TROUBLING A TROUBLED ROLE:

A POSTSTRUCTURALLY INFLECTED AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

INQUIRY INTO "LITERACY SPECIALIST"

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ABSTRACT

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In the United States, Literacy Professional roles are becoming increasingly popular in public middle and high schools. Presumed to impact student achievement in literacy as well as impact teachers' continued professional learning and growth through job-embedded experiences, the role is increasingly utilized towards the adoption of policies, practices, and curriculums. As such, literacy professionals are increasingly positioned as change agents. As it is shaped by audit culture, neoliberal ideology, and accountability/standardization rhetoric, considerations of professional subjectivities of literacy professionals who are bombarded with impossibilities of working toward those neoliberal, measurable outcomes of "more efficient and effective" are difficult to find in the current body of literature. Thus, the professional identities and subjectivities of 'Literacy Specialist' is a fruitful site for investigation.

Feminist poststructural theories of discourse, power, identity, and subjectivity are utilized to re/view possible ways knowledge, "truth," and subjects are produced in language and cultural practices. Since poststructural theories foreground our awareness of structuring impulses and their relation to the social order, this research seeks to explore my own interpretations of "lived experiences" in a literacy specialist role in order to work the tensions by analyzing constructions of self historically and contextually within the role. To do so, poststructurally influenced autobiographical modes of inquiry were

utilized. Such versions of autobiography not only challenge Enlightenment assumptions about autobiography as a full and "accurate" representation of a "self," but also allow for an exploration of my own subjectivities within the discursive regimes in which the role of "literacy specialist" typically operates.

This research is situated within a perspective that pushes back on assumptions about research and methodology which give the notion of findings purchase. Rather, I offer "unconclusions" regarding the ways structures of Response to Intervention, literacy practices, and literacy curriculum operate through dominant discourses to position both literacy professionals and students. Tracing discourses in such a way opens spaces to re/view processes of power/knowledge relations at work. Further, by tracing those discourses through to the subjectivities of teachers and students, spaces are opened to ask questions about literacy and literacy practices that have perhaps not previously been considered.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Saralyn, who grew up alongside the ever-present, over-shadowing presence of this academic twin. You were in elementary school when I began doctoral studies. You are now in college, planning Ph.D. studies of your own as I finish—this dissertation has been present for more than half your life. Much of what I could not be for you as a mother can be blamed on this dissertation. But part of my motivation for pursuing a doctorate was for you. Do you not see possibilities for yourself that you may not have otherwise? Do you not enter your own academic career with eyes wide open? Can we use these to rationalize away the moments we may have missed over the last ten years? Now, as well as my daughter, I call you an academic peer. You are the inspiration for the words on these pages.

This work must also dedicated to Doug, Andrew, Zachary, Micah, who, alongside Saralyn, tolerated—even thrived in—the disruptive life conditions the pursuit of this project necessitated. To Doug, for many generously cooked meals; treks to the grocery store; and graciously fielding many requests to, "Please stop talking—I need to think." To Micah, who read many drafts and could always hook me up with new "study tunes." To Zach, who shared the phrase "subtle triumph" and who was so adept at reminding me I would eventually have a life post-dissertation. To Andrew who tolerated abandonment as I went off to academia myself as you entered college. I am humbled by your support as I remember not one, not two, but three cross-country relocations as well as the daily demands for a quiet house you all endured so I could write. Few families would be as willing. As I analyzed my own subjectivities as wife, mother, student, educator, academic, coach, teacher, etc., etc., you patiently allowed me to wrestle with the demands of each role in the limited hours of each day. Without you all, there would be no words on these pages.

This work must also be dedicated to the relentless coaching and pushing of my sponsor, Dr. Janet Miller. You are the voice ringing in my head. There were tears, there were frustrations, but your words, "Keep going" ensured that the words on these pages are worth reading.

And finally, this work must be dedicated to the One who is, who was, and who is to come. The now and the not yet. Without whom there would be no words.

R. R. C.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

An Impossible Job

Laurel Richardson (1994) states that research may begin from the researcher's desire to "make sense of one's life" (p. 520). After nearly 20 years as a classroom teacher, reading interventionist, writing professional developer, and literacy coach all at the elementary level, I made the move to the middle level as a Literacy Specialist. Early on in my current position in a wealthy suburban U.S. middle school nestled in the Northeast, I sought to make sense of the role by consulting the rather large body of trade literature on literacy coaching, literacy teaching, adolescent literacy, and literacy intervention. As the role encompassed multiple "hats," including reading teacher, coach, and interventionist, I explored a broad range of literature. What I found, and continue to find, is that very little of this literature considers literacy and teaching from anything other than an efficiency and effectiveness standpoint that seeks to grow teaching practice and student learning through a linear progression. Within this framework, the role of literacy specialist is reduced to moves that can intentionally be adopted to manipulate an end.

At the same time I was seeking clarity and understanding of the Literacy Specialist role, I was exploring feminist poststructural perspectives that interrogate and complicate positivist and constructivist-oriented assumptions that typically rule understandings of knowing, learning, and "the self" within U.S. education. Through this study, my efforts to

understand my job and "make sense" became increasingly nonsensical. Recognizing my own daily practice as highly constructivist, yet finding complications of that practice through a feminist and poststructural lens impossible to ignore, tensions and disconnects festered among representations of the Literacy Specialist role within the literature I consulted, my everyday lived experiences, and my philosophical assumptions.

Going Underground

I dreamed that dream again last night. The images are misty; monochromatic. They persistently linger. The pressure of fear sits on my chest even after fully waking. Panic seeps into my day. I still see walls of rough plank wood. A cabin. Frantically scanning secret hiding places. A false wall. A hollowed-out cellar below the flimsy floorboards. I am not alone. Others seek a hiding place. They rely on me. But I can't move fast enough. Soldiers pound on doors. Rifles unshouldered, jackboots stomping, bent crosses form shoulder insignia …. why am I hiding from Nazis? I am not one they seek! Yet my lot is cast with these others. I'm too slow. Too late. I wake as frantic, panicked quiet explodes into chaotic shouts, bangs, orders, cries, and protests.

This dream is recurring. The location changes. The people are faceless, nameless. We're always hiding. We're always chased. It's always Nazi soldiers. The intense feeling that if I can only get underground, then escape – freedom - is possible. That feeling lingers through the rest of the day. It walks through school hallways. It sits with me in classrooms. It taps on my shoulders during meetings. Underground. Underground. I just want to get underground. The emotions bulge behind my eyes as I write. I am drained.

***

The tensions were painful. Me as literacy professional, me as doctoral student, even me as mother: These pieces of "me" collided and collapsed and pushed against each other. I did not, and do not still, understand them. Can you hear it yet? The change in

voice? Keep reading. You will. The good mother. The good coach. The good daughter. The good teacher. The good doctoral student. They're all here, shouting over one another, vying for dominance. The voice that seeks to be the authoritative voice of the academic; the voice that seeks empathy and understanding; the voice that wants to revolt against dominant educational constructs; the voice that wants to be a knower; the voice that searches for nice, tidy resolutions and gorgeous answers for linear teaching practice. They are all here in cacophony. I do not understand these tensions … these varying voices. I spent so much time skirting away from them because they hurt. Perhaps this is why this dissertation took so long to get off the ground but also why it was so critical to continue.

***

Vivian[1] *and I stepped out of her office one day, continuing a discussion begun in an administrative meeting. Discussing and planning for the continued professional learning of our staff around literacy practices in the school had been the focus of the conversation. Given my role as a specialist (as defined in the professional body of literature I had been consulting), much of the work to actualize and foster the "growth" of the staff would fall to my shoulders. As we finalized details and reflected on the meeting overall, Viv turned to me. "You know, you have an impossible job."*

Why is This a Problem?

In order to examine what I found to be impossibly nonsensical as well as the ever-present urge to go underground, I found it necessary to explore larger socio-political landscapes into which my work as a Literacy Specialist occurs. I began to feel and see that my own tracings of the shapes of key contextual pieces from the larger U.S.

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[1]All names are pseudonyms.

historical conversations on literacy, underlying predominant historically presumed and currently assumed theories of literacy, as well as predominant articulations of the role "Literacy Specialist" to all be pertinent. But I also saw these conversations over-shadowed by the looming ideology known as neoliberalism.

Neoliberal Ideology and Audit Culture

The recent surge in literacy roles in U.S. education has found itself conceived and birthed within twin discourses of standardization and accountability stemming directly from neoliberal ideology permeating current society. As such, current literacy practices are inextricably shaped by and linked to the rules and ways of understanding teaching and learning now predominantly assumed in education. To consider literacy roles in U.S. contexts, we must consider the domination of these discourses.

Although the tenets of neoliberal thinking have been traced through economic and political ideology since the early 1900s, the term "neoliberal" originated in the 1930s. Foucault (1979/2008) traced the roots of American neoliberalism specifically to Keynesian policies of the New Deal era, social and economic interventions of World War II, and growth of the federal government. Gaining traction after the economic crises of the 1970s, classic liberalism was revived under the novel conditions of globalization and rose to prominence in the 1980s (Bockman, 2013; Davies, 2003; Steger & Roy, 2010). Neoliberalism is a rather broad and general concept, with several variations emphasizing different parts of the theory according to particular social contexts, but all built on the economic ideal of a self-regulating, free world market. Neoliberal ideology has transgressed the borders of economic and political domains and bled out to all aspects of life to encompass a complex system of language, thought, and behavior now so imbued in society's assumptions as to be invisible. (Apple, 2004; Bockman, 2013; Foucault, 1979/2008; Steger & Roy, 2010). Whether or not we are aware, neoliberal

ideology dictates how and what we think about each other, ourselves, our social structures, and our schools (Taubman, 2009).

Neoliberal goals and aims are generally governed by technological rationality, capitalistic gain, cognitive science, and positivistic studies (Davies, 2005, 2006; Torres, 2008). Neoliberalism generally seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market and suggests marketized solutions for various aspects of society (Apple, 2004; Weiner, 2005). Grounded in the assumption that governments cannot create economic growth or provide social welfare, neoliberal thinking presumes that private companies, individuals, and unhindered markets are best able to generate economic growth and social welfare (Bockman, 2013; Davies, 2005, 2006; Steger & Roy, 2010; Torres, 2008). Within neoliberalism, policies and processes allow a relatively small percentage of private interests to control large percentages of public and social life.

Steger and Roy (2010) describe three intertwined manifestations of neoliberalism: one as an ideology, one as a mode of governance, and another as a policy package. As described above, the ideology of neoliberalism strives toward global economic free-market capitalism. As a mode of governance, neoliberalism is a manifestation of Foucault's theorization of governmentalities[2] and the notion of the panopticon, where internalized surveillance by the multiplied gazes, in Foucault's example of prison guards, ensures that conduct is carried out that meets the institutional objectives; citizens manage themselves (Bockman, 2013; Davies, 2003; Taubman, 2009). As a policy package, the values of competitiveness, self-interest, and decentralization taken from the world of business and commerce dictate decisions across all aspects of social life. Of the many ramifications of these ideological manifestations, neoliberalism tends to treat people as capital and everyday life becomes commodified—including education (Weiner, 2005).

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[2]This concept of Foucault's, as well as others, will be explored and discussed in later sections.

As manifested in current societies, neoliberalism represents a move from social consciences and responsibility toward individualism (Davies, 2005). With this move, neoliberalism finds purchase within a social value of "the self-made man" that has played a recurring role in the "histories" of the U.S. But despite the emphasis on the individual's responsibility, trust is unrealistic in the neoliberal logic because what is understood as possible is shaped by obsessive regulatory practices of government toward which institutions must bend (Davies, 2005). That bending must then report productivity to the governing needs and goals. As Davies (2005) suggests, "We could, as we do, not quite through choice and not quite through necessity, take neoliberalism on board for a safe life - we can survive if we subject ourselves to its terms" (p. 4). Therefore, complex systems of surveillance (Foucault, 1995) and reporting mechanisms for monitoring and producing appropriate behaviors are deemed necessary (Davies, 2003, 2005). Within a neoliberal context of accountability and audit, narrow definitions of knowledge, surveillances, requirements for continuous improvement, and an overall market rationale rule the day. Neoliberal thinking has seeped into and shaped the U.S. education system in profound ways—from policy to practice, including literacy practices (Davies, 2003; Taubman, 2009; Torres, 2008).

Impact of Neoliberal Ideology on Literacy Education

The neoliberal agenda has altered our understandings of the processes and practices of schooling, education, literacy, language, curriculum, pedagogy, and theory. From a drive toward privatization and decentralization of public education, to shifting the aims of democratic education, to reifying the position that only that which is measurable is important, the logic of economic efficiency is extraordinarily effective in re-defining of all aspects of schooling (Apple, 2011; Taubman, 2009; Torres, 2008; Weiner, 2005). While entire books have been written on the impact of neoliberalism on education, three

points are particularly salient to discussions of literacy education and the role of literacy professional roles: knowledge/knowing, continuous improvement, and accountability.

Knowledge, knowing, and teaching. Of utmost significance to considerations of literacy is the prevalence of standards. Neoliberal thinking infiltrates and shapes the way knowledge and teaching are understood and significantly impacts practice (Davies, 2003). Neoliberalism loves scientific authority. But what is accepted as evidence, how that evidence is generated, and the use to which it is put are narrowly defined. Knowledge that counts is knowledge that can be measured (Davies, 2003; Lather, 2012). "Neoliberalism LOVES quantitative reductionism. In the realm of public policy a kind of 'metric mania' disallows what cannot easily be counted" (Lather, 2012, p. 1023). So *what* teachers should teach is prescribed within very narrow parameters, thus ignoring debates around what and whose knowledge should be taught in schools, while also assuming the establishment of a supposed common culture and core knowledge (Apple, 2011).

Specific to literacy, federal and state legislation legitimates testing as the central measure of learning. High-stakes testing situates what is defined as knowledge that counts within the authority of the state. Definitions of knowledge, as well as of what and who counts as capable of constructing knowledge, have progressed from student/teacher to school, to district, to state, to federal control (Gorlewski, 2011). *No Child Left Behind* in particular diminished the educational autonomy of the states by claiming to raise standards while simultaneously defining what those standards are as well as what and who will constitute what is deemed as the quality of education and what that ought to be (Torres, 2008). As Davies (2003) suggests, the discourse of standards can be alluring. "Who can dispute the desirability of every child achieving a minimum standard of literacy and thus achieving not only the potential to be active citizens of democracy but also the potential to survive in the new information technology driven global world?" (p. 98).

But under the reign of high-stakes testing, literacy is reduced to a set of basic skills wherein comprehension means a process by which the reader "discovers *the* meaning" in the text, unrelated to the contexts in which the text is being read or the persons who are reading (Weiner, 2005). Traditional literacies and canonical contents are prized over new literacies (Gee, 2004; Jenkins, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011), or other ways of knowing and being literate (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bloome & Encisco, 2006; Campano, 2007; Dyson, 1997; Heath & Mangiola, 1991; Kliewer, 2008; Lewis, 2001; Seiter, 2005; Wheeler, Swords, & Carpenter, 2004). The means of achieving the aims of a neoliberal-bound literacy curriculum may be at the expense of the teaching strategies through which critical literacy (Comber, Thomson, & Wells, 2001; Janks, 2000; Jones, 2006) and new literacies are taught (Davies, 2003; Gorlewski, 2011; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007).

Continuous improvement. Perceptions and mandates of *how* teachers should teach are also governed by neoliberal ideologies. Since neoliberalism loves quantitative reduction, evidence-based and research-based practice is king. Practices governed by calculations and numbers replace teachers' unique and context-specific approaches to teaching and learning (Taubman, 2009). Through an emphasis on evidence, neoliberal ideology manufactures a crisis around teachers' knowledge and ability, subsequently creating the need for surveillance and accountability. A rationale perpetuates the strong and widespread belief that education is flawed and students are failing, but all students can learn if teachers follow directions (Davies, 2003; Taubman, 2009). In order to effectively and efficiently teach, teachers need training and monitoring. Continuous improvement and surveillance of self and others become the driving force behind teachers' everyday practice (Davies, 2003).

> In the neoliberal age, the literacy level of the literacy teacher needs to be developed so that he or she can respond ethically to the demands of language learners, demands that arise out of the contradiction between neoliberal interests on one hand and democratic needs on the other. (Weiner, 2005, p. 9)

The locus of power thus shifts dramatically upwards from practicing professionals to auditors, policymakers, and statisticians (Davies, 2003). The system itself is naturalized so resistance by individuals is constituted as ignorance of the real, financial, bottom-line issues and thus thoroughly squashed. Additionally, resources available to support professional work are absconded for surveillance and auditing aims. An individual's sense of agency and freedom is overlaid with tension and anxiety of surveillance (Davies, 2003).

Accountability. Accountability is a key element of neoliberalism. As the reduction of teaching and learning to standardized and mechanistic approaches proliferates, a need for an accounting to expectations of control emerges. In the interest of surveillance and efficiency, accountability has created an audit culture (Davies, 2003; Taubman, 2009; Torres, 2008). Within the audit culture, a pervasive threat of external punitive measures erodes the professional judgment of educators. Assumptions that professional practice should include explicit goals, evidence-based practice to meet those goals, and measurable outcomes pervade teaching. However, each step is dictated by legislators, policymakers, and statisticians who may or may not know anything about classrooms and teaching. Thus, they rely on objective, empirical research, suggesting an unproblematic binary relationship between research and practice (Davies, 2003). Additionally, this audit culture necessitates a series of regulatory practices at the macro and micro level to ensure that teachers teach the already determined set of knowledge in the already determined "appropriate" way. The supposed "answers" to questions of "TO whom and BY what means accountability is rendered" are disconcerting. In current educational culture, however, accountability is synonymous with "data" and "numbers" garnered from standardized testing and applied to the evaluation of both students and teachers (Taubman, 2009).

Impact of the Neoliberal on Literacy Professionals

Of particular interest are the impacts of accountability and audit culture on the identities and subjectivities of teachers and students. Julie Gorlewski (2011) traces how—because trust is unrealistic within neoliberalism—in the form of high-stakes testing this ideology undermines students' and teachers' perceptions of themselves as autonomous, intelligent, creative, and intellectual. To be successful in new capitalism, workers must construct identities that affiliate with socially and economically distinctive types of knowledge. High-stakes assessments redefine not only knowledge but also the identities and subjectivities of learners and teachers who are forced to perform according to those assessments' specifications.

It is into this climate of continuous improvement, accountability, and diminished understandings of knowledge that literacy professional roles have bloomed. While some scholars trace literacy professional roles back to the 1930s in the U.S. (Duessen, Coskie, Robinson, & Autio, 2007), a proliferation has been observed within the last 20 years. The influx of literacy professionals in schools has been connected to the growing body of research around reading and writing alongside legislation and national reform efforts such as Common Core State Standards (2010), *No Child Left Behind* (2002), and the reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (2004), all of which have led to the popularization of Response to Intervention, *Reading First*, and Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (Bean et al., 2015; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). Given the foundations of these legislative and reform efforts within dominant national conversations on literacy, teaching, and learning, they are worthy of detailed discussion.

Legislative moves. Directly impacting the growth and understandings of literacy professional roles are specific national legislative moves. The *No Child Left Behind* law of 2001 (in response to a perceived crisis in education—"a rising tide of mediocrity"—as promulgated in *A Nation at Risk* report) pushed states to attend to student achievement as

measured through standardized testing as well as to implement accountability measures to ensure high-quality teaching was occurring (Taubman, 2009). Within NCLB, rhetorical moves and concepts culled from the corporate sector shape the national conversation. This rhetoric posits schools as mediocre, teachers as negligent, remiss, and victimizing students. It also posits students as powerless victims who are unprepared for the demands of the 21st century, the global world, and the demands of the marketplace. Therefore, business and economic leaders, alongside the federal government, must come to the rescue as investors and make demands for the bottom line and return on investments (evidenced by test scores). Teachers are positioned to make the biggest difference for students (erasing effects of poverty, racism, gender, families, and personal responsibility) and are then charged with "saving" the students they "victimized." However, since teachers are positioned as both the victimizers and saviors of students, their work can only be done with strong accountability measures in place (Taubman, 2009).

Coupled with the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (2004) and the reauthorization of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2016), NCLB gave birth to Response to Intervention (RTI). These legislative acts allow districts to utilize a process of RTI to accomplish the mandate of eliminating inadequate or ineffective instruction as the reason for a student's failure. While not replacing the achievement-intelligence discrepancy model for qualifying students for special education services, RTI is also intended to slow the pipeline of students qualified for special education services. IDEA specifically offers language for classifying students as learning disabled based on documentation of their response to the intervention provided (Allington, 2007, 2009; Brozo, 2011; Castro-Villareal & Nichols, 2016; Cotto, 2016; Quinn, 2012). With the adoption of NCLB, the focus for struggling students remained on early intervention. However, embedded within the focus on intervention is a shift toward conventional literacy skills such as phonological awareness. Given the overarching goal of NCLB was literacy success for all

students, literacy professionals refocused attention on instruction meant to remediate or support struggling students.

Also within NCLB, Title I, and Title II, funding was specifically allocated to support professional development for teachers and schools that were positioned as "failing" under the new guidelines (Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, & Garet, 2008). This focus paved the way for an increasing interest in literacy coaches as a way to improve classroom instruction. Instructional or Literacy Coaching as a model for professional development became popular because it became clear that teachers needed the best training possible to ensure reading success for all. Literacy coaching positions were added or current literacy professional roles were shifted to include professional learning work and support for classroom teachers.

In the reauthorization/rewriting of NCLB in 2007, *Race to the Top* was created: a U.S. Department of Education grant intended to support educational policies, such as performance-based evaluations, tied to professional development and the adoption of common standards to turn around low-performing schools. Effectively, *Race to the Top* was an enhanced version of NCLB and continued to incorporate a business model and corporate outlook on education (Gorlewski, 2011). *ESSA*, signed by President Obama in 2015, reverses some of the federal managerial aspects of NCLB back to the state level. However, throughout the Bill, state and local agencies are encouraged to develop, train, and appropriately compensate literacy professionals to work with teachers for professional learning (Desimone & Pak, 2017).

The 2016 election ushered in a new President and Secretary of Education with radically different ideas about how to "save" failing education systems in the U.S.—however, as of this writing, it is too early to make direct correlations between these recent policy developments and the impact on literacy initiatives in schools. While the tide appears to be turning toward more state and local control, it remains to be seen how these

recent developments will impact the legacy of NCLB as it is entrenched in the culture of schools.

Under these legislative conditions, neoliberal discourses that assume that employees are human capital and that key resources and professional standards need to be governed by measurable outcomes as "the" form of accountability find a wide base of support (Davies, 2003, 2005; Webster-Wright, 2009). Learning in professional contexts is viewed in terms of a professional's ability to "apply" pre-determined knowledge to produce outcomes contributing to the organization's goals. Classroom teachers find themselves in the crosshairs of these reform efforts: if student achievement is to be impacted, teacher practice must be impacted. Embedded professional learning for teachers then becomes a key component of initiatives to impact student achievement (Mangin, 2009a, 2009b; Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). Additionally, highly quantifiable measures and means of student literacy development are necessitated to ensure that achievement is occurring. Viewed as a highly accountable mode of transforming teacher practice—thus impacting student achievement—literacy professional roles supposedly help close the gap between gains in professional knowledge and transfer to student achievement (Russo, 2004).

These mandates also rest on perspectives of literacy that emphasize conventional literacy skills such as phonemic awareness and phonics found in cognitive perspectives of reading and writing development (Davidson, 2010; Ivey & Baker, 2004; Worthy, Svcrek, Daly-Lesch, & Tily, 2018). Stemming from cognitive psychology, cognitive views of literacy consider reading and writing to primarily be working the phoneme/grapheme code. Learning the code occurs in sequential, discrete steps through direct instruction of the structures of language. Letter and word recognition, automaticity, and stages of skill learning dominate practice from this perspective (Davidson, 2010; Handsfield, 2016). These legislative mandates significantly shape the expectations of the literacy work across literacy professional roles.

Reform moves. In addition to, and typically stemming from, these legislative moves, specific programmatic initiatives contributed to the proliferation of literacy roles intended to impact *both* student achievement and teacher performance as well as defining what and how those ends would be reached. Stemming from the popularity of Reading Recovery and NCLB, the 1990s saw an intense focus on struggling readers. The Reading Recovery program, originating with Marie Clay in New Zealand, received much attention for early intervention. The premise of Reading Recovery is a short-term, intensive instructional program targeting emergent readers who are at-risk for failure in reading. Key features of Reading Recovery include early identification of reading difficulties, one-on-one instruction, leveled texts, progress monitoring, a structured format, and very well-trained teachers. Over time, Reading Recovery proved effective but lost popularity due to high cost per pupil. Enduring legacies of Reading Recovery include the notions that struggling readers should be identified early and that many can significantly advance literacy skills to "catch up"; one-on-one instruction, which draws attention to the idea that the needs of readers should be understood in terms of individual growth and met through personalized approaches; and pedagogical approaches that prioritize validated evidence-based researched interventions.

Reform programs during the 1990s also began to target instructional improvement and embedded professional development as levers for change. In 1999, Ball and Cohen suggested that a decade of reform efforts created a need for "serious and sustained learning of curriculum, students, and teaching" (p. 4) that moved far beyond the drop-in, "updating" typically provided and considered sufficient as "teacher development." These reform efforts, they contend, challenge accepted perspectives on teaching and improvement, arguing that most teachers would require significant learning to produce the kind of teaching practice reformers envisioned. "This kind of teaching and learning would require that teachers become serious learners in and around their practice, rather than amassing strategies and activities" (p. 4).

Ten years later, in 2009, Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos reported on the status of professional learning in teaching via data garnered from a meta-analysis of research. Among their various findings, they concluded that sustained and intensive professional development results in learning gains for students and teachers when the focus of the professional learning is collaborative, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on specific content and school initiatives; and builds strong collaborative professional relationships. Exactly *how* to attain those goals received much attention as proliferating coaching models were created and popularized. These models ranged from Behaviorist/Mechanistic perspectives—with the primary goal being impacting the implementation/practices of the teacher—to "transformative" perspectives where the purpose is to transform/reform the entire system of education inside out by transforming teachers' way of being, thinking, and practicing teaching (Aguilar, 2013; Costa & Garmston, 2003; Joyce & Showers, 1982; Kise, 2006; Knight, 2009; 2011; McKenna & Walpole, 2008, 2010; Moran, 2007; Showers & Joyce, 1996; Sweeney, 2010; Toll, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010). Despite the particular model adopted, I contend the over-arching goals of coaching remain steeped in neoliberal ideology, particularly as literacy professionals are expected to aim to increase efficiency and effectiveness toward student achievement and attainment of standards (see Appendix A).

Reading First. Under NCLB, professional development was specifically intended to be tied to student achievement as well as to provide strong support for versions of scientifically based teaching practice and programs. Through Title 1 Part B, NCLB authorized and funded the *Reading First* initiative to improve early reading achievement in high-poverty schools with chronic underachievement (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; McKenna & Walpole, 2010; Scott, Cortina, & Carlisle, 2012; Toll, 2006). *Reading First* funding was limited to assessments, instructional materials, and professional development. Choices within these parameters also had to reflect a (rather narrow) body

of research on early reading development from the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHHD], 2000).

It is to *Reading First* that many scholars trace the proliferation of literacy teaching positions (Deussen et al., 2007; Knight, 2009; McKenna & Walpole, 2008, 2010; Scott et al., 2012; Walpole, McKenna, & Morrill, 2011). Predominantly, the role of a literacy coach or specialist within *Reading First* is that of technician who has the authority to use his or her capabilities to convey knowledge and skills to teachers (Toll, 2006). Duesson et al. (2007) looked at data from five states implementing *Reading* First and categorized a literacy professional's work five ways: data-oriented, student-oriented, managerial, individual teacher-oriented, and teacher group-oriented. As various literacy positions have developed, we see these five role categories taken up and emphasized in various ways. Consistently, however, pieces of each make their way into conceptualizations of literacy work.

Eventually, *Reading First* fell out of popular favor. However, the influence it exerted in popularizing literacy professional roles endures. Further, the characterizations of scientifically-based assessment and instruction heavily leaned on in *Reading First* continue to influence perceptions of what a "literacy role" in schools "is" and what it is meant to accomplish. Further legacies include the assumption that professionals are deficient and in need of developing and directing; that standardization, control, and accountability are required and desirable; and that knowledge is an object that can be transferred from those who obtain it to those who do not. These legacies all continue to remain largely unquestioned in research and discussion around professional learning (Webster-Wright, 2009). Despite critiques that emphasize the complexity of knowing and decision making in educational contexts, the technical rational perception continues to shape the design of much literacy work.

Adolescent literacies. Another reform effort stemming from neoliberal ideologies, legislative acts, and reform moves that specifically influence my literacy work with

middle grades is growing attention to adolescent literacy. Predominant understandings of adolescent literacy and theory in the U.S. stem from the early 1990s *National Assessment of Educational Progress* (NAEP) as well as the 2004/6 *Reading Next* and 2007 *Writing Next* reports, which elaborated on the crisis of the decline of secondary students' ability to demonstrate mastery of basic reading and writing skills (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Santa, 2006; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2006). According to these reports, the root of the decline in adolescent literacy proficiency lies not in getting the text off the page, but in negotiation the meaning of that text. Further, the NAEP (2005, 2010) report demonstrated lower scores in reading achievement over time as well as a persistent gap between the reading and writing scores of White students and students of color (Sarigianides, Petrone, & Lewis, 2017).

Alongside anecdotes of students who are unprepared to meet the expectations of college and career, these reports have created the perception of a crisis among the adolescent population. In response, the unique literacy instructional needs of middle and secondary students have burgeoned into a growing field of research, theory, and practice (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2006). Adolescent literacy as an area of literacy study looks to reading and writing development beyond grade 3 as well as beyond the confines of English Language Arts instruction. Alongside a growing interest in adolescent literacy in general, attention on intervention slowly has shifted from early intervention to older grades. A particular concern for older at-risk students has grown.

Pervasive understandings of literacy at the middle and secondary levels are complicated by Sarigianides et al. (2017). Often, literacy is perceived as reading only. However, literacy encompasses reading, writing, as well as social and intellectual practices that break free of the limits of the page. The digital and technological age has ushered in vast varieties of media to be "read." Another pervasive perception is that students learn everything they need about reading and writing in elementary school. However, this view relies on a view of literacy that is limited to processes and skills of

decoding and encoding. Literacy learning is far more complex, ongoing, and nonhierarchical. As such, it requires continual development and practice. Because of the above characteristics, literacy instruction cannot be the responsibility of just the English Language Arts teacher—another common perception. Literacy learning must be spread across a student's entire day, particularly as mastery or struggle in one literacy does not automatically indicate struggle or mastery in another.

Moving away from these common misperceptions of literacy for adolescents, Sarigianides et al. (2017) outline the key dimensions of Adolescent Literacy:

1. The move from elementary to secondary entails fundamental shifts in literacy demands for students.
2. Adolescent literacy is social and draws from various discourses in and out of school.
3. Motivation, encompassing both student choice and classroom environments, has a significant impact on the engagement or disengagement with literacy learning.
4. Multicultural perspectives are crucial across all classrooms as monocultural approaches increase the achievement gap as well as disengagement (pp. xi-xiv).

For middle level and young adult readers, literacy becomes purposeful social and cognitive processes involving analysis, synthesis, organization, and evaluation of meaning-making. Additionally, adolescent literacy involves negotiating the often quite complex and shifting nature of motivation and identity in middle grades and young adult learners (Alverman, 2001; Glen & Ginsburg, 2016; Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Ivey, 1999; Perry, 2006; Reynolds, 2007).

Content area literacy. Given the emphasis on literacy instruction across all subjects for adolescents, the need for instructional strategies for content area teachers has given way to the sub-field of content area literacy within adolescent literacy. Content area

literacy embraces the notion that because reading and writing instruction cannot be limited to the ELA classrooms, strategies for reading nonfiction for untangling text structure, text complexity, and navigating subject-specific vocabulary are just as vital (if not more) as content knowledge acquisition. Content area literacy embraces strategies that can "walk across the halls"—strategies that can be utilized in social studies, science, and mathematics classrooms (McKnight, 2014; Pytash, & Ciercierski, 2015; Vacca & Vacca, 1981). Concurrently, the view that all educators are teachers of literacy has helped increase the recognition that difficulties in reading are not limited to age, gender, or socioeconomic status. Thus, specialized approaches to reading improvement have been steadily increasing. And as with patterns observed at the primary levels, formalized intervention programs receive support through the implementation of RTI frameworks.

In recent years, the Common Core State Standards have been adopted by a majority of states along with CCSS-based standardized assessments (Smarter Balanced Assessment or Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). Researchers and writers have begun to explicitly connect the work of literacy professionals to the implementation of programs or standards. Thus, writers and researchers have begun to embed the assumption that literacy professionals can support efforts in curriculum shifts and instruction in line with the standards into their rationale. RTI also finds purchase with the Common Core State Standards. In addition to emphasizing research and scientifically sanctioned instruction, RTI presumes that the Common Core State Standards are the gold standard to which all students should be held. It also presumes that development toward these standards can be benchmarked in equal measure along a consistent continuum. This leads to the logical presumption that any deviation from said development along that continuum requires intervening to get students back on the correct learning path. In these ways, the CCSS represents a large reform force at work in all aspects of literacy work in schools.

Attempting to bring cohesion and consistency to literacy positions, the International Literacy Association (ILA) created "Standards for Reading Professionals" (2006/2010, revised). In 2017, the ILA released a draft of standards for the preparation of coaches. Working with the National Council of Teachers of English, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Science Teachers Association, and National Council for the Social Studies, they published "Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches." These standards include two broad areas: *Leadership Standards* and *Content Area Standards*. Many see the standards as a useful tool for understanding and evaluating a complex and misunderstood job description (Campbell & Sweiss, 2010). The 2017 revision of the ILA standards for literacy professionals also attempts to tease out the intricacies of various literacy roles (Kern et al., 2018). A Literacy/Reading Specialist is primarily an instructional position with expectations for collaboration with teachers. A Literacy Coach primarily works with teachers in schools, and a Literacy Coordinator typically emphasizes district-wide leadership of literacy programs. It is specifically to the growing perception of literacy professional roles as political and reform-oriented that I turn here.

A Political Role for a Time and Place

The legislative and reform movements discussed above work together to position literacy professionals as change agents and levers of instructional improvements where responsibilities can cover any range of responsibilities falling under the umbrellas of being both teachers of students and teachers of teachers. Very recent literature has noted literacy professional roles moving away from a focus on instructional expectations that include professional learning for other educators toward specific reform initiatives coming from district, state, or even federal mandates. More and more, in literature and in practice, it is assumed literacy professionals will fill leadership and accountability directly tied to specific local and state initiatives (Bean et al., 2015; Buchanan, 2015;

Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). Galloway and Lesaux (2014) specifically noted that literacy professional roles are often explicitly tied to models of school reform. In this way, the role has taken on a political element, as it is tied to accountability, standardization, and audit culture.

