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SUPPORTING IN-SERVICE LITERACY TEACHER REFLECTIVE PRACTICE THROUGH
GRADUATE COURSEWORK:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF BUILDING LITERACY TEACHER REFLECTIVE
PRACTICE IN A MASTERS READING COURSE AND IN-SERVICE SCHOOL CONTEXTS

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

GARY V. PANKIEWICZ

Montclair State University

Upper Montclair, NJ

May 2019

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Michele Knobel

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

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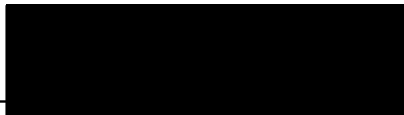
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Doctor of Philosophy

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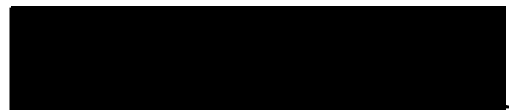
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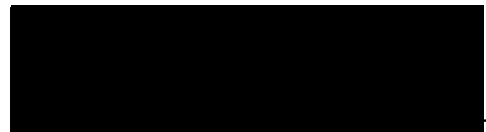
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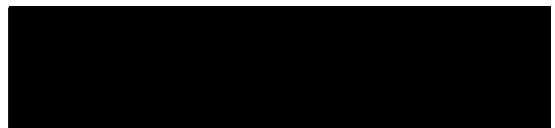
Date



Dr. Michele Knobel
Dissertation Chair



Dr. Jeremy Price



Dr. Emily Hodge

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ABSTRACT

SUPPORTING IN-SERVICE LITERACY TEACHER REFLECTIVE PRACTICE THROUGH GRADUATE COURSEWORK:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF BUILDING LITERACY TEACHER REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN A MASTERS READING COURSE AND IN-SERVICE SCHOOL CONTEXTS

by Gary V. Pankiewicz

This small qualitative research study examined the role of the reflective supports a teacher-researcher explicitly put in place in order to explore the usefulness of these supports in a graduate course taught to a group of in-service literacy teachers. More specifically, this study examined how nine in-service literacy teacher/graduate level students considered and analyzed and reflected in light of the context of their own classrooms in their unique school contexts and, furthermore, how they engaged in social action, or acts which take into account the actions and reactions of others, in the graduate course in creating a revised or reconstructed approach to the situation under study in a process best described as teacher reflective practice. The teacher-researcher was also committed, at the same time, to engage in self-reflection with respect to his own role, assumptions, and expectations as a teacher educator and teacher researcher of reflective practice.

A situated cognition framework was used to build on reconstructivist theorizations of reflection by examining contexts as social contexts. In turn, the goal was to find research-based answers to the following research question:

What supports do in-service literacy teachers (as well as the in-service literacy teacher educator) appear to find useful reflection-wise in a Masters reading course that focuses on building literacy teacher reflective practice?

A benchmark for teacher reflective practice was developed (i.e., a teacher's social action to analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind). Furthermore, two themes emerged from the analysis of data as follows: (1) writing prompts and shared experiences in low-stakes online discussion writing seemed to contribute most directly to the in-service literacy teachers' reflective practice, and (2) despite the teacher-researcher's best intentions, the in-service literacy teachers participated in a life-like (rather than "real-life") or mock, low-stakes approach to reflective practice for high stakes grades. Close analysis of reflective practice enlarged the teacher-researcher's understanding of reflective practice in the following ways: (1) explicit prompting and the impetus for students to share their written reflections with other members of the class proved significant, where students' online discussion board postings (i.e., written reflections) showed strong patterns of the following dimensions: narrative interpretation, slight risk-taking moves, and student collegiality; and (2) whereas a strong pattern of "inauthentic authenticity" questioned the merit of the literacy teacher reflective practice in the graduate course content, dimensions of this theme showed that the graduate coursework was used as a "crutch" or a "scapegoat" to complete the graded course assignments, where the assignment-driven nature gave students an impetus to catalyze leadership and collaboration as they identified and reapproached real-life problems in their in-service school contexts with in-service colleagues.

Keywords: reflective practice, teacher reflection, written reflection

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful for the incredible support of the Montclair State University community, especially my dissertation committee and doctoral study group, and, of course, my family.

First and foremost, Dr. Michele Knobel, my committee chairperson, set an incredibly high standard for a mentor's capacity to deliver responsive challenge and support for one's dissertation journey. Dr. Knobel modeled a passion for and expertise in teaching, learning, theory, and methodology in addition to timely, exhaustive, and sage feedback that gave me an opportunity to be successful in this dissertation. Additionally, Dr. Knobel facilitated a doctoral study group, my gang of critical friends, who also kept me focused and motivated.

Additionally, I am grateful to the entire Teacher Education Teacher Development faculty, particularly, Dr. Jeremy Price and Dr. Suzanne McCotter (my dissertation proposal committee members), whose encouragement, perspective, and insight helped to shape my thinking in the early stages of this dissertation. Once more, Dr. Price and Dr. Emily Hodge (my dissertation committee members) endeavored to support a revision process that added more clarity, complexity, and dimension to this dissertation due to their supportive feedback.

Lastly, it is important that I recognize the ardent support of my amazing wife, Theresa Pankiewicz, and my awesome children, Noah, Bradley, and Lucas. This accomplishment matters more because of all of you.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with loving appreciation to my mother, Alba Pankiewicz, my first devoted teacher and lifelong ardent supporter.

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Preface

The camaraderie of a social justice book club as upper elementary students enhance their perspectives from a library of culturally responsive texts organized by the teacher... The discussion of a dystopian society as middle level students study *The Giver*, Lowry's canonical novel, and integrate their analysis into their academic writing... The fluency-building performance of high school students who find their emotive niche in the dramatization of text-based storylines... The evolution of writing when a college freshman breaks out of a five-paragraph essay model through a peer review exercise... The graduate masters in reading student/in-service teacher who finds a new way to co-create situationally tailored instruction in collaboration with colleagues... These are some authentic literacy experiences that have presented themselves to me as a K-12 literacy supervisor of literacy teachers, a university first-year writing instructor, and a graduate student-literacy teacher educator. In this particular research project, I plan to set out to study the possibility of enhancing meaningful literacy activities such as these by supporting in-service literacy teachers' reflective practice in the context of university graduate coursework.

Most pundits would agree that literacy teachers are oftentimes prompted to *reflect* on their practice as a basis to perform better the next time. So, what *is* teacher reflection? Does it help? How does reflection differ from mere thinking? These are the kinds of questions that prompted my systematic venture into academic literature in order to inform a precise research question that would shape a study that sought to explore the value of supporting literacy teachers' reflective practice. My initial preparatory investigation began by the way of an exhaustive analytic review of qualitative research literature (published between 2000-2016) that reported different approaches used by teacher educators to support preservice literacy teacher

reflection. In this review, I focused on the reflective practices used, how preservice teachers learned through the reflective practices afforded them, how their learning was scaffolded or supported, and any connections related to language because I was especially interested in the process of articulating reflective thinking and how language should be a consideration in the support of reflective practice. I found that teacher reflection is rooted in the foundational philosophical and constructivist work of Dewey (1933), Schön (1983), and Zeichner and Liston (1996). The most significant finding of my analysis of this body of research literature revealed the need to examine the bevy of contextual circumstances (e.g., the specific and dynamic teaching-learning situations or environments) that seem to inevitably influence and shape preservice literacy teacher learning when deliberate reflection is part of the mix (Ward & McCotter, 2004; Freese, 2006; Cooper & Trubanova Wieckowski, 2017). In addition, it became clear to me as a result of this analytic review that teacher educators need to be mindful of the language they use to generate reflective thinking in their students as I explored connections to teacher reflection and reflective writing (Vygotsky, 1986; Reiman, 1999; Farrell, 2004; Parkes & Kajder, 2010) and to promote a reflective process that supports literacy teachers' interaction with others as a factor in supporting reflective practice (Yost & Senter, 2000; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Walker & Baepler, 2017). This point about social action is picked up on later in Chapter Two.

In my current position as both an instructional supervisor to K-12 literacy teachers and as an adjunct university literacy teacher educator, I noticed similar opportunities for supporting *in-service* literacy teacher reflection. For example, in the United States, literacy teachers (or teachers who are charged to deliver English Language Arts standards-aligned instruction) are frequently asked to reflect on their lessons during post-observation evaluation conferences with their supervisors and reflective prompts are commonplace in the various professional learning

activities shared with literacy teachers in K-12 workshop settings and graduate study in university classrooms. However, in my experiences, literacy teachers do not always know what is inherently meant by *reflection*, and this creates a need to define and model reflective practice as a part of the process of supporting enhanced reflective practice. A more explicit understanding of the concept of reflective practice will assist teachers in developing a more strategic approach to their performance of reflective practice. And yet, to date, studies of reflection surprisingly lack a focus on in-service teacher development (Kayapinar, 2016; Pankiewicz, 2016). In direct response to this oversight, this study will discuss and examine my own moves towards explicitly working to put supports for reflective practice in place for in-service literacy teachers enrolled in a graduate reading course that I teach in order to develop their reflective practice. This graduate course was an ideal space within which to examine these moves because the graduate coursework prior to my study was used deliberately to support reflective practice in teachers' authentic school contexts (in the case of the present study, all of the graduate students in the course I examined were working as in-service literacy teachers). For the purposes of this study, I define literacy teachers as those whose professional responsibility it is to deliver English Language Arts content standards through literacy-rich curriculum and instruction to their students. In the lower grades, general classroom teachers and special education teachers are often considered literacy teachers because they teach reading, writing, and foundational literacy content and skills as part of their instructional role with students each day. In the middle and high school grades, English language arts teachers are content-specialists with the primary responsibility of teaching English language arts content and skills in English Language Arts courses. In this study, I sought to identify evidence concerning the ways in which the opportunities I provided within this course did engage (or not) a group of graduate-level in-

service literacy teachers in reflective practice. This included examining the role of the reflective supports I explicitly put in place in order to explore the usefulness of these supports in the coursework to this group of literacy teachers. In addition, this study provided a unique opportunity to examine my own role, assumptions, and expectations as a teacher educator and teacher researcher.

Supporting In-Service Literacy Teacher Reflective Through Graduate Coursework:
A Qualitative Study of Attempting to Build In-service Literacy Teacher Reflective Practice

Chapter One: Literacy Teacher Education Today

This dissertation reports on a qualitative study that examined the role of the reflective supports I explicitly put in place in a Masters reading course to explore the usefulness of these supports in graduate coursework to a group of in-service literacy teachers. After defining teacher reflective practice and developing a situated cognition lens (discussed in Chapter Two) for this study, I identified patterns in my data (discussed in Chapter Three) that contributed to significant findings and discussion about in-service literacy teacher reflective practice (discussed in Chapter Four). In particular, I found that writing prompts and shared experiences in low-stakes online discussion writing coursework seemed to contribute directly to the in-service literacy teachers' reflective practice in this study. Additionally, the in-service literacy teachers in this study participated in life-like (rather than "real life") or mock practice, and, as a result, in low-stakes approaches to literacy teacher reflective practice in their school context with a high stakes grade in the course work. At first glance, this latter finding might seem like a negative or even obvious view of the literacy teachers' reflective practice in a graduate course, but I will discuss how the coursework served as a crutch that assisted the in-service literacy teachers to get some valuable and well-supported training in reflective practice in their school context. Next, I hope to make some teacher-researcher recommendations (discussed in Chapter Five) about the different dimensions of reflective practice that I uncovered such as addressing the nuance of working with others as part of teacher reflective practice. Lastly, this study will provide a unique opportunity to examine my own role, assumptions, and expectations as a teacher educator and teacher researcher as it relates to reflective practice.

To explain what initially brought me to the research focus of this dissertation of literacy teachers and reflective practice, it is important to start at the beginning of my career in education. I have been a literacy educator for over 20 years. I spent the first 12 years of my career as a middle and high school English and reading teacher. I have a master's degree in English with a concentration in Composition Studies as well as a master's degree in Educational Administration, during the pursuit of which I focused my studies on literacy curriculum and instruction. While I have been a district English language arts and literacy supervisor for the past eleven years, I have continued my work as a literacy teacher—this time as a university adjunct professor. In particular, I have served as a college writing instructor for undergraduates for eleven years, and, more recently, as a teacher educator for graduate students in an advanced masters reading program for four years, teaching one of the classes required for students to obtain their reading specialist certification. Presently, I am also a doctoral candidate, and this proposed research study is located within a program that focuses on teacher education and teacher development, which is in keeping with my own interests in supporting the professional learning of literacy teachers. This review of my career maps a landscape of education experiences, in which literacy has always been present in my journey as a student, as an educator, and as an education administrator. Throughout these experiences, I can recall numerous expectations placed on me as a student in literacy classrooms (as well as from me to students in the literacy classrooms where I taught) to reflect on relevant experiences for the purposes of learning; however, looking back on it now, explicit instruction on reflective practice was minimal for both the teacher and the students and the expectation for learning through reflective practice seemed unsupported. In short, these reflections on reflective practice are the genesis of the focus on reflective practice in this research study.

This study focuses on examining the role of the reflective supports I explicitly put in place in a graduate course in order to explore the usefulness of these supports to this group of literacy teachers. Briefly, reflective practice in this sense means to analyze the context of a situation, sharing ideas with others, in order to create a revised approach to the situation based on this analysis and collaboration (reflective practice is explained more specifically in Chapter Two). “Supports” refer to the specific resources and approaches that I provided for the literacy teachers as students in the graduate coursework with the intent to be helpful to these literacy teachers in developing their reflective practice. It must be said at this point that invoking “teacher reflection” as an impetus for reflective practice has become commonplace throughout professional discourses in education over the past century; yet it remains difficult to pin down a precise definition of “teacher reflection” within the academic literature (see similar comments in White, Fook, & Gardner, 2006; Fat’hi & Behzadpour, 2011). Indeed, an analysis of 122 articles that dealt with teacher reflection by Marcos, Sanchez, and Tillema (2011) found that reflective accounts across this body of work lacked a precise description of reflective practices. The authors noted a strong trend towards prescription for supporting teacher reflection with little advice to teacher educators and a lack of empirical and theoretical rationale to provide a research-based framework within which to discuss their ideas and findings.

In turn, Marcos, Sanchez, and Tillema (2011) argued for the need for research that utilized and evaluated procedures and methods for promoting reflective practice in addition to content-rich accounts of reflective practices (Marcos et al., 2011, p. 34). Marcos et al. (2011) found a need for these content-rich accounts to provide more vivid observations of and details concerning the context in which participants are performing reflective practice. Thus, taking Marcos et al.’s (2011) recommendations into account, this study aims in part at contributing to

this call for research-based findings in alignment with a refined, explicated, and informed definition of teacher reflection and teacher reflective practice. This, in turn, directly informs the qualitative research design for this study which organizes my examination of the role of the reflective supports I explicitly put in place in a Masters reading course to explore the usefulness of these supports in the graduate coursework to a group of in-service literacy teachers. Before taking a closer look at literacy teacher reflective practice, however, it is important to acknowledge that a literacy teacher's enterprise already seems packed with distinctive complexity. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to provide a rationale for the need for supporting the reflective practice of in-service literacy teachers coupled with ample explanation of some unique contexts such as newer national student literacy standards and standardized testing requirements in literacy classrooms across the nation, as well as contexts that are more local to the setting of this study, such as the formalization of teacher reflection in teacher evaluation systems in New Jersey.

The Difficult Work of Literacy Teachers' Instructional Planning and Teaching

Again, for the purposes of this study, I define literacy teachers as those whose professional responsibility it is to deliver literacy content standards through literacy-rich curriculum and instruction to their students. In the lower grades, general classroom teachers and special education teachers are often considered literacy teachers because they teach reading, writing, and foundational literacy content and skills as part of their instructional role with students each day. In the middle and high school grades, English language arts teachers are content-specialists with the primary responsibility of teaching English language arts content and skills in English Language Arts courses. Literacy instruction such as reading, writing, and language instruction entails supporting students' literacy learning needs appropriately. For

example, since reading has an interactive and constructive dimension, reading teachers must grapple with providing all the right kinds of supports that contribute to students' success in reading that address variables—such as student backgrounds, home language, interests, and perspectives—relevant to each reader, the text, and the school context (Wepner, Strickland, & Quatroche, 2014, p. 19). As another example, and in terms of written expression, literacy teachers often endeavor to teach a writing process (Murray, Newkirk, & Miller, 2009) whereby students use language to discover, evaluate, and communicate what they have learned or imagined about their world in the construction of creative, narrative, analytic, and information texts. In addition, effective literacy teachers must identify the language tasks inherent in classroom activities and address these directly in their instruction, too. This includes, among other things, targeting key vocabulary and concepts that students need in order to understand curriculum content, understanding the semantic and syntactic complexity used in classroom text resources and school curriculum, and knowing the ways in which students are expected to use language in school experiences and in each learning task (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008, p. 7; Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012, p. 12). In other words, it is difficult to select the sets of vocabulary that are important to literacy learning, to recognize how language is represented in classroom texts, and to foster differentiated ways for students to demonstrate their learning because individual student literacy learning needs are so distinct. I shared this focus on vocabulary-based language instruction to highlight one of many complex sets of decisions that literacy teachers make on a daily basis as part of their instructional planning. In addition to these long-standing complexities for literacy teachers, there are more recent developments with respect to what it means to teach literacy in classrooms today that include curriculum standards, high stakes assessments, and teacher evaluations.

Higher Standards and Standardized Test Scores Linked to Teacher Effectiveness

A major example of how a general teacher's job is more difficult today across the United States than previously is found on the web page for the federal government's Every Student Succeeds Act signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. Specifically, the U.S. Department of Education's web page on the Every Student Succeeds Act (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2018, p. 1) requires that all students in the United States be enabled to meet "high" academic standards that will prepare them for college and their career readiness. This act also promotes the communication of annual statewide assessment data to educators, families, students and communities. Thus, it follows that academic standards and standardized tests necessarily shape and inform the classroom work of literacy teachers. Forty-two states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories have adopted the Common Core State Standards. In K–12 English language arts education, this means the Common Core State Standards have created a new emphasis on preparing students to read and write more complex narrative and informational texts in each grade compared to past expectations while completing more challenging academic work aimed at improving college and career "readiness." Some states have taken the Common Core State Standards and tailored them to meet their needs. New Jersey, for example, adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010 and then later adopted a revised version of the Common Core State Standards called the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in 2016 (New Jersey Student Learning Standards, p. 1). An example of how the New Jersey standards (as part of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards) further refine the national Common Core Standards for English Language Arts is shown by enhanced expectations for reading literature (see Table 1 in Appendix A). For example, revised New Jersey standards reflect beliefs such as that "Background knowledge and motivation are critical to the success of

students when learning to read and when accessing complex text” (New Jersey Student Learning Standards, 2014, p. 1; para. 2). In this case, the New Jersey Department of Education created a more specific expectation for New Jersey students to make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections as part of their analysis when compared to this expectation in the Common Core State Standards. However, despite having the New Jersey “version” of the standards in play in their classrooms, New Jersey students nonetheless will take a standardized test (described in the next paragraph) based on the Common Core State Standards, not the New Jersey Student Learning Standards, leaving teachers in the precarious position of determining which set of standards to use in their instructional planning and when.

In the 2014-2015 school year, new computer-based, high-stakes standardized tests were implemented in states around the country by organizations such as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium to assess the extent to which students have met the Common Core State Standards using digital interfaces and purpose-built platforms. As noted previously, some states with revised standards (e.g., New Jersey Student Learning Standards) continue to use Common Core State Standards-based tests to generate student performance data as evidence of standards implementation. And, indeed, this “test-based accountability in our nation’s schools” (Onosco, 2011, p. 1) is apparent in New Jersey with revamped teacher evaluation systems that are linked to their students’ test results (AchieveNJ Home, 2017). For instance, according to the New Jersey Department of Education and at the time when this study was conducted, 45 percent of a Grade 4–8 Language Arts Literacy teacher’s evaluative performance rating was determined by the amount of student growth in relation to their learning outcomes as measured by factors such as students’ standardized test scores and the extent to which students meet learning goals co-

created by teachers and their evaluators. The other 55 percent of a Grade 4–8 literacy teacher’s evaluation score was determined by the teacher’s practice rating (i.e., a numerical mark given to teachers by an administrative evaluator based on categories such as their professional knowledge, instructional planning/delivery, and professional responsibilities) (AchieveNJ Home, 2017, p. 1). In August of 2018, the New Jersey Governor announced that student scores on state PARCC assessments would account for five percent of a teacher’s evaluation in the new school year, down from 30 percent. This may have been a reaction to those who had actively fought to reduce the importance of student test scores in job performance reviews, arguing that it was an unfair measure. In any case, literacy teacher evaluation performance ratings are still linked to student test scores in an evaluation system that has changed frequently over the last decade. In short, literacy teachers nowadays continue to be charged with improving their students’ levels of reading and writing performance while demonstrating effective pedagogy—as defined by state-approved evaluation systems—throughout the year.

The Evaluation of Literacy Teacher Reflection and Reflective Practice

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that many of the teacher performance evaluation systems described above expect teachers to engage in teacher reflection. For example, in New Jersey, the most widely used teacher evaluation system is the Danielson Framework, which is grounded in a constructivist view of teaching and learning (The Danielson Group: The Framework, 2017, p. 1). The Danielson Framework is aligned with the work of the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium that created model core *teaching* standards for skills new teachers should demonstrate in order to obtain national teaching certification. Furthermore, the Danielson Framework evaluates teachers according to 22 different

components; one of these components is “Reflecting on Teaching” in the domain of a teacher’s professional responsibilities (The Danielson Group: The Framework, 2017, p. 1).

In May 2016, The New Jersey Department of Education Office of Evaluation created a significant adjustment to New Jersey teacher performance evaluation systems and which began during the 2016-17 school year. This adjustment entails participation in the “Reflective Practice Protocol” as an option for tenured teachers who have been rated “Highly Effective” on their most recent summative evaluation rating. If there is a mutual agreement between a tenured teacher and his/her direct supervisor, a “Reflective Practice Conference” between the teacher and supervisor will replace one traditional classroom observation where two classroom observations were required before (*Reflective Practice Protocol Implementation Guidebook*, 2016, p. 7). The New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol (*Reflective Practice Protocol for Practicing Teachers*, 2016) asks teachers to “reflect” on video captured lessons they have taught, student performance, and classroom observations with the goal of participating in the following culminating actions:

- “Teacher and Administrator identify areas of strength and need and agree to specific strategies that build on strengths and address needs.
- A plan is developed for the teacher to monitor progress and discuss at the next reflective check-in, post-conference, or summative conference areas of pedagogical strength.”

(*Reflective Practice Protocol Implementation Guidebook*, 2016, p. 26)

According to the *Reflective Practice Protocol Implementation Guidebook* (2016), the rationale for this move is based on the reflective practice model used when teachers achieve National Board Certification through the construction of a portfolio that demonstrates teacher effectiveness in their classroom practice over time. Further rationale for this protocol is provided in the citation of a 2002 article published by Iowa Research Online that stated, “The process of

the portfolio production and its attendant careful analysis and reflection effect a powerful change in the future practices of National Board Certified teachers” (*Reflective Practice Protocol Implementation Guidebook*, 2016, p. 5; para. 7). Additionally, the New Jersey Department of Education Office of Evaluation launched its own 2015-2016 pilot study in sixteen school districts where reflective conferences were used in place of a traditional classroom observation. During these conferences, teachers discussed their own teaching, student survey and student performance evidence with their supervisors. A March 2016 survey of 168 educators from these 16 pilot districts suggested, “These highly effective teachers found greater value in this portfolio of practice model over traditional observation methods” (*Reflective Practice Protocol Implementation Guidebook*, 2016, p.6; para. 1). To be clear, it needs to be emphasized that the 2002 article (initially published in an art education periodical) reported on investigations of teachers who were seeking National Board certification (Unrath, 2002) and the teacher survey described just now and conducted after the 2015-2016 pilot study were the only two pieces of research found as a rationale for the New Jersey Department of Education's “Reflective Practice Protocol” (AchieveNJ Home, p. 6). In other words, it appears that more empirical research is needed to support New Jersey’s initiative in teacher reflective practice. Studies such as the one in this dissertation could provide a clearer definition of teacher reflective practice while contributing to a more research-based rationale for a teacher reflective practice initiative.

The *Reflective Practice Protocol Implementation Guidebook* (2016) does provide comprehensive guidelines for all aspects of the implementation of what they refer to as reflective practice, including a written description of the process from a teacher’s perspective and a “Reflective Practice Protocol Rubric.” Since *reflective practice* was not defined explicitly in the guidebook, the rubric is essential for understanding the characteristics of reflective practice at

various performance levels. For example an explicit expectation for “exemplary” in the category of “Connected Reflection of all sources [video capture, student performance, classroom observation, and student surveys]” reads:

Teacher and administrator identify areas of strength and need and agree to specific strategies that build on strengths and address needs. A plan is developed for the teacher to monitor progress and discuss at the next reflective check-in, post-conference, or summative conference. (p. 22)

An “adequate” rating is described as: “Teacher and administrator identify BOTH prevalent areas of strength and needed focus from all sources” (p.22). Based on these rubric expectations, it appears that the New Jersey Department of Education defines “adequate” reflective practice as occurring when the evaluator and teacher collaborate on attributes of the teacher’s practice and make suggestions for improvement. Creating and implementing a subsequent plan for improvement would merit “exemplary” reflective practice.

It is important to emphasize that while numerous links to web sites were provided as resources (e.g., a TeachHub.com article on the value of self-reflection; a TeachingChannel.org video of National Teacher of the Year testimonials on reflection; and an article on the value of self-reflection in video reflections published in the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s *Usable Knowledge* newsletter), there is no readily identifiable or explicit definition of teacher reflective practice or any empirical or peer-reviewed research data to support the reflective protocol included within the guidebook document (besides the rubric expectations described above). In my estimation, this exemplifies a need, especially with respect to this New Jersey education initiative in reflective practice, to promote reflective practices that are supported by an explicit definition of reflective practice developed out of academic reasoning and formal

qualitative research. To that end, I argue that the present study may well usefully inform existing reflective practice protocols and procedures, such as the “Reflective Practice Protocol” in New Jersey.

An Abundance of Research on Best Practices in Literacy Instruction

I suggest that there is a need for more reflective practitioners as of late because there seems to be a push by literacy researchers and professional organizations to identify and extend the use of literacy “best practices.” The connection between best practices and reflective practice is the focus of the remainder of this section because best practices may be enhanced when used as a part of—or as the focus of—reflective practice. In other words, best practices such as the examples of literacy best practices that follow are not as valuable unless teachers understand how to adapt them in particular contexts through reflective practice.

A review of scholarly literature suggests the idea of “best practices” within the field of education emerged in Chicago during the 1990s when Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, and Arthur Hyde collected national consensus on recommendations for best educational practices (Rumohr-Voskuil, 2010). More recently, Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde published the *fourth* edition of their definitive book, *Best Practices: Bringing Standards to Life in America’s Classrooms* (2012). A different set of authors—Morrow and Gambrell—has been successful in publishing their fifth edition of a similar book written expressly for literacy educators: *Best Practices in Literacy Instruction* (2015). As a rationale for their book, these authors alluded to a 2012 U.S. Department of Education report that identified a range of evidence-based “best” literacy practices. Morrow and Gambrell described 18 such practices by means of separate chapters written by different literacy researchers (e.g., “Best Practices in Motivating Students to Read” by John T. Guthrie; “Best Practices in Adolescent Literacy Instruction” by Douglas Fisher

and Nancy Frey; and “Best Practices in Informational Text Comprehension Instruction” by Nell K. Duke and Nicole M. Martin). The editors of this volume opened with a call for teachers to act as “visionary decision makers”:

It is the teacher with vision who is able to stand firm in the belief that with knowledge and heart, evidence-based practice can be selected and adapted to meet the needs of each student every day. (Morrow & Gambrell, 2015, p. 14)

This widespread recommendation to use literacy best practice strategies and resources can be classified as a problem, however, since these practices may only make sense in theory or in practice within a specific instructional setting with a particular cohort of students as part of a distinctive course of study with a teacher with particular knowledge and skills. As it is, it seems the literacy teacher is left to evaluate which elements of such recommended best practices, if any, are relevant and applicable to their current teaching and to the literacy teacher’s school context as well as how to integrate these best practices into their own teaching contexts. Moreover, during this work, it is quite possible for teachers to reflect poorly and to react ineffectively in their reflective practice. Teacher reflection does not guarantee better learning outcomes for students, either. One reason for this dilemma may be that many teachers do not inherently know what is meant by “teacher reflection” and often assume that reflection is simply “an introspective after-the-fact description of teaching” (Ward & McCotter, 2004, p. 255) rather than a process that promotes taking up informed and analytical approaches to instructional practices. Even in-service teachers may require support in practicing teacher reflection that can be a real catalyst for change and enhanced professional growth (Parkes & Kajder, 2010; Stover, Kissel, Haag, & Shoniker, 2011; Manrique & Abchi, 2015).

Literacy instruction best practices also are promoted in literacy-based periodicals created and disseminated by literacy professional organizations. For example, *The Reading Teacher*, a publication of the International Literacy Association, published “Best Practices in Reading: A 21st Century Skill Update” (Roskos & Neuman, 2014). This article was republished on the Reading Rockets Project web site, an initiative that is guided by an advisory panel made up of leading researchers and experts in the field of reading (Reading Rockets, 2016). As a rationale for this work, the authors cited The National Reading Panel’s efforts to synthesize a compilation of best practices in the field. One of the identified literacy instruction best practices in the article entailed teaching words in meaningful semantic clusters to provide explicit instruction in vocabulary development. As explained by the authors, “These practices [such as the literacy best practice described above] have acquired evidence over time that if used with fidelity, children are likely to become proficient in reading” (Roskos & Neuman, 2014, p. 507). This contrasts with research in the teaching of English language arts that shows what works in one distinct school context may not work for another (cf. Lapp & Fisher, 2018); indeed, Roskos and Neuman, themselves, concluded: “Clearly they [the literacy best practices cited in the article] reflect our own biases and research perspectives” (Roskos & Neuman, 2014, p. 510). In other words, the authors of these literacy best practices draw from their own unique contexts that might not be applicable or appropriate for other school contexts. Furthermore, a literacy best practice necessarily would require some revision based on the unique classroom context within a unique school context because it should be responsive to the specific learning needs of the classroom and school communities. In other words, a literacy best practice undermines the significance and complexity of a literacy teacher’s contextualized work as a reflective educator. I was mindful of issues such as the abundance of literacy best practices (in addition to the

previously discussed issues of student performance standards, standardized testing, and teacher evaluation systems) when I constructed the goals of my own research study (discussed in the next section).

Literacy Teacher Education Today in Relation to This Study

My own study sets out to provide a rich analysis of my approach to supporting literacy teacher reflective practice in a graduate course with a view to examining what participating literacy teachers did within the context of this course and seemed to take away with them from this course with respect to teacher reflective practices. The intent of this study, as mentioned before, is to document and analyze supports that I put in place when I initially planned to teach the course prior to the year of data collection (implemented during the 2015-2016 academic year). These supports included, for example, online written discussion boards, a whole class feedback protocol for group presentations, and structured assignments. To accomplish this intention, I needed to investigate the extent to which these supports (that were explicitly and consciously provided in coursework) ultimately encouraged robust teacher reflective practice. My goal in this study was to provide richly descriptive and analytic empirical evidence for the extent to which these supports provided a means for participating in-service literacy teachers to navigate literacy research and evidence-based practices as well as examining their efforts to revise and implement literacy reform that took their particular contexts into account.

As I argue in Chapter Two, a graduate-level course of the kind employed in this study is an ideal vehicle for this kind of exploratory work because in-service literacy teachers who work in various school settings comprise the students in the class. Hence, a central interest of the proposed study is to investigate the extent to which a deliberately employed set of what I call “supports” for nurturing and encouraging a group of teachers’ deliberate reflective practices

based within their school settings (and enrolled in a university graduate course) in order to examine the usefulness of these supports that I, as their teacher educator, put in place. In addition, this study will provide a unique opportunity to examine my own role, assumptions, and expectations as a teacher educator and teacher researcher as it relates to reflective practice. For example, I will discuss the online discussion board writing prompts that I assigned to students and different ways that I asked students to share their experiences in their own school contexts. In the next section, I introduce the unique characteristics of the settings of this study as they relate to the topic of reflective practice with a more detailed and theory-based explanation of these settings and their social contexts in Chapter Two.

The Two Different Settings in This Study

Most pundits would agree that settings or one's physical and interpersonal surroundings are important to reflective practice. A setting could be shaped by, for example, geography, history, socioeconomics, and institutional forces. Specific dimensions and qualities of reflection were identified in a teacher reflection framework developed by Ward and McCotter (2004). For example, Ward and McCotter focus on "fundamental pedagogical, ethical, moral, cultural, or historical concerns and how these impact students and others" (Ward & McCotter, 2004, p. 250). I find these dimensions and qualities of reflection helpful in providing areas of focus when looking at setting. With respect to understanding or analyzing reflective practice, these different "concerns" capture a sense of the many social forces that are unique to particular settings and that need to be considered throughout reflective practice. This research project was grounded in two different kinds of settings: one is the study's setting (i.e., the graduate course), and the other involves each participant's school setting that was taken into account in her literacy reform project. As such, from this point on, I will specify whether I am referring to the graduate course

setting or the participants' school settings. This differentiation is important because the unique locations of these settings present different social concerns that must be considered distinctly in reflective practice. In Chapter Two I will share a much more specific description of setting as it relates to context. In particular, I will provide a theoretical lens on the social contexts involved in these different settings in an effort to explain how an analysis of social contexts, or a "network of inter-relationships in the classroom" (Walker & Baepler, 2017, p. 35), is central to my study of literacy teacher reflective practice. Later, in Chapter Three, I will continue a description of these contexts to justify the supports I put in place in the graduate coursework in this study. In Chapter Four, I will discuss examples of study participants analyzing context in their reflective writing. Following, in Chapter Five, I will provide a written demonstration of my own reflective practice by analyzing the contexts in this study as they relate to the reflective supports that I explicitly put in place in the graduate coursework. All along, I have made a consistent effort to emphasize reflection through writing throughout this research study.

Conclusion

I am a literacy teacher, instructional supervisor of literacy teachers, and a literacy teacher educator who values reflective practice. Early in my educational career as a high school English teacher, for instance, I oftentimes facilitated student journal writing in my classes. This journal writing activity was emblematic of my efforts to support a reflective process that prompted students' to make relevant connections between literacy content and the students' own experiences. For me, this writing prompted students to develop new perspectives on their thinking in relation to literature studied in class. More recently, I continued to foster journal writing as an adjunct writing instructor with undergraduate level writing students. These student journals proved to be an important instructional tool in observing my students' "thinking on the

page” as well as for providing targeted support for enhanced learning outcomes. In many ways, these journals became reflective prompts for improving my own practice. Indeed, I have personally benefitted from engaging in writing-based reflective practices as a teacher. Thus, it seemed to me that supporting others in honing and refining reflection—largely by means of writing down their reflections as a focus of my teaching—held much promise.

More recently during my instructional planning for my work as a teacher educator of graduate level reading students, I took up a theoretical framing that provided me with a lens, useful concepts, and a research base from which to build on existing and construct new formal course work that I thought best supported in-service literacy teachers’ reflective practice as it related to the school contexts where these teachers worked—with a particular emphasis on written reflection as a medium or vehicle for this reflective practice. My championing of written reflection is one steadfast way in which I have supported the professional learning of literacy teachers and that I have found to be effective. However, my evaluation of these supports has always been anecdotal in nature. The present study provided me with the opportunity to collect and examine authentic data. Therefore, to reiterate, the focus of this present study sets out to examine the role of the reflective supports I explicitly put in place in the graduate coursework in order to explore the usefulness of these supports to this group of in-service literacy teachers’ reflective practice.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a rationale for the need to support the reflective practice of in-service literacy teachers. To reiterate, newer student performance standards, standardized testing, more intricate and demanding teacher evaluation systems (including the formalization of teacher reflection in New Jersey), and the navigation of an abundance of literacy education research and evidence-based best practices, comprise what I

assert as a set of complex contexts that are further complicated by the unique context of each literacy classroom. Perhaps it makes sense to focus more attention on building literacy teachers' capacity for learning and development as reflective practitioners in order to help prepare them to grapple in self-directed and informed ways with the multitude of challenges and complexities likely to lie ahead for them within their own teaching settings—especially since these circumstances (some as challenges and complexities) are deeply and inextricably contextualized. As such, this study will provide a unique opportunity to examine my own role, assumptions, and expectations as a teacher educator and teacher researcher with respect to in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. My aim is to add research in the field of in-service literacy teacher education.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Empirical Data on Reflective Practice

In this chapter, I define teacher reflective practice as it is used in this study before unpacking the nuances of definition of teacher reflective practice. In particular, this section begins with a foundational or historical explanation of teacher reflective practice, followed by a more specific description of relevant theories, including situated cognition, and a review of literature relating to literacy teacher reflective practice, where I set out to build a case for the supports of teacher reflective practice that I put in place within graduate coursework that relied heavily on written reflection. This chapter concludes with my unique focus in this study on in-service literacy teacher reflective practice.

