to define ourselves as investigators, critical praxis research proved invaluable in allowing my co-researchers and I to both acknowledge and accept our insider positionalities while at the same time breaking down barriers that traditionally exist between the disparate identities of "scholar" and "practitioner" (Kress, 2011). Bridging this gap between researcher and practitioner, on the one hand, allowed my colleagues and I to embrace our insider positionality as a form of expertise while, on the other, yielded us the space to cultivate identities as researchers whose experiences were integral to conducting meaningful research in our own community.

Research Design

As general approaches within which to ground my research design, I utilized both action research and critical theory/critical praxis research. Fundamentally rooted in collaborative and democratic strategies for generating knowledge, triangulated data collection methods (observation, interview, and focus groups) are processes frequently implemented in all genres of action research and therefore made sense within the context of this particular project (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). As essential components of the research process and analysis of findings, the design for this study was also heavily informed by critical approaches to qualitative research which call for data collection methods that privilege reflective collaboration (Grbich, 2013). As approaches that argue for the full involvement of all stakeholders in the process of research, action research and critically conscious research are established traditions of qualitative study that shaped the nature of this participatory action project.

Research Setting

In the emergent stages of my research design, I identified a public high school in the international district of a highly diverse, urban southwestern city as a potential setting for this study. Both due to extrinsic circumstances as well as personal proximity, I chose to conduct this participatory action research project in this highly diverse public high school in the southwest for its positionality in an urban, lower socioeconomic environment. Because I intended my study to be situated within my own textual and pedagogical decisions as well as those of my colleagues, it logically followed that I would set my research within the high school where my co-researchers and I teach. The school—which is one of the oldest standing high schools in the city—sits at an

enrollment of approximately 1,300 students, 100% of whom qualify for free or reduced price meal rates. It is also identified as a community school within its overarching public school district, a designation encompassing a partnership between a school and other community resources. Addressing the lack of access to resource and support for students who are caught in the cycle of poverty, community school partnerships emphasize integrating academics, health and social services, and family and community development and engagement.

Additionally, the school that served as the research setting for this qualitative study is situated in the "International District" of a metropolitan southwestern city and is home to the largest population of refugee students in state, with over 28 different languages spoken by the students who attend the school. One of the most diverse secondary schools in this southwestern state, the research space is home to a student population primarily made up of individuals of color, many of whom are multilingual English Language Learners. The highly varied nature of both the student population and the school itself made my chosen research setting all the more relevant to investigate as a site in which tensions between traditional methods of literature instruction and current critical perspectives on the teaching of students of color play out in the day-to-day decision making of language arts teachers.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Due to the fact that I grounded my study methodologically in collaborative inquiry and participatory action research, it proved necessary to situate my research project in the school at which potential participants were practicing language arts teachers. Because my research questions were rooted in examining why teachers at

urban, high poverty secondary schools select certain texts and whether these texts are being taught from a critical standpoint, I wanted participation in my research study to be available to any language arts teacher who was interested. Although I knew all potential research participants through department meetings, staff meetings, and professional learning communities, after my chair in the department provided me with a list of language arts teachers currently employed at the research site, I began by identifying all potential research participants, classifying teachers within an email list as part-time, full time, regular education, and special education.

Though the teachers in our school's English department represent a diverse population, no specific minority group was targeted by or excluded from this study. Moreover, age, gender, and race were not factors in participant inclusion or exclusion. The maximum number of participants to be enrolled in this study was fifteen individuals, due to the fact that there were currently fifteen language arts teachers (including myself) working at the research site at the time the study was conducted. Because of the qualitative and practitioner nature of the study as it was originally designed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016), I knew that it could rely on a small sample size and felt confident that the study would move forward even if I enrolled only a small number of participants. I targeted 15 (n=15) for my sample size and, from there, decided to create a focus group for the study that would include all who agreed to participate in the research project.

For recruitment purposes, I initially sent out an email to the entire English department that delineated the goals and purposes of my research study. In this email, I alerted all recipients that the study would involve both video and audio recordings of interviews, observations, and focus groups, and made clear that any individuals interested

in being a part of the research study would need to consent to being video and audio recorded prior to the beginning of data collection. I also informed potential participants that I would be digitally scanning related artifacts and documentation (primarily syllabi, unit plans, and lesson plans) from individual teachers who elected to be part of the study. During this recruitment stage, I was also transparent concerning the optional nature of participation within my study. As I was not and am not in a position of leadership at this school, I wanted to assure all potential participants that there were no positive or negative impacts on teacher standing associated with participating in my research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Within this initial email, all potential participants were informed and reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Besides myself, four teachers initially showed interest in the research study. When these potential research participants expressed desire to be involved, I scheduled visits to their classrooms during teacher preparation periods to distribute a hardcopy of the email recruitment script detailing the research study and consent forms. I allowed these teachers 20-30 minutes to read over the consent forms and approach me with additional questions. In order to signal their desire to participate in the study or not, teachers had the option to sign the consent forms and return them or to return them without signing. In this way, teachers were not signaled out for their choice to participate or not. To minimize the possibility of coercion during the recruitment process, I reminded teachers that their choice to participate would in no way impact their classroom practice or evaluations adversely. Teachers were informed that their participation in the study would be voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

Of the four teachers who initially expressed interest in participating in the study,

three returned signed consent forms while one declined to participate due to both time and personal constraints. After engaging in conversation regarding the purpose of my study with these three colleagues, it is my belief that they agreed to enter into this collaborative project with me in large part because we felt that the findings would directly inform and influence our teaching practice, the language arts department at our research site, and the students we desired to help respond critically to the literature we teach in our classrooms. The four of us were and still are teachers who self-identify as committed to social justice, criticality, and constant reflection in our instructional practice. I initially had hopes that the data I would collect through teacher interviews, observations, and focus groups might prove instrumental in illuminating why instructors of literature choose to teach particular works and what their pedagogical choices look like against the backdrop of critical perspectives as well as within our current high-stakes, evaluative educational climate (Anagnostopoulos, 2003).

Participants

In its final form, then, this research study was comprised of four language arts teachers (including myself) who teach a variety of grade levels and have taught at the research site for differing amounts of time. The following is a brief biographical sketch of each of the participants whose identities were protected by self-selected pseudonyms.

Aaron is an AP Literature and 12th grade language arts teacher who has been teaching at the research site for 25 years. He is currently department chair and is endorsed in special education as well as English language arts. Aaron and I work closely together as members in the same Professional Learning Community and have worked together as part of the school's literacy team in the past. We currently co-sponsor the

school's National Honor Society together. Aaron self-identifies as a 53-year-old gay Chicano male with strong ties to his home state and home city, a city where he has taught for the last 25 years. Aaron considers himself to be a traditionalist when it comes text selection and the teaching of reading and writing in his classroom.

Franny has been teaching secondary language arts for the last 15 years and is now in her fourth year of high school English instruction at the research site. She teaches 11th and 12th grade English, as well as African American studies and is the 12th grade class sponsor. She recently completed a master's degree in curriculum and instruction and is highly invested in implementing ethnic studies programs at the high school level. Originally from the southwestern state in which this study is located, Franny self-identifies as a 43-year-old critical feminist who is mother to five bi-racial children. She calls herself an advocate for women and minority rights, and also heads the Women's Student Union at the research site. In terms of text selection and pedagogical methods, Franny considers herself a critical teacher who chooses works of literature that will connect with the backgrounds of her diverse students.

Joaquin has been teaching at the research site for 18 years and identifies himself as 63-year-old Chicano male. He has been involved in grassroots organizations centered on bringing ethnic studies and literature to the classroom for the better part of 20 years. Currently, he teaches two sections of Chicano studies, one section of Chicano Literature, and three sections of psychology. Joaquin is also the school's Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) sponsor and is affiliated with the school's Gay/Straight Alliance club. An active member of the district Federal Teachers' Union, Joaquin is highly invested in teacher and student advocacy and is currently pursuing a PhD in

Chicano/a Studies at our city's local university. As the creator of the research site's Chicano Literature curriculum, Joaquin is passionate about selecting and teaching both well-known and obscure texts beyond the historical English-language canon.

I (Annmarie) am currently a 10th grade Honors and 12th grade language arts teacher at the research site and also instruct methods courses for pre-service English teachers in our local university's College of Education. I also have taught 9th and 11th grade English in the past as well as English as a Second Language and U.S. History. I am a doctoral candidate in my local university's Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies program, with a focus in English education, critical literacy, and young adult literature. The research site is my alma mater, and I have been a teacher at this school for the past nine years with the exception of a year I spent on leave completing doctoral coursework. I currently co-sponsor National Honor Society and 10th grade student union but have been highly involved in the past as a yearbook sponsor, sponsor for the Gay Straight Alliance, and as a varsity cheer and dance coach. A native to the southwestern state in which this study takes place, I self-identify as a 32-year-old Hispanic, Irish, bi-sexual female with deep connections to and love for my research site, my colleagues, and the students I spend my days with. In terms of pedagogical approach to the teaching of reading and writing, I strive to decenter traditionally dominant classroom text through nontraditional voices.

Ethical Considerations

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this particular research study was received from both the university I attend as a doctoral student and the public-school district within which the research site is situated and addressed the following ethical

considerations ranging from risks and benefits to privacy and participant rights. (IRB approval documents are included in the Appendix.)

In terms of overall impact, there were minimum psychological, physical, social, or legal risks associated with this participatory action research study. Other potential risks, however, included discomfort experienced while being audio and video recorded during teaching as well as any discomfort or confusion while engaging in discussions involving text choice and pedagogical decisions in often adverse educational climates. These risks to co-researchers were minimal, for participating in this study was voluntary and I sought to maintain open communication with each co-researcher in order to ensure comfort during semi-structured interviews, observations, and focus groups, minimizing risk to each co-researcher. My colleagues were reminded that they could stop participating as a research participant at any time. If participants chose to withdraw, any material artifacts would be returned to the participant or destroyed. Any participation they had in recorded observations, semi-structured interviews, or focus groups would not be considered as data and would be disregarded and destroyed. I also informed the participants that, if unanticipated problems arose, they were welcome to notify my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) through email and would receive a follow-up call within seven days of notification of the issue.

All participants had access to me by way of phone, email, and open times in my planning periods during school hours. It was my hope that these channels of communication would serve as opportunities for my co-researchers to express concerns or complaints or even to ask questions about the study. Full contact information for both myself and my institution's IRB were provided in consent forms.

Although there were no direct benefits for participants in this study, I believed it offered potential reflective assets, namely to the participants involved and to the field of English education at large. More broadly, it was my belief that the information gained from this study would have potential benefits to research and theory in the teaching of English at the secondary level as well as to teacher preparation programs training pre-service English teachers.

As a matter of course, privacy of participating co-researchers was maintained at all times. Participants names were exchanged for pseudonyms and identifiers that were self-selected and kept secure and separate from the data in an office to which only I had access. Issues related to confidentiality are expanded upon separately in each subsequent data collection.

Ethical considerations of participatory action research. Per Kress (2011), ethical considerations within critical praxis research and participatory action research extend beyond merely following ethical guidelines as set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Because participatory action research occurs within a space the researcher knows intimately, critical praxis researchers must strive to be "wise researchers who use both their minds and their hearts when making research decisions" (McGinn & Bosacki, 2004, p. 24). Therefore, although I received IRB approval for this study, utilizing a critical approach to research, I remained cognizant of the fact that there exists no singular set of ethics, that ethical considerations are always already relative to and intimately dependent upon the specific study. Unlike traditional qualitative research—in which ethical responsibility remains in the hands of the principal investigator—collaborative inquiry and participatory action research necessitate that all stakeholders work to ensure

the undertaking of ethical research (Small, 2001). Only through the upholding of these shared responsibilities can critical praxis research attain its goals of exploration, understanding, and individual and community transformation (Kress, 2011).

Data Collection

This qualitative study addressed the following research questions:

1. Why do practicing language arts teachers in urban, diverse secondary schools teach the texts they do, and what are the pedagogical choices they make regarding these texts?

2. How do the relationships and interactions between historical traditions of literature instruction and critical perspectives impact instruction for these practicing language arts teachers?

3. How does the current evaluative environment for both teachers and students impact text choice and instruction for these practicing language arts teachers?

In order to address and attempt to answer my research questions, my co-researchers and I developed a multi-layered methodology that involved the following procedures: three semi-structured interviews over the duration of the study, three classroom observations of each participant (including artifact collection of syllabi, unit plans, and lesson plans), focus group interviews that occurred three times throughout the study, and a continuous researcher journal.

All data collection components of this multi-layered methodological design were chosen to investigate the pedagogical choices behind the teaching of particular texts that each of the four teachers who were involved in my qualitative study made on a daily basis. As this particular research study was rooted in investigating teacher decisions,

beliefs, and pedagogical choices surrounding the teaching of a variety of literary works in our current educational climate, the project therefore did not focus on analysis of student work as part of the data collection.

Semi-structured interviews. Because my research questions were centered in why and how secondary language arts instructors generate and implement pedagogy in regards to teaching a variety of literary works, semi-structured interview was a form of data collection that made sense within my research study and addressed all three of my research questions. Conducting semi-structured interviews from a critical perspective calls for the decolonization of traditional power dynamics within the interviewer/interviewee process, arguing instead for the generation of a democratic platform for research participants wherein all voices can be heard equitably thus raising consciousness of all stakeholders involved in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Because I approached semi-structured interviews from the framework of a critical participatory action research project, I strove to ensure that the interviews privileged voice as an empowering avenue for community and practitioner growth (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Bearing in mind that my co-researchers and I have been colleagues for several years, there existed a prior level of trust and rapport between us that did not need establishing before conducting semi-structured interviews. Still, I deemed it essential to maintain a high level of cognizance regarding the potential power dynamics at play within the interview process, specifically concerning the relationship inherent between interviewer and interviewee (Seidman, 2012). Most specifically, I sought to avoid the pitfall of asking my co-researchers leading questions without being aware that I was

doing so. Indeed, I knew that proposing leading questions could influence the direction of my co-researchers' response, potentially sending the message in some way that my opinions and beliefs should shape the way that they answer, regardless of whether any of us were aware of this or not. Before the semi-structured interviews, then, I devised a few methods for sidestepping these avenues of examination. For instance, Glesne (2016) provides methods for revising a leading question so that it does not push researcher subjectivities or motives onto research participants or co-researchers. This tactic aligns well with poststructuralist and postcolonial reworking of the interview process, critical modes which stipulate the importance of co-constructed interviews as opposed to interviews in which the researcher is always already in control and in a position of power (Glesne, 2016, p. 128).

I conducted three 60-minute semi-structured interviews in my classroom at the research site with each of my co-researchers while also answering all interview questions myself in my researcher journal. Though I generated the first set of interview questions myself, all co-researchers ultimately arrived at a consensus on the questions to be addressed by the second and third interviews. The initial interview—covering early and formative experiences with books in and out of school, the evolution of personal literary pedagogy, and literacy autobiographies—took place toward the end of the spring 2018 semester prior to the first round of classroom observations. The second interview took place during the summer break of 2018 and covered text selection, place-based pedagogy, as well as the impact of secondary language arts instruction upon policy and canon formation. The final interview occurred in the middle of the fall 2018 semester after the conclusion of all classroom observations and focused on teacher intellectual autonomy

and future changes co-researchers would like to implement regarding literary pedagogy. (Copies of all semi-structured interview questions can be located within the Appendix).

To preserve the existence and integrity of this form of data collection, these semi-structured interviews were audio and video recorded with the consent of each co-researcher. All digital data associated with the audio and video components of these semi-structured interviews were kept in a password-protected computer which was stored in a locked office. For the sake of data documentation, all real names were replaced with self-selected pseudonyms and therefore will not appear in the study's findings.

Classroom observations. To address the study's research questions, my co-researchers and I collected data in the form of classroom observations over the Fall 2018 semester. On a pragmatic level, as a traditionally accepted form of qualitative data collection, observation allows researchers to immerse themselves in the daily workings of a particular communal space (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Indeed, per Marshall and Rossman (2016), observation allows for an observer to hear, see, and experience the means and realities of participants. Observation data allows researchers to take note of patterns, synthesizing and analyzing similarities and differences between instructional practices across multiple investigative settings (Glesne, 2016). For my co-researchers and I, then, observing one another in our own classroom spaces catalyzed the ability to witness in real time whether or not the pedagogical philosophies espoused in our semi-structured interviews and focus groups actually manifested in instructional practices. Observation in the language arts classrooms where our research was situated proved integral in addressing my research questions and gave my co-researchers and I a deeper understanding of how we implement literary curriculum on a daily basis. When

observation data is grounded in participatory action research, it calls for active involvement of all participants in the collection of data. Because this project was ultimately framed within this particular genre of research, rather than merely demanding that a single, primary investigator conduct all observations and subsequent synthesis and analysis in isolation, my co-researchers and I deemed it necessary to each observe one another so that each participant maintained an equitable level of involvement.

Prior to the start of these classroom observations, two semi-structured interviews and one focus group had already taken place. During our first focus group, we collaboratively designed a basic observation form that would accompany organized field notes, both of which we felt addressed the study's research questions. Additionally, within this initial focus group gathering, my co-researchers and I determined that it would be most efficient and productive for further discussions if all observations conducted upon each participant occurred over the course of a single literary unit—i.e., we each observed Aaron while he taught Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (2003); Franny while she taught Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* (2015); Joaquin while he taught Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1995); and myself while I taught Sophocles' *Antigone* (2008).

My co-researchers and I conducted these observations of one another during teacher preparation periods with each session lasting approximately 50 minutes and involving only one observer in the room at any given time. As a matter of course, classroom observations were video recorded so that all researchers could go back and reference objectives, essential questions, and other elements related to pedagogical practice on the board and classroom walls as well as other visual resources that could not

be captured on audio recording alone—i.e, body language, facial expressions, etc. In addition to these more experiential forms of collection, Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggest that researchers should supplement observational data by "gathering and analyzing documents produced in the course of everyday events or constructed specifically for the research at hand" (p. 164). These documents ultimately functioned as artifacts and included anything from syllabi to lesson plans to full unit plans and served as a point of discussion during the second and third rounds of focus groups.

From the standpoint of a critically conscious researcher, there are several elements we strove to consider to better ensure the validity and ethical nature of observation data. In addition to being video recorded, observation data was documented utilizing the research study-specific form we created during the initial focus group. One further form of documentation involved the implementation of organized field notes. Marshall and Rossman (2016) offer an example of "edited and cleaned up" field notes as a way to increase the trustworthiness of observation data (p. 145). This example involves organizing field notes from observations into two columns: one for descriptive notes, and one for researcher comments, analytical insights, and further questions. As the second column provides a space for the researcher to self-critique assumptions and caution herself/himself against overt subjectivity and judgment, reflexivity is inherently built into this format. I suggested using this method of editing and cleaning up observation notes as a way to ensure that all co-researchers respected the individuals we observed, thought deeply about our interpretation of what we observed, and remained hyper-aware of our own subjectivities and positionality as co-researchers.