Hargreaves (2000) developed a framework for the history of teaching professionalism within social and historical contexts. While the framework is focused on teachers in general, it is useful for considering the connections between the social and historical expectations and understandings of literacy professionals as well. According to Hargreaves's framework, the current times can be characterized as a post-professional period. This period is charted mainly by recent reforms and policies that tightly regulate teachers' work and roles. Teachers are categorized as technicians who implement decisions made by others who are far away from the actual classroom. Policy and practice in the post-professionalism era emphasize increased accountability for teaching and learning, with a focus on making the individual quantifiable so teachers can be held accountable and compared to others. These current education reforms foreground instrumentalist notions of the teachers' role and de-professionalize the work of teachers. They fail to value teacher autonomy or authentic collegiality—both characteristics reminiscent of accountable and audit culture values bound up in neoliberal ideologies.

Buchanan (2015) explicitly connects accountability policies that emphasize measurable performance and individual responsibility for student success to new professional norms that reshape teacher professional roles. Within accountability policies, particular practices are mandated to the point of becoming common-sense. The discourses that rule these policies exert a power that goes beyond merely shaping practice into individual consciousness. Teachers become inclined to engage social practices that align with dominant frames. Teachers have been pressured to tightly couple instruction to standardized test measures; tests that serve as the formal accountability system for schools, districts, and states as an informal evaluation measure for teacher performance.

The ways teachers' work is structured and made calculable are changing commonly accepted definitions of good teaching—changes that restructure teachers' practices. According to Buchanan, as teachers engage those practices, identities are influenced. Thus, the role of policy in shaping teacher identity and agency cannot be ignored, to the point that the role itself becomes a political one. Accountability discourses have reshaped the landscape of teacher professionalism and altered the way reformers, policymakers, administrators, and even teachers define what it means to be successful.

The political nature of literacy roles is most evident in professional learning expectations, where fidelity to a valid principle becomes compliance with a prescribed program (Hargreaves & Skelton, 2012). Literacy professionals are linked to more efficient delivery of standardized outcomes and targets imposed from the top. As the state has commandeered and intruded into pedagogy and instruction around literacy, literacy professionals have become a strategic resource of support to try and ensure delivery. Further, the value of evidence-based and research-based practices is exaggerated and imposed with literacy professionals' support. Collaborative teams exploring issues of common concern transformed into forms of contrived collegiality and literacy roles became legitimized by the rhetoric of increasing support. Literacy professionals have become coaches often positioned in the middle of a hierarchical power struggle between teachers and administrators. A view of literacy professionals as a political role speaks to micro-political and macro-political tensions that tend to govern everyday experiences. Additionally, the political perspectives highlight an enactment of a will that opposes enforced and unwanted programs and practices.

What's the Problem?

Given the neoliberal infused context within which literacy professional roles in the U.S. have grown in popularity, and given the purposes that they are now assumed to

serve, a few researchers and those who work in preparation programs are paying attention to the complex, nuanced, and context-driven understandings of literacy specialists (McGrath & Bardsley, 2018). They are attempting to move away from mechanistic models, although this perspective is not necessarily trickling into local practice. The literacy professional in practice is still highly positioned within neoliberal reform efforts—this constitutes the heart of my inquiry. I contend that the literacy specialist is built on many presumptions and assumptions left uninterrogated and unexamined. First, today's specialist has been situated as instrumental to the successful implementation of reform efforts (Bean et al., 2015; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Kern et al., 2018). However*, the reform efforts themselves have been left unproblematized*. Further, *the body of literature on literature professionals focuses primarily on role and role enactment*, most specifically toward conversations on preparation.

While conceptions of literacy professionals are oft considered "new and improved" approaches to professional learning for teachers, I contend that they are shaped by the same dominant discourses of audit, accountability, and standardization as traditional professional learning paradigms. That which is unproblematically purported as a reform measure is built on the same assumptions and rationales as that which precedes. This perspective presumes that the role of a teacher is simply to "deliver" the standardized curriculum and the role of the literacy professional is to increase the "efficiency and effectiveness" of the teacher. From this position, the literacy professional role takes on a disciplinary and normalizing assignment.

The body of literature on literacy intervention and RTI stemming from legislative moves is particularly troubling. Given its strong roots in behaviorism, the field of literacy intervention is dominated by prescriptive programs that reduce reading and writing to isolated, sequential skills (Brozo, 2011). Additionally, the literature on intervention is dominated by standards-based perspectives infused with a perception that presumes appropriate input will equal desirable output: a "teaching that works" logic (Graves,

Brandon, Duesbery, McIntosh, & Pyle, 2011; Vaughn et al., 2012). Within the rationale of neoliberal priorities, legislation that calls for "scientifically-based reading research and instruction" pushes research on intervention towards a domination of studies of effectiveness—I contend a kind of quantitative reductionism. Neoliberal assumptions that tend to create complex systems of surveillance (Foucault, 1995) and reporting mechanisms for monitoring and producing appropriate results (Davies, 2003, 2005) are recognizable within the systems and processes that accompany intervention.

Thus, research on intervention primarily is focused on early intervention, practices, and effects. The small body of research that attends to the middle grades primarily addresses effect size for particular intervention programs or models. Shaped by audit culture, neoliberal ideology, and accountability/standardization rhetoric, I find that picture of the literacy specialist impossible. And I find the resultant tensions within my daily lived experience impossible to resolve.

While a growing number of studies purport to attend to the enactors of the role, a very small number consider identities of the literacy professionals—whether they are called Specialist, Coach, or Interventionist. Even fewer attempt to explicitly connect identities and subjectivities through tensions of practice out to ideological dominant discourses. Given this, a view of the dominant discourses that shape professional identities and subjectivities of literacy specialists who are bombarded with impossibilities of working toward those neoliberal, measurable outcomes is difficult to find in the current body of literature. As such, the professional identity and subjectivity of 'literacy specialist' provide a potentially rich and complex site for investigation.

The problem I have explored throughout this dissertation research is built on a recent body of literature that connects literacy professionals to reform efforts and neoliberal-infused dominant discourses. I sought to trace the threads of those discourses through to my interpretations of my lived experiences to explore moments of tension as well as ambiguity; I did so specifically in an effort to connect those discourses to specific

subjectivities and identities—most particularly, my own. A complex, nuanced, chaotic image of the role of Literacy Specialist may be made visible by re/viewing, through a feminist poststructural lens, the relationship among the role, the historical and educational scene within which it resides, and the identities and subjectivities of selves/subject(s) who attempt to occupy the role.

Developing a Lens

What allows such a viewing of the role is a lens shaped by feminist poststructural thinking on discourse, knowledge, identities, subjectivities, and how each is constituted, largely, but not exclusively, in language. Sifting experiences, events, and memories through varied settings of a particular lens—a way of thinking and understanding—has allowed the sense(s) and interpretations of those events, experiences, and memories to vary, presenting a kaleidoscope of fractured, partial, and fractal images. Such a lens has not been taken up lightly.

A New York City Classroom

The traffic noise of New York City provides a constant cacophonous symphony that seeps through the cracked windows of the classroom. As someone who spent the last 20 years in the serene silence of the Rocky Mountains, the background noise of NYC was something I never quite adjusted to. It took months to stop jumping at the sound of sirens that pierced through walls and windows. Our graduate seminar gathered in a warbling circle formed by forcing rectangular tables into an ovular shape. Grateful for the air coming through the cracked windows that eased the stuffiness of the classroom, but distracted by the accompanying street noise, I had work to concentrate on the conversation between two fellow students across the circle.

"What use is this poststructural thinking then? It's so far away from the daily realities that are dominated by discourses we have no control to change." I leaned forward a little … this was a sentiment I very much shared. The more I read and studied poststructural thinkers, Foucault in particular, the more sense it makes as a way of understanding the shape of things. But when bumped against the material realities of work in current contexts of education, it seemed impotent as a guiding philosophy.

I come back to this conversation in my head often as I attempt to push my own professional practice through a poststructural sieve. Why? What is the usefulness of this endeavor? I am constructivist in my professional practice. That approach has served me well.... I have achieved success in my professional practice, especially if that success is defined by dominant discourses that pervade and dictate teaching and learning. My annual evaluations are consistently highly rated. Supervisors give me positive feedback on my actions and express gratitude for the work I do in the building with both students and teachers. The students I work with grow and achieve based on expectations and assumptions of learning imbued with neoliberal priorities and understandings of "grow" and "achieve." By definitions and understandings that dominate my teaching context, I am a successful educator. Why rock that boat?

I have professed to value "reflective practice," as such a concept is commonly understood. I purport to care less about what the teachers I work with do in their classrooms and more about why they do what they do. I spent years actively studying the impact and connection of my coaching practices on the reflective practices of my colleagues. What actions do I take as a coach that support deep reflection on our teaching? I have pages and pages of journaling that seeks to explore that question. I practice what I preach in my work with students.

Thus, this is perhaps a case of "physician, heal thyself." This study is about reflexive practice. Specifically, a reflexivity that pushes my practice through a far different lens than that with which I unquestioningly view the world. Through that

differing lens, I may be able to question practices and assumptions in ways I have not before. I may choose to continue some practices and may disrupt my comfort with others. The lens that affords me that radically different view, that uncomfortable lens, is poststructural thinking. And an uncomfortable lens it is. I'm continually wrestling with why this is so.

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I primarily position my inquiry as "poststructurally influenced," and I choose these terms very intentionally. While the body of theories that form poststructural thinking offers me specific and useful lenses for this inquiry, my relationship with poststructural thinking has not been/is not an easy one. I entered doctoral study with decidedly social constructivist and sociocultural (and unquestioned) assumptions about knowledge, knowledge production, teaching, and learning. From my personal background, as well as my previous educational studies, truth was something that existed (in my world it had a capital 'T') in totality and uniformity. Reality could be observed and measured. In the Curriculum and Teaching Department of Teachers College, Columbia University, I was introduced to concepts of epistemologies and ontologies. I began to realize that differing philosophical positions offer differing perspectives on the nature of knowledge, whose knowledge counts, as well as how knowledge is created. I learned to look at classrooms, texts, curriculum, and teachers through different eyes.

One highly influential poststructural thinker, Michel Foucault, focused a part of his widely ranging work on how and why a particular statement or hypothesis attains the status of "truth." His body of work has been roughly broken into three phases: archaeology, genealogy, and the care of self, each encompassing a set of complex and overlapping concepts and tools (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005). Central to Foucault's archeological and genealogical analysis (and thus to poststructural theories in general) is the concept of discourse (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). Foucault uses the term to indicate historically, socially, and culturally contingent structuring principles of society

that manifest in social institutions as both reflecting and constructing modes of thought, norms, or practices.

Consisting of written or spoken words grouped according to certain rules, a discourse is not a language or a text, but a structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs that organize a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world (Foucault, 1972, 1981). These structures allow some within a discourse to be subjects and some to be objects, some things to be said or thought, and other things to be impossible to think or say (St. Pierre, 2000). The most powerful discourses in our society have institutional bases (government, schools, media, etc.), and, as such, they represent political interests and subsequently are constantly jockeying for status and power (Foucault, 1980). The notion of a discourse as theorized by Foucault became foundational in the development of a lens through which I began to view classrooms, practices, curriculum, etc.

In her text, *"Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory"* Chris Weedon (1997) calls for theorizing that can explore relationships among conceptions of experience, social power, and resistance, and that recognizes the importance of the subjective in constituting anyone's particular interpretations of "the meaning" of lived reality. Her work helped me note connections between the tenets of feminism and the possibilities of poststructural theorizing—particularly theorizing around constructions of identities identity and subjectivities—as well as the troubling of such constructions. To make sense of contradictions stemming from normative assumptions and pressures to conform, feminism, in general, seeks theories that enable women's awareness of the conflicts and contradictions in everyday lives while still accounting for the social, discursive, and material contingencies and constructions of subject positions (Weedon, 1997). Additionally, feminisms seek to challenge what and who constitute what counts as "useful knowledge," as well as what and who control access to constituted knowledge—especially as knowledge is connected to power and control.

Weedon's work led me to Elizabeth St Pierre. St. Pierre (2000) teases out key philosophical concepts that run across poststructural theorizing: language, power/resistance/freedom, subject, discourse, rationality, knowledge, and truth. Particularly relevant to the questions of this inquiry are the ways poststructuralists question the very tools of language, discourse, and power as well as how they are put to use to interrogate identity constructions. Weedon (1997) makes the case that poststructural thinking on language, subjectivity, and power can provide challenges to normative assumptions and normalizing constructions of identity categories, as well as provide modes of inquiry that can benefit feminist interests.

While initially positioning her own research as ethnography, St Pierre's many writings (1997, 2000, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2016) overviewing poststructural theories as well as the implications for inquiry challenged and deepened my thinking around the purposes, processes, and implications of the nature of research. Leaning on both Weedon and St. Pierre, I have come to understand poststructuralism as a group of theories rather than one unified theory. Largely, poststructuralist researchers focus on the ways and conditions (historical, social, cultural, and material) that particular discourses, interacting and framed by particular forces, events, contexts, and conditions, have come to shape knowledge and "identities" as well as mechanisms of power (Miller, 2010a; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997).

Through my reading of Weedon, St. Pierre, and Foucault, I have found myself poking poststructuralist holes and asking poststructurally inflected questions of my professional work. I appreciate that poststructural theories particularly help me "unfix" language, disrupt boundaries and binaries, and interrogate discourses and their influences on varied constructions and notions of identities. I have learned from poststructural thinkers that the questions are often more important than the answers and that disrupting that which we readily accept allows a re-envisioning of the way things are and the way they must be. I maintained my initial convictions as I entered into this study that a

feminist poststructural lens was useful because I wanted to tend toward a way of looking at the world—a way that pushes back on what is predominantly accepted as "right and true"; a way that disrupts traditional knowing, how knowledge comes to be, and who gets to be the creators of knowledge.

A feminist poststructural analysis seeks to view the workings of subjectivities within discursive fields and cultural practices, and that analysis must focus on constructions and interpretations of thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and memories within linguistic and discursive fields (Miller, 1992, 1998). Further, power relations and negotiations always exist within and among discourses and cultural practices (Foucault, 1980). The subject is subjected to the effects of that power, even while simultaneously acting to resist, reject, or work to change those effects. Tracing power negotiations and considering who gets to be a subject in a particular discourse or set of practices and who is subjected (and who gets to resist) become the critical basis of inquiry (Foucault, 1980; St. Pierre, 2000).

I therefore was and remain interested in a focus on how and what discourses, as well as historical, social-cultural, and contexts, influence our interpretations of personal experiences. I see this as the productive beginning for troubling ourselves and our world (Scott, 1991). Further, I accept that memories, construction of identities, and interconnections with others are fluid and constantly in motion through time and geographic and political spaces (Miller, 2010a). Questionings that draw attention to the political and discursive constructions of "knowing" and "being known" (Miller, 2010a), as well as investigate how the meaning of a role has become established, have the potential to disrupt dominant discourses and potential enactments of the identity category of Literacy Specialist.

However, I also recognized that I could not claim a full poststructural position. What do you do when your perspective on so many assumptions that you previously have never questioned changes? When what you took as absolutes theoretically,

philosophically, even spiritually, have shifted in your periphery? For me, the only apparent choice was to lean toward the tensions, the ambiguities, the dilemmas that such a dissonance creates. And that meant taking up that which provided me the ideas and lenses that enabled me to ask the research questions I wanted to ask within those tensions. While I approached this autobiographically inflected inquiry compelled by poststructural theorizing around "selves," "stories," and "experiences" to question my own assumptions, I am keenly aware of my inability to wrest free from entanglement with those same assumptions. Thus, in describing this study, I can only best describe my perspective as dancing on the edge of poststructuralisms. You'll excuse me if my epistemological and ontological roots tend to show and I still lean in certain directions, even as I am simultaneously drawn to those posed by poststructural theories.

An (Im)possible Job—Reprise

It was the overlapping, predominant expectations of Literacy professional roles to which Vivian referred when she commented on the impossibilities of my job. Specifically, she understood the expectations of accountability for professional learning of teachers alongside the achievement of students within the role of Literacy Specialist to be beyond possibility. Within discursive formations of literacy teaching and practice represented in professional literature, literacy specialists, coaches, and interventionists are positioned as tools for manipulating or "fixing" teacher practices, guaranteeing student learning deemed errant, and acting as effective change agents toward dominant understandings of "reform." One of the assumptions I brought to this study posits that the literacy specialist is also often utilized as a technique for both student and teacher intervention and as a technique toward uniformity and conformity to a norm. I found it impossible to not only "do" this role but to even "make sense of" the underlying dominant versions of Literacy practice given U.S. education's primarily positivist and/or

constructivist assumptions. Such a "lack of sense" creates tension in attempts to "do" the "impossible."

An (Im)possible Job—Reframed

I contend that re/viewing the role through a feminist poststructural lens renders it impossible in ways much more complex and nuanced. So while it represents another primary assumption and hope I brought to this study, this re/viewing was also a part of what I sought to research. Given the highly constructivist leanings I bring to my practice as a Literacy Specialist (both coaching with colleagues and instruction with students), I wondered if and how putting those constructivist-laden practices through a poststructural lens may help me re-see/re-think/re-vision those practices. Starting with Foucault's (1978/1990) thinking that individuals are not the sole authors of their ideas and experiences, but the product of larger discourses and dynamics happening in society, I wondered at how tracing the interweaving effects of discourses at play in my own practices may push back on my own assumptions. I also wondered if and how exploring and deeply reflecting on the im/possibilities of my work in the role of Literacy Specialist might allow speaking what has been unsayable within dominant discourses.

Thus, I sought to interrogate the position of Literacy Specialist that I currently occupy. This interrogation aimed to explore the local, situated, and contingent, as well as broader social, cultural, historical, and political implications of the role in U.S. contexts. Specifically, I sought to explore how and what discourses (as constructed through those local, situated, and contingent, as well as broader social, cultural, historical, and political contexts) thread through to my professional "role." Following Foucault's insistence on historical specificity in analysis, I aimed to look to the specific details of the discursive fields that constitute and rule the institution of school (specifically literacy in middle school) in order to interrogate the particular processes of power and knowledge at work

(Foucault, 1980; Weedon, 1997). In this, the first aim of this study was to trace *the threads of power and constructions of discursive fields through the "daily life" of my work as literacy specialist through Foucault's ideas of discourse, power, and normalization.*

Within the perspective of poststructuralisms, which intends to "post" any structure for viewing and analysis as produced, regulated, and productive of the subject (Davies & Harré, 1990), feminist poststructural theories of discourse, power, identity, and subjectivity allowed me to re/view possible ways that knowledge, "truth," and subjects are produced in language and cultural practices of the literacy specialist role. Since poststructural theories tend to foreground our awareness of structuring impulses, especially via power circulations, and their relations to the social order as discussed above (Lather, 1991), a significant question in poststructural theories is: Who gets to be a subject in a particular discourse, in a particular set of practices? Thus, I sought also to interrogate what appears—and what I assumed—to be those dominant discourses that thread through to subjectivities of and "as" the literacy specialist. *A second aim of this study was to follow discursive threads into an inquiry that focused on the production of ever-shifting understandings and constructions of myself as "subject" in a Literacy Specialist position.*

Operating from these same feminist poststructural theories, I abandoned my quest for "sense." Instead, I sought to examine the production/construction of multiple, uncertain, and unstable "senses"—interpretations of meanings of experiences—while simultaneously acknowledging that those interpreted meanings may be contradictory (Miller, 1998; Scott, 1991). I aimed to work the tensions of my interpretations of my "lived experiences" by analyzing constructions of "the subject" historically and contextually within the role. *I, therefore, lastly aimed to re/search my own interpretations of "lived experiences" in a literacy specialist role situated within a particular time and particular place in order to both identify and challenge what is presumed and acceptable*

within the dominant Enlightenment version of "the specialist" in the U.S. literacy narrative.

What I Wonder

Within these intentions, I specifically pondered:

1. What assumptions, expectations, and biases can I identify—to the extent I am consciously able—as those that I bring into my work as a literacy specialist?
    a. To the extent that I can identify and interpret, what educative experiences can I trace as those that most influenced and framed the initial assumptions and understandings I bring into my work as a literacy specialist?
    b. What, if any, dominant discourses might I identify and interpret, within those particular historical moments in U.S. education, as those that frame my assumptions?
2. How, if at all, have I shifted and/or changed my versions in my years thus far as a literacy specialist?
    a. To the extent that I can identify and interpret, what, if any, educative experiences, including my literacy work, have jostled my initial assumptions?
    b. What, if any, discourses might I perceive as possible to work with and in throughout my current responsibilities?
3. What approaches and practices, if any, have not shifted and/or changed in my work?
    a. What do I interpret as possible reasons for my wishing to maintain these?
    b. What do I interpret as reasons for those approaches and practices that I have not been able to shift and/or change?

4. What, if any, tensions in my work as a literacy specialist can I identify and interpret as those that have erupted as a result of this self-study?
    a. What, if any, tensions of practice have surfaced for me as I have researched and traced threads of dominant discourses in my daily work?
    b. What, if any, resistances or challenges by myself or others to my role do I interpret in relation to this research study?

Let me repeat, the intent of researching these questions was not a quest for clarity, nor an effort to ease the tensions. Rather, it was a quest to embrace the messy milieu, to interrupt, disrupt, and question in order to wonder, ponder, and imagine another. I found nonsense in my literacy specialist work, so I sought to embrace that lack of Enlightenment-influenced meaning of "sense." Acknowledging some educational scholars (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), as well as some constructivist-oriented feminists, who work to "story" teachers' lives, I also recognize that such work can claim that "capturing" teachers' stories is a way to "uncover" particular "selves" and beliefs about teaching and learning, for example. Such assumptions presume that "teachers' stories" are whole, "true," transparent, and complete.

However, throughout this study, as I worked with Foucauldian poststructural theories, I assumed that my autobiographically situated study and any representations of my interpretations of my "research data" would be partial, incomplete, and multiple (Britzman, 1995; Miller, 1992, 1998, 2000a, 2005; Scott, 1991). I intentionally embraced the messiness, the stirring of the hornets' nest, that any "telling of literacy stories" may incur.

To do so, I interrogated those discourses that primarily have shaped what has become normative, not only supposedly across many educative U.S. contexts, but also in my particular school workplace. I explored the allowable narratives of who and what a literacy specialist should be in the role. I followed the shaping of "the Literacy Specialist" into a modern, Enlightenment-born, coherent, rational whole identity. To

interrogate if, how, and to what varying extents the available literacy specialist identities constructed in U.S. educational discourse are limiting/limited, I traced moments of tension back and forth between the dominant discourses at play, the identities and subjectivities of subjects in those moments, and the connections to knowledge and power. I assumed as I entered this study that the predominant perspectives that rule literacy professionals are in the service of efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, standardization, and top-down control. But what happens in the classroom is "extraordinarily complex, physically tumultuous and potentially both ecstatic and maddening" (Taubman, 2009, p. 2) and not possible to understand as objective, transparent, and measurable. I believed we need to talk about teachers, students, teaching, and learning in more nuanced ways. In considering the role of "Literacy Specialist" through a questioning lens, I hoped to reveal chasms/surprises and challenges to what is allowed and expected to be—to what counts as knowing and being known.

Operating through post-foundational autobiographical means, I am of and in this research in unnamed ways (Pillow, 2003). As mother/teacher/daughter/wife/researcher/ writer/woman (and other unknown, static identity markers) I live this work. I am constructed by it as much as I construct it (Pillow, 2003; Richardson, 1994). I wrote this dissertation born of my own lived experiences, and as I wrote those experiences, I created and re-created them. I questioned, interpreted, looked for aspects of dominant discourses and ways of thinking/being that have solidified into concreteness, created and re-created myself in them. It is all fact, and it is all fiction. I wrote knowing my words are an interpretation of a representation of my "experience" (Scott, 1991). It's messy. These are uncomfortable tellings (Pillow, 2003). My goal was embracing "the nonsense" as a means to re-think the (im)possibilities; a means to question dominant assumptions about teaching. I wrote from a position of being in the work and of the work. Interrogating and constantly challenging the thoughts, emotions, and reflections, no matter the beauty or ugliness, is the heart of post-Enlightenment versions of autobiographical research. So,

dear reader, would you like to come along on this exploration? I cannot promise it will be an easy journey. But we may enjoy it.

Chapter II

HOW IS THAT GOING TO HAPPEN?

Introduction

Beginning from the position that literacy professional roles, as primarily conceived in the U.S., are infused with neoliberal and audit culture priorities and discourses—and acknowledging poststructural theorizing and interrogations of discourse, power, knowledge, identity, and subjectivity—I sought to simultaneously interpret and question those interpretive attempts at "making sense" of the nature of my literacy specialist experiences. To do so, I utilized poststructurally influenced autobiographical modes of inquiry for this research. Such versions of autobiography not only challenge Enlightenment assumptions about autobiography as a full and "accurate" representation of a "self," but also allow for explorations and interrogations of, and concurrently perhaps making connections or disconnections among, subjectivities within the discursive regimes in which literacy professional roles typically operate. A self-study of "doing" and "being" a "literacy specialist"—in order to offer self-reflexive interrogations of assumptions, biases, expectations—may contribute a perspective on the role that typically has not been considered in the literature on literacy professionals in the U.S. And yet, a poststructurally informed autobiography was chosen with caution.

A Reading of Chernin

I was drawn to autobiography because Kim Chernin's (1984) work, *In My Mother's House: A Memoir*, inspired me. It also pushed me to rethink my concept of

autobiography. Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson (2010) mentioned this text as an example of a life narrative that blurs the boundaries of autobiographical work. I picked up Chernin's work while studying possible forms and conceptions of narrative research, looking for examples of the kind of research I was reading about in coursework. I entered the study of narrative research with a sense that narrative meant telling stories in the Western, linear, follow-the-story-arc fashion (lingering assumptions from my roots). From this assumption, "telling stories" as research felt like somehow cheating the rigor of the research process (again, assumptions about the very nature of research).

Chernin (1984) toggles between a narrative of her own life and a narrative of her mother's life as a leader in the Communist Party in the United States through the '30s, '40s, '50s, and '60s. Through her narratives, Chernin wrestles with the incompleteness of story, the fluidity of identity, subjectivities, and the tensions of "being" with/in discursive fields. Her work, alongside a study of narrative research and autobiographical modes of inquiry that resist Enlightenment suppositions, challenged many assumptions I held about autobiography and forced me to examine autobiographically situated in curriculum theorizing and its influences on U.S. education. As I read Chernin's memoir as one means of understanding a bit more fully that to which poststructural literary critics Smith and Watson (2010) were pointing, I was struck by the messy-ness, the embarrassing honesty with which Chernin writes. Through her work I saw that there is nothing "simple" about autobiography.

Situating Autobiography

So in choosing an autobiographical mode of inquiry for my research, I was keenly aware that no single iteration of autobiography exists. The term "autobiography" itself covers a range of historical and contextual understandings. Researchers operating from varying epistemological and ontological positions utilize autobiography as methodology with subtle, but crucial, differences. Autobiography can also be placed in a number of

distinct disciplinary arenas and fields of study both outside and within education, such as history, literature and literary criticism, feminisms, narrative inquiry, and curriculum theory (Miller, 2010b). Given these varied iterations, it was crucial that I wrestle with key questions—What is this I call autobiography within my framings of this research as a "self-study" of my work as "literacy specialist"? What theoretical permutations, contestations, and influences do I embrace? Where do I epistemologically and ontologically situate this work as well as my "self"? And how might my research challenge these situatings, positionings, and assumptions?

In addition to, and converging with, particular historical tracings, the understanding of autobiographical inquiry upon which I leaned is situated within U.S. curriculum theorizing and highly informed by a set of understandings drawn from feminist and poststructural thinking. Given assumptions I was—and remain—fully embedded in, I cannot claim a full position in any of these perspectives. I recognize that positioning myself in this manner is not a seamless, smooth approach to research. Tensions and contradictions exist in which I must live and wrestle.

A Trajectory

In order to negotiate the varied forms and genres of "autobiography" (including those that still often appear via Enlightenment understandings of self, voice, memory, story, and experience), I break this chapter into roughly two parts. In the first part, I review autobiographical theorizing as initially promulgated within the curriculum Reconceptualization movement in the U.S. during the 1970s and '80s. I approach this movement as a key historical antecedent to a specific form of autobiography. Immediately following, I discuss poststructural interruptions into the Enlightenment assumptions of "self," "story," and "experience" that permeate these early (re)conceptualizations of autobiography. I also elaborate on why I was influenced by

these poststructural troublings of autobiographical inquiry and how I utilized these perspectives in this specific inquiry.

In the second part, I address concerns of research practice as I negotiated implications of "doing" poststructurally informed versions of qualitative research. It is here that I include those elements of a methodology chapter a reader might expect: discussions of data collection and analysis, validity, reflexivity ... along with a discussion of a postmodern context and why I saw those elements collapsing within such a context.

Part I: Historical Situated-ness: Curriculum Theory

The autobiography into which I lean has roots in specific historical antecedents within education contexts and particularly via curriculum theorizing. Pinar, Reynolds, Slatterly, and Taubman (1995) identify three major streams of often converging scholarship that, in the early and mid-years of the Reconceptualization, affected, influenced, and framed versions of "autobiographical" inquiry:

1. Autobiographical theory and practice, including *currere*, collaboration, voice, dialogue, journals, place, poststructural interrogations of self and experience, and myth, dreams, and imagination.
2. Feminist autobiographical traditions, including community, the middle passage, and reclaiming the self.
3. Efforts to understand teachers biographically and autobiographically, including collaboration, praxis, "personal practical knowledge" of teachers, and teacher lore.

Because the conceptions of autobiography in which I framed this research grow specifically from varied reconceptual curriculum theorizing in the U.S. that includes the development of *currere*, feminist autobiographical theorizings, and poststructural theorizings, it is to specific elements of those streams of scholarship I attended as

historical and theoretical underpinnings for my research. Beginning with curriculum theorizing and *currere,* the work of William Pinar, Madeleine Grumet, and Janet Miller particularly became autobiographical mentors.

Reconceptualization

Working from interpretations of her own educational experiences, Janet Miller (1992; 1998; 2005; 2010a) explicitly connects autobiography in the U.S. to curriculum theorizing and, specifically, to the era referred to as the reconceptualization of curriculum studies during the 1960s and 1970s. The term "reconceptualization" refers to a movement in which some U.S. curriculum theorists, dissatisfied with the prescriptive and positivist nature of curriculum work in the U.S., began to conceptualize curriculum from different epistemological positions. Taking up questions posed by Herbert Kliebard (1970), Dwayne E. Huebner (1967), and James B. MacDonald (1975) about the basic assumptions of the traditional curriculum field—such as Ralph Tyler's (1949) supposedly sequential processes of "designing and developing" curriculum via identification of objectives-learning activities-and-evaluation "Rationale"—scholars moved away from singular and linear understandings of curriculum defined only as "content" that was designed and developed via external, behaviorally oriented learning objectives, as well as linear versions of content scope and sequence (Miller, 2010a; Pinar et al., 1995).

In an effort to question the assumptions of the traditional curriculum field, and to acknowledge earlier calls for the incorporation of theory and philosophy into the field of curriculum, writ large, early reconceptual scholars introduced critical, hermeneutic, existential-phenomenological, and psychoanalytical perspectives about the processes, forms, and politics of knowledge production. This work, while varied, marked a break from the dominant technocratic emphasis on the "practical" development of curriculum design, instead gesturing toward theoretical, historical, and contextualized conceptions of curriculum not only as pre-determined, linear, and sequentially designed "subject

matter," but also as created, experienced, and changed by individuals within specific social, historical, and cultural contexts and events (Miller, 1992, 2005, 2010a, 2017a, 2017b, forthcoming; Pinar et al., 1995).

Through the reconceptualization, an exclusive preoccupation with curriculum development and design was replaced with scholarly efforts to "understand" curriculum. "Curriculum [came to be] understood as historical, political, racial, gendered, phenomenological, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological, and international" (Pinar, 2012, p. 736). No longer primarily intent on guiding practitioners, nor intent on investigating phenomena with the methods and aims of behavioral and social science, the function of reconceptualized curriculum work shifted toward understanding curriculum—where "curriculum" signaled complex interactions and "understanding" signaled consideration of the nature(s) of one's educational experiences (Miller, 2014; Pinar et al., 1995). For Pinar, "understanding" within curriculum as autobiographical and biographical text included self-understanding—with potential for self-transformation (Pinar, 2012).

A variety of curriculum scholars subsequently adjusted the research they conducted, the research questions they asked, and the concepts they employed to theorize about, as well as enact, varied conceptualizations of "curriculum." Questions posed around curriculum were expanded to include not only the question adopted by the field from British philosopher Herbert Spencer's inquiry, "What knowledge is of the most *worth*?" But also … "Whose knowledge? Whose interest is considered? Who decides? What is legitimated as knowledge? How? What conditions structure the production of knowledge? How do I experience my own knowledges? How do I experience others' knowledges?"

To address such questions, some working in and toward the Reconceptualization employed existential/phenomenological and psychoanalytical perspectives. These studies particularly focused on knowledge as created within interpretations of experience of

situations, in contexts of daily lives. To address these questions, autobiography became a favored method for some to examine local and contextualized knowledge. In one sense, autobiography as a major form of curriculum theorizing was employed as a means to challenge normalized conventions of research and practice inflected with positivist (and thus generalizing and normalizing) assumptions. Positivist and even post-positivist perspectives could only reinforce autobiography (if even acknowledged at all) as often essentialized versions of students and teachers who were most often positioned as "needing" definitive versions of already determined "knowledge" that could be ingested and assessed in terms of teaching and learning "end products." Further, untheorized practices that conceptualized autobiographical inquiries as simply "telling your story" of teaching and learning often led to singular tales of fully conscious and fully knowledgeable teaching selves. These practices persist today. "Such distorted versions of autobiographical curriculum theory thus maintain a dominant educational narrative in which one passes, in linear, and sequential ways, from ignorance to knowledge about both the 'self' and other" (Miller, 2010b, p. 64).

Currere. Working within the Reconceptualization, William Pinar—who drew from Sartre's *Search for a Method* (1968) and then later joined with Madeleine Grumet (Pinar & Grumet, 1976)—theorized a method that allowed students of curriculum to sketch relations among school knowledge, life history, and intellectual development in ways that might function self-transformatively (Miller, 2014; Pinar et al., 1995). Employing Enlightenment-centered assumptions that primarily framed their phenomenological work, Grumet and Pinar sought to enable both teachers and students to explore their inner experiences and perceptions of lived curriculum. From the Latin root, "the running of the race," the method, known as *currere* fore-fronted personal experience as part of "curriculum," in order to study the relationship between one's academic knowledge and one's life history (elements of this version of *currere* have been critiqued and those critiques will be explored as I consider feminist and poststructural influences). *Currere*

also signaled an attempt to wrestle with personal experience in education as a break from anonymous, generalized theorizing. Pinar and Grumet sought to acknowledge and examine the relationships between "one's conceptions, perceptions, and understandings of educational experience, one's contextualization of that experience within sociopolitical worlds, and one's constructions of curriculum as both reflecting and creating those worlds" (Miller, 2005, p. 151).