Foundations of Reflective Teacher Practice

The theoretical roots of teacher reflection as a distinct practice can be found in John Dewey's foundational book on reflective teaching, *How We Think* (Dewey, 1933). Dewey (1933) argued that teacher learning based on experience is enhanced by analyzing and evaluating this experience. According to Dewey, who worked principally out of a philosophy of education orientation, the reflective process for a teacher begins when the teacher experiences a personal or professional problem to do with their teaching with no immediate (re)solution and stops to think about the situation and how it might be improved or better addressed based on an analysis and evaluation of the relevant context and circumstances. This, according to Dewey, is typically followed by some kind of action on the teacher's part that aims at addressing the problem with an enhanced perspective on or set of insights into what worked and did not work so well and perhaps why. Thus, Dewey's definition of reflective practice is cast in terms of thoughtful deliberation about beliefs and practices in relation to instructional planning and the subsequent outcomes (or actions) of implementing desired changes (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). In other

words, this position argues that teacher reflection as a practice enables and makes opportunities available to individuals to *reapproach* and analyze teaching and learning situations and then to act more responsively.

Some scholars suggest that sociologist Donald Schön, in his book, *The Reflective Practitioner* (Schön, 1983), built on Dewey's work (Farrell, 2012). Schön drew a useful distinction between two types or kinds of reflection: *reflection-on-action*, which occurs when teachers reflect on a previous situation; and *reflection-in-action*, when teachers adjust instruction on the spot while engaged in the act of teaching. Schön described reflective practice in the following terms: "When the practitioner [in this case, the teacher] tries to solve the problem he [or she] has set, he [or she] seeks both to understand the situation and to change it" (Schön, 1983, p. 134). For Schön, traditional notions of education practice expected teachers to apply theory learned in the university directly to their practice in schools. Schön (1983) argued instead that this practical knowledge—rather than theory alone—was a key component in teachers' reflective practices. A reflective practitioner, according to Schön, has an interest or investment in transforming a unique or conflicted situation of practice from what it is, to something he/she likes better (Schön, 1983, p. 147; Schön, 1987, p. 39). A practice, according to Schön, is "made up of chunks of activity, divisible into more or less familiar types, each of which is seen as calling for the exercise of a certain kind of knowledge" (Schön, 1987, p. 32). Practices are "socially and institutionally patterned so as to present repetitive occurrences of particular kinds of situations" (Schön, 1987, p. 32). With regard to the practice of literacy instruction, literacy teachers share distinct language and tools; plan particular kinds of activities such as lessons; and work within the institutional setting of a school. For example, a literacy teacher might address a student's reading fluency (i.e., the student's ability to read with speed, accuracy, and expression)

by analyzing the student's running record (i.e., a method of assessing a student's reading level) and create a new and subsequent reader's theater lesson, or an activity in which the student practices oral reading and rereading a part in a script, to develop fluency skills within the literacy classroom. Simply put, *reflective* practice, then, is the act of approaching a situation differently—to change the situation rather than letting it repeat itself. In the previous example, the literacy teacher analyzed the student's initial oral reading performance and set out to improve the student's reading fluency by crafting a new lesson. Thus, in relation to the present study, these foundational positions of teacher reflective practice contribute a fundamental expectation to revise an approach to a situation as part of reflective practice. This study focuses on reflection-on-action; that is, a focus on the literacy teachers' reflection on existing situations rather their more spontaneous decisions during the act of teaching. Moreover, this study sets out to evaluate the supports put in place for encouraging in-service literacy teachers in the ways that they might reapproach a situation with the intent to change the situation for the better through a thorough analysis of context as a major component of teacher reflection.

Building on Foundations of Reflective Practice with Situated Cognition

The key foundational thinkers in the field of reflective practice, including Dewey (1933); Schön (1983); and Zeichner and Liston (1996), follow a Reconstructivist theorization of reflection. Reconstructivism (Brameld, 1976) refers to a field of study that has an interest in continually reconstructing or reforming reality for the better. It has a democratic purpose and opposes any theory that views values or meaning as absolute or unchanging such as positivist or absolutist epistemologies. As such, this study sets out to support the teacher reflective practice of participating in-service literacy teachers so that they might reconstruct or improve their practice as a result of their reflection. Context, the set of circumstances that surround a specific situation,

is a central concept in the present study because I argue that the analysis of context is an essential component in the teacher reflective practice process.

While Dewey and Schön are forerunners to the development of reflective practice, in what follows, I suggest that there might be a small opportunity to improve upon their work—that is, to focus more attention on the role that “context” plays in understanding reflective practice. As Clarke (1995) explains, “Schön was particularly interested in knowledge that practitioners bring to bear on the problems they encounter in the action setting” (p. 245), where “practitioners engage in a process of problem setting rather than problem solving” (Farrell, 2012, p. 13). As such, Schön, in particular, certainly acknowledged the importance of locational context. This orientation towards “change for the better” is brought together with situated cognition (Smith & Semin, 2004; Semin & Smith, 2013), which is theoretically consonant with Reconstructivism but adds an important focus to context (e.g., both draw on Vygotsky’s work but the former includes more sustained focus on locational *and* situational factors than that afforded by Reconstructivism). That is, a situated cognition perspective goes further with a more intricate analysis of *social context* that I suggest is necessary in this study’s approach to teacher reflective practice. Situated cognition, identified as what Semin and Smith (2013) explain as “adaptively successful interaction with other agents and the world” (Semin & Smith, 2013), relies heavily on this “social” element of context and is essential to defining useful conceptions of teacher reflective practice, where *social context* is comprised of “the network of inter-relationships in the classroom” (Walker & Baepler, 2017, p. 35). To reiterate, a situated cognition conceptualization (Smith & Semin, 2004; Semin & Smith, 2013), which helps to examine contexts as social contexts with an educational psychology lens, builds on Reconstructivist theorizations of reflection and context developed by Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983). This extension of teacher

reflection theory remains congruent with the earlier theoretical work of Dewey and Schön but provides a more detailed and sustained focus on social contexts involved in situated cognition.

Semin and Smith (2013) argue for a shift away from the approach of cognitive scientists (e.g., Anderson, Richardson, & Chemero, 2012) who focus on cognition as the isolated study of individual cognitive functions (e.g., attention, memory, or learning) or the isolated individual's processing and representation of information. The shift in direction introduced by the situated cognition perspective, a social psychology approach shared by Hutchins (1995) and Semin (2000), "invites understanding of cognitive activities that are extended to the social and physical environment, which constitute integral parts of cognitive activity in their own right (Semin & Smith., 2013, p. 126). Indeed, the interdependence of the mind with social contexts is central to situated cognition. Cognition and social action is explained further by Smith and Collins (2010):

Communication goals and relationships (e.g., whether one is speaking or listening to another) shape and constrain cognition and behavior. As communication is shaped by contexts including dyads, communities, and cultures, not only do biases appear in what is transmitted from one person to another, but also changes are introduced in the individual speaker's own cognition and behavior. (Smith & Collins, 2010, p. 134)

In other words, social context shapes one's thinking when various social forces are considered in more of a networked construction of our thinking, where one's thinking might respond and change to various aspects of a given situation. Semin and Smith (2013) refer to the social context as a constellation of motivational states and representation, whose shared expressions then depend further on the details of the situation, including relationships with others (Semin & Smith, 2013, p. 128). I will discuss these ideas again in Chapter Five, when I discuss situated cognition in relation to the online discussion board assignment in the graduate coursework.

This study focuses on two different elements to context as they relate to in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. The first element of context is *locational*. In other words, it involves the contextual circumstances that surround a specific setting or situation. This locational component of context is identified by Blommaert (2018) as “a physical setting, within which interaction occurs—the actual timespace constellation within which people encounter each other” (Blommaert, 2018, p. 3). In Chapter One of this study, I pointed to the areas of focus for teacher reflection in a physical setting that were identified by Ward and McCotter (2004) in their teacher reflection framework: “fundamental pedagogical, ethical, moral, cultural, or historical concerns and how these impact students and others” (Ward & McCotter, 2004, p. 250). However, there is another element to context: “the social occasion” (Blommaert, 2018). This latter component of context is also an important part of teacher reflective practice, where context is more than a sum of the social concerns, constraints, or forces that are unique to particular setting. In this case, context becomes dependent on social interaction involved in the social event. Interestingly, the social context specific to classroom learning has been broken into distinct dimensions in a study by Walker and Baepler (2017). More specifically, Walker and Baepler (2017) identified the following factors for tracing social context in the classroom: student interactions with each other (e.g., student-student or students as instructors with other students) and formal and informal interactions between the student and the instructor (e.g., written feedback on student assignments and more casual conversations in the classroom). In turn, this study looked at the social interaction between graduate students and other graduate students as well as the graduate students and me (as the course instructor) as part of an examination of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. To reiterate, drawing on situated cognition requires an examination of the *social context*, inducing “a specific constellation of

motivational states, representations, and so forth, whose expressions in action then depend further on the details of the situation, including others' actions" (Semin & Smith, 2013, p. 128). I argue that situated cognition provides a useful theoretical lens for examining the usefulness of the supports that I put in place in the graduate coursework within this study.

An Analogy to Help Explain the Effect of Social Contexts

Semin and Smith (2013) share an analogy concerning words and sentences that supports the effect of social context on teacher reflection. They explain that words in isolation can be analyzed with respect to their meaning; for example, one might define "literacy" as the quality or state of being literate, especially the ability to read and write. However, a sentence composed of specific words—such as the sentence, "Grade Four students are assessed on their performance on assessments that are aligned to the state *literacy* standards" —possesses an entirely different quality for "literacy" when compared to the other words in the sentence that cannot be understood by an analysis of the word or word category alone. When we say, "Grade Four students are assessed on their performance on assessments that are aligned to the state *literacy* standards," the relationship between the words "literacy" and "standards" shares a different representation of the word literacy as meaning the ability to read and write. The word within the sentence has more to do with a government-approved model of literacy (e.g., designated reading and writing skills and processes), and in this case the literacy standards are specific to a particular state and fourth grade level—all of which are related to the issue of assessment or evaluation in this particular sentence. This analogy helps to explain situated cognitivists' conception of social context on teacher reflection because it helps to explain how it is possible for one's mind to construct more complex meaning based on one's relationship with all other aspects of a situation, just like the meaning of a word becomes more sophisticated based on its

relationship with other words in a sentence (and one's knowledge of and understanding about these words-in-relation-to-each-other). Thus, a situated cognition perspective calls for the research to set out to explore the influence of the social relationships in a classroom in order to analyze all aspects of an experience in relation to each other rather setting out to analyze the experience in isolation and seeks to understand an experience based on the social situation within which this experience is occurring.

Thinking Is not the Same as Reflecting and Setting out to Support Teacher Reflection

Cognition or thinking (I use these terms interchangeably, in keeping with social cognition conventions) absent of a consideration of social context is simply thinking with no social action or a mere "translation and output of preexisting cognitions" (Smith & Collins, 2010, p. 134). In other words, there is no social action or act which takes into account the actions and reactions of others. Again, this is all important to teacher reflective practice because I suggest that a teacher must *analyze* social context, and not just think about it, in order to reflect effectively. In the context of this study, analysis is the process of examining a situation by breaking it into its component parts to uncover their interrelationships. As foregrounded by Schön's explanation of reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983, 1987) wherein one reflects on aspects of an event after the fact and expanded upon with a situated cognition perspective (Semin & Collins, 2010) wherein one participates in social action, I define teacher reflection in a way that builds on but surpasses thinking, in general. Teacher reflection occurs when one has a deep appreciation and analysis of a contextualized experience and engages in more vigilant and deliberate thinking about these contexts, sometimes with others, in evaluating a situation with the goal of revising and improving an approach, or content, or resources and so on in subsequent student learning situations (Schön, 1983, 1987; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Fat'hi & Behzadpour, 2011; Marnrique &

Abchi, 2015). More simply put, this position argues that teacher reflection as a practice enables and makes opportunities available to individuals to analyze the social context of teaching and learning situations and then to reapproach the situation with more responsive actions.

A traditional view of cognition describes “social” as the object of cognition (e.g., persons, events, and subjects such as “stereotyping”) in a way that makes “social” seem like a static concept and does not capture the dynamic reality of these objects of cognition, or what Semin and Smith (2013) call “the adaptive co-regulation of action” (Semin & Smith 2013, p. 126). This less traditional view of cognition for social action aligns with the purpose of this study because it invites a description of the processes of social action as part of literacy teacher reflective practice. This is important because at its core, the situated cognition perspective recognizes the interdependence of the mind with social context in the generation of cognition or understanding. This “situated” perspective sees the mind “as a controller for behavior, continually transforming incoming information into specifications of what to do right now” (Smith & Collins, 2010, p. 127). As such, social supports such as the ones I put in place in the graduate coursework are crucial scaffolds because social action generates cognition and the behavior we adapt to the situation in order to help us make sense of it (Smith & Collins, 2010).

Systematically identifying, analyzing, evaluating and responding to contexts distinguish reflective practice from less methodical and less purposeful thinking and action. Situated cognition is concerned with cognition that transpires through social action when social contexts, or “the network of inter-relationships in the classroom” (Walker & Baepler, 2017, p. 35), influence our thoughts and actions (Smith & Semin, 2004) causing us to think or act differently. This differs from Dewey and Schön’s respective takes on “action” that are less concerned with social contexts, but is warranted in this study because I set out to trial explicit supports of teacher

reflective practice from a situated cognition perspective. Thinking about cognition for social action—when embedded in a reflective practice—is useful in the present study because it reminds the practitioner to be more mindful of the different relationships that exist within the classroom as part of the construction of a revised approach to a situation.

This understanding of the importance of context and social interaction in prompting cognition showed me as a teacher educator that teacher reflection does not need to be something that just happens but that it can be actively supported in graduate coursework by means of carefully designed supports that encourage an analysis of social context and makes use of social interactions among members of a graduate course to further enhance this analysis. As such, this study does not focus on the detached thought that might occur when an in-service literacy teacher/graduate level student reads about a new learning theory or instructional approach in the graduate course textbook and think about this new learning theory or instructional approach solitarily. Instead, this study focuses on how nine in-service literacy teacher/graduate level students considered and analyzed and *reflected* in light of the context of their own classrooms in their unique school contexts and, furthermore, how they interacted with other members of the graduate course in creating a revised or reconstructed approach to the situation under study in a process best described as literacy teacher reflective practice.

Thus, this study focuses on several supports I put in place to encourage and promote literacy teacher reflective practices. These supports are discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, but include: online discussion board postings, student-facilitated class sessions, draft literacy reform projects, and class presentations. The deliberate intention of these supports was to encourage students to attend to context and promote social interaction within the classroom as they engaged in reflective practice.

Supporting Teacher Reflective Practice Through Writing

In closely examining reflective practice, there are important insights to be gained in examining the process of *articulating* reflective thinking through the writing process that are not a primary focus in the more conversational or dialogic formats described in the accounts of Dewey and Schön, or of the social cognitivists. Vygotsky, in *Thought and Language* (1986), usefully explained the nature of verbal thought, or inner speech, as semantic analysis: “Real concepts are impossible without words, and thinking in concepts does not exist beyond verbal thinking. That is why the central moment in concept formation, and its generative cause, is a specific use of words as functional ‘tools’” (p. 107). Semantic analysis in this sense refers to examining how syntactic structures (e.g., words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs) are conceived or drawn on in our minds as we generate meaning. Vygotsky’s claims directly challenged Gestalt theorists’ position at that time. These latter-mentioned theorists believed a word refers to a single object (e.g., *lines* contribute to the conception of a *triangle*). Instead, Vygotsky argued that words refer to a group or a class of objects (e.g., triangles as one of many shapes). He explained that any use of words (in speech or in writing) invokes generalizations to form meaning (Vygotsky, 1986), and that we cannot think without language. To put this another way, words are tools for communicating the generalizations of inner speech and, in the case of the present study, can be understood as the “beginnings” of any expression of reflection as verbal speech (and, later, socially expressed speech or language).

Vygotsky (1986) also argued that the relationship between thought and word is a recursive process; that is, from thought to word and from word to thought. By means of this process, thoughts come into existence and develop (and are shared) through words and these words, in turn, shape and inform the meaning of the concept. For example, I might visualize a

book in my mind and think the word “book.” Conversely, I might read the word “book” and visualize a book in my mind. This process holds for thoughts expressed out loud or on paper. With respect to writing, then, one might write down words based on one’s thoughts or construct thoughts in one’s mind as a result of reading written words on the page. Moreover, effective written communication must also deploy *syntactic differentiation* (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 240). According to Vygotsky, who was writing long before the advent of short written communications such as text-messaging or Twitter, in order to reach its audience, written communication must use many more words (with more sophisticated combinations of syntax and grammar) and more precise word choice to convey an idea than is typically required by everyday spoken language because such things as tone of voice are excluded from the author’s written message. Interestingly, this would suggest that lengthy written speech can enable writers to get closer to the intended meaning of their inner speech more so than can everyday spoken language because more precise written word choices can convey what might only be implied. In keeping with Vygotsky’s position, sociocultural dimensions of written speech have been examined by Wells (1999) who argued that carefully considered written speech is more advantageous to conveying more precise ideas than oral discussion because it is more permanent and typically takes more time to produce, which generates more thinking about the text and word choices made to produce this text. Again, this suggests that written speech has a greater potential to be helpful in communicating a more accurate intended meaning than oral discussion; moreover, it supports the expectation for lengthy written reflections to capture and represent students’ thinking on the page as part of the graduate coursework. Of course, this only holds in relatively recent times with the advent of writing as a central academic practice over spoken discourse—which held sway in schools and universities in the United States until the late 1880s. Spoken

discourse still holds a controlling influence in many prestigious UK universities today.

Interestingly, context and purpose matter, and writing may benefit the writer by representing one's thinking on the page.

Reflection-on-action (Schön, 1987) involves context because it is a process that enables the practitioner to make explicit what otherwise might not be stated. That is, it provides an impetus to analyze the contextual circumstances and to respond and change one's approach to a situation with context in mind. (To reiterate, my research study will address the analysis of context more specifically from a situated cognition perspective). In any case, reflection-on-action is not necessarily a "natural" process; "it needs to be aided and scaffolded through different means that create a distance from one's own actions" (Abchi, 2015, p. 14). This suggests that this distance is important and that teachers often need help in achieving this distance.

As part of the graduate coursework in this study, I (as the teacher educator), took the importance of distance seriously and required in-service literacy teachers/graduate level students to write reflections about their own experiences in their school contexts that related to the literacy topics that we studied each week as a part of our graduate coursework. For example, in one graduate course session, the students learned about different approaches to academic literacy intervention (i.e., support for students to gain grade level literacy proficiency in their academic achievement based on specific literacy assessments) while remaining mindful of the academic literacy intervention program in their school settings. As part of their written reflection in response to this reading, they described and critiqued their own schools' approaches to academic literacy intervention and some significant contextual circumstances in their school contexts before sharing some ideas about how their schools' literacy programs could be improved. More specific findings about this support will be discussed in Chapter Four; however, it is important to

note that I (as the teacher educator) provided an impetus for the in-service literacy teachers/graduate level students to examine their social contexts as part of a (hopefully more) reflective practice. In this sense, these in-service literacy teachers/graduate level students were assisted in taking a close look at their actions in light of new information presented in class and supported through course assignments that included interaction with their graduate course instructor and their graduate level classmates. A more specific description of the social context in the graduate coursework setting in this study will follow in Chapter Three.

Reiman as a Forerunner in Connecting Thought and Language in Teacher Reflection

One important figure in supporting the value of written reflection with adult learners was Reiman (1999), whose quantitative synthesis of seven quasi-experimental studies made him a pioneer in connecting thought and language to teacher reflection because he identified the important elements of Piaget's (1967, 1972) and Vygotsky's theories (1956, 1978) as they pertained to reflection and developed a cognitive-developmental framework to explain how adult learners could be guided to write more reflectively. Reiman argued that putting concepts into writing "centers attention, clarifies thinking, provides a means of symbolizing thought, and is an integral part of the process of concept formation" (Reiman, 1999, p. 599). In addition, Reiman argued that just as instruction can be differentiated for the needs of students, so reflection must be "encouraged, differentiated, and guided according to the learning and developmental needs of the adult learners" (Reiman, 1999, p. 604). Reiman (1999) referred to this differentiation of instruction based on the needs of his students as the *zone of proximal reflection* or the point at which adult learners would benefit from social interaction and guidance for enhancing their reflections. Reiman (1999) used the assigned task of written reflection with teacher guidance to support teacher reflection. He suggested that teacher educators should assess student reflective

writing and provide feedback and guidance for even more reflective writing on their part, and in keeping with the iterative nature of reflection-on-action. That is, “By carefully attending to the expressed ‘meaning making’ in the journal or portfolio, the teacher educator can more adequately guide the written reflections in ways that can encourage deeper reflection and development” (Reiman, 1999, p. 604).

Reiman (1999) provided insight to my development or selection of support of the written reflections that I assigned in the graduate coursework in my study. Reiman (1999) suggested written responses by students are more effective when they include several questions and directions that require the student to account for the learning of students in the creation of lessons—cautioning that the challenge for the instructor involved was figuring out when to explicitly encourage “growth of abstract intelligence, more flexible problem solving, greater social perspective taking, and greater principled reasoning” (Reiman, 1999, p. 610). He noted that this teacher-guided reflection in the student’s written dialogue helps the student to progress from what they know to developing new knowledge. In short, Reiman’s research strongly suggests written reflection can be initiated and supported as a vehicle for enhancing reflection and resonates with my earlier claims about the importance of social action/interaction because Reiman set out to guide student writing to enhance reflection. I seek to identify evidence concerning the ways in which the opportunities I provided within this course did engage (or not) a group of graduate-level in-service literacy teachers in reflective practice.

The act of writing can create an inclination in the writer that facilitates thought as reflection and, it can be argued, creates time and space within which teachers can organize their conscious evaluation and analysis of their teaching practice in a more organized fashion compared to that in which they might otherwise engage (Farrell 2004, 2015). The idea of writing

as a “tool for thinking” (Wells, 1999, p. 143) was also engaged with by Roskos, Vukelich, and Risko (2001), who noted how writing was characteristic of the literacy studies they reviewed in their synthesis of the research literature and was used as a means for eliciting and documenting teachers’ reflection and had rich potential to “further the development of conscious awareness and deliberative thinking” for these teachers (p. 611). The value of exploring the connectedness of thought, reflection-on-action, and written language is clear (Vygotsky, 1986; Reiman, 1999; Farrell 2004). Chapter Three elucidates how writing was used in the present study in a range of ways to support literacy teacher reflective practice within graduate-level coursework by providing students’ with carefully structured written assignments (e.g., online discussion board postings and draft literacy reform projects).

To sum up, writing and social supports such as the ones I put in place in the graduate coursework are crucial scaffolds that align with a situated cognition conception in which the interdependence of one’s mind with social contexts is central (Smith & Collins, 2010). The connectedness of thought, reflection-on-action, and written language (Vygotsky, 1986; Reiman, 1999; Farrell 2004) adds value to the support of teacher reflective practice through writing. The following section of this chapter examines methods and approaches of relevant research that are concerned with how to further best support my own approach to studying reflective practice.

Extant Research on Reflective Practice in Literacy Teacher Education

Examining contemporary studies on reflective practice in literacy teacher education informed my own approach to setting up supports for and studying literacy teacher reflective practice within the context of a graduate course. The compilation of extant research that follows in this section begins with an explanation of a review of preservice literacy teacher reflection (Roskos et al., 2001) followed by a discussion of key findings from my own review of extant

research that builds on where Roskos et al. (2001) left off. At this point it is worth noting that my research project seeks to study *in-service* literacy teachers. To date, studies of teacher reflection seem to lack a focus on in-service teacher development (cf. discussions in Kayapinar, 2016; Pankiewicz, 2016). As such, extant studies of in-service literacy teachers will also be integrated into this review of research before I discuss the focus of my own study.

Reflection in Reading Teacher Education (1985-1999)

An analytic review of academic research concerning teacher reflection involving pre-service teachers was conducted eighteen years ago by Roskos et al. (2001). They generated a comparative analysis of 54 studies of teacher reflection (18 studies in literacy teaching; 36 studied in general teacher education) with the goal of clarifying the concept of *reflection* as studied in the literacy field from 1985 to 1999. In their review, Roskos et al. (2001) noted how much is said in the academic literature about reflection as an *ideal*, they but found a lack of well-organized information on reflection development and research-based strategies to guide instruction in teacher reflection. They worked analytically to answer the question: “What are the broader patterns that pull two sets of descriptive observations (on literacy teacher education and general teacher education) together to induce a more conceptual overview of reflection as a topic of study?” (2001, p. 603). Roskos et al. (2001) used the results of their analysis to offer five suggestions intended to light the way for more targeted study and encouragement in teacher reflection within literacy professional education. These suggestions include: (a) proven strategies for improving preservice teachers’ reflective abilities in different teaching-learning environments need to be identified and used (e.g., they recommend *dialogic relations* between peers and between developing teachers and their instructors as a recommended reflective strategy); (b) what constitutes reflection *seems to vary greatly* across studies and all or any kind of reflection is

not necessarily helpful; (c) more rigorous observation methods are needed in research designs in order to develop better educational interventions to improve teacher educators' practice (e.g., an examination of the research setting could provide important information about specific contextual factors that may cultivate different and enhanced reflective characteristics); (d) a scattered approach to the examination of the foundational ideas of teacher reflection calls for a documented history of reflection research so that studies can build on past gains for new research efforts and integrate teacher reflection as a significant feature of effective literacy instruction. The study findings of Roskos et al. (2001) were essential to identifying the needs for more targeted research in my study and supported my own examination of the role of the reflective supports I explicitly put in place in the graduate coursework in order to explore the usefulness of these supports to this group of literacy teachers.

Literacy Teacher Reflection (2001-2016) and a Focus on Writing

The suggestions made by Roskos et al. (2001) signal the need to improve the quality of reflection research in the field of literacy teacher education and literacy teacher reflection instruction. This section sets out to review extant literature on literacy teacher reflection that built in part on where Roskos et al. (2001) left off. I analyzed broad patterns in more recent research and compared this body of work with this older review of teacher reflection research (Pankiewicz, 2016). As part of my analytic review and in line with Roskos et al.'s guidelines, I identified and analyzed how *reflection* was defined in research studies of reflective teacher practice with particular reference to contextual circumstances involved in reflective practice, paying close attention to any references to written reflections. Contextual circumstances, in this case, were defined as I have done so earlier in this chapter.

As such, I set out to focus on articles that reported investigations of preservice literacy teacher learning through various approaches to reflective practices (i.e., Bean & Stevens, 2002; Howard, 2003; Lin & Kinzer, 2003; Wade & Fauske, 2004; Perry, Phillips, & Hutchinson, 2006; Shoffner, 2009a; Shoffner, 2009b; Waring, 2013; Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, & West, 2015). All of these studies identified a need for more effective preservice teacher reflection opportunities within teacher education coursework. All of these studies also described the methodology used to create empirical data about the use of preservice teacher reflection within the field of literacy or language as part of a teacher education program. In my analysis of these articles, I identified several patterns generated from identifying a number of patterns across the nine studies. For example, one pattern involved different approaches to writing that were used to support preservice literacy teachers' learning through reflection. This included using technology-based platforms as part of the reflective process (e.g., autobiographic reflective stories (Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, & West, 2014); computer mediated discussion (Wade & Fauske, 2004); scaffolded online conversations (Bean & Stevens, 2002); choice of technology for journaling (Shoffner, 2009a); personal reflection weblogs (Shoffner, 2009b); and reflective hardcopy journals and creation of complex tasks for self-regulated learning (Perry, Phillips, & Hutchinson, 2006). As part of my analysis of this pattern, I noticed the significance of narrative writing and computer-based platforms as part of the teacher reflection process.

Research on Narrative Writing in Literacy Teacher Reflection

While I expected to find research on preservice teachers' written reflections, I was surprised to find a nuanced approach to what I came to call "self-reflection writing." This included personal narrative writing such as autobiographical texts about personal experiences in relation to different school contexts and settings (e.g., a teacher identifying favorite books from

childhood as part of a discussion on the types of books to provide to students as a teacher in her own classroom).

Preservice teachers' literacy autobiographies were used by Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, and West (2014) in their study of *autobiographical reflection*. A literacy autobiography was defined by these researchers as a "reflective and interpretive account of one's development as a literate being" (p. 343). This autobiographical writing required preservice teachers to think about how their memories of and personal experiences with reading and writing shaped them as literate persons and teachers of literacy up to their current life circumstance. For example, one participant shared experience from her childhood as well as experiences as a mother and preservice teacher. Study participants also discussed and examined problematic and difficult situations in these autobiographies with their classmates as a way to learn about the experiences of others. Bokhorst-Heng et al. (2014) were interested in having preservice teachers reflect formally on their learning within a literacy-focused course, and, more specifically, on their own literacy development by means of their autobiographical reflective stories. They identified a key characteristic of *autobiographical reflection* as the interaction between key dimensional contexts within literacy practices (i.e., temporal matters, personal and social relationships, specific settings) that bring literacy events and literacy practices together. In this way, they argued that reflecting on past learning experiences opened up opportunities for "transformative learning" (Bokhorst-Heng et al., 2014) for these preservice teachers by means of sharing and discussing problematic and difficult situations found within their teaching contexts. From my perspective, however, there seemed to be a missed opportunity in this study to promote more social interaction toward guided reflection. The participants did not take part in any additional reflective writing in response to any feedback from others such as the guided

reflection protocol used by Reiman (1999), and more transformative learning would be possible with more social interaction in a community or social group (Smith & Collins, 2010).

Nevertheless, Bokhorst-Heng et al. (2014) showed an intention to implement the deliberate cognitive process shown in thoughtful reflection (cf. Dewey, 1933) and *reflection-on-action* (Schön, 1983) with substantial citations about the interpretive nature of autobiography. For example, Bokhorst-Heng et al. (2014) cite how narratives are not mere stories relating to a set of facts, but rather are “interpretive devices” (Lawler, 2002); moreover, Leggo’s (2008) “story” dynamic provided a structure to analyze the unique combination of features in each story or narrative’s ability to capture “temporal dimensions and address temporal matters” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Additional literature exists that supports teachers using the power of written reflection in the form of narrative writing for the benefit of professional learning (Atwell, 1998; Lieberman & Wood, 2001; National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006; & Aharonian, 2008, 2016). These studies as well as additional studies discussed later in this chapter provide weight to my justification to include a narrative element to written reflection assignments in the support of reflective practice in the graduate coursework in my study. The significance of computer-based writing in extant research on literacy teacher reflection follows.

Research on Writing Mediums in Literacy Teacher Reflection

Another key pattern was the way in which many of these studies included various digital publication affordances (e.g., online discussion lists and weblogs); this more innovative and computer-based written reflection supports the use of the online discussion board in my own study.

Nine studies in my corpus examined regarding the mode of computer-based writing in relation to reflective practices. Five studies examined how technology-based platforms played a role in reflective thinking and learning for preservice teachers (Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, & West (2014); Wade and Fauske (2004); Bean and Stevens (2002); Shoffner (2009a); Shoffner (2009b)). Bean and Stevens (2002), for example, explained that “scaffolding [in an asynchronous dialogue on an Internet bulletin board] helps to focus students’ reflections and provides explicit support in modeling the role of reflection” (Bean & Stevens, 2002, p. 216) in their study of scaffolded online conversations among preservice undergraduate teachers and graduate in-service students. Participating preservice teachers wrote weekly reflections in response to instructor-driven prompts on the literacy themes that had been studied through the week and also reflected the course’s theme of examining issues of equity and power in schools and instruction. Other prompts provided by the course instructors referred to the professional text studied in class, the students’ preservice teaching experiences, and peer feedback with the expectation for in-depth discourse on literacy instruction. In their study, Bean and Stevens (2002) credited the asynchronous dialogue in the preservice teachers’ online reflections and the course instructor’s scaffolding (e.g., general discussions about literacy instruction on the online bulletin board and more specific discussions on specific online entries) as important. That is, these various elements helped participating preservice and in-service literacy teachers to undertake a task or goal that was beyond the present level of the learner’s capacity, discern critical features of a task through direct instruction and modeling, and alleviate potential frustration during the reflective process. For example, the course instructors began by writing some thoughts in an initial online post to act as a model for students and later drew preservice teachers’ attention to exemplary student posts. These exemplars were described by Bean and Stevens (2002) as “thoughtful” in that they

synthesized various viewpoints in relation to the preservice teachers' own thought-through positions. Even though the study reported on the preservice teachers' online discussion of the research setting as a contextual factor to encourage reflective thinking, the findings suggested that none of the preservice teachers internalized these settings in exploring implications of what they were learning in their university classes with very few statements about institutional and/or societal contexts. Interestingly, the in-service teachers' written reflections, which were part of specific educational institutions as teachers in a school and members of a school district, lacked references to their institutions—suggesting a need to be more explicit in prompting these in-service teachers to address institutional levels of discourse in my own study.

More detailed exploration of technology-based platforms for reflective writing was apparent in some studies, too. For example, Shoffner (2009a) researched preservice English teachers' choice of a specific technology medium and its seeming influence on their reflections. She explained that reflection “supports teachers' ability to analyze issues of teaching and learning from differing perspectives, as well as their efforts to make changes to practice and belief” (Shoffner, 2009a, p. 371). Shoffner (2009a) suggested that preservice English teachers may benefit from interacting with a more diverse audience beyond the course instructor such as the more communal interaction in the public communities involved in weblogs and websites. In either case, she concluded that preservice English teachers should be challenged but supported in using less familiar technology to develop technological pedagogical content knowledge as a part of their meaningful reflective practice. In turn, Shoffner (2009a) encouraged English teacher educators to explore the pros and cons of different digital media in relation to reflective practice and encouraged more social interaction between the writer and other members of the class.

Drawing from her second qualitative study in which weblogs were used for voluntary preservice teacher reflective practice in a second article, Shoffner (2009b) examined preservice teachers' attitudes toward a specific asynchronous communication technology and the influence of those attitudes on the use of that technology for voluntary reflection. Voluntary reflection is described as "reflection that is undertaken by choice, outside course or programmatic requirements, with all aspects of the reflective activity (such as topic, quantity, formality and medium) determined by the preservice teacher" (Shoffner, 2009b, p. 144). Shoffner (2009b) provided an overview of the specific advantages to asynchronous communication: independence of time and location; participation beyond classroom walls; and flexibility in involvement and structure. Whereas Shoffner (2009b) anticipated that preservice teachers would have a negative attitude toward digital technology, she found that technology was a preference for reflection when it could fit into the preservice teachers' daily lives and their connections with others. She affirmed the work of Ward and McCotter (2004), which found that teacher educators should work with preservice teachers "to reflect on their [the preservice teachers'] practice in meaningful ways, to consider the effect their teaching has on student learning, and develop habits that will stay with them" (Ward & McCotter, 2004, p. 244) as they emerge from their initial, formal teacher preparation and move into their own classrooms (Shoffner, 2009b, p. 146). Similar to Shoffner's first study (2009a), the impetus addressed in this second research study was again about the preservice teachers' previously formed and emerging attitudes toward technologies as they connected to the preservice teachers' classroom experiences. Shoffner (2009b) found that the preservice teachers considered weblogs to be a positive medium, in general, and supported their use for reflective practice.

Lai and Calandra (2009) examined the effects of computer-based scaffolds on novice teachers' reflective writing in preservice teachers in technology integration courses. While the computer-based platform was described as an online journal interface called PASS-PORT, a tool to gather, demonstrate, and evaluate performance data from preservice teachers, the scaffolds were identified as the reflective writing question prompts and a flowchart depicting a model process for reflective journaling. The study participants found that the structure of the question prompts allowed them to notice significant aspects of their teaching experiences that they may otherwise have not recognized; they also appreciated having the writing process broken down and displayed as three easy-to-follow steps. As such, I incorporated strategic prompting and support within the graduate coursework such as teacher and student-driven written reflection prompts that asked students to take their own school contexts into account as well as a written reflection rubric to clarify expectations for a comprehensive written reflection response.

In contrast to the previous studies in reflective writing, Waring (2013) described an in-depth investigation of course instructors described as mentors in relation to how reflective practices were managed in post-observation conferences in a graduate TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) program. In describing the background to his study, Waring (2013) reviewed suggestions for using reflection in post-observation conferences, including: the teacher supervisor talking less and being less directive (Copland, Ma, & Mann, 2009); withholding value judgments or unsolicited feedback (Brandt, 2008; Zepeda, 2007), and making open-ended statements about some aspects of teaching (Zepeda, 2007). Waring concluded that the mentor's assessment or advice can function as a trigger for teacher reflections. In particular, Waring recommended "a more realistic appreciation for practices such as advice and assessment in mentor talk" because the mentor's advice, like assessment, created an opportunity to share

their own perspectives that are conducive to reflection (Waring, 2013, p. 114). This study used the dialogic means and the varied learning setting that Roskos et al. (2001) recommended. And, similar to the intent of my study, it added the innovative suggestion for teacher education programs to elicit greater reflection by means of well-informed feedback and advice from mentors, where mentors give teachers a supportive space to explain problems and devise solutions rather than accomplishing these tasks on their own. In a sense, in my study, I served as such a mentor as the teacher educator and as a practicing literacy department supervisor.