Similar to the data collected from semi-structured interviews, digital copies of

observation and artifact data were stored on a computer that was password-protected and remained within a locked office. Any speech of or appearances made by non-consenting teachers or students captured by observation video recording was not considered as data and was destroyed/scrubbed. Much like the semi-structured interview data, participant names within these observation documents were replaced with self-chosen pseudonyms and will not be used within this dissertation or any subsequent published reports concerning this study.

      Focus group interviews. Even in my initial design of the study, I knew that the format of focus groups would serve as an integral component of my multi-layered methodology, a component that would, at the very least, explicitly address my second research question. This question—which explores the relationship between traditional means of literature instruction and more current critical perspectives regarding how literature can potentially be taught—originally involved me sharing outside research on both the history of English education and critical pedagogy/literacy with my colleagues. I therefore intended for focus groups to become a place where my co-researchers and I could discuss how both the historical and contemporary pedagogical practices of literature teachers compare with what we found in our own and each other's classrooms.

      Following the research project's evolution into its final form, though focus groups remained a fundamental aspect of data collection, they became less sites of member-checking and spaces for the sharing of literary pedagogical theory and rather more geared toward equitable collaborative inquiry and data analysis amongst all participants. By their very nature, due to their allowance for the sharing of multiple perspectives on similar experiences, focus groups are conducive to generalized action research and, more

specifically, participatory action research (Glesne, 2016). As such, although one member

typically functions as the moderator or discussion facilitator (Morgan, 1997), focus

groups within participatory action projects serve as sites for data synthesis and analysis

with all members contributing equally to the conversation. More historical forms of

focus groups situate themselves as a dichotomy between facilitator and participants, a

structure that reasserts traditional power dynamics between researcher and subjects, thus

allowing the primary researcher to generate a single perspective of knowledge gleaned

from the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). However, because this study grounded itself

in participatory action research, my co-researchers and I sought to generate collective

knowledge together, as a group, that would benefit our school community. My co-

researchers and I entered into focus groups with the mentality that, rather than singularly

defined, knowledge is in fact socially constructed and, as such, focus groups are essential

elements of qualitative data collection insofar as they foster development of social ties

that supersede the research projects themselves (Peek & Fothergill, 2009).

Conveniently, these ties were already in place within the language arts department

at my research site. Because my co-researchers and I met in professional learning

communities which are, in essence, ongoing discussions about classroom practice, the

utilization of facilitating focus groups as a site for the collection of data—and likewise

for the synthesis and analysis of that same material—proved congruent with collaborative

practices already in place amongst our department. After the redesign of the research

study, my colleagues and I established specific goals for each of the three 90-minute

focus groups within which we decided to engage. At this point, we also decided to set

these focus groups in my classroom at the research site following school hours or during

breaks.

The first focus group centered on data analysis following the initial semi-structured interview. At this time, after discussing emergent patterns within the data, we also determined questions that would drive the second semi-structured interview. Finally, we created the aforementioned study-specific form that we intended to use for classroom observation in the Fall 2018 semester. The second focus group followed a similar procedure in that my co-researchers and I analyzed data from the second semi-structured interview and all classroom observations; however, our discussion during this gathering also turned toward similarities and differences between self-proclaimed teaching philosophies in comparison with the reality of implemented pedagogical practices. This second focus group also involved me sharing my own research on historical and traditional perspectives in the teaching of literature. Once again, stemming from these discourses, we set questions for our final semi-structured interview. The third focus group involved a final round of data analysis and a discussion of how we might use findings to inform future pedagogical practices—i.e., asking ourselves and determining what this data could ultimately mean for our school community and, more specifically, the language arts department therein. Focus groups ultimately served as a means for collectively identifying emergent themes in both semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

In terms of data privacy, similar to the semi-structured interviews, focus group sessions were audio and video recorded with the consent of my co-researchers. As with the previous two forms of data collection, digital copies of focus group data were kept in a password-protected computer stored within a locked office. Moreover, participant

names were changed to self-selected pseudonyms and are neither found within this

dissertation study nor will appear in future publications stemming from this research.

Researcher Journal. Due to the fact that I was also an active member within this

participatory action research study, I maintained a researcher journal throughout the

process wherein I answered semi-structured interview questions and reflected on focus

groups and classroom observations. This journal brought an extra level of reflexivity

(Dewey, 1916; Miles & Huberman, 1994) to my analysis and observations within a

research study in which I was an insider and therefore not a neutral researcher.

Data Collection Timeline

This participatory action research study took place over the spring 2018 and fall

2018 semesters, approximately a six-month period (see *Figure 1* below). After receiving

IRB approval from both the university I attend as a doctoral student and the public-school

district within which the research site is situated, data collection began in April of 2018

and was completed in early November of 2018. The first round of semi-structured

interviews took place in late April-early May of 2018, with the second round taking place

right before the beginning of the fall 2018 school year. The final semi-structured

interview was conducted near the end of the study (October 2018). Focus group

meetings were spread out over the duration of the project, with one taking place in July,

one in October, and one at the conclusion of data collection in early November. All co-

researchers conducted observations in one another's classrooms throughout the months of

September and October 2018. After the conclusion of data collection and collaborative

analysis, my synthesis and write-up of the findings took place across November 2018-

February 2019. Defense of the dissertation was scheduled for early April 2019.

Data Collection Graphic Organizer
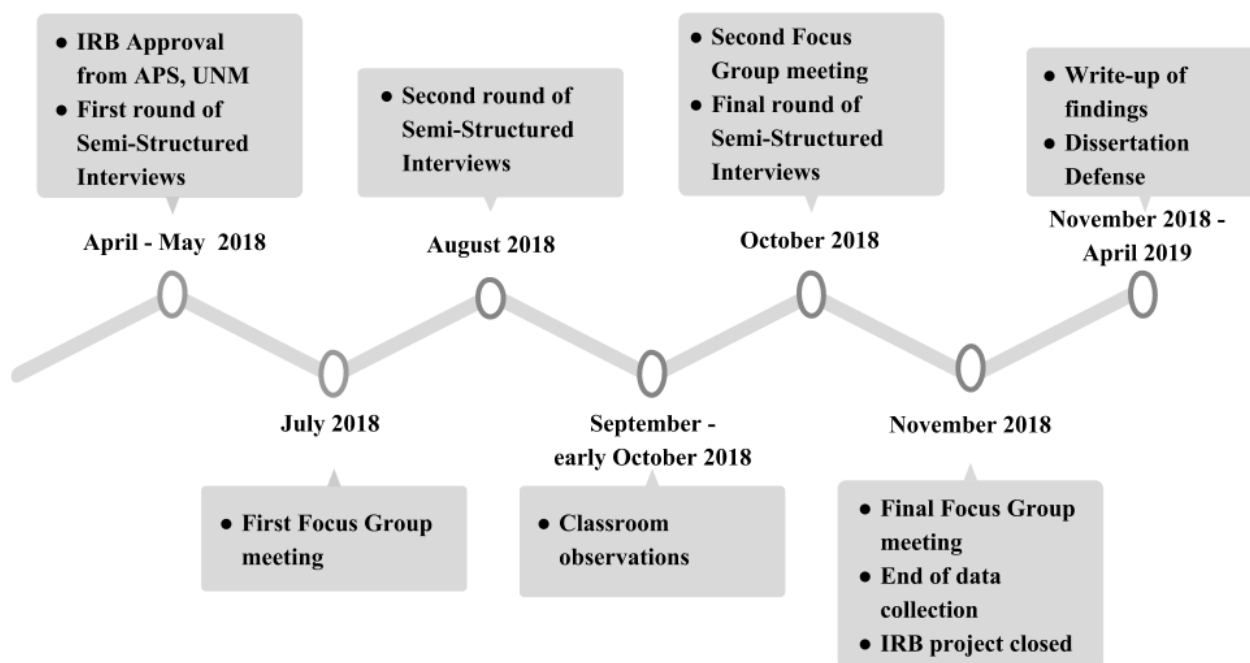
Figure 1. Timeline of research process.

Data Coding, Synthesis, and Analysis

When working within the critical methodologies of participatory action and

critical praxis research, it is essential that all participants be involved in data coding,

synthesis, and analysis to ensure accurate self-representation and self-authorship during

each stage of the research process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Luttrell, 2010). Though

my co-researchers and I developed the above triangulation of data methodology to ensure

the trustworthiness and reliability of this research study, through the full involvement of

all four of us in the various steps of data analysis, we further sought to ensure equitable

voice in our understandings of findings.

During the design and implementation of this research study, because I still

considered myself to be a relatively inexperienced researcher, it proved useful for me to

consider data analysis in accordance with LeCompte's (2000) five steps for engaging in meaningful and valid data interpretation. In addition, Marshall and Rossman (2016) provide reasonable steps for managing, analyzing, and interpreting the wide breadth of one's data in a way that ensures trustworthiness and thorough examination of data. Specifically, the pair's breakdown of analytic procedures—organizing the data, immersion in the data, coding the data, and writing analytic memos—proved invaluable to me in analyzing collected data. My co-researchers and I also considered Bloomberg and Volpe's (2016) systematic procedure for data analysis when considering how we might individualize the process of coding, synthesizing, and analyzing data in a way that would correlate with our own goals for the research project. Alongside their call for reflexive journaling throughout the research process, Bloomberg and Volpe's (2016) suggested linear process of exploring data for key ideas, then coding and categorizing data, and finally reporting and interpreting findings proved particularly useful to our work.

Though we were influenced by the aforementioned qualitative scholars, in our engagement with the study's data, my co-researchers and I were also committed to creating our own procedure for data analysis that coincided with my research questions, the project's critical framework, and the time constraints the four of us faced as full-time language arts teachers with many other personal commitments beyond the classroom. As Kress (2011) points out, even though traditions of established data analysis exist within qualitative studies, all critical researchers reserve the right to take their own approach to analysis, interpretation, and writing contingent upon their research philosophy, questions, and methods. In accordance with Kress (2011), then, my co-researchers and I generated

an analytical procedure that ultimately served our busy schedules and our research site community.

Furthermore, Kress (2011) takes adaptability one step further by advocating for flexibility regarding at what point during a research study data coding, analysis, and interpretation should take place. Unlike other qualitative scholars such as Bogdan and Biklen (2007) who claim that novice researchers should postpone analysis and interpretation until the conclusion of data collection and coding, Kress (2011) views detached analysis as impossible, instead reminding researchers that humans inevitably catalogue, analyze, and interpret what we see in the world around us through our daily lives and interactions. Furthermore, as Kincheloe (2003) asserts, "Even as data are being collected, they are being subject to critical analysis" (p. 157). Proceeding from an avenue of analysis more akin to Kress (2011) and Kincheloe (2003), the data collection my co-researchers and I undertook during this study continuously and fluidly intermingled with coding, analysis, and synthesis—a dynamic process that ultimately led us to a point at which we could no longer readily distinguish these interrelated practices which had been so distinctively enacted over the course of our research project.

In the process of redesigning and casting our research study into its finalized form, I approached my co-researchers with the initial idea of utilizing grounded theory as the methodological approach through which to identify emergent themes from our collected data. According to Kress (2011), the purpose of grounded theory resides within inductively generating conceptualizations that emerge from the data as that data presents itself as opposed to the process of moving from a theoretical hypothesis, to data, and then back to theory as occurs in more traditional qualitative methodological design (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory, however, has been problematized on the basis that it is fully impossible for researchers to set aside or prevent previously held theoretical dispositions toward their own research design (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Therefore, though I initially presented the approach of grounded theory to my co-researchers, we determined that presuppositions regarding not only our own but also each other's pedagogical practice would naturally lead us to formulate predictions about what our collected data would thematically reveal, whether intentionally or otherwise. The prior knowledge of one another we brought to the project as teachers who had known and worked closely alongside one another for an extended period of time inherently prevented us from situating out project within pure grounded theory. We remained, furthermore, transparent in acknowledging these preconceptions about one another's practices, a transparency that required that we anchor our coding, analysis, and exploration of the data in something else solid, namely our research questions, and which allowed the emergence of themes to occur thereafter.

One of the earliest instances of data analysis rooted in our research questions manifested in the form of transcription, arising in June 2018 with the transcription of the first semi-structured interviews. Using my research questions as a reference to index key ideas within interview data, I transcribed all interviews prior to the first focus group meeting. I thereafter repeated this process with all subsequent interview data, always with an eye toward those sections of data that most aptly pertained to the research questions at hand so that my co-researchers and I could capitalize on our 90-minute focus group sessions.

As part of this initial data indexing, I also began the process of data coding that

would continue throughout the remainder of the study. Saldaña (2009) defines data coding as a means of utilizing a word or short phrase that assigns a summative attribute to a portion of language-based or visual data, positing the idea that coding is most grounded in linking thoughts as they span data. Glesne (2016) takes a slightly more purposeful approach, suggesting that researchers code data to uncover themes, patterns, and processes, to make comparisons, and to build theoretical explanations. For the purposes of our project, my co-researchers and I utilized an amalgamation of these definitions, understanding coding, essentially, as a way to categorize data encompassed by each research question.

During the first focus group meeting, my co-researchers and I engaged in an initial round of collective data analysis of the indexed transcriptions of semi-structured interviews. Within my classroom at the research site, before our meeting began, I wrote my three predetermined and agreed-upon research questions on enlarged sticky notes and posted them on the walls. When the meeting started, I gave each of my co-researchers copies of the interview transcripts, scissors, and tape. We spent approximately half of the meeting combing through data and placing relevant transcript quotes on the research question sticky notes with which we felt they correlated most closely. We then dedicated the second half of this initial meeting to both co-creating a classroom observation form we would all use when observing each other as well as determining our second set of semi-structured interview questions. Following this first gathering, I returned to the sticky notes my co-researchers and I had generated and proceeded to code our collective responses by the emerging categories, patterns, and themes that I noticed. I then planned to bring this coded data to subsequent focus groups. I repeated this same process of

coding after the second and third focus groups, as well.

Much like the first, the second focus group similarly became a site for collective data analysis. We once again scoured second semi-structured interview and classroom observation data, placing chunked data onto research question sticky notes. Unlike the first group meeting, however, my co-researchers and I stumbled into an impassioned conversation concerning the disconnect we had each noticed between the teaching philosophies we espoused in our first two semi-structured interviews and the realities of our actual classroom practices regarding the instruction of literature. This conversation both influenced several of the questions we determined for our third and final semi-structured interview and simultaneously caused the second focus group gathering to exceed its 90-minute limit, instead lasting approximately 120 minutes.

The third focus group, like the previous two, involved my co-researchers and I looking at interview data and correlating it to corresponding research questions. Unlike the prior two focus groups, however, this final collaborative data analysis involved us looking at all prior coded data to better identify themes we wanted to include in my final write-up of the findings. At this point in the meeting, we also began to discuss implications of our research for our future teaching practice and expressed our desires to continue working with one another professionally and personally to develop ourselves into more critical teachers of both traditional and nontraditional texts.

Though the majority of data analysis for the current participatory action research project functioned as a collaborative effort between my co-researchers and I, I additionally opted to keep reflective, analytic memos within my researcher journal throughout the duration of the study, specifically making sure that I wrote up in-depth

entries after focus group meetings. Writing analytic memos within my research journal proved to be an integral part of my data analysis, in that I found I learned and discovered best through this form of synthesis writing which assisted me in discovering patterns and themes. These reflective memos drafted after each focus group meeting allowed me to maintain a log of my personal reactions that would later provide useful material for ensuring the validity of data synthesis, analysis, and write-up of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the process of writing and analyzing one's own memos proved quite time-consuming, I believe it was essential in helping me discern findings in my own research. The credibility of any qualitative is rooted in insightful self-reflection (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Reflexivity and Trustworthiness

Glesne (2016) states that researchers, in some sense, always simultaneously conduct two research studies: one into their actual topic and one into themselves, their interactions, and the research process itself (p. 145). Entering this study bearing in mind such a concise explanation of reflexivity allowed me to more accurately comprehend the argument that the trustworthiness of any qualitative study intensely depends on the performance of ongoing critical reflection at every step of the research process' creation and execution (Luttrell, 2010). Indeed, any research project that delves into examining self-practice therefore falls under the umbrella of reflexivity and, further, necessitates that, throughout the duration of the study, all researchers involved ask questions of not only the research process but also of themselves (May & Perry, 2014; Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

For my co-researchers and I, this notion of reflexivity informed the creation of our

research design as well as our process of data collection and analysis and my subsequent writing-up of our research findings. In terms of our own participatory action research study—and with specific regards to my critical framing of it—the concept of reflexivity necessitated that my co-researchers and I constantly consider how our personal histories and passions shaped connections, interpretations, and discoveries formed or otherwise encountered over the course of our research and work together (Kress, 2011). As we engaged with the various aspects of the collaborative inquiry process, it became increasingly essential to critically evaluate the ways in which our lived experiences, socio-cultural positionings, autobiographical connections to our chosen research space, and our individual epistemologies shaped how we interpreted, evaluated, and implemented data.

Throughout the duration of this qualitative study, I remained highly cognizant that placing both my researcher positionality and my personal subjectivities into the open might very well have led me to determine or otherwise create a need for shifts in research questions, chosen methodology, and in the way I related to my co-researchers within our research space. In retrospect, the thorough, reflexive analysis of myself allowed me to better understand precisely why I chose the theoretical frameworks of critical literacy/pedagogy that so informed my study as well as the methodological design of participatory action research. Alongside these discernments, I arrived at a more comprehensive appreciation for exactly how my shifting identity categories and inhabited positions shaped how I interact with the language arts teachers who served as both my colleagues and co-researchers within our chosen research space.

Though often grounded in journaled thoughts and thus largely self-contained,

these processes of reflexive analysis ultimately bore direct impact upon the study, leading to my determination of a need for adjustments to research questions, chosen methodology, and even the manners in which I related to my co-researchers within our research space. Marshall and Rossman (2016) refer to this need for change as flexibility within the research design and claim that although an initial research proposal must be situated in logical methods for a particular research question, the researcher reserves the right to change the implementation plan during data collection (p. 100). Flexibility, then, is highly related to reflexivity in the sense that researchers must constantly inquire into how their own subjectivities and positionalities impact their research and must use these reflections to make necessary changes to their current and future research. Alongside multi-layered data collection and collaborative analysis, I identified this duality of my ongoing reflexivity and my openness to flexibility throughout the duration of this qualitative study as the means in which I ensured the trustworthiness of data collection, analysis, and writing.

Conclusion

It is my belief that all aspects of this collaborative research design—the use of multiple data collection methods; the maximization of time allowed in the field for study; the rich and varied descriptions within gathered data; the synthesis and analysis of data collected by all stakeholders; and the ongoing willingness to reflect upon and contemplate the positionalities my co-researchers and I brought to this project—ensured the inherent trustworthiness of this participatory action study.