Utilizing the notion that "teachers and students might work from inner sources of insight and imagination" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 518), Pinar (1975) suggested that the initial method of *currere* should involve four temporal and reflective moments: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical. Not meant to be a linear process, the moments of *currere* were intended to support an active process to "understand curriculum" by attending to one's interpretations of educational experiences. In the regressive moment, one's lived experiences are utilized as a "data source." These data are generated by free-associating in order to recall the past and to enlarge one's memory. Pinar described this moment as returning to the past in order to supposedly "capture it as it was" and as it hovers over the present. In the progressive moment of the method, one looks forward to what is not yet the case, what is not yet present in order to imagine possible futures. The analytical moment examines both past and present while distancing oneself from the past and future in order to become freer in the present. The final moment, the synthetical, is where one reenters the lived present and carefully asks what the meaning of the present is. Within this process of *currere*, curriculum becomes a process that invites "complicated conversations" (Pinar, 2012).

Along with Pinar, Madeline Grumet elaborated *currere* as a method necessitating multiple accounts of selves and experiences as a way of studying lived experience while drawing attention to the social milieu of that experience (Miller, 2010a, 2014). For Grumet (1991), multiple accounts cultivate capacity to see through the habitual explanation of things. In order to see outside the dominant and habitual "way things are,"

multiple accounts supposedly fracture the singularity and power of a single telling and can call attention to social and political framings of what is taken for granted.

From the psychoanalytical perspective within which Grumet worked, *currere* also seeks to slide underneath concepts, abstractions, conclusions, and generalizations to the experience that is their foundation. Theorizing those experiences is crucial as the goal of *currere* is describing the sense the individual makes of these experiences. Grumet described *currere* as an attempt to reveal the ways histories and hope suffuse our moments and study them through telling stories of educational experiences (Pinar et al., 1995). “Psychoanalytically, *currere* as interpretation of experience involves the examination of manifest and latent meaning, conscious and unconscious content of language, as well as the political implications of such reflection and interpretation” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 521). *Currere*, then, offers the opportunity to study both the individual’s lived experience and the impact of the social milieu upon that experience. Since it seeks to depict and reflectively make sense of the impact of the milieu, as well as the subject’s past, upon the educational experience of the individual in the present, it must be grounded in context. Through the work of Pinar, Grumet, and others, a lasting legacy of the Reconceptualization is the emergence of autobiographical studies as a major force in the curriculum field (Miller, 2005; Pinar et al., 1995).

Another Reading of Chernin

Returning to my reading of Chernin’s work, my assumptions of autobiography as singular, linear, and transparent accounts were challenged as she attempts to render interpretations of shared experiences through her own and her mother’s eyes. While not exactly mirroring the multiple accounts of selves and experience Grumet elaborated, Chernin’s work began to help me understand the failures of exploring only one “true” interpretation of experience. In one scene, Chernin’s mother states, “My brother … says it isn’t so…. But this is what I remember” (location 3274).

Feminist Poststructural Influences: Complications, Challenges, and Critiques

Through continued exploration of autobiography, I repeatedly found tools for questioning my own underlying assumptions of autobiography—many which mirror assumptions embedded within *currere*. Specifically, poststructural feminist thinkers and researchers challenged me to reconsider representation of "self," representation of "story," representation of "experience," and the constitutive, discursive formations and language that cannot be untangled from any conceptions of the above. Negotiating, as well as interrogating, the dynamic processes of autobiographical subjectivity, particularly memory (Smith & Watson, 2010), became particularly salient, given the aims and questions of this inquiry.

Thus, a poststructurally informed autobiography provides opportunities for negotiating interpretations of the past, reflecting on and challenging identity constructions, and critiquing hierarchical social and cultural norms (Smith & Watson, 2010). Sidonie Smith, Julie Watson, and Janet Miller attend to autobiography as a historically situated and discursively inflected practice that attends to multiple selves and constructions of identity as produced and sustained by power relations, dominant discourse, and normative cultural and social ways of "being in the world" (Miller, 1998, 2005, 2010, 2017a, 2017b, forthcoming). It is to this body of work I turn for complications, challenges, and critiques of dominant, Enlightenment-oriented assumptions about "autobiography."

Multiple accounts and "story." Considerations of multiple accounts float predominantly through the feminist and poststructural streams of scholarship that influence my understanding of autobiography. While I am enticed by the practice of writing an experience at least three times, as Grumet admonished her students (Pinar et al., 1995), I am compelled by the poststructural thinking that greatly complicates the very notion of "multiple accounts."

Janet Miller (2005), for example, in "Autobiography and the Necessary Incompleteness of Teachers' Stories," works from theoretical positionings that problematize assumptions of the multiple accounts that Grumet urged. Miller admonishes that untroubled, untheorized, versions of "telling my story," written as unitary and transparent—even often within those three attempts—more often than not in many educations research representations give us a "whole" or "seamless" sequential presentation that presumes an unquestionable or unproblematic universal reality. This kind of telling maintains the status quo, re-inscribes the already-known as "fixed, immutable, locked into normalized and thus often exclusionary conceptions of what and who are possible" (Miller, 2005, p. 54).

Even the "telling of multiple versions of a story" can also ignore the ways in which dominant discourses can "write us." The decision to "write" or "re-write" is not external to language. Accepting language as the place our subjectivity is constructed (Weedon, 1997) implies that subjectivity is not innate, but socially produced in a range of discursive, as well as material, practices and contexts. Thus, telling multiple versions of a story does not implicitly dismantle Enlightenment versions of a knowable self. We cannot simply step outside the discourses that write us (through language) to tell "truth."

Such humanist versions of "stories" also serve to reify the dominant narrative in U.S. education of linear, sequential, and measurable progress toward academic and personal development. It often leads to versions of teachers and teaching that are about becoming fully knowledgeable and enlightened and that ignore multiple, conflicting, odd, or "abnormal" stories and identities. It glosses over complexities generated from power relations, contradictions, and paradoxes that infuse educational contexts. It forgets that what contains necessarily also excludes (Miller, 2005). Within this Enlightenment version of "story," autobiography can only be used to address a very narrow range of questions, issues, and purposes (Miller, 2014).

Instead of such untroubled and untheorized versions of “multiple stories,” Miller necessitates analyses of multiple accounts in order to discern ways those tellings may simply be a repetition of dominant constitutive materialities and discourses, in particular (Miller, 1998, 2005). She argues that even multiple versions of “self” and “stories” must be immediately questioned through the lenses of normative and historically specific social, cultural, and discursive constructs and practices. A version of autobiography that includes multiple tellings, multiple questionings of those tellings, and multiple angles on impossibilities of full and “accurate” representations might wrestle with normative discourses that society, history, and cultural conditioning have constructed for us and that we often unconsciously assume.

This version of multiply situated and interrogated “stories” might be analyzed for ways that predominant educational discourses, as well as social and cultural norms, have influenced and framed our versions of ourselves. Multiple and situated stories might enable analyses of multiple and even contradictory ways we embody our socially constructed identities as we interact with schooling conditions and structures that attempt to standardize us all, for example (Miller, 2000a). Multiple interrogations of what constitutes “stories,” as well as the ways that individuals tell those “stories,” are rendered as necessarily always incomplete—never linear and fully intact, never fully “coherent,” never fully and always conscious, never unmediated (Miller, 1998, 2005, 2010b, 2017).

Limits of language. In addition to complicating the notion of “story” and how “stories” are told, poststructural thinking simultaneously pushed my questionings of the very words and assumptions of unmediated experiences upon which those tellings are built. Enlightenment-inflected theories of language presume a correspondence between a word and something in the world. Within this frame of understanding, language simply names and reflects what it encounters (St. Pierre, 2000). Enlightenment-born conceptions of language, the very words we speak, convey “identical,” synonymous “meaning.” Similar to the initiating event in a Rube Goldberg construction—where a marble tips the

first domino, which in turn trips a long series of actions—tipping humanist conceptions and assumptions of language off their base incites reconsideration of many humanist and Enlightenment-born ideas. Weedon (1997) explains that since language is the place where forms of social organization and their likely consequences are defined and contested, language is thus “the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness” (p. 21).

Since humanism seeks to define the essence of things in order to identify and categorize, language within humanist frames of thinking is necessarily transparent. There is a presumed correspondence between a word and something in the world; language is fixed (St. Pierre, 2000). One difficulty with such assumptions about language is that it is impossible to produce enough names to attach to all the variations in the world. Things, people, and ideas are grouped into categories, and this categorizing privileges identity over difference (Ellsworth, 1989; St. Pierre, 2000). Such a view of language also presumes a “natural state of things” and, therefore, a further presumption: meaning can be guaranteed by the subject who speaks (Weedon, 1997). This perspective leaves little room for challenging what is presumed naturally or foregone in our world.

A fundamental insight of poststructural thinking that challenges these Enlightenment assumptions around language springs out of and ultimately beyond the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). Working as a structural linguist, Saussure troubled humanistic presumptions about the transparent representation language offers. He conceived language as a system of signs. Each sign is made up of two elements: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the concept being represented, and the signified is the sound or image representing the signifier. Saussure considered the signifier and signified to be randomly assigned and the meaning of a sign generated through its differences with other signs. Thus, meaning is generated through the differences between one sign and all the other signs in the language. The meaning of language is relational as opposed to intrinsic and, as such, does not reflect or express an

already given social or natural reality. However, Saussure also insisted that, while no natural connection between the signifier and the signified exist, and the meaning the sign attains is derived from its difference from all other signs in the language chain, meaning within the language system is singular or fixed. Self-conscious, rational individuals who speak are subject to these fixed meanings. The problem with such a fixedness of meaning is that it fails to account for pluralities of meanings or changes in meanings (Weedon, 1997). What the word "coach," or "woman," or "teacher" means across time and contexts is not stable.

While accepting Saussure's theorizing that no intrinsic correspondence between a word and a thing exists, Derrida troubled the fixedness of the signified, and it is this troubling that is crucial for poststructural theories. Derrida theorized that the meaning of the signified is never fixed once and for all, but rather, it is constantly deferred. Representation through language generates only a temporary retrospective fixing. "Signifiers are always located in a discursive context and the temporary fixing of meaning in a specific reading of a signifier depends on this discursive context" (Weedon, 1997, p. 25). What a signifier means in any particular moment depends on the discursive context within which it resides at that moment. Thus, language is not a stable, transparent referent to reality. Instead, language is transient and fleeting; we can never fully know what something means because meaning slips and slides, depending on who and in what contexts the "speaking" occurs. As such, meaning can always be disputed (Weedon, 1997).

In addition, Derrida's theorizing indicates that language is productive. Language constructs the world in the utterance: we word the world. However, this construction takes place within cultural and social practices. Meaning can never be fully secured since it is always already implicated in cultural practice (St. Pierre, 2000). It is in discourse that meaning is constructed and, as such, fluctuates (discourse itself and further connections to language, meaning, and power will be discussed in subsequent chapters). According to

Foucault, the linkages between language and human and material reality are always on the surface. There is never a deeper, true, stable meaning uncovered or revealed in language (St. Pierre, 2000, Weedon, 1997).

Poststructural thinkers instead conceive language as producing the world instead of mirroring it. Because language can be multiply and differently interpreted, "meanings" are available or unavailable within discursive regimes. Language shifts depending on social, cultural, and historical contexts, so meaning can always be disputed. Thus, language is unreliable. It falls apart (St. Pierre, 2000). What was said yesterday changes meaning in the context of today—and even at the very moment it is spoken.

If the word does not reflect the world—the world is instead constituted by the word within discursive frames—then no research or writing can accurately "capture" the world. A coherent, sequential, complete telling is impossible to represent in language. Miller noted how the feminist literary critic Shoshana Felman (1993) indicates that we must pay attention to the very construction of meaning as always situated in language that "unwittingly write[s] us" (p. 157) by writing in such a way that attempts to show language breaking down, even as it simultaneously constructs and reconstructs "us."

Limits of experience. If language is an unreliable conveyor of meaning, then the nature of experience that language attempts to convey is also challenged through poststructural thinking. Smith and Watson (2010) contend that autobiography necessarily relies on experience as a primary source of evidence. But humanist and modernist conceptions of telling personal "stories" based on experience conceived as unproblematic take the validity of experience as evidence as a foregone conclusion: it happened to me, thus I know.

Feminist historian Joan Scott (1991) challenges this notion of experience in her seminal work to question the uses of experience as evidence by historians. The traditional mission of historians documenting the lives of those omitted or overlooked in accounts of the past has rested on the foundation of accounts of experience as authoritative evidence:

> Knowledge is gained through vision; vision is a direct apprehension of a world of transparent objects. In this conceptualization, the visible is privileged; writing is then put at its service. Seeing is the origin of knowing. Writing is reproduction, transmission—the communication of knowledge gained through (visual, visceral) experience. (p. 83)

Scott (1991) argues that documenting and highlighting experience in this way has been simultaneously a highly successful, as well as limiting, strategy. While it allows new evidence to challenge old narratives, Scott questions the appeal made to "experience as uncontestable evidence and as an originary point of explanation" as a foundation for analysis (p. 81). Difference is naturalized and the vision of the individual becomes the foundation of evidence on which accounts of "experience" are built (Ellsworth & Miller, 1996). "The evidence of experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference, rather than a way of exploring how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world" (Scott, 1991, p. 82). Making the experience of different groups visible exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but it does not focus a gaze on their inner workings or logics. As such, dominant discursive ideologies are simply reified, not challenged. The postructural argument for interrogating dynamics associated with the constitutive nature of discourse is thus ignored.

Scott (1991) suggests that it ought to be possible to make visible the assignment of subject positions without implying we have captured reality, but rather, by trying to understand the operations of complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, and embraced. Treating identity as a discursive event is to refuse a separation between "experience" and language. Instead, to insist on the productive quality of discourse and the conflicts among discursive systems indicates that multiple interpretations of meanings are possible. Experience is a linguistic event within discursive fields. Scott states, "Experience is a subject's history. Language is the site of history's enactment. Historical explanation cannot, therefore, separate the two" (p. 93).

Scott (1991) cautions that talking about experience as either internal (expressive of an individual's consciousness) or external (what happens to us) leads to a taken-for-grantedness of the relationship between individual experience and the claim to unique individuality. She questions this taken-for-grantedness as obscuring how meaning is socially produced through language. Conversely, Scott defines "experience" as a process through which a person becomes a certain kind of subject with certain identities constituted through material, cultural, economic, and psychic social relations. Individuals do not have experience; rather, experience—as it is embedded within discursive regimes—constitutes subjects.

Therefore, since discourses are historically specific, what counts as experience changes over time and culture. The meanings we make of experiences—the stories we tell—are guided and compelled by discursive patterns (Smith & Watson, 2010). Scott (1991) argues for attending to questions about the constructed nature of experience. She argues that we need to analyze the operation and meaning of experience through focusing on the discursive nature of experience and its constructions, including identity productions. Thus, experience can never be taken as straightforward or self-evident. Scott warns, "Experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted" (p. 793).

To analyze experience through this re-framing, Scott (1991) suggests different ways of reading experience and different understandings of the relationship between words and what is implied in the readings. Specifically, she calls for readings that do not assume a direct correspondence between words and things, does not presume singular meanings, nor aims for resolution of contradictions. Instead, Scott calls for reading experience as interpreted representation. "This entails focusing on processes of identity production, insisting on discursive nature of experience and on the politics of its construction. Experience is at once always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted" (p. 96).

This position does not mean that experience has NO meaning. Weedon (1997) explains, “poststructural feminist theory suggests that experience has no inherent *essential* meaning” (p. 33; *emphasis mine*). With this statement, she indicates that experience has multiple and infinite meanings, depending upon particular interpretations of such that most often, for most Subjects, are infused with assumptions of the dominant discourse circulating. Weedon admonishes, we “should not deny subjective experience since the ways people make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society” (p. 8). Thus, experience is not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain.

Informed by Scott’s (and others’) work, poststructural feminisms seek to offer explanations of where our interpretations of experience are lodged in terms of dominant discourses and resulting norms, in particular. Such interrogations thus also encourage examinations of why and how interpretations of “experience” can change. If experience is interpreted, as Scott (1991) indicates, via language, then language, with/in varied iterations of discourse, constructs both our subject positions and subjectivity. Since experience is an interpretation, any recountings of selves in context are necessarily incomplete, partial, fractured, and demands analysis of which, what, and how certain discourses habitually frame those recountings (Miller, 1998). One goal of autobiography must, then, be calling attention to the interpretations of experience as discursively and materially constructed within particular social, cultural, and historical contexts—and these interpretations will always be limited—incomplete.

***Limits of memory*.** Further complicating my understandings of interpretations of experiences within autobiography representations was Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s (2010) discussion of memory. In *Reading Autobiography*, Smith and Watson define the constitutive components of autobiographical subjectivity as: memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment, and agency. These concepts prove useful for understanding the sources and processes of autobiographical subjectivity constructions. But just as

assumptions of the authority of “experience” are challenged by Scott (1991), the function of memory upon which interpretations of experience rest must also be questioned.

Smith and Watson (2010) position the subject as decentered, as rejecting assumptions of the fully knowing subject who depends on fully accessible memory to narrate the past. These narratives of the self are a reconstruction and re-appropriation of the past and the lived experiences and memories as well as re-imaginings of the future (Smith & Watson, 2010). They indicate that narrators are at the center of the historical pictures they assemble and are interested in the meaning of larger forces at play within their own “stories.” Narrators selectively engage their interpretations of lived experience through personal storytelling and locate them in specific times and places. They are at the same time in dialogue with the processes and archives of memory. “Memory is thus the source, authenticator, and destabilizer of autobiographical acts” (p. 22).

In exploring the nature of memory, Smith and Watson (2010) identify six concepts crucial to understanding what memory is and how it works: Memory as meaning-making, memory as historically influenced, memory as contextual, memory as political, memory as collective, and memory as material. (They also include a discussion of memory and trauma, which, for the sake of this discussion, I exclude). Within these categories, Smith and Watson emphasize that memory is a re-interpretation of the past in the present and as such is not a passive activity. As subjects remember, they actively create a partial interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered. As techniques and practices of remembering are historically, culturally, and contextually specific, what is remembered, who remembers, how they remember, what is forgotten, and what is obscured are dictated by particular discourses, times, places, and ideologies—in ways that can even be multiple or competing. Writers incorporate multiple modes and archives of remembering in their narratives—some personal, some collective, some public. Because acts of remembering are fundamentally social and relational, they are implicated in how people understand the past and make claims about our versions of the past. Since memories are often attached to

specific sites, circumstances, artifacts, discourses, and even our very bodies, remembering is an act of association. When we read—and write—autobiographical narrative, we attend to the role of remembering—and conscious, as well as unconscious, forgetting—in the act of making meaning out of the past and present.

So from Scott's work, alongside Smith and Watson's thinking, I began to think of representation or "storying" within autobiography as a shadow—something able to be made visible, but not captured and maintained within definitive lines. Something that is ever-shifting, morphing, or distorting that which is represented. I found myself wanting to layer representations … to let them co-exist; to appreciate the complexity the varying interpretations rendered and to embrace that complexity; to let them be shadows. No, more like shadows in a funhouse mirror … convolutions and twists layered over a fuzzy approximation of the shadow that only vaguely represents the "thing" and shifts in response to only slight adjustments.

Multiple "selves" and identities. So who, then, is the subject of such "stories"? Along with the challenging of assumptions of "story" as well as the "evidence of experience" necessarily must come a shifting of considerations of the subject of such "stories" and "experience." If a stable, unified story is impossible, at least from poststructural perspectives, then a stable, unified subject is also impossible (via Foucault, 1981). Within humanism, rationality and the scientific method have come to be valued keys to supposedly unlocking the secrets of the social and natural worlds (Olesen, 2011; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000).

Central to this rationale is the Cartesian subject of modernity who is presumed to be the intuitively-given, original site of all cognitive representation and social action. Further, the subject (the "self") of humanism is assumed to be conscious, stable, unified, rational, coherent, knowing, autonomous, and a-historic (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). This essentialized, rational, wholly conscious, unified man [sic] can fully know and be fully known. Stemming from Descartes's philosophy of "cogito" wherein

knowledge is acquired by human method ("I think therefore I am"), the individual of humanism can separate himself from the outside, study it, predict it, and control it. He can then produce "true" knowledge (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Thus, the humanist individual is the origin of truth and knowledge, while everything that is not "subject" (the person in charge who is dominant and primary) becomes object. In this subject/object distinction, multiple and various binaries are created wherein the lesser part of the binary is "subject" to the dominant part: man/woman, parent/child, teacher/student, coach/teacher. One effect of humanism's desire to "fix" identity categories in order to produce order and regularity is a privileging of identity (and the accompanying binary assumptions of "same/different," greater/lesser, dominant/non-dominant) over difference (Ellsworth & Miller, 1996; St. Pierre, 2000).

Foucault illuminated the crucial critique of this modern subject. In his analysis of discourse, power, and knowledge, Foucault sought to decenter "man" as the modern subject. He did so, in part, by suggesting that history is not created by a logical rational subject. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978/1990) demonstrated that even an oft-deemed "basic human need" such as sexuality is socially constructed. He argued that such "essential" drives and "needs" are buried beneath socially constructed interpretations so as to also argue that there is no "essence" of humans. Foucault instead gestured toward the discursive production of the subject—although Foucault also deeply recognized the simultaneous influences of material conditions, contexts, and embodied sensations and desires on that subject. "The subject" is simultaneously constituted and de-centered through the operation of dense and conflicting networks of discourses and historically situated social/cultural practices, materialities, and relationalities (Weedon, 1997).

If an individual's "inner nature" is socially constructed, even more so is cognition. As the activity of understanding the world is shaped, cognition is constituted by available discourses. Weedon (1997) explains:

> How we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent. (p. 26)

Our knowing, desires, relationalities, and materialities—in short, our “selves”—are continuously constituted within ever-shifting discursive influences.

While central to poststructural thinking in general, this critique is particularly crucial to projects exploring relationships between subjectivity, subject positions, and identities (Weedon, 1997). If a Subject, as conceived through Foucault, represents a “self” who is *not* fully realized, ever-changing, never conscious, rational, or sovereign, that Subject cannot have a coherent and unitary “voice” that can always remain a fully intact “developed” and even “empowered” voice (Miller, 2017; Weedon, 1997). In *Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Knowledge*, Foucault (1972) was clear that he did not seek a “speaking subject” (St. Pierre, 2014). This view shifts considerations from what was said to the conditions of possibility that allowed the speaking.

Smith and Watson (2010) contend that even while arguing multiplicity when storying one’s experience, embedded in many narrative conceptualizations of autobiography are humanist assumptions around voice and self as subject. Via poststructural perspectives, Miller (2000b, 2005, 2010b) questions Enlightenment assumptions around conceptions of “self” that underpin *currere* and normalized versions of autobiography.

Currere claims a self that is “knowable,” a self that can access its prior as well as current “lived experience” and can “integrate” into a whole. The method of *currere* is often coopted (incorrectly, give the phenomenological and psychoanalytical perspectives utilized by Pinar and Grumet) as just another way of knowing that can be utilized toward definitive and conclusive portraits of fully-realized selves. In such versions of *currere,* an Enlightenment “I”—a rational, coherent, autonomous, unified, fixed and given “self”—is

replicated rather than questioned. Janet Miller (2005, 2010b, 2017) explains that a normalizing conception of autobiography, built on a rational, coherent "self," offers no place to explore how we are situated and constructed in and through normative discourses.

Miller thus argues for forms of autobiographical curriculum theorizing as involving incessant interrogations of processes and constructs informed and shaped by discourses as well as cultural, historical, and social materialities and relationalities. Such constant questionings can defamiliarize static categories and versions of "the self" while attending to relations among language, subjectivity, social organization, and power (Miller, 2005). Poststructural feminists grapple with *how* to conceptualize "self" not as permanently essentialized, but rather as open, resignifiable, and as sites for cultural critique and social change (Butler, 2002). Further, and as already noted, Weedon (1997) describes language as integral in that potential resignifiability—I say I am, or I say I do, or I say I think… and thus I create myself in the speaking. Weedon explains that even the idea of oneself as a Subject, author of destiny, is an illusion. The Subject does not exist before society because the Subject is socially bounded—a contingent effect of society. But the speaking is not stable, nor is language to be relied upon. Any representation of "self" must analyze the limits, shape, and possibilities of the language we use to speak them. Smith and Watson (2010) suggest that narrators may well present inconsistent or shifting views of themselves. Gilmore (1994) indicates that writing multiple, contradictory, experimental "identities" can be a means for opening up toward an "I" situated simultaneously in multiple identity constructions. All of these possibilities are ones to which poststructurally informed autobiographical curriculum theorists both attend and interrogate.

An (im)possible "I." Working from poststructural perspectives, then, necessitates that the very processes of "writing the self" be taken up and interrogated. These perspectives eschew linear stories of coming to "know" hidden selves and, rather,

emphasize writing practices that aim to displace the self into the social; what Patti Lather (2000, as cited in Gannon, 2006) refers to as scandalous, excessive, leaky writing. Susanne Gannon (2006) suggests that poststructural writers who take on tasks of writing centered on the self as subject, as I did in this attempt to "make sense of my own literacy specialist life," find themselves in a paradox. Such work "presumes that the subjects can speak (for) themselves," but poststructural thinking disrupts that very assumption (p. 475). In this sense, writing the self is (im)possible and can only be attempted from fractured and fragmented subject positions. All discursive constructions of categories are unstable, all experiences are interpretations (Scott, 1991), all identities are produced via a variety of discursive, material, and historically situated processes and power relations, and all knowledge constructions provoke partialities, uncertainties, misrecognitions, ignorances, and silences (Smith & Watson, 2010; St. Pierre, 2000). As such, self "stories" within poststructural frames of thinking are necessarily multiple, fractured, and open to constant questionings and "re-tellings" (Miller, 1992, 1998, 2000b; Smith & Watson, 2010).

De-centering "the self" in autobiographical inquiries then troubles the binaries of "private/public, personal/social" while simultaneously troubling the presumption that subjects can "speak for others," let alone "speak for themselves." Gannon (2006) suggests that writers who lean on poststructural theories must wrestle with the "(im)possibilities of writing the self." A fractured, fragmented subject position becomes imperative as the "I" who spoke yesterday can never be the "I" who speaks today (Gannon, 2006). The "subject" is always present, but only partially because in the writing, language not only "write[s] us," but also substitutes for the unknowable, the unconscious whereby we suppress or repress parts of ourselves too: there is no such thing as getting it "right" (Richardson, 1994). "The writing writes the writer as a complex (im)possible subject in a world where (self) knowledge can only even be tentative, contingent, and situated" (Gannon, 2006, p. 474).

These considerations of an autobiographical subject prompted me to ponder dominant discursive framings that indeed constitute versions of “identity”; dominant discourses that have become so “taken-for-granted” and thus so normalizing within my particular social, cultural, and historical contexts—those constructions of “me” that I call teacher, mother, researcher, wife, daughter, female, White … endless. These are not fixed, reified, essentialized “identities.” They are shifting, merging, and flowing. I am amazed how often those identities are in conflict with one another…. I cannot ignore their fierce competition, nor their shifting manifestations, their surprising eruptions, their meldings. I don’t always—don’t often even—understand.

Yet Another Reading of Chernin

These critiques pushed my reading of Chernin further. While she explores her own and her mother’s interpretations of shared experiences, they are presented as whole and complete narratives. Chernin chooses not to interrogate the singular interpretations of her own experiences—instead juxtaposing them with her mother’s interpretations—and I wondered at the then singular identities she portrays for herself and her mother. Her mother is, through and through, the Communist idealist. And while Chernin does position subjectivities as historically and socially constructed (describing her mother’s perspective on the Communist political party versus her own, necessarily required an elaboration of the social, political, historical, and even religious context of the decades spanning her mother’s and her own lifetimes), she skirts at the edges of interrogating and theorizing the very discursive and material construction of those subjectivities.

Autobiography–in-the-Making

Negotiating the slippery slopes of this conception of autobiography left me searching for a vision of the writing I hoped to engage. I looked to writing mentors to help me envision what might be. Janet Miller (2000a) refers to a kind of telling that seeks to engage the fight for meaning as autobiography in-the-making. This kind of writing

tells and then interrogates multiple and situated stories in order to wrestle with normative discourses and their attached meanings and identities that have been discursively and materially constructed within society, history, and culture. This kind of autobiographical inquiry, with accompanying self-reflexivities of "discomfort" (see below, Pillow, 2003), highlights the contradictory, multiple, and often never-fully-known ways we embody, repeat, and/or challenge our socially constructed identities. The subject of such a telling is dynamic, situated historically, and positioned in multiple discourses. Multiple angles on interrogations of self-representation allow for grappling with multiple and often contradictory versions of self. Interpretations are incomplete, and representation is multiple, indeterminate, contingent, and tentative.

> Autobiography in-the-making, then, includes multiple tellings, multiple angles on representations of "self" that give strategic leverage on two central questions that frame a notion of English education in-the-making: 1) As a teacher, as a teacher educator, how will I respond to students' and colleagues' identities and responses that deviate from the "norm," and/or that are different from "mine?" And, 2) how will I respond to educational discourses and practices that function to position some as permanently "other," knowing that, at the same time, I am always caught up in and by the very languages and resulting practices that I wish to challenge? (Miller, 2000a, p. 39)

In researching how particular discourses create and govern, as well as the gaps and silences in such rulings, poststructurally positioned writing seeks to work with (not against) the complexities of human existence. It embraces what Weedon (1997) refers to as a dynamic, changing, situated subjectivity constructed in the language of the telling. This leads to incomplete, fractured, and deferred meanings (Miller, 2000a, 2010a) wherein "selves" are theorized as unfinished and identity is fluid. Such a telling must immediately call into question not only the language used to tell those multiple stories, but also question the assumptions we bring to telling and the discourses that have constructed "selves" and "experiences" in the telling. It may analyze the ways educational discourses and social/cultural norms have influenced and framed versions of

"self." It might also analyze the multiple, contradictory, or exclusionary ways we embody and perform our socially constructed identities. It may enable imagining possibilities for constructing versions of "selves" that resist prescription and that can respond to the divergent, the paradoxical, the unanticipated, the unknown (Miller, 2014). I am encouraged by Janet Miller's belief that "such work can enable us to jostle, dislodge, revamp, startle, or at the very least, interrogate versions of what counts as knowledge, who counts as a knowledge-creator, what counts as educating, what counts as learning, teaching, and curriculum, what and who counts as "effective?" (p. 20).

So while situating this inquiry within this version of autobiography was decidedly uncomfortable—I wrestled with much—I did embrace one aim of feminist poststructuralist researchers: to draw attention to the politics and discursive constructions of "knowing" and "being known" as they (we) (impossibly) attempt to "tell others' and their own stories" (Miller, 2010a). I recognized that those same poststructural positions that allowed for this exploration also demanded that I continually problematize and interrogate not only my interpretations and constructions of those experiences but also the entire research process. To this end, I turn to issues of conducting a poststructurally informed autobiographical inquiry within a postmodern research context.

Part II: From Theory to Practice: Research in a Postmodern Context

Laurel Richardson (1994) describes styles and methods of writing as neither fixed nor neutral but reflecting historically shifting philosophical, methodological, theoretical paradigms and schools of thought. She traces writing since the 17th century as roughly divided into literary and scientific modes. During the 20th century, in response to excessive positivism, the relationship between social scientific and literary writing grew in complexity with the blurring of lines between fact and fiction, true and imagined (Metta, 2010; Richardson, 1994; Smith & Watson, 2010; St. Pierre, 2011).

A Context of "Posts"

This still pervasive era of blurring lines and pushings against literal as well as physical boundaries, known as "the postmodern," refuses a totalizing definition. In mapping nine historical moments in qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005, 2011) characterize the postmodern turn as a phase associated roughly with the early 1990s but overlapping with other moments into the present. Elizabeth St. Pierre (2011) considers the postmodern not so much a singular phase as an assemblage of "posts": post-colonialism, post-positivism, post-feminism, post-subjective, post-foundational, post-emancipatory, post-subjective, post-memory, post-everything. Literary critic Brenda Marshall (1992) considers the postmodern a moment in logic. She defines this moment as an awareness of being within a way of thinking—first as and within language, and second as a particular historical, social, cultural framework.

The paradox of Marshall's (1992) understanding of the postmodern moment is crucial to understanding the moment itself: recognition that such awareness disallows definitive namings of the terms of that moment. Namings must occur from a position outside and indicate attempts at control. Crucial to understanding the postmodern moment is first recognizing that there is no "outside" from which to "objectively" name. Janet Miller (2010b) elaborates: "Conceptualizing postmodernism, then, is problematic, given that any attempted formulation must immediately involve a constant questioning of presumptions underlying the very conceptual efforts themselves as well as the discourse available to even challenge and interrogate" (p. 667). We know we are within a particular way of thinking even if we cannot say how it works.

> There can be no such thing as objectivity: all our definitions and understandings of all that has come before us must pass through our historical, social, cultural being, as well as through our language—all of which precede us and constitute us, even as we insist on our own control. (Marshall, 1992, p. 3)

Therefore, the postmodern is partly about language and its slippages as explored above. The postmodern demands attention to the ways particular uses and iterations of

language determine "meanings" and to how language is utilized to exert control and restrict. The postmodern is also about how we are defined within that language; about difference, power, and powerlessness. The postmodern is about histories and questions—what is hidden, invisible, changed, eradicated, prioritized, etc. and the refusal to see history as linear. The postmodern works toward increased knowledge but never toward pure insight or absolute conclusions (Marshall, 1992). These implications of the postmodern not only influenced my understanding of autobiography as described above but the very processes of inquiry as well.