In summary, this review of extant literature shined a light on four supports for preservice literacy teacher reflection (e.g., narrative writing (Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, & West, 2004); explicit prompting (Lai & Calandra, 2009); technology-based asynchronous communication (Bean & Stevens, 2002; Shoffner, 2009a, 2009b); and guided reflection (Waring, 2013)) that informed and helped to justify the supports for literacy teacher reflective practice I used in this study and that are explained in more detail in Chapter Three.

Based on the idea that it is clear that more research is needed concerning reflective assignments in university coursework as well as a need to better understand how educators assess and scaffold reflection (Arrastia, Rawls, Brinkerhoff, & Roehrig, 2014; Pankiewicz, 2016), in what follows I engage with research concerned with supporting literacy teacher reflective practice with a focus on university coursework.

Structuring University-Level Coursework to Support Literacy Teacher Reflective Practice

A number of recent studies have designed a range of coursework assessment tasks that were foregrounded in “structured curriculum tasks” (Hatton & Smith, 1995) to foster reflective practice. For example, Brookfield’s conceptions of critical approaches (i.e., autobiography, theoretical literature, colleagues’ experiences, and the lenses of students’ eyes) were embedded

as reflective scaffolds in assessment tasks in preservice teachers' pedagogy units by Cornish and Jenkins (2012). They embedded these different types of opportunities for critical reflection in practice to help the student teachers in their "journey towards more expert reflections" (Cornish & Jenkins, 2012, p, 167). In addition, a formative experiment conducted by Gelfuso and Dennis (2014), as co-teachers and researchers, investigated the challenges of developing support structures for preservice teacher reflection using video and interaction with knowledgeable others (the literacy content coaches in the study). Their work pointed to the challenges present in providing support during the reflective practice and how little is understood about the specific moves a knowledgeable other could make to co-create warrants about teaching and learning with preservice teachers. Interestingly, they noted that the knowledgeable other needs to have "deep and facile knowledge of content and reflective phases and practices as well as praxis with Deweyian notions of analysis/synthesis and balance" (Gelfuso & Dennis, 2014, p. 9). In the end, they also concluded that study into facilitating the process of reflection was needed.

Preservice elementary educators enrolled in an early field experience course were scaffolded with Future-Oriented Reflection (F-OR), a form of prospective reflection that allowed expression of preservice teachers' intentions, beliefs, and values by Arrastia, Rawls, Brinkerhoff, and Roehrig (2014). They reported that preservice teachers can reflect without guidance or scaffolding, but that the structure of assignments could support deeper reflection (echoing research previously shared by Bean & Stevens, 2002). The guidance and scaffolding they provided included support of general writing skills, identifying problems both in theory and practice, questioning fundamental assumptions, and relating reflective tasks to self or practice. Advice for teacher educators included guidance in providing instruction in reflective thinking, or self-talk, to build problem recognition and problem solving skills.

Rodman (2010), too, scaffolded reflective practice through the construction of the reflective prompts. In this case, preservice teachers responded to a structured reflection questionnaire after different field-based experiences in public school classrooms throughout their teacher preparation field experience. The prompts/questions were cited as useful in encouraging growth and professional development; they included: Name three things you learned at your school; discuss how your university partner helped you; and what did you learn from your field based assignments? By prompting students to write about critical incidents, or dilemmas, Yost, Sentner, and Forlenza-Bailey (2000) shared some important research that demonstrated that carefully guided mentoring of the writing process can enhance reflection. Citing evidence that when preservice teachers are engaged in journal writing over time they develop a habit of reflection (Yost, 1997; Yost, Forlenza-Bailey, & Shaw, 1999), they concluded, “Supervised writing exercises in the context of practicum experiences may enhance preservice teachers’ ability to reflect on higher levels. Teacher educators must understand the rationale and possess a knowledge base for reflection to assist students in the development of higher levels of thought” (Yost et al., 2000). These “supervised writing tasks” informed the written reflections and draft proposal that I implemented as supports of in-service teacher reflective practice and describe in Chapter Three.

In summary, this extant literature highlights the following aspects of coursework in supporting teacher reflective practice: “structured curriculum tasks” (Cornish & Jenkins, 2012; Arrastia, Rawls, Brinkerhoff, & Roehrig, 2014); “knowledgeable others” (Gelfuso & Dennis, 2014); and reflective prompts (Yost, Senter, Forlenza-Bailey, 2000; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Rodman, 2010). This robust body of work collectively justifies the supports for literacy teacher reflective practice that I used in this study (discussed in Chapter Three) such as the various

course assignments that were supported by me as the teacher educator with a heavy focus on reflective prompting.

That being said, these ideas for supports were drawn from studies focused largely on pre-service teachers. In the following section, I share two examples of studies that facilitated the process of *in-service* teacher reflective practice to inform my own study on the usefulness of the supports for in-service literacy teacher reflective practice that I put in place in graduate coursework. I singled out these two studies because they too set out to support in-service teacher reflective practice with an analysis of an in-service school context and social interaction in graduate coursework.

Research on Supporting In-service Teacher Reflective Practice

As mentioned earlier, the bulk of research to date on teacher reflective practice involves preservice teachers. The participants in my research study are in-service literacy teachers. Two studies on in-service teacher reflection were of particular use in providing models for supporting in-service teacher reflective practice with an analysis of an in-service school context and social interaction in graduate coursework.

The first study involved graduate students enrolled in a multicultural education course in fulfillment of their master's degree in education, the researchers used a metacognitive approach with case-based instruction to enhance teacher reflection and promote effective educational practices for diverse learners (Whittaker & van Garderen, 2009). In this case, the metacognitive strategy was defined as the case decision-making scaffolded in the context of recommended case-based practices to determine what aspects of reflective practice are revealed by students' written responses. The assumption was that by grappling with multidimensional situated cases, students would acquire knowledge in action (Schön, 1987, 1991) in an apprenticeship provided

by the context of a case analysis. The participants were able to identify multiple major problems and consider the values of several important stakeholders by looking at the case in a comprehensive manner. Once more, the goals they established went beyond the classroom level to address issues in the school and community (Whittaker & van Garderen, 2009). This study, similar to my own study's intent, sought to use university coursework, with an emphasis on written reflection, to develop more reflective practitioners.

Kayapinar (2016) also studied the in-service teachers using their Reflective Practitioner Development Model. This model of reflective teaching and reflective practitioner development was presented as a professional development program for teachers that included professional development workshops, reflective classroom observations, feedback, focus group discussions, co-planning, and peer observations. Kayapinar (2016) concluded that measuring teachers' reflection using the Teacher Reflection Scale developed by Kayapinar and Erkus (2009), created a built-in procedure of a new design and model of reflective teaching and reflective practitioner development program for teachers prompted teachers' reflective development.

Both of these studies on in-service teachers' reflective practice highlight the opportunity to be had in studying the comprehensive nature of coursework in relation to an in-service teacher's in-service school setting. This supports the detailed description of the context of the graduate coursework in this study (provided Chapter Three). After all, the collective descriptions of what comprises *context* (i.e., who constitutes the context; the relationship between the individual and the context; and how the individual makes changes within the context) is "often a cursory acknowledgement of the individual's place within the broader institutional or societal framework" (Choo, 2009, p. 36). By and large, foundational theorists (e.g., Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996) have addressed context in a very general manner, with less

attention given to the social contexts within which reflective practice is taking place. In this respect, I assert that a study of reflective practice *must* provide an impetus to analyze the contextual circumstances extensively and to respond and change one's approach to a situation with context in mind.

The Focus of My Own Study

My intention in the graduate coursework in my study was for the literacy teachers in my university classroom to filter all of the course's readings and discussions through interactions with me and other students within the class with additional opportunities to examine their own school contexts. This included engaging in sustained, prompted, and guided reflection that was supported through tasks that were assigned by me as the instructor.

As such, the research question driving the present study is:

What supports do in-service literacy teachers (as well as the in-service literacy teacher educator) appear to find useful reflection-wise in a Masters reading course that focuses on building literacy teacher reflective practice?

In turn, I designed a series of experiences and learning opportunities to support the reflective practices of in-service literacy teachers and then evaluated the apparent effectiveness (or otherwise) of these supports in terms of these in-service literacy teachers' reflective practice. Reflective practice, in this sense and as discussed earlier, refers to an interest or investment in transforming a situation of practice from what it is, to something better (Schön, 1983, p. 147; Schön, 1987, p. 39). I suggest that the orientation towards "change for the better" is enhanced through a situated cognition perspective (Smith & Semin, 2004; Semin & Smith, 2013), which is theoretically consonant with Reconstructivism and adds an important focus on context (e.g., both draw on Vygotsky's work but the former includes more sustained focus on complex contextual

factors than that afforded by Reconstructivism). Drawing on a situated cognition conceptualization (Smith & Semin, 2004; Semin & Smith, 2013) helps the researcher to examine contexts as *social contexts* using an educational psychology lens, building on Reconstructivist theorizations of reflection and context developed by Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983). This usefully deepens the discussion of teacher reflective practice by moving from general areas of focus on a setting to a concentration on social context, or “the network of inter-relationships in the classroom” (Walker & Baepler, 2017, p. 35).

In summary, then, I define teacher reflection where one reflects to have a deeper appreciation and analysis of a contextualized experience and engages in vigilant and deliberate thinking with social action and in evaluation of a situation with the goal of revising and improving an approach, or content, or resources and so on in subsequent student learning situations (Schön, 1983, 1987; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Fat’hi & Behzadpour, 2011; Abchi, 2015). I take a situated cognition perspective that is concerned with cognition that occurs through social action when social contexts, or “the network of inter-relationships in the classroom” (Walker & Baepler, 2017, p. 35), influence our thoughts and actions (Smith & Semin, 2004) causing us to think or act differently.

I drew from my analysis of pertinent empirical research on supporting preservice and in-service literacy teachers in their reflective practice—based on the identification of the need for a more sustained investigation of how to support literacy educators in their complex work. To reiterate, my initial review shined a light on four supports for preservice literacy teacher reflection (e.g., narrative writing (Bokhorst-Heng, Flagg-Williams, & West, 2004); explicit prompting (Lai & Calandra, 2009); technology-based asynchronous communication (Bean & Stevens, 2002; Shoffner, 2009a, 2009b); and guided reflection (Waring, 2013)). Extant literature

highlighted the coursework in supporting teacher reflective practice: “structured curriculum tasks” (Cornish & Jenkins, 2012; Arrastia, Rawls, Brinkerhoff, & Roehrig, 2014); “knowledgeable others” (Gelfuso & Dennis, 2014); and reflective prompts (Yost, Senter, Forlenza-Bailey, 2000; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Rodman, 2010). Additionally, two studies on in-service teachers’ reflective practice (Whittaker & van Garderen, 2009; Kayapinar, 2016) highlight the opportunity in studying the comprehensive nature of coursework in relation to an in-service teacher’s in-service school setting. This supports the detailed description of the context of the graduate coursework in this study (provided Chapter Three), where I detail the contexts of my study and the supports of teacher reflective practice that I set out to investigate. Also in Chapter Three, I will explore the research design and methods for my own study that focus on supporting literacy teacher reflection, ultimately sharing a discussion of my findings in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three: Research Design

This small-scale qualitative study set out to find research-based answers to the question: What supports do in-service literacy teachers (as well as the in-service literacy teacher educator) appear to find useful reflection-wise from a Masters reading course that focuses on building literacy teacher reflective practice? In this, my own study of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice, I was interested in how the in-service literacy teachers who enrolled in my graduate reading course practiced teacher reflection within the coursework and by means of the explicit reflective supports built into the course. Additionally, I wanted to build these students' capacity to perform reflective practice because I felt that would help them in their role as literacy teachers. I was also committed, at the same time, to engage in self-reflection with respect to my own role, assumptions, and expectations as a teacher educator and teacher researcher of reflective practice. The latter is especially important because it afforded an opportunity to share the unique perspective of a teacher-researcher in this study as well as an opportunity to demonstrate my own teacher reflective practice.

Overview of Study Design

A qualitative research approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used for this study. Qualitative research made sense for the present study because I wanted to gather interpretive data to build a better understanding of the supports I put in place by attending to what participating teachers said and did in reflective practice and how this informed the inclusion of effective support for literacy teacher reflective practice in a university course. As such, my approach to qualitative research focused on a group of in-service literacy teachers' perspectives (expressed in their written products and in-person interviews). In other words, I put in place a number of supports (described later in this chapter) that I strongly believed to be effective for in-service

literacy teacher reflective practice based on how these supports were promoted in the academic literature as being effective. I looked for the extent to which these supports guided students to analyze context, share teacher reflections with other members of the class, and construct revised plans with contexts in mind. This qualitative study was conducted over 15 weeks--the duration of a graduate-level course within a literacy specialist program. Due to university requirements, I could not collect data from the graduate students enrolled in this course until after the course was over and grades were submitted. In order to address my research question, I collected data consisting of the following: nine students' online written course assignments (i.e., online discussion group postings, draft literacy reform projects, and final literacy reform projects), audio recordings of semi-structured individual interviews with seven students out of the original nine (post-course grading), an audio recording of a focus group interviews with five students out of the original nine (post-course grading), and a research journal.

Data collection transpired from January to March, 2017 (10 weeks total). This included four weeks of participant recruitment and collection of Canvas-archived documents, four weeks of semi-structured interviews, and two weeks of focus group interview/discussion. Data analysis took the form of basic coding, undertaken in a range of iterations in order to hone and refine emerging patterns that were then collated into themes (Saldaña, 2016). In what follows, I described the study participants, the data collection methods and tools (including my teacher-researcher role), and the data analysis that I used in more detail.

Recruitment of Participants

The participant population was comprised of students who took the university graduate reading course of study that I taught in the 2016 fall semester as part of an advanced degree master's program. During the final face-to-face class session of this graduate reading course, I

dismissed myself from the room and two third parties, two of my CITI-trained doctoral student peers, explained the study to the students and let them know what participation in the study would entail. Participation included permission to study their in-class work and all documents submitted to the Canvas course site. In addition, participation included one subsequent interview and one subsequent focus group discussion. The third parties also explained that consent forms—whether signed or not—were to be looked at by me after course grades were submitted. My colleagues distributed the consent forms and explained that participants would also receive a \$15 Starbucks gift card for participating. All the students were only informed about the study itself by a third party on the last day of class in an effort to enhance the credibility of my data. If the students knew prior to this that I was conducting a study of reflective practice, they might have performed differently. In the end, a pool of nine students (out of a total of 25 students) consented to participate in the study. These participants are described in more detail in the next section.

The Participants

Nine students provided signed consent and responded to follow-up emails to participate in the study. Two of these nine consenting students provided written course documents, but they were not available to meet for an interview or focus group discussion. Two of the remaining seven consenting students agreed to participate in an individual interview, but they did not consent to participate in a subsequent focus group interview. As a result, a pool of nine students consented and participated in this study in some form. Seven of these students participated in sharing their written course documents *and* an individual interview; five of these students participated to the fullest extent (i.e., written course documents, interview, *and* focus group discussion). I considered nine participants large enough to pick out key areas and themes in the data. Nine students is actually more than suggested by Creswell (2011), who in relation to

sample size explained that normally within qualitative research it is typical to study a few individuals or a few cases (Creswell, 2011). As such, I considered this a successful recruitment outcome—especially since I did not have any communication about the study with my students during the course. Table 2 below summarizes key characteristics of the nine graduate students who participated in this study:

Graduate Student (Pseudonym)	Literacy Instruction Level and Current Grade Taught	Years of Literacy Teaching	Project Focus
#1 Alice	High School Grade 9	6 years	Supplementing the literacy curriculum with more culturally responsive texts and teaching (e.g., books and teaching that align with student interests, cultures, and backgrounds)
#2 Alexa	Elementary School Grade K	4 years	Developing literacy practices for strategic teaching in reading comprehension through the development of teacher resources in guided reading (i.e., assisting students in small groups assigned by student reading levels in the reading process)
#3 Yolanda	Elementary School Grade 3	6 years	Developing more connected classroom activities between the existing word study program (i.e., programs that focus on literacy foundational skills such as phonics and spelling) and reading and writing units of study
#4 Rhea	Elementary School Grade 3	5 years	Creating a teacher book club to support professional learning in conducting writing conferences with students as part of a writing workshop model
#5 Rose	Elementary School Grade 5	17 years	Providing teacher professional development to develop writing curriculum in grades 3-5 that includes common language about the writing process, articulation of writing skills and types, and multi-grade collaboration
#6- Edna	Middle School Grades 6, 7, and 8	5 years	Developing teacher resources in teaching reading and vocabulary strategies in

			content areas across the curriculum such as social studies and science.
#7 Nell	Middle School Grades 7 and 8	5 years	Facilitating teacher book clubs in reviewing and discussing more engaging and diverse young adult books for students.
#8 Nancy and #9 Agnes	I did not interview these students, but their course documents indicate that they were both tenured middle school (Grade 6) literacy teachers who worked in the same school context.		These teachers partnered on the following assignment: Creating a streamlined technology-based platform for literacy teachers to manage and use district-driven technology literacy resources in a Google Classroom (i.e., a free web service developed by Google for schools that aims to simplify the communication of resources and assignments in a paperless way).

As a reminder, all students were white or Latina, all were female, and all taught literacy at some level in a school in northern New Jersey. This set of demographic features is consonant with the overall demographic of students enrolled in this program (personal conversation, Graduate Program Director, 10/18/19).

It is important to note that communication with these students was challenging. Many students were busy with their next graduate course as well as their in-service teaching responsibilities. Along those lines, many students were only willing to meet for in-person interviews on campus and at a time before one of their current graduate courses, and I made sure to accommodate every student request in scheduling interview dates and times. This predicament in accruing voluntary study participants was a challenge, especially since these participants had no obligation to meet with me as part of their already very busy schedule. Studying one's own coursework teaching and students is often described in terms of "convenience"—and yet in this case it was somewhat difficult to schedule the interviews and focus group interviews that were an important component to this qualitative study. As a reminder, these students were both

graduate students and in-service teachers, who participated in the graduate coursework in both the course setting and their school setting (explained in the next section).

The Participants' Course Setting

To reiterate, the research study took place as part of a graduate course required for students to obtain their Masters in Reading and Reading Specialist Certification. The principal assignment for/in this course was a literacy reform project (i.e., analyze and evaluate the literacy programs(s) in their respective schools in order to identify instructional areas in need of addressing and to produce written documentation of a plan to improve the quality of the literacy instruction in their school, along with a report on the results of their implementation of their plan). A “literacy program” in this sense is a school district’s plan of action in literacy curriculum and instruction that supports school student literacy learning. It is whole-school in nature and outlines instructional strategies, elements to be covered and central resources to be used for each grade level. Some examples of instructional areas in need of addressing within a school’s literacy program include the development of culturally responsive classroom libraries, helping teachers facilitate reading conferences with individual students, and the revision of standards-based writing units that include in-common benchmarked writing assessments, to name just a few. The ostensive purpose of this literacy reform project was set in place as a university department-driven requirement for the course (in response to advanced graduate study standards and professional association standards for reading specialists) and was not designed by me. Historically speaking, a university department-driven rubric was revised in the spring of 2015 in alignment with the 2010 International Literacy Association’s Standards for Reading Professionals which impacted the “shape” and focus of this literacy reform project (see Appendix B for the comprehensive rubric). For example, this included an expectation that reform

plans would include “technology-based practices” in the use of “a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, and methods.” The candidate would “exceed performance expectations” by the following:

Candidate designs a sophisticated reform plan that supports teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of a wide range of materials. Material recommendations and budget are appropriate and align closely with needs assessment and evidence. The candidate skillfully incorporates modeling these practices in his/her own teaching and professional development plan. In coordination with school administration, candidate implements aspects of the plan associated with the use of these materials.

Despite the role of this assignment in collecting data regarding the extent to which assigned performance standards were being met, I was still able to have some autonomy in my instructional planning and took it as an opportunity in Fall, 2016, to really try some of my hunches about what it means to support effective reflective practice for literacy teachers. At the time, it was not my original intention to have this graduate coursework become my dissertation study in in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. During the unfolding of the course with my new emphasis on teacher reflection, however, it became clear that more research was needed on in-service literacy teacher reflective practice—especially since this kind of study held the potential for me to examine my own role, assumptions, and expectations as a teacher educator and teacher researcher with respect to encouraging and supporting in-service literacy teacher reflective practice.

This graduate level course is one of the first several courses that graduate students take as part of a 33-credit Masters in reading program of study. Anecdotally and generally speaking (during the three years in which I taught this course), the class of 25 students comprised

predominantly white female students who appeared motivated to complete the course work at a high level as evidenced by their timely and detailed completion of course assignments. I taught this same course for two semesters prior to data collection; and, as mentioned earlier, I brought 13 years of experience as a secondary literacy teacher and eight years as a practicing K-12 language arts supervisor, in which I supervised a district-wide literacy department—supporting over 100 teachers and literacy specialists in literacy curriculum and instruction in a suburban school district setting.

The Participants' School Settings

As noted in the previous section, as I began my initial research on preservice teacher reflection in my doctoral course work preceding the origin of my study, I began to notice course-driven supports that aligned with my research. In particular, it appeared that I was building these literacy teachers' capacity for reflective practice through additional formative assignments such as teacher and peer feedback on written reflections posted to online discussion boards. I noticed that with each assignment, students seemed to respond well to what are best described as “supports” with respect to their analysis of contexts in their school settings alongside their study of published literacy research as beginning to develop reflective practice. This support took a number of forms—each of which is spelled out later in this chapter—but included such things as an online written discussion board and feedback protocols in class presentations. Ultimately, within the contexts of the of the course wherein I collected data for this study, the graduate student literacy teachers were prompted to engage in analyzing their school contexts as they designed their literacy reform project and engaged in collaborative practices sparked by their assigned readings, discussion prompts, peer presentations, and the like. Although the literacy reform project was the culminating project within the course, I set out to pay sufficient attention

to the process entailed in developing this final graduate course assignment—and which is where the reflection really took place. As a reminder, the contexts of the course and the participants' school settings and a justification of the supports that I put in place for reflective practice will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Data Collection Methods and Tools

This study used multiple sources of data: course documents, individual interviews, and focus group discussion. This section provides an explicit account of exactly which supports I put in place across the “life” of the course. I will describe each data source, noting how some of these data sources (i.e., online discussion board postings, draft literacy reform project proposals, literacy reform projects, and class presentations) served as reflective supports in the study, and then conclude by explaining how each data source served as a data collection tools to add clarity to my explication of my research design.

Online Discussion Board Postings (Reflective Support and Data Collection Tool)

Throughout the course, the students studied a core professional text, *The Administration and Supervision of Reading Programs* edited by Wepner, Strickland, and Quatroche (2014)—use of this book was set by fulltime faculty. This book featured chapters written by experienced literacy experts with authentic examples of the application of literacy theories and insights regarding current literacy mandates and policies. In preparation for face-to-face class sessions, students were expected to complete assigned readings from the text in preparation for the in-class lesson work. For example, in Week Five of the course, students read “Chapter 7: Selecting Materials for the Literacy Program” by Jill Castek and Dianne Lapp and “Chapter 11: Evaluation, Change, and Program Improvement” by James V. Hoffman and Misty Sailors to explore the goal of developing thoughtful and responsive literacy programs in the students' own

school contexts. In preparation for online class sessions, students also completed assigned readings from the text before writing online discussion board postings in reaction to a relevant written reflection prompt. The students completed a total of nine written reflections that were posted to an online discussion board hosted within the university's Canvas platform, the online learning management system that is used by the university (see Appendix C for these nine prompts). For eight out of the these nine written reflections, students were assigned the additional task of adding a reaction/response to at least one classmate's written reflection. These online discussion board class assignments were asynchronous (students could log on at different times); however, weekly due dates were assigned with respect to posting the written reflection and the reaction/response to a classmate. Students typically wrote a one-page written reflection before providing some feedback or response to at least one other classmate's written reflection on the online discussion board (see Appendix D for an example of a student written reflection in response to a written reflection prompt as well as one of the subsequent student responses).

I extracted the nine initial online written reflections for each of the nine participating students as well as each participating student's online response to eight of these written reflections from a classmate (for a total of 81 online discussion postings and 72 online response postings). I used the online discussion board postings as data because the online discussion board was one of the supports that I put in place. The online discussion board postings also seemed to capture the students' written reflection in the form of their analysis of context, sharing ideas with other members of the class, and, at times, their construction of revised plans of action based on their analysis of context.

Three of these written reflection prompts were created by me, the teacher educator; six of the written reflections were co-created by me *and* different in-service teachers as students in this

course. I felt that the student taking on the role of a teacher provided a different dynamic. As an example of the type of written reflection prompt that was created solely by me, in Week 11 of the course, students read “Chapter 15: Providing Classroom Leadership in New Literacies: Preparing Students for Their Future” by Donald J. Leu, Elena Forzani, and Clint Kennedy and responded to the following teacher-driven written reflection prompt:

As stated on page 210 of our text: "The world of new literacies requires school leaders and teachers with the understanding of what is taking place and a vision of what is now possible for our students. It is an exciting world for leaders who are interested in supporting change and development." How could you use this chapter to organize and conduct a one-hour workshop for teachers at your school? Your response should show a reference to the text, an exploration of a new literacy tool, and a plan to share it with teachers. Although it's not required, think about making it happen!

As an example of the type of written reflection prompt that was co-created by me *and* two students, in Week 11 of the course, students read “Chapter 13: Reaching Linguistically Diverse Students” by MaryEllen Vogt in the course textbook, and posted online written reflections in response to their choice of one of the following written reflection prompts co-created by myself *and* two students (a critique of my written reflective prompts will appear in my discussion of my findings in the next chapter):

Imagine your current school or district has formed a committee to analyze their current program for English Learners. You are on the committee with teachers, reading personnel, and administrators. Based on this chapter in the text, answer the following questions: What is your school or district already doing well to provide the best education for English Learners? What suggestions would you make to your colleagues to improve

your school or district? How would you plan to sustain your suggested changes over time?

Watch this video published by PearsonSIOPModel on Youtube [a hyperlink to the video was provided to this external site: <https://youtu.be/3BvIijRQMek>]. As you watch the video, use figure 13.2 on page 85 to evaluate which features of the SIOP Model the expert touches upon during her lesson example. Does she cover each feature? Which features are emphasized the most in this lesson? After the video, write a short reflection determining what aspects of the Stay and Stray lesson would be successful for English Learners in your setting. If possible, include a topic you could cover with your students using the Stay and Stay lesson.

The first written reflection in the course received no explicit support from me in terms of reflective practice beyond a generic prompt that I posted. As such, for me, this initial response text from each student served as a diagnostic writing assessment (i.e., it helped me to identify student learning needs). This initial post by each student also informed subsequent explicit face-to-face instruction based on the student learning needs observed in their posted texts. For example, since most of these first written reflections lacked a discussion of the individual's own school context, I prepared explicit instruction in the form of an in-class presentation that listed the characteristics of "teacher reflection": an evaluative process; mindful analysis of the context surrounding the teacher, the school, and the experience that is the target of the reflection; determines the catalysts and hindrances to productive and meaningful teaching experiences; and goes all the way to with a revised performance. The purpose of this presentation was to signal my expectation for analysis of each in-service teacher's own school context into future written

reflections about the text-based literacy topics (an expectation to act as a part of their reflective practice would come later in the course).

The purpose of the online written discussion prompts and my subsequent facilitation of the online written discussion board was first and foremost to support students' analysis of major tenets in literacy instruction in the course textbook as it related to the literacy in-service teachers and their individual school contexts since I consider an analysis of school context as the first component of reflective practice. My feedback on written reflections praised instances where students responded to all aspects of the prompt with a detailed analysis of the text, redirected students to address their own individual school contexts as needed, and made an attempt to provide additional insight and/or resources. For example, in a different Week 10 prompt when students were asked to explain and evaluate the literacy intervention program in their schools as it related to the Response to Intervention model, I praised students (e.g., "On a positive note, it was great to read about your worthwhile experience in co-teaching this year. In addition, I'm glad this chapter has informed your perspective further as you continue to advocate for your students as needed" and "You bring up a HUGE point. We can have the best programs around, but they mean nothing if we cannot navigate the schedule in a way that connects students to the intervention without too much disruption."); redirected students (e.g., "I'd like to read more about your Tier 3 support- as well as your assessment of whether it [the literacy intervention program at your school] is working" and "If ELA scores have improved, what other data are you using to show that the district is still struggling with literacy?"); and tried to provide insights (e.g., "As for your struggle with students reading high level, complex texts... have you tried partner reading? I've found that there is something about the dynamic of students working in partnerships that provides support, motivation, and engagement in special ways" and "I'm always

reminded that in order to close the literacy gap, our intervention programs have to incite gains that surpass the growth of the other students.”). Admittedly, these written reflections were only a beginning to building a more comprehensive teacher reflective practice that could eventually include acting on revised plans.

In summary, the social action of these online discussion board postings involved student-student interaction (e.g., students sharing their online written reflections), students acting as instructors to the other students in the course (e.g., select students contributed in generating reflective writing prompts and provided written feedback as chapter facilitators), and student interaction with their instructor (e.g., the instructor facilitated the online discussion board prompts and, at times, provided written feedback). My creation of online written discussion prompts as well as my facilitation of the shared written reflection supported in-service literacy teacher reflection. I anticipated that the technology-based platform would be instrumental in engaging the students in reflective writing (Wade & Fauske, 2004; Bean & Stevens, 2002; Shoffner, 2009b; Perry, Phillips, & Hutchinson, 2006) because it provided an asynchronous opportunity for students to share their thinking as writing—especially since the very act of writing should enhance the reflection (Wells, 1999; Yost et al., 2000; Farell, 2004, 2012, 2015).

Draft Literacy Reform Project Proposals (Reflective Support and Data Collection Tool)

These documents entailed one-page draft proposals from students about their intended topic for their literacy reform project (see a complete example of a draft proposal in Appendix E). Thus, nine draft proposals were collected—one per participant. I provided written feedback on all of these. More specifically, after reviewing the School-wide Literacy Reform Project in a P-12 Setting assignment (described in the following section), students submitted a one-page proposal to pitch their topic idea to me. This was an ungraded requirement that was created to

construct an opportunity for me to provide students with feedback during the planning phase of the assignment in addition to suggesting additional resources whenever possible. The intention was to give the in-service literacy teachers some feedback early on to make sure they were on target with their literacy reform projects.

The following is an example of written feedback I gave that steered the student in a direction that provided a literacy-based focus and led to a revised plan and action based on their analysis of their school context:

...This is a great topic. Just make sure that you are keeping literacy curriculum and instruction central to your project... In other words, make sure you are putting your literacy training to use, and you are not just providing technology training.

Also, start thinking about how you will share your reform project with others. For example, are you creating a model Google Classroom to be shared in some kind of PD or meeting presentation?

Thanks,

Gary (10/3/16)

While this teacher feedback may seem to do less with teacher reflection and more in terms of focusing decision making, I would argue that I reminded the graduate student/in-service literacy teacher to consider multiple contexts (e.g., technology training and literacy content). In turn, my teacher feedback, however subtle, had the potential to support in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. In this round of feedback, I set out to provide encouragement and differentiation to meet students within their *zone of proximal reflection* (Reiman, 1999). In other words, I assessed the students' proposal as it related to a context-based reform and a plan for revised action. The written feedback to the draft proposals also resembled guided mentoring of

the reflective writing process because it resembled a supervised writing task (Yost et al., 2000).

The following is an excerpt of my written feedback to draft proposal on 10/3/16:

...Terrific. As you look to integrate more texts throughout the curriculum that are in tune with the students' cultures and interests, please remember that you do not need to limit yourself to book-length texts. Short stories, articles, and poems are also great texts for student connections.

If teachers are interested, one idea would be to create a professional book club on the topic of culturally responsive teaching. You would need to research and select the text that is most appropriate for your professional learning needs...

In many cases, this feedback led to subsequent follow-up emails from me and professional conversations that strongly resembled the guided mentoring suggested by Waring (2013). That is, I was able to create opportunities to share my literacy knowledge and perspectives that I believed contributed to reflection. For example, I shared a graphic organizer (see Appendix F for this graphic organizer) that I created to support my own literacy reflective practice, and offered an example of how I used this text to support my own reflective practice. Students were encouraged to use (or not use) the graphic organizer template as they wished.

Literacy Reform Projects (Reflective Support and Data Tool)

This study's emphasis on writing within reflective practice meant that collecting the students' draft and final written literacy reform project reports was important because they captured key elements of the students' reflective practice. These documents were submitted in two parts: a Phase 1 Environmental Needs Assessment and a Phase 2a Literacy Reform Project Plan/2b Presentation to Stakeholders. The Phase 1 project submission was typically 10-12 pages in length, while the Phase 2 project was approximately 20 pages in length for each of the nine

participating students. Students received written feedback and a grade from me on Phase 1 of the project, but they only received a rubric score that equated to a grade from me on Phase 2 of the project (with no additional written feedback).

As previously explained, the literacy reform project was the primary graduate course assignment used to encourage teacher reflection in this course. As argued by Arrastia, Rawls, Brinkerhoff, and Roehrig (2014) the structure of an assignment can be used to support reflective practice. And, since I had taught this course before, I had a short history of noticing how this literacy reform project appeared to put students in a position to analyze their school context and create a plan for reform. This is a university-department driven assignment, but I argue that it can act as a useful vehicle for supporting in-service teachers' reflective practice. In my estimation, the very nature of the assignment (i.e., a needs-focused assessment that precedes a data-informed plan of practice and an authentic presentation of this plan to stakeholders or interested others) puts students in a good position to explore their own school contexts as part of developing informed decision-making and even what they see as needing to be reformed. In this sense, students were given an opportunity to explore theoretical ideas shared in our graduate coursework in their authentic school context. Course work is widely considered to be more authentic when it has a clinical component, and more clinical opportunities support teacher practice. University coursework is often criticized as "too theoretical" or too general. Teachers need theoretically grounded tools (e.g., knowledge of curriculum materials, assessment strategies, and techniques for flexible student groupings) in conjunction with opportunities to practice these tools systematically (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Our course content and assignment work, combined with the in-service

teachers' school contexts, provided theoretical and contextualized support of the teachers' reflective practice.

Historically and as previously described in Chapter Three, a university department-driven rubric was revised in the spring of 2015 in alignment with the 2010 International Literacy Association's Standards for Reading Professionals which impacted the "shape" and focus of this literacy reform project (see Appendix B for the comprehensive rubric). This reform project entailed developing needs-based, school-wide literacy program in a P-12 setting. Students needed to plan their literacy reform project with the expectation to try to share their plan with stakeholders in their school contexts. In some cases, students were permitted to share their literacy reform projects in a mock presentation to the graduate students during class (in the event that this interaction could not be arranged in their school contexts). However, in the case of this study, all of the participants did, in fact, share their literacy reform project with stakeholders in their school contexts.

The graduate students' decision-making was to be based on data collected in their in-service school context (i.e., the student's data-based evaluation of their school site and the student's determination of the school site's needs as it pertained to the development of literacy initiatives) and site observations, in which students maintained a log of their classroom observations of other teachers. Examples of literacy reform efforts that have been designed and implemented in previous iterations of this course include: making books more accessible to students in schools that do not have school libraries; integrating more comprehension-focused literacy teaching strategies in school-based literacy programs (i.e., the school's systemic approach to literacy curriculum and instruction) with a heavy emphasis on phonemic awareness, word identification and phonics; and introducing assessment systems that are more coherently

aligned with the grade level literacy curriculum. Additionally, students were expected to conduct their own independent academic literature research as it related to their school-wide literacy reform projects in their school settings. For example, one student read sections from *Subjects Matter: Exceeding Standards through Powerful Content-Area Reading* by Daniels and Zemelman (2014) as part of this student's research on cross-content reading strategies and a literacy reform goal to provide more collaboration around reading strategies across content areas in her school. In short, students were expected to identify some aspect of the literacy program currently in place in their schools that they would like to improve. For the purposes of the assignment, students were not confined to their respective classrooms, but they had a larger view of the school's literacy program. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this assignment was written by fulltime faculty at the university and answered directly to ILA standards for literacy specialists and, at the time of my study, to NCATE standards for advanced graduate programs (see Appendix B for the NCATE standards within the assignment rubric). As such, student performance data was collected by means of this assignment and used subsequently in reporting to both of these evaluative bodies.