Despite these attempts to maintain trustworthiness within my study, participatory action research, by its very nature, privileges utility to the community as parallel with

methodological rigor and, therefore, the study's soundness resides within its potentiality

for transformation (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Because practitioner and action

research at large inherently disregards the necessity of arriving at solidified answers to

questions posed, the process itself of collaborative inquiry and investigation becomes the

singular catalyst of purpose. In other words, intent is the means not the end. The intent

to reflect, the intent to lay bare one's own practice, the intent to be vulnerable amongst

one's colleagues, the intent to further understand one's place within a community, the

intent, finally, to develop within one's localized space—these are the ultimate goals of

participatory action research.

     These goals manifest within the flexible nature of action research design itself, a

design which remains constantly open, constantly reflexive, constantly critical, constantly

cyclical. In light of this cyclicality, no definitive findings are ever truly possible within a

collaborative inquiry project; rather, what findings arise serve merely as dialogue, as

conversations opening into further transformative potentialities for individuals within a

community at large. Moreover, when members within such spaces become active forces

in designing and implementing their own community-based research, there manifests an

organic collective accountability, a sense of native ethicality that surfaces from the lived

interactions of those who both design and benefit directly from such intimate work.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

For my co-researchers and me, research—real research, research that meant something to us—was rooted in passion, inquiry, and growth and stemmed from the reflexivity that our practice as English educators demands. Over the course of this participatory action research project, my colleagues and I sought to explore our textual and pedagogical choices as those choices occur both within the framework of shifting traditions in the teaching of literature as well as within an educational climate that does not always value autonomy and organic intellectualism (Gramsci, 1971; Levins Morales, 2001) of practicing high school teachers. We set as our purpose the creation of a flexible study that would allow us the space and time to explore both questions related to the larger concerns of our discipline and those related to our own teaching practice within a localized community.

The findings presented within this chapter delineate an ongoing dialogue between my co-researchers and I that evolved as we grappled with the research questions posed by this participatory action project. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the data collected as part of critical, community-based research is neither generalizable nor finalized in nature, instead divesting itself of such traditionally requisite outcomes in favor of continued exploration of localized epistemologies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Bearing these characteristics of action research in mind, this chapter lays forth a narrative rooted in the multiple perspectives and varied teaching philosophies of the four teachers who comprised this study as well as our communal research space. Although my co-researchers and I shared equitable responsibility in designing our research study,

choosing data collection methods, and jointly analyzing and discussing data, as this study

provided the basis for my dissertation, I took full accountability for weaving all member-

checked findings together into the account presented below. Therefore, while the themes

that form this narrative were identified by all stakeholders during our final focus group, I

made decisions about how to most effectively present those concepts here and how best

to weave together self-selected sets of data and quotes provided by my co-researchers.

Because my colleagues and I utilized the study's three research questions to code,

organize, and examine data, our findings organically oriented themselves in a similar

manner, each paralleling, to some degree, a specific question. For instance, the first

section covers synthesized data from all co-researchers that directly addresses the

personal and experiential factors that influence the selection of literary texts, responding

to the initial aspect of my first research question. The second thematic section of this

chapter attends to the remainder of the first question. My second research question—

grounded in how shifting traditions impact pedagogical decisions for literature teachers—

is examined by the third thematic section. Finally, the last thematic section speaks to my

third research question, dealing directly with issues related to making textual and

pedagogical decisions in high-stakes teaching environments.

As part of a collaborative inquiry and participatory action project, the following

findings chapter organizes and presents data purposefully selected by my co-researchers

and me in both a critically conscious and organic way that privileges the voice,

experience, and passion for literature and teaching of the four practitioners who shaped

all aspects of this research study.

Personal Interests and Histories with Texts Generate a Tension Between Text

Selection for Self and Text Selection for Students

Parallel Experiences with the Canon Across Decades

As my co-researchers and I sat in my classroom during our first focus group meeting, combing through indexed transcriptions and exploring them through the lens of our research questions, we started noticing particular trends in how our own personal histories with reading and literature shaped our process of text selection. These observations came as no surprise, as much of the literature regarding philosophical and pedagogical approaches to text selection illustrate a pattern in how formative experiences with text shape practicing teachers' choice of text (hooks, 1994; Santoli & Wagner, 2004; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006).

One trend that we did not expect to discover, however, was the overwhelming similarity of experience that the four of us encountered in high school literature curriculum spanning several decades of secondary education in various schools and locales. For instance, as Joaquin read through the first set of semi-structured interview data, he immediately pointed out that although we attended high school separately over the course of nearly four decades, all four of us had nearly identical experiences with literature in terms of the books that we read within our secondary English classes. Joaquin articulated this realization excitedly as he pointed from transcript to transcript, claiming, "We've got me. 70s. Aaron...80s. Franny in the 90s and Annmarie in the early 2000s. All reading pretty much the same books in English classes, verdad [right]? Shakespeare...all the canon. Not much difference for half a century." The four of us left that first focus group meeting wondering if Joaquin had stumbled onto a larger pattern of the canon's ingrained place across both classrooms and time periods.

Joaquin's realization about the similar nature of our experiences with literature curriculum in various high schools was strongly supported by data from the first semi-structured interviews, data which allowed us to begin exploring how we would answer our first research question. Joaquin—who attended a military high school in a southwestern border city in the early 1970s—primarily recalled reading "short stories and poetry in literature books and lots of Shakespeare. *Canterbury Tales* [Chaucer, 2003] and *Scarlet Letter* [Hawthorne, 2009]. Senior year was Bulfinch's *Mythology* [2014]. Can't remember when but we read *The Odyssey* [Homer, 1999] too." Within his first interview, Aaron mentioned similar texts as part of his high school curriculum, despite attending a public high school in both a different state and different decade than Joaquin. When I asked Aaron about the kinds of texts he remembered encountering in language arts, he also listed primarily works of the Western canon as the crux of his required reading, saying, "We read lots of short stories in anthologies. *Romeo and Juliet* [Shakespeare, 2004] was a formulating experience, but I also remember reading *Moby-Dick* [Melville, 1999], *Scarlet Letter* [Hawthorne, 2009], and *The Great Gatsby* [Fitzgerald, 2004]."

With a few exceptions, Franny and I articulated similar experiences regarding the works we were taught in high school, even though she graduated in the early 1990s and I finished in the early 2000s. In her first semi-structured interview, Franny recollected her varying experiences with text in and out of school, mentioning that the only books covered in her high school literature courses were written by "dead white guys. Typical. *The Odyssey* [Homer, 1999]. *Romeo and Juliet* [Shakespeare, 2004]. *Scarlet Letter* [Hawthorne, 2009]. Umm...a few political novels by dead white guys like *1984* [Orwell,

1961], but pretty sure that's still...that would be considered...the canon." I shared my similar high school literature experiences with Franny, mentioning the overemphasis on the canon both during our first semi-structured interview time as well as in my researcher journal as I reflected on Joaquin's realization during our first focus group meeting, writing:

> Now that I think about it, I don't think I ever read a non-canonical book in my high school English classes. Every book my [co-researchers] mentioned being covered in high school literature is either one I read, or one I'm familiar with, and I went to school anywhere from one to three decades after my co-researchers. I know there is something important just in acknowledging this.

After our first focus group meeting, reflecting on Joaquin's realization and all four of our similar encounters with traditional texts allowed me to situate these encounters within a larger trajectory of the canon's power in secondary language arts classrooms. As evidenced by nearly a half-century of almost identical in-school interactions with texts of the Western canon, the data from our first semi-structured interview and our first focus group meeting attested to the resilient nature of dominant narratives within public high schools (Applebee, 1992; Guillory, 2013).

Gaps in Our In-School Literature Curriculum

Also during our first focus group meeting, we discussed our answers to the question from our initial semi-structured interview that I posed regarding which texts we felt were left out of our schooling. Alongside the similarities we noted in the kinds of texts the four of us read in high school, we simultaneously noticed parallels in the kinds

of texts disregarded by our literary curricula. As we reflected back onto our high school

English classrooms, all four of us were able to acknowledge noticeable absences in the

voices privileged by our language arts programs. For example, in his first semi-

structured interview, Aaron addressed the problematic lack of nontraditional texts in his

high school literature curriculum, mentioning Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (2007) as the

"first and only non-white book" he had to read in a secondary language arts class. When

I asked him to follow up on this train of thought and pinpoint what he felt had been left

out, he paused for several moments, finally responding with:

> Everything else. Chicano literature. Black Literature. Asian literature
>
> was not even touched on...Actually, literature by women, but female
>
> authors of color weren't even mentioned. Native American literature. I'm
>
> sure...I don't remember anything taught that was contemporary or young
>
> adult in nature.

Franny identified similar gaps in her classroom encounters with literature,

primarily mentioning the lack of "contemporary books, female authors, authors of

color, and young adult books" in her high school required reading lists.

Likewise, Joaquin and I expressed frustration with the narrow view of literature

offered to us in our schooling experiences, as evidenced by our responses during the

initial semi-structured interview. Literature as such was prescribed for us primarily in

terms of texts traditionally considered valuable, texts that were deemed worthy of

academic study. However, the reflexivity demanded by our collaborative inquiry led us

to understand that literature was not only defined by the texts that were taught but also by

the texts that were ignored in our classroom spaces. In his interview, Joaquin specifically

mentioned several of these increasingly apparent absences, noting the missing elements of "Chicano authors and books. Really anything dealing with sexuality [. . .] Not a lot of female authors." Answering the same question regarding missing texts in my researcher journal, I wrote:

> Even though I was going to school in the early 2000s, I never encountered
> a single young adult book in high school. We read some Hispanic authors,
> but my teacher said it was because we lived in [in the state that we did].
> Where were the rest?

Throughout the first set of semi-structured interviews and initial focus group meeting, as my co-researchers and I reflected upon our high school experiences with texts, we became increasingly cognizant of the fact that, regardless of place, regardless of time, certain bodies of texts just did not appear within the curriculum and were therefore not framed as being worthy of study. The moments of remembrance catalyzed by part of this collaborative study allowed us to recognize this lack of voice in our early teaching experiences. Through both reflection on our early years in teaching as well as through conversation generated through our work together, we were all able to identify the voices absent from our in-school interactions with literature, perhaps attesting to the prolific and privileged nature of traditional texts in educational institutions. It was only in these spaces well removed from our early experiences with text that my co-researchers and I were able to recognize the limited and limiting nature of a literary curriculum fundamentally rooted in dominant narratives of the western canon. Speaking back to our first research question, it became clear that the personal histories and encounters my co-researchers and I experienced with both texts that were included in school as well as texts

that were left out influenced and continue to influence our selection of works for our own high school students.

Influence of Personal Histories with Texts on Text Selection

As evidenced by data embedded within this section from our second semi-structured interviews and second focus group meeting, it became apparent to the four of us that we were continuing to teach many of the texts from the Western canon that we read in high school. Though we did not necessarily approach these texts with our students in the way that they were taught to us, the fact that we consciously continued to choose these works aligned with scholarship problematizing teachers' inability to move away from an overreliance on the canon within their own curriculum (hooks, 1994; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2006).

During our second semi-structured interview, when I asked Aaron how he chose the texts he teaches, he mentioned his love for the canonical works he was first introduced to in high school. Aaron explained that, even twenty-five years into his career, his choice of texts as a language arts teacher remained firmly rooted in the literature he was exposed to in his high school and college English courses. "These books," Aaron claimed. "I loved them. I still love them. Maybe I teach them because of my love for them." Aaron's comments attested to the power of personal history with text, canonical or otherwise, and, even up until the end of this study, he, for the most part, did not teach works located outside of the canon.

Though Joaquin admitted that the canonical works of his high school experience had a clear impact on him as a teacher, he also observed that he has deviated substantially from situating his curriculum in traditional texts. In our conversation during his second

semi-structured interview, Joaquin noted that, "In my early teaching, I taught what I liked from high school. *Macbeth* [Shakespeare, 2003], *To Kill a Mockingbird* [Lee, 2005] ... But later and now, I wanted to do [texts] more accessible to the kids in terms of level, interest, and cultural relevance." Joaquin's shifts over time demonstrated his ability to reflectively problematize the canon's relevancy for his diverse group of students.

Like Joaquin, I spent my early years as a language arts teacher fundamentally teaching the same texts I was taught in high school. In my researcher journal, answering the second set of semi-structured interview questions, I reflected that "I taught only works that I had been taught. I'm talking my first four or five years, pretty much straight canonical texts." I also noted that, paralleling Joaquin, my text choice had grown and expanded over time. I mentioned this shift in my researcher journal, saying that, "Since [my first years], a lot of work that I've done in my doctoral program has helped me decenter the canon and introduce more nontraditional texts into my classroom."

Franny's choice of texts for her students also shifted substantially over the course of her teaching career.

There's definitely stuff that I taught when I was [a] newer [teacher] that I absolutely do not teach anymore. These are mostly canonical works. I try to consider cultural factors in making sure I have a variety [diversity] of...gender and culture represented in the texts I choose. In both characters and authors.

With the exception of Aaron, then, during the second round of semi-structured interviews, Franny, Joaquin, and I all noted shifts away from our early experiences with canonical texts both as high school students and as beginning teachers. Instead of

teaching traditionally taught works, we all discussed a move toward teaching texts influenced by the backgrounds of our diverse students.

Influence of Our Students on Text Selection

For Joaquin, relatability, accessibility, and the needs of his students presented the driving forces behind his choice of texts for his 11th grade Chicano literature class. "Relate-ability...Can the students relate to the story? Access-ability? We have to consider our population and their frame of reference. Our kids relate to different existential considerations because of their backgrounds [. . .]" As he talked about the factors that go into his choice of class texts during our second semi-structured interview, Joaquin critiqued an overemphasis on the canon, particularly within his curriculum, saying, "I don't consider classic canon because of what and who I teach, you know? They need familiarity with the canon on some levels like cultural frame of references, but I think they could make it without it." Subversively speaking back to the prevalence of the canon in classroom spaces, Franny also thought deeply about her own selection of text within the framework of our school and students, observing that, "I choose texts that I hope are culturally relevant to my students. I guess I hope by doing so, we are rethinking the canon as we know it, and letting our kids drive our choices." Both Joaquin and Franny articulated strong commitment to the backgrounds, lived experiences, and needs of their students when considering factors that influence their selection of text.

In addition to considering the needs of students, I noted a desire to appeal to my students' interests as influential in my own choice of classroom texts, writing within my researcher journal, "I definitely try to choose texts that students can see themselves and their experiences in. I mean, I teach some old-school, but I want to choose high interest

books for my students so they will want to read." While I discussed my focus on

selecting texts that mirror the realities of my students, Aaron explained that his factors for

text selection are grounded in the aspects of literature he inherently values as an English

teacher, saying, "I like choosing texts based on their syntax, word choice,

difficulty...things like that. I want [the texts] to feel sophisticated or academic. Not

necessarily something the kids would read on their own." Aaron's stated method of text

selection, then, demonstrated both a consideration of student growth and an equally

important element of exposing students to texts outside of their experience.

Tensions Surrounding Text Selection

Aaron's comment, however, also alluded to one point of contention among my

co-researchers and I that emerged during our second focus group meeting. As we

combed through the data keeping in mind our first research question regarding factors of

text selection, Aaron problematized the responses Joaquin, Franny, and I gave in our

second semi-structured interview concerning how we chose texts. As department chair,

his familiarity with our curricula led to the observation that, in our responses, he felt we

were failing to acknowledge the role our personal interests played in selection of texts.

Unlike Aaron's transparency in choosing texts based on their appeal to his own

assessment of worthiness, the three of us did not admit that our own judgments of texts

impacted how we selected them for our students.

As conversation evolved around Aaron's point, we all agreed that there existed a

tension between selecting works rooted in the needs of our students and selecting works

that reflected the texts we love, are familiar with, and relate to personally. Initially, we

came to the consensus during the first half of second focus group meeting that, at a

school like ours, it proved vital to consider the needs, interests, and lived experiences of our highly diverse, highly varied student population. Therefore, following Aaron's observation, Franny, Joaquin, and I were visibly bothered and almost defensive in our attempt to articulate our belief that we were, indeed, going beyond personal preference in what we taught in the classroom.

Fundamentally, though, we were all forced to admit that we primarily chose and taught texts that we knew, valued, and connected with. For instance, when my co-researchers questioned why I taught *Antigone* (Sophocles, 2008)—the text all three of them observed me teach—I eventually admitted that, though I found it a vital work for my students at the level of feminist analysis, it was my formative experience with the play during my undergraduate degree that had cultivated my passion both for the text and for teaching it.

Evidencing the aforementioned defensiveness, I then asked my colleagues, "Is it wrong to teach a work we're passionate about?" Admitting that there were other determining factors aside from the needs of our students, my co-researchers attested to the equal—and perhaps even primary—importance of passion and personal interest that contributed to text selection. Aaron clearly articulated this belief, saying, "I definitely choose texts based on my personal interests. If I read it, and it really excites me, obviously I want to teach it." Following Aaron's adamant pronouncement, Joaquin seemed a bit more hesitant, eventually recognizing the importance passion played in his own choice of text. "I guess I also choose what I like. I'm more familiar with them. Because I relate to [these texts], I can help the kids relate to them. If I didn't love these texts, the kids would know." Franny, perhaps, shared the simplest response to my

question, saying, "I teach what I like and what I enjoy teaching."

Immediately following this admission, however, Franny attempted to articulate the balance she believed could be found between selecting texts that we valued as both individuals and teachers while also being conscious of how to choose and approach these texts critically, saying, "We can still teach books we like critically, and we can relate them to the experiences of our students." Franny's point created a train of discussion we continued not only in this second focus group meeting but also in our final focus group meeting, as we attempted to wrestle with the tension between self-driven and student-driven selection of text we had identified through the reflexivity demanded by this study.

Though Franny, Joaquin, and I had to come to terms with the connection between personal preference and text selection, our second focus group meeting simultaneously illustrated our willingness as colleagues to not only be vulnerable with each other but also to collectively understand how our students influenced our choice of text. I strove to examine the role of my students through positioning them as active agents in selecting and consuming texts even as I acknowledged the importance of my own love of literature in my pedagogical decisions. "I can't, nor should I have to, hide my passion [for books] in the classroom. But that should not overshadow the agency my kids can bring to the classroom [in the selection of their texts]." In trying to convey the role I wanted my students to play in my selection of text, my response illustrated the struggle of merging my love for particular books with my ongoing attempt to empower my students by giving them a voice in what they read.

Franny likewise expressed the need to find a balance between her own choice of texts and the desire to give her students active involvement in her literature classroom.