Autobiography as Contested Terrain: Implications of Entertaining the "Posts"

Brenda Marshall (1992) elucidates the relationship between the postmodern and poststructural theorizing:

> [O]nly within the postmodern moment do the questions raised by poststructuralists have currency. Moreover, these poststructuralist concerns and questions—about language, texts, interpretation, subjectivity, for example—specifically lend themselves to larger historical, social, and cultural questions that inhabit the postmodern moment. Thus, poststructuralism provides many of the tools used for the decidedly political and historical questions of the postmodern moment. (p. 8)

Elizabeth St. Pierre (2014) argues the impossibilities of conventional humanist qualitative methodology alongside "post"-informed analyses, as their epistemological and ontological commitments do not align. She indicates that the "posts," in part, aim to displace and put under erasure (via Derrida) the assumed structures of qualitative research, including, most prominently, "methods" of "data gathering" (St. Pierre, 2011). Thus it is impossible to *think* "post"-informed analysis within conventional humanist qualitative methodology; "post" analysis requires a different approach from the beginning. If I critique (as in pointing out assumptions without necessarily outright rejecting) some of the basic humanist assumptions around subject, knowledge production, and language upon which conventional qualitative methodology rests, then I find it quite

difficult to set those critiques aside and lay out a research design that unproblematically follows a conventional qualitative research process. St. Pierre (2011) suggests that the struggle for researchers operating within the "posts" is wrestling with questions stemming from the impossibility of fully representing within a science that is no longer "this, not that," but rather "this and this and this and this" (p. 613).

Lather (2000), along with St. Pierre and Pillow (2000), utilizes the metaphor of working the ruins to describe spaces where re-working humanist concepts of knowledge and truth occur. In lieu of seeing devastation and despair where traditional, Enlightenment-born regimes are dismantled, working the ruins suggests possibilities, critiques, and approaches to examining the functions and effects of those regimes. Working from feminist, postmodern, and poststructural framings as described, I sought to work the ruins and limits of Enlightenment versions of knowledge, research, and method to highlight normative meanings and constructed identities and subjectivities of literacy specialists (Lather, 2000). This position afforded me the full advantage of the postmodern "turn" or shift in conceptions of research—particularly of education research that continues to reinscribe positivist-only modes of thinking and researching, especially within these current "audit culture" times.

Research from these perspectives was not undertaken light-heartedly. Despite the possibilities, it is certainly contested terrain. Western writing loves linearity, and education, within these "accountability" times, seems to love certainty. First, next, then, last … is it not how we teach our children to construct written work? Theorists in this post season recognize that linearity is an artificial construct. Thoughts, ideas, learning, and knowledge do not necessarily follow that pattern: Type a sentence, delete a word, delete a whole sentence, type, cut, paste, copy, move, delete, delete, delete. Autobiography in-the-making embraces the repetitions, the full stops, the broken lines, the non-linear paths, the silences, gaps, the unknown. It embraces the fight with normative meanings and identities. It embraces the contradictory, multiple, and often

never-fully-known ways we embody our socially constructed identities. It embraces the dynamic, changing, situated subjectivity constructed in the language of the telling (Miller, 2000a; Weedon, 1997). And it holds at arm's length conventional qualitative research design (St. Pierre, 2011, 2014).

Implication 1: Myths of generalizability and "findings." As autobiography within a postmodern moment questions modernist Enlightenment notions of rational, fully conscious humans and certainties of truth claims, we give up absolutism. Because the postmodern suspects versions of "the one and only truth" and operates with a disbelief toward metanarratives, there are no timeless "truths" to be "found" through research methods. We work toward local, contingent, provisional, situated, truths … truths that are ever-changing and shifting with the contingencies (Miller, 2010a). We also seek local, contingent identities and pay attention to how versions of knowledge position subjects within discourses by enabling particular possibilities and repressing others. As such, researching framed by the postmodern implies that we can know some things … or parts of things … without knowing everything (Lather, 1991; Richardson, 1994).

Therefore, a poststructurally informed autobiographical inquiry situated in the postmodern seeks a multitude of ways of contingently "knowing and telling": How many more ways might there be to "tell the story"? Whose story is this anyway? How does/can "the self" look into all "stories"? What discourses are available and how do they "frame what/where/how one "sees" and "tells"? What are the conditions of "story production"? How, what, and who might "telling a story" change (Miller, 2010b; Smith & Watson, 2010)?

Contextualizing autobiographical writing within these troubling ways allowed me to grapple with discursive, historical, and cultural norming of identities and pushes against humanist traditions of knowledge creation. I, therefore, "understood" autobiography as situated within a postmodern context in order to write against normalizing, "grand" narratives of literacy work. I sought no concrete "findings." I did

not presume to speak for any other literacy specialists. I did not even presume to fully speak for myself.

Implication 2: Problematics of self-reflexivity. In *Bitter Milk,* Madeleine Grumet (1988) intertwined autobiographical and feminist theory to explore the middle passage as a space between public and private. She theorized, “We work to remember, imagine, and realize ways of knowing and being that can span the chasm separating our public and private experience” (p. xv). To do so, Grumet emphasized reflexive storytelling in *currere*. She described reflexive storytelling as a telling that folds back on itself: “A method of receiving stories that mediates the space between the self that tells, the self that is told, and the self that listens” (Grumet, 1991, p. 70). For Grumet and the perspectives she operated from, reflexive storytelling represented looking back at oneself as if in a mirror in the interest of transparency (Pinar et al., 1995).

Within postmodern framings, arising partly from colonizing practices of research, self-reflexivity is posited as a methodological tool to explore and expose the politics of representation—including interrogations of dominant discourses framing and constituting any representation—as well as continually interrogate assumptions embedded in the writer and writing. Reflexive practices attempt to make visible “how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect data collection and analysis” (Pillow, 2003, p. 176). To be reflexive opens up the process in which knowledge is produced to investigation and demands critical consciousness about, as well as interrogating assumptions, of the “presence” of self as well as the influences of dominant discourses on constructions of those “selves” (Pillow, 2003). It is presumed that reflexive practices produce research that questions its own interpretations.

These presumptions have been furthered by researchers and theorists working the ruins (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008; Pillow, 2003). Their interrogations gave me pause in accepting reflexive accounts as simply writing multiple accounts, as Grumet initially described (in addition to critiques of multiple accounts described above). But as

challenging Enlightenment versions of "the self" in autobiographical writing continues to be a concern for feminist poststructural researchers and theorists, it also demanded my attention. I then also was compelled to understand more complex notions of self-reflexivity.

Wanda Pillow (2003) names and troubles four common humanist-oriented reflexive strategies as methodological tools to represent, legitimize, or question data within the postmodern. Pillow, for example, cautions against an Enlightenment version of reflexivity that acts as a confessional cure for the writer. She demonstrates, through her critique of four typical versions of self-reflexivity, how these common practices of reflexivity depend upon a modern subject. These practices require a subject who is singular, knowable, and fixable. However, self-reflexivity predicated upon the ability of the researcher to know his/her subjectivity and to make subjectivity known is limited and limiting (Gannon, 2006; Pillow 2003). Such tellings often collapse into linear renditions that fail to make the familiar strange, at the least. As discussed above, poststructural theorizing, in contrast, positions subjects as multiple, unknowable, and shifting in continual processes of de-centering, re-configuring, and possible deviations from dominant discourses as well as materialities that frame writing and reading (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). I am woman, wife, mother, teacher, specialist, but assuming these identity categories as essentialized and fixed is insufficient for interrogating my "presence" within the research. Such a subject demands a different use of reflexivity.

Pillow also argues that common practices of reflexivity are often associated with validity, even co-opted toward scientific rigor. The danger here is that reflexivity may act in the interest of substantiating a definitive and universal version of "truth." Practices such as fore-fronting voice, the construction of texts, and relinquishing control to subjects can lure us into a sense of "real and true." As such, these humanist versions of reflexivity risk validating enlightenment assumptions about fully rational selves who can always fully know (Richardson, 1994).

Instead, Pillow (2003) puts forth her theorizing of "uncomfortable" reflexive practices that interrupt uses of reflexivity as a methodological tool to get "better" data. Her discussion of "reflexivities of discomfort" forefronts the difficult and uncomfortable task of leaving what is unfamiliar as just that—unfamiliar. Uncomfortable reflexivity attempts to lay out one's own subjectivity (as much as this is even possible, given the unconscious as well as the opaqueness of one's subjectivity) throughout the research process to recognize the limits of certain aspects of and in one's research and to acknowledge what can never be resolved. The politics of a text are announced and interrogated continuously. And, as Foucault (1972) theorized "the subject" as both agential and as "subjected" to dominant discourses as well as the workings of power as they are exercised in multiple directions at once, no interpretation is privileged. Thus, in my research, I worked toward a messy text that interrogated how "reality," "self-reflexive research practices," and "selves" are discursively and socially constructed as "subjects" and impossibly represented.

In Patti Lather's (1986) discussion of validity and reflexivity as constant negotiations of meaning and power, she explores strategies for writing that is "rigorously self-aware" (p. 188). Reflexivity that confronts problematics without attempting to resolve tensions and contradictions with and in constructions of "researcher" and "subjectivities" is an uncomfortable approach to dissertation research for me. Reflexivity that troubles data based on language and turns to data outside of language (St. Pierre, 1997) is uncomfortable. Reflexivity that confounds is uncomfortable. At the same time, I conceded—given my poststructural leanings—that I must work with and in "reflexivities of discomfort" as conceptualized by Pillow (2003). Simple stories of subjects, subjectivity, transcendence, or self-indulgent tellings are insufficient (Pillow, 2003).

Uncomfortable tellings. For this inquiry, I, therefore, returned to interpretations of my "experiences" from my work as a full-time literacy specialist in a middle school. Key assumptions I brought to my literacy practice—and hence those I brought to this

research—are born from my understanding of teaching and learning grounded in social constructivist thinking. From this position, I have been educated to see, and often continue to see, learning as a construction based on an individual's own understanding and knowledge of the world through interaction with the world and others. I have long been convinced by constructivist assumptions, including that meaningful learning is garnered through active participation in problem-solving, critical thinking, and reflection. Leaning on theories of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and John Dewey (1916), I have operated for a long while now under assumptions that language and culture play essential roles in knowledge construction. "Good" teaching involves scaffolding the divides between learners' current level of understanding or mastery and what is just beyond their reach. "Good" coaching guides teachers through reflection as a method of scaffolding toward "better" teaching. "Good" literacy support is responsive to teachers' interests, desires, and needs. "Good" literacy practice is respectful of local contexts. "Good" literacy teaching is child-centered.

While these understandings led me to specific literacy practices, I immediately recognized that much of the poststructural thinking I discussed above questions a reliance on particular discourses and the languages that typically accompany any worldviews; questions discursive constructions of "selves" that especially rely on developmental notions of growth and learning in predictable and even measurable ways; questions interpretations of experience; questions reflection as praxis. I recognized that these assumptions about my practice are inconsistent with the poststructural theorizing that informs this research. This tension further pushed me to constantly question and challenge any interpretations I may have made of my work.

Implication 3: Chasing validity. So what does working the ruins of a humanist research paradigm do to a concept of validity? Traditional research paradigms necessitate that researchers prove that the "instruments" utilized in the research have indeed "researched" that which is claimed to be researched, that the research is replicable, and

that the conclusions they put forth are generalizable, and hence, the research is "valid," thus justifying the knowledge "found" as beyond reproach. Traditional validity is also concerned with judging various knowledge claims and determining what counts as truth. Strategies such as member checks, reflexivity, and triangulation are intended to render a trustworthy representation of "the other" as well as check the authorial voice of the researcher to justify conclusions drawn.

Poststructural thinking does not coincide with the concept of validity in research, but rather critically pushes back on the positivist assumptions these strategies are founded on (Lather, 1991). Lather (1993), Britzman (1995), and Smith and Watson (2010) have all re-considered validity within the "posts" and the conditions of the legitimation of knowledge. Their thinking challenged many of my assumptions about the processes and "value" of research and the intentions of this inquiry in particular.

Lather (1993) positions validity as an incitement to discourse. She wrestles with validity in the distinction between "found" and "constructed" worlds where "the real" is contested territory. In this distinction, we shift our sense of the real to discourses of the real. The crisis of representation is not the end of representation, but rather the end of pure presence, as well as "understanding" fully and completely. Responsibility for researchers shifts from representing things in themselves to inconclusively and contingently representing the web of social relations by seeing what frames our seeing. This responsibility is interested in how discourse does its work. Validity is de-centered and reframed as multiple, partial, endlessly deferred. Lather uses the term "validity of transgression" to consider validity from a position that accounts for the crisis in representation and that runs counter to a validity of correspondence.

Britzman (1995) takes up the term "transgressive validity" to re-consider the authority of empiricism, the authority of language, and the authority of reading upon which writing typically rests. Recognizing that the social reality represented is selected and constructed through writing mechanisms implies that the writer is always in the text

and any description and interpretation are tainted—never pure. Approaching writing as an effect of a context of discourses allows the researcher to approach writing as a regulated fiction. Writing of this nature "should trace how power circulates and surprises, theorize how subjects spring from discourses that incite them, and question the belief in representation even as one must practice representation as a way to intervene critically in the constitutive constraints of discourse" (p.236). Writing that engages the struggle for meaning works actively against the tendency to become the authorial voice and opens up the possibilities to examine the textual staging of knowledge.

Smith and Watson (2010) also suggest that if we approach writing as such an intersubjective process, rather than as a true-false story, the emphasis shifts from assessing and verifying knowledge to observing not only the workings of dominant discourses but also the processes of communicative exchange and understanding. This writing attempts to go beyond the structuring regulations of the true and false, the objective and the subjective, and the valid and the invalid. Validity becomes concerned with the construction of particular versions of truth, questioning how regimes of truth become neutralized as knowledge, and pushing the sensibilities of the reader in new directions.

As I pondered the parameters of my dissertation inquiries, I was reminded that focusing on discourse as it frames the sense, the meaning, the telling, the writing, and minding the unreliable nature of language would be crucial as I attempted to constantly turn back to question interpretations and "tellings." Additionally, I needed to attend to the tools and mechanisms utilized in the telling, focusing in particular on the processes of communication and "understanding" as I repeatedly turned back to question and interrogate.

"Doing" a Poststructurally Influenced Autobiographical Inquiry: A Blurred/ing Process

Despite my persistent constructivist and humanist assumptions and tendencies, I was convinced that positioning this dissertation research as poststructurally influenced autobiography opened up possibilities for what may be learned about literacy work as well as how it is learned. But this position also posed challenges for a research process. As previously discussed, once epistemology has shifted, so too must ontology (St. Pierre, 2014). I intentionally and carefully resisted my natural inclination toward a systematic process that conventional qualitative research may suggest. I was cautious about what may be closed off by operating within a "cookie-cutter" design. I refused the tempting urge to be locked into the comfort of linear steps. I made this choice to maintain ontologically consistency with epistemological commitments I had made.

Yet, I remained conflicted with the requirements of a dissertation that asks for a delineation of "data collection" and "analysis" and "presentation of findings." While the hope and potential of such a "methodology-free" (St. Pierre, 2016) intention was exciting, it was also terrifying. Without a concrete set of steps, how could I know I was progressing? How could I know I was done? And of course, could such a dissertation be approved within an institution that expects traditional research paradigms. So, what remains for a "research design"?

I leaned once again on poststructural research mentors to help me sort through these tensions and provide some sense of breath amid the uncertainty—while never "resolving" them. Reflecting on her own poststructurally influenced research process, Elizabeth St, Pierre (1997) stated that she "felt that all the activities of the narrative—data collection, analysis, and interpretation—happened simultaneously, that everything happened at once" (p. 180). In order to work the limits or ruins of a failed qualitative methodology, in order to remain true to the epistemological commitments I had claimed, in order to resist my urges toward systematics, I accepted that the concrete distinctions between data collection, analysis, and presentation must dissolve and the process of

research must blur (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Thus, I leaned into a blurred/ing "research design."

Laurel Richardson's (1994) thinking around writing itself as a method of inquiry helped me envision such a blurred/ing process. She elaborates how the act of writing is a method of analysis and a way of knowing—so much more than a phase of the research project. Writing is thinking; writing is analysis; writing is discovery (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Writing as a method opens a research practice by which we can interrogate how the world, ourselves, and others are constructed (Richardson, 1994). If the word does not reflect the world—rather the world is constituted by the word—then no writing can accurately capture the world. Language becomes a site of exploration and struggle. "Writing as a method of inquiry, then, provides a research practice through with we can investigate how we can construct the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social science" (Richardson, 1994, p. 924). Thus, the blurred/ing research design I utilized may be thought of as an intention toward writing. I attempt below to elaborate the messy "intention" as interrogated in ways Richardson alludes.

"Data Collection"

I briefly pause here to consider the concept of data in poststructurally influenced research such as this. As discussed above, Smith and Watson (2010) suggest that "data" for autobiographical research may include interpretations of always elusive and always changing personal "memories" as a primary "archival" source. To prompt what I deem "memories," I situated journal writing, remembered conversations, and related district documents collected during a three-month period of a school year relating to actions, responsibilities, reactions, interactions, and emotions in my literacy specialist role as "data." The usefulness of these sources lies in the ways they are employed to question, support, supplement, or muddy any of my re-constructed rememberings on remembering.

In relying on these sources as data, I relied heavily on words. But, as also discussed earlier, language falls apart (St. Pierre, 2000, 2013b). So beginning with already failed data—accepting that data from self-writing are already incomplete, partial, representations, and interpretations—opens spaces in which to work the limits (or ruins) of that practice. St. Pierre (1997) suggests that emotional data, dream data, sensual data, and response data are some of the potentially multiple sources that can enhance particular interpretations of meaning and knowledge-making. These "transgressive data" are difficult to predict, categorize, and impossible to codify. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) argue that seeking a multi-layered approach to "data" engages a process of data/theory/writing that decenters some humanistic qualitative inquiry assumptions about data, voice, narrative, and meaning. So I intentionally remained open to possibilities of transgressive data through processes of writing.

Over the spring months of the 2017-2018 school year, I collected and generated several forms of data. None of these data are traceable to subjects or contexts, as I employed pseudonyms as well as "composite characters" as representational strategies. Additionally, district documents were cleared of any identifiable information. These documents are freely available via the district website. Specifically, I utilized:

1. Daily journal writing. This writing focused on capturing intensive emotional moments and events that arose in the day-to-day and was the foundation for exploring my work as a literacy specialist.
2. Previous professional journaling. This writing, alongside recent journaling, allowed for historical perspectives of assumptions I brought/bring to my work.
3. District English Language Arts curriculum maps. These documents, which demonstrated the historic and current values the district held for students in English as well as demonstrated the major literacy theories at work, were collected as secondary data sources.

4. District Response to Intervention/Multi-Tiered Systems of Support Handbook. The handbook illuminated what was/was not available in the intervention work, illuminated perspectives on learning, as well as pointed to discourses at play.
5. "Other" unpredictable data (dream data, emotional data, response data, etc.). These data, collected via a researcher journal—in addition to the ongoing journaling described above—were valuable in considering my subjectivities. The researcher journal was utilized to intentionally attempt to collect the unknowable data that I wanted to remain open to as I engaged in reflexive writing and analysis.

These various collected and generated data allowed me to juxtapose perspectives, constraints, demands, and expectations that interweave within in my daily work.

A Blurred and Blurring Process: "Data Analysis"

Within a research process where the stages of "data collection," "data analysis," and "presentation of findings" collapse, analysis becomes something different. Analysis that allows for returning to data in the way described above is failed by traditional practices of coding, categorizing, finding themes, etc. Kaufman (2011) suggests an analogy of a cookie cutter to illustrate the limits of coding. In assuming codes will "emerge" from raw data, we end up applying what we already know and simply re-creating known knowledge as well as our assumptions and ways of seeing the world. Nothing is challenged, interrogated, or contorted. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) also suggest that methods of mechanistic coding, reducing data to themes, and writing up transparent narratives tend to tell us what we already know and fail to critique complexities of social life. Analysis of transgressive data that truly seeks to make the familiar strange must simultaneously recognize the limits of coding, categorizing, and drawing conclusions as well as re/work those limits and limitations of those practices—

beginning with accepting that data also are interpretations, are partial, incomplete, and provide particular framings (and not others) from which to engage in the constant processes of interpreting, re-telling, and re-membering (Lather, 2007; St. Pierre, 1997, 2011).

In lieu of such conventional qualitative research analysis, Jackson and Mazzei (2012) describe a process of “plugging theory into data into theory” (p. 10). Playing off Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) phrase “plugging in,” Jackson and Mazzei engage plugging in as something they can put to work—a process rather than a concept; a process of reading-the-data-while-thinking-the-theory. For them, plugging in is a constant, continuous process of making and unmaking, arranging, organizing, fitting together while asking not just how things are connected, but what territory is claimed in the connection. Through the process of plugging in, Jackson and Mazzei begin with experience as something already filtered, processed, and interpreted, and thus their data are already partial and incomplete. So rather than seeking stability within such data, they intentionally seek multiplicities and excesses of meaning and subjectivity. Any meaning or understanding garnered in the process of plugging in is temporary.

From a methodological perspective, Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) plugging in requires an intimacy with both data and theory while negotiating three particular maneuvers:

1. putting philosophical concepts to work by showing how theory and practice discursively constitute one another
2. being deliberate and transparent with what analytical questions are made possible by a specific theoretical concept and how those questions are put to use
3. working the same data repeatedly

Data analysis where writing and thinking with theory IS the inquiry method is akin to a repetitious kneading of data with theory, me, texts, etc. (Ellsworth & Miller, 1996;

Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Writing and thinking become data, data collection, and analysis. The method for analysis becomes a creative play, imaginatively weaving and juxtaposing of data—constructing a text where data may be read through each other and theory.

St. Pierre (2011) suggests that researchers create different articulations, remixes, mash-ups, "becomings" within inquiry that are not stable or repeatable (p. 622). Hence, "when writing the next word and the next sentence and then the next is more than one can manage, when one must bring to bear on writing, in writing, what one has read and lived that is thinking that cannot be taught. That is analysis" (p. 622). Recognizing that analysis cannot be simplified into a step by step process, but partly comes through time embedded in theory offers possibilities for one to produce different knowledge and produces it differently (St. Pierre, 2011).

However, not engaging a process that is a linear, step-by-step method does not mean it is haphazard. To work in such an analysis, I returned to the theoretical framings that inform the questions of this research. Foucault's conceptions of knowledge, normalization, discursive fields, and power alongside feminist poststructural theorizing on subjectivity and both discursive and material constructions of identity became the framings for that which I collect/analyze/write as data. These concepts became the theory I thought and kneaded the data in, and with, and through. The analysis of my data developed into a pattern through four "phases." I use the term "phase" extremely loosely, as working through them was recursive in that the procedures and thinking utilized in one phase very often took me back and forth into the other phases.

A. I read the journal data, recording initial reactions and connections between and among the events I recorded, knowing full well such connections and "categories" I made were constructed and imposed, not innate. This phase also involved word processing data (primarily "old" journaling) that had been hand-written.

B. I read through the data again through the lens of the analytical questions and theoretical frames I had chosen. I organized the data into a two-column chart with the “raw” data on the left-hand side, reserving the right-hand side for notes. My initial note-taking for this right-hand column typically was around two overarching, big-idea questions: (1) How and what discourses, as well as historical, social-cultural, geo-political materialities and contexts, influence my interpretations of my experiences as a literacy specialist? and (2) How do power/knowledge relations and practices produce my own, my students, and my colleagues’ multiple subjectivities in our interactions around literacy?

C. Reading/writing across the data in order to consider possibilities for “nesting” the “stories,” by way of thinking through what use may connections/ categories/etc. I saw in my initial reading serve in interpretations of the data. More detailed analytical questions were useful during this re-reading and writing “phase.” These questions included (but were not limited to):

1. What discourses are at play (including those Neoliberal born, those born of various understandings of literacy, those born of understandings of disability, normal, etc.)?
2. What is presumed to be natural and taken for granted (by language, deed, and text)?
3. What are the statements I can observe functioning on objects and subjects?
4. How do those statements function?
5. What are the effects of interweaving discourses at play?
6. What are my own assumptions at work here?
7. Through what combination of practices, subjectivities, relations of force, and rationalities have assumptions (and subsequent practices) been assembled?

D. Question, question, question. Continuously throughout the analysis, I questioned my interpretations: What do I think I "know"? How do I think I "know" it? What discourses and habitual practices frame what I assume? What do I "choose" to not see? This work was primarily occurring continuously within a researcher journal, but it also occurred in a third column I added to my analysis chart.

That last phase—questioning, pushing back on what I think I know, exploring where my interpretations may be coming from—proved the most difficult. The emotional nature of such an endeavor is taxing, often to the point of exhaustion. While I sought a text that is real, raw, tangled, and heart-breaking, I constantly questioned if my insecurities could take such a probing.

The research journal served as a space to reflexively react and ponder the "processes" of analysis and the continuous re/reading of theoretical texts. It became a space to practice "reflexivities of discomfort" (Pillow, 2003) as I attempted to trace my awareness of and shifting in perspectives, attitudes, and responses to data. It became a space to interrogate the politics of the texts and the narrative apparatuses I employed. And it became a space to retreat to when the emotions, the fears, the dreams all became too much.

Representation

The construction of the text you are reading on these pages, the representation(s), involved careful consideration. Eschewing the traditional constructs of chapters in a dissertation, and yet attempting to be mindful of a reader who had to navigate the work, became a constant battle. I was exceedingly mindful that the order, the organization, interruptions, literary tropes, or analogies I put to use *are themselves* interpretations (Smith & Watson, 2010). I attempt here to offer some thinking behind my representational choices, knowing also they can never be fully explained.

Burnett and Merchant (2016) utilize the concept of “stacking stories” to describe their presentation of rich and complex meaning-making experiences in classrooms. Stacked stories represent differing accounts of actions and interactions in and around a classroom experience where the stories, together with the gaps, contradictions, continuities, and discontinuities between them, read together trouble what is taken-for-granted. In their description, they call upon the imagery of blocks haphazardly stacked, one upon each other—neither presenting a whole and complete picture nor assuming those blocks or representations fit neatly and cleanly together. In their imagery, the space in between the stacked blocks speaks as loudly as the connections.

I borrowed from this imagery the idea of stacking episodes together in order to draw attention to the connections and disconnections between them. In my borrowing, I morphed Burnett and Merchant’s (2016) original image of “blocks” into asymmetrical, irregular, ever-changing, undefined shapes. I did so to emphasize resistance to the boundaries and “static-ness” of storying. I worried—and worry still—it is too easy for each “story” to be considered a “whole.” Another distinction in my borrowing is that I stacked “stories” of different moments together as well as varying representations of the same moment. Again, in doing so, I attempted to reach for, and resist, the limits and boundaries that traditionally frame not only story-telling but narratives of research itself. As my aim, in utilizing poststructural orientations and perspectives, was to trouble literacy perspectives at play in the context, including those I bring to my work with students, it was crucial to embrace complexity and ambiguity, challenge orderly perspectives, and be alert to textures, details, and feelings so that we may not only look differently but also feel differently, about the everyday and mundane (Burnett & Merchant, 2016).

In seeking representations that allowed me to convey the messy complexity and overlapping considerations of the work, I envisioned nesting moments. I cannot tell an “intervention” moment without also telling a “practice” or “coaching” moment. I cannot

tell a “coaching” moment without telling a “practice” moment. I cannot tell a “current” moment without telling a “past” moment. It remains interwoven and overlapping and interconnected. The idea of “nesting” moments helped me place them in and amongst each other in ways that pushed connections to the forefront. At the same time, being ever mindful that those same connections I attempted to forefront also minimize or eliminate other connections. I was also mindful that such nestings may be rather dizzying for my reader. I eschew a telling here that is too neat and tidy and orderly. I sought to impose on my reader some of the senses of disorientation and perhaps even frustration that I feel amid the work.

Chapter III

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"What does that mean?"

A question that can sound condescending or confused or snarky depending on the emphasis: "What does THAT mean?" or "What does that MEAN?" or "WHAT does that mean?"

In the case of this utterance, the question is layered.

The question was posed to me by a literacy colleague at a national conference. I had very recently accepted the position of Literacy Specialist but not yet started the contract. Given it was a recently created position, the job title was open-ended, as I was discovering. The prospects and potentials were enticing and energizing. And terrifying. Bumping into a colleague at this annual national literacy conference, she excitedly proclaimed, "You have to meet my friend, Diana. She's an expert on middle school."

Upon introductions, including my new job position, Diana's response was, "What does that mean?"

I heard, "That's a fancy title … but it doesn't mean anything."

I chuckled a little awkwardly.

"I'll get back to you on that one after I figure it out."

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A Literacy Specialist is What, Exactly?

In order to meet the ever-changing and complex literacy demands of adolescent readers and writers, a growing trend in middle schools is to add literacy positions (Bean et al., 2015; Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008; DiMeglio & Mangin, 2010; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Kern et al., 2018). Often, “Literacy Specialist,” “Reading Teacher/Specialist,” and “Instructional/Literacy Coach” are terms used interchangeably in various school settings. Responsibilities vary and overlap according to need. Thus, “Literacy Specialist” can represent a catch-all term employed in various ways (Bean et al., 2015; Kern et al., 2018).

Through a national survey of educators self-identifying as literacy professionals, Bean et al. (2002, 2015) attempted to tease out the specifics of various roles. They attempted to categorize and distinguish between a literacy coach, a reading teacher/interventionist, a reading/literacy specialist, and a supervisor. They noted the top five self-reported tasks of literacy professionals to be: instruct students, analyze data, support teachers, assess students, and leadership/administrative tasks. In the intervening years between the 2002 and 2015 surveys, the researchers noted significant changes to expectations of the role. Specifically, they noted greater leadership responsibilities, increased variability in responsibilities, increased amount of paperwork, increased expectation to serve as a resource, plan, and coach teachers, increased expectations to provide in-class instruction, and increased involvement with special education students and with parents. Obligations for literacy professionals often include being a teacher, a leader, a diagnostician, a colleague, and a change agent. Given the variability of literacy roles, Bean et al. (2015) and Kern et al. (2018) note that those who fill the role require particular agility to toggle between instructing students, analyzing data, supporting teachers, managing assessment, and filling leadership or administrative tasks.

Attempts to clarify the distinction between the various titles often utilized in schools have met with marginal success (Bean et al., 2015; Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Kern et al., 2018). The National Council of Teachers of English in conjunction with the International Literacy Association created descriptions, standards, and evaluation tools for literacy professionals and in the recent (2017) revisions, intentionally separated literacy interventionist roles from literacy coaching roles (see Appendix B).

However, both Bean et al. (2015) and Galloway and Lesaux (2014) noted that distinctions between literacy roles found in the ILA Standards rarely hold in varying educational contexts. Distinctions are recognized as artificial in practice because the multiple roles and responsibilities of literacy professionals are prioritized differently in different contexts. Thus, literacy roles are highly context-specific in response to the interplay of complex local factors, including the level of the school, performance of the school, expectations of stakeholders, professional culture, etc. (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; MacPhee & Jewett, 2017).

For example, Bippert (2019) analyzed the perceptions of (and contradictions among) teachers, students, and administrators toward a computer-assisted reading intervention program in an urban middle school. Given the trend toward technology-based reading intervention programs among schools in the U.S., the author sought to explore the cultural perceptions of technology tools that exist within administrators, teachers, and students. She noted inconsistencies and contradictions between the perceptions of the three groups of individuals and observed that assumptions about the value of such tools can be incorrect, impacting their use and evaluation. However, what is most notable here is the observation that the inconsistent and contradictory assumptions can lead to differing understandings and expectations for literacy teachers among themselves, their administrators, their students, and even parents. This study explored one aspect of a literacy professional's work (a technology/curriculum tool), but it is easy to

see how a multitude of factors within any specific context can influence perceptions and expectations of literacy work.

The literacy role has also evolved to include multiple elements of schoolwide literacy improvement, teacher professional learning, as well as the implementation of evidence-based literacy practices (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014; Parsons, 2018; Worthy et al., 2018). Additionally, literacy professionals are positioned as change agents for district or even state-wide reform efforts (Galloway & Lesaux, 2014). In short, literacy professional roles are getting more complex as professionals receive increasing responsibilities and are expected to fill multiple roles as they move away from a sole focus on identifying and delivering reading instruction to students based on diagnostic-prescriptive models. Thus, despite attempts at articulation and standards, shared understandings are difficult to reach because the enactment of literacy professional roles is so highly context-specific.

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In Diana's question, "What does that mean?" she was also inquiring into the various iterations such a job title can take within specific contexts. Would I be working with students primarily? Would I be working with teachers? Would I be moving between multiple classrooms? Would I be moving between multiple buildings?

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In my particular context, a literacy specialist at the middle level is a marrying of a literacy "coach" and a literacy "interventionist." Many districts such as mine without the budgetary means to employ a coach or interventionist separately will seek to meet both students and staff learning need with a single "specialist" position. In our district, each of the six elementary schools has a separate Literacy Interventionist and Literacy Coach with the interventionist focusing on the implementation of RTI and the coach focusing on curriculum implementation with teachers. Early in my tenure, it was made clear to me that, even though I would have a large hand in defining the actual role, I was expected to

cover both coaching and interventionist territories as they were articulated at the elementary level.

I find the lines between the coach role and the intervention role in my everyday practice are not clear-cut; they blur and blend. Supporting teachers with instructional ideas or resources while they in turn attempt to support struggling readers or writers falls under the purview of both sides of the role. Pushing-in (an approach to intervention where the specialist or interventionist works with struggling students within their regular education classes versus “pulling them out” to a separate environment) to classrooms to support teachers and students, modeling lessons of reading or writing strategies in content area classes, and reviewing assessment data with teachers all are pieces of the work that could be considered both intervention and coaching. As is often the case with such blended roles, the immediacy of the intervention needs can supersede the coaching work.

When I accepted this Literacy Specialist position, I consulted the growing body of literature on Literacy roles, particularly attending to what felt most new to me: secondary student support and secondary teacher support in literacy (coaching). What I found only contributed to an impression of (im)possibility and (non)sense. Specific reform and legislative moves that factor into key historical shifts and subsequent ruling discourses appeared to exert large amounts of influence on literacy roles. These legislative and reform moves appeared to be largely unproblematically taken up in the conceptual and empirical literature. Further complicating the (im)possibilities and (non)sense was the variety of definitions and expectations based on differing contexts and differing stakeholders (McGrath & Bardsley, 2018).

Interlude: What I Thought I Was Studying

A conversation with myself:

I, maybe, have come to a bump in the road. Not quite a wall that is stopping me, but definitely a bump slowing momentum. I'm wondering if, perhaps, I am tackling too large a territory with this study. The expectations within my job of Literacy Specialist are vast and varied, I'm struggling to "cover" all aspects of the job that create the moments of tension I'm using as starting points with the depth of analysis I believe my research questions demand. The literature review alone is massive—to review the work on intervention for adolescents alongside the work on coaching at the secondary level has yielded a monstrous document. I worry I've cast my net too wide and, if I choose to keep the current two-pronged focus (coaching tensions and intervention tensions), I need to cull the areas and pieces I attempt to review down, down, down.

And then there is the issue of data. I seem drawn to the data on my work with students. I keep writing those events. I keep thinking of ways to nest them. When I think of the data that focuses on coaching conversations, it feels like a completely different dissertation. Even though I know the work overlaps—is complicated—is blurred … I'm struggling with how to marry the data.—I see two paths through … first, I drop the attempt at the coaching aspects of the role altogether. Or, I only work with coaching moments that connect to student support, intervention, or differentiation … and only working with the aspect of coaching that has to do with the direct student work. My concern is this choice is a misrepresentation of the work in the role … it is a sliver of the overall work. Is the intervention work not where the majority of moments of tension arise??? Can I tackle that question of what does it mean to coach through intervention and student support?