To reiterate, this assignment was separated into two parts (see Appendix G for the comprehensive assignment as listed in the course syllabus). In Phase 1 (10-12 pages), students completed an Environmental Needs Assessment of their P-12 school site. This phase entailed providing provide these in-service teachers with the tools required to evaluate a site, determine the site's needs as it pertained to the development of literacy programming. Students then used the information ascertained to design and implement a needs-based literacy initiative. If despite their best efforts the students were not able to implement their needs-based literacy initiative,

they were permitted to perform a mock presentation to our class (as if we were stakeholders within their school districts).

Students were given specific prompts to address in their report such as:

What is the philosophy of the current literacy program and is it clearly articulated?

What are the instructional grouping options (individual, small-group, whole-class, and computer based) and are they appropriate for accomplishing given purposes?

Additionally, students were expected to provide academic references that supported their analysis and findings.

In Phase 2, the in-service teachers developed a school-wide literacy program reform project based on needs identified in Phase 1 of the assignment. The report had to include program goals; the intended population served; the personnel involved; a clear interpretation of assessment data and demonstration of the appropriate use of assessments in future practice and teacher preparation; program implementation, emphasizing how the in-service teacher will support other classroom teachers in their instructional practices, approaches, methods and grouping options (including an evidence-based rationale that links back to needs based assessment data); attention to issues of cultural and linguistic diversity; materials used; detailed timetables; a summary of key professional development components; potential funding sources; detailed budget; plan for securing administrative support; anticipated difficulties in effecting the proposed change, and how these might be minimized; and details on how to evaluate the success of the proposed change to include summative and formative data collection. In addition, this project had to be presented to a number of key stakeholders—drawing on explicit connections between data and practice. Most Phase 2 papers were about 20 pages, incorporating five to seven sources.

In summary, the Phase 1 Project Needs Assessment was included as a data source because it serves as a district literacy program needs assessment. I provided feedback on each graduate student's Phase 1 Project Needs Assessment in an effort to support a comprehensive analysis of their school contexts, where the graduate students were describing all aspects of their district's literacy program in an attempt to locate an issue that could be improved. For example, I posted the following written feedback on 10/29/16:

...I was impressed with your comprehensive explanation of reading and writing workshop- as well as Words Their Way for Word Study.

I am curious about how the supplemental programs such as Newslea, Core Clicking, and Typing Club are integrated- during what units, what part of the literacy block, and how are teachers trained in each of these?

Also, what does professional development look like for all of the above as well as for other initiatives- and what are your current PD goals? For example, what does it look like when the head reading specialist conducts training- and how are the topics selected? Lastly, you need to address special education and ELL learners. How are these students supported distinctly?

In my notes [from the draft literacy reform project], I thought you were proposing a new reading comprehension assessment... Did you show that as a need?

Additional social action ensued when the graduate students shared their ideas about their plans for literacy reform in a presentation to the entire class as well as Phase 2 Literacy Reform Project final written reports submitted online. These Phase 2 Literacy Reform Projects demonstrated the students' revised plans based on their analysis of context. For example, students had to investigate available funding for their plans and create a budget or alternate form

of funding such as a grant. These summative assessments are clearly demonstrations of the students' in-service teacher reflective practice by the nature of the needs assessment and reform project assignment.

Semi-structured Interviews (Data Tool)

Qualitative research interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) shed light on the participants' points of view to help to make meaning of their experiences and contexts. One semi-structured interview, or mix of more and less structured questions, was conducted with seven of the nine study participants as follows: "This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). In this respect, the interviews were guided by my intention to gather data about what students took away with them from reflective practice-wise as a result of the support for literacy teacher reflective practice that was built into the course. The following are examples of my questioning:

- Reflective practice has so many definitions and "takes", so tell me, what does reflective practice mean to you?
- Can you recall a routine, activity, or resource from our class that you feel perhaps helped you become a more reflective practitioner? How and why did (whatever they said in the previous question) help you?

These interview questions generated important data regarding the in-service literacy teachers' perspectives on the support of their reflective practice. The interview responses provided data on what, if anything, seemed to work for each individual student. In some cases, patterns of students' ideas emerged such as three students who expressed how their colleagues in their school contexts were more likely to collaborate with them because their suggestion for

literacy reform was a graduate school project (I will shed more light on how this pattern is, in fact, relative to my research topics of literacy teacher reflective practice in the discussion of my findings.). In summary, the interviews proved as a useful data tool to collect information from teachers about their perspectives regarding teacher reflective practice.

An interview schedule and the comprehensive list of prepared questions are available in Appendix H. As a reminder, seven students were interviewed for approximately 20 minutes each. These interviews were all conducted on the university campus three months after the course was completed (midway through the next semester), and the audio recordings were transcribed by Rev.com, an online transcription service.

Focus Group Interviews (Data Tool)

I conducted two different focus group interviews with five participants: two students in one focus group and three students in the second focus group (see Table 3 in Appendix H). A focus group interview is an interview about a topic with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic (Krueger, 2002; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Kayapinar (2016) described the benefit of focus group interviews as follows:

Participation in focus groups can increase participants' reflection capacities and their sense of efficacy. Organized discussion, collectivity, and interaction, enable participants to ask questions, to obtain feedback, to re-evaluate, and to reconsider their own understandings and experiences. (Kayapinar, 2016, p. 1678)

I conducted the focus group interviews because I was curious to see how the group setting might contribute to the data. The group interaction in each interview did, in fact, produce "data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (Flick, 2009, p. 203 citing Morgan, 1988 p. 12). For example, when I asked one focus group (conducted on

4/19/17) about suggestions they might have for ways to better support teacher reflective practice in the course content and assignment work in future classes, I found a disagreement in two participants' responses. While both respondents agreed that it was important to get past complaining about their school contexts, Edna said, "I mean, I think it's easier to avoid commiserating when you're putting things in writing... Like it's, you know, no one wants to sit online and complain about the curriculum, or whatever is happening in their school." Then Rose responded, "I have to say though, I think I prefer the conversation in person, than I do, um, the digital, the online discussion..." This exchange shows that the focus group had the potential to prompt dissonance or different ideas among the participants in the group setting and to move beyond the response of an isolated interviewee (Flick, 2009). I collected significant data from the focus group interviews, and, as noted in the example below, the group format provided a nuanced tool to gain more data on teacher reflective practice.

As previously stated, five students consented to the focus group interview. I held two different focus group interviews with two students in one focus group and three students in the second focus group (see Appendix H for the focus group schedule and questions) in an effort to accommodate the busy schedules of the consenting participants. Similar to the semi-structured interviews, both focus group interviews took place on the university campus.

Class Presentation (Reflective Support Only)

The class presentations were not used as data in this study because I was actively facilitating a class tuning protocol for these presentations (to be explained later in this section) at the time of the students' in-class performance, and I do not have a detailed written account of what transpired during each class presentation. For this assignment, the in-service literacy teachers developed an "update" in the form of a presentation of their draft School-wide Literacy

Reform Project (Phase 2). This was an opportunity to share progress with the whole class, to get some feedback (e.g., praise and suggestions for improvement), and to build momentum toward the final project report due on the last day of class. There was an explicit expectation in the course syllabus description of the assignment to engage the members of the class in a thought provoking in this presentation (see Appendix G for this description of the class presentation assignment). Digital presentation media such as PowerPoint or Google Slides were encouraged to provide an efficient 20-minute presentation and so that I could subsequently collect presentation notes as well as any charts, visual displays, examples of children's work, or video clips as data for my study. To support these presentations, a "tuning protocol" (Blythe & Allen, 2015) was used. This protocol was designed to provide specific feedback on teacher-created tasks, projects, and assessments in order to improve them (see Appendix I for the protocol and some sample written teacher feedback to the class presentation). I used this protocol because it was made available in one of the textbooks for the course required by the university department. The end of the protocol is a clear support of literacy teacher reflective practice. For example, as part of the protocol, the presenter began by sharing the context for his/her work, supporting documents, and a focusing question for which she wanted feedback. Next, the class participants were encouraged to ask clarifying questions before offering "warm" (i.e., praise) and "cool" (i.e., constructive criticism) feedback. At the end, as the final component of the tuning protocol, the presenter was encouraged to share a spoken reflection about her classmates' feedback—evaluating the feedback and explaining which feedback was helpful, if any. In addition to using the research-based tuning protocol, this provided the opportunity to demonstrate their class facilitation skills (a method used by Mraz, Vintinner, & Vacca, 2014). The class presentation also provided support for the students' reflective actions since many students used the class

presentation as an opportunity to practice parts of their presentation to stakeholders in their own school context.

In retrospect, I think I could have planned better to include the class presentation as a data collection tool; however, students did have an opportunity to talk about the tuning protocol in the focus group interview when I asked a question about the reflective supports that they found helpful in the course (see Appendix H for a complete list of the focus group interview questions).

My Teacher-Researcher Role

My study relied on me serving both as a researcher and as a teacher educator for the course. This put me in an advantageous position to identify, evaluate, and analyze the support of literacy teacher reflective practice that I studied. At the same time, it also risked a disadvantageous position of investing too deeply in the usefulness of the reflective supports I put in place and reading the data solely through my own subjectivity. Nevertheless, as a teacher researcher I felt I was in a strong position to access and observe the class context and the reflective practices that I set out to support within the graduate coursework that I facilitated. I was obviously invested in in-service literacy teacher reflective practice, but I tried to unpack this investment without letting it shape what students did too much. I also tried to look at my data as objectively as anyone can and from multiple angles—letting the data speak to me rather than looking for findings that I expected from the start.

Unquestionably, my teacher-researcher role impacted the supports I put in place, the data I collected, and how I collected it. For example, my course was bound by the course objectives, a model course syllabus, a required professional text, and a literacy reform project rubric required by the university. As such, many of the major components of the course of study were

established by institutional frameworks before this study was started. Correspondingly, many of my supports were tied to assessment grades, too. Nonetheless, I had an ethical imperative to teach the course similarly to the way I taught it in the previous semester—without conscious variation for the sake of my research study because I did not want to lead students to any particular outcomes with respect to my research question. I did not collect or analyze any data until the course was over, grades were submitted, and study participants consented (as described later in the chapter in “Recruitment”).

It is also important to note that my data collection was not a neutral endeavor. I had already taught this course in a previous semester, and so I had my own hunches about how to best support teacher reflective practice within the boundaries/context of this course and a strong personal investment in literacy reflective practices. This inevitably shaped the course itself. For example, the model course syllabus provided by the university called for online student discussions of literacy topics addressed in the course textbook. When I designed my approach to the course, I created an expectation for these online discussions to be heavily skewed towards being written reflections and which I initially facilitated by means of formal prompts and provided students with explicit expectations regarding the online written reflections and feedback that supported reflective practice. In some cases, I provided individual feedback to the graduate students’ initial online written reflection posting, and in some instances the graduate students’ facilitated the online discussion and provided feedback to other students based on a course structure that I created. In a very real sense, my own fingerprints were all over the supports for literacy teacher reflective practice within the course. That being said, I can also argue that any teaching can bring with it heightened awareness of something that is under scrutiny and a project of change and that this alone is not necessarily a bad thing. What matters is

the sense that is made of it afterwards, and my teacher-research role well-positioned me to engage in the descriptive nature of qualitative research that requires “rich” data (Maxwell, 2010) of the context, the participants involved, and relevant activities.

In this study, I set out to collect interviews with the student participants (i.e., converted to verbatim transcripts) and a semester of student-written course documents in addition to be richly descriptive with analytic memos and research journal entries. Using multiple sources of data with the intent to compare and cross check different data at different times, in different places, and from people with different perspectives, promoted triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the process of, or a variety of data sources, to double-checking the associations I made and my interpretive biases (Maxwell, 2010). For example, I analyzed different sources that took place at different times and used different modes: a draft literacy reform proposal (Week Three of the course), a literacy reform project phase 1 report (Week 7 of the course), a literacy reform project phase 2 report (Week 14 of the course), nine online discussion board postings and responses (different occasions throughout the course); individual interviews (post-course); and focus group interviews (post-course). Another strategy for ensuring validity included adequate engagement in data collection as well as adequate time spent collecting data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This was planned through data collected in the semester-long course with a variety of data sources (including interviews several months after the course was over). Additionally, I ensured that my own expectations did not overly direct my findings, either. A “halo” effect—that is, a cognitive bias that assigns multiple positive traits to a person after observing only one specific positive trait of that person (Kahneman, 2011; Lammers, Davis, Davidson, & Hogue, 2016)—can apply equally to supports put in place as well as to people. Anticipating this predicament, I coded data from each data source separately in a Reflective Practice Table (see Appendix J) before

examining and analyzing all of the data as a whole. By doing this, I hoped to bring less effective interventions, ones that did not contribute to the support of reflective practice, to light. For example, one of the interviewees identified my habit of posting the goals for each face-to-face course session on the whiteboard as a support to her reflective practice. Posting class goals on the whiteboard before starting class sessions was a common practice that I favored in my teaching because I felt that it provided an anticipation guide and pacing structure to the upcoming class session. Although this support appeared to be a positive way to somewhat support the pedagogical concerns in the course, it was not strongly connected to other elements of literacy teacher reflective practice. For example, posting these goals did not support the analysis of multiple contexts, prompt social interaction within the course, or encourage formation of a plan for revised practice. In essence, a strong student mentioned a practice that I had always favored. Whereas multiple codes could be generated from this one respondent on this topic, these codes did not contribute to any pattern of codes across data sources (e.g., other individual interviews, focus group interviews, or student-written course documents). Keeping this coded data on the posting of goals for each face-to-face course session separate before analyzing all of the data as a whole prevented me from interpreting this support as a useful support of reflective practice due to one positive expression from one respondent in an interview that only seemed to align with my own positive personal and professional feelings about this support. In this respect, I did not allow the “halo effect” to make this isolated occurrence one of greater consequence. Instead, I looked for patterns of codes throughout my open coding of data. A more specific description of my data analysis is described later in this chapter, however, it should be noted that I remained mindful of my research question as it related to the research literature and theoretical

perspective presented in this study throughout the data analysis component of my research process.

Research Journal

A research journal is a written documentation of the researcher's experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings, to make these things visible and to acknowledge them as part of the research design, data generation, analysis, and interpretation process (Ortlipp, 2008). It is regarded as useful in qualitative studies because it comprises a research 'trail' of gradually altering methodologies and reshaping analysis" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 696). In my own case, I looked systematically and as objectively as humanly possible at what sense students made of the supports for reflective practice that I put in place once the course was over. With this intention foregrounded in my mind, I kept my own reflective journal with the goal to provide a written account of my reflections on post-teaching research process and my data analysis. It was important to use this journal to make "my decisions, and the thinking, values, and experiences behind those decisions visible, to both myself and to the reader" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 697). I started this journal in January of 2017 (after the course was over).

The following excerpt from my research journal on April, 26, 2017, following a round of interviews with participating students, exemplifies a reflection I wrote on my research process at the time:

I really like how I have three separate types of data to analyze for my research. Because I taught the class before, I feel as if I knew that the literacy reform project was bound to evidence the students' ability to show an analysis of context, revised planning, and reimplementation because that is what is expected in the assignment. I'm actually more interested in the participants' perspectives on some of the other supports that I provided--

like the graphic organizer. It has become clear that if I did give students' class time or an explicit expectation to practice the support, they didn't get any value from it [the support]. For example, they didn't say much about the analogies or the graphic organizer that I shared, but they were more apt to talk about the online discussion board or the tuning protocol for group presentations because we lived with that discussion board throughout the course and with the tuning protocol for several class sessions and all of the students' presentations. What was even better was that the students were able to share their ideas about these things and that spurred an opportunity for some to talk about things they wouldn't have addressed otherwise. So between the written documents, individual interviews, and focus group interviews, I feel as if I will get a full picture of the participants' perspectives. In the end, I'll need to ask my dissertation proposal committee on some guidance on whether I should only focus on the 5 participants who completed the interview AND the focus group. Or, would it make sense to use all of the data available to me...

This reflective journal excerpt is an open account of my thinking as part of my research process. It also shows how I was actively seeking support from knowledgeable others (e.g., my dissertation committee) to develop a stronger research study. In the example above, my dissertation committee recommended that I should use all of the available data from my data sources for which I had permission to use (see below for an explanation of why this was not a straightforward matter), an approach that I may not have taken without their feedback and a decision that I can trace back to the research trail in my research journal.

Indeed, the reflective journal captured decisions and experiences that related to my research design. In another example, I noted the suggestions and comments of critical friends

who provided feedback on my study, such as other doctoral candidates with whom I met with regularly once a month to discuss my research progress. The following is an excerpt from my research journal on March 2, 2017 describing how I had explained an instance in which my doctoral study group helped me shape my interview questions for this study:

My doc study group was instrumental tonight in shaping my study because we spent a couple hours critiquing my interview questions. I noticed that I did a lot of “Hey, I did this- wasn’t it helpful?” kind of prompting, and I really needed this checkpoint to be more objective with my questioning. I like how I start with a question that says- What does reflective practice mean to you? Michele [my dissertation chair who also facilitated my doctoral study group] and the group really helped me to develop questions that were relevant to my intended research. For example, I posed questions about writing and power. These are so important to my work, but I probably would have neglected these topics if I didn’t get the input of my doc study group.

In another doc study group meeting captured in my research journal, it was suggested that I was judging my interview data based on my own expectations and definition of literacy teacher reflective practice, rather than focusing on what students were actually saying about literacy teacher reflective practice. This feedback was instrumental in focusing on data that included the teachers’ own definitions of literacy teacher reflective practice as well as a need to generate additional codes with more open coding that may or may not have related to my own ideas about literacy teacher reflective practice.

This researcher journal also served as a cross-reference check for claims I made about patterns emerging in my data analysis. For example, my research journal helped me really see

how student grades were an issue in the assignment-driven supports in my research design that needed to be addressed. The following is an excerpt from my research journal on July 3, 2017:

...there is another issue in play. It involves the predicament of assessing reflective practice. In my research for my literature review, I came across an article by Janet Hargreaves “So how do you feel about that? Assessing reflective practice” (2004). While I have tried to clear up the definition of reflective practice in my research, it is still difficult to assess students’ performance in reflective practice. Similar to Hargreaves’ explanation of the issue, I expected the students to “recount narratives about their practice and both formative and assessment criteria make it clear that such narratives must demonstrate the students’ application of appropriate and safe professional practice” (Hargreaves 2004, abstract). In essence, Hargreaves suggests that because the students are graded, they are “obliged to choose only those reflections that fall within a professionally acceptable frame, or to fictionalize events” (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 200). In the attempt to use the assessment process to capture professional reflective practice, we may create a situation in which students “suppress” their thoughts rather than analyze/examine these thoughts and feelings as needed. I would argue that being honest about the reflective practice expectation, students are at least exploring and sharing knowledge of the process of reflective practice in their assignments, the students are more ready to employ the principles of reflective practice in their authentic and ungraded professional work. How would someone prove this? The questions in my interview show that most of the students stopped exploring the reflective process that was shared in class once the assignment-driven reflective expectations were over. This is my dilemma. How

contrived is this entire research project? I have to own up to these worries and possible flaws in my research design.

In sum, my research journal also served as a reflective journal, providing a research trail (Ortlipp, 2008) of my thinking and some of the adjustments that I made to this study once the course was over and I was collecting interview-based data and analyzing data. For example, when I discuss my findings in the next chapter, I include this issue of the reflective supports in my study as graded assignments in my analysis and discussion.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using multiple iterations of basic coding (Saldaña, 2016). Basic coding involves:

- (1) Generating and tagging the data with codes that represent the major topics that guided and emerged from the study, (2) using those codes to separate the data into smaller segments for analysis, and (3) analyzing data within and across these segments to identify overarching concepts that describe the phenomenon under study. (Neuman, 2014, p. 79).

Data analysis in the present study followed this process of coding the data, organizing the data, and looking for patterns (identified by Neuman [2014] as “concepts”). Coding of this kind is useful because it comprises a cyclical comparative method that can be used across many types of data to generate patterns or themes. I hand-coded all of my data on paper. This meant that I printed copies of all the data sources and noted information that I wanted to look at more closely because it related to my research question or appeared interesting to me. Next, I generated text codes for these notes. I cut out each text code on a small piece of paper and organized and clumped all of these codes over and over in different ways—until my themes were generated

(See Table 4 and Table 5 on the next page for examples from my code-to-category-to-theme process that support my written description of the process that follows).

My process for creating codes from the data sources was revised several times as part of a refinement and fine-tuning process. For example, in my first attempt to code the data, I found that my codes were too verbose, and I was not signifying the distinct importance of the data source in my code. In turn, I, again, sought the advice of my doctoral study group, at which time I was advised to set out to develop one-word codes from my data. This was extremely helpful because it caused me to tag the data with codes that focused on the meaning of each data element (e.g., stretch of written text, segment in a transcript). I drafted a code registry (see Appendix K for samples from this coding registry) that included a one-word code, my definition of each individual code, and the stretch of data and data source that the information was retrieved from (e.g., individual interview, focus group interview, literacy reform project proposal, draft literacy reform project phase 1, literacy reform project phase 2, or online discussion board posting).

Next, these codes were grouped together into clusters or categories, based on similarities or common meanings, and then the codes were reread, and analyzed in order to ensure that the emerging categories were robust and useful in addressing my research question. In the end, the results of my rounds of analysis were organized into 30 distinct categories (e.g., Analysis, Mock, Catalyst, and Leadership). I then looked “within and across these segments [i.e., categories] to identify overarching concepts [or themes] that describe the phenomenon under study” (Neuman, 2014, p. 79). In this way I formulated each key theme, or “an *extended phrase* or *sentence* that identifies what a unit of data is *about* and/or what it *means*” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 199). In conference with my dissertation committee chairperson, I determined that there were two most salient themes that emerged from the data. These two themes are: (a) interpretive writing

prompts and shared experiences in low-stakes online discussion writing seemed to contribute directly to the in-service literacy teachers' reflective practice, and (b) the in-service literacy teachers participated in a life-like (rather than "real life") or mock and, as a result, low-stakes approaches to reflective practice in their school context with a high stakes grade in the course work.

Table 4		
<i>Theme Two Codes to Theme</i> (using Saldaña's Code to Theory Model for Qualitative Inquiry [Saldaña, 2016, p. 14])		
Codes	Categories	Theme/Concept
Modeling Ongoing dialogue Stakeholders Envision Agency	Blurring	The in-service literacy teachers participated in a life-like (rather than "real-life") or mock and low-stakes approach to reflective practice for high stakes grades. However, the graduate coursework positioned these teachers advantageously to practice their reflective practice in their in-service school context as part of their graduate coursework
Push Chain Rally Spark Invigorated	Catalyst	
	Spark	
Real Problems Student Accountability Crutch Fix Leading Collaboration	Leadership	

Discussions with my dissertation committee chairperson and doctoral study group also helped me to spot egregious impositions of my own hopes about the data. For example, I identified a clear bias in which I was looking for the data to show the benefit of the online written discussions to the participants' reflective practice (an idea that is well-supported by the literature review and theory in this paper). However, as I read and reread my data, revised my

codes, discussed these codes with my dissertation committee chairperson and my doctoral study group peers, I realized I was focusing my codes too much on specific writing tasks and not on the reflective practice taking place (or not taking place). Looking more open-eyed at my categories of coded data generated instead an important theme concerning writing genre, context and reflective practice. That is: interpretive writing prompts and shared experiences in low-stakes online discussion writing seemed to contribute directly to the in-service literacy teachers' reflective practice. In other words, I constructed a data-driven theme rather than described a theme concerning what I initially suspected to find.

Table 5 <i>Theme One Codes to Theme</i> (using Saldaña's Code to Theory Model for Qualitative Inquiry [Saldaña, 2016, p. 14])		
Codes	Categories	Theme/Concept
Application Identifying Challenges Collecting Ideas Text-to-world Teaching Past Commiserating Writing Prowess	Discussion Board Writing	Writing prompts and shared experiences in low-stakes online discussion writing seemed to contribute most directly to the in-service literacy teachers' reflective practice
Redirecting with feedback Peer Audience Publication Teacher Feedback Shared Experience Asynchronous	Shared Writing	
Organization Springboard Thinking on the page Gap analysis Student-driven prompts Compound prompt	Prompting Reflection	

In summary I completed a qualitative research study that has a solid audit trail. It is my aim to have strong communicative validity to extend the knowledge base of the field of literacy teacher education in addition to improving literacy teacher educator practice. As noted by Merriam & Tisdell (2016), “Research can contribute to both theory and practice, but only if it is communicated beyond the research situation” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 290).

Conclusion

In summary, my data collection and data analysis approach supported the purpose of this study; that is, to bring a greater understanding to the support of literacy teacher reflective practice within graduate-level coursework by examining the students’ structured assignments (e.g., online discussion board postings, draft and final literacy reform projects, and class presentations), interviews, and focus group discussions. Guided by my theoretical framing as well as a distinct explanation of the characteristics of reflective practice, I conducted my qualitative research that was informed by previous research in the field. Basic coding (Saldaña, 2016) worked well with my varied data sources and assisted in making research-based claims. Findings and claims will be discussed in detail the next chapter before concluding with some research-based recommendations and self-reflection with respect to my own role, assumptions, and expectations as a teacher educator and teacher researcher of reflective practice.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

This small qualitative research study examined the role of the reflective supports I explicitly put in place in order to explore the usefulness of these supports in a graduate course I taught to a group of in-service literacy teachers. This study is very much grounded in the assumption that teacher reflective practice can be deliberately enhanced by means of teacher-driven reflective supports that are embedded in graduate coursework. As such, my intention was to add research-based insights to in-service literacy teacher reflective practice that were specific to and grounded in tangible research data rather than attempting more wide-ranging and broad findings about in-service literacy teacher reflective practice in general. In particular, this study is mindful of the theoretical framing described in Chapter 2 (i.e., situated cognition and current conceptions of “reflective practice”) and the contexts described in Chapter Three (i.e., the graduate course and each participant’s in-service school). After multiple rounds of coding and category development (see Chapter Three), the following two themes emerged from my analysis of the data: (a) writing prompts and shared experiences in low-stakes online discussion writing seemed to contribute most directly to the in-service literacy teachers’ reflective practice, and (b) despite my best intentions, the in-service literacy teachers participated in a life-like (rather than “real-life”) or mock, low-stakes approach to reflective practice for high stakes grades. However, this complication is not a deal-breaker with respect to supporting reflective practice because the graduate coursework positioned these teachers advantageously to practice their reflective practice in their in-service school context as part of their graduate coursework—and I will return later to this finding to discuss patterns in the data that relate to this dynamic.

These two themes responded in various ways to my research question: What supports do in-service teachers (as well as the in-service teacher educator) appear to find useful reflection-

wise in a Masters reading course that focuses on building literacy teacher reflective practice? The first theme picked up on repeated patterns in the data that pointed directly to the apparent usefulness of the online discussion board in prompting students to reflect in writing. Again, the literature reviewed as part of this study suggested that this is hardly a surprising theme to emerge from a study—especially given that contributions to this online discussion were required *and* graded. However, in the present case, I assigned explicit written reflection prompts that supported the students’ analysis of context and revised approaches to situations with these contexts in mind. These supports seemed to contribute to an efficient and easy-to-replicate means of getting the students to enhance their—or, at the very least, engage in—reflective practice. Thus this theme captured a sense of the apparent usefulness of the course’s approach to an online discussion board as a support for in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. This theme clearly focused on some of the reflective process and *social action* that could be traced within my classroom context and each participant’s reported school context. As an in-service literacy teacher educator, I both signaled and affirmed the value of this online discussion board across the life of this graduate course. When the prompt called for an analysis of one’s school context and a revised approach to a literacy-focused situation in one’s school context, students generally delivered written reflections that described and analyzed their school context, identified problems, and created revised plans of literacy-focused action with school contexts in mind. To reiterate, I expected this approach to work and it did, but at the same time, close analysis of this practice enlarged my understanding of the significance of explicit prompting and the impetus for students to share their written reflections with other members of the class. In particular, later in this chapter, I will discuss how the students’ written reflections showed strong patterns of

narrative expression, slight risk-taking moves, and collegiality and why these dimensions of the online discussion board seemed important.

The second theme I generated out of my data served to expand my initial conception of “supports” and directly questioned the authenticity of the literacy teacher reflective practice in this graduate course context. A strong pattern of what I call “inauthentic authenticity” in the data also surfaced in my research journal, where I recorded my own reflections on my teacher-researcher positioning and my research decision-making process within this study. I expected that the grade the students received might influence their approach to the assignments, but I was surprised to find instances where the students used the graduate coursework as a “crutch” or a “scapegoat” to complete the graded course assignments. For example, one pattern in the data suggested that the assignment-driven nature of the literacy reform project gave students an impetus to take on leadership roles or catalyze their collaboration with colleagues in their in-service school contexts. That being said, as part of my culminating discussion of this theme, I will grapple with the degree to which my unique positioning as an adjunct professor, local school literacy administrator, and teacher-researcher was bound up with a potentially contrived and inauthentic research design, where students may have been motivated first and foremost by their interest in succeeding with me as their professor and in the grade that they aspired to receive from the graduate coursework much more so than in honing their reflective practices. At the same time, this discussion will nonetheless also suggest that there is distinctive value to the graduate coursework’s support of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice.

It is important that I foreground the usefulness of the situated cognition theoretical perspective to these findings in this chapter—especially since I will make a recommendation (in Chapter Five) to use this conceptualization in future studies involving reflective practice. As a

reminder, a situated cognition lens attempts to support the analysis of *multiple* contexts when reapproaching situations in an effort to make them better. In what follows in the discussion of each theme, I identify and explain specific examples of students demonstrating teacher reflective practice (i.e., a teacher's social action to analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind). Later, in Chapter Five, I will explain how this situated cognition perspective was helpful to me as a researcher. In short, my social action in sharing my research ideas with my dissertation committee and doctoral study group as well as my analysis of multiple contexts was useful for creating revised approaches to teaching the graduate course in addition to proposing future research projects in supporting literacy teacher reflective practice.

This study does not attempt to identify whether or not the in-service literacy teacher reflective practice studied in the coursework context transferred into reflective practice outside of my explicit supports and this graduate coursework context after the graduate coursework was over. But this study does attempt to unpack the distinction between "being a reflective literacy teacher" (i.e., literacy teacher reflective practice) and "learning to be a reflective literacy teacher" (i.e., practicing literacy teacher reflective practice with the support of a teacher educator and graduate course context). Furthermore, I scrutinize why some pundits are prone (as in-service literacy teacher educators) to privilege what students do in their school contexts as more authentic over a graduate coursework context (deeming it less authentic) as part of my discussion concerning teacher-educator literacy teacher reflection (and my own findings regarding inauthentic authenticity). Nevertheless, again, the pros and cons of study participant motivations in my research data provided an additional layer of context--and complexity--with respect to this theme.

In what follows, I discuss the evidence that led me to generate the two themes reported and discussed in this chapter as they relate to in-service literacy teacher reflective practice—including my self-reflection with respect to my own role, assumptions, and expectations as a teacher educator and teacher researcher of reflective practice.

Theme 1: Writing prompts and shared experiences in low-stakes online discussion writing seemed to contribute most directly to supporting in-service literacy teachers' reflective practice.

This study focused explicitly on the role of writing in supporting literacy teachers' reflective practice. At one level, it is easy to claim that writing helped and proved to be a very useful support (see Chapter 2 and my extended discussion of writing and reflective practice). Results of my data analysis show, however, that the act of writing itself is not necessarily the central element in supporting the development of reflective practices. My findings strongly suggest that the design of the online discussion board assignment and the graduate course context mattered. More specifically, patterns within the data strongly suggest that less formal, relatively low-stakes writing requirements opened up opportunities for students to make interpretations of their school contexts through narrative writing and to take small risks by pushing personal or professional boundaries. These latter occurred when the students constructed revised approaches to situations that were prompted by the analysis of context and the expectation to reapproach a situation differently with their specific school context in mind. Additionally, the data also suggested the online discussion board created an occasion for being “collegial” with each other with respect to sharing, capturing and building on reflective thoughts in print. This necessarily has to be read through the acknowledgement that all of this writing was *required* writing, which usefully problematizes any teacher educator's concern with and work on supporting reflective

practices within university coursework. In what follows, I spell out each of these three dimensions of this first theme in turn (i.e., interpretations through narrative writing, small risks, and collegiality) and then discuss how the context in which students were writing—a collective coursework requirement that took place online and that could be done in their own time—plays a significant role in supporting reflective practice. I also revisited the literature on writing and reflective practice in order to emphasize the importance of prompted and collegial writing over individual journal writing. The discussion of this theme is rounded out with explicit reflections on my own role and interpretive work in these sets of findings as a teacher researcher.

Supporting Teachers' Reflective Practices and the Act of Writing

Data analysis revealed interesting, and on one level, not altogether unexpected results concerning the teacher reflective practice supports I put in place for students in this course. As already mentioned, one key outcome is that student writing *did* seem to be a helpful vehicle or mode for helping teachers to develop or articulate their reflections (as a reminder, each of the supports referenced inside brackets below and elsewhere throughout this chapters are described in Chapter Three). For example, from the seven participating students' written work:

[Example 1](Alexa, literacy reform project proposal, 9/26/16) – “The students we work with come from a low economic and high crime urban environment. The demographic consists of predominantly Hispanic and African American students most of who test below grade level.” Alexa went on to say that “students appear to be disengaged and at times frustrated” with the current literacy curriculum, and she proposed to select novels that better reflected students' personal hardships and situations in an effort to engage students more in classroom activities and discussions. In addition, she noted that “...professional development would need to be put in place to educate teachers on the

concept of Culturally Responsive Teaching and provide teachers with additional resources in order to feel confident within this form of instruction.”

[Example 2](Nell, online discussion posting, 11/13/16)—“In my district, reading is valued among the members of the community. The police department is even involved in school functions, and is a constant presence throughout the school day. There are grant programs that fund literacy program enhancements, and it is a clear group effort. I see the results in the students. As expected, we run into the students that struggle or don't enjoy reading. But from a faraway glance, the district as a whole raises students who are highly engaged in reading. When I have students who struggle with reading or don't enjoy it, it is often the case that reading was never a priority or even thought at home. I think that creating a school of students who enjoy literacy, and achieve high, is the job of all members of the community: town, state, and nation-wide.

[Example 3](Alice, literacy reform project, 10/25/16)—“Our district has only recently adopted learning A-Z [an online reading program] and there are many parts of the program that have yet to be explored. Our district has access to many great websites and resources; however, with so many changes taking place, it is very difficult for teachers to keep up without support. It would be interesting to investigate the possibility of pioneering a new technology based assessment of this kind.”

Each example showed reflective practice in that the students were using the online discussion board assignment to participate in social action to analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind. In Example 1, Alexa examined student demographic data and identified a problem: she felt as if her students did not have access to books that represented the cultures of these students. With this context in mind, she proposed a

plan to share books that resembled her students' cultures as well as the idea of providing professional learning opportunities for teachers on the topic of culturally responsive teaching. Example 2 shows Nell analyzing her school community with a specific reference to the police department and their shared community value regarding the importance of reading. Nell went on to make connections between student learning outcomes and the community's continued support with an implication that this community support was important to her students' reading progress. She identified the problem with some students who lacked reading motivation—perhaps due to a lack of support outside of the classroom. With this context in mind, she set out to partner with the community to increase the reading motivation for these students. Example 3 showed Alice citing the abundance of teacher resources available in her school context. However, she explained that teachers in her school context needed more support to use the literacy program's teacher resources more effectively. For example, she felt limited by a lack of time for instructional planning with newer initiatives in her school context. Nevertheless, with context in mind, she aimed to try out a new online writing assessment with her students. Examples such as these were found across the entire corpus of data for the seven participating students. This pattern of catching students in teacher reflection (i.e., using the online discussion board platform as a means to share an analysis of school context, identify a problem, and plan to reapproach a situation differently) was not surprising, and may well have been an artifact of my research design. Due to ethical board clearance requirements for studying one's own teaching I was unable to record in-class conversations or other forms of spoken language. This has important implications for studying teacher reflective practice and the supports put in place when written data dominates the investigation because I know firsthand that students demonstrated their reflective practice in spoken language during the face-to-face class sessions as well.

Nevertheless, my study explicitly set out to examine the role of writing in in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. As such, finding that writing did indeed seem to support reflective practices remains a valid outcome. That being said, this finding on its own is not of vital importance and certainly not unexpected given the weight of studies that Chapter Two covered regarding this medium. Looking at key categories of data codes I generated and grouped together to form this theme, it was apparent that there was more to be said about the act of writing than simply the act of writing on its own with respect to developing in-service literacy teacher reflective practices.

In looking across all of the evidence pertaining to the reflective supports I deliberately put in place for this course (e.g., online discussion board postings, draft literacy reform project proposals, literacy reform projects, and class presentations with accompanying artifacts), a sizeable pattern of evidence captured how students' online discussion board posts seemed to contribute directly to or, at least, make space for in traceable ways, their reflective practice. In Week One, students were assigned their first written reflection with a generic writing prompt as follows:

Share a written reflection in which you reflect on a topic addressed in the assigned reading [Chapter 1 of the textbook]. If you prefer, you may use one of the "Reflection Questions" at the end of Chapter 1 as a prompt.