> I'm always torn between giving students books they relate to and books
>
> that will be new experiences for them. [. . .] It's all about
>
> perspective...Every teacher brings their own perspective and personal
>
> choices to the classroom...Kids didn't choose the book, but they bring
>
> their perspective, too.

For Franny, then, criticality in text selection did not mean disregarding her personal preferences in text choice but rather additionally involved providing her students an equitable role in uncovering meaning from within her chosen works.

Taking Franny's desire for her students to have a voice in interaction with text even further, Joaquin argued for the integral role our students should play in our selection of text, eventually claiming that our own interests in text selection should not take precedence over an understanding of our students' needs.

> We have a generation of non-readers; they read because we force them
>
> to...Given those limitations, I'd rather give them something they relate
>
> to...that they might actually read...that they might actually establish a
>
> connection to. We should start with books they relate to and go from there.

Fundamentally but respectfully disagreeing with Joaquin, Aaron acknowledged the importance of considering student interests in the selection of text but argued instead that what our students inherently need is exposure to texts outside of their lived worlds rather than texts merely set within them. Aaron strongly defended his belief, claiming, "Kids need to how other people live, in all contexts...religion, locality, cultural beliefs, social position, etc. They have to learn to get beyond reading past themselves." Aaron's assessment of our responsibility as teachers in selecting texts outside of the worlds of our

students illustrated that there was no easy way my co-researchers and I could address the tensions inherent in selecting the literary works that made up our curricula.

As the four of us attempted to agree upon overall themes in answering our research questions during our third and final focus group, these tensions between self- and student-driven text selection manifested yet again. It was at this point that we not only agreed to simply acknowledge these tensions but also to problematize and understand them from the critical perspectives which framed this study.

According to Morrell (2008), an understanding of critical literacy necessitates acknowledging the importance of texts for self-understanding and growth but also recognizing the power texts can hold for social change. During our semi-structured interviews and our second and third focus group meetings, my co-researchers and I attempted to wrestle with this duality of influence on our selection of texts, finally coming to the conclusion that our own histories with literature in our high school curriculum and our own personal experiences with text shaped what we decided to teach in our high school classrooms just as much as the perceived needs of our highly diverse students. However, we also finally admitted that criticality in teaching literature requires an acknowledgment and embracing of our identities as subjective readers and consumers of text and a recognition that these identities affected and will affect what we bring into our classrooms.

Whether committed to rooting text choice in the experiences of our students or in exposing them to lived realities outside of their worlds, my co-researchers and I also expressed strong desires to empower students through our selections. As I wrote in my researcher journal after our final focus group meeting:

Whether we are choosing to teach texts we love or choosing to teach texts we think students will love, I truly believe the four of us are actively committed to selecting books that will change the way [both students and teachers] think...the way we think about who we are, what our place is in this world, and fundamentally, who we can eventually be.

This belief in the transformative power of literature demonstrated our view of both a text and the choice of said text as a catalyst of empowerment. We felt that if a work was approached critically and meaningfully, then the pedagogical choices that surround the teaching of a particular text would prove integral to self- and societal growth.

At the same time, though we viewed meaningful and critical text selection and pedagogy as acts leading to the potential empowerment of our students, the scholarship I had engaged with concerning critical acts of teaching allowed me to realize that act of choosing a text in and of itself was representative of the power already grounded in the hands of teachers and inherently perpetuated a teacher-centered pedagogy of literature. Therefore, rather than the students such a growth-minded selection was intended to benefit, the mere act of choosing texts as part of our literature curriculum retained power within the decisions of us as teachers rather than granting the power of agency to students. Ultimately, though this paradox was true, the four of us also recognized that the choices we made regarding text and pedagogy do have the power to impact our students on a daily basis. Though the above irony was of particular interest to me as a critical scholar, pursuing it in any sort of collaborative, data-driven form was impossible

within the bounds of this study, a study which was fundamentally and collectively rooted in exploring our text choices as teachers.

Pedagogical Choices Illustrate Dissonance within Espoused Teaching Philosophies

As part of this participatory action research study, my co-researchers and I were determined to investigate the influences that impacted our selection of texts for our students but also to closely examine the pedagogical decisions we made in regards to these chosen texts. The four of us were curious as to whether the approaches we each took toward the literary works we privileged in our classrooms were consistent with how we envisioned meaningful teaching of texts within our particular school and with our diverse students. In order to address all aspects of our project's first research question, we knew that observing one another in our own classroom spaces would prove vital for a deeper understanding of our own *praxis*, the ability to meld our literary teaching philosophies with our methods of practice (Freire, 1970; van de Ven & Doecke, 2011).

Familiarity with one another's teaching practices led us to presuppose that, with regard to text, we would practice what we had preached. What we did not expect to find, then, was a dissonance between our espoused philosophies and pedagogical choices driving text selection and the actual decisions we made regarding these texts within our daily teaching. Just as tensions emerged in our collaborative discussions regarding our choice of texts, so, too, did obvious tensions manifest when comparing our semi-structured interview data with what we had observed in each other's classrooms.

Before classroom observations began, my co-researchers and I collaboratively crafted a form for taking observation field notes designed specifically around our research questions, evolving from our desire, in particular, to explore our second research

question which involved relationships between historical and critical approaches to texts. Because this was a participatory action research project, we deemed our growth as practicing teachers essential, giving us the drive to be honest in our constructive and critical assessment of one another's teaching practices (Kress, 2011).

Also, before beginning our observations of one another, in our second semi-structured interviews, I asked each of my co-researchers a set of questions concerning text selection, specifically expanding on their choice for the unit during which we planned to observe. I then asked them to describe what it meant to them to teach a text well—their teaching philosophy both concerning this particular text and teaching literature in general. During the latter part of our second focus group meeting, we compared data from these second semi-structured interviews with observation data on each participant, acknowledging patterns, differences, etc. It was here that we noticed a strong disconnect between what we had expressed during the interviews and what our pedagogical decisions within the classroom illustrated.

Aaron—Self-Proclaimed Traditionalism

Prior to the beginning of the fall semester, I sat down with Aaron during his second semi-structured interview and inquired about what he was planning to teach during the upcoming school year. He replied with: "*Bless Me, Ultima* [Anaya, 1994]. *Medea* [Euripides, 1993]. Definitely *Macbeth* [Shakespeare, 2003]. Probably *Pride and Prejudice* [Austen, 2002]. *Crime and Punishment* [Dostoyevsky, 2003]." Because I knew that his unit on *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 2003) was the central text of the unit during which Franny, Joaquin, and I would observe, I asked him to explain his rationale behind his selection of this work for his seniors. "I always teach a Shakespeare...But, its

messages are universal, it has sophisticated language, its politics connects with current events...Its aesthetic value, reading for an appreciation of beauty, it prepares [students] well, teaches dedication." This response connected with Aaron's articulated desire to provide his students with a skills-based approach to rigorous texts.

> "We need to be more aware of the skill level of our students and how to bring them up to grade level. We need to teach a text so that it allows our students to be on a level playing field. They need to read difficult, high-level texts, and I need to give them the tools to do so. [. . .] They need to understand thematic issues with a text."

In this interview, Aaron conveyed a traditionalist approach to the teaching of a text, privileging what he perceived to be the necessary literacy skills that should derive from the in-school reading of literature. Utilizing the text as a source from which to build reading and writing skills aligned with what I knew of Aaron as a literature teacher over our past decade working together.

Contrary to my expectations of what Aaron's teaching would look like, during our classroom observations of him, Franny, Joaquin, and I noticed a student-centered, nontraditional approach to instruction that the three of us did not anticipate finding. Up until that point, though we all knew Aaron as a self-proclaimed traditionalist, we had never found the space or time to actually observe him interact with both text and students, highlighting one of the problems that drove our very design of this study. For example, during her observation in which Aaron asked his students to perform a scene from *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 2003), Franny noted his nontraditional activities surrounding this canonical text: "His approach is super-kinesthetic. His kids are up and moving, they're

talking to each other, they're combining their own language with Shakespeare's to drive their performances." Likewise, I observed Aaron teach what he called a Disco-Minute, a dialogue-based activity in which students tackle a higher-order question collaboratively. The question during this particular class session was 'Would our society consider Macbeth to be a villain [or a hero]?' In my observation field notes, I delineated this activity as nontraditional, writing: "This is all about students talking to each other and building ideas off one another [. . .] He's placing the world of *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 2003) in direct contact with the worlds of his students." With a traditional approach to a Shakespeare text I assumed I might observe within Aaron's classroom, I expected that students would find meaning within the text itself rather than from within their own lived experiences. Similar to Franny and me, Joaquin also witnessed what he believed to be a nontraditional approach to *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 2003) in Aaron's practice. During his observation of Aaron, he described the activity as akin to a collaborative spoken essay that would eventually be filmed and uploaded to YouTube, noting that, "You would never see this on an AP exam—I love it."

In all three of our observations of Aaron's teaching of *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 2003)*,* Franny, Joaquin, and I discovered a seemingly more critical approach to the teaching of a traditional work than we had expected to find in Aaron's classroom based on his proclaimed philosophy toward approaching texts. Despite what we knew of Aaron as a colleague, and in contrast to what he focused on in his semi-structured interview responses, Aaron's pedagogical decisions, activities, and student-centered instruction reflected far more criticality than his teaching philosophy had articulated.

Annmarie—Multiple Genres, Multiple Voices

As I answered for myself the second semi-structured interview questions within my researcher journal, I acknowledged the influence my own doctoral scholarship in decentering canonical texts had played in my selection of works for my 10th grade students. Looking ahead to the upcoming school year, I wrote, "I want to teach a combination of traditional and nontraditional texts this year. In every unit, I want to make sure I include a nontraditional text, like a YA or graphic novel, a film, and a traditional text." Thinking through what this could look like within any given unit, I explained that, "when I teach *Inferno*, I also want to teach *Lowriders to the Center of the Earth* [Camper & Gonzalez, 2016] and *What Dreams May Come* [Deutsch, Bain, & Ward, 1998] ... *Hamlet* [Shakespeare, 2003], *Yummy* [Neri & Duburke, 2010], and a film. *Night* [Wiesel, 2006], *Book Thief* [Zusak, 2007], and *Hotel Rwanda* [George & Ho, 2004]. Etc." I wanted my co-researchers to observe me during a fall semester unit on gender characterization across multiple texts in which I was planning to teach *Antigone* (Sophocles, 2008), the film *Divergent* (Wick, Fisher, &Burger, 2014), and several graphic novels from *The Olympians* (O'Conner, 2014) series. I taught these texts with the help of one of my doctoral mentors the year prior to the start of my research study, and because students had found the unit meaningful, I wanted to teach it again. Articulating the rationale behind my choice of this text set, I wrote in my researcher journal, "I want students to explore power dynamics related to gender, social status, identity across both ancient and contemporary texts...texts that are in a variety of forms."

As I reflected on what it meant for me to teach texts well, I continued to describe my desire to place texts in dialogue with one another, noting:

Like, I don't want the students to see any work as the 'main' work. I want

[these texts] all in conversation with each other. Maybe if students see

these texts having equitable voice, they will see that their voices are just as

important as anything we read.

Within my answers to the second set of interview questions, I stressed the importance of

a critical, multimodal approach to the teaching of texts of similar contexts (Beach &

O'Brien, 2005), expressing my desire to encourage student voice through allowing them

to experience multiple voices in the texts they interacted with in class. The desire to

draw critically from both traditional and nontraditional texts as a way to empower and

center student voice was a teaching philosophy I had shared many times with my co-

researchers prior to their observations of me, both in department meetings as well as in

our conversations during semi-structured interviews. Because of how adamant I had

been in vocalizing my desire to approach texts in such empowering and nontraditional

ways, I believed my co-researchers would witness this in my teaching.

Aaron, Joaquin, and Franny, however, noted that, although I was using a variety

of voices and nontraditional texts within the unit they observed, the actual activities that I

was asking the students to engage with were in fact highly traditional and text-centered in

nature. For example, Joaquin observed me teach the day students were doing

characterization work comparing Tris, the main character of the film *Divergent* (Wick,

Fisher, & Burger, 2014), with the female protagonist from *Antigone* (Sophocles, 2008).

Though he described the works being utilized as "non-traditional...I like the cool mix of a

modern teenage-film and dead white guy play", he also delineated the characterization

activity as fundamentally traditional. "Comparing and contrasting the characters

definitely helps synthesize ideas between texts, but the students don't have to take the

ideas anywhere else in this activity. So it feels like mostly reading comprehension…"

Like Joaquin, Franny acknowledged my use of both traditional and nontraditional works within this particular unit, noting in her observation, "It's pretty radical [. . .] the movie *Divergent* [Wick, Fisher, & Burger, 2014] and the graphic novels are being used just as much as *Antigone* [Sophocles, 2008] ...nontraditional." Within her observation, however, she also problematized the fact that students were not given the chance to make authentic connections between their worlds and the worlds of the unit texts. Mentioning my use of a graphic organizer in which students analyzed the ways Antigone, Tris, and a character from *The Olympians* (O'Conner, 2014) spoke back to oppressive control, Franny wrote:

I think she's asking the students to compare how the main characters

across three different texts questioned power dynamics, which is critical

[. . .] but I also think there could be a way for them to think about power

dynamics in their own lives...maybe how they could question power or

something.

Though Franny made a note in her observation that class discussion had leaned toward student perception and connection to notions of social power, she suggested that there was not an explicit part of the graphic organizer activity that would have allowed them to explore their thoughts further.

Aaron's observation field notes substantiated the emerging tension between my choice of nontraditional texts and my more traditionally oriented pedagogical activities that Joaquin and Franny's data hinted at. Observing on a day centered in a collaborative review of *Antigone* (2008), *Divergent* (Wick, Fisher, & Burger, 2014), and *The*

Olympians (O'Conner, 2014), Aaron pointed out that although I was utilizing different mediums of text as part of the unit, I was asking my students to complete similar review tasks for the texts, noting, "The activity for all three is the same. So I'm not quite sure what is being done differently with the film or graphic novel than the play." Of the collaborative work I had assigned—in which groups of students chose the text that they most wanted to review in depth— Aaron commented:

> Traditional. I mean, New Critical in the sense that the students are
> looking at summary, key terms, and a quote analysis for their choice of
> one of the three texts. Choice itself, high interest texts,
> collaboration...maybe those are not run of the mill New Criticism, but the
> activity certainly is.

In all of my co-researchers' observations of me teaching characterization across multiple texts*,* though they acknowledged my inclusion of multiple voices within this given unit, they all highlighted the fact that my formative assessments, assignments, and activities seemed to privilege a text-centered understanding of literature. Despite convincing myself that my understanding of teaching literature well revolved around empowering student voice, the notes my colleagues shared all observed that my pedagogical choices instead remained rooted within the texts themselves. This dissonance proved to be the case with Franny and Joaquin's choice of literary activities, as well.

Franny—Grounding Reading Experiences in Reality

"It means they read it." This was Franny's response during our second semi-structured interview when I asked what it meant to her to teach a text well. "A lot of

interaction and discussion about the text," she continued, "It's important for them to understand how they can relate it to their own world...That's why we read." Returning to the question, she said, "I know I've taught it well when *I know* they have connected it to their own lives [emphasis Franny's]." More than Aaron and me, then, Franny's philosophy of teaching texts seemed to be rooted in both the Freirean (1970) notion of understanding the world and the word as well as Rosenblatt's (1982) work on reader response theory.

When I asked Franny about her selected texts for the upcoming school year, *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 2004) was the only canonical work in her 11th grade curriculum. The other texts she listed were works not traditionally taught in high school English classrooms. "James Baldwin's 'A Letter to My Nephew' [1962], Coates' *Between the World and Me* [2015], *Always Running* [Rodriguez, 2005], *Everything I Never Told You* [Ng, 2014], and *The Namesake* [Lahiri, 2004]." She also excitedly shared with me that she does a "movie unit—*Moonlight* [Romanski, Gardner, Kleiner, & Jenkins, 2016], *The Breakfast Club* [Tanen & Hughes, 1985], *Inside Out* [Rivera & Docter, 2015] ...I consider film text." Discussing her unit on *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015), the unit the three of us would be observing her during, she said, "I also want to prioritize nonfiction this year...I want students to ground their reading experience in reality." When I followed-up by asking her why she chose Coates, she declared that "I think this is the most important book that you can teach in high school. As a mother of biracial children, I believe that we have to face racial issues in our society today face-on." I knew Franny as an educator committed to facing issues of race, ethnicity, gender, etc. head-on—she sponsored the Black Student Union at the research site and worked closely

with the Gay Straight Alliance. Therefore, my co-researchers and I were well-aware of her social justice approach to education and fully expected to witness this level of criticality in her teaching.

In his observation of Franny, Joaquin acknowledged the nontraditional nature of her text choice but questioned whether the activity being completed in class that day would also be considered nontraditional. Watching students use Chromebooks to individually research current instances of police brutality, Joaquin noted, "I wouldn't call this nontraditional, per se. The students are researching police brutality. I guess it's a good link to go from the text to what's been going on." He also problematized the assignment itself, however, remarking, "...Feel like the research activity limits discussion on the actual text." Despite detailing the need to relate this text with current events, Joaquin also wondered if the issues within the text that he felt demanded classroom conversations were getting set aside.

Similar to Joaquin, Aaron also described *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015) as a work not typically taught within high school English classes. In his field notes, he wrote, "I would consider this text to be nontraditional. It's current. It's controversial. [. . .] Definitely a text that could teach students about social responsibility." Although Aaron acknowledged the potentiality of this text as socially transformative, he simultaneously found the activity observed—reading comprehension questions over the first third of the text—to be fairly noncritical. "We would use this [activity] for fictional works as well, just checking basic understanding [. . .] Are these questions going to be used for a summative activity?" With this question, Aaron alluded to his hope that the questions were simply scaffolding toward a deeper understanding of

the text's relevance.

Like Joaquin and Aaron, I was equally impressed with Franny's decision to teach *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015). In my observation data on her, I was forthright in admitting that the work was "Definitely nontraditional. This is one of those texts I wish I had the balls to teach [. . .] I feel like this is the kind of text that students would be really invested in." During the timeline activity that I observed Franny teaching, I noted high levels of student engagement with Coates' work. However, like Aaron, I was surprised by the lack of criticality involved in the mode of activity being done, one that seemed helpful for checking comprehension of plot and yet which did not involve the students dialoguing with the text. In my observation field notes, I expressed, "The timeline activity feels very traditional in nature. I think she's trying to check whether her students understand the chronological order of events in the book." Reflecting on this realization, I then wondered "what important conversation is lost in the 45 minutes being spent on this?"

Like me, Franny chose a very nontraditional text but, also similarly to me, she seemed to approach *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015) from a more fact-based angle rooted in basic comprehension. Although Franny's articulated philosophical approach to the teaching of text was one grounded in interaction, discussion, and understanding of the work's social relevance, based on classroom observation data, her social justice approach did not manifest in chosen classroom activities.