Wait a minute, Robin! Wait a cotton-pickin' hot second! You never committed to representing anything. In fact, you devoted a great number of lines in methodology

explicating exactly why you were not claiming any kind of truthful, full, complete representation. Get over yourself already … it's all your representations of your interpretations of lived experiences … it's all (or at least partial) fiction anyway.

Ok. Fair. So I can "let go" of the coaching tensions work and focus on the student/intervention tensions and tensions of practice moments. There's this one last nagging bit: I feel the "coaching" aspect of my current job is the bastard child. It's the invisible piece of my role. It's hidden. It's on my mind. It's on my administrator's mind. But it's not the visible work like the work I do with students. So it's the work I feel I'm constantly having to remind people that I'm supposed to do … and the work I'm constantly justifying. "Yes, it's part of my job description to meet with teachers to help plan instruction." "Yes, it's part of my job to help teachers pace the curriculum." "Yes, it's part of my job to push-in to classrooms to support instruction for all." "Yes, it's my job to support teacher growth." "Yes, it's part of my job to manage assessments." I constantly fight the urge to let go of that coaching work and just do the student support and intervention that everyone expects and seems to want. If I let go of the coaching work in this dissertation too—am I letting myself down??

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It was the blurring and blending of roles as articulated within legislative and reform moves that I believed contributed to the (im)possibilities and (non)sense of my role. It was this I believed I was studying. However, as I began the process of recursively analyzing the data I collected for this study, I began to realize that my journaling primarily reflected the immediacy and urgency of the support and intervention work with students. As I continued the process of kneading the data through theory as described in Chapter II, the moments with struggling readers increasingly became rich sources of reflexivity and analysis. Given the blended expectation of the work in my context, I was somewhat dismayed to find that my writing favored one aspect. Once again, the coaching work with teachers became the bastard child.

I find that a school year has a rhythm; in the fall we tend to think about establishing routines, setting expectations, collecting data, and planning curriculum units. Mid-winter we tend to focus on revisiting instructional pacing as well as maintaining consistency and energy during holiday and weather disruptions. Early spring feels focused on test prep. The time of year I engaged the data collection for this study was the late spring months as teachers were wrapping up their content instruction; curriculum work was put aside until summer and fall months. In my years working with teachers in a coaching capacity, I have observed that attention to instructional practices occurs primarily in early fall and winter months. By spring, teachers are beginning to think about what they want to try out next year. They often come to me with those preparatory thoughts. But work with teachers slows down significantly in the spring months. Thus, as I focused on writing moments of intense emotions for data collection, the interactions available to draw on were largely in my work with students.

I thought I was studying the many and various aspects of my work as a literacy specialist. I thought I was studying literacy coaching. The study, however, has shifted with the data to primarily be a study of my work with students. I fully recognize that this is an artificial isolation. I struggled with the shift.

Even though the data I am primarily engaged with stems from moments with students, I am still interested in both the discursive forces at play in those moments as well as the traces of those forces into the identities and subjectivities of self and students. *Thus, I remain interested in the explorations of literacy professionals. Specifically, I am interested in research that specifically explores identities and subjectivities of literacy professionals as they engage the variety of demands placed on them, no matter the job title.* Literature that explores literacy professionals in this way is fairly small as the focus has predominantly been on the impact of intervention and RTI on student achievement. Very few researchers have turned their attention to the educators tasked with implementation.

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In her question, "What does that mean?" Diana wondered into the unknown of how the role was shaped by larger historical, social, and cultural forces.

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Equipped for the Unknown?

Given the increasing variability and complexity of literacy professional roles, it is interesting to note that preparation for literacy professional roles is inconsistent. It is quite common for classroom teachers to move into coaching, specialist, or intervention positions with varying degrees of professional learning themselves. Indeed, Bean et al. (2015) found in their survey that literacy professionals themselves called for greater opportunities for preparation in leadership. To meet ever-growing demands, one must have a deep and broad knowledge of how to assess and meet students' and teachers' literacy instructional needs (Parsons, 2018).

With the express purpose of improving teacher preparation programs, Pontrello (2011) explored how the specific content knowledge developed in a newly certified learning specialist's practicum experiences were taken up in her practice to support struggling literacy learners in one middle school. Pontrello observed that the behaviors, beliefs, and stances the literacy specialist cultured in her preparation program were implemented in diagnostic decision making and reflective processes and what her practices may represent as she attempted to meet the needs of her struggling seventh-grade literacy learners. Pontrello also examined the way this literacy specialist assessed her students' areas of strength and development, confronted specific difficulties experienced by her students, and planned an effective program of re-mediation for the improvement of comprehension. All in all, Pontrello explores the way a literacy specialist responds to the professional challenges she faced in her professional role.

One implication from this study focused on attempting to "understand" literacy professional roles and preparing for them suggests that providing for the development of research-based pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge situated within authentic contexts helps to inform practice. Situating learning experiences within authentic contexts also supported teacher learning as well as instructional decision making. A second implication suggests that a literacy professional's decision making involves the adoption of guiding principles. Preparation for such a role must include the opportunity to develop guiding principles, as Pontrello posits that the adoption of guiding principles occurs through the effective development of reflective practice.

In their study of a field experience for advanced literacy specialist candidates, McGrath and Bardsley (2018) noted that developing the technical and interpersonal skills necessary to be an effective literacy leader takes time and practice. They found that a fieldwork component provided opportunities for literacy educators to more deeply explore theoretical concepts introduced across the readings, connect theory to practice, experience issues in personal and authentic ways, and engage in reflective practice. The combination of these experiences resulted in the construction of new understandings of professional collaboration and literacy coaching for the candidates. Further, McGrath and Bardsley noted that the candidates needed to experience tensions of teachers being closed off or resistant in order to understand the many levels and facets of professional collaboration and nuances of relationship building. The researchers noted that it is important to address the growing expectations that literacy specialists will be required to assume leadership responsibilities, crafting learning experiences that give aspiring literacy specialists opportunities to develop abilities in authentic settings.

Parsons (2018) also looked to investigate how literacy instructional leaders cultivate their coaching professional identities during graduate literacy specialist coursework. Parsons relied on sociocultural and socio-cognitive understandings of identity wherein identity is socially constructed and situation-dependent. Thus, teacher

professional identity is a type of situated identity that allows a teacher to define his or her role as an educator. Professional identity is the product of knowledge, context, and experience. Parsons coupled this notion of identity with PCK (professional content knowledge). PCK allows teachers to match content information, curricular materials, and pedagogical technique with student needs. She presumes that effective and agentive PCK application aids teacher professional identity development.

Theoretically, Parsons (2018) blended socio-cognitive and sociocultural perspectives to explore the intersection of individual cognition and social context for learning within a cohort in a graduate university program. Operating under the perspective that language is a tool to convey conceptual knowledge, Parsons viewed literacy professionals' identity as influenced by their ability to communicate knowledge through language. Thus, she documented how teachers began to construct their coaching identities within various course activities that correspond to the known roles and responsibilities of literacy specialists. Leaning on Bandura and Vygotsky, she also included a close examination of how environment enhances individual identity construction.

From her analysis, Parsons (2018) noted three types of knowledge evidence that shape thoughtful coaching input: coaching knowledge, literacy strategy knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge. Additionally, two types of questions (in a peer coaching exercises) were coded: clarifying and explanatory. She noted that the candidates early in their program provided support, feedback, and pedagogical knowledge alongside hesitancy, and neutral or vague feedback. She saw this as evidence of an emerging coaching identity. Toward the end of the program, candidates demonstrated a greater understanding of coaching through improved conversational flow, increased specific feedback, and evidence of coaching knowledge. Conversations were more efficient. Additionally, candidates' reflections supported evidence of their developing identities.

Parsons concluded that as candidates' knowledge increased, their language changed to reflect their growing identity development.

Noteworthy in these studies is the explicit observation that reflective practice, authentic settings, and opportunities to navigate unanticipated situations appear to be crucial for individuals moving into literacy professional roles. What is perhaps missing is an acknowledgment of the greater dominant discourses at play from reform and legislative moves that shape some of the complexities literacy professionals may face. Pervasive views that a professional identity can be developed through experiences and reflection are reminiscent of Grumet's and Pinar's efforts to enable both teachers and students to explore their inner experiences and perceptions of lived curriculum through autobiographical practices. And, as discussed above, such a perspective of identity is just another way of knowing that can be utilized toward definitive and conclusive portraits of fully-realized selves.

Views of identities in which I situated my understandings in this study consider identity as created in the ongoing effects of relations and dominant discourses as well as in response to society's codes and normative regimes (St. Pierre, 2000). Identity is a sense of self only as it exists and is created primarily (but not exclusively) in and through dominant discourse and its particular language conveyers. Identity is a social negotiation with/in discourses, expressed through particular and typically accepted language descriptors. But language itself is a negotiation; words are slippery and elusive and cannot deliver "the real." Thus, the problem of identity, among multiple complications, is a problem of language. Since language meaning is constantly shifting within the constraints and practices of discourses, identities continually slip. "Our identities, overdetermined by history, place, and society are lived and imagined through the discourses or knowledge we employ to make sense of who we are, who we are not, and who we can become" (Britzman, 1994, p. 58). Any discussion of identity must consider one's interpretations of meanings of social experience as significant moments of and in

its construction. To theorize about identity, Britzman posits, we must be concerned with how language inscribes or interprets experience (Scott, 1991), even as it positions and therefore also constructs the self.

Since identity is presumed to be created in the ongoing effects of discourses as well as relations and in response to social codes, it is never fixed or static. It is socially, discursively, and materially produced and reproduced in language, culture, history, etc. (St. Pierre, 2000). Within the primarily discursive production, poststructural theories maintain that fixing the essence of identity categories is dangerous. A person is the intersection of constantly shifting, multiple identity categories that are never "fixed" (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, wellness, religion, etc.), but rather what Butler (1992) calls "undesignatable fields of differences" that thus can be conceived and enacted as sites of "permanent openness and resignifiability" (p. 16). Once differences are erased by fixed, essentialized notions of identity, people not only can be easily slotted into hierarchies, but also manipulated, dismissed, and oppressed (Ellsworth & Miller, 1996; St. Pierre, 2000). Thus, identity in poststructural thinking is a heterogeneous and incomplete, always changing process of resignifying. The subject of poststructuralism is opened up to the possibility of continual reconstruction and reconfigurations (St. Pierre, 2000).

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Another layer in Diana's question, "What does that mean?"—in addition to an implicit inquiry into the complexity and uncertainty such a title could convey—was the experience, knowledge, and assumptions I was bringing that would support my own navigation of the work.

Navigating All That

A relatively small, but growing, body of literature explores connections between the work of literacy professionals and greater discursive forces as well as effects of such

work and forces on the development and intersection of identities within the ongoing work of literacy professional roles. Studies that take up issues of identities and positioning in literacy positions bring to light the notion that the work is entrenched in the broader politics of education, specifically whose voice counts in the development of policies that guide literacy professionals' work. The small body of literature on identity and positioning points to the multiple complexities of literacy work.

In her dissertation, Kristin Rainville (2007) was one of the first to consider situated identities, power, and positioning inside the practices and relationships of coaching. Rainville begins with the argument that many conceptions of literacy coaches in practice incorporate monolithic views of literacy that rely heavily on standardization and testing culture. Since coaching is thought of as a professional development model that will improve teacher quality and raise student achievement, assumptions that this mode of professional development can be applied in any situation, improve quality of teaching, and raise student achievement abound. This view presumes coaching can occur successfully without attending to social identities, personal histories, and issues of power and positioning in social interactions—a view that also disregards dominant discursive constructions of identities of the participants.

Leaning on sociocultural theories of literacy and context alongside poststructural understandings of power and positioning, Rainville (2007) looked at the situated identities of literacy coaches and explored how they negotiate those varied identities and practices. She specifically worked with three literacy coaches in New Jersey. She explored the power embedded in coaching relationships, how coaches are positioned, how they position themselves, and the discourses that inform constructions of identity, as well as conceptions of power, and positioning. In defining identity as socially constructed and continuously changing, multiple, fluid, and dynamic, Rainville was able to make a distinction between role and positioning. Individuals move through multiple positionings that are discursively and interactively constituted and are open to shifts and changes as

the discourse shifts. Roles, however, are taken up and then shed off. The use of roles usually highlights the static, formal, and ritualistic aspects of encounters. Rainville argues that a literacy coaching process is not made of one single non-contradictory language and practice and not one single identity that is created through that practice. Rather, literacy coaches see and understand through multiple identities, multiple positionings, and multiple forms of discourses available to them. Coaches learn from forms of power and powerlessness that are embedded and made possible by the discursive practices through which they position themselves and are positioned. Similar to teacher identity considerations, Rainville suggests that we need to consider the ways in which we choose to render our coaching identities as providing limits and possibilities.

In her discussion, Rainville (2007) looked at how local, district, and national discourses around literacy and teaching practices (often in conflict with each other) are negotiated by each of the three case study participants. Her emphasis is on the situatedness of coaching—despite having received the same training and information—the practices of the coaches looked different in each school and each classroom. The three participants were also influenced by their own backgrounds and experiences. Rainville suggests that based on the context and situation, coaches consciously and unconsciously chose what identities, practices, and positioning to enact. Often practices were negotiated in reaction to participants and sometimes changed as the event progressed, reflecting the dynamic and fluid process of coaching. She argues that coaching is messy, complicated, and embedded with power, so it cannot be looked at simply as a linear model for teacher change. She posits that literacy coaching is not the panacea to fix teacher practices and suggests that the field take a step back from the assumption that coaching is working wonderfully. "As 'agents of change' and positioned as 'the fix,' the 'weight of the world' is being placed on the shoulders of literacy coaches to change the woes of the current system" (p. 221). As the literacy coaching process is not made of one single, non-contradictory language and practice, nor one single identity

created through the practices, this research demonstrated that the context and subsequent identity negotiation shifted in each specific context and situation. Rainville noted not only federal, state, and local discourses, but also subtle and nuanced school and personal discourses that informed the identities, positioning, and practices of the coaches.

Another study utilized the same set of data as Rainville (2007). Rainville and Jones (2008), however, explored one particular literacy coach's identity negotiations as she interacted with colleagues in multiple settings. The researchers focused on how the coach consciously and unconsciously positioned herself by shifting her language and social interactions within each context, as well as how she was positioned by others. Again, leaning on sociocultural understandings of situated identities, they sought to explore how and why a particular literacy coach projects a different self in various social encounters. They also relied on poststructural understandings of power and positioning to discuss the personal and political dynamics integral in the work of teaching and learning. They categorized their participant's coaching identities in the three scenarios they analyzed as concerned colleague, a friend, a co-learner, and an outsider.

Three potential lessons Rainville and Jones suggested from their analysis include: power shifts and struggles exist but are less inhibitive when an informal relationship between coach and teacher exists; conscious and strategic self-positioning as learner is possible and beneficial to the teacher/coach relationship; and differing expectations can lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication between coach and teacher. They suggest that reading and responding to the nuances of a context should be an important aspect of preparing coaches. Further, they reiterate the notion that coaching is complex, involving far more than a knowledge base on teaching and learning.

These two studies mark a significant contribution to the body of research on literacy professional work in supporting teachers. In approaching literacy work, not from a perspective of efficiency and effectiveness, but from a perspective on positioning, situatedness, and relational power, the researchers move the conversation to a much

deeper, reflexive consideration. In addition to questioning the underlying assumptions much of the vast body of work on literacy coaching has been built upon—namely, a monolithic understanding of literacy, Rainville (2007) challenged much of the neoliberal assumptions (without naming them as such) embedded in literacy practices that I also questioned. In suggesting that we pay attention to the ways we render multiple and fluid identities as coaches within multiple and often conflicting discourses, these researchers led directly toward the aims of my own inquiry.

Another set of researchers also considered identity construction and enactment of literacy professionals. McKinney and Giorgis (2009) explored the ways literacy specialist identities as writers intersected with their identities and performance as teachers of writing and in supporting the teaching of writing. Beginning from the assumption that it is important for teachers to see themselves as writers in order to work most effectively with student writers, the researchers utilized narrative inquiry to analyze writers' autobiographies alongside interviews. In doing so, relying on postmodern perspectives of identity construction wherein complex, multiple "selves" are embedded within social, cultural, and historical contexts associated with values, attitudes, and beliefs, the researchers attempted to establish connections between participants' writer identity and the impact on their teaching of writing as well as how the participants negotiated the performance of those identities in different contexts over the two years of the study. The researchers saw identities as always in process and continually constructed across contexts and over time. Thus, the process of identity construction is characterized by discontinuity and disjunction as who we are is shaped by various contexts and our perceptions of self within those contexts and by how we are perceived or positioned by others. Relying on Bakhtin, the researchers acknowledged internal dialogue that may aid in the process of constructing and reconstructing ourselves as we struggle to make meaning of experiences and actions. In such ways, identities are also linked to language and associated with particular discourses.

The researchers also rely on Butler's thinking on performance and performativity. Given the position that literacy and literacy practices are tools for representing or performing certain identities, particular contexts make particular practices available or may constrain representation of identity and position them in particular ways. The dominant insistence on standardization by society and schools condemns those who struggle with mechanical aspects of written language and places teachers in the impossible position of having to perpetuate those beliefs and the impacts on students. Thus, the researchers argue that various literate practices known to literacy specialists and available to them may constrain how they are positioned within a school community and even how they are able to perform their job.

To examine the discontinuities between "writer identity" and ways of teaching writing, the researchers used dialogic narrative analysis to explore specific connections between writing identity and its impact on teaching. Being mindful that the self and narratives about the self are culturally and discursively situated, highlighting an unexamined assumption that how we see ourselves as writers impacts the way we teach writing, it is important to consider how the current political context impacts the preparation and support of literacy specialists.

In their analysis, McKinney and Giorgis (2009) observed four categories of writer identity that intersected with teaching practices and identities: non-writers who taught writing; non-writers who did not teach writing; writers who taught writing; and sometimes writers who taught writing. The participants narrated a variety of writer identities that had been constructed over time through a variety of life and school experiences and through interaction with others who were part of their social, cultural, and historical milieus. The literacy specialists' identities as writers and teachers of writing worked in complicated and sometimes contradictory ways to define their performance as literacy specialists for whom writing was only one aspect of their roles. The participants' experiences with writing in school had repercussions on their identities

as writers and teachers of writing, and McKinney and Giorgis noted that connections between writing identities and teachers may be complex and tension-filled. Power, control, and status were revealed in the positioning narrated across interviews and autobiographies. As writing is affected by the writers' life histories and a sense of their roots, life histories shape a sense of self-esteem and status. Through various performances of their stories, participants positioned themselves in different ways with respect to their roles in current contexts. The researchers saw evidence that the literacy specialists were using the narratives to author their worlds, their identities, and their positions within their social worlds.

McKinney and Giorgis (2009) indicate that these results suggest that further exploration of writer identity and its impact on teaching may be fruitful. They purport that, as literacy specialists construct their roles in actual settings, develop deeper knowledge about literacy learning and teaching, and engage ongoing reflective conversation about how identities as writers inform their work, they may need opportunities to recognize the need for flexible approaches and to understand that the performance aspects of writing develop over time. This research is relevant to my own exploration not only for their understanding of identity but also for the connections they draw between identities and practice as well as their focus on the discursive, constitutive nature of identity.

Building on these studies, Hunt and Handsfield (2013) looked at first-year literacy coaches' negotiations of power, positioning, and identity through positioning theory and de Certeau's insights into cultural production. Analyzing small stories from interviews and a vignette to investigate how literacy coaches positioned themselves within the moral order of the district's literacy and professional development model, the researchers suggest that coaches both shaped and were shaped by the institutional spaces through which they moved as they tactically negotiated conflicting expectations and discourses about coaching. In particular, they highlight the emotional nature of coaches' work as

they co-construct identities and negotiate understandings of how school spaces are used and the purpose of literacy coaching.

The purpose of Hunt and Handsfield's (2013) research is to complicate the notion of coach role by asking: How do first-year literacy coaches negotiate issues of power, positioning, and identity during training? They argue the necessity of moving beyond current conceptions of literacy coaching as a series of roles and tasks to recognize the complexities of literacy coaching and to offer more meaningful support and learning for coaches themselves. This study promotes the understanding that for professional development to be effective, conceptualizations of literacy coaching must move beyond fixed and oversimplified definitions of roles and how they should be enacted.

Position, in this study, is defined as the discursive process by which speakers locate themselves within a jointly constructed storyline. Such positioning is often based on interpretations of cultural stereotypes such as gender, class, race, and role. Positioning theory recognizes fluidity and interactional moves literacy coaches and teachers use as they work together, whereas theories emphasizing role freeze identity in space and time. Literacy coaches bring multiple identities and positions with them to any interaction and cannot simply take up different roles. Moving beyond a static notion of role requires a dynamic understanding of identity, power, and positioning. Hunt and Handsfield (2013) posit that a coach would never possess one static identity (expert, co-learner, or friend) but would interact with others based on a multiplicity of identities that draw on a wide variety of social contexts such as race, class, gender, age, religion, parental status, etc. "Coaches do not passively conform to fixed roles but are active participants in the co-construction of social identities in motion across contexts." (p. 55). Based on de Certeau's understandings of tactics, space, and positionality, these authors consider boundaries and identities as fluid and produced in practice.

Hunt and Handsfield (2013) indicate that this study suggests strong emotions exist around coaching work. The researchers looked at not just what emotions were expressed,

but how they are used to negotiate identity, power, and positioning, seeing emotions as social acts. People "do" emotions so emotional performances cannot be separated from identity performances. It is also noted the coaches attempted to strike a balance between demonstrating knowledge and expertise and supporting teachers through collaborative, trusting relationships. Given their connection to an overall reform effort, the coaches felt forced into positions of expertise that they were uncomfortable with. While participants negotiated professional identities in unique ways, all were similarly limited by common discourses within the learning community. Discourse in the training emphasized building supportive, trusting relationships with teachers, but placed pressure on the coaches to live up to the supportive role despite institutional and relational barriers. Discourses of demonstrating expert knowledge were implicitly prevalent in the coaches' training, but not spoken. A doubling of identity was noted as the coaches were being educated and educating others simultaneously. The coaches used emotional expression to respond to the conflicting discourses—through which they positioned themselves to the moral order of the coach training.

The authors of this study state that simply defining the roles (expert vs. collaborator) is not a solution to the conflict of the two competing discourses. They suggest that roles and job descriptions can be viewed as modern-day maps that erase the practices, experiences, and emotions of the travelers. However, the coaches' tactical, discursive negotiation of identity, power, and positioning allow for the spatialization of literacy coaching. Spatialization allows coaches to navigate across institutional spaces and promote fluidity and transformative possibilities for their work and professional identities. Thus, implications from this research suggest that roles can and should be outlined, but that is not enough to ensure successful coaching and retention of coaches. Coaches and teachers must work together to establish possibilities and limits of coaching within local context: "Future research may benefit from a reconceptualization of role as

just one of the ways in which literacy coaches are positioned. This reconceptualization could open up a broader vision of literacy coaching" (Hunt & Handsfield, 2013, p. 74).

These authors also argue that coach training needs to openly acknowledge positioning, power, and identity and allow coaches to grapple with these issues. Professional development that addresses these issues may provide sites of resistance from which literacy coaches can resist dominant discourses. Further, Hunt and Handsfield (2013) suggest that research is needed that builds on scholarship regarding teacher emotion to more closely consider how emotions affect their work. "Research in literacy coaching needs to move beyond traditional Western dichotomies between reason and emotion, private and public, mind and body … to consider alternate ways of knowing and interpreting the world." (p. 75).

MacPhee and Jewett (2017) also explored the multifaceted identities of individuals in a literacy coach role. They purport that we still know very little about what it means to take up the multifaceted identities of a literacy coach. From this position, the researchers asked, how do teachers negotiate multiple discourses of coaching as they engage in a supported coaching experience? To engage this question, MacPhee and Jewett utilized an understanding of identity as a socially constructed view of self and the world that is enacted through social positionings. These, in turn, are influenced by issues of power that are constructed through discourses in social contexts. They indicate that it is critical to acknowledge the social influences on participants' views of themselves as teachers and coaches in their educational spaces. Thus, they rely on a modified version of Gee's identity framework wherein a discourse perspective, an institutional perspective, and an affinity perspective align with the view of identity as a social construction. They defined discourse identities as ways in which the teachers recognized coaches, recognized themselves as coaches, and/or the way the positioned coaches as being a certain type of person/persona. From this perspective, they looked at how a cohort of students in a

graduate program of study connected to a school district negotiated the complexities of becoming literacy coaches.

The researchers noticed signs of intersecting identities and found that teachers invoked multiple discourses of coaching that both aligned with and traversed institutional and affinity identities. Nine of the 15 teachers in the cohort were explicitly negotiating competing discourses as they engaged the coaching experience. Institutional identities included coach as expert, coach as teacher, and coach as evaluator. Affinity identities included coach as collaborative colleague, coach as learner, and coaching as reflective dialogue. And intersecting discourses included coaching as a process, coaching as complex, and coaching for student achievement. The researchers also noted that participants revealed multiple factors that influenced their developing identities as teacher leaders: personal histories, multiple contexts and discourses, and issues of power and positioning.

Of particular note, participants' personal experiences with coaching guided perceptions and beliefs about the practice of literacy coaching and the role of coach, often making it difficult to see themselves in the position. Most participants shifted affinity identities by seeking out common interests with their peers and engaging in shared inquiry. Thus, they positioned themselves as learners alongside their colleagues, which seemed to decenter issues of power (expert/novice) and to allow for more authentic learning to occur. Finally, participants seemed to shift their personal views of coaching from coach as expert to coach as collaborative colleague; enacting their new beliefs was often challenging—particularly within an institution that maintained a consistent power structure.

Most recently, Worthy et al. (2018) explored discourses at play within literacy teachers' understandings of and practices toward dyslexia. Operating under the premise that dyslexia policy and practice are steeped in authoritative discourse that speaks of a definitive definition, unique characteristics and prescribed intervention programs that are

not well supported by research, Worthy and colleagues sought to explore the perspectives, understandings, and experiences of dyslexia interventionists. Despite research to the contrary, current dominant discourse on dyslexia infused into policy and practice speaks into a unique set of characteristics and a specific form of intervention born from cognitive psychology. Utilizing Bakhtin's notion of "authoritative discourse," the researchers noted that the language around disabilities reflected medical terminology describing identification, instruction, and characterization of learning disabilities (namely, dyslexia) as having a neurobiological origin, thus being an intrinsic deficit.

To explore how this dominant discourse wove into and through literacy teachers' practice, the researchers interviewed 13 interventionists. They noted three major themes, including distinct language around the definitions and characteristics of dyslexia, distinct perspectives on the instruction for dyslexia, and a critique of others who did not share their training or understandings. The researchers also noted that the common dyslexia discourse promulgated by media and medical science has been institutionalized into legislation, making the discourse authoritative and unquestionable. The discourse and the law position one group of educators as more knowledgeable than other educators who may have broader understandings of literacy and experience teaching reading to a range of students. Further, authoritative discourse of dyslexia and the institutionalization in policy has led to an unfortunate separation between dyslexia interventionists and other educators who share the goal of supporting students with reading difficulties.

A Differing View

Each of these studies contributes pieces to my growing understanding of what it may mean to "be" a Literacy Specialist as well as continues to reveal the layers of complexity in Diana's simple question: What does that mean? But limits exist in this cluster of studies. Burnett, Merchant, Pahl, and Rosewell (2014) caution that situatedness

that relies on particular contexts is problematic. Defining the context in which literacy is situated can imply boundedness. But individuals' lived literacy practices often span spatial, cultural, and relational domains that intersect and spill over boundaries in multiple ways. They suggest that we must look at literacy practices in relation to more general issues of figured worlds, identity, and power. I find this useful when considering this body of research. As some of these researchers do not explore the larger dominant discursive forces (via poststructural understandings) at play on the identities and subjectivities of literacy professionals, I believe there are limits to the observations they make. To understand these limits, I return to Michel Foucault to consider discursive fields, power, subjectivities, and subject positions.

Discursive Fields

In his attempt to delineate the relationship between language, social institutions, knowledge, truth, and power, Foucault (1972, 1981) suggested the concept of the "discursive field." Discursive fields are collections of statements and documents associated with a particular field of study (literature, psychology, philosophy, etc.). A statement is a little like a discursive junction box where words and things intersect and become invested with particular relations of power that enable groups of signs to exist—an articulation that functions with constitutive events. Discursive fields consist of social structures and processes organized through institutions and practices such as the political system, the family, the education system, the media, etc. Each institution is located in and structured by a discursive field. Meanings are created within these discursive fields of force (Foucault, 1980).

Dominant discourses within discursive fields are understood to be reinforced by existing systems of law, education, and the media. Discursive formations most often display a hierarchical arrangement and reinforce certain already established identities or subjectivities. "We must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted

discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (Foucault, 1990, p. 100). Again, as Foucault was not interested in what a discourse "meant," the main question he sought to explore included interrogations of the processes by which some discourses maintain their dominance, some voices are heard, and who benefits. In order to access historically situated discursive constructions of truth statements, practices, and subjectivities, Foucault (1980) called into question the relations among statements in accepted categories within discursive fields.

Power

Foucault rethought the location of power as well as the nature of power. Within his genealogical interrogations (and working in concert with archeology), a piece of Foucault's analysis of discourse was a description and critique of various systems of subjection and domination. In this description and critique, Foucault made a distinction between *power relations* and *disciplinary power* (St. Pierre, 2000). He considered disciplinary power as a mechanism of regulation and surveillance of people within modern society. He argued that in modern society, mechanisms of self-discipline operate to control, but these same mechanisms block relational power as they objectify and fix people in prescribed and static ways (St. Pierre, 2000). Power is "productive." One productive or produced effect of the circulation of power within discursive regimes may well be normalization of appropriate or desired behavior (Foucault, 1995; Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005).

Disciplinary power ensures normation, or techniques for social control, particularly for subjects on the periphery—to train bodies to be efficient and obedient and in conformity with the norm. The norm provides the grounds for distinguishing normal and abnormal but also for sanctioning interventions to ensure conformity and reduce the threat posed by resisting individuals and populations (Foucault, 1980, 1995; Foucault,

Davidson, & Burchell, 2008; Taylor, 2009). These techniques perpetuate the power relations within sociopolitical landscapes to the point they come to be seen as simply natural and necessary. It is the uncritical acceptance of particular norms as natural and necessary that is cause for concern. The norm provides the grounds for distinguishing normal and abnormal but also for sanctioning interventions to ensure conformity and reduce the threat posed by resisting individuals and populations (Foucault, 1980, 1995; Foucault et al., 2008; Taylor, 2009). In order to understand how the mechanisms of power work to normalize, Foucault sought to analyze how discourses operate, including the histories, effects, and connections to other discourses—the discursive elements at play. The purpose of Foucault's analysis is to yield a new picture of what knowledge and practice have previously been offered as unquestionable and indisputable, obvious and natural.

Normalization/Normation

Operating largely from Foucault (1981), I also recognize discourse as normalizing social constructions. Normalization/normation (eventually, Foucault would come to distinguish between the two terms as appropriate for particular contexts) are techniques for social control, particularly for subjects on the periphery. Once a discourse comes to be considered by many numbers of a particular social grouping, country, etc. as "normal and natural," it makes sense to say or do only certain things and is difficult to think and act outside that dominant discourse—the norm (Taylor, 2009). Within a disciplinary context, the norm brings both qualification and correction: the norm establishes the normal. Individuals are brought into conformity with some pre-existing standard. "The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchized, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*" (Foucault, 1995, p. 183). Normation ties the norm to disciplinary power that governs individual bodies—to train subjects that are efficient and obedient. Normation

consists of techniques associated with disciplinary power such as supervision of space, time, activity, and behavior, most often accompanied by the threat of potential punishment for the intent of bringing subjects into conformity with the norm.

Subjectivity

Given that a fundamental goal for feminists is questioning relations of power (Olesen, 2011), including how power inhabits knowledge production, and how people make sense(s) of their experiences, Weedon (1997) argues for theories that look at relationships among experience, social power, discourse, and resistance, but still "recognize the *subjective* in constituting meaning of lived realities and that are able to account for diverging and different subject positions" (p. 8). In her argument, Weedon indicates that Foucault's theories of discourse and power in relation to particular historically situated constructions of institutions, dominant practices and norms, and "identities" are particularly useful to many feminist interests.

Weedon (1997) defines subjectivity as the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of an individual that create a sense of self. Subjectivity is re/constructed with/in language in socially specific ways. Leaning on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Weedon asserts that it is language that enables us to think, speak, and give meaning to the world around us. We use language to give meaning to our experience within particular discourses. But language is unstable and unreliable (Britzman, 1994; St. Pierre, 1997; Weedon, 1997). What is said expresses different meanings across time and space. The meanings available for assignation at any given moment in time are grounded in the discursive fields with/in which we function. Since the subject does not exist ahead of or outside of language, language does not express a stable, unified subjectivity—but rather constitutes semblances of such (St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997).

In this way (Weedon, 1997), subjectivity becomes the processes of continual re/constitution of subjects' selves within and through language as expressed in and a part

of specific historical, socio-cultural contexts. Our subjectivity is precarious, contradictory, and in process. It is constantly reconstituted every time we think or speak. A single subjectivity that is assumed as fixed, complete, and totally representable is completely disrupted (Miller, 1992, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2010b, 2017).

Subject Positions

While subjectivity implies an unconscious and conscious sense of self, subject positions indicate a range of ways of being in particular times and places (Weedon, 1997). Ways of being are in response to social expectations and gesture toward the values supposedly inherent in those ways of being (Weedon, 1997). These practices include images of how one is expected to look and behave, rules of behavior to which one should conform, as well as particular definitions of pleasure offered as natural (Weedon, 1997). According to Britzman (1994), subject positioning within a discourse is also not akin to taking on a role. Roles are public and speak to function and can be stepped into and out of at will. Thus, "taking on a role" implies consciousness and fully aware intention, similar to the actor stepping out onto the stage. A role can be assigned and incorporates all kinds of assumptions and biases and expectations about "what I am supposed to do" (Britzman, 1994, p. 59). For Davies and Harré (1990), "role" is congruent with the notion of self as static and fixed.