Make sure to submit your reflection AND add a reaction/response to at least on classmate's reflection before our second class.

Upon analysis of the Week One written reflections, there was a pattern of students "starting" to show evidence of teacher reflective practice (i.e., a teacher's social action to analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind) in this course by

describing information about their school contexts. Although I had no idea of how honed the students' reflective practice was prior to the course, the following examples show the beginnings of reflective practice in the course. For example, Rose shared the following explicit instance of beginning to "be reflective" when she began evaluating her district wide assessment reading assessment system (Rose, online discussion posting, 9/18/2016):

In terms of a district wide assessment system my district utilizes the Fountas and Pinnell reading levels as benchmarks and PARCC scores to evaluate student learning. There is not a district wide reading or writing benchmark per grade level. In my school, grade levels collaborate to create/modify weekly assessments to measure student learning. To identify students for basic skills, pull-out, and the gifted and talented program, data from PARCC scores and F&P levels are evaluated. There are no district wide rubrics for writing.

In my estimation, this online discussion posting demonstrated teacher reflection in that Rose began identifying characteristics of her school setting and hinted at a plan to reapproach the situation differently when she went on to suggest that there should be more of a district-wide expectation for writing for a more fair and consistent approach to writing assessment. As a reminder, students also were assigned the task of responding to other students' initial online discussion post. In what follows, Nell replied to Rose's online discussion thread cited above (Nell, online discussion response posting, 9/19/16):

I found myself wondering the same thing [as Rose]. ...when I stopped to reflect on my district in relation to the reading, I realized that not only do we not have one [district approach to assessing writing], but we never even talk about it. I am constantly conflicted: How do I improve my students' scores and achievement, without worrying

about standards and testing? Aside from standard goals, what ARE my objectives and outcomes? Am I teaching the right thing? Do others have the same objectives?

Prompted by Rose (as well as the general course expectations for online discussion posting), Nell, too, identified some problematic characteristics of her school context and suggested, “I think it is so important to have ongoing discussion, more opportunities for professional development, so we can develop a program that structures us, in terms of outcome” (Nell, online discussion response posting, 9/19/2016). In other words, Nell, too, seemed to be capable of identifying situations in her school context that she would like to improve and began by asking questions with her school context in mind. This hinted at her intention to answer her own questions to improve her work with student writing expectations.

In Week 11 (of this 15 week course), students received more explicit prompting in their assignment development than in the first week of this course. The Week 11 prompt focused on the topic of new literacies as follows:

As stated on page 210 of our text: "The world of new literacies requires school leaders and teachers with the understanding of what is taking place and a vision of what is now possible for our students. It is an exciting world for leaders who are interested in supporting change and development." How could you use this chapter to organize and conduct a one-hour workshop for teachers at your school? Your response should show a reference to the text, an exploration of a new literacy tool, and a plan to share it with teachers. Although it's not required, think about making it happen!

In Week 11, all nine participants were writing a more developed analysis of context in place and with more definitive plans in mind for revising an approach to a literacy-oriented situation in their school contexts. For example, as part of Rose’s response to the Week 11 discussion board

prompt on new literacies, she noted the critical importance of developing the skill of navigating the internet to find, evaluate, and use relevant information in her fourth grade classroom. Next, she wrote (Rose, online discussion posting, 12/4/2016), “For a professional development workshop, I would present strategies, tools, and lessons on how to help students implement effective searches.” She evaluated the current approach of students’ online searches in her district as a problematic “click and look” approach by students, and provided an annotated bibliography to her school colleagues that identified different web sites that she and her school colleagues could use in their instructional planning in addition to a plan to develop a custom “list of safe, theme, informationally specific sites for certain projects” to help students navigate internet sites within specific literacy unit plans. In a different Week 11 online discussion posting, Nell cited the 1:1 student-to-computer initiative in her school district. She noted some of her attempts in using digital discussion boards in her classroom, such as starting a private chat room with her students and projecting the chat room in the front of her classroom to begin various literacy lessons. After trying out this private chat room with students, Nell suggested a professional development workshop for teachers in her district to “help educators to experience the benefits of a class-wide, threaded discussion” (Nell, online discussion posting, 12/5/18). She continued, “I would then lead a discussion based on the results on the board, and even have teachers post about the benefits of the digital tool” as part of a department meeting. To reiterate, all nine participants were writing a more developed analysis of context in place and with more definitive plans in mind for revising an approach to a literacy-oriented situation in their school contexts. In other words, they delivered written reflections on the online discussion board that seemed analyzed multiple contexts, identified a problem, and created a plan to reapproach the situation with context in mind.

My research design does not permit me to make claims about change over time due to the compressed nature of the course. Nonetheless, I argue that this online writing supported students in analyzing their own school contexts, develop ideas to reapproach a situation differently with these contexts in mind, and then to share these reflections and emerging plans with others.

Interpreting Events and Contexts through Narrative Writing

What became apparent in my analysis of the students' written reflections is that claiming "online discussion board writing is a useful support for reflective practice" does not adequately suffice in describing the role of this particular kind of writing in my efforts as a teacher educator to support reflective practice. I argue that the prompt-and-response approach employed to help students generate their online posts, and which sometimes included sharing personal and professional stories and accounts, engaged them in *interpreting* events and contexts. What I mean by this is that some of the students' stories as well as their personal accounts of situations in their school contexts provided a great deal of interpretation and analysis of their school context, which suggests that narrative writing is an important component in reflective practice. As addressed in the previous section of this chapter, I required all of the students in this course to post online written reflections each week as part of their coursework. I asked them explicitly to examine their own school contexts in relation to the literacy topics that were addressed in the graduate coursework each week (e.g., *Selecting Materials for the Literacy Program; Evaluation, Change, and Program Improvement; and Supporting English Language Learners*). However, closer analysis revealed writing that surpassed description or a set of facts, and rather that these posts were "devices" through which these students appeared to be explicating or interpreting elements of their school contexts. These interpretations were especially evident when students shared their written reflections in the form of personal stories.

[Example 4](Rose, online discussion posting, 9/23/16)—...For the bulk of my career in the classroom I have been “the lone wolf” teacher. I would keep to myself, plan on my own, rarely touch base with other teachers. Why? I think I just felt that I could get things done quickly if I just did everything on my own. Recently, I have two new teachers in my grade level that pretty much won’t let me keep my door closed. They have opened my eyes to the power of collaboration. We meet several times a week and discuss, plan, evaluate, and reflect on what we are doing in the classroom. I must say I have learned more from them in a few short weeks than I have in years. Honestly, I am pretty adequate with technology but my new colleagues have demonstrated new apps and programs that are amazing.

This example shows Rose sharing a personal narrative that examined her more recent collaboration with colleagues in addition to her increased use of digital technology in her classroom in her school context. She identified a problem in her isolated practice—making the interpretation that she was (in the past) completing her instructional planning independently to get things done more quickly (e.g., “...I have been “the lone wolf” teacher. I would keep to myself, plan on my own, rarely touch base with other teachers.”). Next, she cited her revised approach to her instruction that included much more collaboration with colleagues as well as far more integration of technology within her lessons (e.g., “They [the two new teachers] have opened my eyes to the power of collaboration. We meet several times a week and discuss, plan, evaluate, and reflect on what we are doing in the classroom.”). In what followed in her written reflection, her revised approach to her situation is also a call-to-action, to show patience with “lone wolf” teachers (i.e., teachers who work more independently in their instructional planning) and to be persistent in their development. In what followed, she wrote:

So, to get the closed door teacher to open the door I think you need to open their eyes to what they are missing. I did! I have learned that there are technologies that will make lessons ten times more effective, engage the students in a new way, and help keep me organized far better. So, work slow and steady with us “lone wolves,” but we will eventually come around!” (Rose, online discussion posting, 9/23/16).

Again, this written reflection went beyond sharing information and explanation. It provided a personal account of Rose’s story, which included her interpretation that teachers who seem to work more independently will require patient and persistent support in moving toward more collaborative approaches. In Rose’s specific case, she shared her own growth as a collaborator to integrate more technology into her literacy classroom in her school context to exemplify her interpretation. Another example of a student’s interpretation of her school context is shown in the following narrative writing by Edna.

[Example 5](Edna, online discussion posting, 11/14/16)—Unfortunately, so many of my students do not even have books at home. Recently, after turning in incomplete reading log homework, a student told me, “My sister has one or two books but she won’t let me read them.” On top of absolutely breaking my heart, it scares me that I could be one of the few people in this child’s life that addresses his literacy needs. The role of a community library is of utmost importance, but then there are some students that do not have a family car, so they cannot go there either. Each year I try to give students a book in June, so they have at least one novel to read over the summer vacation.

This example shows Edna explaining aspects of her school context with specific examples in her personal story (e.g., “so many of my students do not even have books at home,” “I [as the student’s teacher] could be one of the few people in this child’s life that addresses his literacy

needs,” some students do not have a family car [to get to the library]). In addition, Edna clearly interpreted her students’ lack of access to books as a problem. As part of her analysis of context and her identification of a situation that she would like to change, Edna later in the same post extended her written reflection, this time sharing a plan to “give students a book in June, so they have at least one novel to read over the summer vacation,” and she aimed to “find out more about educational associations, like the Commission on Adolescent Literacy” and hoped that there will be a national shift to emphasize literacy in homes and communities. Again, this reflective practice seemed to surpass information and analytic writing by sharing a personal account that included her interpretation of a situation within her personal story. In this case, Rose interpreted her students’ lack of books as unfortunate and took a personal stride to share books with her students as well an interest in participating in a more global professional conversation about student access to books. Similar interpretations through narrative writing were also shown in the next example by Yolanda.

[Example 6](Yolanda, online discussion posting, 11/5/16)—I currently have a new student in my classroom who just came from Beijing. He speaks conversational English but cannot understand English during any subject area. I teach the third grade and we are currently modifying work in the classroom and giving him first grade level text to read. This boy receives ELA services for only 30 minutes each day at 2:00 which is the end of our school day. By this time, I am sure he is exhausted and burned out. According to Chapter 13, “All English learners are required to do double the work in school.” I believe this is what my student is experiencing by trying to understand what is happening in the classroom. If I could make a suggestion for the ESL program, it would be to take a closer look at how students who are trying to learn the English language and a program that

would better suit their needs. This student in particular would benefit from being in an ESL classroom for ELA and Math. With this, the classroom teachers will have the support for their ELL students and the students themselves will be receiving instruction that they can understand. I often feel as though I am failing at teaching this student. He needs so much extra one-to-one attention in order to understand what is happening in the classroom and as a result, I end up neglecting my class. Trying to find the right balance is something I am still currently working on.

While Example 6 may not be classified as a “story,” it does include a personal account of Yolanda’s experience, that is, her narrative. Yolanda’s account provided some context about a new student in her classroom from Beijing. She identified the problem that this student speaks conversational English, but he “cannot understand English during any subject area.” Furthermore, the student’s ELA services were scheduled for 30 minutes at the end of the day when the student appeared to be very tired. While she worked with colleagues to modify this student’s work in his reading classroom, she worried about whether the student received adequate differentiated instruction in his other classes, such as math. Upon further analysis of what followed in the same post in Yolanda’s written reflection, she continued by interpreting her context—suggesting a revised approach to the situation. She set out to give the student more one-on-one instruction that was mindful of a second dilemma arising in relation to meeting all students’ needs?: “He [this student] needs so much extra one-to-one attention in order to understand what is happening in the classroom and as a result, I end up neglecting my class.” In the end, Yolanda ended her online discussion posting with the intention to try to find the “right balance” of support for this student in relation to her other students within her classroom with an interest in seeking more support for him from other teachers across the content areas.

It is interesting to note that I did not think much about the intended genre of the students' written reflections when the online discussion board writing prompts were created. Additionally, it took multiple rounds of coding before I was able to abstract this dimension from the data. My major intention as the teacher educator was to have the graduate students address their school contexts in relation to the literacy issue that we were studying that week (e.g., if we studied intervention for struggling readers, I asked students to discuss literacy intervention in their school contexts).

My analysis of the students' written reflections revealed an important pattern of students taking narrative approaches in their written reflections. That is, they took the opportunity to share a story or a personal account of events, experiences, or the like within their responses. As shown in the examples above, this narrative dimension seemed to contribute to students making a range of what seem to me to be justified interpretations. Likewise, the data also seemed to suggest that this interpretive element is essential to the analysis of context, and which in turn, I argue here, is crucial to reflective practice. That is, it seemed that being able to interpret the "so what?" of one's analysis opened up potentially fruitful "ways forward" with respect to showing what the students seemed to deem as important. In other words, their narratives focused on the details and explanations that they determined were significant, and this provided context and good background to analyze a problem with context in mind. It appeared that the informal nature of the online discussion board and the expectation to address one's school context seemed to contribute to these students' narrative approaches—quite unexpectedly but advantageously nonetheless. In other words, there is a pattern of evidence that showed that the less formal, relatively low-stakes writing requirement of the online written discussion board with the expectation to address one's in-service school context opened up opportunities for students to

make interpretations concerning problems and their probable causes—and how to possibly address these—of their school contexts through narrative writing. This adds a significant dimension to conceptions of teacher reflective practice that I will revisit in the next section in this chapter when I discuss the dimension of “slight risk-taking” in which the online discussion board appeared to push students to extend their personal or professional boundaries, and how this, too, seemed to contribute to reflective practice.

Slight Risk-Taking

Many scholars would agree that effective educators oftentimes push the boundaries of a standardized approach to curriculum and instruction. For example, after examining the classroom practices of National Teacher of the Year winners and finalists, Henriksen and Mishra (2015) found that successful educators oftentimes push these boundaries by incorporating real world, cross-disciplinary themes into their lessons. As related to my findings, student comments in their interviews regarding reflective writing suggested that slight risk taking was an important dimension of their reflective practice (in addition to their online discussion board writing) resulting in social action in the form of sharing their experiences and ideas with other members of the class as well as the impetus to create revised plans based on their analysis of context. The word “risk” alone would be an inaccurate description. In other words, the students did not “risk” or jeopardize their well-being or job security, but they did, in fact, show a willingness to take a chance and go beyond what might have been normally expected from the actions of a literacy teacher, pushing their personal or professional boundaries in some way. As such, this dynamic is described as a slight or modest risk. In my analysis of the students’ written reflections in their online discussion board postings, I found a substantial pattern of evidence that showed students taking these slight risks in their reported or documented reflective practice. The following

examples seem to show students taking slight risks as a result of their online discussion board written reflection writing.

[Example 7](Rhea, online discussion posting, 11/11/2016)—If I needed to make time to meet with special teachers [such as physical education, art, and music teachers], I would ask if the principal would carve out 1 PD full or half session per month in order to meet with these teachers. Then we could discuss ways to help implement content specific pedagogy, incorporate reading strategies, and align assessments to inform instruction together. This would then give these teachers ample amount of time to apply concepts discussed to various grade level classes and report back the following month with reflections. As a result we would meet standards such as skillful collaboration, job-embedded coaches, and evaluators of literacy needs as shown in table 6.1 [in the course text].

This example showed Rhea reflecting on the topic of content area literacy in her own school context. In her response, she discussed the importance of professional collaboration for enhancing reading across the content areas to the point where Rhea took a slight risk by committing to meet with her school principal to advocate for more meeting time as needed. This may be perceived as a slight risk because Rhea is critiquing the principal's current professional collaboration structure and asked her principal to reconsider his administrative decision.

Whether or not her principal may be perceived as approachable and open to such suggestion, the idea to set out to meet with her principal to ask for more interdisciplinary meeting time may be perceived as a slight risk.

[Example 8](Yolanda, online discussion posting, 11/13/16)—In my district, the reading specialist is really focused more on pushing into the classroom during our 90 ELA block

each day. There is not much discussion about helping those content area teachers to become stronger “reading teachers.” After reading this chapter and the discussions, I do believe it is something important to bring up to my reading specialist.

In this instance of minor risk-taking that was captured in the online discussion board, Yolanda noted her district’s focus on the 90 minutes of literacy time in her district, and she seemed prompted to reach out to her district reading specialist to ask her to consider supporting content area teachers such as science and social studies. In what followed in her written reflection, she wrote, “A lot of the text and passages found in science and social studies in particular can not only be hard to children to read, but it can be a challenge to try and comprehend what is being discussed in the text” (Yolanda, online discussion posting, 11/13/16). In other words, after examining her reading specialist’s prominent focus on helping the literacy teachers in her district, Yolanda set out to take a slight chance or risk to suggest that the reading specialist should spend some time supporting science and math teachers in her school context as well. Yolanda’s intended discussion with the reading specialist may be perceived as a slight risk because she is acting outside of the boundary of a literacy teacher and making a suggestion to her colleague about her colleague’s role as a reading specialist.

[Example 9](Alexa, online written reflection posting, 11/12/16)—Last year I had several students that were in the ELL program. Some were newcomers and some had been in the program for several years. At the end of the year I was very confident that several students would exit the program, and I was shocked to find out that they did not. From what I know this was the first year the test was administered on the computer and this may have partially contributed to their poor scores. All of these factors need to be considered, especially when one test holds so much weight in deciding who exits the

program. Personally, I have seen students who have done well in my class, and had been in the program for several years, and they still failed the test. In one case, I was able to argue that the child would benefit more from basic skills support instead of ELL instruction. There seems to be a lot of discontinuity, and I believe that professional development in this area is crucial.

In this example, Alexa analyzed the predicament of several ELL students who were in her class (e.g., “Some were newcomers and some had been in the program for several years” and “At the end of the year I was very confident that several students would exit the program”). She cited a problem in that, to her surprise, many of these students did not test out of the ELL services program—perhaps due to a new computerized test. Alexa advocated for one of her students to “benefit more from basic skills support instead of ELL instruction.” In what followed in her written reflection, she explained that she would extend herself to seek more professional development in this area, particularly because professional development in ELL instruction was scarce in her district. Similar to the previous examples, Alexa pushed her professional boundaries by asking an administrator to provide more remedial instruction for a particular ELL student. Furthermore, Alexa planned to find professional development outside of her school community in an effort to bring back some new training to use with the ELL students in her classroom.

The idea of students taking slight risks in their reflective practice is corroborated by examining patterns of reflective writing in their reform project reports; however, some of this risk seemed to have been “ironed out” or glossed over in these projects. In particular, students were asked to work on these projects with the support of their supervisor or principal, and several of the teachers created literacy reform initiatives that remained closely aligned to district

initiatives already in progress despite online posts claiming that they might do otherwise. In these cases, there was less risk involved because these graduate students received permission from administrators to analyze contexts and suggest change, and all of their work was completed under the pretext of a university assignment. For example, Rhea developed a plan to study writing conferences by means of a professional learning community (i.e., a formalized way in which school districts already organize teachers into groups of practice-based professional learning) alongside her district's adoption of a new writing program, and Nancy's literacy reform initiative involved a more streamlined technology-based platform for literacy teachers to manage and use district-driven technology literacy resources already available in the Google Classroom suite used in their district (i.e., a free web service developed by Google for schools that aims to simplify the communication of resources and assignments in a paperless way). Although these were meaningful literacy reform project ideas that were formulated through an analysis of the school context and interpretation of specific problems and how they could be addressed meaningfully, there was little risk-taking involved in the development of these graduate students' literacy reform initiatives because these literacy reform projects were endorsed by an administrator in the student's school context as well as through the endorsement of the project within their graduate coursework. This pattern related to a second theme characterizing the outcomes of this study (and discussed more in the next section) whereby students used the graduate coursework as a "crutch" and sometimes as a "scapegoat" for their literacy reform project initiatives. I argue here that the literacy reform project diminished any feeling of risk or actual risk taking that might be present in a more authentically "open" context (that is, a context that was not already supported by the district and university stakeholders). Compared to the literacy reform project, it seemed there was more space in the online discussion board for the

students to separate their written reflections from the graduate coursework protections that were afforded by the more formal, and highly weighted grade in the literacy reform project assignment. In this respect, the online discussion board became a better source of data for identifying students' openness to slight risk-taking compared to the data found in the literacy reform projects. Clearly, the data overall seemed to suggest that there was something in the discussion board that drew out reflective thinking and captured some small instances of envisioning (hoped for or "in the future" or possible) slight risk-taking in a way these other supports (all the other supports—such as the draft literacy reform project proposals, literacy reform projects themselves, and class presentations of the literacy reform projects—are tied to the literacy reform projects) did not do so well. In short, the online discussion board seemed to do more to promote small risk-taking, a feature that students identified as an important component to reflective practice within the interviews. This is unpacked in more detail in what follows, whereby my analysis of the data as presented here showed how the written reflections seemed to capture the students' pushing their personal or professional boundaries—especially when envisioning the problems that they identified in their online discussion differently with their respective analyses of context in mind.

[Example 10](Rea, online discussion board posting, 12/4/16)—After reading this chapter, I was filled with excitement at various ideas that I would love to take advantage of and implement in my classroom. For instance, search engines like Kiddle (kid's version of Google), and differentiating between valuable websites. However, overly ambitious, I had to think realistically and work with what I have and gradually implement new technology where applicable. While Google + seems to be a tool that is taking over, I myself need to explore more before I feel confident to present it to my students.

Although, my school just purchased a program called Raz Kids this year as a supplemental reading source. Often, with so much going on, little training or PD is provided for a new program. As stated, "research shows that students are unskilled with locating, critically evaluating, and reading online information" (201). So, I thought, why not demonstrate an hour workshop on how to take a resource we have and use it to its full potential to aid in online reading and supporting digital readers.

The reflective work in this excerpt from Rhea's post in response to a prompt focusing on new literacies (Week 11) took the following forms. First, she analyzed her school context (i.e., "Google + seems to be taking over" and "my school just purchased Raz Kids"). Second, she identified a situation that she wanted to change (i.e., "But new programs are often not accompanied by a lot of professional development in how to use them"), and then she signaled that she thought through this situation in an interpretive way ("So, I thought, why not demonstrate an hour workshop..."). In short, the written reflection captured Rhea envisioning a do-able and different approach to a situation that she found problematic in her district. In the absence of significant and relevant professional development, she proposed a one-hour workshop with the newer Raz Kids reading program in her school context. This seemed to show Rhea pushing her professional boundaries, seemingly beyond the general expectation of a literacy teacher, to develop and share a professional development opportunity in a computer-based reading program in her district.

[Example 11](Alice, online discussion posting, 11/14/16)—"...Many students today are struggling with reading specifically in urban school districts like the one I teach in. With the recent adoption of Common Core and revamping of the NJ Science Standards an emphasis on reading has been placed in every subject holding all teachers accountable as

reading teachers. The problem is there aren't any resources or professional development provided to teachers outside of the reading content area on these essential reading skills and techniques. ...I would help foster an environment that focuses on cross-curricular lessons in which reading teachers would be paired with teachers from other content areas such as math and science. By pairing these teachers up my expectation is that they could share resources and strategies to use in the classroom that would help build on students reading abilities and skills.”

Alice’s online discussion posting followed a similar process to Rhea in the previous example (Example 10). Alice, too, analyzed context (i.e., “Many students today are struggling with reading specifically in urban school districts like the one I teach in” and “With the recent adoption of common core and revamping of the NJ science standards an emphasis on reading has been placed in every subject holding all teachers accountable as reading teachers”), identified a situation she wanted to change (i.e., “The problem is there aren't any resources or professional development provided to teachers outside of the reading content area on these essential reading skills and techniques”), and thought through the situations in an interpretive way (i.e., “I would help foster an environment that focuses on cross-curricular lessons” and “By pairing these teachers up my expectation is that they could share resources and strategies to use in the classroom...”). As such, the written reflection captured Alice envisioning a different approach to a situation that she found problematic in her district. In the absence of district support of reading instruction in science classrooms, she proposed to partner reading and science teachers in their instructional planning for more reading strategies across the reading and science curriculum. I argue, based on key patterns in the data, that the writing supports I put in place within this course to foster reflective practice—and especially the low-stakes, conversational online

discussion post requirement—made possible a kind of comfortableness with taking—or at least envisioning—small risks or pushing personal boundaries with respect to the contexts and situations the students’ shared with me and with each other. To begin, and continuing the discussion started in the previous section, my analysis strongly suggests that the online discussion writing was most useful as a “support” within this course because it prompted students to learn more about pertinent literacy issues and reflect on how these issues were related to their school context. Their documented reflective practice occurred when they analyzed these contexts to create revised plans of action with their own specific school and teaching contexts in mind. An explicit prompt to discuss a literacy topic studied in class and set within the teacher’s in-service school context seemed to prompt students’ to take—or say they might take—slight risks when they suggested or enacted revised approaches to problematic situations in their school contexts.

Collegiality

What also became apparent in my analysis is that claiming “online discussion board writing is a useful support for reflective practice” also does not adequately suffice in describing the collegiality involved in the students’ written reflections and the role of this particular kind of writing in my efforts as a teacher educator to support reflective practice. In turn, collegiality appeared to be an important element of the type of sharing that promotes reflection. As a reminder, the students wrote for the entire class as their audience. They knew that I would be reading each post, but they also knew that their classmates would be reading their written reflections, too, with the assignment including the requirement that they each respond to one or two of the written reflections of their choosing each week. The following examples seemed to show collegiality in the form of cooperative interaction among the students in the class.

[Example 12](Alice, online discussion response, 11/7/16)—[In response to a classmate’s written reflection about the value of using graphic novels to engage ELL students] As an ELL student myself in middle school I found that I was a visual learner. I feel that graphic novel would of really helped me and would have in fact made literature class more enjoyable. I also believe that it would of helped to have more books that represented diverse cultures. I always felt as though I was a minority in my own school setting not in relation to the student population but rather in terms of the materials and books used.

[Example 13](Edna, online discussion response, 12/4/16)—[In response to a classmate’s written reflection about using the microphone component of an online reading program] I loved that you mentioned your listening center and accessing the microphone tool! We do not have Raz Kids, but we do have a similar computer based reading program that requires students to complete fluency recordings. While I went to two PD sessions on our reading program, no one ever addressed the recording aspect, and I was left to figure it out on my own. It took a lot of trial and error. It was frustrating for the students to switch from headphones to microphones mid-lesson, plus I would have to drop everything I was doing to help them, and then the recording would yield so little information about their fluency skills, it really didn't seem functional. Eventually I just turned off that piece of the program on my teacher dashboard! Maybe if I had a teacher like you at my school that could teach me a better way, I could tackle turning it back on!

[Example 14](Agnes, online discussion response, 12/5/16)—[In response to a classmate’s written reflection about using Google docs as a platform for middle school students to share their writing with peers] I love how you plan to use Google Docs

throughout reading and writing. I think it is an excellent idea to have students produce and publish their writing while students interact and collaborate with others. I also like how you would incorporate book clubs with the use of Google Docs. Google Classroom is a useful resource that supports digital literacy and provides many useful tools within literacy. Lauren and I have been organizing and conducting a workshop for Google Classroom in our school districts. Although our focus is how Google Classroom is a platform to manage data from other external online resources, I think it is also important that we mention that Google Classroom can be used for other unique ideas in literacy as well (like the ones you had mentioned). Thank you.

Interview data corroborated this pattern of collegiality and showed why it was significant within the online discussion board postings. In my analysis of the students' written reflections, I found a sizeable pattern of evidence that showed students' "collegial" responses to their classmates' written reflections. This is important because, as these three examples show, they conveyed a sense of the students' cooperative interaction in that the students each clearly read their classmate's written reflection, provided some praise in response to their analysis of context, and shared a *connection* based on their own personal experiences or their own school context. In Example 12, Alice agreed with her classmate's written reflection about the possibility of using more graphic novels with ELL students and seemed to show her own teacher perspective that she would have benefitted from these texts when she herself was an ELL student in middle school. In Example 13, Edna praised her classmate's use of a microphone feature used in a listening station with an online reading program. Edna explained that she gave up on using that tool, and wished she could have her classmate as a colleague in her own school context for better support. Example 14 showed that Agnes was pleased to read about her classmate's ideas about using

Google Applications in her reading and writing units rather than a platform to manage data for teachers. Agnes complimented her classmate and thanked her for giving her the notion to try to use Google Applications in her classroom in a way that was new to her. Across all three examples, collegiality took the form of students reading about a classmate's written reflection, making a connection to their own school context, and proposing to do something differently in their own school context with their classmate's written reflection and their own school context in mind. To reiterate, these examples all showed a cooperative interaction among members of the class.

To reiterate, interview data corroborated this pattern of collegiality and showed why it was significant within the online discussion board postings. All seven students seemed to appreciate the opportunity to share ideas with their classmates by means the online discussion board. For example, Rose explained (personal interview, 3/23/17):

But then sort of having to read someone else's [online discussion board posting] and really think in a helpful, meaningful way about what they wrote and responding to it and so it's not just telling a story about "Well, this happens in my school." Because that's very easy, to sort of give your two cents. But to think about what they wrote and sort of use my experiences but help them move forward. And then also with my own responses, seeing what people responded to me and made me think about... Made my writing a little bit more meaningful.

Rose's statement described her sense of the collegiality involved in the online discussion board that would not have existed if students wrote reflections solitarily or to the audience of only a teacher and not the rest of the class. In particular, Rose seemed to create an elevated expectation for herself to help her classmates "move forward" by sharing her own relevant experiences in

response to their written reflections. Once more, Rose seemed to give voice to the benefit she obtained from the anticipation that her classmates would read her written reflection as well as the opportunity to reflect on her classmates' comments. In a sense, this shows Rose noticing the significance of the online discussion board in supporting social action with other members of the class.

Another example of this collegiality that seemed to come from an awareness of the peer audience was shown by Alexa when she described her efforts to write a written reflection on the topic of teacher evaluation studied in the sixth week of class. She explained (Alexa, personal interview, 3/21/17):

...before I understood that it [the teacher evaluation system in her school context] was all about like the InTASC [Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium] standards and where it came from and Charlotte Danielson, and I learned all about the history of it, um, in order to write about it, then I was able to use that to help me with my, um, you know to help me in the classroom, as well. To help me with my observation and things.

This showed that Alexa researched the teacher evaluation system in her school context so that she could write about it in a more informed way in her online discussion board posting. She even hinted that this written reflection put her in a better position when she was evaluated during the in-service teacher observation process in her school context. In what followed in the personal interview (on 3/21/17), it seemed to show more of this intention to cooperate with other members of the class:

I feel like, um, instead of just like writing I know this, I know this, I know this, I have to write from the perspective of somebody that doesn't have this system in their classroom.

So, I wanted to sort of make sure that anybody who read it would be able to understand.
...And in that way, I knew that I, that I myself, to have to teach somebody else about something-

In short, Alexa seemed to promote cooperative interaction in the class. She appeared to create a higher expectation for herself; this time in terms of sharing well-researched information in an accessible manner with her classmates—noting the possibility that her written reflection might in some way teach her classmates about teacher evaluation, the literacy topic studied in class that week. In other words, it seemed as if Alexa was not only writing for her own benefit but with the intention to support the other students in the class as well—thus promoting cooperative interaction in the class.

This collegiality and cooperative interaction to others was a recurring pattern. It suggested that the dynamic of sharing ideas and experiences and even problems—even in relatively “required” discussion formats and modes—contributed in important ways to students’ cooperative interaction and practice. In the examples above, the students did more reading up on their literacy topics and wrote with consideration for their peer audience. It goes without saying that this pattern regarding collegiality is also important with respect to critiquing the extent to which a managed platform like an online discussion board does indeed engender “discussion”. I argue that in this specific case or instance it did because the students seemed to write with an awareness of this audience of sympathetic and synergistic peers—especially given the expectation that they had to respond in writing to others’ written reflection board postings. In turn, there was some back and forth in the sense that everyone wrote their initial reflection, received and wrote a response, and then had a chance to read and reflect on the exchange of

ideas. There was no online discussion post response to an online discussion post response. It was not expected, and no students attempted to respond to a response.

In what follows, I share some of my insights in my role as a teacher-researcher. In other words, I share some of my own reflections based on my position as a researcher and the teacher of the class.

Some Important Teacher Educator Reflections on Online Discussion Boards

What has become very apparent to me is that my initial work in preparing for this study elided attention to students' own discursive savvy with respect to "getting academic work done." That is, as I read over and read over my participating students' writing—and attended to the discussion board texts of all 25 students in the class, while focusing my attention on my nine participating students, I soon began to see that most of the students in this class seemed to have a knack for writing these online written reflections. For example, Rose explained (Rose, personal interview, 3/23/17): "Because I think at this point in my academics... I have two master's degrees. Like I could just bang out a response." In other words, Rose felt as if she had enough know-how in graduate school coursework to write quickly and with ease to meet the expectation of an online discussion board assignment. Rose's claim that she could "bang out a response" gives me strong pause with respect to making any generalizable claims about online discussion boards and writing prompts as "best practice" supports for encouraging teacher reflection. This is because it is possible that students approached their written reflection as an assignment—with the job or task to speedily complete an assignment rather than with a more genuine interest in developing reflective practice. This knack for participating in the online discussion board is also evidenced by approaches in Rhea's discussion excerpt—used earlier in this chapter to discuss online discussion postings and slight risk taking (Rhea, online discussion board, 12/4/16):

Because times and resources are always changing, we as teachers must adapt to that change. We find ourselves in the shoes of our students learning and teaching ourselves new strategies, in order to better fit their needs. After reading this chapter, I was filled with excitement at various ideas that I would love to take advantage of and implement in my classroom. For instance, search engines like Kiddle (kid's version of Google), and differentiating between valuable websites. However, overly ambitious, I had to think realistically and work with what I have and gradually implement new technology where applicable. While Google + seems to be a tool that is taking over, I myself need to explore more before I feel confident to present it to my students. Although, my school just purchased a program called Raz Kids this year as a supplemental reading source. Often, with so much going on, little training or PD is provided for a new program. As stated, "research shows that students are unskilled with locating, critically evaluating, and reading online information" (201). So, I thought, why not demonstrate an hour workshop on how to take a resource we have and use it to its full potential to aid in online reading and supporting digital readers.

Rhea's discussion excerpt started with a generalized statement that served the purpose of restating key elements of the prompt for that week to develop an effective topic sentence for her written reflection (i.e., "Because times and resources are always changing, we as teachers must adapt to that change."). An analysis of the written reflections showed a pattern of students using this way of beginning their written reflections (to restate the prompt strategically in their openings). As this particular excerpt continued, Rhea described her emotion and interest almost with hyperbole (i.e., "After reading this chapter, I was *filled with excitement* at various ideas *that I would love to take advantage of* and implement in my classroom" and "However, *overly*

ambitious, I had to think realistically and work with what I have and gradually implement new technology where applicable.”) leaving one to wonder if she might have exaggerated to some extent to paint herself in a more positive light. Additionally, frequent transitional phrases (e.g., “However” and “For instance) and the integration of text citations (e.g., As stated, "Research shows that students are unskilled with locating, critically evaluating, and reading online information" (201)) suggested that students, at times, participated in these written reflections in a way that set out to please the academic institution, writing in a customary academic way, rather than provide a true voice for their thinking on the page.

Interestingly, some of the “management” elements I put in place for ensuring students did “real” work in understanding their assigned reading and the purpose of the prompt perhaps balanced out some of the academic discourse savviness I saw in some of the data. That is, by ensuring that students could not read what others had posted until they themselves had posted a response that week seemed to force students to take a more original approach to their initial written reflection. In other words, the students completed a “blind posting” in the sense that they could not read any other written reflections until they published their own on the online discussion board. This was a feature that I elected to utilize from the Canvas platform (described previously in Chapter Three). Interview data supported the benefit of this blind posting. For example, Nell explained (Nell, personal interview, 4/5/17):

I think it [initial blind postings to the online discussion board] definitely enhanced it because I was able to get my own thoughts out [first] and then sometimes someone would say something that I didn’t really think of, and it would help me to, to add onto what I was thinking [later].

A similar excerpt can be found in Edna’s interview as well (Edna, personal interview, 3/29/17):

I liked the format [of the online discussion board] because I think it allowed me to collect my ideas before responding to my peers. ...allowing myself to collect my ideas, and then, um offering like a response or feedback, constructive, um, response to my peers was helpful.

It seemed that both Nell and Edna benefitted from looking at a blank slate to begin their written reflection and anticipated the opportunity to share ideas and further their discussion later on.

Rose explained her preparation for her written reflection (Rose, personal interview, 3/23/17):

...let me think about what happens in my school and what maybe I've reflected on or what I can do to change it. And sort of then meet you in that forum. Whereas I think in the past, I would have just given my two cents, like "I've been a teacher for a long time. This has happened to me too and it's the worst." But now I sort of ...I'm at a point like "Yeah, that's happened to me too, but like, let me think about how I maybe have worked through it or may have not totally worked through it, but that's... This is sort of where I am.