Joaquin—Literature as a Social and Individual Act

Heading into Joaquin's second semi-structured interview, I remember being excited to hear him share thoughts on the curriculum he had chosen for his upcoming

Chicano Literature class, particularly because he had spent several years not only

designing a course entirely unique to our research site but also fighting for the class to

count as credit for English 11. Still working through his choice of class texts, Joaquin

said, "I'm thinking *Los De Abajo* [Azuela, 2008] … 'The Underdogs' … This text is part

of the Chicano lit canon. It's humorous. It's like the *Red Badge of Courage* [Crane, 2005]

of the Mexican Revolution. [. . .] *Hearts of Aztlan* [Anaya, 1988] ... Local connection."

Though he hadn't thought through his spring semester texts yet, Joaquin continued to

explore optional works for Chicano Literature, mentioning, "I've also got copies of the

book *The Rain God* [Islas, 1991], and I'll teach *Always Running* [Rodriguez, 2005]. I'll

use *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* [García Márquez, 2003] to talk about community

responsibility." Joaquin and I discussed how unexplored many of these works are in

traditional English classrooms, even in schools such as our research site in which a large

amount of our students identified as Chicana/o.

With our diverse students in mind, the conversation during this interview flowed

naturally into discussing what Joaquin valued in the teaching of texts. When I asked him

what it meant for him to approach a work effectively, he explained:

> I try to jump in and just teach it right. Look at nuance...look at more than
>
> just what is on the page [. . .] I want them to say this is just like my
>
> homeland. You can teach surface-level stuff with any text, but the book
>
> matters if you want them to say 'wow, something in this book relates to
>
> my life.'

As evidenced by Joaquin's expressed desire to go beyond the four corners of a work in

his approach to literature (Gallagher, 2015), his teaching philosophy articulated

commitment to connecting texts with the lived experiences of his students. During our interview, Joaquin also noted that teaching a text well involved interacting with a work beyond the realm of the individual and moving toward necessary social analysis and critique, a key component of teaching critical literacy in urban classrooms (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Joaquin espoused this desire to teach literature as both a social and an individual act, arguing that "...part of a personal connection [to text] relates to understanding the book in terms of race, class, social issues, etc." Having worked with him intimately for the past decade, this mentality aligned with what I knew of Joaquin as both a Chicana/o activist and an interventionist for at-risk students of color at our research site.

Prior to Joaquin's classroom observations, I asked him to expand on his rationale for teaching the novel he had placed as the crux of the unit we would be observing, Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (1995). Pausing to consider his choice, he praised it highly: "I love its layers of culture, like food. I haven't done a novel by a woman, so we need to. I love its revolution, magical realism aspect. You might find this in a Chicano lit class but not in a regular English class." The rationale behind Joaquin's text selection clearly illustrated his willingness to include a novel that resonated with the cultural background of his students and accounted for underrepresented voices in his literary curriculum.

Going into Joaquin's Chicano Literature classroom, my co-researchers and I were eager to see how *Like Water for Chocolate* (Esquivel, 1995) would resound with a diverse group of high school students, many of whom identify as Chicana/o. During his classroom observation, Aaron described the text as nontraditional, remarking, "This is a

novel that I love and wish was taught more, though I have only taught it as an option for independent reading and never [as] a class text." He also noted both the traditional and nontraditional elements of Joaquin's chosen activities surrounding the novel, commenting on their binary nature—the first portion of the period centered in whole-class discussion of a specific chapter with the latter portion of the class moving into individual response to reading questions. Addressing this dichotomy, Aaron wrote,

> I think the teaching approach is both nontraditional and traditional. The
>
> discussion was riveting…so much connection to food, language, culture!
>
> But the reading questions are just that…focused exclusively on the novel.
>
> I want more of the former!

Aaron observed here the potential for critical dialogue and student relatability embedded within the first half of the lesson that he felt did not carry over into the second half, which focused on more traditional, individual engagement with the text.

Like Aaron, I also did not consider *Like Water for Chocolate* (Esquivel, 1995) a text typically taught, commenting, "Though he [Joaquin] said this novel is part of the Chicano Lit canon, I definitely would not consider it a traditional text. I've never read it nor have I ever seen it taught in a classroom." The day that I did see Joaquin teach the work in a class, however, the students were brainstorming and starting rough drafts for an academic paper on magical realism in *Like Water for Chocolate* (Esquivel, 1995). Though Joaquin had mentioned the novel's cultural connection to his students, the activity appeared to be rooted within a distanced, generalized understanding of a piece of literature. During my time in his classroom, I documented in my field notes that "I'm not sure if a traditional, 5-paragraph essay is the best way to check for understanding of and

connection to a novel that the students have primarily used as a way to discuss their personal connection to their own culture." Though critical pedagogy argues for teaching students how to navigate dominant discourses of power (Delpit, 1988; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008), I found myself unsure as to whether this was Joaquin's intent in teaching a traditional essay.

Likewise, Franny visited Joaquin's classroom during the later stages the same essay writing process, and, similar to me, she mentioned both the nontraditionality of the novel choice while also expressing concerns about the lack of cultural relevance of the assignment. "The activity is definitely what I would call traditional. Final drafts for 5-paragraph essays...I don't know. Would have been more culturally connected if the students could have drawn on their own experience in relation to the book for their summative assessment."

Though his class discussions with his students surrounding *Like Water for Chocolate* (Esquivel, 1995) clearly held potential for deep cultural engagement with the text, the data Aaron, Franny, and I collected on the actual in-class activities did not exhibit his desire to connect his chosen novel with the lived experiences of his students.

Summary: Disconnect and Dissonance Between Philosophy and Practice

After all of my co-researchers provided me with their classroom observation data and I began to plan the second focus group meeting, I felt disconcerted looking through our collective field notes and reflecting back upon what we had originally shared concerning our teaching philosophies during our second semi-structured interviews. It very quickly became apparent to me that there existed a disconnect between our view of what teaching a text well looked like as opposed to the chosen activities with which we

approached the work with our students. In light of the fact that we were all very adamant in how we wanted to teach texts, at least within the parameters of these observations, our pedagogical choices did not reflect these desires. As I looked at the observation field notes, though I knew that we were all critical teachers in our own right, I felt in my gut that the data was going to bring up tensions and vulnerabilities, that it would force us to look at aspects of our practice that we often did not acknowledge. However, because we had agreed to be honest with one another in our responses, I hoped that our rapport and respect for another would allow us to discuss within our next focus group the deeper reasons behind these dissonances.

Whether as a Set of Texts or a Set of Practices, the Canon is Still a Presence in

Language Arts Classrooms

After the first half of our second focus group meeting which involved a relatively tense discussion about rationale behind text selection, we moved into discussing classroom observations. At the outset, I reminded my co-researchers that we were looking for data that spoke to our first and second research questions—involving, on the one hand, text selection and pedagogical choices and, on the other, the relationship between educational traditions and critical perspectives. As I handed out copies of the observation data, I felt and looked apprehensive, a bodily reaction I noted later when I returned to video footage from this meeting. I was not entirely certain how the second half of the meeting would progress nor how my co-researchers would react to the information. As each of them began to read through the field notes, they had varying visceral responses, from Aaron's uncomfortable laughter and self-commentary, to Joaquin and Franny's silence that proceeded into defensiveness, to my own frustration

with the data that reflected my practices. Despite noticing everyone's reticence to start a

discussion, I tried to facilitate a conversation rooted in my earlier concerns that our

philosophies articulated within the semi-structured interviews did not seem to manifest

within classroom observation data.

To do this, I began by expressing my own disconcerting realization that, although

I taught several nontraditional texts, my activities were traditional in nature. I reacted

with exasperation, throwing my hands into the air and asking, "So to what extent does it

even matter if I teach a nontraditional text if I teach it the same way I would teach

Antigone [Sophocles, 2008]?" By sharing this frustration with my co-researchers, I

attempted to come to terms with the realization that my choice of critical texts did not

inherently evolve into critical classroom practices and activities. I noticed that this

disconnect directly opposed to Aaron's disconnect—for him, the choice of traditional text

did not necessarily lead to traditional classroom practices, and I immediately voiced this

to the group, referring back to the data. Aaron found Franny, Joaquin, and my

observations of his classroom practices as nontraditional to be surprising, mentioning,

"When I say I'm a traditionalist, maybe what I mean is the books I teach. Traditional

books." He further reflected, "The way I teach is...almost like New Criticism plus?

Traditional books, but letting the students do with them what they need to do. Lots of

choice, I suppose. Making it theirs." Aaron's statement exhibited a growing awareness

that his own pedagogical practice, though not aligned with his espoused teaching

philosophy, was inherently far more student-centered in nature than his self-identification

as a traditionalist had led him to believe.

Though Aaron and I attempted to objectively accept what our classroom

observation data was showing us, Franny and Joaquin were more invested in a conversation surrounding the idea that perhaps more traditional activities of literary analysis were still necessary even when working with nontraditional texts (Delpit, 1988; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). They each discussed their desire to avoid disadvantaging students from diverse backgrounds by not providing those students with the skills necessary to succeed in academic environments. Franny vocalized this, saying, "I guess I feel like there are certain things students have to know about a book, even if it is a daring book or a contemporary book. Like *Between the World and Me* [Coates, 2015]. They still have to comprehend it. The logistics." Based on what I witnessed in my classroom observation of Franny, by 'logistics,' she meant an understanding of a text rooted in oral and written comprehension of narrative elements. Joaquin's classroom practices also demonstrated an attention to traditional skill-based literacy through his choice of essay writing as summative assessment for *Like Water for Chocolate* (Esquivel, 1995), though he seemed more hesitant about their place in a Chicano Literature classroom rooted in nontraditional, culturally authentic texts. "I don't know. I'm choosing a Chicana text that isn't...canon, you know. But they need to write an essay. Essays are important. They have to write essays, canon or not, right?" Franny and Joaquin's statements brought up larger questions concerning the continued—perhaps required—focus on traditional classroom activities with regard to a variety of both traditional and nontraditional texts.

Joaquin's question about the necessity of essays in particular catalyzed a thought that had started forming in my mind as Aaron discussed whether he was a traditionalist in practice as well as in text selection, a thought I articulated to my co-researchers as a

question, asking, "So, if Aaron teaches these canonical texts...in these ways that are nontraditional...noncanonical, what does it mean to teach in canonical ways?" Attempting to process this emergent idea about the canon's manifestation as more than merely a set of texts and perhaps also as a set of ingrained practices, I then asked my co-researchers, "Are the rest of us teaching canonically? What does that even look like?" Later that night, in my researcher journal, I tried to make the connection between this notion of the canon as both text and practice and the apparent dissonance within the four of our teaching philosophies and exhibited classroom practices. Though I had wanted to talk through these realizations during our focus group meeting, and though my co-researchers expressed interest in continuing this line of inquiry, it was clear that, at this point in the meeting, all four of us felt exhausted and frustrated.

Instead, because we had already run over our agreed-upon time, Aaron proposed including a question concerning canon as text and practice in our final semi-structured interviews. Keeping in mind the flexibility inherent in participatory action research, we generated questions for our third semi-structured interview that honored the organic flow of what our data was showing us. Aaron's proposed inquiry was an example of our flexibility even in attempting to answer our predetermined research questions. Though my co-researchers and I knew that this line of inquiry might not explicitly speak to our second research question, we felt we had to address disconnects that spoke to larger collisions between historical traditions and current perspectives on the teaching of literature.

The Canon as Text and Ideological Practice

Aaron's question, which we all agreed upon, turned out to be: 'How does the

canon manifest as both a set of texts and a set of practices in our classrooms?' This

question intrigued me, in part because much of the recent scholarship regarding current

views on canonicity in diverse classrooms focused on a variety of strategies. These

include: pairing canonical and young adult literature (Lycke, 2014; Smith, 2014),

decentering the canon with nontraditional texts (Dallacqua & Sheahan, 2019), and using

critical frameworks such as critical literature pedagogy and critical canon pedagogy to

problematize and re-envision works of the dominant narrative (Borsheim-Black,

Macaluso, & Petrone, 2014; Dyches, 2018; Morrell, 2008).

What my co-researchers and I were interested in investigating, however, was the

idea that the canon could manifest as more than a set of literary texts historically

attributed with certain legitimacy, authority, and truth (Macaluso & Macaluso, 2019).

Indeed, we were not only interested in exploring how the canon manifested within the

local context of our classroom, school, and larger school district; we were also intrigued

by the question of how the canon operated both historically and holistically as well as

how this functionality impacted us. I believed that if the canon operated both locally and

ubiquitously as a set of texts, it naturally followed that it operated as a traditionally

accepted set of practices within language arts classrooms as well, whether contained

under the umbrella of canonicity or not. This was a point I attempted to articulate when

answering our third semi-structured interview questions within my researcher journal.

There are all these ways we teach a text that we don't even think about

that are almost...second nature? Essays, response questions,

characterization...we were taught using these methods, we were told they

were important. Even when everything in our philosophy screams that we

need to find new ways of approaching texts with our students, we remain

rooted in these valued practices. 'Time-tested' texts? 'Time-tested'

practices? They are both canon.

Classroom observation data from my co-researchers allowed me to see that these "time-tested" pedagogies were at work within my own teaching choices, even in relation to texts outside of the traditional body of the canon. Even without acknowledging them until this research project, these ingrained pedagogical approaches were always already there.

Although I chose to focus on the canon as practice within my response to Aaron's posed question, Franny directly addressed both the canon as text and as pedagogy during her third semi-structured interview. Thinking about how the canon manifested as a particular body of works within our classroom spaces, Franny remarked, "I feel like every English teacher knows the canon as specific works that have always been taught and sometimes we are pressured to teach. Basically your typical old-school dead white guy novel. Novels gathering dust in book rooms." Elaborating on this sense of pressure, Franny equated works of the canon with their privileged position in both curricula and assessments, noting, "Sometimes we are required to teach them as part of a curriculum...because of what is valued by testing and standards as a 'classic.'" For Franny, the continued emphasis on a dominant body of traditionally taught texts through top-down policy and curricular requirements also correlated with a compendium of pedagogical practices that she also identified as canonical in nature.

As Franny grappled with understanding how canonical ideology emerged within pedagogical choices, she grew visibly frustrated, eventually explaining, "a

canonical...practice would be...also valued by testing and standards. Like, almost an overdone, traditional assignment like an essay. It's still held as sacred. I'm not sure by who...maybe that's what makes it canon." In addition to describing canon-based practices as those deemed worthy by institutional forces, Franny's comment illustrated her exasperation with the imperceptible advocates of canonicity. When I asked Franny to expand upon this concept of anonymous influence in the continuation of the canon, she implied that secondary teachers should also be held accountable for the instilled nature of canonicity in high school English classrooms and drew attention to both complacency and lack of inquiry. "Maybe no one can point out who considers these texts and practices sacred, but we just accept that they are."

Embracing and acknowledging the continued presence of the canon in both high school English curriculum and in his own classroom, Aaron delineated his belief in the value of 'classic texts' during his third semi-structured interview. "I teach the canon, so they appear in my classroom consistently as works that I agree are valuable in terms of rigor, sustainability, universality, elevated language." Although Franny seemed to criticize the passive acceptance by teachers of a body of canonical works, Aaron articulated very specific reasons for his perpetuation of the canon as a set of texts to which he believed his students needed exposure. When I mentioned the fact that his classroom observation data showed practices not typical in the traditional teaching of the canon, Aaron explicitly differentiated between the canon as text and the canon as practice. Admitting his love of incorporating canonical texts in his 12th grade curriculum, he also seemed to problematize traditional classroom practices that historically accompany an overemphasis on works of the canon. He referenced these

historical practices as an ingrained intellectual approach to the teaching of literature,

saying,

> I guess if you teach with a canon-mindset...which I don't...I'm not sure if
>
> that makes sense? A canonical mindset is New Critical I think. Activities
>
> that focus on the text and not much else. I would say the majority of
>
> English teachers still teach this way.

Again, Aaron spoke to an understanding of the canon as more than just texts, alluding to

it as an influential force that manifested in pedagogical choices, practices that he

described as not in the best interest of his students.

As a Chicana/o Literature teacher, Joaquin was cognizant of considering the lived

experiences of his students when choosing texts. In all aspects of this research project,

Joaquin consistently acknowledged the existence of the canon but rejected its relevance

for his highly diverse students. As both a Chicano activist and a teacher, Joaquin

inherently criticized systems of power that have historically disadvantaged and silenced

students and teachers of color. During his third semi-structured interview, Joaquin

explicitly connected the canon as a broad manifestation of hegemony with the day-to-day

implications this has for teachers and their decisions.

> I see the word canon and I think 'power,' you know? So people in places
>
> of power say something is important or right, and it becomes canon. So,
>
> yeah, this is texts. But it could be how we teach too, now that I'm
>
> thinking about everything we talk about. Uh...kind of like the Common
>
> Core is canon? I think so. And so if we have to teach to meet standards
>
> then we are teaching to power? [. . .] Maybe all of this is canon...the

standards...the books...all these bullshit activities.

Even in light of his classroom observation data—which showed an adherence to these traditional "bullshit" practices—Joaquin's response attempted to acknowledge that the canon appears in a variety of unseen ways in school spaces. Because of the nature of our students and research site, Joaquin's comment demonstrated that the canon as a representation of power continues to hold great weight, even in classrooms meant to be both critical and rooted in intervention and activism.

Indeed, in all four of our classrooms, as a body of texts, as a body of practices, and even as a body of pedagogical mentalities, the canon manifested in some way. Not only in our classroom observation data but also within our conversations during semi-structured interviews and focus group meetings, the canon as a historically inherited set of texts and practices consistently clashed with our more current teaching philosophies rooted in criticality and/or student-centered instruction. Because my co-researchers and I had never once desired to be complacent teachers of literature, the question then was: to what extent can we impact the canon as it endures within and materializes through a variety hegemonic forces?

Secondary Teacher Impact on Canon as Text, as Practice

One of the ways in which practicing language arts teachers can consider our place within a historical and constantly changing discipline is through the ongoing attempt to understand our role in shaping both the perception of limiting, text-oriented traditions and the formation of new avenues. Stemming from the data collected during our focus group meetings, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations, my co-researchers and I discussed that both the text and pedagogical choices we made, whether acknowledged

or not, were influenced by the history of the discipline as much as by personal literary experiences. Knowing what we had accepted about the canon's effect on our text selection and teaching practices, it was necessary to address how we ourselves in turn impacted that same ideological force. Despite what our classroom observation data exhibited about how the four of us as teachers perpetuated different aspects of canonicity, we did not want to simply function as passive conveyors of dominant narratives and pedagogical traditions (Borsheim-Black, Macaluso & Petrone, 2014; Dyches, 2018).