Subject positions are complex, as they are socially produced in a range of discursive practices through language. My role as a Literacy Specialist in this sociopolitical and historical context is somewhat fixed. However, within that role, multiple, complex subject positions may be taken up through a range of discursive practices through language. Due to their constitutive nature, subject positions are never final. They are always in progress and open to challenge. The discourses within which we move most often dictate the availability of certain subject positions and not others. Althusser (as cited in St. Pierre, 2000) theorized that subjects are constructed as they are

recruited by dominant ideologies. Subjects uncritically take up ideologies of the discourses within and through which they move. Within the many competing and contradictory discursive practices that each person can engage, a subject position is "both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons with the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 46). Once having taken up a subject position, the person sees the world from the vantage point of that which is relevant within the discursive practice within which it is positioned. The contradictions one experiences between the constitution of various selves provide the dynamic for understanding (Davies & Harré, 1990). Positions can be contested, accepted, or both—or neither, especially as lived by subjugated persons.

Positioning is a fluid and dynamic discursive process by which selves are located in subject positions as we take up discursive practices. Davies and Harré (1990) suggest two types of positioning. In interactive positioning, language (spoken or written) positions another. In reflexive positioning, one positions oneself. Positions may be seen by participants in terms of known "roles" or "they may be much more ephemeral and involve shifts in power, access, or blocking of access, to certain features of claimed or desired identity" (p. 51). Positioning directs our attention to a process by which certain trains of consequences (both intended and unintended) are set in motion.

The processes of discourse production and construction are worth examining—including the ways those discourses produce subjects (Davies & Harré, 1990; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). Part of an overall Foucauldian project can focus analysis on discourses as influencing, framing, and playing major roles in constructions of subjectivity as well as various understandings of subjects (Miller, 1998; St. Pierre, 2000; Weedon, 1997). The implications drawn from many studies (such as those discussed above) that consider identities continue to be limited by the very epistemological and ontological positions upon which they rest. Understandings of the constructions of identities and subjectivities in these studies are limited by the exclusion of dominant discourses that currently dictate

educational practice and policy in the U.S. From a poststructural framing, constructions of identities, subject positions, negotiations of power and knowledge cannot be disentangled from the discursive fields within which they operate.

Again, “What Does That Mean?”

In returning to Diana’s question of what does it mean to be a Literacy Specialist, I cannot separate such a consideration from dominant discourse born from legislative and reform efforts. Very often, what literacy specialists are expected to do is in service of institutional goals of reform and accountability as opposed to teacher goals or student goals (Mangin & Dunsmore, 2015). While several voices do call for literacy professionals to base their work on teachers’ and students’ desires, needs, and problems, that call is often difficult to answer when managerial or accountability demands come from supervisors and administrators. Standardization and accountability measures limit the attention literacy professionals can pay to students’ learning priorities. The judgment of literacy professionals’ work, teachers’ growth, and student learning is often tied to standardized or numerical measures. Additionally, demands for evidence of effectiveness are made on both teachers and literacy specialists to demonstrate that resources and time given over to literacy work are worth the outlay. As Davies (2003) reminds us,

> managerialism is based on an assumption that professional practice should take the form of specifying goals explicitly, selecting strategies for achieving them on the basis of objective evidence about their effectiveness, and then measuring outcomes in order to assess their degree of success—thereby providing the knowledge required for improving future performance—not individual set goals, but the goals of the institution or even the state. (p. 97)

I believe that it is entirely valid to question if literacy professionals can deliver the reform and transformation oft demanded when the role is so steeped in the particular discourse that predominantly creates it.

I wonder at the implicit implication of categorizing and naming identities that some researchers attempt in their analysis. By the very act of naming, do they imply static identity categories? Some researchers also indicate that each of these identity categories they noted had implications for the power available to the coach to wield in each situation. However, Foucault's work sought to expose power relations as always being "exercised," pulsing through language within discursive fields. He showed that power is imbued in social contexts in much more complex ways as to simply be available for wielding at will.

I am mindful of the problems of integrating sociocultural perspectives on situated identities with poststructural perspectives on power and knowledge that some of the studies above attempt. A critique of "man" as knowing subject cannot be untangled from poststructural perspectives on power and knowledge. Attempting to locate situated identities within sociocultural perspectives that rely on Enlightenment-born understandings of man as an essential, stable, knowing subject is incompatible with poststructural perspectives on the discursively constitutive nature of subject positions and subjectivity. Critiquing the subject of humanism, and subsequently identity, does not negate either. Rather, it suggests a way to interrogate the subject's construction with/in historical, social, cultural and discursive contexts (Miller, 1992).

Making subjectivity the product of society and culture within which we live requires a view of subjectivity as produced historically and shifting with wider discursive fields that constitute them. Decentering the subject and abandoning an essential subjectivity open subjectivity up to change. Further, this implies that the individual is always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). Thus, recognizing and accounting for competing subjective realities must include looking at ways that discourses and their functioning within social structures and processes create conditions of existence. Particularly important questions in poststructural thinking thus become:

Who gets to be a subject in a particular discourse? Who is allowed a subject position? Who is not? Who is subjected?

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Diana's question takes on yet another layer. "What does that mean?" also inquiries into both the identities and subjectivities I bring to the job title Literacy Specialist, but also those that I enact, those I subvert, those I suppress, those un/available, and those I create … and some combination of all.

INTERMEZZO 1

I can stand in the middle of the hallway now. I'm not afraid of these wild things we call middle schoolers who swarm around me. I used to keep my body pressed against the wall as I stood outside my room at dismissal. Simultaneously wanting to be visible, available, and out of the choked mass of the main artery pumping through the halls. These beasties scared me. Unpredictable, unknown, varying sizes, shapes, and smells. Some bigger than me! They move in tight, impenetrable packs. Forcing the smile on my face, I internally chant, "I am the confident adult, I am the confident adult, I am "the adult." Similar to encountering a bear—it's more afraid of you than you are of it.

Now I'm not afraid to stand in the middle of the hallway. To let the swarm open up and move around me. To force the packs to become porous. None have ever run into me. My very stance in the middle of the floor is a monitoring of behavior. A reminder of expectations. They won't physically bowl me over if I am in their path. They will slow down.

They will, they will, they do.

Chapter IV

A SPACE FOR US

Building the Literacy Lab

Ashley popped her head into the open doorway of my classroom, referred to as "the Literacy Lab." She opened her mouth to speak but paused, slowly turning her head to take in the room ... the Reading nooks, library corners, gathering rug, spaces for retreat, lamps and cloth panels over fluorescent lights, soft classical music, rugs, pillows, and bean bags for "plopping down." "It's like it's not even a part of the school in here it's so peaceful!" she slowly commented before giving her head a slight shake and moving on to the issue that originally brought her here. The ways I set up the space in which I teach reflect my beliefs about reading and writing. This space hasn't always looked this way.

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Situated in the far western elbow of a Northeastern state approximately 60 miles outside of New York City, the town of 24,000 people is often affectionately referred to as a "village" or "hamlet" by local residents. Anchored by a tree-lined main street complete with locally-owned shops and restaurants, the town prides itself on being safe and family-friendly, a quintessential New England town. As may be assumed with such a description, the town is predominantly White, middle and upper class. The community is quite invested in boasting a school system that can compete with local private schools as well as other districts in the same District Reference Group (DRG). With a cost of living

index ranking of “high” and a very low poverty rate, the town can put their money behind their values. Thus, standardized testing and SAT scores consistently rank the school district as high-performing, while state ranking profiles typically place it within the top ten.

Composed of one high school, two middle schools, and six elementary schools, the school district is the largest budget driver and employer for this small town. Eden Middle School, at the time of this inquiry, enrolled approximately 750 students in grades 6, 7, and 8. However, due to recent redistricting of elementary feeder patterns, Eden has a declining enrollment, resulting in the reduction of a team at each grade level over the course of three years. Eden employs 69 certified teaching staff, 21 support non-certified staff, and 3 administrators. Utilizing an interdisciplinary team approach to create smaller learning communities within the larger school building, each grade is organized into teams consisting of four core teachers (Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies) and a special education teacher. Currently, sixth grade has two teams; seventh and eighth have three but are slated to be reduced to two over the next two years.

I joined the staff of Eden Middle School in the newly created position of Literacy Specialist. Walking into the room my first day on the job, evidence of the room’s former purpose as a science closet was still evident on the mostly blank white-brick walls—from the beaker drying rack next to the sink to the cabinet for protective eyewear on the wall. Besides these lingering vestiges, the windowless room was absolutely empty. Not even a teacher desk or a chair. This building, this district, had never had a reading teacher, literacy coach, literacy specialist … ever … at the middle level. I was the first. And without any limits of “the previous,” the program was mine to design as needed to meet the needs of the teachers and students.

The initial list of tasks was daunting: curating an arsenal of resources and materials to support students’ needs; creating a battery of screening and progress monitoring assessments; learning curriculum frameworks for all three grades and all content areas;

developing systems for catching struggling readers and writers; establishing expectations for collaboration with teachers; positioning myself as a resource for teachers and administrators; cultivating trusting relationships with parents, students, and teachers. Over several years, I added a paraprofessional, moved out of the science closet into a science classroom (with windows!), developed a professional and student library, and worked on developing relationships with my colleagues. In addition to creating systems and processes for meeting the mandates of RTI, I developed Reading Immersion classes for each grade level for supporting the stamina, engagement, motivation, and identity of readers.

I continued, and still continue, to work toward a specific vision of space in the Literacy Lab. I strove for it to be seen by many students as a reading and writing haven, by teachers as a valuable resource, and an overall space from which love of books and literacy-rich practices can flow. A parent mentioned to me that her daughter loved coming to our Literacy Lab because it felt like a privilege instead of punitive to enter the space to work on reading skills. This vision did not develop in a vacuum. It was—and is—informed by my own experiences, professional literature on middle-grade literacy, my epistemological assumptions, as well as the theories of literacy that swirl in this context.

***

The first words out of Annie's mouth to me were, "I don't read." Considered at-risk for dropping out, Annie spent the majority of her day in a space the school had created to foster students who needed a "safe space" in their day outside of their regular classrooms—the Loft. Annie avoided school and classes whenever possible. Simply getting her into the building regularly was a victory. Concerned that perhaps Annie avoided reading because she had a particular struggle with reading, the guidance counselor asked me to meet Annie and assess her ability. The day I walked into the Loft

to meet her, Annie looked up from her assignment, listened as the tutor introduced us, and promptly stated, "I don't read."

"Ok," I responded. "Then we'll just spend some time together."

Theories-at-Work

The range of theories-at-work at Eden mirrored larger debates in the field of literacy at large. But they played out in complex ways in this particular local context, especially as they were connected to district initiatives, state legislation, as well as my own shifting understandings and beliefs. At Eden, reading and writing instruction has historically been presumed to occur only in English Language Arts classes. Content area teachers were thought to be experts in their respective domains, and to them, the job of reading and writing instruction belonged in elementary school and ELA classes. However, ELA curriculum maps focused primarily on literary analysis with "classic" core texts from a "teach the text" (versus "teach the reader") perspective. Thus, reading and writing instruction occurred in limited ways in ELA classes.

Disciplinary Literacy

The Common Core State Standards are embedded with the argument that generalizable skills and abilities are insufficient in preparing students to deal with the complex demands and texts in content areas. With an emphasis on the use of evidence in analysis and presentation of claims made in increasingly complex text, the CCSS shifts attention to nonfiction texts and the unique communication practices of each content domain. Not only does this further disrupt the logic that reading and writing instruction belong solely in English courses or elementary grades, but also "literacy" writ large becomes an integral part of the instruction of any content.

Thus, a key theory-at-work at Eden stemmed from what is thought of as disciplinary literacy. Part of my task as the Literacy Specialist was (and is), alongside district-level curriculum shifts, to support all teachers' growing understandings of adolescent literacy in general and disciplinary literacy in particular. Disciplinary literacy operates on the key assumption that reading and writing as a scientist, writing as a historian, etc. are all very different types of literacy. Tracing from historical antecedents such as the1960s curriculum reform movements in the U. S. (spurred by the Russian launch of Sputnik and interests to "catch up" to Cold War competitors), knowing in a discipline embraces not only the purpose, but the origin and representation of that knowledge (McConachie & Petrosky, 2009; Moje, 2008; Pytash & Ciecierski, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Wilhelm & Lauer, 2015). Each subject domain has a discourse community with distinct ways of communicating. Every field of study creates, evaluates, and communicates knowledge in specific and specialized processes. Proficiency in a subject domain includes internalizing the ways of the discourse community of that subject. Thus, content area teachers must take ownership of initiating students into the literacy practices of their subject domain. My work to support teachers' understandings of adolescent and disciplinary literacy necessitated supporting not only instructional practices but also shifts in belief systems about what is considered content area curriculum as well as reading and writing instruction. These belief systems were—and remain—often firmly lodged in many educators' assumptions as well as educative practices.

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I brought to my work with Annie a foundation in the philosophy of Gradual Release of Responsibility (Fisher & Frey, 2013), and "To, With, and By" (I read to you, I read with you, the reading is done by you; Swaby, 1989). From this perspective, I saw reading development as a mentored activity—something done together. IF Annie did not have a strong sense of self as a proficient and capable reader, I reasoned, I may need to

demonstrate what that looked like through the engagement I brought to books. I resolved to approach Annie from a perspective that to be a reader, to grow as a reader, one had to fall in love with books. And falling in love with books meant one had to meet the right books. It also meant that a relationship with books developed best when mentored by fellow readers. My role for Annie would be to tease out characters, genres, plots, and issues that may capture her attention.

Multi-tiered Support Systems

Another theory-at-work in Eden stemmed from mandates around Response to Intervention. One of several states to mandate RTI, in 2008 the state in which I work labeled the initiative SRBI (Scientific Research-Based Instruction, see Appendix C). Effectively, SRBI is RTI rebranded. Embedded in the assumptions and structures of SRBI/RTI are notions of mastery and remediation. Within this perspective, reading and writing development can be broken down into sets of sequential, isolated skills. It is reasoned that students can be expected to follow a predictable path to mastery through a gradual release of responsibility in instruction. Movement along this path can be benchmarked, and students who fail to meet the markers require remediation or intensified direct instruction in order to catch up.

In this district, the term Multi-Tiered Support Systems (MTSS, see Appendix D) was adopted in response to a 2016 in-district study of the fidelity of implementation of SRBI/RTI. Often, MTSS is considered synonymous with or a version of RTI (Castro-Villareal & Nichols, 2016). In the exploratory study, 31 characteristics on a Fidelity of Implementation Rubric (see Appendix E; American Institute for Research, 2014) were evaluated across the district to review and collect information regarding school-level implementation, identify areas of strength and areas for improvement, and offer recommendations as next steps for the district. Following the study, a district-wide committee was formed to re-work RTI processes already in place and re-formulate them

under MTSS. The goals of MTSS are to systematically address support for all students while setting higher expectations for performance. Core features of MTSS include:

- Expectations for high quality, research-based instruction
- Universal, classroom-level screening to identify needs for support
- Collaborative, team-based approach to the development, implementation, and evaluation of interventions
- Increasingly intense, multi-tiered applications of high-quality, evidence-based instruction
- Continuous monitoring of progress to determine the impact
- Expectations for parent involvement

Given the district's status as "high-performing," the emphasis in MTSS is providing levels of instruction/support to all students regardless of achievement and performance. Thus, under the MTSS model, students who need support, as well as students who excel and benefit from extension, are embraced within tiered instruction. However, I suggest that, by utilizing the same language as RTI and SRBI (research-based, intervention, monitoring, etc.), MTSS is really just one version of RTI/SRBI and is dictated by the same overarching dominant assumptions. Given that I see RTI, SRBI, and MTSS as neoliberal iterations of positivisms—a "same thing, different name" phenomenon—for the ease of discussion, I refer to all as RTI.

The empirical and conceptual literature base on intervention through RTI is vast. Significant attention has been paid to various programmatic implementations, effectiveness, and fidelity. However, the body of literature on intervention in middle grades is rather small, relatively recent, and primarily focused on effect size, impact, and implementation (e.g., Ciullo et al., 2016; Dietrichson, Bog, Filges, & Klint Jorgensen, 2017**;** Fagella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011; Graves et al., 2011; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2012*)*. In other words, it is primarily focused on what is happening with RTI in middle grades via program implementation and evaluation with a view toward the

impact of individual interventions in the service of the "evidence-based" demands of NCLB.

Interestingly, several writers consider the evidence on the effectiveness of RTI in the middle-grade context to be inconsistent (Graves et al., 2011; Vaughn et al., 2012). As the empirical foundations for RTI are rooted in early literacy research and elementary context (Faggella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011), there is a small body of work comparatively on middle-level intervention (Ciullo et al., 2016**;** Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). Despite this, the growth of RTI into middle grades is supported by a handful of studies that demonstrate student response to reading development support and interventions in the upper grades (Edmonds et al., 2009; Loadman, Sprague, Hamilotn, Coffey, & Faddis, 2010; Lovett, Lacerenza, Steinbach, & De Palma, 2014; Slavin, Cheung, Groff, & Lake, 2008). Solis et al. (2012) synthesized the studies that explored reading comprehension interventions for middle-grade students identified as Learning Disabled between 1979 and 2009. They intended to explore how effective reading comprehension interventions based on experimental, quasi-experimental, and single-participant research studies were on comprehension for middle-grade students. For that time period, they found 14 studies that met their qualifications, and their findings focused on effect size for specific interventions targeting comprehension. Recent research continues to focus on specific intervention effect-size (Dietrichson et al., 2017**;** Fagella-Luby & Wardell, 2011; Graves et al., 2011; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2012) and intervention implementation such as *what,* for *whom*, *when*, and *how often* (e.g., Ciullo et al., 2016; Suggate, 2010). Given the interest in statistical evidence that demonstrates the "evidence-based" demanded by NCLB, this body of work reifies reductive, skill-based perceptions of literacy. Such perceptions proliferated at Eden.

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Annie appeared in my doorway at our agreed upon time. Her short stature, slightly greasy brown-red hair, acne-prone skin, all gave her a slightly mousey appearance.

Interlude: Troubled Representation

Oh dear. Did you hear that? Can you see what I've done right there? In those two sentences, I have created an identity for Annie with my representation. Even as a composite of multiple individuals, I have positioned her as a socially awkward, non-conforming type of adolescent character. This representation is static, singular, limiting. Compelled by the question, "Who decides?" I cannot ignore the ways I am complicit in the positioning I seek to disrupt.

***

Annie thrust a book at me. "I have to read this." Looking down at the title of the assigned class novel, I inwardly groaned. The Boy in the Striped Pajamas. *This was not going to be a light-hearted, fun read to get us started.*

"All right, then—have you started it yet?"

"Yes, but I don't understand it."

"Ok. Show me where you are and we'll talk through the things that are confusing you."

We reviewed and summarized the first few chapters, clarifying characters, background, and vocabulary. Then we began to read forward. "Why don't you read to me to get started," I suggested, wanting to snatch the chance to assess her ability via a running record before tackling strategies for managing her understanding moving forward in the book. Her reading was well-paced and fluent. She handled tricky vocabulary appropriately. At the bottom of the first page, I asked Annie to give me a quick summary of what she had read.

"It's telling about the mom's parties."

"Yes, it is describing a Christmas party and the family interactions there. What does this scene show us about the relationship between the mother and the grandmother?"

"Oh, well … the mother said…." Annie quickly turned back the last few pages, scanning the text. After a few minutes of fruitless searching, I jumped in to rescue her.

"Ok, this is a flashback—a moment where the author goes back in time to tell us about something that happened that is important to what is happening now. Let's keep reading to see why this scene at the Christmas party is important."

And on we continued. Annie read to me and every page or so I questioned her or coached her understanding. It did not take too many pages before it was clear Annie was getting tired. Her lack of habitual reading appeared to be impacting the stamina she could bring to the task. With a deadline to meet before her English class, I suggested I read the remaining pages to her and let her listen. She agreed.

This pattern became our habit through the rest of the book. Annie would read to me, I would check in with her understanding. When she tired, she simply handed the book to me. My turn. We gradually stretched our check-ins on understandings and discussions from the bottom of each page to several pages, and then to the end of each chapter.

Orton-Gillingham

Further legislative mandates at the state level around Dyslexia were and remain highly influential in the local context and conflate to a theory-at-work. In 2015, the state added an SLD-Dyslexia designation as a primary disability for qualifying students for special education services. The state also mandated that any teacher seeking a reading or special education certification complete a program of study in Evidence-based Structured Literacy Interventions. In response to the legislation (as well as several lawsuits where the district was deemed negligent for not identifying and properly serving students with dyslexia), this district diverted both money and professional learning time toward a multi-year professional development initiative to train special education and reading teachers in the Orton-Gillingham method.

Firmly situated within cognitive psychology (Handsfield, 2016), which views reading and writing to simply be working the phoneme/grapheme code, Orton-Gillingham (Gillingham & Stillman, 2014) is a highly structured teaching approach wherein reading and spelling are broken down into the smallest phoneme/grapheme pieces and explicitly taught, incorporating a multisensory instruction. Within the Orton-Gillingham approach, learning the code occurs in sequential, discrete skills with direct instruction in the structures of language. Letter and word recognition, automaticity, and stages of skill learning dominate practice from this perspective.

Orton-Gillingham was created by a neuropsychiatrist and pathologist (Samuel T. Orton) alongside a psychologist (Anna Gillingham). Together, they combined neuroscientific information with principles of remediation in the 1930s to create an approach that focuses on the foundational skills of language. While intended for direct and systematic instruction in the system of language for students who do not infer those skills (commonly considered less than 10% of a given population, Allington, 2011), the O-G approach has become generalized to be effective with *any* student who exhibits encoding or decoding slowness or difficulty. Particularly in this district, the push for O-G treatment to be given to any student who does not score at a particular level on a specific test of word knowledge is quite strong.

While I cannot argue that increasing awareness of and sensitivity to dyslexia has not been valuable, the effect in this local context has been a certain mania. My early graduate work in reading sits comfortably with a structured literacy approach as it was highly informed by psycholinguistic understandings that emphasize the phonological. Dr. Barbara Swaby ingrained in my fellow students and me the importance of “to, with, and by” as well as “whole, part, whole”—mantras that still ring in my head. Lara Handsfield (2016) places psycholinguistics under the broad umbrella of cognitive constructivism wherein reading is a hypothesis-driven and active mental process.

The emphasis on language distinguishes psycholinguistics from other cognitive approaches as it posits that reading involves the use of four language cueing systems: graphophonics (letter-sound correspondences); syntax (a system of grammar rules guiding how words are combined as well as word parts, morphemes); semantics (the meaning conferred upon language); and pragmatics (social and cultural contexts of language use). Psycholinguistics also maintains that language consists of two levels. The surface level is the structure that includes sounds and written representations of language. The deep level is the structure connected to meaning, and it is in this deep level that language is processed. The process of miscue analysis—analyzing reading errors through those four cueing systems—as an assessment approach still plays heavily in my practice. Because psycholinguistics emphasizes top-down processes of reading (versus bottom-up processes), legacies in my current practice consist of an emphasis on whole texts and authentic literature, analytic and embedded approaches to managing "the code," student choice of authentic texts and writing topics, as well as thematic units of interest (Handsfield, 2016).

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Upon finishing the assigned text, Annie and I tried to decide on her next book. "What kinds of stories have you enjoyed in the past?" I asked.

"Ones with characters who are like real life," she replied.

"Ok. Do you like stories that are set in the past or stories that take place in current times?"

"Current time."

"Ok, realistic fiction it is." I walked over to the bookshelf and began to pull out some realistic fiction books. I focused on characters that reminded me of Annie: strong females dealing with a crisis, big life issues, or traumas. Bringing the pile to the table, I walked her through the highlights of each book. Speak *by Laurie Halse Anderson*

grabbed her attention. Here was a character who refused to speak in school, who sought to be invisible. Annie could relate to that. We began our dance of reading to each other.

Interlude: Another Representation

Here, my book choices for Annie—my presumptions of what she wanted or needed to read—serve to represent her as a particular type of girl with particular types of issues. Donalyn Miller (2010) speaks of her practice of creating short stacks of books to suggest to individual students upon meeting them at the beginning of the year. She describes choosing books she feels her students need to read based on who she believes them to be. I have unproblematically adopted such an approach to recommending books to Annie. And yet, such recommendations constitute another representation of her. A representation worthy of disruption.

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Then came the day when Annie walked into my room, book in hand, and went directly to the bean bag chair, plopped down, opened the book, and began to read. I waited for a few minutes. Eventually, I rolled up in a chair next to her. "How are you doing?" I questioned. "Want me to read to you for a while?"

"No thanks, I'm fine."

She finished Speak *and asked for another like it. One after another I handed her* Eleanor and Park *by Rainbow Rowell,* The Impossible Knife of Memory *by Laurie Halse Anderson,* Skinny *by Donna Cooner. As she became invested in each story, Annie stopped leaving the book in my room to read only there. She began to take it with her. Then home. She asked me for a new book almost weekly. Then it seemed she was back for something new almost every day. As she began to collect more and more texts, I suggested she begin keeping a list of all the books she read so we could see how many she finished at the end of the school year. We began to discuss characters across books.*

In what ways were Eleanor and Ever similar? How did they each approach and handle the conflicts they faced?

***

One critique of cognitive literacy developmental perspectives and its emphasis on phonological processing and phonics within which my psycholinguistic influences have connections is that research within this perspective has rested within quantitative research methods that embrace positivist conceptions of validity and reliability (Handsfield, 2016). As discussed earlier, research of this ilk has distinct limits and boundaries. Another critique of cognitive perspectives of literacy is that it has been suggested that strong adherence to developmental stages may disadvantage students whose out-of-school literacy practices differ from those stages (Alvermann, 2001; Learned, 2018). A developmental approach to literacy learning with distinct skills and milestones largely disregards socio-cultural and embodied differences. Cultural practices of the dominant group (which includes assumptions of "normal" and "abnormal," "abled" and "disabled," etc.) are considered the norm, and the non-dominant are often judged deficient. School literacy tends to reflect the values of the dominant and powerful socioeconomic group. As school literacy practices are predominantly influenced by cognitive literacy thinking, many school practices discriminate against students from diverse backgrounds (Davidson, 2010), whose daily language practices, for example, may "deviate" from "the norm**.** Another critique is that highly cognitive perspectives do not pay enough attention to social interaction and the social contexts in which the constructions of meanings occur (Handsfield, 2016)—not to mention the often-reinscriptions of dominant versions of "meanings" that also too often occur.

Sociocultural Perspectives

These critiques lead me toward sociocultural perspectives on reading from which I also find legacies in my daily practice (Handsfield, 2016). Very broadly, sociocultural perspectives can be categorized within social constructivist literacy theories, which emphasize how people make sense as knowledge via social engagement (Mills, 2015; Street & Street, 1991). This perspective emanates from Vygotsky (1978), who acknowledged that knowledge becomes internalized through a process of interaction with cultural communities that are historically situated. While sociocultural theories are multiple and nuanced, a key theme is that children's literacy development is understood by exploring the cultural, social, and historical contexts in which the children have grown. It is understood that we bring our cultural backgrounds to text, so meaning-making is situated at the forefront of sociocultural theories. As power structures in society dictate what acceptable and allowable literacies are, literacy is not just mastery of skills that reside in an individual's head; rather, literacy is an interactive process that is modified according to the socio-cultural environment (Davidson, 2010; Street & Street, 1984). Within this view, literacy practices replace literacy skills.

From sociocultural perspectives, I understand "literacy" as much broader than the bounds of language. I understand that internal knowledge that bears a direct correspondence to objective, external reality is impossible. I recognize this assumption also presumes another—that there IS supposedly ONE "objective reality," an assumption that is dislodged by the poststructural influences I claim. Rather, meaning is, instead, dependent on knowers and interpretations of reality (Handsfield, 2016). Knowledge is internalized through processes of social engagement with the world (Handsfield, 2016). Literacy includes complex acts of negotiating meanings with and within a wide range of visual, auditory, and inscribed texts. Developments of such practices are culturally,

historically, and socially situated (Mills, 2015). From sociocultural perspectives, I see reading and writing as social acts.

The implications of this perspective not only include the notion that reading and writing are not isolated, individualized activities, but also that they are social interactions—"social acts" defined by social constructs. What acts get to be classified as "reading" or "writing" are effects of discourses that swirl and dominate within any one context. Thus, from these perspectives, I DO value opportunities for student-student and student-teacher interaction around reading and writing. I value consistent use of authentic literature. I see conversation as key to instructional engagement that apprentices students into different language and academic communities. I emphasize student choice and self-selection.

Rather than seeing literacy only as acts that can be dissected down to isolated and prescriptive bits, I view literacy as far, far more complex. The development of literacy cannot be neatly categorized and sequenced. Thus**,** I believe that attention to an environment that supports a broader, more complex understanding of literacy is crucial. In his historic work to theorize literacy development, Cambourne (1988) discusses eight conditions necessary for literacy development: immersion, demonstration, engagement, expectation, responsibility, approximation, use, and response. If those conditions are adhered to, then he suggests students should be in classes filled with a wide range of high-interest books; students should be read aloud to by a teacher who models how to read well and discuss with students their own reading practices; students should be encouraged to take risks with their reading and writing and develop realistic goals and expectations; students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their reading and make choices and preferences and behaviors; and students should be encouraged to read together and then talk together about their understandings and interpretations of their literacy experiences. These conditions gel nicely with my underlying sociocultural

perspectives and beliefs on literacy. Thus, I currently DO let these conditions guide the structure of my reading work with students.

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Toward the end of the third quarter, a group of sixth-grade girls joined me for a book club during their lunch hour. This happened to be the period Annie was typically in my room. After a few days of reading her book and listening in with our book club discussion, Annie began to interject comments from across the room. One younger student picked up a book Annie had finished and began to leaf through it. "Oh, that is such a good book," Annie gushed, launching into a hard sell of the novel. Over time, all the girls in the book club gravitated to Annie. Instead of joining me for book chats at the table, they plopped down on pillows and bean bags on the floor near Annie. She became their book queen bee.

At the end of the school year, Annie counted the number of books in her reading notebook. Between January when I met her, and she informed me she didn't read, and mid-June, Annie had read 15 novels. I was a front-row witness to her personal transformation from "non-reader" to "reader" to "reading mentor." Her sense of self around reading shifted dramatically.

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While the literature base on secondary intervention is dominated by effectiveness, effect-size, and programmatic implementation, I found a few bright spots that support my sociocultural assumptions. Of particular interest are the very few studies that utilize qualitative methodologies to explore intervention and notions of struggling readers. These studies embraced complex and nuanced perspectives of literacy.

In a multiple case study exploring how middle school struggling readers and their content-area teachers made decisions about how to work with classroom reading tasks and each other, Hall (2010) investigated the decisions students and teachers make to help unearth the complexities that exist and challenge the idea that there are limited reasons

struggling readers may fail to succeed. She examined one sixth-grade social studies classroom, one seventh-grade math classroom, and one eighth-grade science classroom using multiple views of identities, including Gee's discursive identities (socially constructed identities based on people's interactions with each other, how they interpret those interactions, and how they view those interactions in relation to the models of identity that exist within the community); sociocultural framings of identities; and notions of identity capital (the specific behaviors or achievements that a community sees as valuable and are used to link individuals to specific models of identity). Given the charge by researchers that comprehension can be improved if subject matter teachers provide appropriate skill and strategy instruction along with regular opportunities to read and discuss texts, the author sought to understand how and why struggling readers may *not* choose to apply the reading skills or may approach reading tasks in ways they know are not useful and marginalize their abilities to grow as readers.

Hall (2010) found that teachers' interactions with readers were based on their own models of identity for what it meant to become a good reader as well as the discursive identities they created for their students based on those models of identity. Students' interactions with classroom reading tasks were based on how they identified themselves as readers alongside their own goals to prevent their peers, teachers, or family members from constructing a discursive identity of them as poor readers. Hall suggests that student opportunities to develop as readers were marginalized by both themselves and their teachers. Further, she noted, the models of identity teachers made available presented a dichotomous view of reading (bad versus good) as instructions, tasks, and interactions with students intended to help them understand and acquire the identity capital associated with good readers while showing them the disadvantages of poor ones. But she noted there was not always agreement between the teachers and students on what each model looked like. However, the teachers' models were given the most power, and those framed and constrained which identities were valued and devalued. She concludes that no matter

how effective a teacher's reading instruction or tasks may be, it is ultimately up to the students to decide if, when, and how such things will be used. Thus, teachers and researchers must find ways to understand and be responsive to those identities in ways that "transform" students and do not make them feel as though they have to marginalize themselves to maintain their dignity.

Taboadoa Barber et al. (2015) also examined data from the first year of implementation of a social studies literacy intervention for 6th and 7th grade ELL and English native speakers. The program, USHER (Unites States History for Engaged Reading), is a content-area situated intervention program intended to boost students' reading comprehension as well as their engagement with social studies content-area texts. In addition to examining changes in students' reading comprehension, the authors attempted to quantify changes in students' self-efficacy beliefs and engagement in social studies as a predictive factor for growth in reading comprehension.

The authors purported that overall, observed changes in reading comprehension and self-efficacy suggest there is promise in applying principles from the reading engagement model to a different domain for an older, more diverse student population than previously studied; how students feel as well as what they do when reading are important contributors to growth. This is noteworthy, as it represents an empirical attempt to contextualize effect-size of an intervention within factors intrinsic to students.

In 2016, Hall returned to similar questions in the 2010 study to examine an instructional framework intended to help middle school teachers create instruction that responds to students' "reading identities" while helping them learn reading skills. Hall began from the premise that, by middle school, students often have a long and negative history of academic reading experiences that results in feelings of being overwhelmed and unsure. Their interactions with texts are affected by how they have been positioned as readers and the reading identities they possess as well as those that have been assigned to them. Students bring these histories with them to literacy events, and teachers need to

be able to respond to the diverse range of readers and social histories and identities they bring. The instructional framework incorporated three pedagogical goals: examine and positively change students' involvement with classroom reading practices; improve reading comprehension abilities; and allow students to progress toward who they want to become as readers.

Hall (2016) utilized a theoretical perspective that posits that identities are shaped by environment, understandings of the norms of that environment, and how individuals view themselves in relation to those norms. Identities can be disrupted, reinforced, and/or shaped based on past and current experiences and how individuals situate themselves within those experiences. For students, reading identities include an understanding of how capable they believe they are in comprehending texts, the value placed on reading, and their understandings of what it means to be a particular reader within a given context. Hall also distinguishes self-efficacy from reading abilities but claims that "self-efficacy" is connected to motivation. Students can stay motivated to persist with difficult texts. Thus, students who enter classrooms with low-self-efficacy about their reading abilities may feel apprehensive or inadequate. It is important for educators to recognize that literacy interactions are not necessarily based on lack of motivation, but rather on perhaps a person's beliefs that they do not have the ability to meet requirements.

This particular study involved one eighth-grade English language arts classroom for one academic year. Hall (2016 observed that students initially saw the teacher as being in charge of their reading development. Over the course of the study—with intentional focus by the teacher to implement the instructional framework—students modified that perception and took greater ownership over their development and reading identity. The teacher had to navigate between students' visions of how they wanted to grow as readers (which were limited) and her own. As she worked to connect the two and honor students' visions alongside her own, the students were more willing to accept the teacher's challenges to their ideas and conceptions about reading. Students' reading

identities began to shift, and they started to vocalize the differences between reading at school and reading at home as well as initiate challenges to assigned “reading level” as determined by tests.