This showed that Rose thought through her school context in an analytic way before publishing any of her ideas, describing the online discussion board as a meeting "forum." These statements suggested at least these three students did not rely on formulaic responses and made understanding the week's readings and analyzing their school context in relation to the literacy topic studied in class as a central concern. This, too, could be an artifact of the interview itself, however. Nonetheless there is evidence that students appeared to benefit from the support of the online discussion board in their reflective practice, even when taking into account their knack for writing such texts.

Online Written Reflection and Teacher Reflection Research

My finding that writing could be used to promote reflective writing in course work is not new. Dymont and O’Connell (2010) examined the quality of student journal writing in a review of research in higher education—citing factors that can either limit or enable more reflective journals from students. It appears that my approach to the online writing discussion aligned with research-based practices cited by Dymont O’Connell (2010). For example, my online written reflection prompts framed the reflective writing experience that I have built into this course in a way that is easily understood, a support deemed important by Fisher (2003), Nesoff (2004), and Thorpe (2004). In addition, the purpose of the online writing was made clear to students as posted on the classroom whiteboard during a face-to-face class session: to prompt students to analyze contexts and share their ideas about revised practice with other members of the class with contexts in mind. Furthermore, according to Dymont and O’Connell (2010) a clear purpose for structure (Moon, 2006; Cornish & Cantor, 2008) and alignment to learning objectives and assessment support more critically engaged writing (Blaise et al., 2004; Nesoff 2004). Not only were the expectations for the online written discussion clear to members of the graduate course, it was also clear that all members of this graduate classroom community would read the online writing discussion. This was in line with the explanation by Dymont and O’Connell (2010) that students should know who would read their reflective writing (Elbow 1997; Fenwick 2001) to help write for an appropriate audience (Stewart and Richardson 2000).

All that being claimed, however, my approach to supporting reflective writing also contrasted in some ways with claims made about reflective writing in higher education. For example, Dymont and O’Connell (2010) argued that students need “adequate training in how to reflect more deeply” (Dymont & O’Connell, 2010, p. 237). They pointed to research that

suggested that instructors should teach students about the *numerous* models and theories of reflection and higher order thinking (Epp 2008; Fisher 2003), such as Dewey's Process of Experiential Learning (1998), Hatton and Smith's Framework (1995), or Ash and Clayton's Articulated Learning model (2004). Furthermore, Dymont and O'Connell (2010) provided students with exemplars of reflective journal entries from various levels—including their own reflective writing. My data suggested, in contrast, that a concise and explicit definition of reflective practice that I shared in several face-to-face in-class sessions (i.e., an analysis of context that contributes to the identification of a problem and a revised approach to a situation) coupled with explicit and repeated instruction in light of this specific definition of reflective practice, along with opportunities to share ideas and problems with others seemed to promote reflective practice without any explicit "training" in "being reflective" such as the review of reflective models or theories suggested by Dymont and O'Connell (2010) above. In addition, the participants above also indicated that they were very familiar with an online response/reflection as a genre, which is another explanation to de-emphasize more explicit training. Perhaps insufficient attention has been paid in the research literature to the advantageous position of *literacy teachers* to reflect through writing. As inservice teachers, these teachers work as teachers of writing in addition to participating in writing-intensive courses such as the graduate course in this study. In other words, these literacy teachers were well-positioned to participate in written reflections with a concise, clear, and often repeated direction. I did not teach students about the numerous models and theories of reflection and higher order thinking in my support of their reflective practice, neither did I set out to train the students in reflective practice. Nonetheless, the students seemed to show evidence of reflective practice despite my more concise approach.

All in all, this study echoes the value of reflective practice supports in the role of digital technologies in facilitating reflective processes by Parkes and Kajder (2010). Two of their major findings included the value of providing “adequate and strategic prompts” for reflective writing (they drew on the work of Fernsten & Fernsten, 2005) and “an accessible platform for the students to house their reflective practice in an ongoing and consistent fashion” (Parkes & Kajder, 2010). The findings in my own research study suggested that my approach to using an online discussion board with students, with particular attention paid to using carefully conceived online written discussion board prompts, supported in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. In the end, it was not surprising that the online discussion board supported the nine graduate students in making sense of their school contexts through their writing—that is, in making their analysis of context explicit. Although the number of students participating in my study was small, the patterns were nonetheless convincing. These online discussion postings appeared to provide an impetus for the students in the course to describe and analyze and interpret their individual school contexts as these contexts related to the topics and situations studied in the course.

Some of the other assignments in the course also supported in-service literacy teacher reflective practice, but the online discussion board seemed to be the most related to the supports that I put in place within the graduate coursework. For example, the required literacy reform project assignment represented literacy teacher reflective practice because the students developed a literacy reform project (that they presented to the class and submitted for grading) after an extensive needs assessment (i.e., analysis of multiple contexts in order to find a gap or a need for literacy reform shared with other members of the class). There was also some evidence that an in-class concept mapping activity demonstrated reflective practice because the students described

their ideas about the concepts discussed in class as they related to possible improvements in their home schools with consideration to their school contexts—albeit in a text and pictorial form. However, in all honesty, these assignments drove themselves, so to speak. In other words, the support was implicit within the assignment. This research project investigates the supports that I put in place (i.e., the methods I used to assist students to complete the reflective tasks) to support literacy teacher reflective practice. The graduate students/in-service literacy teachers' writing seemed to become more reflective when I prompted it through the online written discussion board described throughout this section.

Reflection-on-action is not a “natural” process; “it needs to be aided and scaffolded through different means that create a distance from one’s own actions” (Marnrique & Abchi, 2015, p. 14). In turn, my prompts and approaches to the online written discussion board assignment were significant in making spaces available for the reflective writing process as a vehicle for enhanced reflective practice. More specifically, similar to Reiman’s study (1999) where the writing process was used to encourage deeper reflection and development, data concerning the writing process in the course in this study seemed to support students in addressing pertinent literacy concepts with a focus on how these literacy concepts related to their specific school contexts (more discussion of this to follow). As such, it appeared that within this study the act of writing was helpful in two ways: it had a “built-in mechanism” or created an inclination that seemed to facilitate thought as reflection and created time and space within which the teachers organized their conscious evaluation and analysis of their practice in a more organized fashion in which they might otherwise engage (Farrell 2004, 2015). The idea of writing as a “tool for thinking” (Wells, 1999, p. 143; Roskos, Vukelich, & Risko, 2001) provided a rationale to analyze student writing as a data source—to find patterns in the deliberative

thinking (e.g., an analysis of context and a revised approach to a situation with this analysis of context in mind) captured on the page.

It appeared to me that writing can capture thinking on the page, and when this writing represented revised thinking as a result of considering specific and multiple contexts, this deliberate thinking should be viewed as a particular type of social action: teacher reflective practice. Therefore, this theme suggested that more study is needed in this under-researched area of literacy teacher reflective practice represented by the kind of writing that captures the in-the-moment social action of thinking with multiple contexts in mind.

To sum up, my data suggested that it was not simply “writing” alone that matters in supporting teachers’ reflective practice. Instead, the teacher educator was well-served by paying attention to opportunities for reflective practice in an online discussion board. In summary, an analysis of the data in this research study showed that student interpretations existed in narrative writing. These interpretations were an important component to the analysis of context that was essential to literacy teacher reflective practice. In addition, students oftentimes took slight risks in the form of pushing their personal or professional boundaries. These slight risks were important to setting out to solve problems that were identified after an analysis of context in reflective practice. Last, students seemed to benefit from cooperative interaction; that is, writing with empathetic others who have a multitude of shared experiences in mind. The online discussion board seemed to contribute to an efficient and easy-to-replicate means of getting the students to (potentially) demonstrate their reflective practice. Again, what seemed important to the participating students was that the online discussion board assignment was low-stakes and came with a series of explicit prompts that asked students to write a reflection about a literacy topic studied in class in relation to how this topic might be addressed better in the students’ own

in-service school context. Once more, the expectation to publish the response for the class audience and to respond to classmates' written reflections seemed to contribute to more collegial responses.

Theme Two: The in-service literacy teachers participated in life-like (rather than “real life”) or mock and, as a result, low-stakes approaches to reflective practice in their school context with a high stakes grade in the coursework.

A clear pattern of evidence seemed to demonstrate a strong sense that the in-service literacy teachers engaged in less than authentic literacy teacher reflective practices or an imitation of authentic literacy teacher reflective practices that were assigned as graduate coursework. To reiterate, students were *assigned* the task of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice in their literacy reform projects—leading me to describe their impetus to reflect as forged and not necessarily based upon the in-service literacy teachers' own free will. Again, the main project in the course, the literacy reform project, asked students to complete a needs assessment of the district literacy program in their school contexts in an effort to uncover something that should be improved upon in their district literacy program in order to formulate a reform initiative to be presented to the class. Essentially, this required students to complete the graded task of sharing their analysis of their school context, identifying a problem, and then reapproaching the situation with context in mind (i.e., teacher reflective practice). The students' in-service literacy teacher reflective practice resembled mock in-service literacy teacher reflective practice when the graduate coursework was used as a crutch, where students scapegoated their graduate course assignment as a means to better position their approach to interacting with stakeholders in their school contexts (examples from the research study data will follow). In this sense, at times, it appeared as if the graduate students participated in the literacy

reform project, a course assignment, as graduate students playing the role of literacy teacher reflective practitioners in their school contexts as part of their graduate coursework.

This study focused explicitly on the supports that I put in place to enhance in-service literacy teacher reflective practice with the students in my graduate course. At one level, it is easy to claim that the assignment-driven supports, particularly the literacy reform project, helped and proved to be a very useful support. To reiterate, the process of the literacy reform project entailed an ungraded project proposal followed by teacher feedback on same; a 10-12 page Phase 1 report (i.e., a needs assessment of the student's literacy program in their in-service school context); and 18-20 page Phase 2 report (i.e., a description of a literacy reform project initiative that included a presentation to stakeholders in the student's school context). Results of my data analysis showed, however, that the act of assigning this literacy reform project itself was not necessarily the central element in supporting the development of reflective practices. My findings strongly suggested that the *contexts* within which these literacy reform project initiatives took place mattered. Patterns within the data also strongly suggested that literacy reform project requirements opened up opportunities for students to catalyze their collaboration with colleagues in their school contexts and/or to take on leadership roles that they may not have broached without the impetus of the literacy reform project assignment. Similar to the previous theme, this necessarily has to be read through the acknowledgement that all literacy reform project initiatives and report writing were *required* tasks, which usefully problematizes any teacher educator's concern with and work on supporting reflective practices within university coursework. After reviewing examples of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice within the participating students' literacy reform project reports, I identified two dimensions of this second theme: leadership was an important element in the students' reflective practice and the graduate

coursework served as a crutch for reflective practice. While I will certainly acknowledge the research on the effect of graded coursework on this research, in what follows in my discussion, I will emphasize the benefit to be had from providing opportunities for students to practice their reflective practice in their school contexts with teacher educator support through graded coursework. As such, I will I set out to establish how the context of the literacy reform project initiative and literacy reform project report writing played a significant role in supporting in-service literacy teacher reflective practice, and then I will discuss each of these two dimensions of this second theme in turn. The discussion of both dimensions of this theme is rounded out with explicit reflections on my own role and interpretive work in these sets of findings as a teacher researcher.

This theme is in alignment with my research question because it provided ample data on the in-service literacy teachers' participation in the literacy reform project initiative and report writing in their school contexts—albeit in a less than authentic context. However, after problematizing the assigned nature of graduate coursework, I argue that there was significant value in this assignment. In other words, even with an inauthentic context (due to the assigned nature of the reflective practice tasks), students endeavored to practice and share the reflective practice process—articulating their analysis of context, identification of a problem in their school context, and reapproaching the situation with context in mind in their written literacy reform project reports. As such, as a result of this practice, I suggest that participating students will have a better knowledge of the in-service literacy teacher reflective practice process and be in a better position to embark on more authentic practice of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice at the end of the graduate coursework.

Problematizing the Assessment of Teacher Reflective Practice

A principal source of evidence of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice (admittedly in the less than authentic context of the graduate coursework) existed in the written documents produced in the literacy reform project as part of the graduate coursework. Before I began studying my data, I assumed that the literacy reform project report writing would prove to be the best account of the students' literacy teacher reflective practice, at least better than the interviews, because the graduate coursework written documents were created before the students had any inclination that I was studying in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. In turn, I felt these graduate coursework written assignments provided a *true* expression of the graduate students' thoughts and actions. This turned out to be a naïve assumption on my part because the literacy reform project report did not address the discrepancy between reflection and high stakes assessment purposes in university contexts (for more discussion on this discrepancy, see Crème, 2005; Dymont & O'Connell, 2010; Tummons, 2011; Wharton, 2012). Many scholars would agree that some students will be more motivated by grades than by being invested in becoming excellent reflective practitioners—making their responses more contrived to meet an instructor's course criteria rather than focused on new learning (Crème, 2005; Tummons, 2011). In this sense, the student writing might be generated as a pragmatic exercise or routine to complete an assignment (Stierer, 2000; Vassilaki, 2016). In the context of this research study, the students might have acted in the ways that they did because they received a high stakes grade for each of the written documents that I collected as evidence of their work to meet the standards of the assignment (e.g., the literacy reform project comprised 45 percent of their overall grade for the graduate course). As such, I cannot be sure that the students' written expressions submitted as graded graduate coursework were "truthful" in the sense that I cannot be positive that the

students' written expressions were completely accurate. This does not imply that the students had malicious intentions; it only acknowledges the idea that the students may have constructed their responses "in such a way so as to avoid producing a more reflexive, critical or honest account of a particular moment or event so that they do not position themselves as vulnerable" (Tummons, 2011, p. 475), or perhaps they were reluctant to reveal their inner thoughts and some of their faults (Tummons, 2011; Vassilaki, 2016). In other words, the students might have only shared stories, experiences, and interpretations that they were comfortable sharing and/or painted themselves in a positive light. While the idea that students might be motivated by grades shook the impetus of this research study, it also added a caveat to these issues. That is, I argue that there should be an adjustment in *how* in-service literacy teacher reflective practice is studied and discussed. Perhaps a more honest approach to studying in-service literacy teacher reflective practice in graded graduate coursework could set out to support an in-service teacher's *learning* about reflective practice rather than one's authentic reflective practice. In other words, what became apparent in my analysis of data relating to this finding is that claiming "graded coursework is inauthentic" does not adequately suffice to describing the students' participation in the reflective practice process (i.e., analyzing context, identifying a problem, and reapproaching the situation with context in mind) and the sizeable pattern of evidence that captured the students' advantageous positioning as collaborators and leaders within their reflective practice process. In what follows, I share some examples of the students' literacy reform projects before spelling out the two key dimensions of this theme (i.e., leadership was an important element in the students' reflective practice and the graduate coursework served as a crutch to assist the students in reflective practice in their school contexts). The discussion of this theme is rounded

out with explicit reflections on my own role and interpretive work in these sets of findings as a teacher researcher.

Student Reflective Practice Seemed to Appear in Literary Reform Project Report Writing

To reiterate, the graduate students' decision-making in the literacy reform project initiative and report writing was to be based on data collected in their in-service school context (i.e., the student's data-based evaluation of their school site and the student's determination of the school site's needs as it pertained to the development of literacy initiatives) and their site observations, in which students maintained a log of their classroom observations of other teachers. Examples of literacy reform efforts that have been designed and implemented in previous iterations of this course included: making books more accessible to students in schools that do not have school libraries; integrating more comprehension-focused literacy teaching strategies in school-based literacy programs (i.e., the school's systemic approach to literacy curriculum and instruction) with a heavy emphasis on phonemic awareness, word identification and phonics; and introducing assessment systems that are more coherently aligned with the grade level literacy curriculum. Additionally, students were expected to conduct their own independent academic literature research as it related to their school-wide literacy reform projects in their school settings. For example, one participating student read sections from *Subjects Matter: Exceeding Standards through Powerful Content-Area Reading* (Daniels & Zemelman, 2014) as part of this student's research on cross-content reading strategies and a literacy reform goal to provide more collaboration around reading strategies across content areas in her school. In short, students were expected to identify some aspect of the literacy program currently in place in their schools that they wanted to improve. For the purposes of the assignment, students were not confined to their respective classrooms, but they had a larger view of the school's literacy

program. As mentioned in Chapter One, this assignment was written by fulltime faculty at the university and answered directly to International Literacy Association's standards for literacy specialists and, at the time of my study, to National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education standards for advanced graduate programs (see Appendix B). As such, student performance data was collected by means of this assignment and used subsequently in reporting to both of these evaluative bodies.

Although the problematization of graded coursework presented an issue with authenticity, the following extended excerpts that follow appeared to provide evidence that there were some very valuable aspects to the graded coursework such as the students' practice in the analysis of context and in the identification of real problems in the literacy programs in their in-service school contexts.

Rhea's literacy reform project entailed creating a teacher book club to support professional learning in conducting writing conferences with students as part of a writing workshop model. In her Phase 1 report, she wrote:

[Example 15]—(Rhea, Phase 1 of the literacy reform project, 10/23/16)In conclusion, Smith School [pseudonym] provides its teachers with a plethora of ways to aid their students and expand our own knowledge. We have access to many materials, which our principal helps find funding for. Parents take part in school activities and recognized the key role teachers play in their children's lives. "Across a range of studies, there has emerged a strong conclusion that parental involvement in child and adolescent education generally benefits children's learning and school success" as stated by Alyssa R. Gonzalez-DeHass. This aids teachers in helping to educate our students by knowing we have parents as resources and reinforcers. Next, the curriculum map I found while

researching my school's website has proven to be an extremely beneficial resource. To illustrate this point, lists of standards by grade are recorded with skills, procedures, examples and common core exemplars. I was unaware of the depth provided by this curriculum map and will refer to it now to better incorporate standards into my lessons. Furthermore, co-workers lend each other supplies and as teachers, we learn to become creative with resources. There are multiple professional development opportunities, yet, the in-service days could be more productive by having teachers lead workshops opposed to having speakers hired. Hayes Mizell believes "effective professional development enables educators to develop the knowledge and skills they need to address students' learning challenges" (Mizell 10). Many speakers who come into our school discuss the same challenges, but not necessarily ways we can implement techniques in our classroom. They are not specific to learners' needs.

Likewise, increasing the amount of grade level meetings would improve collaboration among grade level and ultimately school wide. Since teachers are differentiating lessons depending on the student population, teachers are not always on the same page. For instance, the delivery of sight words alters by classroom since some teachers are Orton trained and others are not. Similarly, some teachers are testing writing workshop model and others only do whole group instruction without conferencing. Differentiating properly and effectively, such as my grade level adjusting phonics assessments to be more realistic and less wordy has effectively helped our students. Also, creating our own scoring guide that relates to report card terminology has decreased parent conferences. Yet, we are not all on the same page with how to teach certain subjects, such as writing. There are guides to follow for reading, phonics, and shared

reading, but no such outline for writing. In fact, each first grade teacher teaches writing differently, there is no cohesiveness. Additionally, there is no time to collaborate during the day, unless it is our monthly grade level meeting. Even then, there are countless topics to touch on, that writing tends to be overlooked. “Reading and writing development go hand-in-hand” suggests Wepner (67). Smith School is so focused on improving literacy in regards to phonics and reading, it falls short in writing, when it is equally important.

This extended excerpt from Rhea’s needs assessment report showed how she effectively analyzed her school context (e.g., ample teacher resources, strong parental involvement, intricate curriculum map, supportive co-workers). Next, she identified a problem that she wanted to change: grade level lesson work was inconsistent, particularly in writing. In particular, Rhea noted that teachers had different training in phonics instruction and writing instruction. Through this analysis of context, she began sculpting a plan to reapproach the situation with context in mind. In particular, she appeared to set out to create more consistent professional learning opportunities and more consistent use of student writing conferences.

In her Phase 2 report, she wrote (Rhea Phase 2 of the literacy reform project, 12/11/16):

As a result of this Reform Project, my principal asked me to join the SCiP committee (Student Climate Improvement Panel). He explained to me that he believes I would be beneficial to have on the panel because of my initiative to take the lead and get involved. Also, after suggesting a meeting with the teachers at Tree School (pseudonym) on how their pilot program was going my principal contacted their principal in order to set up bi-monthly district wide grade level meetings. This would allow opportunities for teachers to collaborate and discuss strategies, common assemblies, etc. Creating a bridge between

the two schools by means of collaborating and strengthening the overall district was never my intention. However, I feel I have helped, even if in a small way, in contributing to create a bridge between the two schools in order to keep contact open. Furthermore, there is a meeting to be held in the new year regarding what direction we will take towards our writing program. We shall see the verdict.

In summary, Rhea reported that she followed through to reform her school district's writing program at a building and district level. For example, she piloted a writing workshop program that incorporated a structured protocol for conducting student writing conferences. Furthermore, her principal noticed the success of her pilot initiative and set up bi-monthly district-wide for enhanced collaboration in instructional planning across two schools. It appeared that Rhea's literacy reform project report traced Rhea's participation in the teacher reflective practice process (i.e., analyzing context, identifying a problem, and reapproaching the situation differently with context in mind). Rhea's initiative was so successful that her principal helped her to extend the collaboration that she started—potentially continuing well after the graduate coursework was over. In what follows, Edna showed a similar example of analyzing her school context and identifying a real problem.

Edna's literacy reform project entailed developing teacher resources in teaching reading and vocabulary strategies in content areas across the curriculum such as social studies and science. In her Phase 1 report, she wrote:

[Example 16](Edna, Phase 1 of the literacy reform project, 10/24/16)First and foremost, I can conclude my school has a very strong language arts curriculum, as well as high teacher investment in our curriculum. In speaking with two sixth grade English teachers, they were passionate and had positive things to say about the chosen anthology as well as

the novels. They explained that their opinions were taken into account when developing almost every aspect of the curriculum, from summer reading to quarterlies, and they felt as though their supervisor truly appreciates the work they do each day. If the positivity and expertise of the English department could be shared and spread to the content area teachers as they continue to explore teaching reading and writing skills in their classes, my school would be a highly literate, exciting place. Additionally, the district is doing an excellent job introducing and maintaining new literacy related professional development. NEWSELA and Tales2Go are beneficial for all students, but specifically target skills like reading fluency and listening comprehension, which classified students and English language learners, are often still developing. It is exciting to be a part of these initiatives that are already having a positive impact on students. Hopefully Linkit! will be just as successful. The literacy needs in my school really lie in the social studies and science curriculums and lesson execution. And according to Daniels and Zemelman, it is not uncommon for content area teachers to struggle with deciphering the reading requirements presented in the NJCCCS and then integrating these reading requirements into their classrooms (15). Skills such as making inferences, summarizing text, and comparing and contrasting different viewpoints can and should be done across the curriculum (Daniels, Zemelman 16 – 17). Looking at these needs from a realistic perspective, since it would be incredibly difficult and somewhat unethical for me to rewrite a curriculum, I believe I could make a positive change in the way social studies and science teachers incorporate reading, vocabulary, and writing skills into their lessons. Avoiding the negative attitudes surrounding our data collect procedures, the quarterlies and student work folders, I would not want to place a strong emphasize on a final

product. Comparatively I would prefer to speak with teachers directly or observe classes in action to obtain anecdotal evidence. Presenting several techniques, and then creating an online resource, like a Google Document, would give content area teachers new ways to utilize reading strategies in a low pressure setting.

This extended excerpt from Edna's Phase 1 needs assessment report effectively analyzed her school context (e.g., strong language arts curriculum, teachers voices are present in text selections, supportive supervisor, content area literacy research, effective new reading resources such as Newsela, classified and ELL student needs are addressed). Next, she identified a problem that she wanted to change: the positive aspects of the language arts department were not as present across the content areas. In particular, Edna noted that social studies and science teachers needed more support in reading, vocabulary, and writing instruction. Through this analysis of context, she set up a plan to reapproach the situation with context in mind. In particular, she appeared to develop interdisciplinary lessons that integrated reading, vocabulary, and writing skill development on a shared Google document.

In her Phase 2 report, she wrote (Edna Phase 2 of the literacy reform project, 12/12/16):
So far teacher feedback has been positive, the first semantic features analysis chart was effective, and the science teachers were enthusiastic about trying new ideas. Being able to collaborate with content area teachers and see how I can help them left me feeling invigorated and inspired. After this process, I feel as though my thought process has shifted from one of a reading specialist to one of a literacy coach. In the past I very much thought of myself as a teacher of students, and Wepner and Strickland note that reading specialists primarily work with students, assess students and a school or district reading program, and can work with teachers (35). After working side by side with my colleagues

in a role that required me to lead an activity and discussion, I can picture myself in the role of a literacy coach, primarily working with teachers, to create exciting, research rooted content area literacy lessons (Wepner, Strickland 35).

In summary, Edna reported that she followed through to reform her school district's content area literacy program. For example, she demonstrated lessons with science teachers with the goal of enhancing students' reading comprehension and vocabulary development. Furthermore, Edna appeared to make professional strides in working with colleagues in a coaching capacity. It appeared that Edna's literacy reform project report traced Edna's participation in the teacher reflective practice process (i.e., analyzing context, identifying a problem, and reapproaching the situation differently with context in mind). The content area literacy lessons created by Edna's initiative were saved on a shared Google drive—potentially continuing well after the graduate coursework was over. To reiterate, these examples showed the students analyzing their school context and identifying real problems. Another example was shown in what follows from Alexa.

Alexa's literacy reform project entailed developing literacy practices in her school context for strategic teaching in reading comprehension through the development of teacher resources in guided reading (i.e., assisting students in small groups assigned by student reading levels in the reading process). In her Phase 1 report, she wrote:

[Example 17](Alexa, Phase 1 of the literacy reform project, 10/25/16)There were aspects of the literacy program [in her school context] where there were gaps between its potential and the current state of the program. Some themes that stood out had to do with our professional development opportunities. In one case there was a failure to follow up when certain new programs such as Learning A-Z have been introduced. Our teachers are finding lots of success using this program as a means to respond to our lack of quality

guided reading material. It has also been highly successful for providing teachers with lessons that are aligned to the common core. However, I feel there is insufficient professional development to help facilitate the use of all components of the program. Virginia Richardson, suggests an inquiry approach to professional development in which teachers, “Experiment with practices, and engage in open and trustworthy dialogue about teaching and learning with colleagues.” This approach fits right in with our district’s philosophy of collaboration; however, there has been no ongoing conversation. No doubt, Learning A-Z is a great system that works to complement our heavily phonics, word work, and sight word-based system. At this time, another component of the program, called RazKids, is not a requirement of the district. So, one possibility is exploring the Learning A-Z assessment system and pioneering the program with other educators. Our district has only recently adopted learning A-Z and there are many parts of the program that have yet to be explored. Our district has access to many great websites and resources, however, with so many changes taking place, it is very difficult for teachers to keep up without support. It would be interesting to investigate the possibility of pioneering a new technology based assessment of this kind.

This excerpt from Alexa’s needs assessment report effectively analyzed her school context with a focus on professional learning (e.g., failure in sustained professional development for teachers, interest in Guided Reading practices and resources, untapped aspects of online reading programs). Next, she identified a problem that she wanted to change: additional and sustained professional development for teachers in Guided Reading. Through this analysis of context, she began a plan to reapproach the situation with context in mind. In particular, she appeared to set out to create a sustained plan for teacher professional development in Guided Reading using

Reading A-Z. Admittedly, some aspects of reflective practice seem embedded in the assignment itself—in doing a needs assessment and making an improvement plan, students will inherently identify aspects of their context and identify a problem to change, as well as the situationally dependent parts of the solution

In her Phase 2 report, she wrote (Alexa, Phase 2 of the literacy reform project, 12/12/16):

In the end, thinking critically about everyday events can change your perspective on what's around you helping you to more effectively locate and solve problems. Reflection has been an essential endeavor throughout the development of this project. Deep reflective thinking enabled me to see the connection between the components of our district's literacy program, and to be realistic about its strengths as well as its weaknesses. I also began to see more clearly how what we value, and the initiatives that we push, tend to have an effect on what our students leave our programs with. Most importantly, I believe that it was reflection that helped me to envision what positive change in my literacy program could look like. So, through this ongoing, reflective process I was able to identify many of the challenges that were brought to the surface and addressing real problems that were pertinent to my district. Without this acute awareness, the production of innovative solutions would not have been possible. Using reflective thinking offers teachers the instrument, through which they can initiate progress, and take action against ineffective policies.

This last excerpt captured the explicit student perspective that was also implicit in the previous examples about the “realness” of the problems that were identified in the students' literacy reform projects. In other words, there were opportunities that were made possible through the

literacy reform project to address “real” problems in the literacy programs in the students’ in-service school contexts.

This pattern of evidence regarding students citing real problems in their literacy reform projects was important because the problematization of graded coursework (cited in the previous section) suggests that graded coursework is less than authentic. The examples cited above appeared to provide evidence that there were some very valuable *aspects* to the graded coursework made possible in the graded coursework such as the students’ analysis of context and identification of real problems in the literacy programs in their in-service school contexts.

This research project does not attempt to identify whether or not the in-service literacy teacher reflective practice studied in the coursework context transferred into reflective practice outside of my explicit supports and this graduate coursework context after the graduate coursework was over. But this research project does deliver a sizeable pattern of evidence that captured students’ “learning to be literacy teacher reflective practitioners” (i.e., practicing literacy teacher reflective practice with authentic problems found in their school contexts with the support of a teacher educator and graduate course context). In other words, although the assignment-driven nature of this literacy reform project was less than authentic due to the problematic nature of reflective writing as graded coursework, students nonetheless articulated the reflective practice process using real problems that were identified within a district needs assessment in their school context. To reiterate, although some might deem the graded coursework as inauthentic, I argue that there were authentic elements to this initiative such as the opportunity to identify and analyze real-life problems that contributed to the students’ learning about reflective practice.

Interview data corroborated this emphasis on the real-life nature of the problems identified in the literacy reform projects with real-life action from the students' perspective:

[**Example 18**](Yolanda, Focus Group interview, 4/26/17)—Okay, so I did mine [literacy reform project] on, um, assessing the Words Their Way vocabulary and I always reflected in the sense where I kept saying to myself, “I don’t really care for the program. I don’t think it’s very effective.” But it wasn’t until the class where I took the initiative with the phase I and II to kind of assess the situation and see how I could enhance it and make it better, and that was all based on teacher reflection. So how I think students will respond better to the program or how I could enhance it in some way. And with that phase II, I was able to kind of create a second type of assessment with Words Their Way and activities to, you know, make it better for the students and more effective.”

It seems Yolanda explained that the literacy reform project in the graduate coursework gave her the push she needed to address a real problem in her district that she shied away from in the past (e.g., “But it wasn’t until the class where I took the initiative with the phase I and II to kind of assess the situation and see how I could enhance it and make it better, and that was all based on teacher reflection”).

[**Example 19**](Nell, Focus Group Interview, 4/19/17)—And, I think we’re held a little bit more accountable because we had to start the project by talking to people in our schools, and, and saying, “This is what I’m doing.” And so, it was more of a reflective process, because we kind of had to check in with them, um, throughout the entire semester. Like, we couldn’t just go through the motions and make it up.

Nell explained how the literacy reform project was real because she had to continually check in with the colleagues in her school context and include their perspectives in her report writing

(e.g., "...we kind of had to check in with them, um, throughout the entire semester. Like, we couldn't just go through the motions and make it up.").

[**Example 20**](Alexa, personal interview, 3/21/17)—So, when we work together, and we really come together, we could see like, "Oh, what your students doing?" Or, "How are you doing?" And I feel like it's really nice to open our doors. ...So, um, I mean, working together so we can reflect and be like, "Oh, where are you?" It's kind of much more helpful to gauge instead of having like your door closed and, and really wondering like, Is this what everyone is doing, or I wonder if I'm doing a good job, you know.

Alexa used the metaphor of how doors were closed before she began her literacy reform project initiative, but the doors in her school context were more open now (i.e., "And I feel like it's really nice to open our doors.").

These interview excerpts provide examples of the students' perspectives on the realness of the students' real experiences in their literacy reform projects in their school contexts. These statements suggested at least these three students thought beyond the opportunity to develop teacher reflective practice in real situations in their school contexts. In turn, there was evidence that participating students appeared to benefit from the support of the literacy reform project initiatives in their in-service literacy teacher reflective practice.

The Graduate Coursework Served as a Crutch

There is still much to be learned in studying students who are graduate student/in-service literacy teacher reflective practitioners. For example, students in this study were scaffolded, or provided with a temporary support that would eventually be taken away, and scaffolded in a sense by their identity as graduate students completing a course assignment. For example, in working on their school-based literacy reform projects, the students seemed to fall back on the

premise that their literacy reform project was a course assignment and part of their degree work. This seemed to provide a caveat or crutch to support the students in getting other in-service teacher colleagues to cooperate and collaborate with them as part of their literacy reform project assignment in their school contexts. The goal of this research study was to support the students in in-service literacy teacher reflective practice, and it appeared that the graduate coursework itself gave these students an alibi-type excuse (e.g., “My professor is making me do this for a graduate class, can you help?”) to commence work with in-service colleagues as part of their intended literacy reforms in their school contexts. The following data excerpts exemplified this crutch dynamic:

[**Example 21**](Nell, personal interview, 4/5/17)—Um, I can’t speak for everybody, but I know the teachers in my building have been so supportive of me. Um, because they know I’m kind of, they see me all the time running around doing something in grad class—so they’ve all been there. Um, and they’re always happy to help when I tell them it’s for a class. ...if I were to go in and say, “Oh, I saw this great program, let’s use it,” I’m sure it wouldn’t have the same effect as if I said, I’m using this it in my class, I’m doing this for school. They’re not threatened about it, because they’re looking to... They’re like in a position of power helping you. And it is odd, because you would think that veteran teachers would kind of not want to be bothered. Um, but they, they really are enthusiastic about it.

In Nell’s response, she found her colleagues “so supportive” and doubted that they would be as supportive if her impetus for literacy reform within the school was not under the guise of a university driven assignment. She appeared surprised that her “veteran” colleagues showed an interest in her project ideas, and guessed that it was a result of her working as a graduate student.

In other words, Nell's response seemed to explain that her in-service colleagues were more apt to collaborate professionally because they were in a position of contributing to her graduate study.

[Example 22](Yolanda, Focus Group, 4/26/17)—“Um, and then just having an assignment like this where you actually take a closer look and then take those ideas and you have a leeway of making them a reality because you use the excuse, like I'm doing this for a class, um, allows you to be more reflective. Receptive.”

The excerpt from Yolanda's interview seemed to capture the space or “leeway” that was provided when she used the “excuse”. “I'm doing this for a [graduate] class.” Nell described her in-service colleagues as more “receptive” when they were asked to be included in the students' literacy reform projects.

[Example 23](Rose, personal interview, 3/23/17)—Because the caveat would be like “Well, I'm doing it for school. Like it's for school. ...Like, having, like my grad school work as sort of the backup.” Maybe [now that the class was over] I could rally the troops a little bit more? And now I sort of know through the process who sort of has their heart in it, I feel, and who's sort of up for the challenge.”

Rose, too, reported that she said, “It's for school,” in order to get more participation from her in-service colleagues. She even suggested that the course helped her to motivate her colleagues (i.e., “rally the troops”) in a way that they might not have responded otherwise.

In short, this pattern of evidence suggested that the students scapegoated the assignment-driven nature of the literacy reform projects. In other words, the premise of working in graduate coursework appeared to, at times, give the graduate students an advantage or excuse to more boldly address their colleagues with regard to their literacy reform projects in the graduate coursework, thus, putting the students at an advantage in terms of completing their literacy

reform projects—and engaging in reflective practice—with the in-service teacher colleagues being receptive to these efforts.

Leadership Roles

Students' comments in their interviews regarding their literacy reform projects suggested that leadership was an important dimension of their reflective practice resulting in an enhanced leadership perspective in their school contexts. Data analysis revealed interesting and unexpected results concerning the leadership that regarding from these nine students' reflective practice displayed in the literacy reform projects. For example, from the seven students' written work:

[Example 24](Edna, Focus Group Interview, 4/19/17)—Well, I think the project asked to take a leadership role. It's for many of us who are in our careers, this is sort of getting us to that leadership role. So, just the whole idea, I find myself is, reflecting on the choices I made, my leadership decisions. Did I do that well? ...Just sort of reflect on sort of how I was initiating the project, following through on the project and really, how I was taking on a new role that I hadn't taken on before?

[Example 25](Nell, Focus Group Interview, 4/19/17)—I think when you do take, like, that step out of your comfort zone and you do projects like this, um, a lot of times your work affects your colleagues, so I think sometimes you take it a little bit more seriously. A little bit, you hold yourself a little bit higher, when you take on projects and leadership roles. So, I think there is an aspect of reflection in that way. Like you have to think back and say, you know, did I present myself as a leader? Do I think I was successful? You know, are these people listening to me?

[Example 26](Rose, personal interview, 3/23/17)—Right. And the main thing of the project was you couldn't just ask like, your buddies. You, like, you had to sort of expand

your sort of net. And so, it was a, it was a different dance, because you, like with your friends, you then had a different role. And then, you sort of were reaching out to people that you don't normally sort of interact with. And you were sort of asking them to see you as a, a leader of sort of. I feel like I was calling in favors. I'm like, "Well, you know I have this to do and you know, we seem to, we say hello in the hallway. Do you mind like donating?" I-I, we sort of had to reach out more than, I think. And get out of the comfort zone.