Therefore, in our third round of semi-structured interviews, it was important to my co-researchers and I to discuss the ways in which we understood our role in both canon formation and canonical teaching practices. I framed this discussion through the question of "How much do practicing literature teachers shape canon formation with our choices regarding text and practice?" I left the question open to my co-researchers as to whether they considered this influence more localized in nature or rather impactful on a widespread understanding of canonicity.

When considering his influence on the canon, Aaron remarked, "I think we help students determine what counts as the 'canon.' But I think canon formation is definitely in flux right now...not sure if that is good or bad? Genres are changing quicker than they ever have before." Even while acknowledging that his text choices helped his students understand the potential for what meaningful literature can be, Aaron also expressed uncertainty about his role in the constantly changing literary landscape, saying, "It seems like old canon is increasingly irrelevant. The new canon might be different tomorrow. So I'm not sure where my impact falls within these changes." As we talked this through, I found Aaron's point about the death of the traditional canon interesting in light of his

self-proclaimed tendency to teach primarily canonical works. After Aaron discussed the idea that what counts as worthy of teaching is continuously shifting, he mentioned that he wasn't sure to what extent his selection of texts for his high school students played a role in shaping the future of the canon. However, he then referenced our collected observation data on his classroom choices and attempted to articulate that he felt as though he had a much more day-to-day effect on changing traditional, limiting approaches to the teaching of literature. "I guess I have broken away from the canon as these traditional practices, without even knowing it [. . .] So yes, I do control it." Talking with Aaron, he seemed to view his role in the impact on and formation of the canon less in terms of shaping a relevant body of texts and more in terms of his ability to disrupt traditional practices associated with the canon.

Almost in opposition to Aaron's stance, I viewed my impact on the nature of canon as one rooted more concretely in text selection than in practice. As I reflected on my classroom observation data and answered the third set of semi-structured interview questions in my researcher journal, I noted,

> I think we can change the canon as text easier than the canon as practice.
> This at least rings true for me. I can change a text I teach far easier than I
> can erase years of being taught and teaching in particular ways. It's
> almost ingrained, these canonical teaching practices.

This realization that, as a practicing teacher, at least within my own classroom, I had some impact on the canon as body of texts coincided with my growing awareness that, up until this point, my impact on disrupting traditional, colonizing teaching practices was limited. While journaling, I thought about how I attempted to add to and expand the

canon as a set of texts to make it more equitable and inclusive. Though I believed and still believe this is powerful and necessary, I realized that changing the nature of our pedagogical practices to be more critical and student-centered carried perhaps far greater influence on the future of canonicity. Through writing, I wrestled with the idea that decentering the canon through practices could be just as effective as the disruption of the canon through text choices. Thinking about the impact that I and other English teachers had, I commented, "We change the canon by consistently bringing in new voices to expand it...I feel like my impact at this point lies more in widening what we consider canon in both what we teach and how we teach it." Grounded in what I learned from classroom observation data and conversations with my co-researchers, I framed my influence on canonicity as a practicing teacher as one that must be situated in pedagogical choices as much as in text selection. Though this impact was much easier to acknowledge locally (within my classroom and even my school), I also believed that a larger, established canon existed, a canon with which we were always either complying or resisting.

For Franny, her shaping of the canon primarily manifested through her covert and overt choices as a classroom teacher. During her third semi-structured interview, she adamantly mentioned, "I think pushback to standardization and scripted curriculum is how we shape canon formation. We choose what texts to teach in our classroom. Even if we teach canon, we don't call it that. We teach good books." Franny seemed to believe that removing the label of 'canon' from how she identified texts allowed her to focus on choosing literature beyond any sort of traditional mandates or frameworks. She also alluded to teacher autonomy as an integral part of canon formations and shifts,

mentioning at several points that our choice in classroom texts influenced canonicity even if those changes were not immediately noticeable. When thinking about the canon as ideological pedagogy, Franny paused before suggesting that, "In terms of practices...that's harder. I guess a lot of the times, we don't acknowledge that we teach in traditional ways, we don't acknowledge that we teach in *certain* traditional ways, that this itself is canon. [emphasis Franny's]" Like me, Franny also problematized the lack of critical examination concerning our text-based, traditional ways of approaching literary works. Neither one of us had ever reflected on the idea of canonicity as it manifested within classroom activities and practices.

Whereas Aaron, Franny, and I acknowledged the presence of the canon as something we could or could not influence, Joaquin initially disregarded the relevance of the canon as something he even cared about impacting. Though Joaquin had been surrounded by the canon for longer than the three of us, he questioned its continued viability in twenty-first century classrooms grounded in diverse voices, multimodal approaches to learning, and even the shifting concept of what counted as meaningful literature. During his third semi-structured interview, Joaquin shook his head, vehemently asking, "At this point in this society right now, are there even consequences for not teaching the canon? We should teach great, interesting literature as great, interesting literature, not as the canon." Similar to Franny, he seemed to reject the notion of labeling a text as canonical, expressing a parallel sentiment that good literature supersedes delineation. Though he disliked thinking about texts in terms of 'canon,' Joaquin considered what the term entailed for pedagogical practice, saying, "If we are thinking canon as teaching techniques, obviously we have a lot of control over this once

we acknowledge it. We can say we are going to teach this book and teach it in the ways we want." It was clear here that Joaquin, like Franny, was starting to think about teacher autonomy in relation to the influence on canon in both its present state as well as the formation of future ways to consider the valuation of texts. He equated the notion of a new canon with the notion of doing what we as teachers need to do to give students texts that they need. "I guess we create a new canon. If we don't have the funding, we teach excerpts, we find PDF versions online, we violate copyright laws, whatever. If that's not control of the canon, I don't know what is." Moving away from the desire to set aside the relevance of the traditional canon, Joaquin instead seemed to embrace the power practicing teachers could have over changing the canon's undecided future.

Intellectual Autonomy in Text Selection and Pedagogy as More Imperative Than Top-Down Policy

As we sat in our third and final focus group meeting, considering all of the data that we had collected, identifying emerging themes that we wanted to explore, and talking about our final interview questions, we realized that almost everything we had discussed was rooted in the ability to make our own decisions regarding text selection and practice within our classrooms. My co-researchers and I were all cognizant that the ability to engage freely in pedagogical choice was a kind of privilege unique to our research space. Indeed, one of our third semi-structured interview questions—as part of an attempt to further explore our final research question—focused on this privilege of autonomy as it pertained to working within classrooms often dictated by top-down policy.

For literature teachers in particular, texts and the ways in which we present these

texts to our students are so laden with ideological values (Spring, 2014) that conversations about teacher choice and teacher autonomy are absolutely vital to an understanding of the discipline of English education itself. For my co-researchers and me, third semi-structured interview data illustrated a belief that that top-down policy limited both teacher autonomy and the intellectual ability to make meaningful choices concerning texts (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Lipman, 2009). The four of us also felt that top-down initiatives prevented us from having the space and time to explore and reflect upon our pedagogical choices as teachers of literature. The creation of this participatory action research project attempted to address both the lack of time and space to explore our practice as well as what exactly autonomy looked like in an era of pervasive standardization.

During the third focus group meeting, we shared-out some of our own answers from the final round of semi-structured interviews, particularly those that addressed the question of autonomy. When considering the effect top-down policy has had on her autonomy as a literature teacher, Franny seemed to disregard the influence of increasing standardization, reading out, "I've got to say...I don't teach to the test. I want to produce good, critically thinking people." She connected this notion of critical thinking with autonomy, not only for herself but also for all of us as researchers and teachers. "The four of us are voracious readers and critical thinkers. Autonomy for us is having different ideas but respecting each other. We come to these [conversations] together and value each other as intellectuals even if we disagree." Though Franny seemed to equate top-down initiatives and standardization with complacency and enforced agreement, semi-structured interview data also showed that we emphasized pedagogical autonomy as a

means to respect and trust ourselves, our own decisions, and the decisions of our colleagues, a sense of trust in teacher intellectualism that top-down policy did not appear to value.

In reading his semi-structured interview response to questions of autonomy, Aaron addressed notions of teacher intellectualism, creativity, and trust in regards to text selection and practice. Criticizing the effects of scripted curriculum and policy, Aaron remarked, "I think we should avoid top-down policy that turns us into automatons. What about our own intellectual rigor as teachers? [. . .] This is why I became a teacher: the creativity and autonomy involved." For Aaron, autonomy and creative control in pedagogical choices appeared to reside at the heart of what it meant to be a teacher of literature. Aaron moved from this general assessment of the need for autonomy as a teacher to celebrating the uniqueness of our research site as a place where autonomy had thrived in spite of consistent initiatives and policy aimed at increasing standardization. For Aaron, the ability to choose a text and teach it with a form of subversive feedback seemed to represent a form of tangible autonomy. "At our school, we choose a book we find meaningful and we teach it. We have a lot of intellectual and academic freedom that many teachers don't. We trust one another. We are intellectually rebellious." Here Aaron alluded to a line of thought that I had noticed throughout the third round of semi-structured interview data: the dichotomy of trust and distrust between autonomy and institutional policy.

Likewise, Joaquin spoke to a similar type of nuanced place-based autonomy in text selection and pedagogy, also equating autonomy with a level of trust in both self and colleagues.

We have leeway at a school like ours, and it's by accident rather than by design. I think we trust ourselves. Some of us teach the canon, but we don't force others to teach it. We teach to the kids. We are a little pocket within the midst of standardization. [. . .] Our school is unique. Scripted curriculum and policy create the canon unless you are at a school like ours. We don't care about top-down. We care about academic freedom.

As evidenced by his response, Joaquin seemed to define autonomy in terms of the commitment to intellectual liberty he and the rest of his colleagues at the research site exhibited as it related to pedagogical practice. In our previous focus group meetings, Joaquin had been highly vocal concerning manipulation of teacher time and space by district and statewide initiatives. As he read us thoughts from his final semi-structured interview, however, he stressed his belief that valuing ourselves as practicing teachers who emphasized creative freedom fundamentally allowed us to disregard these policies, preventing them from encroaching on critical decision-making processes in our English classrooms.

Like Joaquin, I attempted to understand my own autonomy as a literature teacher from a position that allowed me to disregard policies which did not advantage my students, my fellow teachers, or my own development as an educator. During our final focus group meeting, I read to Franny, Joaquin, and Aaron from my researcher journal, arguing, "I think we have to ask ourselves who top-down policy is benefitting. It's not us as teachers and it's not our students. I guess once I realized this, I stopped thinking about it. That's how I view autonomy."

As I expanded on this idea, I tried to articulate that for me, disregarding top-down

mandates developed outside the interests of my community was instrumental in my ability to remain true to my own intellectual freedom within the classroom. I also shared with my co-researchers the connection I believed existed between creative autonomy and the ability to reflectively and constantly change and improve upon one's own pedagogical practice. "Intellectual autonomy, for me, goes hand-in-hand with reflection...The ability to take what worked well, what didn't work well, and to make future changes based on this...To trust my own decision-making process...To trust myself." Similar to Aaron and Joaquin, I implicitly and explicitly equated teacher autonomy with a level of trust in my own intellectual, empathetic, and creative abilities as a language arts educator, a trust that seemed to be inherently negated by top-down policy that assumed a blanket understanding of a community's needs.

As my co-researchers and I sat together in the latter half of our final focus group meeting, our conversation shifted naturally from a discussion of teacher autonomy in a climate of standardization to a reflection on the role autonomy played in our own design of this participatory action research project and the impact it could have in our future growth as teachers of literature. Though we framed inquiry in our third semi-structured interviews and final focus group meeting to answer our last research question, we found that working through what our own autonomy as literature teachers meant in an era of standardization and top-down mandates also meant thinking about our research project itself as an act of this autonomy. At one point, Franny alluded to participatory action research as a form of community-driven autonomy, mentioning, "This [project] is part of our autonomy. We created this on our own, outside of policy."

Thinking back to one of the initial problems driving the creation of this study—

the lack of space and time we were afforded to consider larger questions of our discipline—my co-researchers and I realized that Franny's point rang all the more powerfully. Our desire to craft a collaborative space in which we could explore our text and pedagogical choices as language arts teachers was an autonomous decision made in the face of district and state initiatives that often determined how our time as educators was spent. In doing so, my co-researchers and I utilized the unique autonomy offered to teachers at our research site to capitalize on our shared value of intellectual freedom and pedagogical creativity, developing a collaborative inquiry project which existed beyond the bounds of policy.

Through discussion centered in addressing our third research question, my co-researchers and I realized that for teachers of literature, autonomy most clearly manifests through trust in our own intellectual liberty in text selection and practice. Yet we also acknowledged that autonomy exists beyond choices regarding the texts we teach and the ways in which we teach them. For the four of us, autonomy was and is the self-driven desire to be better teachers for ourselves, our students, and our community at large. Fundamentally, the creation of this participatory action research project was rooted in this self-driven desire, demonstrating that the aspiration for ongoing research, reflexivity, growth, and change is inherently an act of autonomy, or even revolution, in and of itself.

Conclusion

Due to the fact that this project was grounded in collaborative inquiry and participatory action research, my co-researchers and I never intended to specifically answer the predetermined research questions that I developed prior to the redesign of this study. Rather, we sought to collectively and organically explore our pedagogical

practices, teaching philosophies, and day-to-day decisions as these aspects pertained to our community-based project. Moreover, as a participatory action research study, my co-researchers and I always already strived to ground any realizations that arose from the data we collected in our own voices instead of solely in the work of scholars who had performed research similar to ours (Kress, 2011). Rooting data primarily in our voices and our relationship to the research site, we attempted to honor our passions for literature, our community, and the development of our own practice.

Fundamentally, in working through these findings, we discovered that it wasn't top-down mandates, policies, or initiatives that determined our text choices and activities. Instead, it was a combination of literary experiences, personal connections to texts, the needs of our highly diverse students, and something larger and imperceptible that we couldn't initially identify. Though we had situated our study within both an understanding of historical trends and critical perspectives on literary pedagogy, it wasn't really until my co-researchers and I worked through the data we collected that we understood how significantly canonical traditions impacted not only our text choices but also the very practice of teaching literature itself. Though the top-down mandates we discussed and rejected clearly assisted in perpetuating canonical practices, our data and discussions illustrated that these mandates colluded with the existence and real power of the dominant historical traditions behind the canon itself. Through a growing awareness of the canon's continuation as a subversive, hegemonic body of influences, we came to understand how our own day-to-day decisions as practicing language arts teachers were passively dictated by ingrained traditional approaches to the teaching of literature. However, through our collective work in this study, we also came to realize that our own

intellectual autonomy meant that we had the ability to disrupt these limiting pedagogies

instead of passively perpetuating them through our practice.

Chapter Five: Implications

Introduction

Because of the nature of this community-based research project, the implications of our study, delineated in the following chapter, are of first and foremost value to the community from which they arose—the four of us as practicing language arts teachers. In participatory action research work, the line between personal and professional is often blurred, producing outcomes that are rooted in both personal reflection and development as professional educators (Kress, 2011; McNiff & Whitehead, 2005; Sagor, 2005). For my co-researchers and me, as critical teachers looking to change, develop, and grow our practice, the methodological design of the project itself was just as integral to the implications that arose over the duration of the study as the data and findings themselves.

As a research project autonomously designed by and for the four of us, this collaborative study was created with the intent of benefiting the community in which we teach. Therefore, any generalizable implications that might be utilized by individuals beyond the scope of our research site are merely by-products of that work. That being said, however, there are certain aspects of our findings that we believe will add meaningfully to larger conversations surrounding the teaching of literature. For instance, I believe our work implies relevance for rethinking professional development in secondary schools; for embracing the cyclical, reflexive nature of teacher-driven inquiry; for linking intellectual autonomy with transformative practice; and, finally, for historical self-situation as teachers of literature. The intimations I have noted as meaningful for groups I feel will benefit most closely from our work are products of my own review of the data and findings rather than the collective work the rest of this study has been

situated within.

The reflexivity that can derive from examining text choice and pedagogical decisions is something that can aid all secondary teachers of literature, particularly those who work at schools similar in diversity to that of our research site. Such reflexivity need not be limited to practicing educators but can also serve as a point of inquiry for pre-service language arts teachers in English education programs, especially when helping these pre-service teachers think about how to align pedagogy with critical teaching philosophy. Just as significantly, the conversations my co-researchers and I had regarding canon as more than a body of texts can contribute to current scholarship in research and theory within the teaching of English, scholarship that focuses on disrupting the literary canon through critical teaching practices. Finally, the work that my co-researchers and I have done within this participatory action research project has deep implications for myself as a scholar, teacher of literature, and as a reflexive, critically minded individual.

Participatory Action Research as Authentic Professional Development

In their work on action research as professional development, Bissonnette and Caprino (2014) argue for investigation of and reflection on one's own practice as a means of speaking back to decontextualized, fragmented professional development rooted in top-down mandates. For my co-researchers and I, designing, implementing, and reflecting on our own participatory research project had and will continue to have deep implications for us as professionals who strive to consistently re-evaluate how we approach literature in our classrooms.

Prior to our collaborative work on this study, professional development for the

four of us had generally been dictated by various interventions and initiatives determined

by research site administration as well as district and state policy. More often than not,

this required, top-down work we were asked to conduct within professional learning

communities, department meetings, or school-wide development days held little

relevance for our own day-to-day practice. Additionally, such work afforded limited

opportunities or time for my co-researchers and me to consider our roles within the larger

discipline of English education or to evaluate our text and pedagogical choices within a

landscape of shifting frameworks for teaching literature. In part, the four of us developed

this research study as a way to create ground-up, genuine, community-driven professional

development that was rooted in *our* identified needs and areas of concern. With little

time and few meaningful opportunities for teacher-driven initiatives, we created a

practitioner-based project that emerged from our desire to catalyze meaningful

conversations geared toward reflexivity and intended growth.

For my co-researchers and I, then, embracing our community-based research

study as successful, authentic professional development had clear implications for the

four of us as practicing teachers. This participatory action research project routinely

required that Aaron, Joaquin, Franny, and I grow comfortable with being vulnerable

around one another, to take a critical and honest look at our pedagogy regarding literary

texts, and finally, to reflectively consider both our students' needs as well as the need to

make purposeful, conscientious decisions within our instructional practice.

When addressing the significance of our collaborative project during our final

focus group meeting, Franny considered how our work might potentially impact

professional development for our colleagues across language arts, those in other

disciplines, our school community at large, and other schools similar to ours. "What if we actually spent our time in PLCs, staff meetings, and in-service days doing this kind of work? Lots more would get done. More that...benefits us as professionals, which of course is going to benefit our students." Reflecting in my researcher journal after the close of our participatory action research study, I thought about Franny's comment and what implications it holds for meaningful professional development at our research site and beyond, noting, "We should always be allowed the professional autonomy to investigate our own practice...to take the responsibility to drive our own development as professionals."