Despite many lingering assumptions around “reading identities” as well as “progress” that Hall (2016) leaves untroubled, the significance of this study for my work with students centers around the initial belief that the participating students felt they had no control over their reading development. Their experiences in school from early grades contributed to a sense of empowerment or disempowerment. From this study, empowering students as readers and getting them involved in their reading development is not simply about teaching skills—attitudes, beliefs, and practices go along with literacy. Attempts to disrupt students’ thought patterns about reading and school were successful as space was made for them to work on what they valued. In turn, students responded by also working on their reading in ways suggested by the teacher. Over time, a partnership developed between the students and the teacher that was reciprocal, respectful, and that encouraged students, in a certain sense, to re-vision their identities in some fashion. In this way, the teacher introduced a counter-discourse around identity by asking students to consider what they wanted to become as readers and to provide input on how they might achieve their goals. Through counter-discourses, I assume from this study that spaces can be made that allow students to reposition themselves and reshape their identities as they disrupt commonplace conceptions about what it means to be a reader in school, thus providing new opportunities for any student.

Learned (2018) focused on ninth-grade students, but I find this research to be useful, given the small body of research as well as her focus on reading identities. Beginning with the rationale that adolescents interact with shifting contexts throughout their school day and thus must demonstrate varying literacy skills and identities, she also noted that students are assigned unidimensional labels such as “struggling.” Since little research has explored the extent to which youths’ reading changes across classroom

spaces and contexts, efforts to identify struggling readers can facilitate narrow skills-based literacy learning. To disrupt deficit positioning and improve secondary literacy opportunities, more research is needed to investigate the extent to which adolescents' reading skills vary across school spaces and the ways changing school contexts mediate literacy. In her year-long qualitative study, Learned shadowed eight ninth-graders identified as "struggling readers" and compared experiences with similar peers. Leaning on sociocultural perspectives of learning and literacy and reading as a social practice rather than the acquisition of discrete skills, Learned looked at reading difficulty as a manifestation of the complex interaction among text activities, readers, and contexts and literacy skills, practices, and identities as existing in dynamic interaction with the purposes, texts, and people that youths encounter.

In the analysis, Learned (2018) noted that students' and teachers' interactions with the contexts of schooling not only identified reading difficulty but also constructed "struggling readers" regardless of students' skilled, engaged reading. When student-teacher interactions focused on building trusting relationships and learning disciplinary literacy, youths and teachers created supportive contexts through which youths positioned themselves as readers and learners. Trusting student-teacher relationships alongside disciplinary literacy instruction appeared to be powerful in supporting students' reading identities, skills, and practices. But positive relationships were mitigated by strained interactions students experienced with teachers—particularly related to how teachers interpreted students' reading or learning difficulty. When teachers understood reading difficulty as a problem of motivation or behavior, interactions tended to be strained and focused on behavior compliance. When teachers interpreted challenges not as student deficits but as manifesting among numerous contextual factors, student-teacher interactions tended to be productive and focused on learning.

Several interesting conclusions were drawn by Learned (2018). She saw student refusal to read as likely a way of resisting an intervention placement the student

considered unhelpful and unfair. She also noted that positive social dimensions of classrooms intertwined with and were supported by effective instruction. Further, teachers engendered trust with focal participants by engaging them in meaning-focused literacy learning rather than decontextualized skill-building. Student-teacher interactions that focused on disciplinary literacy appeared to motivate and support youths' literacy and knowledge development.

From these conclusions, Learned (2018) makes several crucial points. First, she posits that identification as a struggling reader has consequences, including the assignment of deficit labels and placement in reading intervention and low-track classes. In spaces where teachers actively positioned youths as able to learn, engaging them in rigorous instruction and trusting relationships, students grappled with complex texts, read with improvement, and remained engaged—thus positioning themselves as readers and co-constructing positive contexts for literacy learning. This supports other research findings that learning difficulty is not innate, but rather contextual.

> That young people's demonstrations of difficulty and proficiency varied across classroom spaces challenges the notion that struggling readers have uniformly low skills or disengaged attitudes. Assessments, which were used for reader identification and progress monitoring, often failed to reflect this multidimensionality. (p. 33)

Second, the discourse of remediation positions young people as lacking. When intervention comes at a cost, it undermines not only literacy but also youths' rightful opportunities to participate as valued members of school communities. Thus, dismantling labels requires shifting attention away from the labels to how the labels are constructed and disrupted through actors' participation in classroom contexts.

Third, Learned (2018) posits that an alternative to remedial instruction is disciplinary literacy teaching, as disciplinary literacy contexts made particular positions and identities available to students that did not appear readily accessible in more skills-based or compliance-oriented classrooms. Foregrounding the discursive practices of

particular disciplines can allow youths to read, produce, and critique disciplinary texts, as these processes involve literacy practices and skills not as means unto themselves, but rather, as means to pursue intellectual questions that have social and cultural dimensions. Decontextualized skill-building does not serve struggling readers, as it fails to apprentice them into disciplinary practices. Finally, Learned notes that policies can better reflect the overlapping and divergent disciplinary literacy demands that span content area classes, particularly as schools adopt RTI. As there is limited scholarship about the implementation of RTI at the secondary level (Ciullo et al., 2016), concerns that RTI may not attend to the complexity and disciplinary literacy demands of middle and high school students have been noted (Brozo, 2011). This study suggests that the complexity inherent in secondary contexts is not a liability but an opportunity for youths to enact and grow multidimensional skills, practices, and identities.

My readings of these studies informed my semester with Annie. They also solidified my beliefs in the potential of extended reading time in school to build engagement, stamina, and self-efficacy, social interaction around text, and choice in reading material. The Reading Immersion classes I created for each grade level the following year, as I continued to seek to foster a community centered around books, were largely designed around these beliefs and practices that worked so well for Annie. In the desire to create spaces where I can exercise my assumptions around literacy practices—where literacy identities are safely negotiated, where meanings are contestable, and where the social become part of the practice—I strove—and strive still—to foster the Literacy Lab as space that pays close attention to flexible seating for small group and partner discussion as well as comfort for independent reading. Much of what I push the teachers I work with toward (classroom libraries, student choice, diverse texts) is greatly informed by literacy as social practice. I also find myself trying to subvert practices of intervention with practices of negotiated meanings and identities.

Complexities

The poststructural framings I have accepted trouble my readings of these studies, my sociocultural assumptions, and my practices in literacy. The sociocultural perspectives on literacy that predominantly rule my practice have been critiqued as not attending to issues of power and equity in classrooms as well as the extent to which they can—or cannot—elucidate processes of identity construction (Handfield, 2016). Most importantly, the interplay of the discursive in contexts cannot be ignored. These critiques are consistent with the poststructural inflections I claim around identities, subjectivities, knowledge, and power that incorporate how and why certain meanings or ways of understanding the world are deemed coherent or valued—or not—as well as how sets of knowledge, ways of thinking, and practices become valued over others. Further, poststructural thinking pushes me to consider social positioning via language use as well as what is discursively made available or unavailable. Thus, I am compelled to consider the discourses at play.

In his analysis of discourse, Foucault was not interested in determining what a discourse meant, but rather he sought to explore how discourses function, where are they found, how are they produced or regulated, and what are their social effects. Thus, for Foucault, an analysis of discourses seeks to describe the surface linkages between systems of thought, power, knowledge, institutions, etc. (St. Pierre, 2000). Particularly, in his genealogical analysis, Foucault sought to explore *how* statements come to be true or false in discourses and domains of knowledge. In his archeological analysis, he sought to explore how it is that one particular statement or truth appears in lieu of another (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005). Because both analyses of discourse relate to knowledge and knowledge production, tracings of discourses at play necessarily also must consider what can be known. To a great extent, discourse and knowledge are inextricable from one

another. Within discourses, complex relationships between knowledge, truth, and power dictate what can be said and who can say it.

Because Foucault (1990) viewed discursive fields as containing multiple competing and overlapping discourses that define possibilities for inquiry and knowledge, as well as the rules and practices within those fields, each discursive field contains complex as well as competing—sometimes even simultaneously—ways to give differing meanings to the world. He stated:

> Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. (p. 102)

Thus, within any discursive field, there exist discourses that constrain knowledge production, dissent, and difference as well as some that both enable or block alternative knowledge and differences. Further, power is always being "exercised" within discursive fields (Foucault, 1990).

For Foucault (1990), knowledge and knowledge production within discourse become interwoven with power. Foucault specifically states, "It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (p.100). He defines power as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (p. 92). Power, in Foucault's view, is a continuous process of struggle and confrontation among those force relations, the support these force relations find in each other, and the strategies in which they take effect. He argued that in modern society, mechanisms of self-discipline, such as those for regulation and surveillance, operate to control, but these same mechanisms block relational power as they objectify and fix people in prescribed and static ways (St. Pierre, 2000).

Interlude: More Representations

I fear that my description of my work with Annie reads along the lines of the "teacher hero" narrative. Such a narrative is found in popular media, fiction stories, and movies. In this narrative, a wise sage teacher figure sees beyond the struggles, conflicts, and inequities of student situations and leads said student to rise above, conquer, or overcome said situations. This singular narrative—even as I have succumbed to it here—limits the subjectivities and positionalities of the actors. It ignores the multiple discursive fields at play that constrain, enable, or block; discursive fields that offer complex and competing ways to give differing meaning to Annie and my worlds. Once again, the language of my representation has discursively constituted each of us. My complicity in the discourses that constitute is undeniable.

A Balancing Act?

In what I have named here as theories-at-work in the creation of the Literacy Lab and the work I engage in with students like Annie, I recognize discursive fields in which these various theories, legislative acts, reform efforts, personal beliefs, and interpretations of research employ multiple, overlapping and competing discourses. These discursive fields yield statements about what is and is not allowable in the construction of space, literacy practice, as well as who my students and I are or are not allowed to be within those spaces and practices. I also recognize there is much I have failed to name. Influences I am blind to because I am so embedded in them, they feel "logical"—which also harbors the accompanying habitual and Enlightenment-filled assumption that "logical" is "good."

Given a large amount of freedom to operate in response to the needs I perceived in the building, I have embedded many of my own values and assumptions around literacy into its construction. However, to continue that level of freedom, I've been mindful to

create something that "looks good" according to expectations, demonstrates effectiveness in measurable ways, meets legal obligations, etc. I have resisted certain practices, fostered others, and compromised on many. Negotiations stemming from the very discourses of literacy embedded in the local landscape continue to flow through my daily work.

Davidson (2010) builds the argument that cognitive and sociocultural theories of literacy**,** which are historically considered to be incommensurable in practice and research, need not be so. She argues that integration of the two broad theories is possible and even desirable in educational practice and research in order to equalize the learning opportunities for all students. Given that many literacy legislative acts and reform efforts (including NCLB and Reading First) are underpinned by predominantly cognitive views of literacy, a perhaps lopsided view of literacy dominates practice in schools. Davidson proposes that the cognitive occurs in a sociocultural context and both are necessary for educational success. She proposes that an integration of the two theories into a unitary framework for literacy instruction and research has the potential to equalize educational practice.

The rationale behind Davidson's (2010) conception is that cognitive reasoning works in conjunction with beliefs, values, and habits of mind that form an individual's identity and which need to be considered when interventions or instruction are designed. From the sociocultural perspective, she adds that all literacy is ideological, context-dependent, and value-ridden, all of which must be considered when utilizing the cognitive perspectives needed to promote print literacy. She contends that the two perspectives are not diametrically opposed. Each has merits and each recognizes the value of the other.

Davidson's (2010) argument is seductive. I *want* to accept it, as it would resolve for me what I have come to recognize as sources of tension in my work—particularly as I find the tensions I experience as stemming directly from competing discourses. In the

same way the memories of Annie juxtapose with the theories-at-work that I am currently able to trace, these perspectives on literacy often *feel* incommensurate in practice. The varied theories-at-work, stemming from my own histories, local mandates, as well as greater contextual influences, are sources of dissonance. It is in the moments of tension that the positioning of both teachers and students within literacy events and literacy practices feels contradictory to me.

But I fear Davidson's view offers false hope. According to Foucault, discursive formations most often display a hierarchical arrangement and reinforce certain already established identities or subjectivities. That which is allowable and available to myself and my students varies with each of the influences discussed here. But some statements are stronger than others—they exert more influence. The hierarchical arrangement within literacy practices bombarded with standards, accountability, audit, and other tenets of neoliberal ideology makes the work I chose to engage in with students like Annie feel "less than." In some cases, an exhausting amount of pressure must be exerted to dislodge the limits of what is available to us in the Literacy Lab. And as Foucault insisted on interrogating the processes by which some discourses maintain their dominance, some voices are heard, and who benefits—a certain refusal to accept feels necessary.

INTERMEZZO 2

Subtle triumph. That phrase has been ringing in my head all week. Two words I'm quite sure I never would have put together. Triumph *rings of victory—public, known, recognized accomplishment over a public enemy or hardship. But* subtle *calls forth quiet, hidden, unrecognized, and private. What good is a triumph that is subtle? Subtle triumphs. Small moments. They keep me here. Sustain me. Over-shadow the nagging frustrations. This is not glamorous work. There are no victory parades for teachers. No bubble-gum cards with our pictures. No red carpets. I absolutely cannot be here for the glory. I am here for those teeny-tiny subtle victories that easily go unnoticed unless I choose to celebrate them.*

Chapter V

MOMENTS WITH RTI

During transition meetings between his fifth and sixth-grade years, Mattie's[1] *elementary teachers reported he had received tier 2 intervention support for reading fluency and decoding. Early in the fall of his sixth-grade year, universal benchmark assessments*[2] *placed Mattie in the 34th percentile in both reading and language usage goal areas. Not far into the school year, his mother expressed concern that his achievement level on state standardized assessment results had dropped. I conducted further diagnostic assessments with him to explore his skills in word knowledge for decoding and encoding, written expression, reading speed and prosody, knowledge of word meaning, sight word base, and both implicit and explicit comprehension. These diagnostic assessments indicated that Mattie exhibited below grade level performance in reading fluency, writing fluency, phonological and encoding skills, as well as mechanics in writing; thus, under the dictates of RTI, Mattie required remediation.*

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[1]Mattie represents a composite character.

[2]This district utilizes the NWEA MAP© Reading and Language Usage assessments as a universal screening tool to track student growth in reading and writing.

The Historical Traces in RTI and a Local Iteration

RTI stands for Response to Intervention. Not quite a unified, clear structure or even a highly-researched program with universally agreed-upon features, RTI nonetheless has wormed its way into the expected vernacular and practices of U.S. schools (Brozo, 2011; Castro-Villareal & Nichols, 2016). As already discussed, RTI's roots are embedded deeply in the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004), and the reauthorization of Every Student Succeeds Act (2016). Allington (2009) crystallizes the goals of RTI to include: early identification and intervention; effective, intensive, evidence-based intervention; an alternative method of locating students with disabilities; monitoring of student progress with data-based[3] documentation; accelerated reading growth to meet annual yearly progress criteria; and high-quality professional development to teachers of lowest-performing students. Intervention Central (www.interventioncentral.org) defines the purpose of RTI as intended to help struggling learners attain the Common Core State Standards. Systems of RTI provide remediation or intervention according to increased levels of duration, intensity, and frequency to accomplish getting students "up to standards."

Some have traced the origins of RTI beyond IDEA to applied behavior analysis with its emphasis on precision teaching, direct instruction, and monitoring. Others trace the system to the scientific method, where a problem is identified and a hypothesis formed, study procedures—which include "validated" instruments for quantitative data amassing—are implemented, data are collected, and interpretations/conclusions are drawn. Regardless from whence it is traced, RTI presumes a systematic approach to student learning: What is the problem? Why does the problem exist? What should be done to remediate the problem? Did the intervention work?

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[3]"Data" within RTI frameworks typically indicate quantitative assessment results. In discussions here, I utilize the term in ways consistent with positivist, scientific, and singular assumptions found in the literature on RTI.

Brozo (2011) argues that RTI is more rhetoric than reality as iterations vary across states, districts, and schools. However, common components typically include universal screening, progress monitoring, and tiered intervention—most commonly three tiers. Within these tiers, intervention is interpreted as action taken instructionally to redirect a student's learning progression according to "best practice" and "research-proven" methods. Increasing frequency, intensity, and duration of intervention at each tier ensures a systematic approach to eliminating "lack of instruction" as a factor in a student's struggle or failure. Typically, Tier 1 (expected to be around 80% of a student population) involves intervention resources available to all students within the regular classroom structure. Tier 2 (15% of a student population) is implemented when students fail to make expected progress given classroom-level interventions. In Tier 2, additional supports in the form of small group or individual instruction are provided. Tier 2 is meant to supplement (not replace) Tier 1 support in order to get students "back on track" with normal academic progress. Frequency, intensity, or duration increases yet again in Tier 3 (5% or less of a student population) for students who do not progress as expected with Tier 1 and Tier 2 intervention. More intensive intervention (most often through one-on-one work with the student) is provided (Brozo, 2011). Should students fail to achieve given Tier 3 support, the final step is the decision for special education referral (Brozo, 2011; Catro-Villareal &Nichols, 2016; Quinn, 2012).

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No sooner had I hung up the phone when Mattie strode into my classroom that early fall day.

"Hi Mattie, thanks for coming back."

"Mmmph," he responded incoherently.

"So, I told you after we did all those assessments together last week that I would show you the results. We could talk through together what we might be able to work on. Do you remember that?"

A quick shrug and a nod.

"Ok, so I have everything scored and I also pulled up your recent MAP report too. Come have a seat so I can talk you through it."

I carefully walked Mattie through each assessment, explaining to him what I was looking for with each one and noting the places he met or exceeded expectations.

"A big strength for you seems to be your ability to understand and remember what you read. See here on this assessment you were able to retell the key points of the article and you were able to answer both explicit and implicit questions easily. Do you find that is often the case—that you don't have any trouble understanding what you read?"

A quick shrug and half nod in reply.

"Well, that is something we definitely want to notice and celebrate. I mean, that's the whole point of reading, isn't it? To get meaning and information from the text?"

A slight nod. I watched as his eyes flit around the room.

"I am wondering, though, if you find writing to be a little bit more challenging. This assessment helps me know what you know about words, word parts, and how they work together in multisyllabic words. And this assessment helps me see how you do with putting all the pieces and parts of writing altogether at once. I expect that kids your age and grade will fall in this range (I point to a few categories) and you fell here (I point to a column below the expected range). So that tells me that there are a few things about word endings that might be helpful to work on together. That might make writing and spelling easier for you. Do you find spelling is an area that gives you grief?"

Another shrug and mumbled, "Maybe."

"Ok. That showed up in this writing assessment here too. You were able to write an expected amount in the time limit, but the accuracy of spelling and mechanics—like punctuation and capitalization—were a little lower. Do you find mechanics to be another tricky area for you?"

"Maybe. My teachers say that sometimes"

"So here's what I'm thinking. I'm thinking that if we were to work on some word analysis together along with some reviewing and practicing punctuation, you might find the writing you are asked to do in all your classes may be less difficult or intimidating. What do you think?"

He shrugged.

"I'll tell you what, you think about it for a couple of days. Come back to see me next Learning Lab[4] *and let me know if some word work and mechanics work might be helpful to the writing you have to do in school."*

"'K."

"Do you have any questions for me? Or anything you would like me to know? … No? Ok, that's all for today then, Mattie. Thanks for coming up. I'll see you in a couple of days." "Bye."

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IDEA does not specify a tiered intervention approach to meeting the needs of students, even though it is a common feature. However, IDEA does specify "scientific research-based" instruction (Brozo, 2011; Castro-Villareal & Nichols, 2016). The assumption with this language is that it is not enough to systematically ensure that instruction has occurred. Rather, it must be ensured that the quality of instruction is "proven, valid, and reliable." This language—indeed, a continuing dominant discourse in U.S. education (à la Foucault)—has led to a proliferation of commercial, packaged, and prescriptive programs of instruction that are "teacher-proof." Additionally, with the emphasis on scientific research-based, school districts are pressured to utilize such programs, often at great expense.

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[4]Learning Lab is the term utilized in this building for a flex period where students meet with various teachers, work on projects, receive support, or independently read.

RTI finds purchase with the Common Core State Standards. In addition to emphasizing research and scientifically sanctioned instruction, RTI presumes that the Common Core State Standards are the gold standard to which all students should be held. It also presumes that development toward these standards can be benchmarked in equal measure along a consistent continuum. This leads to the logical presumption that any deviation from said development along that continuum is in need of intervening to get students back on the correct learning path.

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I initiated a Tier 2 intervention plan for Mattie. Two to three times a week for 20 minutes, Mattie received intervention in the Literacy Lab through a district-approved intervention program. Within the Orton-Gillingham approach, the focus of the intervention was on multisyllabic word knowledge, morphemic analysis, and writing mechanics. In accordance with the district intervention expectations, Mattie's progress was analyzed every six to eight weeks to determine the need to continue the intervention plan, adjust frequency, duration, or intensity, or discontinue the plan. Twice a month, his growth in these specific skills was monitored for progress using a writing sample that was scored for total words produced, total words spelled correctly, and total semantic/ syntactic accuracy. Additionally, Mattie's knowledge of phonological elements was regularly monitored. In response to this progress monitoring data that showed low growth, additional support was added to his support plan.

What's Wrong Here?

Critiques of RTI are plentiful—from the limited research base around the effectiveness of RTI to the criticism that it is not culturally responsive or sensitive (Castro-Villareal & Nichols, 2016). However, in the interest of tracing dominant discourses born of neoliberal ideology through to subjectivities and subject positions, I

zoom in on a tracing of the language at work within RTI. Poststructural theorizing of language demands that we attend to our own wording of the world. We are fully complicit—as well as subjected and thus constructed too in relation to the dominance of certain discourses that often have become habituated and normalized, especially within the field of U.S. education—in the making of the world we inhabit and there is no absolution or avoidance of responsibility in presumed absolutes. In terms of Foucauldian theorizing of persons as "subjects"—that is, as possessing agency AND as constantly and simultaneously "subjected" to power circulations, which include the dominance of certain discourses and not others—we, therefore, must ask: In what specific contexts, among what communities of people, by what textual and social processes, has meaning of language (and meaning in general) been acquired (St. Pierre, 2000)? If we recognize the ways language works to both constrain and open up, we are pushed away from questions of what something means and toward questions of how meanings are acquired, change, normalized, or eclipsed.

Both Taubman (2009*)* and Gorlewski (2011) have drawn strong connections between the assumptions of Neoliberal thinking (and of course, its undergirding Enlightenment-inflected, technical-rational, behavior-oriented, positivist-centered assumptions) and education at large and the practices of literacy instruction. I lean into their work to pull those connections further through the language of RTI in literacy. Specifically, I look to the language of treatment, the language of science, language of skills, and language of standardization that permeate RTI and the subsequent connections to the subjectivities and subject positions made available for students and teachers forced into those systems.

The Language of Treatment

Due to strong roots in behaviorism, the language around learning disabilities is distinctly clinical (Brozo, 2011)**,** whereby "treatments" for learning difficulties are

administered in ways not unlike a medical model of deficit and prescription. With strong connections to the special education process and language of disability, the process of tiered instruction also mimics that clinical treatment language. Neoliberal assumptions that tend to create complex systems of surveillance (Foucault, 1995) and reporting mechanisms for monitoring and producing appropriate results (Davies, 2003, 2005) are recognizable in the language of treatment. Students' learning deficits are "*diagnosed,"* perpetuating the assumption that "*intervening on* "or *"remediating"* a particular lacking skill will resolve a student's struggle across all learning contexts. Interventions increase with *frequency*, *duration*, and *intensity* according to the severity of the deficit or disability and the student's response to the treatment.

Foucault considered the mechanisms of regulation and surveillance of people within modern society as disciplinary power. One productive or produced effect of the circulation of power within discursive regimes may be normalization of appropriate or desired behavior (Foucault, 1995; Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005). The very nature of RTI as a *system* for *intervention* acts as a mechanism of regulating and surveying students to ensure conformity to the norm of learning standards. In the case of education in the U.S., that learning standard and expectation is governed by the Common Core State Standards. In order to meet the demands of globalization and labor markets, the CCSS directly connects literacy to the nation's economic success (thus playing directly into neoliberal values that permeate education in the U.S.) (Gorlewski, 2011). Concurrently, RTI provides the mechanism by which to define "normal" and "abnormal" based on "assessments." Thus, a percentile rank and failure to demonstrate achievement designate a student as "not normal" and justify treatment to correct.

Within this language of treatment, the embedded assumption is that student learning deficits can easily be fixed, all students can be neurotypical, and all students can be brought into the norm. However, programs are necessary to recover what is deficient or diseased in the student to bring them back to the norm. Modification or adaptation of

treatments/programs to individual and unique students is discouraged, as it may reduce the validity of the treatment. Words such as *screening, diagnosis,* and *monitoring,* reminiscent of medical science, create a false sense of assuredness in the process and the implication that deviation is dangerous—because someone other than the practitioner has determined what is needed for whom and when. The professionalism and knowledgeability of educators are eroded as the locus of power and control shifts dramatically upwards from practicing professionals to auditors, policymakers, and statisticians (Davies, 2003). Deviance from the treatment by individuals is constituted as ignorance and thoroughly squashed.

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Mattie walked into my room today as he does every day: blank expression on his face, silent. I greeted him near the door. "How was your weekend?"

"Fine," he mumbled and began to move away.

I reached up to lightly put my fingertips on his shoulders in an effort to stop his forward motion. His face quickly winced as he shifted his body back and away from my touch. Inwardly I sighed but proceeded.

"Mattie, I am going to have you join this group of students who are also working on some of the same word study skills that you have been working on." I hoped the peer influence of his friends who were in the group would help him feel more comfortable. Consistently, his progress monitoring data demonstrated that he was not improving. I feared the emphasis on structured language that our assessment battery was pushing me toward was not serving him well.

The Language of Science

Neoliberal goals and aims in education are governed by cognitive science and positivistic studies, with an undertone that points to market-driven economic practices of the "audit culture" (Davies, 2005, 2006; Taubman, 2009; Torres, 2008) that infiltrate and

shape the ways knowledge and teaching are understood and significantly impact practice according to "*science*" and "*research-based.*" However, those terms are not problematized (Davies, 2003). Thus, assumptions that professional practice should include explicit goals and evidence-based practices suggest an unproblematic binary relationship between research and practice (Davies, 2003). Playing out in RTI, along with historical connections mentioned above, the wording of IDEA stipulates the use of *scientific, research-based interventions* to remediate student failure. Legislation for the state in which this research is conducted intentionally defines "scientifically-based reading research and instruction" as:

> (A) a comprehensive program or a collection of instructional practices that is based on reliable, valid evidence showing that when such programs or practices are used, students can be expected to achieve satisfactory reading progress, and (B) the integration of instructional strategies for continuously assessing, evaluating and communicating the student's reading progress and needs in order to design and implement ongoing interventions so that students of all ages and proficiency levels can read and comprehend text and apply higher-level thinking skills. Such a comprehensive program or collection of practices shall include, but not be limited to, instruction in five areas of reading: Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. (CT SB01019, 2019)

Additionally, the State Department of Education discusses SRBI thusly:

> The broad benefits of SRBI come from its emphasis on uniting scientific, research-based practices with systems approaches to education. Scientific evidence is substantial for a number of areas central to children's school success and well-being, such as reading, language development, some areas of mathematics and social-emotional learning. (Department of Education, n.d)

This language clearly emphasizes the merits of "scientific" and "systematic." However, definitions of *whose* science, to what aims/goals, and by what epistemological and ontological assumptions those interventions are created are left unstated; thus, the whole enterprise defers to traditional, cognitive, positivistic science.

The call for *research-based instruction* has encouraged the proliferation of commercial programs labeled "Research-based," "Evidenced-based," and even "Aligned

with Common Core Standards." Not only do these programs tend to reduce literacy to isolated, discrete, measurable skills (discussed further below), they tend to purport a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching that removes the agency of both students and teachers. Further entrenching the one-size-fits-all approach are common assumptions of what counts as *evidence* in RTI, how that evidence is generated, and the use to which it is put. Knowledge that counts is knowledge that can be measured (Davies, 2003; Lather, 2012). Thus, what teachers should teach is prescribed within very narrow parameters, ignoring debates around what and whose knowledge should be taught in schools, while also assuming the establishment of a supposed common culture and core knowledge (Apple, 2011).

This line of rationale firmly excludes not only diverse knowledges, diverse values, but also contextually sensitive and responsive teaching. Instead, it is assumed that what is valued knowledge in rural Appalachia is equally valued in urban New York City, for example. For Mattie, results of an assessment and evidence of learning in the form of standardized programming failed to account for the uniqueness, the difference, the humanity of the child. It also failed to consider the values, the interests, and the goals of the specific context—that is, the school and district and neighborhood communities in which both Mattie and I spend a great deal of our lives—as well as the individual student.

Ironically, not only are IDEA's calls for research-based interventions problematic and reductionist, they are impossible to answer—particularly in middle and high schools. Brozo (2011) argues that very little research has been conducted on RTI in middle and high schools. The limited research around the "effectiveness" of RTI that does exist has been primarily conducted in elementary settings. Most of what we "know" about teaching struggling readers and designing RTI models is primarily sourced from studies below grade six (Brozo, 2011). Given the structural, curricular, and cultural factors unique to secondary settings, it is impossible to simply replicate RTI models from the elementary level. However, with the emphasis on *high-quality instruction,* secondary schools, in

particular, tend toward "approaches sanctioned by government officials and policymakers controlling reading and special education research and program dollars" (p. 21). Thus, schools often implement intervention programs that are mismatched with adolescents' multiply situated and diverse "academic" needs.

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It felt a little like jury deliberation. Six of us—four core teachers, guidance counselor, and I—sat around a conference table in a windowless room, debating the "evidence." Knowing full well how we interpreted the evidence may "sentence" a student to special education. Except, in this case, that sentence may be the best way to get continued support the student needs for "success" in high school. Our debate was whether we had the evidence (via progress monitoring data, assessments, and student work) to demonstrate that he was still "failing" despite the intervention efforts. Purely going by the numbers, as the system requires, Mattie was "struggling."

One nagging issue remained. Mattie's affect seemed to us to indicate he was not interested in receiving support. We worried that his "lack of response" demonstrated that Mattie was neither invested nor interested in the skills we interpreted his assessments as showing that he needed. Further, Mattie's classroom performance—as determined by his grades—was fine. Our interpretation was that he had developed compensatory strategies that were serving him well. The failure of the system was that using data-driven decisions forced us to implement a system that labels him as learning disabled.

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The Language of Skills

Stemming from the language of science that rules RTI, thus very closely connected, is the language of skills. Within a neoliberal context of accountability and audit that narrowly defines knowledge, encourages surveillances, and imposes

requirements for continuous improvement, literacy is reduced to a set of basic and isolated skills (Apple, 2011; Gorlewski, 2011; Taubman, 2009; Torres, 2008; Weiner, 2005). Comprehension is relegated to a process by which the reader decodes a text, unrelated to the contexts in which the text is being read or the context of its origin (Weiner, 2005). Writing becomes the manipulation of syntax, semantic, and morphemes devoid of the identities and cultural contexts of the writer. And, of course, these skills can be sequenced, measured, and remediated. Brozo (2011) traces the process of this reduction:

> RTI was conceived as an effective alternative to intelligence testing and the discrepancy formula for classifying students as learning disabled. However, as with much of what emerged over the past decades from special educators researching reading, programs and practices designed for a very small and narrowly defined population of special learners have tended to become generalized to all learners. (p. 20)

Thus, IDEA as legislation for the learning disabled has created a system of instruction and intervention for struggling and non-struggling students alike, in particular by requiring schools to institute preventive measures that attempt to reduce the number of students who experience initial failure. As mentioned above, commercial programs that meet the call for *scientific research-based instruction* tend to reduce literacy to isolated, discrete, measurable skills. These skills are taught through *systematic* processes to ensure validity and fidelity.

Such is the case with the Orton-Gillingham approach in this context. This district has developed a hypersensitivity to dyslexia in the last several years. As discussed earlier, the district has pushed for O-G training and implementation in response to legislative and local pressures. The effect has been a certain mania. Mattie, with a slower reading rate and lower than expected phonological skills, was recognized as a candidate for O-G treatment, regardless of how relevant he found the treatment or how it may not have impacted his comprehension and engagement with text.

Ivey and Baker (2004) offer a useful critique of approaches that emphasize phonological and phonemic awareness skills for middle-grade students. First, they indicate that this approach is ineffectual because there is no existing evidence to suggest that phonemic awareness training or isolated phonics instruction helps older struggling readers become more competent at reading. Such approaches seem to produce the most benefit for young students, with diminished results for older students. Second, they purport that systematic phonological approaches do not make students *want* to read more. Again, no evidence suggests that focusing on sound-level, letter-level, or word-level instruction will make older struggling readers read more; however, it may make them read less. This argument seems particularly crucial given the work of Allington (2009), Alvermann (2001), Gallagher (2009), and others to connect increased motivation and engagement with growth for adolescent readers.

With the adoption of commercial programs and the push for isolated skills-based approaches, the transactional navigation inherent in literacy is completely minimized. Systems of RTI ignore the growing body of literacy theory that emphasizes complex acts of negotiating meanings with and within a wide range of visual, auditory, and inscribed texts that are culturally, historically, and socially situated. Adolescent reading intervention programs, in particular, tend to emphasize decoding development and fail to produce students who read with comprehension, even though understandings of adolescent literacy emphasize reading and interacting with meaning over basic, foundational skills (Allington, 2011; Brozo, 2011; Sarigianides et al., 2017). Assessments often used to "identify" necessary treatment fail to match the actual texts, social literacy practices, and literacy demands that adolescents navigate across their school day and content area classrooms. Thus, decontextualized skill-building fails to apprentice students into disciplinary literacy practices needed for content areas (Learned, 2018). Also dismissed are the trusting relationships between students and teachers shown to be crucial for struggling students (Learned, 2018). Finally, this reductionist phenomenon leads to a

deficit model of thinking about students. Focusing on narrow, skill-based learning in an effort to support "struggling readers" serves to construct and, in certain cases, even maintain deficit reader identities (Alvermann, 2001.) Students are viewed in terms of what they lack instead of their various assets. Language that strips students of identities, dehumanizes them, and refers to them as fragmented and fully known/knowable within those fragmented bits bleeds into the conversation protocols that often accompany systems of RTI.

Interlude

I was angry. My husband's arm reached in front of me as if to prevent me from catapulting across the table in an animalistic lurch toward the teacher sitting on the other side. My son's IEP review meeting was heated. The teacher had informed us that one of the accommodations on my son's IEP was not in accordance with her classroom policy and therefore she had not provided said accommodation to him. As a legal document, I explained, the IEP was nonnegotiable … no matter what her personal classroom policy was.