Edna's example (Example 24) captured a dimension that I did not expect to find. She appeared to take on "leadership roles" and make "leadership decisions" that she did not participate in before the literacy reform project assignment. Nell (in Example 25) described working as a leader as "stepping out of your comfort zone" because her work would not "affect her colleagues" and she needed to "take it a little bit more seriously." Rose's response (in Example 26) seemed to capture her efforts to "expand her net" in a "different dance" that involved working with unfamiliar people as a leader of the reflective practice shown in their literacy project initiatives.

In planning this study, I did not consider that students would gain perspectives in leadership as part of the literacy reform project assignment and my support of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. However, the data showed that some students did gain this vantage point as a result of their literacy reform project assignment—even when it was a graded and somewhat inauthentic or "forced" project.

Wonderings About the Summative Nature of the Literacy Reform Project Assessment

I have been thinking about the literacy reform project assignment as a summative assessment item up until the late stages of my analysis of findings. After all, the literacy reform

project was a high-stakes assignment that comprised the majority of coursework hours and writing in the course. However, while the literacy reform project served as a summative assessment of the graduate coursework, it seemed that truer summative assessment of *authenticity* would take place after the graduate coursework was over, where the in-service literacy teacher would no longer receive the support of the graduate coursework. In this sense, the literacy reform project may be viewed as a formative assessment of the in-service literacy teachers' reflective practice in the lead up to putting this practice into practice. This conceptualization of all aspects of the graded graduate coursework as formative assessment for supporting authentic and actual literacy in-service teacher reflective practice is cause to rethink all aspects of the graduate coursework. As noted by Tummons (2011), if the assessment of reflective practice was built around a formative rather than summative task, a low stakes rather than a high stakes paradigm, "there may be more time and space both for meaningful, critical and honest writing by students, for more negotiable, intersubjective reading by tutors, and for more constructive conversations between the two" (Tummons, 2011, p 480-482). Perhaps the literacy reform project could be viewed as a formative assessment toward authentic, real-life summations. This is certainly rich terrain for subsequent investigation on my part. Arrastia, Rawls, Brinkerhoff, and Roehrig (2014) argued that the structure of an assignment can be used to support reflective practice; that is, they contended that the way that a teacher sets up course and assignment expectations could influence a students' reflection. And, since I had taught this course once before, I had a short history of noticing how this literacy reform project appeared to put students in a position to take context into account and to collaborate with other people in the class. In my estimation, the very nature of the assignment (i.e., sharing a needs-focused assessment that precedes a data-informed plan of practice and an authentic presentation of this

plan to stakeholders or interested others) put students in a good position to explore their own school contexts as part of developing informed decision-making and even what they saw as needing to be reformed. In this sense, students were given an opportunity to explore theoretical ideas studied in our graduate coursework in their authentic school context.

Course work is widely considered to be more authentic when it has a clinical component and more clinical opportunities support teacher practice. University coursework is often criticized as “too theoretical” or general to be useful to teachers. This seemed an odd claim when it is widely recognized that teachers need theoretically grounded tools (e.g., knowledge of curriculum materials, assessment strategies, and techniques for flexible student groupings) in conjunction with opportunities to practice these tools systematically (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2006) in order to be effective teachers in their school contexts. Our course content and assignment work, combined with the in-service teachers’ school contexts, provided theoretical and contextualized support of the teachers’ reflective practice in a formative way—potentially building student skills and processes in more authentic literacy teacher reflective practice to come. In other words, within the larger teacher education project of helping literacy teachers to become effective reflective practitioners, the goal of the graduate coursework could be to learn about and build skills and processes through structured on-the-ground, authentically (rather than abstractly) contextualized practice of literacy teacher reflection—realizing that more authentic literacy teacher reflective practice would need to transpire outside of the support of the graduate coursework. From this perspective, the graduate coursework undertaken in the present study served as an “assessment tool that allows students more time and space within which slowly and carefully to develop their identity as reflective writers” (Tummons, 2011, p. 481), so that the in-service literacy teachers may be better prepared

to participate in more authentic in-service literacy teacher reflective practice once the course was over (after they have practiced in-service literacy teacher reflective practice in as part of their formative graduate coursework). This contribution to developing reflective practitioners is no not to be dismissed as an inauthentic practice. Instead, there are authentic elements to practicing and learning about reflective practice in graduate coursework that seemed to prepare students for even more authentic opportunities at the completion of the graduate coursework.

To sum up this theme, my data suggested that the literacy reform projects within the graduate coursework appeared to have value in supporting in-service literacy teacher reflective practice—despite the less than authentic nature of the graded aspect of the assignment. In particular, even though the literacy reform projects were summative and heavily weighted assignments, there was a sizeable pattern of evidence that many of these students in this study were supported in their literacy reform projects by their identity as graduate students falling back on the premise that their literacy reform initiatives in their school contexts were part of their degree work. This provided a caveat or crutch to support the students in getting other in-service teacher colleagues to cooperate and collaborate with them as part of their literacy reform project assignment in their school contexts. The goal of this research study was to support the students in in-service literacy teacher reflective practice, and it appeared that the graduate coursework gave these students an alibi-type excuse (e.g., “My professor is making me do this for a graduate class, can you help?”) to collaborate with in-service colleagues as part of their intended literacy reforms in their school contexts. In the end, I suggest that even if the graded nature of the literacy reform project assignment was less than authentic, it still supported students in the practice of in-service literacy teacher practice with real problems identified within in-service school contexts.

Conclusion

All in all, this small qualitative research study examined the role of the reflective supports I explicitly put in place in order to explore the usefulness of these supports in a graduate course I taught to a group of in-service literacy teachers. My findings suggest that I can make several contributions to research conceptions of literacy teacher reflective practice and reflective practice preparation.

First, my data suggests that it is not simply “writing” alone that matters in supporting teachers’ reflective practice. Instead, the teacher educator is well-served by paying attention to opportunities for reflective practice in an online discussion board. Repeated patterns in the data pointed directly to a sense of the apparent usefulness of the graduate course’s approach to an online discussion board as a support for in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. Close analysis of the online discussion board enlarged my understanding of the significance of explicit prompting and the impetus for students to share their written reflections with other members of the class. In summary, an analysis of the data in this research study showed that student interpretations existed in narrative writing. These interpretations are an important component to the analysis of context that is essential to reflective practice. In addition, students oftentimes took slight risks in the form of pushing their personal or professional boundaries. These slight risks seemed important to setting out to solve problems that were identified after an analysis of context in reflective practice. Last, students seemed to benefit from cooperative interaction; that is, writing with empathetic others who have a multitude of shared experiences in mind. The online discussion board in the graduate course seemed to contribute to an efficient and easy-to-replicate means of getting the students to engage in reflective practice. To reiterate, what seemed important to the participating students was that the online discussion board assignment was low-

stakes and came with a series of explicit prompts that asked students to write a reflection about a literacy topic studied in class in relation to how this topic might be addressed better in the students' own in-service school context. Once more, the expectation to publish the response for the class audience and to respond to classmates' written reflections seemed to contribute to more collegial responses. More specifically, students' written reflections showed strong patterns of narrative expression, slight risk-taking moves, and collegiality. I argue that these patterns within the data represent dimensions of the students' reflective practice, and these dimensions should be focus points for teacher educators who set out to support their students' reflective practice in online discussion board writing in graduate coursework.

Second, my data suggests that the literacy reform projects within the graduate coursework appeared to have value in supporting in-service literacy teacher reflective practice—despite the less than authentic nature of the graded aspect of the assignment. In particular, even though the literacy reform projects were summative and heavily weighted assignments, there was a sizeable pattern of evidence that many of these students in this study were supported in their literacy reform projects by their identity as graduate students falling back on the premise that their literacy reform initiatives in their school contexts were part of their degree work. This provided a caveat or crutch to support the students in getting other in-service teacher colleagues to cooperate and collaborate with them as part of their literacy reform project assignment in their school contexts. In other words, I suggest that even if the graded nature of the literacy reform project assignment was less than authentic, it still supported students in practice of in-service literacy teacher practice with real problems identified within in-service school contexts. Furthermore, I was surprised to find distinctive value to the graduate coursework's support of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice such as where the students used the graduate

coursework as a “crutch” or a “scapegoat” to complete the graded course assignments or that the assignment-driven nature of the literacy reform project gave students an impetus to take on leadership roles or catalyze their collaboration with colleagues in their in-service school contexts. Whereas the literature about the problematization of graded coursework makes it difficult to argue about the authenticity of graded coursework, I found significant value in supporting students to “learn to be literacy teacher reflective” (practicing literacy teacher reflective practice with the support of a teacher educator and graduate course context).

In my next and final chapter, I will reaffirm the purpose of my study, explain areas where I believe I added research to the field of literacy teacher education, and make some recommendations for future research. Lastly, I will share some of my own reflections in my role as a teacher-educator by confronting the pros and cons of this positioning in my research study.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this final chapter, I will reaffirm the purpose of my study and explain how I appeared to answer my research question: What supports do in-service literacy teachers (as well as the in-service literacy teacher educator) appear to find useful reflection-wise in a Masters reading course that focuses on building literacy teacher reflective practice? Next, I will identify areas in which I believe I have added research to the field of literacy teacher education such as insights about several dimensions of the two themes that I detailed in Chapter Four. After identifying this study's unique definition of teacher reflective practice, I will make some recommendations for future research in teacher education and share some of my own reflections in my role as a teacher-educator by confronting my positioning in my research study. Finally, I will anticipate where I plan to go research-wise now that this study is completed.

Summary of Purpose and Findings

The purpose of my study was to examine how the in-service literacy teachers who enrolled in my graduate reading course practiced teacher reflection both within the coursework and by means of the explicit reflective supports built into the course. Additionally, I wanted to build these students' capacity to perform reflective practice because I felt that would help them in their role as literacy teachers. I was also committed, at the same time, to engage in self-reflection with respect to my own role, assumptions, and expectations as a teacher educator and teacher researcher of reflective practice. I set out to bring a greater understanding to the support of literacy teacher reflective practice within graduate-level coursework by examining the students' structured assignments (e.g., online discussion board postings, draft and final literacy reform projects, and class presentations) in addition to conducting individual and focus group interviews with participating students. Guided by my theoretical framing described in Chapter

Two (i.e., situated cognition and existing conceptions of reflective practice) and the contexts of the settings described in Chapter Three (i.e., the graduate classroom for this course and each participant's in-service school), I identified a definition of teacher reflective practice in the form of chunks of activity that served as a benchmark for my examination of reflective practice in this qualitative study (i.e., a teacher's social action to analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind).

To this end, the study design entailed basic coding (Saldaña, 2016), which worked well with my varied data sources and assisted in making research-based claims. Data analysis in the present study followed this process of coding the data, organizing the data, and looking for patterns. I constructed two themes from the data in response to my research question: What supports do in-service literacy teachers (as well as the in-service literacy teacher educator) appear to find useful reflection-wise in a Masters reading course that focuses on building literacy teacher reflective practice? As I stated in Chapter Four, these two themes in one sense were to be expected: (a) writing prompts and shared experiences in low-stakes online discussion writing seemed to contribute most directly to the in-service literacy teachers' reflective practice, and (b) despite my best intentions, the in-service literacy teachers participated in a life-like (rather than "real-life") or mock, low-stakes approach to reflective practice for high stakes grades. However, after multiple rounds of coding and category development, I found dimensions to each of these themes that were worthy of notice. Specifically, in relation to my first theme, results of my data analysis showed that the act of writing itself was not necessarily the central element in supporting the development of reflective practices, despite claims regarding its centrality in the existing literature. My findings strongly suggested that the contexts within which this writing took place mattered. Patterns within the data also strongly suggested that less formal, relatively

low-stakes writing requirements opened up opportunities for students to make interpretations through narrative writing, to take small risks that pushed personal or professional boundaries, and to create an occasion for being more “collegial” with respect to capturing reflective thoughts in print. What became apparent in my analysis of data relating to the second theme was that claiming “graded coursework is inauthentic” does not adequately suffice as describing the students’ participation in the reflective practice process fostered within a graduate-level course (i.e., analyzing context, identifying a problem, and reapproaching the situation with context in mind) and a sizeable pattern of evidence captured the students’ advantageous positioning in relation to teacher reflective practice as collaborators and leaders within the assignment-driven nature of the graduate coursework.

Insights About Context, Interpretation, and Graduate Coursework

The following insights gleaned from an analysis of the dimensions of the themes cited above (in the previous paragraph) contributed research to the field of teacher education. First, my findings strongly suggested that the contexts within which this writing took place mattered—at least for the group of nine participating students. As a reminder, much of the research literature assumed a single context for reflective practice, but when “teaching” students to be reflective, my data—albeit on a small scale—suggested that multiple contexts contributed to reflective practice in interesting ways and this multiplicity should be taken into account when thinking about “teaching” reflective practice. As such, the situated cognition theoretical perspective (Smith & Semin, 2004; Semin & Smith, 2013) appeared to be useful to me in my support and examination of the students’ analysis of multiple contexts demonstrated through their writing as they reapproached situations in an effort to make these situations better. Students were encouraged to focus on complex contextual factors and this usefully deepened their discussion of

teacher reflective practice by moving beyond a focus on locational contexts to a concentration on social context, or “the network of inter-relationships in the classroom” (Walker & Baepler, 2017, p. 35). (I will return to this insight about the advantage of analyzing contexts distinctly when I detail this study’s definition of teacher reflective practice in the next section.)

Another dimension of my thematic findings involved my insight regarding narrative writing and interpretation. This bit—interpretation—is absent from the field, but I took it into account because in my data—again albeit on a small scale—student narratives focused on the details and explanations that they determined were significant, and this provided an interpretation of context to analyze a problem with context in mind. I argued that the less formal, relatively low-stakes writing requirement of the online written discussion board with the expectation to address one’s in-service school context opened up opportunities for students to make interpretations concerning problems and their probable causes—and how to possibly address these—through narrative writing. (I will return to this insight later when I make a recommendation later in this chapter as to how I will revise the reflective writing prompts in the graduate coursework to encourage more narrative approaches.)

One other dimension of my findings provided insight to the literature regarding the use of coursework to build teachers’ capacity to act as reflective practitioners. My data suggests that the students’ performance in the reflective practice process (i.e., analyzing context, identifying a problem, and reapproaching the situation with context in mind) was fostered by the assignment-driven nature of the graduate coursework. This refutes the literature that described graded coursework as contrived or inauthentic (as described in Chapter Four). In particular, even in the instance of the literacy reform projects that were summative and heavily weighted assignments, there was a sizeable pattern of evidence that many of these students in this study were supported

in their literacy reform projects by their identity as graduate students falling back on the premise that their literacy reform initiatives in their school contexts were part of their degree work. This provided a caveat or crutch to support the students in getting other in-service teacher colleagues to cooperate and collaborate with them as part of their literacy reform project assignment in their school contexts. In other words, I suggested that even if the graded nature of the literacy reform project assignment was less than authentic, it still supported students *in the practice* of in-service literacy teacher practice with real problems identified within in-service school contexts.

Furthermore, some of the distinctive value to the graduate coursework's support of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice occurred when the students used the graduate coursework to catalyze their collaboration with colleagues in their in-service school contexts. Whereas the literature about the problematization of graded coursework challenged authenticity (and validity) of graded coursework, I found significant value in supporting students to "learn to be reflective literacy teachers" and practice literacy teacher reflective practice with the support of a teacher educator and graduate course context. (I will return to this insight later when I make recommendations about the continued use of graduate coursework to support literacy teacher reflective practice.)

This Study's Definition of In-Service Literacy Teacher Reflective Practice

Throughout this study, I set out to keep a connection to the research literature on teacher reflection, a situated cognition perspective, the contexts of this study, and my own research design. Consequently, an important insight from this study is my construction of a definition of teacher reflective practice that took all of these connections into account. My work to define teacher reflective practice began early in my literature review process by constructing a definition of teacher reflection (as explained in Chapter Two):

Teacher reflection occurs when one has a deep appreciation and analysis of a contextualized experience and engages in more vigilant and deliberate thinking about these contexts, sometimes with others, in evaluating a situation with the goal of revising and improving an approach, or content, or resources and so on in subsequent student learning situations (Schön, 1983, 1987; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Fat'hi & Behzadpour, 2011; Manrique & Abchi, 2015).

This theoretical definition of *teacher reflection* was essential to my next steps, where I set out to define *teacher reflective practice*. In other words, I wanted to create a clear benchmark to evaluate and analyze if and how the participating students in the graduate course practiced teacher reflective practice. As such (and based on feedback from my dissertation chair), I first had to define a practice in general. Schön (1983) was a forerunner in this regard. A practice, according to Schön, is “made up of chunks of activity, divisible into more or less familiar types, each of which is seen as calling for the exercise of a certain kind of knowledge” (Schön, 1987, p. 32). Practices are “socially and institutionally patterned so as to present repetitive occurrences of particular kinds of situations” (Schön, 1987, p. 32). Simply put, according to Schön, reflective practice, is the act of approaching a situation differently—to change the situation rather than letting it repeat itself. Thus, in relation to this study, these foundational positions of teacher reflective practice contributed a fundamental expectation to revise an approach to a situation as part of reflective practice. To reiterate a statement that I asserted in Chapter Two, it became clear that systematically identifying, analyzing, evaluating and responding to contexts distinguished reflective practice from less methodical and less purposeful thinking and action. This is where my situated cognition perspective (Smith & Semin, 2004; Semin & Smith, 2013) added an additional layer to this definition of reflective practice. As a reminder, situated cognition is

concerned with cognition that transpires through social action when social contexts, or “the network of inter-relationships in the classroom” (Walker & Baepler, 2017, p. 35), influence our thoughts and actions (Smith & Semin, 2004) causing us to think or act differently. My situated cognition lens differs from Schön’s respective take on “action” that is less concerned with social contexts, but is warranted in this study because I set out to trial explicit supports of teacher reflective practice from a situated cognition perspective. Thinking about cognition for social action—when embedded in a reflective practice—was useful in the present study because it reminded the participating students to be more mindful of the different relationships that existed within the classroom as part of the construction of a revised approach to a situation. This understanding of the importance of context and social interaction in prompting cognition showed me as a teacher educator that teacher reflection does not need to be something that just happens but that it can be actively supported in graduate coursework by means of carefully designed supports that encourage an analysis of social context and make use of social interactions among members of a graduate course to further enhance this analysis. This study focused on how nine in-service literacy teacher/graduate level students considered and analyzed and reflected in light of the context of their own classrooms in their unique school contexts and, furthermore, how they engaged in social action, or acts which took into account the actions and reactions of others, in the graduate course in creating a revised or reconstructed approach to the situation under study in a process best described as literacy teacher reflective practice. The deliberate intention of these supports was to encourage students to attend to context and promote social interaction within the classroom as they engaged in teacher reflective practice.

To this end, I identified the following concise definition that also served as a benchmark of teacher reflective practice in this study: Teacher reflective practice is a teacher’s social action

to analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind. This definition, although seemingly basic at first glance, explains the chunks of activity in teacher reflective practice that are in alignment with the extant literature and a situated cognition perspective. This definition of (or description of the chunks of activity involved in) reflective practice was put to use as an effective benchmark for teacher reflective practice in this study (as shown in the analysis of Examples 1-15 in Chapter Four), and it promoted complex teacher social action with easy-to-replicate simple direction.

As a reminder, this study set out to support the reflective practice of in-service *literacy* teachers. This literacy context mattered. With respect to this study, the reflective practice of the participating in-service *literacy* teachers was situated in *literacy*-based settings — informed by a distinct set of *literacy* circumstances such as the ones detailed in Chapter One (e.g., newer *literacy* standards, rigorous *literacy* testing, and a lack of support in navigating an abundance of *literacy* education research and evidence-based *literacy* best practices). Furthermore, the participants were studying *literacy* instructional programming in the settings of a graduate *literacy*/reading course while working in *literacy* classrooms in their in-service schools. As such, one cannot take a one-dimensional look at the teacher reflective practice in this study in isolation from its contextualized literacy focus. In every practical sense the definition of teacher reflective practice in this study (i.e., a teacher's social action to analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind) is more appropriately applied to in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. As such, in the next section, mindful of my study findings, insights, and definition to reflective practice in this literacy-centric context, I will make some recommendations in the field of in-service literacy teacher education with the intent to

conduct subsequent research regarding how this definition of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice and this study's findings do or do not apply to other educational contexts.

Recommendations

The purpose of this section is to make recommendations to the field of literacy teacher in-service education that are grounded in the research-based findings in this study. In particular, I will explain how and why I recommend revisions to the online reflective writing prompts that I used in this study, identify places where others might use the research-based findings in this study, and deliver a call-to-action for more research study in the field of supporting literacy teacher reflective practice in graduate coursework.

Revise Reflective Writing Prompts with Explicit Reference to Reflective Practice and Encouragement for Narrative Interpretations

While the online reflective writing prompts in this study (see Appendix C for a complete listing of these prompts) seemed to be helpful in supporting teacher reflective practice (e.g., there was a strong pattern of evidence that the students were supported in writing that analyzed multiple contexts, identified a problem, and then reapproached the situation with context in mind), it is possible to interpret the findings in this study to suggest revised approaches to subsequent written reflection prompts in future iterations of teaching this class or in using an online discussion board to support teacher reflective practice in a different course. As a reminder, the purpose of the online written discussion prompts and my subsequent facilitation of the online written discussion board was first and foremost to support students' analysis of major tenets in literacy instruction in the course textbook as it related to the literacy in-service teachers and their individual school contexts since I consider an analysis of school context as the first component of teacher reflective practice. In preparation for online class sessions, students completed

assigned readings from the text before writing online discussion board postings in reaction to a relevant written reflection prompt. These online discussion board class assignments were asynchronous (students could log on at different times); however, weekly due dates were assigned with respect to posting the written reflection and the reaction/response to a classmate. Students typically wrote a one-page written reflection before providing some feedback or response to at least one other classmate's written reflection on the online discussion board. The suggestions to improve the written reflection prompts used in this study include making a more explicit reference to teacher reflective practice embedded in the prompt as well as some explicit encouragement for students to use narrative approaches in their written reflection postings.

First, the written reflection prompts used in this research study only showed an implicit expectation for teacher reflective practice. In other words, somewhere in each prompt, students were asked to reference the textbook's discussion of literacy topic and to write about this literacy topic in a situation in their own school context. For example, one prompt stated:

As stated on page 210 of our text: "The world of new literacies requires school leaders and teachers with the understanding of what is taking place and a vision of what is now possible for our students. It is an exciting world for leaders who are interested in supporting change and development." How could you use this chapter to organize and conduct a one-hour workshop for teachers at your school? Your response should show a reference to the text, an exploration of a new literacy tool, and a plan to share it with teachers.

As a revision to this prompt, I suggest including an explicit reference to the expectation for teacher reflective practice as part of the online written reflection prompt, and thus students might

be more apt to deliver a response that shows teacher reflective practice. More specifically, I would revise this prompt to state:

As stated on page 210 of our text: "The world of new literacies requires school leaders and teachers with the understanding of what is taking place and a vision of what is now possible for our students. It is an exciting world for leaders who are interested in supporting change and development." *Write a written reflection that demonstrates reflective practice. Analyze the context of teaching new literacies in your school context. Make sure to describe several contextual circumstances. Next, identify a problem or potential problematic situation involving this topic. Then, explain how you could reapproach the problematic situation with information from the text and an analysis of your school context in mind. For example, perhaps you might begin by describing some of the digital initiatives in your school, the level of comfort that teachers have with computer-based platforms in your school, specific issues such as the school's ability to provide access to computers in your school, and/or the times set aside for teachers and professional learning. Identify a specific problem with regard to the topic of new literacies in your school context, and then explain how you might reapproach this situation with the information from the text and the contexts you identify in mind.*

This revised prompt clearly identifies the expectation to demonstrate teacher reflective practice as well as examples in how students might achieve each part of the teacher reflective practice process (i.e., analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind). Social action is already embedded in the act of sharing information with other members of the classroom community via the online discussion board forum. As the teacher, I would focus my feedback on praising instances when students share detailed responses to each

part of the reflective practice prompt and provide suggestions in areas where the students might improve their written reflection that demonstrates their reflective practice. Additionally, I might create an expectation for students to evaluate a peers' reflective practice in reaction to a peer's initial online written reflection. This would add some more direction to supporting teacher reflective practice (more than the general expectation in this study to respond or react to a peer's online written reflection).

Another revision to this written reflection prompt might include more explicit encouragement for students to engage in narrative approaches in their written reflection postings—especially since one dimension of the findings in this study cited the apparent benefit to narrative writing and interpretation. As noted in this study, I did not think much about the intended genre of the students' written reflections when the online discussion board writing prompts were initially created. Additionally, it took multiple rounds of coding before I was able to draw this dimension from the data. Since student narratives appeared to focus on the details and explanations that they determined were significant, and this provided an interpretation of context to analyze a problem with context in mind, I would encourage the use of narrative writing more explicitly. While I would be hesitant to require students to share narrative writing (because students might not always have a personal story or experience in mind to share), I would be more explicit about the value of narrative writing in written reflections—to make interpretations concerning problems and their probable causes—and how to possibly address these—through narrative approaches. One idea might be to include a teacher-driven oral or written example of my own personal narrative (relative to the prompt) as part of the online discussion board posting assignment.

Use this Study as a Rationale or Model for More Research-based In-Service Teacher Reflective Practice

This study's approach to support in-service literacy teachers in reflective practice such as the revisions made to support in-service literacy teacher reflective practice in an online discussion board might inform other teacher educators who set out to support reflective practice in graduate coursework. It could even be used to help school administrators who are interested in supporting teacher reflection in their school context. For example, I identified one initiative in New Jersey in Chapter One: the "Reflective Practice Protocol" created by the New Jersey Department of Education Office of Evaluation in May 2016 as an option for tenured teachers who have been rated "Highly Effective" on their most recent summative evaluation rating (explained in greater detail in Chapter One). In short, I reported that the *New Jersey Reflective Practice Protocol (Reflective Practice Protocol for Practicing Teachers, 2016)* asked teachers to "reflect" on video captured lessons they have taught, student performance, and classroom observations with the goal of participating in the following culminating actions. However, there was not a lot of guidance on how the supervisors or principals of these teachers could support teacher reflective practice. Studies such as the one in this dissertation could provide a clearer definition of teacher reflective practice while contributing to a more research-based rationale for a teacher reflective practice initiative in school contexts. For example, the in-service teachers might be encouraged to participate in a version of the easy-to-replicate online discussion board that was detailed in Chapter Three of this study. Or, they might make use of the graphic organizer that is consistent with the definition of teacher reflective practice, described in Chapter Two of this study, and shared in Appendix F). To that end, I recommend that the present study

may well usefully inform and support existing reflective practice protocols and procedures, such as the “Reflective Practice Protocol” in New Jersey.

Continue to Support Teacher Reflective Practice Through Graduate Coursework and Conduct More Research on the Transfer of Reflective Practice Post Graduate Coursework

Since one of the dimensions of my findings provided insight regarding the use of coursework to build teachers’ capacity to act as reflective practitioners, I would urge teacher educators to set out to support teacher reflective practice more through graduate coursework. One caveat to this recommendation is to reconfigure any course goal of teacher reflective practice to “learning more about” literacy teacher reflective practice with the support of a teacher educator and in a graduate course context. I suggest that teacher educators should hesitate to privilege what students do in their school contexts as more authentic over a graduate coursework context (deeming it less authentic as seen in literature cited in Chapter Four). Nevertheless, more research is needed in regard to whether the support of in-service literacy teacher reflective practice supported through graded graduate coursework transfers to more authentic contexts (that are not related to graded coursework) after the graduate coursework is over. In other words, this study presented a sizeable pattern of evidence that showed the students’ advantageous positioning in relation to teacher reflective practice as collaborators and leaders within the assignment-driven nature of the graduate coursework. There is no evidence that the students’ practice of teacher reflective practice carried over into their professional teacher endeavors after the course was over. As such, more research is needed in this area.

My Reflections on My Role as a Teacher Educator

In this section, I reflect on different occasions when my hunches got in the way of my effective research. In addition, I reflect on how my interest in more critical reflection caused me

to stray from the purpose of my study. Ultimately, I share an example of my own reflective practice as a teacher-educator.

Heightened Awareness of Preconceived Notions

In my experience as K-12 literacy supervisor of literacy teachers, a university first-year writing instructor, and a graduate student-literacy teacher educator, I found that literacy teachers were oftentimes prompted to reflect on their practice as a basis to perform better the next time, but readily available information to support the literacy teachers in their reflective practice was rare. For example, the teachers whom I currently supervise and teach are frequently asked to reflect on their lessons during post-observation evaluation conferences with their supervisors and reflective writing prompts are commonplace in the various professional learning activities shared with literacy teachers in K-12 workshop settings and graduate study in university classrooms. However, in my experiences, these literacy teachers did not always know what is inherently meant by “reflection,” and this created a need to define and model reflective practice as a part of the process of supporting enhanced reflective practice. Examining my own moves towards explicitly working to put supports for reflective practice in place for in-service literacy teachers enrolled in a graduate reading course that I taught (and continue to teach) in order to develop literacy teacher reflective practice has been extremely rewarding. I found that the graduate course in this study was a promising space within which to examine these moves because all of the graduate students in the course were working as in-service literacy teachers.

One of my biggest challenges as a teacher-researcher was to stop looking for what I was expecting to find from my students during my research process. For example when the course was over, I was at first disappointed with the students’ interview responses about the support of teacher reflective practice in the course. My impression of these interviews was that most of the

inservice teachers struggled and failed to define reflective practice *in the ways that I expected*. For example, I wanted the students to be able to explain how they went “all the way” in their reflective practice by sharing examples about how they made their reflective practice actionable by making sure that they took action to change and revise their practices for the better. In other words, I felt that if they didn’t “go all the way” to take action in some kind of reform, I probably failed to teach them about reflective practice effectively. As I reflected on my disappointment and shared it with my doctoral study group, I soon realized that I had to stop looking for the students to act in ways that I thought I taught them to act. Looking for what I expected to find in the data turned out to be a consistent challenge for me (as also seen in the next example).

On a similar note, I was convinced about my hunch that the literacy reform project would serve as the main facilitator of reflective practice throughout the course. Honestly, I had a naïve notion that this would be a straightforward study because I felt as if the needs assessment and literacy reform initiative assignment would be ideal evidence for my support concerning analyzing context, identifying a problem, and literacy teacher reflective practice. It took a lot of discussion with my dissertation chair and some more frustrating meetings with my doctoral study group to open my mind to a different approach to the coding of my data sources. For example, in my first attempt to code the data, I found that my codes were too verbose, and I was not signifying the distinct importance of the data source in my code. In other words, I had too much room for subjectively to shape the data code. From the advice of my doctoral study group, I developed one-word codes from my data. This was extremely helpful because it allowed me to tag the data with codes that focused on the meaning of each data element (e.g., stretch of written text, segment in a transcript) rather than adding more of my interpretation. When I began to listen to the data rather than adding extraneous descriptions of the codes and my preconceived

notions and hunches, and when looking at several different sources (e.g., teacher interviews, teacher focus group interviews, written proposals, online written reflections posted on a course discussion board, and formal written projects), I was able to see that the online discussion board emerged as the key support of literacy teacher reflective practice in my study. Once more, I finally embraced my theoretical perspective of situated cognition and began to analyze the ways that social action and analysis of multiple contexts added incredible complexity to what I erroneously thought might be a predictable and uncomplicated study.

Keep a Focus on the Specific Theory, Literature, Methodology, and Data (My Issue with Critical Reflection)

On a different note, early in my research process I was enamored of the idea of critical reflection. At the suggestion from a colleague, I read Brookfield's foundational work, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (1995) and was really enlightened by how critical reflection is informed and shaped by critical theory's concern with consciously identifying and critiquing power relationships present in the ways that people behave towards one another and think about each other. Under the auspice of critical theory, Brookfield argued that reflection becomes critical when there is an explicit focus on illuminating power: "when teachers uncover how educational processes and interactions are framed by wider structures of power and dominant ideology" by "questioning the assumptions they hold about the way power dynamics operate in classrooms, programs, and schools and about the justifiable exercise of teacher power" (Brookfield, 2017, p. 43). As a result of learning this bit about critical reflection, I expected that all of the students in my study should be able uncover hegemony "by examining how to push back against exploitations by changing structures and alerting others to its presence" (Brookfield, 2017, p. 43). For example, I expected them to question the literacy best practices touted by their

school supervisor or the simple answers to complex problems presented in a professional text, while contemplating “the structures and workings of power that exist outside the classroom” (Brookfield, 2017, p. 42). I wanted the students to take the power dynamic of social forces into account more deliberately and to show evidence that they were doing this as part of the graduate coursework. One might imagine my disappointment when my student could not provide a contemporary analysis of issues concerning power during in-person interviews after the course was over. After all, I considered myself to be a culturally responsive educator who modeled the navigation of context by keeping power relationships in mind. In reality, I had to accept that the implementation of teacher reflective practice in this study was traditional in the sense that it looked to support literacy teachers’ new understandings of their practices leading to (ideally) enhanced teaching performance. Whereas some embryonic critical reflection was targeted within this course when these teachers were supported in their critical review of literary research as it related to their school contexts when writing their literacy reform project report, there was no explicit expectation on my part for these teachers to examine and critique power relationships within their school contexts in relation to literacy topics that we studied in class. For reflection to become critical, its explicit focus must be on illuminating power and uncovering hegemony (Brookfield, 2017, p. 43). I had to just let it go! Critical reflection was never explicitly defined or explicitly articulated in written or verbal course expectations in this study, and I neglected to create explicit prompts for a more specific expectation for students to critically reflect. While this might suggest a subsequent recommendation that critical reflection may need to be addressed more explicitly if it is expected as a learning outcome, the real intent of this reflection is to note how I have become a more reflective teacher-researcher as a result of this study. Dimensions of my findings emerged when I stopped trying to create a study that encompassed

my impression of what a study should be and, instead, took part in the very definition of reflective practice that I developed in my study—engaging in social action to analyze multiple contexts, identify my research problem, and reapproach the situation with the extant literature, an analysis of the graduate course context as well as well my doctoral candidate school context. My own teacher-researcher reflective practice grew substantially when I embraced the social action of sharing my analysis of context, problems, and ideas to reapproach the situation with the critical friends in my doctoral study group and members of my dissertation committee. For example, my revised approach to coding my data (described earlier in this section) demonstrated my teacher-educator reflective practice. In the following section, I share an additional example of my reflective practice as a teacher-educator.

Another Example of My Reflective Practice in the Role of Teacher-Researcher

I had taught the course at the heart of this study for two semesters prior to data collection; and, as mentioned earlier, I brought 13 years of experience as a secondary literacy teacher and eight years as a practicing K-12 language arts supervisor, in which I supervised a district-wide literacy department—supporting over 100 teachers and literacy specialists in literacy curriculum and instruction in a suburban school district setting. As a practicing language arts supervisor, I often shared timely and authentic literacy-based materials or experiences from my K-12 school district in our classroom discussion as they related to our study and work together. In these instances, I made sure to note how any of my shared literacy-based materials or experiences were examples of one district's (or one district supervisor's) approach to literacy programming, where many effective materials or approaches were possible. For example, during one graduate course class, I shared my K-12 district's approach to supporting students with dyslexia (e.g., a specific word study program, specific formative and summative assessments, specific approaches to

academic literacy intervention, and descriptions of specific professional development opportunities for literacy teachers). As part of this discussion, I made a clear statement that this was not necessarily the only or the best way to support students with dyslexia. Moreover, I presented these materials as examples of one district's approach and the needs for school districts to create a rationale for their own approaches that addressed their own school contexts. On these occasions, I suspected that some students might think that my approach to literacy programming was the best way to address a literacy program issue because it was the one that I was presenting as their university professor. As I reflected on this particular class, I identified a problem that some students might try to replicate the resources and experiences that I shared simply because they thought it might help them to get a better grade. As such, in reflection, I wondered if there were a part of me that used student class time to present (and perhaps exaggerate) more successful literacy endeavors that I had led in my own school district context as a way to validate my role as an adjunct literacy professor—especially since I was not at liberty to compromise confidentiality and trust with these K-12 literacy teachers. To put this another way, as I reflect on this concern, I noticed that I perhaps avoided sharing any examples of conflicts with individual teachers as that might sacrifice confidentiality or compromise my trusted role as an instructional supervisor and teacher evaluator in my own school district. Thus, I might have painted a more positive and “smoother” description of my work experience than had actually transpired, and I plan to be more forthright about this concern in future iterations of this course in order to better convey a sense of the this predicament and to own up to any potential issues with my school administrator-teacher-educator role in the classroom.