My co-researchers and I directly benefited from the self-efficacy and responsibility for our own pedagogical knowledge and practice developed through this collaborative study (Bissonnette & Caprino, 2014; Short & Rinehart, 1992). For the four of us and for other teachers in our school community, the implications of our design, implementation, and outcome of our participatory action study are clear: When critical, self-created, teacher-driven forms of research are utilized as a means for practitioner reflexivity and growth, the results can be transformative (Kress, 2011). Therefore, it is also clear that, if this kind of teacher-driven research were to be utilized more as authentic professional development, it would seem likely capable of benefiting other educators occupying all stages of their teaching careers (Atay, 2007; Zeichner, 2003). As an individual who works closely with both pre-service and in-service language arts teachers within university-level English education programs, it has become clear to me that this type of research is a means for combating the disillusionment with disingenuous, top-down professional development that I witness in both my work with pre-service

students and as a practicing literature teacher. My participation within this study has consistently reiterated to me the value of teacher-driven research, not only as genuine, professional development but also as a means for continuing to grow as a critical language arts educator.

Participatory action research projects, community-based research, and teacher-driven inquiry hold powerful implications for research and theory in the teaching of English. Any current work conducted within the discipline of English education inherently fails to be meaningful and complete without accounting for the voices of practicing secondary language arts teachers. Indeed, these are the voices whose work and research grounds any and all scholarship that can be done surrounding the discipline itself. Historically, research and theory within the teaching of English has focused on cataloging structural changes within the discipline itself, the shifting approaches to how literature should be taught, the lenses through which students view a body of texts (Applebee, 1974). In opposition to these traditions, teacher-driven participatory action research situates itself within these macro-level concerns but only insofar as those abstractions pertain to the micro, day-to-day choices literature teachers make regarding text and pedagogy.

The Cyclical Nature of Reflexive, Teacher-Driven Inquiry

As mentioned earlier in the methodological and findings chapters of this study, both critical praxis research and participatory action research, by nature, situate themselves beyond the realm of generalizable and conclusive data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For my co-researchers and I, then, a meaningful implication of engaging in this kind of teacher-driven research is learning to come to terms with the fact that there will

never be any definitive end or conclusive findings to a particular study. Instead, inquiry cyclically leads to more inquiry. For instance, as we sat wrapping up our research study within our final focus group meeting, we collectively reflected on Aaron's question regarding secondary teacher impact on canon as text and practice. Thinking about our data, it was clear that the four of us could not definitively answer his question, even though we all attempted to do so in our individual ways.

Rather, Aaron's posed question instead eventually led us to consider our own intellectual autonomy in regards to the ways in which we choose and teach both traditional and nontraditional works of literature within the current educational climate. For my co-researchers and I, being a part of the cyclical nature of this research project—structuring research questions, designing a methodology to answer them, exploring data, and eventually posing new inquiry—mirrored the cyclical and reflexive nature of teaching itself. In a dynamic, ever-changing field such as English education, the four of us realized that perhaps there can be no definitive answers to any of the larger existential, collective, and professional questions that consume the discipline.

For example, at the very end of the third focus group meeting, Aaron reflected upon a moment of inquiry he had had the previous week in which he seemed to feel lost, "I was physically off yesterday, and when I'm physically off, I'm emotionally off. And I just sat there thinking: 'Why do we teach English?' In the back of my mind, I was thinking...what are they [students] getting out of this?' I was having this moment of ethereality." Aaron's conundrum implicitly connected questions regarding the teaching of literature with larger questions of teacher identity that cannot easily be answered. For the four of us, participatory action research gave us a platform to collectively explore

many of these questions while also providing a starting point from which to investigate further lines of inquiry related to our profession, lines whose never-ending nature we almost became comfortable with.

Collective and cyclical teacher inquiry, so integral to shaping of our study, could hold equal relevance for the work of other educators both at our research site and beyond (Freire, 1970; McTaggart, 1994). Through the identification of an area of one's own teaching to deeply explore, teacher inquiry not only builds self-efficacy (Comber & Woods, 2016) but also mirrors the very process of the discipline of teaching itself: a constant, reflexive examination into pedagogy and practice. In this vein, pre-service teachers within English education programs should also be taught how to conduct ongoing inquiry into their own practice and decision-making as a means of reflexivity even before entering the discipline in an official capacity. Conducting research into both one's own practice and the practice of colleagues—as in participatory action research— brings up lifelong questions related to students, communities, and ourselves (Putney & Green, 2010). My co-researchers and I were affected and changed by this kind of inquiry, teacher-driven questioning that has the potential to shape the practice of all educators both present and future.

As with other implications of this study, when thinking about research and theory in the teaching of English, the need for practitioner voice to inform the field is paramount as these voices have the capacity to provide the discipline with more grounded avenues of change going forward. Essential to the field, then, is teacher-driven, teacher-created, teacher-led inquiry that brings up the questions, whether acknowledged or not, consuming English teachers today (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). Personalizing current

research and theory in English education with the voices and concerns of practicing

literature teachers is consistent with both the individualized nature of selecting and

teaching text itself as well as with the lived experiences that shape who we are as

educators. Beneficial to scholarship that examines trends in language arts pedagogy is

teacher-driven inquiry that allows for a cyclical exploration of our identity as teachers, an

identity inextricably entwined with both the books we teach and the choices we make

regarding them. Because we cannot divorce identity from pedagogical decisions (Meyer

et al., 1998), this participatory action research project suggests that future research and

theory in English education should value practitioner inquiry for its capacity to bring up

ongoing existential questions related to both teacher identity and the discipline as a

whole.

Using Intellectual and Reflexive Teacher Autonomy as a Means of Transforming Practice

My co-researchers and I utilized the data we collected as a means of collaborative

analysis that catalyzed a discussion aimed toward the need for a shift in our classroom

practices. During the process of this participatory action research study, we realized that

our own intellectual autonomy was, in fact, the only way we could effectively transform

our own text selection and pedagogical choices as literature teachers. This growing

awareness was itself an implication for my co-researchers and I in that we capitalized and

realized we must continue to capitalize on these forms of self-efficacy to enact change.

My co-researchers and I directly benefited from our desire to transform practice,

illustrating that our collaborative work has clear implications for our future teaching of

language arts. Conversations during focus group meetings allowed us to collectively

explore our often-conflicting reasons for selecting literary texts for our students while also enabling us to note the disconnects in our espoused teaching philosophies and pedagogical choices. Additionally, we were able to critically widen our understanding of the canon's continued presence in our language arts classrooms as it manifested through both selection and our instructional decisions.

Perhaps most significantly, this participatory action research project allowed my co-researchers and I to both reflect on and renew our commitment to our own intellectual freedom as practicing teachers of literature, leading us to realize that we can always utilize this inherent autonomy to constantly transform our pedagogy. Indeed, one powerful implication of our work together was the realization that we had both a personal and professional responsibility to use our collected data in enacting change in our choices and our classrooms. As our third and final focus group came to an end, my co-researchers and I considered what this change might look like in our future pedagogical decisions. Showing his desire to step outside the traditional texts he regularly teaches, Aaron remarked, "I want to start incorporating more art. Something powerful. I want to incorporate all the art."

In a similar vein, Franny, Joaquin, and I also reflected on the different ways we intended to approach texts with our students, with Joaquin jokingly mentioning, "Guess I'm going to stop teaching bullshit essays," before growing serious when he expressed, "I believe that personal connections and social issues are most important. I want to show that in my text choice and in how I teach that text." As Franny and I nodded to what we had gleaned from our classroom observation data, I thought about the next unit I planned to teach after the conclusion of our research study, sharing, "I want the nature of my

classrooms activities to reflect the...diversity of my text choice. Like...not just in my summative assessments but throughout." Likewise, Franny referenced her desire to change her choice of pedagogical strategies in teaching a text, noting, "I feel more hyper-aware of teaching traditional activities...I want to ensure...include more activities rooted in student voice." The very fact that all four of us were sitting together in this final project meeting—reflecting and sharing excitement over the changes we wished to implement in our literary pedagogy—illustrated the power this collaborative work held and will hold for our future practice. Simply and reflectively summarizing the mentality my co-researchers and I shared at the conclusion of our research study, Franny aptly expressed, "I want to teach in critical ways." As a direct result of this participatory action research project, the four of us acknowledged and embraced the potential role of intellectual autonomy in transforming our instructional choices, representing our collective desire to become more purposeful teachers of literature.

In an educational climate of increasing standardization and top-down policy, the collaborative project my co-researchers and I designed eventually led to a reaffirmation of our own intellectual autonomy as language arts teachers. The realization of the need to trust our judgment when making pedagogical choices in the best interest of both our students and our community holds significance not only for other teachers at our research site but for all educators at highly diverse, urban public schools similar to ours that often become the primary target of neoliberal, "reform" based initiatives (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Lipman, 2009, Patterson, 2015). Through our collaborative work, my colleagues and I celebrated our autonomous creativity as teachers of literature but also continuously called into question the choices in text and pedagogy we make on a day-to-day basis. For

us as practicing teachers, for other teachers at our research site, and for secondary educators in general, the conversations this research project catalyzed regarding intellectual freedom are reminders that valuing self-autonomy does not necessitate teaching without examination of one's practice. Instead, autonomy derives from and because of such willingness to be vulnerable in an ongoing investigation of one's pedagogy. This realization shared by my co-researchers and me holds meaning for all practicing educators who question the potential of their own autonomy and influence in an era of increasing standardization and top-down initiatives.

Additionally, pre-service language arts teachers in university-level English education programs can directly benefit from conversations rooted in both the role of teacher autonomy in our current educational climate and the need to utilize autonomous decision-making to enact pedagogical change. As future language arts educators, it is imperative that pre-service teachers be allowed to build trust within their own creative, intellectual liberty, particularly when entering a public education system that is often influenced by for-profit testing, scripted curriculum, and standardization (Patterson, 2015). Based on the experience my co-researchers and I had conducting this collaborative research study, it seems essential to give these pre-service teachers time and space to develop an identity as autonomous educators outside the bounds of top-down mandates. In addition to these more practical implications for pre-service English teachers, there exists a level of more abstract significance that can be drawn from the work of my co-researchers and me. One of the most valuable lessons the four of us learned from our project, therefore, stems from both the willingness to be vulnerable with colleagues as well as the confidence that comes from the knowledge that one's own

practice can always be changed and improved. Though not always directly addressed in English education programs, intellectual autonomy is not only a characteristic of the discipline itself but also integral to making pedagogical decisions in the best interests of self, students, and community.

For research and theory in the teaching of English, the discussions my co-researchers and I had regarding our own creative liberty in our classrooms illustrate the growing tensions between the standardization of literary curriculum and teacher autonomy (Buchanan, 2015; Strong & Yoshida, 2014). Though these conversations already exist within scholarship currently being conducted in the field, I believe this participatory action research project necessarily grounds such scholarship within the voices of practicing teachers who address these concerns daily. For instance, my co-researchers and I disregarded scripted curriculum, standardization, and top-down initiatives, considering instead the value of making pedagogical choices aimed at benefiting ourselves and our students. We also developed the autonomy to reflectively examine and change aspects of our practice that lacked criticality, demonstrating the idea that practicing teachers of English, through enacting these changes, can shape the course of the language arts discipline in their own localized ways. Whether or not research and theory in the teaching of English privileges the voices of practicing teachers, their autonomy, intellectual freedom, and creative choices can, in fact, determine the nature and avenues the discipline takes in both this local community of educators and beyond.

The Necessity of Historical Self-Situating as Teachers of Literature

Just as much as this participatory action research project allowed my co-researchers and I to reaffirm our autonomy as teachers of literature, however, it also

pushed us to explore larger historical forces in the teaching of English that may affect our text selection and pedagogical choices on a daily basis. One undeniable implication of engaging in this collaborative inquiry study is the awareness of the need to situate our practice within the history of the discipline as well as alongside current critical approaches to teaching literature, particularly as it pertains to students of diverse backgrounds. In addition to the realization of the importance of self-situating practice with these larger forces, this collaborative study allowed the four of us to discover the blatant dissonance between our espoused teaching philosophies and the pedagogical choices we made within our classrooms. Participating in collaborative inquiry also gave us the space and time to consider these discordances as unacknowledged byproducts of ingrained, inherited traditions rooted in historically colonizing epistemologies in the teaching of English (Spring, 2014).

Prior to our classroom observations of one another, my co-researchers and I each expressed clearly articulated beliefs in our approach to text selection and pedagogical choices, generally considering these approaches to be critical and student-centered in nature. Though we acknowledged the weight that traditional texts—such as the canon and other "classics"--had held during our own secondary experiences and though we all held very personal and adamant views about the place of canonical works in our own classrooms, we had not yet considered the possibility that the influence of the canon could extend beyond a body of time-tested, "sacred" texts (Guillory, 2013; Scholes, 1998). A highly significant aspect of our participatory action research study, then, is that it encouraged my co-researchers and me to broaden our understanding of the canon as merely a set of traditional works or even as a dominant ideology that was perpetuated

through such works (Spring, 2014). Instead, the four of us grew to realize that the impact

of canon manifests not only within the choices we make regarding the texts we choose to

bring to our students but within the day-to-day classroom decisions we make regarding

literature.

Considering the canon as both a body of texts and as a body of traditional

practices associated with the teaching of literature has implications for all secondary

language arts teachers at our research site and beyond. As ways to teach literature more

authentically and meaningfully, current, critical perspectives regarding English education

have become increasingly more prolific (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Dyches &

Sams, 2018; Macaluso & Macaluso, 2019). Though many practicing teachers embrace

these critical approaches, historical traditions in the teaching of literature remain so

highly ingrained in our daily pedagogy that they often go unnoticed and unexplored. For

Franny, Joaquin, and me, these practices manifested as activities grounded primarily

within the four corners of the text (Gallagher, 2015), activities historically associated

with New Critical, teacher-centered instruction often disconnected from the lived

experiences of diverse students. Though we cannot project this tendency onto other

practicing language arts teachers, as highly-invested, pedagogically conscious English

educators, if the four of us unknowingly participated in this historical trend of dominant

classroom practices and text selection, it is likely that other critically minded teachers do

so as well. Therefore, rooted in what we found during our collaborative investigation,

my co-researchers and I believe our work implies the importance of historically situating

oneself as a critical teacher of literature. Such situating is valuable for *all* language arts

instructors who often perpetuate dominant, historical traditions of literary pedagogy at the

same time as they seek to disrupt them.

Pre-service secondary teachers can also benefit from a historical understanding of the discipline of English education, particularly as it allows them to place themselves within larger conversations relevant to the field. My experience working within university-level English education programs has often demonstrated to me the unfamiliarity many pre-service teachers express toward both the evolution of the secondary subject of English and current perspectives on authentic ways to approach literature in increasingly diverse classrooms. To a certain extent, engaging in this participatory action research project allowed my co-researchers and me to realize that tensions surrounding text selection, pedagogical choices, and even the purpose of English as a secondary subject have clear historical precedence (Applebee, 1974; Donelson, 1982). Our work also gave us the opportunity to acknowledge the role that both dominant traditions in the teaching of literature and current critical perspectives regarding literacy have had on decisions we make regarding text choice and classroom activities. Likewise, understanding the ever-shifting and multi-faceted frameworks that exist in language arts pedagogy may be highly valuable for pre-service English teachers attempting to contextualize their place in the discipline (Aston, 2017; Donelson, 1982). Discussing the history of English as a secondary subject with novice practitioners could encourage deeper reflection both on how this history has influenced their early experiences with text as well as on the ways inherited traditions of the discipline might manifest in their future pedagogical choices.

Within English education programs, these pre-service educators work toward articulating their literary teaching philosophies while also developing skills in more

methods-based areas of the discipline such as unit and lesson creation, planning

formative and summative assessments, and choosing daily classroom activities related to

a variety of texts (Burke, 2012; Gallagher, 2015). Keeping in mind this preparation, the

discoveries my co-researchers and I made regarding our own disharmony between

espoused philosophies and actual classroom practice could hold significance for language

arts teachers in the early stages of their career as they begin to consider how to align

pedagogy with more theoretical and personal philosophy. If my co-researchers and I—

teachers of various and extensive years of experience in the field—were unknowingly

failing to engage our students in classroom activities that correlated with our expressed

philosophies, it seems likely that teachers fresh to the discipline of English education

might also struggle to do so. Because this difficulty in alignment is often due to larger

tensions existing between dominant traditions in the instruction of literature and current

critical perspectives, building historical context for pre-service language arts teachers will

allow them to situate themselves as self-aware, insightful educators who can make

informed pedagogical decisions for themselves, their students, and their communities.

As critical perspectives regarding text selection and literary pedagogy become

increasingly significant within research and theory in the teaching of English, it is also

essential to remember that for many practicing educators, dominant narratives, practices,

and texts are still very much an active presence in classroom instruction. Scholarship in

the field offers varying reasons for this continuation, namely comfort and familiarity with

canonical texts and traditional approaches to teaching them (Sheahan, 2016; Stallworth,

Gibbons, and Fauber, 2006). Also at work is the belief many teachers continue to hold

regarding the inherent value and rigor of such texts and practices, a belief stemming back

to a dominant academic tradition that formed as the subject of secondary English emerged in the late 1800s (Applebee, 1974). Critical scholarship, however, continues to problematize the ideological, colonizing epistemologies at work within these dominant traditions (Spring, 2014), arguing for current educators to adopt a level of historical honesty toward pedagogy which disregards the lived experiences of students of color in particular (Sosa-Provencio, Sheahan, Desai, & Secatero, 2018).

Through a close examination of our text selection and practice, my co-researchers and I discovered that, even though we all in some way self-identified as critical, student-centered, anti-hegemonic educators, our choices involving literary works and classroom activities illustrated that canonical, traditional, text-driven epistemologies were often still inherently at play in our pedagogical decisions. Our collaborative project forced us face these realities and to acknowledge the inherited, historical nature of these dominant practices while also providing us a space within which to be vulnerable enough to admit our own previously unexplored roles in advancing them. Adopting a level of personal and professional honesty in our work together, my co-researchers and I were able to broaden our definition of the traditional canon, coming to understand its continued existence not only as a traditionally taught body of texts but also as an ingrained, often unacknowledged set of classroom practices. I believe that such an examination of canonicity holds great weight for research and theory in the teaching of English, in part because of its honest assessment of the extent to which canonical ideology continues to pervade various aspects of literary pedagogy.

Even more significantly, this participatory action research project called for the four of us as researchers and teachers of literature to honestly, critically, and, most

importantly, historically ground both our text selection and pedagogical choices. Doing so allowed us both to recognize our implicit roles in maintaining dominant literary traditions through our classroom activities and to eventually realize that we could utilize critical reflexivity and inherent autonomy to change our pedagogical practice. That these conversations stemmed from and aimed to benefit us as practicing language arts teachers is vital, for they demonstrate the potential of including critical teacher voice in larger conversations within the field of English education. Fundamentally, this study serves as a reminder to all individuals engaging in scholarship around literary pedagogy of the need to recognize the influence of historical forces on their own epistemologies even as they seek to dismantle the dominant traditions we inherit as researchers and teachers of English.

Conclusion

My co-researchers and I walked away from this participatory action research study with not only a better understanding of the various historical and personal influences on our pedagogical practices but also with new questions pertaining to the nature of the canon and our impact on it as current teachers of English. Through conversations we had regarding policy and autonomy, we also came to recognize and value the importance of our intellectual creativity while also acknowledging larger forces that always already affect that same classroom autonomy. Essentially, my co-researchers and I came to view our text selection and pedagogical choices as a struggle among historical traditions in the teaching of English, current critical perspectives within that field, and our own early experiences with literature.

Even though this project was a collaborative inquiry study driven by equitable

participation of all four researchers involved, ultimately, our work also served as the basis of my dissertation and therefore has personal and professional implications for me as a current and future researcher and teacher within English education. Going forward, I am passionate about continuing my work with practicing literature teachers in an examination of their text choices and pedagogical decisions regarding those works. My newly formed understanding of the canon—as not only a body of literature but also as an inherited set of ingrained practices—will continue to inform future scholarship that I conduct. I hope such work will encompass my deep interest in the interplay between historical traditions in the teaching of English and the current critical perspectives within which I frame my research and pedagogy.

As I leave behind a decade of secondary language arts instruction to move into a position within an English department at a regional university, I find myself constantly thinking about what I will take from my own experience as a high school literature educator into the future work I will be doing with pre-service teachers. Primarily, I will take with me the value of reflexivity and the constant examination of one's own practice, despite the discomfort and disillusionment that often came from such investigation. Because this project forced me to face the dissonance between my critical philosophy and my actual classroom practices, I desire to transparently address these disconnections with novice teachers whom I will be mentoring. In my future work within English education programs, I also want to emphasize teacher-driven and/or participatory action research as meaningful avenues toward attaining reflexivity and authentic growth. Additionally, I want teachers to be able to view this self-motivated and self-designed research conducted within their community as a genuine form of empowering professional development

(Bissonnette & Caprino, 2014; Stacy, 2013).

Though this project left me with many professional implications, it also reflected and impacted me on a personal level. Fundamentally, this study had its roots in my love for stories, books, reading, and the power literature can have both within and beyond classroom spaces. Because so much of my identity has been formed and informed by my various experiences with texts, I cannot divorce myself from the larger questions that emerged from this project, questions driven by the need to understand why readers and teachers choose the books that we read and teach.

As this study came to an end, I accepted the reality that these inquiries are forever unanswerable even as I acknowledge that I will spend the rest of my life, personally and professionally, seeking to answer them. I am reminded of lingering questions Joaquin voiced during our final focus group meeting as co-researchers in this study. Speaking to the abstract nature of text selection, Joaquin suggested that approaching a text does and should always force examination into who we are as lovers of literature, education, and self-exploration. "Teaching a book should bring up existentialist questions. Before we teach any text, we should ask ourselves: 'Why are we teachers? Why are we teachers of English?'"
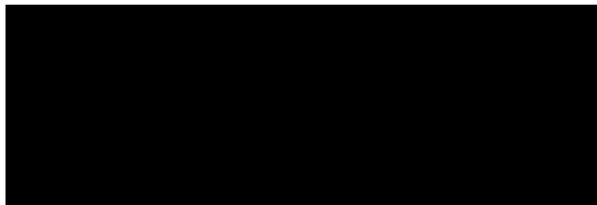
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL DISTRICT RESEARCH PROPOSAL APPROVAL

███████████████████

SUPERINTENDENT

*CHIEF OF STAFF*

RESEARCH REVIEW BOARD CHAIR

April 10, 2018

Dear Ms. █████

Your research proposal titled *Historic Traditions and Critical Perspectives: An Exploration of the Pedagogical Choices of Language Arts Teachers in an Urban, Diverse Secondary School* has been reviewed and given **final approval** by the ████████████████ Research Review Board. Please obtain the consent of principal(s) or department director(s) *before* approaching potential participants under their supervision, and provide them with a copy of this letter (pointing out the information on page 2) for their records.

We respectfully ask that you take care to honor your participants' right to refuse and/or withdraw consent without undue pressure. We would also like to gently remind you of the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of your ███ participants, as well as our expectation that you will maintain the anonymity of specific ███ locations and refer to the district only as a "large metropolitan district in the southwest" in all written products and presentations that include the data you collect for this study.

Finally, when your research is complete, send a copy of your findings to this office for interested district personnel to review. We wish you well in your investigation.

Sincerely,
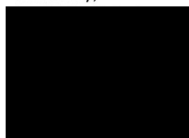
Research Review Board

███████████████████

Attention Principals and Department Directors:
This letter allows the above named researcher(s) to recruit participants for their study in ██ however, it does <u>not</u> guarantee that anyone will agree to be a part of their study. Participation by any ██ employee, student, or parent is strictly voluntary and up to each individual.

The researchers conducting this study have been approved to collect the following data:

- Observations of classrooms, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, artifact collections such as unit plans, lesson plans, and handouts.

Researchers should conclude their data collection at ██ sites by: **Fall, 2018.**

███████████████████

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY IRB PROJECT APPROVAL

**OFFICE OF
THE INSTITUTIONAL
REVIEW BOARD**

DATE: March 7, 2018

IRB #:   01318
IRBNet ID & TITLE: [1174402-1] Historical Traditions and Critical Perspectives: An Exploration of the Pedagogical Choices of Language Arts Teachers in an Urban, Diverse Secondary School
PI OF RECORD: PhD
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

BOARD DECISION: APPROVED
EFFECTIVE DATE: March 6, 2018
RISK LEVEL: Minimal Risk
PROJECT STATUS: Active

DOCUMENTS:
- Advertisement - Video Recruitment Script (UPDATED: 01/15/2018)
- Advertisement - Interview Recruitment Script (UPDATED: 01/15/2018)
- Application Form - Project Information (UPDATED: 02/1/2018)
- Consent Form - Consent Form (UPDATED: 02/22/2018)
- CV/Resume - CV_____ (UPDATED: 02/1/2018)
- CV/Resume - CV_____ PDATED: 01/15/2018)
- Data Collection - Interview Questions (UPDATED: 01/15/2018)
- Data Collection - Focus Group Interview Questions (UPDATED: 01/15/2018)
- Letter - Letter to OIRB Staff 2/22/18 (UPDATED: 02/22/2018)
- Letter - Letter to OIRB Staff 2/19/18 (UPDATED: 02/19/2018)
- Other - Scientific Review (UPDATED: 02/1/2018)
- Other - Project Team (UPDATED: 01/15/2018)
- Protocol - Protocol (UPDATED: 02/19/2018)
- Training/Certification - CIT_____ (UPDATED: 02/19/2018)
- Training/Certification - CIT_____ PDATED: 02/19/2018)

Thank you for your New Project submission. The____IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an acceptable risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks to participants have been minimized. **This project is not covered by____ Federalwide Assurance (FWA) and will not receive federal funding.**

The IRB has determined the following:

- Informed consent must be obtained and documentation is required for this project. To obtain and document consent, <u>use only approved consent document(s).</u>
- Project activities cannot commence at____HS until final approval has been obtained from____

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission and does not apply should any changes be made to this research. If changes are being considered, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to submit an amendment to this project and receive IRB approval prior to implementing the changes. A change in the research may disqualify this research from the current review category. **If federal funding will be sought for this project, an amendment must be submitted so that the project can be reviewed under relevant federal regulations.**

All reportable events must be promptly reported to the ███████RB, including: UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to participants or others, SERIOUS or UNEXPECTED adverse events, NONCOMPLIANCE issues, and participant COMPLAINTS.

If an expiration date is noted above, a continuing review or closure submission is due no later than 30 days before the expiration date. **It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to apply for continuing review or closure and receive approval for the duration of this project.** If the IRB approval for this project expires, all research related activities must stop and further action will be required by the IRB.

Please use the appropriate reporting forms and procedures to request amendments, continuing review, closure, and reporting of events for this project. Refer to the OIRB website for forms and guidance on submissions.

Please note that all IRB records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the closure of this project.

The Office of the IRB can be contacted through: mail ███████████████████████

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello colleagues,

As many of you know, I am currently a doctoral candidate at the [redacted] and I will be conducting my qualitative research study for my dissertation here at [redacted] within the Language Arts Department. My research study will be overseen by my committee chair, Professor Emeritus Dr. [redacted].

The purpose of my dissertation research study is to examine the pedagogical choices of secondary Language Arts teachers within the framework of critical perspectives on the teaching of literature and within the current realities of a high-stakes, evaluative teaching environment. I am interested in how we make decisions regarding what texts to teach in our classrooms, and how we choose to teach those texts to our diverse body of students and within our current educational system. I will also be researching my own practice as part of this research study. As you all know, the realities and daily decisions of practicing secondary teachers are of the utmost importance to me, and this study will place high value in the pedagogical choices we make involving literature and teaching said literature to our students.

By consenting to be part of this research you are agreeing to be interviewed by me both one-on-one and in a focus group with other volunteer participants in this research study. These interviews will last about 60 minutes and will include questions about your experiences selecting literary texts and the pedagogical choices you make in teaching these texts. These interviews will be audio and video recorded.

These interviews will be private conversations. If published, results will be

presented in summary form only and your name will be replaced with a pseudonym.

Participation in this study is voluntary. There is no direct benefit or compensation for participating in this research, though the study has potential implications to add to research and theory in the teaching of English at the secondary level, as well as to teacher preparation programs for potential English teachers.

If you do not agree to participate as a research participant or choose to withdraw from this study at a later date, any one-on-one or focus group interviews captured by video or audio recordings will not be considered as data and will be scrubbed through video editing or destroyed. Therefore, if you change your mind about participating in this study or choose not to participate at all, [redacted] and I will not use anything you have shared as data for this research study.

There are no psychological, physical, social, or legal risks associated with this study. Other potential risks include discomfort or confusion that may stem from one-on-one interview or focus group interview discussion. These risks are minimal. Once again, a reminder that participating in this study is completely voluntary.

Please read the consent form carefully I have attached and let me know if you have any questions. Any additional questions can be posed to me via email [redacted] or [redacted] or by phone [redacted]. I am excited about working with as many of you who would like to volunteer on this research study!

Sincerely,

Annmarie

APPENDIX D

VIDEO / AUDIO RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Hello colleagues,

As many of you know, I am currently a doctoral candidate at the [redacted], and I will be conducting my qualitative research study for my dissertation here at [redacted] within the Language Arts Department. My research study will be overseen by my committee chair, Professor Emeritus Dr .[redacted].

The purpose of my dissertation research study is to examine the pedagogical choices of secondary Language Arts teachers within the framework of critical perspectives on the teaching of literature and within the current realities of a high-stakes, evaluative teaching environment. I am interested in how we make decisions regarding what texts to teach in our classrooms, and how we choose to teach those texts to our diverse body of students and within our current educational system. I will also be researching my own practice as part of this research study. As you all know, the realities and daily decisions of practicing secondary teachers are of the utmost importance to me, and this study will place high value in the pedagogical choices we make involving literature and teaching said literature to our students.

If you agree to participate, this study will involve being video and audio recorded teaching in your classrooms, as the study seeks to closely examine daily pedagogical choices related to the teaching of literature. Selected classes will be audio and video recorded. By signing this consent, you agree to be video and audio recorded for the purpose of data collection and research. Your participation in this research study may be used for future research publications and presentations, however, your name will be

replaced by a pseudonym.

Participation in this study is voluntary. There is no direct benefit or compensation for participating in this research, though the study has potential implications to add to research and theory in the teaching of English at the secondary level, as well as to teacher preparation programs for potential English teachers.

If you do not agree to participate as a research participant or choose to withdraw from this study at a later date, you are not required to appear on video or speak around the recorder. Further, any speaking or appearances of a nonconsenting teacher or student that are captured by video or audio recordings will not be considered as data and will be scrubbed through video editing or destroyed. Therefore, if you change your mind about participating in this study or choose not to participate at all, [redacted] and I will not use anything you have shared as data for this research study.

There are no psychological, physical, social, or legal risks associated with this study. Other potential risks include discomfort or confusion that may stem from being video and audio recorded while teaching in a classroom environment. Once again, a reminder that participating in this study is completely voluntary.

Please read the consent form carefully I have attached and let me know if you have any questions.

Any additional questions can be posed to me via email [redacted] or [redacted] or by phone [redacted]. I am excited about working with as many of you who would like to volunteer on this research study!

Sincerely,

Annmarie

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Historical Traditions and Critical Perspectives: An Exploration of the Pedagogical Choices of Language Arts Teachers in an Urban, Diverse Secondary School

Informed Consent for Video/Audio Recording, One-On-One Interviews, Focus Group Interviews, and Artifact Collection

2/15/18

I (Annmarie [redacted] from the Language Arts Department at [redacted] am conducting a research study as the core of my dissertation under the direction of [redacted] Professor Emeritus [redacted] . The purpose of the research is to examine the pedagogical choices of secondary Language Arts teachers within the framework of critical perspectives on the teaching of literature and within the current realities of a high-stakes, evaluative teaching environment. You are being asked to take part in this study because you a Language Arts teacher at [redacted]. Participating in this study is voluntary and will in no way affect participating teachers adversely.

This form will explain what to expect when joining the research, as well as the possible risks and benefits of participation. If you have any questions, please ask myself or [redacted] (contact information included later in document).

What you will do in the study:
If you agree to participate, this study will involve:
-being video and audio recorded teaching in class
-being audio recorded as part of a one-on-one interview
-being video and audio recorded as part of focus group interviews
-granting permission for me as researcher to make digital copies of your unit and lesson plans, as well as handouts or classroom assignments related to a particular unit

Selected classes will be audio and video recorded. By signing this consent, you agree to be video and audio recorded for the purpose of data collection and research. Your participation in class may be used for future research publications and presentations.

Your participation will involve being interviewed one-on-one. The interview should take about 60 minutes to complete. These interviews will be audio recorded. The interview includes questions such as:

Describe your process for selecting a particular text to teach in your Language Arts

classroom. What factors play in to your selection?
Did your experiences with literature in both high school and college affect how you select
texts to teach in your own classroom? Why do you think so? And if yes, how?

Your participation will also involve being interviewed twice in a focus group with other participants in this study. The interview should take about 60 minutes to complete. These interviews will be audio and video recorded. The focus group interview will include looking at lesson plans/pedagogical choices involving the teaching of a particular text and will include questions such as:

Describe your process in teaching this particular text? What choices did you make
within this particular lesson in teaching this text?
Would you teach this particular text again? Why or why not?

If you choose to give consent, digital copies of your classroom artifacts will be collected and copied by the instructor/researcher and may be part of future research publications and presentations. If you choose not to consent or withdraw from this study at a later time, your work will not be considered as data for this research and copies of that work will be either destroyed or returned to you.

If you do not agree to participate as a research participant or choose to withdraw from this study at a later date, you are not required to appear on video or speak around the recorder. Further, any speech or appearances of a nonconsenting teacher or student that are captured by video or audio will not be considered as data and will be destroyed or scrubbed. I will not be analyzing data until she is aware who has consented and removed the participation of those who have not consented from the video data.

Risks: There are risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research study. However, these risks are minimal.

Benefits: There will be no benefits to you from participating in this study. However, the information gained from this study has potential implications to add to research and theory in the teaching of English at the secondary level, as well as to impact the pedagogy of teacher preparation programs for potential English teachers.

Confidentiality of your information: Data (in the form of digital recordings) will be kept on a computer that is password protected. This computer will be stored in a locked office. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym for all documentation of this data. We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but we

cannot guarantee confidentiality of all study data. [redacted] Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human subject research may be permitted to access your records. Your name will not be used in any published reports about this study.

You should understand that the researcher is not prevented from taking steps, including reporting to authorities, to prevent serious harm of yourself or others.

Payment: You will not be paid for participating in this study.

Right to withdraw from the study: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any point in this study without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study once it has begun, and audio or video recordings of you and material artifacts of your work will not be used as data. Any audio or video recordings where you are heard or seen will be destroyed.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research study, please contact:

Annmarie [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

Or

[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

If you would like to speak with someone other than the research team or have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB. The IRB is a group of people from [redacted] and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving people:

[redacted] Office of the IRB, [redacted]. Website: [redacted]

CONSENT

You are making a decision whether to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read this form (or the form was read to you) and that all questions have been answered to your satisfaction. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

I agree to participate in this study.

_____   _____
_____

Name of Adult Participant   Signature of Adult Participant
      Date

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of his/her questions. I believe that he/she understands the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

_____   _____
_____

Name of Research Team Member   Signature of Research Team Member
      Date

APPENDIX F

FIRST SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.　　Discuss your early experiences with books.

2.　　What kinds of texts received focus in your secondary schooling?

3.　　What kinds of texts were left out of your schooling experiences?

4.　　Describe a formative experience you had with a text (in-school or out-of-school)?

5.　　How was literature taught/approached in your secondary English classes?

6.　　How would you characterize the way you approach/teach literature in your classes

now?

APPENDIX G

SECOND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you choose the texts you teach? What factors go into your personal selection of text?

2. What texts are you teaching this specific school year? Why?

3. Why did you choose your unit on _____ as the unit in which you would like to be observed?

4. Once you have chosen a text, what does it mean to you to teach that text well?

5. In our first focus group, we talked about the struggle between giving students books they relate to vs. exposing them to new experiences. Can you speak to that?

6. Do you choose texts with our particular community in mind?

APPENDIX H

THIRD SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How does the canon manifest as both a set of texts and as a set of practices in our classrooms?

2. How much to practicing teachers shape canon formation with our choices regarding text and practice?

3. What does having autonomy as a language arts teacher mean to you?

4. Discuss teacher autonomy in a climate of top-down initiatives, standardization, and high-stakes testing.

5. In focus group we talked about scripted curriculum vs. selection of texts and activities ourselves as intellectuals. Policy favors the former it seems. Thoughts on that?

6. Thinking about our prior interviews, focus group meetings, and observations, do you see your selection and pedagogy regarding texts changing in the future?

7. What are the implications of our collaborative project for you both personally and professionally?

APPENDIX I:

CO-RESEARCHER CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM

Date:

Class/Pd:

Teacher:

Observer:

What text is being utilized for this particular lesson?	
Would you consider this text to be traditional or nontraditional? Why?	
How is the teacher approaching the text with her/his students?	
Would you consider this approach to be traditional or nontraditional? Why?	
Discuss observed formative or summative assessment for this particular lesson. How does assessment relate to text?	
Any other thoughts, comments, suggestions, etc.?	

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