Closing Thoughts

Undertaking this research study has been an invaluable opportunity for me to analyze my graduate coursework context as a teacher educator *and* as a teacher researcher. After a deep exploration of the context of the graduate coursework, I have gained important insights into the need to support teacher reflective practice (i.e., a teacher's social action to analyze multiple contexts, identify a problem, and reapproach the situation with context in mind). I see my next step research-wise is to conduct an additional study on supporting in-service literacy teacher reflective practice. I plan to maintain the situated cognition perspective that served me well in this study; however, in a new study, I will set out to respond to one of the recommendations for future research in this study. Namely, I could conduct a similar study, this time with a revised approach to online discussion board written reflection prompts suggested earlier in this chapter, or I might attempt to study if/how the support of in-service teacher reflective practice through graduate coursework transfers to the in-service teacher's school context once the course is over.

In addition to my research findings, discussion, and recommendations, another purpose of this research study was to contribute to a rationale for the need for supporting the reflective practice of in-service literacy teachers. To reiterate key issues in literacy education today, newer student performance standards, standardized testing, more intricate and demanding teacher evaluation systems (including the formalization of teacher reflection in New Jersey), and the navigation of an abundance of literacy education research and evidence-based best practices, comprise what I assert as a set of complex contexts that are further complicated by the unique context of each literacy classroom. Now that my research and report writing is completed, I can attest that it appears to make sense to focus more attention on building literacy teachers' capacity for learning and development as reflective practitioners in order to help prepare them to grapple

in self-directed and informed ways with the multitude of challenges and complexities likely to lie ahead for them within their own teaching settings—especially since these circumstances (some as challenges and complexities) are deeply and inextricably contextualized.

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Appendix A: Standards Comparison

Table 1 <i>National and New Jersey Standards Comparison</i>	
Grade 6 Common Core State Standards	Grade 6 New Jersey Student Learning Standards
RL.6.1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text (K-12 English Language Arts Revisions, p. 4).	RL.6.1. Cite textual evidence <i>and make relevant connections</i> to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text (K-12 English Language Arts Revisions, p. 4).

Appendix B: University Project Rubric

Criteria	IRA Standards for Reading Professionals	University Standards for Advanced Programs	1 Does not meet performance expectations	3 Meets performance expectations	4 Exceeds performance expectations
(a) Knowledge of the major components of literacy	1.4 Are able to determine if students are appropriately integrating the components in fluent reading	1. Candidates know how knowledge in their discipline is created, organized, linked to other disciplines, and applicable in the real world. Candidates have mastery over the core knowledge of their disciplines.	Candidate demonstrates little or no understanding of the major components of reading in his/her literacy curriculum reform plan for a specific school.	Candidate demonstrates an understanding of the major components of reading in his/her literacy curriculum reform plan for a specific school.	Candidate demonstrates a deep understanding of the major components of reading in particular, and literacy development in general, in his/her literacy curriculum reform plan for a specific school.
(b) Use of instructional grouping options	2.1 Participate in, initiate, implement, and evaluate professional development programs.		Candidate does not accurately or appropriately use valid assessment data to describe instructional grouping options at the school. Candidate does not include purposeful grouping strategies in conjunction with the needs of the students in his/her reform plan.	Candidate satisfactorily uses assessment data to describe and assess grouping options at the school. Candidate's reform plan demonstrates purposeful grouping strategies in conjunction with student needs as represented in student data and work with paraprofessionals, teachers and administrators.	Candidate displays great care in using appropriate assessment data to describe, analyze and interpret instructional grouping options. Candidate's reform plan demonstrates well-designed and purposeful grouping strategies in conjunction with student needs as represented in student data and work with paraprofessionals, teachers and administrators. Grouping strategies aligned with broader literacy policies and practices put forth in plan.

Criteria	IRA Standards for Reading Professionals	University Standards for Advanced Programs	1 Does not meet performance expectations	3 Meets performance expectations	4 Exceeds performance expectations
(c) Use of a wide range of instructional practices	2.2. Support classroom teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, and methods including technology-based practices. They help teachers select appropriate options and explain the evidence-base for selecting practices to best meet the needs of all students. They demonstrate the options in their own teaching and demonstration teaching.	4. Candidates are able to plan for and employ a range of strategies and resources to create a meaningful context for learning and development.	Candidate is unable to design a reform plan that supports teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, and methods including technology-based practices. The candidate uses little or no data to support instructional practices and does not incorporate modeling these practices in his/her own teaching and professional development plan.	Candidate designs a reform plan that supports teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, and methods including technology-based practices. The candidate uses data to support instructional practices and incorporates modeling these practices in his/her own teaching and professional development plan.	Candidate designs a sophisticated reform plan that supports teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, and methods including technology-based practices. The candidate skillfully uses data to support instructional practices and incorporates modeling these practices in his/her own teaching and professional development plan. In coordination with school administration, candidate implements aspects of the plan associated with these varied instructional practices.
(d) Use of a wide range of instructional materials	2.3 Support classroom teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of a wide range of curriculum materials. They help teachers select appropriate options and explain the evidence base for selecting practices to best meet the needs of all students. They demonstrate the options in their own teaching and in demonstration teaching.		Candidate does not design a reform plan that supports teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of a wide range of materials. Material recommendations and budget are inappropriate and do not align with needs assessment or evidence. The candidate does not incorporate modeling these practices in his/her own teaching and professional development plan.	Candidate designs a reform plan that supports teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of a wide range of materials. Material recommendations and budget are appropriate and align with needs assessment and evidence. The candidate incorporates modeling these practices in his/her own teaching and professional development plan.	Candidate designs a sophisticated reform plan that supports teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of a wide range of materials. Material recommendations and budget are appropriate and align closely with needs assessment and evidence. The candidate skillfully incorporates modeling these practices in his/her own teaching and professional development plan. In coordination with school administration, candidate implements aspects of the plan associated with the use of these materials.

Criteria	IRA Standards for Reading Professionals	University Standards for Advanced Programs	1 Does not meet performance expectations	3 Meets performance expectations	4 Exceeds performance expectations
(e) Communicate results of assessments	3.4 Communicate assessment information to various audiences for both accountability and instructional purposes (policymakers, public officials, community members, clinical specialists, school psychologists, social workers, classroom teacher, and parents)		Candidate does not meet with and/or communicate assessment information to various audiences for both accountability and/or instructional purposes.	Candidate meets with and/or communicates assessment information to various audiences for both accountability and/or instructional purposes.	Candidate meets with and communicates assessment information to various audiences for both accountability and instructional purposes. Candidate details short and long terms goals and procedures for implementing action plan and provides concrete steps to do so.
(f) Display positive dispositions related to reading and writing	5.1 Articulate the theories related to the connections between teacher dispositions and student achievement.	7. Candidates continue to develop dispositions expected of professional educators. They: (b) believe that all students are capable of learning	Candidate's reform plan does not align with key theories related to the connections between teacher dispositions and student achievement.	Candidate's reform plan aligns with key theories related to the connections between teacher dispositions and student achievement.	Candidate's reform plan closely aligns with key theories related to the connections between teacher dispositions and student achievement. The alignment shows that the candidate has a sophisticated understanding of these connections.
(g) Continue to pursue the development of professional knowledge and dispositions	5.2 Conduct professional study groups for paraprofessional and teachers. Assist classroom teachers and paraprofessionals in identifying, planning, and implementing personal professional development plans. Advocate to advance the	6. Candidates are active members of learning communities.	Candidate does not demonstrate the ability to take a leadership role in planning effective professional development experiences for colleagues, administrators or parents. S/he does not effectively assist teachers and paraprofessionals with their personal professional development	Candidate demonstrates the ability to take a leadership role in planning effective professional development experiences for colleagues, administrators or parents. S/he assists teachers and paraprofessionals with their personal professional development plans. S/he advocates for	Candidate demonstrates skill in taking a leadership role in planning effective professional development experiences for colleagues, administrators <u>and</u> parents. S/he is adept at assisting teachers and paraprofessionals with their personal professional development plans. S/he is a strong and effective advocate for advancing the professional research base.

Criteria	IRA Standards for Reading Professionals	University Standards for Advanced Programs	1 Does not meet performance expectations	3 Meets performance expectations	4 Exceeds performance expectations
	professional research base to expand knowledge-based practices.		plans. S/he does not serve as an advocate for advancing the professional research base.	advancing the professional research base.	
(h) Work with colleagues to observe, evaluate and provide feedback on each other's practice	5.3 Positively and constructively provide an evaluation of their own and others' teaching practices. Assist classroom teachers and paraprofessionals as they strive to improve their practice.	3. Candidates critically examine their practice and incorporate ongoing practical and theoretical knowledge.	Candidate's professional plan lacks concrete examples of how it will provide teachers with an evaluation of each other's practice. He/she does not critically examine practice.	Candidate's professional plan offers concrete examples of how it will provide teachers with a critical evaluation of each other's practice.	Candidate's professional plan offers powerful concrete examples of how it will provide teachers with an evaluation of each other's practice. The explanation is clearly linked to data collected during needs assessments.
(i) Practice in, initiate, implement and evaluate professional development programs	5.4 Exhibit leadership skills in professional development. They plan, implement, and evaluate professional development efforts at the grade, school, district, and/or state level. They are cognizant of and can describe the characteristics of sound professional development programs. They can articulate the evidence base that grounds their practice.		Candidate's plan lacks evidence of leadership skills in professional development and specificity in providing an articulation of sound professional development programs. The plan is not based on data derived during the needs assessment.	Candidate's plan exhibits leadership skills in professional development. He/she can apply the characteristics of sound professional development programs to a P-12 setting. He/she can articulate the evidence based on the data derived during the needs assessment.	Candidate's plan exhibits exceptional leadership skills in professional development. He/she can skillfully apply the characteristics of sound professional development programs to a P-12 setting. He/she can clearly and thoroughly articulate the evidence based on the data derived during the needs assessment.

Appendix C: Nine Online Discussion Board Prompts

1. Share a written reflection in which you reflect on a topic addressed in the assigned reading. If you prefer, you may use one of the "Reflection Questions" at the end of Chapter 1 as a prompt. Make sure to submit your reflection AND add a reaction/response to at least on classmate's reflection before our second class.
2. Please choose one of the questions below to answer for our Discussion of Chapter 2. Teachers are trained or told what standards makes an effective teacher-what do you think makes an effective literacy coach/reading specialist?
 - Do you think a reading specialist needs the characteristics described on pages 35-37 to fulfill their role? What other characteristics do you think are necessary to be a reading specialist?
 - What role does the principal play with literacy coaches/reading specialists? Provide examples or scenarios where the principal can have a positive and negative impact on the role of the reading specialist.
 - As a reading specialist, how do you balance collaboration with teachers while still acting as a leader? What do you do about teachers who refuse to collaborate/engage in new literacies and who "close their doors"?
3. Please choose one of the questions below to answer for our Discussion of Chapter 3.
 - What does the literacy coach at your school/district do? If you do not have a coach, what would you like to see one do? Please use information from the text to support your answer.
 - Please reflect on which scaffolding technique listed on pages 51-52 you think is most significant and why.
4. Chapter 8: Teachers always have and always will be evaluated on how effectively they do their jobs. While the evaluation system may change from school to school, expectations of quality teaching remain the same. Can a few observations reflect the many roles a teacher plays on a daily basis? Please watch this 3 minute video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zMbspRhqJc>) to answer ONE of the questions below:
 - As seen in the youtube video, Lily Garcia discusses how teachers wear many hats on a daily basis to educate and help our students. Aside from teaching the curriculum in your district, do you feel that your evaluations take these "other jobs" into consideration?
 - What evaluation system/framework does your school use? How many observations are requested of you (state if tenure/non-tenure) per year? Do you think this method of evaluation and number of observations is fair? Explain your reasoning.
5. Chapter 9: Please answer one of the following questions.
 - Which three strategies do you believe to be the most essential in supporting teachers as they navigate change and continue to develop professionally, and why?

observations in one another's classrooms in one's own or another building; book clubs that provide a face-to-face or electronic forum for discussing professional literature with colleagues; peer support teams where peers share questions, concerns, and ideas for solutions as they seek to implement changes in their teaching and literacy programs; lesson demonstrations and guided practice of new instructional strategies; threaded discussions and forums via e-mail or an online platform; availability of websites where teachers can share resources, ideas for lesson plans, and relevant data...

- Based on your understandings of the different topics broached in this chapter, what are the core things that you would do, as a Literacy Coach or Reading Specialist, to provide a relevant and meaningful professional development session? Please provide evidence from the text to support your response.
 - What role does the administrator play in professional development? Using your experiences as an educator, have you found that administrators in your district have supported this role? If not, what could they have done differently that would be more aligned to that of an ideal administrator in this role?
6. Please answer both questions for our Discussion of Chapter 13.
- Imagine your current school or district has formed a committee to analyze their current program for English Learners. You are on the committee with teachers, reading personnel, and administrators. Based on this chapter in the text, answer the following questions: What is your school or district already doing well to provide the best education for English Learners? What suggestions would you make to your colleagues to improve your school or district? How would you plan to sustain your suggested changes over time?
 - Watch this video published by PearsonSIOPModel on Youtube: <https://youtu.be/3BvIijRQMek> As you watch the video, use figure 13.2 on page 85 to evaluate which features of the SIOP Model the expert touches upon during her lesson example. Does she cover each feature? Which features are emphasized the most in this lesson? After the video, write a short reflection determining what aspects of the Stay and Stray lesson would be successful for English Learners in your setting. If possible, include a topic you could cover with your students using the Stay and Stay lesson.
7. Please answer both questions for our Discussion of Chapter 6.
- "Every teacher is a teacher of reading" has become a very popular phrase. However, many content area teachers are faced with the additional challenge of being a "reading teacher". Does the reading specialist/literacy coach in your school help the content area teachers develop as "reading teachers"? If so, how? How would you, as a reading specialist/literacy coach, support and work with content area teachers? Consider the Leadership Standards in Table 6.1 as well as Tables 6.3-6.6.
 - On page 88, Wepner and Strickland discuss 7 characteristics of effective programs for adolescents. Which 2 do you believe are the most important? Why? Would you add anything to the list? If so, what would you add?

8. After reading and annotating Chapter 14, explain what literacy intervention looks like in your school district. Is it working? How do you know? Explain. Lastly, how does your district's literacy intervention program relate to Response to Intervention (RTI) as it is explained in our class text.

FYI:

<https://homeroom5.doe.state.nj.us/broadcasts/2016/SEP/13/15249/New%20Jersey%20Tiered%20System%20of%20Supports%20Resources.pdf> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.

9. Chapter 15: As stated on page 210 of our text: "The world of new literacies requires school leaders and teachers with the understanding of what is taking place and a vision of what is now possible for our students. It is an exciting world for leaders who are interested in supporting change and development." How could you use this chapter to organize and conduct a one-hour workshop for teachers at your school? Your response should show a reference to the text, an exploration of a new literacy tool, and a plan to share it with teachers. Although it's not required, think about making it happen!

Appendix D: Example of a Student Reflection and Response

Rhea's initial written reflection (12/4/16) in response to Prompt #9 in Appendix C:

Because times and resources are always changing, we as teachers must adapt to that change. We find ourselves in the shoes of our students learning and teaching ourselves new strategies, in order to better fit their needs. After reading this chapter, I was filled with excitement at various ideas that I would love to take advantage of and implement in my classroom. For instance, search engines like Kiddle (kid's version of Google), and differentiating between valuable websites. However, overly ambitious, I had to think realistically and work with what I have and gradually implement new technology where applicable. While Google + seems to be a tool that is taking over, I myself need to explore more before I feel confident to present it to my students. Although, my school just purchased a program called Raz Kids this year as a supplemental reading source. Often, with so much going on, little training or PD is provided for a new program. As stated, "research shows that students are unskilled with locating, critically evaluating, and reading online information" (201). So, I thought, why not demonstrate an hour workshop on how to take a resource we have and use it to its full potential to aid in online reading and supporting digital readers. The program allows teachers to provide books necessary for students at their independent and instructional reading level. If I put on the workshop I would show teachers how they can assign stories with comprehension questions for a guided reading center, aka listening center. The training would show teachers the capabilities the site provides such as seeing, after the quiz, what areas of weakness/strengths the student possesses. For instance, if a question that related to author's purpose was wrong, they can see key areas that the teacher needs to review. Also, providing guidance on how to access the microphone tool to have students record themselves reading. Additionally, on a grand note, an entire class roster would appear with the exact same information. Furthermore, I would, step by step show teachers how to teach students to access the website (under a student login). Then they would be able to use this tool as a resource in the classroom as well as homework support. Through demonstrating the student's viewpoint before teaching, teachers will be prepared with questions that might arise and how to answer them. "The leadership that you provide will determine the future that our children achieve," and we need to take responsibility for that (210). By creating an online support system and PD for this program we can utilize all resources it has to offer and use it to its full potential.

- Edna's response (12/4/16) to Rhea's post above. I loved that you mentioned your listening center and accessing the microphone tool! We do not have Raz Kids, but we do have a similar computer based reading program that requires students to complete fluency recordings. While I went to two PD sessions on our reading program, no one ever addressed the recording aspect, and I was left to figure it out on my own. It took a lot of trial and error. It was frustrating for the students to switch from headphones to microphones mid-lesson, plus I would have to drop everything I was doing to help them, and then the recording would yield so little information about their fluency skills, it really didn't seem functional. Eventually I just turned off that piece of the program on my teacher dashboard! Maybe if I had a teacher like you at my school that could teach me a better way, I could tackle turning it back on!

Appendix E: Example of a Draft Literacy Reform Project Proposal

Edna (9/16/16):

Sixth grade is a huge transitional time for many students. On a school wide level, students change buildings, begin switching classes, have lockers, all on top of completing a more rigorous curriculums requiring more higher level thinking skills than ever before. This is often a very challenging time for students with disabilities, especially the shift from having one teacher to having potentially eight different teachers. As a sixth grade co-teacher last year, I noticed my classified students were much more successful in class when teachers were able to not only collaborate on a regular basis, but use the same or very similar terminology. For example, as we completed a reading comprehension task in Social Studies one day, I used the same terms, like recall, prediction, and connection, as their Reading/Writing teacher. In my reflection of the lesson, I believed it was more successful because I referenced terms students already knew, and felt confident with, to complete the Social Studies task. Later that day I was even able to send a positive email to the Reading/Writing teacher and a parent stating how well the student had generalized the reading skills into Social Studies class. Drawing on this experience, for my literacy reform project, I would like to meet with all the special education sixth grade teachers and work with them to develop a collection of reading strategies they could use in their content area classes. I have spoken with the sixth grade resource level Science teacher, and she mentioned she really wants to incorporate more vocabulary instruction into her units. She feels as though the additional vocabulary instruction would help students develop a deeper understanding of the content. When I co-taught Social Studies, I felt the same way. It was difficult to teach students about artifacts from the Zhou Dynasty if they had no idea what the word “artifact” meant first. As long as I can clear it with my supervisors, I would like to complete this project during after-school meeting days, specifically Special Education Supervisor meetings as well as Professional Development days. Additionally, I would create a living document online, for teachers to access at their convenience that summarizes the reading strategies and organizes blank materials that can be utilized quickly and effectively. Some examples I can think of are: vocabulary graphic organizers for pre-teaching content area words, the COPS editing strategy (capitalization, organization, punctuation, and spelling), and active reading strategies taught as part of the sixth grade curriculum in our district.

Appendix F: Reflective Practice Graphic Organizer

This was intended to supported the analysis of the online discussion board written reflections, student-facilitated chapter reviews, and literary reform projects)

Title: Focus for Reform Project	
Relevant Context from Needs Assessment and Research	
2a Identification of Problem and Description of Rationale for a Revised Approach	2b Action(s) Planned or Taken to Promote Professional Learning

Appendix G: Literacy Reform Project Assignment

As a reading specialist/literacy coach, you will be responsible for developing needs-based school-wide literacy programming in a P-12 setting. The comprehensive literacy program should be based on data collected as well as sound literacy theory and practice addressed in your coursework and beyond. Examples of literacy reform efforts that have been designed and implemented include addressing the needs of bilingual and bidialectical learners in schools without formalized programming for such students; making books more accessible to students in schools without school libraries; integrating more comprehension-based literacy strategies in school-based literacy programs with heavy emphases on phonemic awareness, word identification and phonics; and introducing assessment systems that are more coherently aligned with the grade level literacy curriculum. In short, identify a facet of a literacy program that you would like to improve.

Phase 1: Environmental Needs Assessments

You are required to conduct an environmental scan/needs assessment of an existing P-12 school site.

The purpose of the assignment is to provide you with the tools required to evaluate a site, determine the site's needs as it pertains to the development of literacy programming, and use the information ascertained to design and implement a needs-based literacy program. During the site observations, you should maintain a log of your classroom observations, thus facilitating memory.

Your assessment should be 10-12 pages in length and address the following points:

- o What is the philosophy of the current literacy program and is it clearly articulated? What are the instructional grouping options (individual, small-group, whole-class, and computer based) and are they appropriate for accomplishing given purposes? (IRA 2003 Standard 2.1)
- o What does the current literacy curriculum consist of—including instructional practices, materials, literacy activities, instruction, and evaluation? What are the instructional grouping options? How does the current curricular program support classroom teachers and paraprofessionals in the use of a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, and methods and materials? (IRA 2003 Standards 2.2 and 2.3)
- o What are current professional development initiatives, structures and practices within the school?
- o What data does the school use to analyze progress and literacy performance? Compare and contrast, and interpret this wide range of assessment tools and practices. Assessments may range from standardized tests to informal assessments and also include technology-based assessment. (IRA 2003 Standard 3.1)
- o What is the expertise of faculty and staff with regard to literacy?

o Based on data collected, a summary of the strengths and needs of the school with regard to literacy teaching and learning.

In this paper, you are required to provide evidence that supports your analysis and findings by using three sources in addition to the course text. These sources can be refereed journal articles and/or books. The paper should have a title page, a table of contents, headings and subheadings, and a bibliography. Please use a style guide and specify which one you've decided to use.

Phase 1 Paper Due: 10/24

Worth: 20%

Class Presentation (to support the development of your final project report)

For this assignment, you will develop an update/presentation on your School-wide Literacy Reform Project (Phase 2a and 2b). In a sense, this is an opportunity to share your progress on your School-wide Literacy Reform Project, get some feedback, and build momentum toward your final project report due on the last day of class. In your presentation you will:

1. Give an update about your current work with your School-wide Literacy Reform Project. What is going well? What are some of your challenges?
2. Explain the resources that you will provide in your School-wide Literacy Reform Project. If you are sharing a professional text, think carefully about the text that you choose. How will this text enhance student learning? How does this text build on current practices and curriculum in schools? How might this text enhance a range of teachers' practices, both veteran and novice?
3. Explain what the implementation of your plan will look like. For example, if you will be responsible for designing a professional development experience that could be implemented in a school, your course may involve a sequence of at least 3 professional development experiences that you would develop or use with teachers, based on the content of a shared text. Your plan may include: a professional development workshop; a "Study Group" or meeting with teachers; and a side-by-side coaching lesson plan based on the content of a shared text.

Due: Class Presentations 11/7-11/28

Worth: 20%

School-wide Literacy Reform Project in a P-12 Setting

Phase 2a: School-wide literacy reform project

For this phase of the assignment you will develop a school-wide literacy program proposal based on needs identified in Phase 1 of the assignment. The particular literacy program should be based on data collected, and on sound literacy theory and practice addressed in your coursework and beyond. The report should include the following:

- An assessment of the needs and current status of the challenge: What problem are you addressing? Why is the program you're proposing needed? Do you have assessment data to support your interpretation of the problem and the way in which to address it in a programmatically sound manner? (You may consider using a concise summary or a review of the most relevant parts of your Phase 1 Environmental Needs Assessment.)
- How will the proposed program benefit students, faculty and school personnel, parents/caregivers, and the community?
- Articulation of a program philosophy: Clearly define your vision and mission statement for the literacy program, in addition to the ways in which you will enhance participation from administrators, faculty and school personnel, parents/caregivers, and influential community members. This philosophy should integrate principle theories of reading and writing processes showing that you understand the major components of reading and how they are integrated in fluent reading (IRA 2003 Standard 1.4) and should articulate how this program aligns with theories related to the connections between teacher dispositions and student achievement (IRA 2003 Standard 5.1). This section will positively and constructively provide an evaluation of the school faculty's teaching practices. The goal here is to assist classroom teachers, paraprofessionals and the school administration as they strive to improve their practice (IRA 2003 Standard 5.3).

The description of the program design should include, but is not limited to:

- a) Program goals
- b) Population served
- c) Personnel involved
- d) A clear interpretation of assessment data and demonstration of the appropriate use of assessments in future practice and teacher preparation (IRA 2003 Standard 3.1)
- e) Program implementation, emphasizing how you will support classroom teachers in their instructional practices, approaches, methods and grouping options. This discussion should have an evidence-based rationale that links back to your needs based assessment data. You will help teachers select appropriate options and explain the evidence-base for selecting practices to best meet the needs of all students. You will demonstrate the options in demonstration teaching. (IRA 2003 Standards 2.2)
- f) Attention to issues of cultural and linguistic diversity
- g) Materials used and a clear articulation of how you intend to support teachers in the wide range and use of these materials and how you will demonstrate the options in demonstration teaching. (IRA 2003 Standard 2.3)
- h) Detailed timetables
- i) A summary of key professional development components to include workshops, study groups (IRA 2003 Standard 5.2), and small group/1:1 meetings with teachers and paraprofessionals
- j) Potential funding sources
- k) Detailed budget

- l) Plan for securing administrative support
- m) Difficulties you might encounter in effecting your proposed change, and how these might be minimized
- n) Details on how you will evaluate the success of your (proposed) change to include summative and formative data collection

Phase 2b: Presentation for Stakeholders

The data derived from the needs assessment (Part 1) and the proposed program (Part 2) will be presented to a number of key stakeholders—teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators—thus demonstrating literacy leadership skills and the ability to translate data for accountability and instructional purposes. In this presentation, it should articulate how this program aligns with theories related to the connections between teacher dispositions and student achievement (IRA 2003 Standard 5.1). (IRA 2003 Standards 3.4 and 5.4). This demonstration should draw explicit connections between data and practice.

Appendices can include:

- a) Needs Assessment details
- b) Sample letters to personnel and parents
- c) Sample materials
- d) Sample program evaluation materials
- e) Sample assessment data (with names/private information removed)
- f) An agenda from your meeting/presentation to key stakeholders

Please follow University Writing guidelines when submitting your project report (see Graduate Student Catalog). Papers should be approximately 10-12 double-spaced pages and should incorporate a 5-7 sources (excluding class texts). Please be certain to indicate sources for your ideas and plans where appropriate and align the paper with well-recognized style guidelines.

Project Report Phase 2a and 2b Paper Due: 12/12

Worth: 25%

Appendix H: Interview Schedule and Questions

Participant #	Interview Date and Time	Focus Group Date and Time
1	3/21/17, 5:30 PM	
2	3/21/17, 4:30 PM	4/26/17, 4:45 PM
3	3/22/17, 4:30 PM	4/26/17, 4:45 PM
4	3/22/17, 5:00 PM	
5	3/23/17, 5:30 PM	4/19/17, 4:45 PM
6	3/29/17, 4:30 PM	4/19/17, 4:45 PM
7	4/5/17, 4:30 PM	4/19/17, 4:45 PM

Interview Questions

Opening blurb: Thanks so much for meeting with me for this interview, especially now that our class is over and done with. I just want to reiterate that I'm no longer your instructor, and would really just appreciate your insights on the topic and practice of reflection. This is of course completely voluntary on your part, and I appreciate it. I want to remind you that you don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to, and that your identity will be kept confidential. Would you like to continue?

1. It's been a while since we have been in class together. Please remind me about your background and experiences as a literacy teacher.
2. My interest is teacher reflective practice. Reflective practice has so many definitions and "takes"; so tell me, what does reflective practice mean to you?

The focus of my study is on supporting literacy teachers' reflective practice. Now that the course is over, I'm really interested in what you took away from this class--if anything--about reflection as a literacy teacher.

3. Can you recall a routine, activity, or resource from our class that you feel perhaps helped you become a more reflective practitioner? How and why did (whatever they said in the previous question) help you?
4. [If writing was not mentioned in #3a or 3b...] One way to reflect on our teaching practices is through writing, and we did an extensive amount of writing in many different forms in our class. Can you share examples of any ways in which writing tasks helped you engage in reflective practice?
5. Tell me about any of the ways in which you reflected on the role of power in your role as a literacy teacher (if at all) [offer the following if they do not offer it]...as teacher in the classroom? ...in terms of external factors (policy, mandates)?
6. Thinking back to the last few months, I'm curious if your practice has changed, if at all, since you've taken the class. Can you identify anything from class that contributed to

more reflective practice after the class was over? If so, please give an example of a particular reflective practice and action cycle that you've taken.

7. As a final question, is there anything else you'd like to tell me about reflective practice before we wrap up?

Focus Group Questions

Opening blurb: Thanks so much for meeting with me for this focus group interview, especially now that our class is over and done with. I just want to reiterate that I'm no longer your instructor, and would really just appreciate your insights on the topic of reflection. This is of course completely voluntary on your part, and I appreciate it. I want to remind you that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to, and that your responses will be kept confidential.

Although I will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents me, as the researcher, from guaranteeing confidentiality. I would like to remind you to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not to repeat what is said in the focus group to others. Please do not share anything in the focus group you are not comfortable sharing.

Would you like to continue?

As a reminder, the focus of my study is on supporting literacy teachers' reflective practice. Now that the course is over, I'm really interested in what you took away from this class--if anything--about reflection as literacy teachers.

1. The main goal of the course was your construction of the Phase 1 Environmental Needs Assessment and Phase 2 School-wide Literacy Reform Project and Presentation to Stakeholders in your own school districts. We worked on different parts of these projects throughout the course. When you were working on these projects, to what extent did you feel you were participating in teacher reflection?
2. I don't know if you noticed, but during the course, I was interested in promoting reflection throughout the course. For example, I shared the following supports (I provided the following eliciting devices for review):
 - Analogies to help define reflection
 - A co-created rubric for scoring your student-facilitated chapter presentations
 - A tuning protocol to guide the presentation and feedback when you presented your progress with your literacy reform projects
 - A reflective practice graphic organizer
 - A concept map activity

To what extent were any of these supports helpful? Why was this (the support they selected) more significant to your reflective practice than the other supports?

3. I hope to teach this READ 502 course again. I would really appreciate your input into how to best support reflective practice in the course content and assignment work. What suggestions do you have for me? Why do you think (the suggestion provided in the previous question) would be useful?
4. We all shared the READ 500 face-to-face class sessions and I interviewed many of you individually as well--is there anything that our class sessions or the interview might have prompted you to think about with respect to teacher reflection that you'd like to talk about now?

Appendix I: Tuning Protocol and Sample Teacher Feedback

Tuning Protocol (from Blythe & Allen, 2015):

1. *Introduction.* Facilitator briefly introduces protocol goals, norms, and steps.
2. *Presentation.* Presenter shares the context for his/her work, supporting documents, and a focusing question for which he/she wants feedback.
3. *Clarifying questions.* Participants have an opportunity to ask factual informational questions to better understand the work. Presenter answers briefly.
4. *Examination of the student work.* Participants look closely at the presenter's student work samples, as well as task, project, rubric, etc., and prepare to offer warm and cool feedback related to the focusing question. Presenter is silent.
5. *Warm and cool feedback.* Participants share feedback. The feedback generally begins with "warm" feedback (observations about how the work relates to the goals), then moves on to "cool" feedback (possible disconnects, gaps, or problems, sometimes phrased in the form of probing questions). Presenter is silent.
6. *Reflection.* Presenter reflects on what he or she heard in participants' feedback.
7. *Debrief.* Facilitator leads reflection on the process of using the tuning protocol.

Sample Teacher Feedback to Alice (12/3/16):

- We surely did save one of the best for last:)
To start, I like how you began with the visual image and research citations to anchor your audience in the issue at hand.
Once more thanks for sharing some of the intricacies of your district context because they provided a good rationale for your reform project, and many of your classmates were unfamiliar with an extended day/year and community school.
In addition, using your own mission and core beliefs to support your reform project was a good idea. It shows you are extending the philosophies of the district in a smart way.
While I love the idea of a book club, don't overlook the value of shorter PD resources such as articles or chapters on culturally responsive teaching. And, the potential for using existing resources in your explanation such as an enhanced/more culturally responsive lesson on *The Outsiders* adds great connected authenticity as well as a resource that could be replicated.
I forgot to mention it in class, but perhaps you could think about bringing in some ACHIEVE 3000 texts on culturally responsive topics that connect to your fiction core texts. This could keep a focus on text analysis in themes that are connected to students' lives. As you probably know, you could search articles by topic.
Let me know if you need any support as you fine-tune your reform project. I'm so pleased that you have chosen such a meaningful topic and it was a pleasure to see you facilitate with a passionate and smart disposition.
Well done.
Best,
Gary

Appendix J: Samples of Data Collected Across the Course

Definition of Reflective Practice (Post)-interview	Preferred Written Reflective Practice from Class (Post)-interview (coding for supports)	Written Proposal (Week 3)	Literacy Reform Project (Phase 1 Needs Assessment, Week 7) End of Report (Add assignment to Appendix)	Online Written Reflection (Week 10)- Initial posts and responses to peers	Literacy Reform Project Phase 2a/2b conclusion (Week 14)
<p>Definition: Self-critiquing (p. 3) Looking at something either I've done myself or with other people on a project, and being able to constructively criticize it. What went well? What could go better? And how would I change it, if I was able to do it again.</p>	<p>Specific Supports: Processing peer connections and teacher feedback (p. 6) The online discussion. Your class was the first class I'd ever had that in- And how to respond to other people, and generally take all of the comments and connect them and, um bring other people's names into them so that they could kind of see, "Okay, well, I have a similar example." Um, so do they and just the terminology to use." Um, also I enjoy how when we had the different phases of the paper, you had commented on what aspects we could've potentially included what I might now have thought of on my own.</p>	<p>Proposal topic: Selecting an effective writing program (p. 2) Context: Unsupported writing program (p. 1) There was a manual to follow and that was the extent of my introduction to <i>Good Habits Great Readers</i> writing series. I tried implementing the lessons according to the scope and sequence provided. Context: Students bored and disruptive with packaged curriculum: Many students were bored, which caused them to be disruptive, while others struggled to even brainstorm ideas. How can I differentiate the lesson to meet all needs while staying on the same topic?</p>	<p>Context: Parental involvement (p. 13) Parents take part in school activities and recognized the key role teachers play in their children's lives. ...This aids teachers in helping to educate our students by knowing we have parents as resources and reinforcers. Practice: Researching Curriculum Resources Next, the curriculum map I found while researching my school's website had proven to be an extremely beneficial resource. To illustrate this point, lists of standards by grade are recorded with skills, procedures, examples and common core exemplars.</p>	<p>Reflective Response: Context: Asking principal for common literacy planning time with special education colleagues: If I needed to make time to meet with special teachers I would ask if the principal would carve out 1 PD full or half session per month in order to meet with these teachers. Reflective Response: Process: Collaborating on literacy lesson work and reporting back after giving it a go: Then we could discuss ways to help implement content specific pedagogy, incorporate reading strategies, and align assessments to inform instruction together.</p>	<p>Process: Collaborating on approaches to problems: If we have questions regarding a writing piece, we can now refer to one another with advice on how to approach the next step. Unexpected: Principal Commendation on Teacher Reflective Practice: As a result of the Reform Project, my principal asked me to join the SCiP committee. He explained to me that he believes I would be beneficial to have on the panel because of my initiative to take the lead and get involved.</p>

Appendix K: Representation Sample of Codes

Code	Definition	Example	*Data Source
Publication	To post a written reflection for others in the class to see	“I knew that it was going to get published [to our class online discussion board], and everybody was gonna see, I really wanted to make sure that I understood it.” Previous to this response, the student shared how she put in extra effort to learn more about the history of learning standards and the Danielson evaluation model in order to write about them with more confidence before publication.	PI
Community	A shared environment	“I think that creating a school of students who enjoy literacy, and achieve high, is the job of all members of the community: town, state, and nation-wide.”	ODB
Evaluation	To make a judgment based on the availability of data	“With the district assessing Treasures this year and deciding a new direction it is critical to evaluate what has been successful and what has failed to help move forward in a meaningful direction.”	LRP1
Connections	Linking information from two different sources	“Deep reflective thinking enabled me to see the connection between the components of our district’s literacy program, and to be realistic about its strengths as well as its weaknesses.	LRP2
Past Commiserating	Moving forward in a positive way instead of getting caught up in complaining	The participant explained that the online written reflections created an expectation to reflect on experience in a meaningful way that may help in the future “...rather than sort of just commiserating in like, yucky-ness.”	FGI

*Data Sources: Personal Interview (PI); Online Discussion Board (ODB); Literacy Reform Project Phase 1 (LRP1); Literacy Reform Project Phase 2 (LRP2); Focus Group Interview (FGI)