Sitting on "the other side of the table" at that moment, I stood firmly on the accountability provided by special education law. The system of checks that ensured Zach … my own child … receive the support he needed was the weapon I confidently wielded. The data were my assurance the educators working with him were meeting his needs. Despite my status as an educator, as even a colleague to this teacher, my perspective on "the other side of the table" craved an accounting.

The Language of Standardization

The language of standardization permeates RTI. The effect of the language of science, coupled with the language of skills and the language of treatment, is that students

must be assessed. Assessments must be valid and reliable, so standardized testing mechanisms must be put in place to screen all students for deficits (*universal screening*) as well as monitor response to intervention treatment (*progress monitoring*). They must also be referenced to a standard (i.e., the CCSS) in order to effectively monitor student growth toward expectations (the norm). These assessments allow student learning to be categorized into *percentile ranking* and *achievement benchmarks* and therefore judged.

Further, the language standardization is governed by quantitative “data.” The term “data” pops up repeatedly in research and literature around RTI, even in our district handbook. As mentioned above, what is presumed in the word “data” is numbers … a quantity, a percentage, a percentile … which can be graphed to demonstrate trends. Those trends are then utilized to determine a student’s response to the intervention. Phenomena that count as “data” are narrowly defined.

Such standardized practice is also embedded within the discourses of science and skills. Since neoliberalism loves quantitative reduction; evidence-based practice is king. Practices governed by calculations and numbers replace teachers’ unique and context-specific approaches to teaching and learning (Taubman, 2009). Neoliberal ideology manufactures a crisis around teachers’ knowledge and ability, subsequently creating the need for surveillance and accountability. Stemming from the *A Nation at Risk* report (1983), which initiated the rhetoric of a “rising tide of mediocrity,” a rationale perpetuates the strong and widespread belief that education is flawed and students are failing, but all students can learn if teachers follow directions (Davies, 2003; Taubman, 2009). To effectively and efficiently teach, teachers need training and monitoring and teacher-proof programs; thus, the proliferation of one-size-fits-all commercial intervention programs. In current educational culture, however, accountability is synonymous with “data” and “numbers” garnered from standardized testing and applied to evaluation of both students and teachers (Taubman, 2009).

Within the language of standardized testing and standardized practice, the relationship between disciplinary power and perceptions of "normal" once again step front and center (Foucault, 1980, 1995). Once a discourse comes to be considered by many numbers of a particular social grouping, country, etc. as "normal and natural," it makes sense to say or do only certain things and is difficult to think and act outside that dominant discourse that has morphed into the norm (Taylor, 2009). Within a disciplinary context, the norm brings both qualification and correction: the norm establishes "the normal"—and therefore, in binary assumptions, "the abnormal." Individuals are brought into conformity with some pre-existing standard. "The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchized, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes" (Foucault, 1995, p.183). In the language of *benchmark* and *ranking* inherent in standardized universal screening processes of monitoring student growth, the assumption is that there is a "normal" reading and writing developmental continuum that can be assessed. Appropriate progress along that continuum or meeting predetermined *standards* (such as CSSS) is an expectation largely left unchallenged within RTI … indeed, the notion of normal developmental progress is foundational to the very systems of RTI. If learning can be standardized, so can instruction.

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I made Mattie's mom cry. I perched on a stool at the long black table in the front of the room. My phone doesn't reach my desk, so it sits on my assistant's desk at the front corner of the room. Corporate decision-making at its best—put the phone where it makes sense to the IT guy, but not to the teacher who has to work in that room. So whenever I want to make a phone call, I have to gather my notes and materials, move the phone to the table, and make the call. It's always a little awkward when my assistant is sitting right there at her desk trying not to listen in.

"Good morning. How are things going?"

"Glad to hear it. As you know, I've been working with Mattie for some time now. I'm concerned because I was looking at all his progress monitoring and assessments the other day. I'm just not seeing the kind of growth I would expect given the amount of time we have been spending on these skills."

"Yeah—two to three times a week, that's correct. But I've also been pushing into his English class while they have been in a writing unit to try to help him make connections between the skill work we've been addressing and the process of drafting, revising, and editing. It's tricky because I know those phonological and orthographic skills are difficult areas for him ... and I expect that to show up in spelling in writing. But I think he does a good job of using the tools on the Chromebook to help him with that. I think he also relies on a vocabulary that he feels confident in—like he's self-editing a little. So we aren't really seeing those skills give him trouble in his academic reading and writing. Where this all gets tricky is that we have seen the deficit in his assessments, so that data tells a different story than his classroom performance. You know what I mean?"

"Yes, that's exactly it."

"So, because the assessments aren't showing that growth, we need to move forward with a PPT to make sure there isn't anything else going on."

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Connections of Language to Subjectivities

Following poststructural inclinations to consider language as functioning with particular discursive "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1972), connections to subjectivities of both teachers and students are impossible to ignore. To consider RTI and how it positions both teachers (specifically myself as teacher) and students, it is crucial to trace the dominant discourses and discursive practices through to the subject positions that are enabled and disabled as well. Julie Gorlewski (2011) traces how neoliberalism enacted in

the form of high-stakes testing undermines students' and teachers' perceptions of themselves as autonomous, intelligent, creative, and intellectual. To be successful in new capitalism, workers must construct identities that affiliate with socially and economically distinctive types of knowledge. High-stakes assessments redefine not only knowledge but also the identities and subjectivities of learners and teachers who are forced to perform according to those assessments' specifications. With its heavy reliance on science, high-stakes testing, and achievement, I purport that the systems of RTI, the very language of RTI, has explicit and negative connections to the subjectivities of both teachers and students.

Subjectivities of Teacher: RTI as Enforcer

Within the systems of RTI, I-as-literacy-specialist am reduced to a conduit for "programs" that are sanctioned—a vessel through which treatment is poured. There is no need for professional decision-making, responsiveness toward students or context, or relationship building. As a clinician and data analyst, I must simply plug in assessment results to a decision-making formula that determines the need for intervention, the level of service, and the specific skill set to be addressed. Directly connected to neoliberal assumptions and priorities, within RTI complex instructional decision making is simplified to the degree that a teacher's sense of agency and freedom are overlaid with tension and anxiety of surveillance (Davies, 2003).

But I am also pigeon-holed into the role of enforcer within RTI. I enforce the system through accountability measures such as data spreadsheets, forms, protocols, and documentation. These measures play the dual role of enforcing me—ensuring I am staying within the system—but putting me in the position of enforcer. I become the gatekeeper of sanctioned knowledge who enforces assumptions around what knowledge is worth knowing, and when and how it must be mastered. As Taubman (2009) suggests, "a teacher's own knowledge, wisdom, experience, and intuition need to be replaced by

the information provided by numerical data" (p. 59). In considering this process, it is useful to return to Foucault's thinking on power, knowledge, and discourse.

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"Robin, I know you really like this stuff, but I just have so many problems with it." It doesn't surprise me to learn this teacher and others in my building believe I love RTI. I am constantly pushing them to collect evidence, make evidence-based decisions, and document, document, document. I'm grateful for the system. Evidence-driven decisions offer me a security blanket. Data justify the instructional choices I make. Data "prove" I am "doing my job." There is a sense of safety in being able to point to data should my instructional actions be called into question. Without data or the processes of RTI, how would I even know I was benefitting a student?

But RTI also ensures that I'm not bombarded with student referrals because teachers don't know what to do with a "struggling" student—or even deal with a "struggling" student. The system offers me a filter. I can stem the tide by asking for documentation of the classroom teacher's tier I efforts. I can narrow the gateway by pointing toward assessments that demonstrate expected performance. I can conversely point to assessments that demonstrate areas of instructional needs for students who are positioned as simply "lacking effort."

So it wouldn't surprise me if teachers believed I really love RTI. Maybe I'm a good liar. But to whom am I lying? Them?? Or myself??

***

As discussed above, power is "productive." Also as discussed above, one productive or produced effect of the circulation of power within discursive regimes may be normalization of appropriate or desired behavior (Foucault, 1995; Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005). Normation ties the norm to disciplinary power that governs individual bodies—to train subjects that are efficient and obedient. Normalization consists of techniques associated with disciplinary power, such as supervision of space, time,

activity, and behavior, most often accompanied by the threat of potential punishment for the intent of bringing subjects into conformity with the norm. These techniques perpetuate the power relations within sociopolitical landscapes to the point they come to be seen as simply natural and necessary. As I resist the audit measures of RTI, I cling to them in a self-monitoring justification reminiscent of Foucault's panopticon as briefly discussed in Chapter I. My own internalized surveillance ensures that my conduct meets the institutional objectives and provides assurance that I am "doing my job."

It is the uncritical acceptance of particular norms as natural and necessary that is cause for concern. Those who do not conform to expectations for growth and achievement, or for conforming to values of school knowledge, are targets for intervention toward that norm. As a mechanism for social control toward normation within the institution of school, RTI makes available subject positions that *appear* uncontestable. The whole notion of creating a system to standardize student growth and achievement within the dominant discourses is considered logical and beyond reproach. The desire to do so is altruistic. Why *wouldn't* we strive to do whatever necessary to bring students along toward standardized expectations? Further, why *wouldn't* we intervene in such a systematized manner? Why *wouldn't* we constantly assess along the way to ensure student success?

Foucault also saw power as relying on relations to advance, multiply, and branch out deeply into social networks. In this, discourses became the site of analysis of power (Foucault et al., 2008). It is within discourse that power and knowledge "play," but also where power and knowledge can be critiqued and challenged. "Discourse transmits and produces power, it reinforces it but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault, 1990, p. 101).

In my role as "interventionist," I waffle between the desire to roll over and play dead—letting the system do its thing and shrugging my shoulders at my place as a cog in the RTI wheel—and resisting. Objections exist. Some I ignore in order to sleep at night.

Some I succumb to under dominant expectations. But some I resolve by going underground in places I can quietly infiltrate. The balance is quite delicate and feels a slight bit dangerous. The place I stake is not a simple binary of acceptance or rejection. It's more of a complex dance of "this I will accept here but reject there; this I will reject there, but accept here." I find "data" points useful in conversations about students. Not because they tell "the True tale" of a student but because they force teachers and me to ask questions that deepen our understandings of a student. However, I also seek a broader definition of "data" than that which is typically allowed within the language of RTI. Following the poststructural thinking that informed the "data collection" of this very study, I allow an understanding of data that includes that which is garnered outside of language (St. Pierre, 1997) as well as interpretations of always elusive and always changing experiences, memories, events, representations, etc. (Smith & Watson, 2010). I choose to allow interpretations of my students' facial expressions, gestures, actions, speech acts, and more to be included as "data." I consciously and actively attempt to shift my language from "data" to "evidence" to signal such a shift in understanding.

Thus, I believe in telling "stories" (as long as I acknowledge their always situated, "partial" nature) about our interactions with and observations of students. I believe in looking at the evidence found in student work to verify or challenge our perceptions of students. I believe in asking why. I believe in developing action plans lest we fall into the trap of talking around and around our students without ever doing something different on their behalf. I believe in setting goals for our work with students in specific areas of concern to help us know that, despite our often immediate perceptions, change is occurring. And if it isn't, being able to ask: What should we be doing differently for the child?

***

I often find comfort in the great secret of "data-driven" decisions ... data can be interpreted. If I put this assessment together with other benchmark assessments and

samples of student work, I can paint that picture of Mattie as "deficient" that I would need to refer him. I'm just uncertain if I want to … or if that is truly in his best interest. Even as systems of RTI try to make decision-making clear-cut and a "no brainer" … it isn't.

***

Buchanan (2015) explored the identities of primary teachers within the reform and accountability culture. The researcher found that teachers stepped up or pushed back—meaning that even as teachers were critical of standardized testing, they altered their instructional practices to meet the accountability demands. But teachers also found validation for their success within those same measures they criticized. This represents imprints of how the structure of accountability shapes teachers' understandings of their work. Further, it indicates the complex interplay between professional identities, accountability demands, and teacher agency. Authoritative discourses are not only constraining, but they can shape the ways teachers measure their effectiveness. It certainly shapes the way I measure mine.

***

Following the process of RTI, when the case review revealed that Mattie exhibited low growth in the targeted intervention areas, he was referred to an initial evaluation for special education (a Planning and Placement Team meeting in this state, commonly referred to as PPT). The initial PPT meeting decided the evidence indicated an evaluation to determine if he had a learning disability was appropriate given the history of intervention and assessment results. The second PPT determined that the evaluation process indicated Mattie exhibited characteristics consistent with a reading disability (dyslexia) and thus was referred for special education services.

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Even as I look to evidence to validate my efforts with students, I also want to resist RTI's insistence on treatment, science, skills, and standardization. I resist the

presumption that you *can* fully know a child and that numbers and evidence *will* be needed to be known. And while my background in graduate education was heavily informed by psycholinguistics, which indoctrinated me with a perspective toward balanced instruction in literacy that includes knowledge of the phonological and orthographic code, I do resist the assumption that an isolated skill-based approach that ignores the relational, contextual, and situational nature of literacy is appropriate. I resist rigid protocols and decision-making processes that strip away my own professional knowledge as well as my relational knowledge of the child. I resist reliance on quantitative and reductive "data" as expected within RTI frameworks as the sole factor in decision making. I resist the notion that a learning path for one child can ever be inferred to another child. And I resist the controls that attempt to force me to value certain knowledges over others.

Positions of Students: RTI as Erasure

In considerations of subjectivities of self within RTI, I find I cannot ignore the subject positions of my students. As mentioned above, the language of RTI serves to objectify students as it positions them in singular ways. Exploring this positioning opens up the question of how discourses construct what and who is considered "other." Even though the scientific way of thinking about adolescent readers is only one way of "knowing" youth, it has become the singular story of what the profession identifies as "reading difficulty." As such, I suggest that the process of objectifying begins in attempts to define the term "struggling reader."

"Struggling readers" seems to be the preferred term among reading professionals for adolescents who, for whatever reason, are unable to keep up with the reading demands in school. As will be examined further below, in the assignation of the term "struggling," complex reading identities are reduced to assessment results, benchmarks, and standards. In reality, providing specificity to the designation is "like trying to nail

gelatin to a wall" (Alvermann, 2001, p. 679). What a struggling reader "is" takes on different characteristics depending on who is defining it and for what purpose. The term covers a vast variety of literacy difficulties, as literacies themselves cover vast territories (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). But it can also refer to students who are clinically diagnosed with reading disabilities as well as those who are unmotivated, disenchanted, or unengaged (Alvermann, 2001).

Taubman (2009) indicates that the testing culture emanating from dominant values of effectiveness with which we determine a student is "struggling" or "successful" is a form of surveillance at a distance; control from afar. It is through designations of dis/ability determined through testing regimes that schools and communities are able to make determinations about entire schooling entities as "high achieving," "low achieving," or "failing." Individual students are absorbed into a mass or group singular identity. "The normalization of testing regimes has also begun to affect how we value our experiences. If the only measure of experience is a standardized test, it becomes increasingly difficult to employ a language attentive to the nuances of meaning, to the beauty of the idiosyncratic, to the variegated hues of experience" (Taubman, 2009, p. 52). Individuals are erased.

To further complicate, Alvermann (2001) suggests that, as a culture, we are constructing struggling readers out of some adolescents who may simply not be buying into versions of school literacy. We presume literacy as a stable set of tasks by which all members must respond if they are to qualify as developmentally competent. As such, "literacy education is less about skill development and more about access to cultural resources and to understandings of how schools that promote certain normative ways of reading texts may be disabling some of the very students they are trying to help" (p. 679). Adolescents who are positioned as struggling with reading will find they are unable to compete for the privileges that come with grade-level performance on literacy-related tasks. The cultural construction of the struggling reader is all-inclusive, as it includes

curriculum publishers, educators, parents, philosophers, test designers, psychometricians, educational researchers, etc.

Once the label has been assigned, the view of the reader and response toward the reader tend to be singular and static. In other words, many kinds of readers are lumped into the category "struggling reader" and then treated in over-simplified ways. The unique characteristics of individual readers and writers are erased. RTI constructs "struggling readers" as static, deficient readers devoid of alternate ways of knowing or sophisticated maneuvering techniques. Universal screening and progress monitoring assessment data fail to reflect the multidimensionality of students (Learned, 2018).

Literacy scholars have suggested reframing the label "struggling" to other modifiers ("striving," "inexperienced," "reluctant," etc.) as the reification of struggling reader label undermines youths' literacy learning (Alvermann, 2001). However, no matter how re-named, the effects of labels persist. Once any designation has been given, it follows a student like a scarlet letter and proves difficult to cast aside (Alvermann, 2001; Learned, 2018). This is simply because a focus on remediation continues to position young people as lacking regardless of the signifier attached. The cost of remediation to students undermines rightful opportunities to participate as valued members of school communities (Learned, 2018).

In accordance with poststructural perspectives, the question that becomes pertinent is *how* we have established cultural norms that outline particular identities as either struggling or successful (Alvermann, 2001). In general, the perceived nature of the category "adolescents" contributes to norms of readers and thus reifies assumptions of students in RTI and subsequent objectifying tendencies. Sarigianides et al. (2017) and Lesko (2012) challenge the myth that "adolescence" is a stable identity category governed by naturally occurring physical development. This perception of adolescence is socially, culturally, and historically constructed within the United States. While it is outside the parameters of this analysis to follow their tracings completely, I rely on their

interpretations of common perceptions of the "teenage brain" as responsible for diminished views of adolescents. The perception that naturally occurring physiological and psychological deficits in adolescents define the age group is only one way of understanding this age category and positions students as already unable to navigate sophisticated sociopolitical landscapes. As well, this view denies the categories of multiple and interacting adolescence diversities connected to race, class, culture, gender, sexuality, religion, etc. I also suggest that this dominant myth of adolescents that permeates our society underpins the rationales and iterations of RTI. Under RTI, social factors such as race, trauma, geography, religion, family, etc. are denied relevance in the single story of "struggling reader." Therefore, RTI restricts the subjectivities and allowable subject positions of students. This leads to reifying a static understanding of adolescents and readers.

Specific to the local context of this research, understandings of "struggling reader" are constructed by a skewed standard of "normal." Standardized testing and SAT scores consistently rank the school district as high-performing, and parent expectations are often that their students perform "above average." Thus, on the universal screening and growth assessment adopted by the district, the "average" performance typically falls around the 65th to the 70th percentile. This means students who fall at the 50th percentile are below average and often perceived as "struggling" when compared to their peers. In many other contexts, the term "struggling reader" indicates a reader who performs two years below grade-level expectations. However, in this context, a struggling reader is anyone who is not *above* a local understanding of average.

Foucault argued that in modern society, mechanisms of discipline objectify and fix people in prescribed and static ways (St. Pierre, 2000). Through the processes of assignation and treating "struggling readers" through the mechanism of RTI, students are constructed as objects of intervention. RTI as a mechanism of control toward a norm fails to account for the subjectivities of both students and teachers. Thus, the effect of RTI on

the subjectivities of students is erasure. The mastery of various literacies is erased. The complex and ever-shifting identities of students are erased. The multidimensionalities of literacies are erased. The uniqueness and differences of individuals under the single narrative of "struggling readers" who are denied access to privileges are thus erased. In short, the system seems designed to erase those who operate outside normative understandings of reading. So I ask, respected reader, if you met my students in my community, would you recognize them? If you met them in their school building, would you be able to pick them out? If you met them in my classroom, would you be able to converse with them, drawing on their hopes, fears, dreams, likes, and dislikes? Would you recognize their multiple and varying literacies?

***

"Mattie, I'm thinking about the word study work we're focusing on here. I'm wondering if you are seeing how it can be useful to you?"

Chapter VI

REFRAMED RTI? MORE MOMENTS

Given the tensions of RTI as described above, but also given the legislative requirements that govern it, I wonder how RTI may be re-framed while meeting mandated obligations. How can I construct an approach that perhaps eases the tensions of working within mandated RTI? In particular, I struggle with the iteration of RTI in my own district (MTSS) that is rolled up from elementary to secondary. In the middle school context of my own building, I find that cultural, structural, and scheduling factors leave little flexibility to implement rigid structures of tiers while remaining responsive to adolescent literacy needs. In an effort to "go underground," I seek a different approach to supporting students. I am not alone in this desire.

Response to Instruction

Some have attempted to re-frame RTI to refer to Response to Instruction, or Responsive Instruction (Allington, 2007, 2009, 2011; Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Brozo, 2011; Learned, 2018; Quinn, 2012). I have found this a productive space in which to reconsider my priorities within my district's MTSS and intervention work. Response to Instruction or Responsive Instruction (following the lead of many authors, I will use the terms interchangeably) in secondary contexts seeks to reposition many assumptions underpinning traditional RTI and thus mitigate some of the negative connections to

student and teacher subjectivities. While the perspectives and principles suggested by various authors are distinct, there are overarching commonalities.

Time Provided for Reading

It can seem obvious that doing something often is a means toward improving or mastering that task. Fortunately, a broad swath of research supports the idea that quantity and quality of wide reading yield notable results in achievement and motivation to read (e.g., Allington, 2009, 2011; Brozo & Hargis, 2003). Unfortunately, this logic is often left at classroom doors in middle grades. Pressed for time to meet content and standards expectations, it can be difficult justifying time to "just read." However, Fisher and Ivey (2006) in particular argue that without significant opportunities for wide reading in place, any intervention program or RTI framework implemented is doomed to fail.

Literacy Instruction Must Occur Across a Student's Day in Content Areas

Many writers indicate that any intervention implemented at the middle and secondary level must refuse the tendency toward pull-out programs and instead focus on support that is directly tied to a student's content learning (Digisi & Fleming, 2005; Fisher & Ivey, 2006; Lenski, 2011). Allington (2011) and Brozo (2011) specifically advocate for moving away from isolated reading intervention and toward reading instruction embedded throughout a student's day. In order to accomplish this, Learned (2018) suggests that an alternative to intervention focused on isolated skill instruction may be found within a focus on disciplinary literacy. Interestingly, this is not a new idea, as Gay Ivey (1999) suggested an interdisciplinary curriculum 20 years ago. Disciplinary literacy is built on the premise that each subject domain has a discourse community with distinct ways of communicating and purports that reading as a scientist, writing as a historian, etc. are all very different types of literacy. Thus, literacy is situated as an integral part of instruction of the content. This approach does indicate that content area teachers have to share the responsibility for developing all literacies of students and

implies that instruction commonly thought of as Tier I would need to look different than it often does. Universal screening, tiered interventions, and progress monitoring must become low-stakes testing, responsive/differentiated literacy instruction, and formative assessment and student self-assessment.

***

I "pushed into" Mattie's Language Arts and Science classes to support an overall, comprehensive approach to literacy instruction where all "pieces and parts" are interconnected. I'm mindful that an intervention that focuses on decoding/encoding does not support reading and writing for "meaning"—and "meaning" has to be central in adolescent literacy. I am mindful that Mattie's entire day must support his reading development. To accomplish this, I joined Mattie's Science class with the intent of looking for opportunities to help both Mattie and his science teacher make connections between his work with me and his content area learning. I encountered push back from his teacher as we were discussing the relevance of this connection-building. One day last week, I suggested that one way to support all her students could be to draw their attention to the organizational structure the writer used as a way to help them untangle difficult passages in their textbook. As I explained how looking for comparison/contrast, chronological order, or process could be useful to students, she interrupted me, "I didn't learn this in school. Why do I have to teach it in science?"

***

Consideration of Reading Materials

Closely connected to copious opportunities for reading are considerations of what materials are available for students during intervention. For many years, writers have identified the link between *choice* in reading and *motivation* for reading (Alvermann, 2005; Fisher & Ivey, 2006; Ivey & Baker, 2004; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Lenters, 2006). Given the observed trend of decreased engagement overall observed as students move

into middle grades, the role engaging, interesting texts play for adolescent readers, especially for those who are resistant to reading or find difficulty in reading tasks, cannot be underestimated (Wozniak, 2011). Alverman (2005) specifically suggests a broadened view of texts to include the multiliteracies students engage in in their everyday life. Additionally, some writers argue that in order to support content learning and engagement, intervention materials should be closely connected to students' content areas (Allington, 2007; 2009; Brozo, 2011; Quinn, 2012). Students should not be denied access to content based on their reading level; thus, differentiated reading material is integral to successful literacy instruction across a student's day. Additionally, interventions must embrace a multiple and fluid design to adapt to meet varying students' reading needs. As students think with text in various ways, our ability to support them must be equally adaptive and responsive.

***

Ten eighth-grade students perched on stools around our "big" table. My chart paper and easel were rolled up to the edge of the table beside me. On the chart, I created a t-chart: Test-taking. One column was labeled "Hard?" and the other "Strategies?" I wanted to initiate a conversation with my students to begin our mini test-prep unit with a frank discussion on the realities of mandated, high-stakes tests. I wanted to be able to dispel myths as well as develop some test-taking tool kits. Before we began practicing strategies for managing long and boring reading passages, wandering attention, and mental and physical fatigue, I wanted to set a tone around these mandated tests that would encourage the students to manage the tests instead of letting the tests manage them.

***

Careful Assessment Choices

Unfortunately, assessments used for identification and progress monitoring within RTI frameworks often fail to reflect the multidimensionality of difficulty and proficiency, and choices of assessments may lead to discrete and decoding skill intervention in isolation. Rather, Dennis (2010) suggests a battery of assessments that can be triangulated to provide a more complex picture of student success and need. In addition to a range of initial assessments (informal reading inventory, interviews, observation, spelling inventory, writing sample), assessments that help determine a student's purposes for reading and writing can help create a picture of the complex and sophisticated processes at work as well as support student investment in the intervention (Fisher & Ivey, 2006). Fuchs and Deshler (2007) also suggest a two-step identification process wherein a one-time benchmark screen is coupled with several weeks of progress monitoring before intervention is implemented.

***

But rallying this group of eighth-graders around what I wanted is a bit like herding cats. Every question I posed or comment a student made spurred an eruption of side conversations, murmurs, and called out reactions.

Ali commented, "I don't like to request a break or do stuff like that during a test because I don't want to stand out."

***

Recognize and Value Shifting Literacy Identities

Various researchers and writers (Glenn & Ginsberg, 2016; Hall, 2010; Ivey, 1999; Learned, 2018) have noted that adolescents themselves are far more complex and sophisticated than the common structures of traditional RTI allow. In navigating the ever-shifting contexts of their school day—different classrooms, different disciplinary domains, teachers, peer groups, and texts—students call upon varying literacies and identities. The knowledges and negotiations students must bring to bear as they move

through various school contexts are complex and sophisticated (Glenn & Ginsberg, 2016; Ivey, 1999; Learned, 2018; Sarigianides et al., 2017). Under broader definitions of literacy, students demonstrate mastery of various literacies throughout their day; but students' demonstrations of difficulty also vary vastly across classroom contexts in response to complex contextual factors. As students negotiate shifting contexts in schools, navigate competing discourses, and demonstrate varying literacy skills, literacy identities are constructed through interactions with language and discourses (Learned, 2018). Often available identities as readers are predicated, and by taking up one or more of these identities (Alvermann, 2001; Hall, 2010). Unfortunately," struggling readers" are often invited to construct identities grounded in the stigma of pseudo inclusion in school as school and society demand high-level literacy for full participation. In supporting all learners, educators must trouble the single-story narratives of adolescents, struggling readers, and adolescent literacy and embrace the shifting and continually constructed literacy identities of students (Sargianides et al., 2017). Educators must also be ever mindful of what the contexts of their classrooms and interactions make available or close off to students. Hall, Burns, and Taxis Greene (2013) suggest that, in order to help create more inclusive spaces for struggling readers, teachers should pay heed to their language use, intentionally reposition struggling readers as primary knowers, make struggling a normal experience for all readers, and work to create reading partnerships between themselves and students.

***

Jessica (somewhat randomly) adds, "Intelligence has nothing to do with learning…."

Henry (even more randomly) asks, "What do you suppose Stephen Hawking's last words were?"

Jessica immediately responds, "Who's Stephen Hawking?"

Conversation derailed. Despite my preference for a "give and take" conversational type of discussion, this group seems to automatically revert to hand-raising and turn-taking. I wondered if they go there to manage each other. I laughed and quipped, "I love this class, but it's like an ADD convention."

Responses shot back to me, "Oh, I have attention issues!"; "We're looking into if I have attention issues"; Henry and Casey high-fived over Jessica's head as if to indicate, "Yeah, I wear that badge."

I immediately questioned the wisdom of my comment. "Wait, wait, wait…" I hollered. "…I'm going to get on my soapbox for a second here."

"Be quiet, everybody," Casey yells, attempting to support me.

"I want you to understand something," I continue. Many people think of attention issues as a deficit. As if something is wrong. I don't think of it that way. I think of ADD as a brain that thinks faster and in many different directions at once, so I think of it as an advantage."

***

Recognize the Role of Self-efficacy and Engagement

Finally, writers have suggested that frameworks of intervention must value students' own perceptions of their needs and interests. This principle requires that we work to reimagine instruction that acknowledges young people and helps them acknowledge themselves as thriving, literate, intelligent human beings with important contributions to make (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009). The role that purpose plays in students' inclination to read cannot be ignored (Ivey, 1999; Lenters 2006). Students are more motivated to accept reading support when they view support as helping them accomplish their own goals and desires. Further, this principle reaches toward acknowledging and valuing the trusting relationships between students and teachers shown to be crucial for struggling students (Alvermann, 2005; Learned, 2018). The

beauty of scholarly work (Lesko, 2012; Sargianides et al., 2017) that has disrupted the common presumptions of the category of "adolescent" and underpinning understandings of "adolescence" is in the support for a view of youth as having self-efficacy and agency. Thus, instruction that recognizes adolescents' ability to articulate their needs and interests and listens to those articulations as a valuable resource is responsive instruction.

***

Cat grinned at me from the other end of the table, "My doctor that helps me with my ADD says it isn't that I can't pay attention or focus but that I pay attention to too many things at once."

"I agree, Cat," I respond." I think ADD means the brain is working faster than a "normal" brain and the rest of the world just hasn't caught up."

I desperately hoped my attempt to reframe attention issues covers any damage my hastily-made comment may have caused.

"But let's get back to our conversation about strategies—what are some ways we can manage when reading passages get long and boring?" I lose them again. I really wanted to discuss visualizing and summarizing before I release them to independent reading, but brains and bodies seem itching to shift gears.

***

Literacy Instruction that Deemphasizes Discrete Skills and Decoding

Given the multiple literacies adolescents navigate across during their school day, in addition to the complex nature of adolescent readers, most authors argue against heavy decoding, phonics, or phonemic awareness intervention for older struggling readers (Dennis, 2010; Fisher & Ivey, 2006; Ivey & Baker, 2004). Ivey and Baker (2004) argue that isolated phonic or skill instruction neither helps students read better nor does it make them want to read more. Reading difficulty manifesting in the complex interaction between texts, activities, readers, and contexts cannot be solved through isolated skill

intervention. Thus, instruction that focuses primarily on discrete skills and decoding leaves huge gaps in areas where students may require support (Glenn & Ginsberg, 2016; Ivey & Baker, 2004; Learned, 2018). Unfortunately, as already discussed, published programs and packaged interventions tend to rely heavily on decoding and decontextualized skill-building, as those are the bits easily tested and measured—a necessity to be considered "scientific" and "proven." Particularly for older readers, struggles most often manifest in navigating academic vocabulary and complex content area text are not addressed with pre-packaged programs. Those programs and packages that do purport to serve all serve to erase the uniqueness and diversity of adolescent students as well as leaving many students' needs unmet. Additionally, decontextualized skill-building fails to apprentice students into the many disciplinary communities and practices students encounter in school, never mind those encountered out of school (Learned, 2018). Kylene Beers goes so far as to argue (in Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009) that education based on scripted programs and limited literacy practices amounts to "segregation by intellectual rigor, something every bit as shameful and harmful as segregation by color" (p. 3).

***

"So, Jess—tell me. What do you think is working or not working for you as a reader or writer in school?"

"It's really just social studies. I have trouble taking notes on the textbook and then using them for the test. What I put into my notes just isn't on the test or doesn't help me find the answers on the test. I guess I'm just am not finding the right stuff for my notes."

"Okay, Jess. That's very interesting and very insightful. I'd like to understand a little more about what is happening when you read. I'm going to have you read a passage out loud to me and then ask you some questions about it so I can see and hear how you're reading in action. Now, since you are at the end of 8th grade about to go into high school, the upper-middle school passage should be comfortable for you. But we could

also try the high school level passage just to see how you handle the material you will be going into next fall. What do you think? Which would you like to try?"

Jess opted for the high school level passage, but I think she did so to please me. She read the nonfiction piece on the events surrounding the end of World War I. I could tell she was working at the piece, utilizing all the tools she had to "get it." As we discussed the passage, it was clear she had navigated it sufficiently to pull the main points and key ideas from the text. A sophisticated understanding of some of the nuances of the ideas presented eluded her. But the understanding she demonstrated qualified the level of the text as at her instructional level.

"Jess, this is exciting! While I could tell it was tough for you, you were able to successfully manage this high school level piece."

Jess beamed.

***

In short, as it emphasizes instruction over intervention, Responsive Instruction attempts to shift the perspective from deficit, deficiency, or handicap toward strengths, effort, and potential when thinking about students. I elaborate on the overlapping characteristics in the interest of then pulling the discursive assumptions through to again consider the subjectivities and available subject positions of teachers and students as I attempt to practice Responsive Instruction within moments of intervention work.

Assumptions of Language Left Intact within Response to Instruction

While I recognize reframing toward Response to Instruction as navigating away from many of the troubling aspects of Traditional RTI—and as much as it appeals to me as a "safe" iteration of mandated support—a close reading of the language in the principles and my own attempts to adopt them into my practices show how many key assumptions and their inherent neoliberal foundations are left unchallenged. These

assumptions continue to connect to the subjectivities of myself and my students in complex, and often subtle, ways. Specifically, here I explore the dominating narrative of the deficit view of students and the term “struggling reader,” the stability of the locus of control remaining with myself as teacher/interventionist, as well as some underlying assumptions within the language of disciplinary literacy.

The “Struggling Reader”

A key principle of Responsive Instruction is to recognize the shifting identities that students enact across their school day with the express purpose of moving from a deficit, deficiency, and handicap perspective toward a perspective of strength, effort, and potential. However, the stable category of “struggling reader” is so ingrained in my own vernacular and ways of doing school that I find iterations difficult to unseat—in the conception of Responsive Instruction itself as well as in my practices.

One tricky spot within my attempts toward Responsive Instruction lies in the distinction between literacy *support* for remediation across a student’s day and literacy *instruction* across the school day. The underlying assumption of literacy *support* is that a student *will* struggle in consistent ways within the varying literacies they encounter in school. Conversely, literacy *instruction* across the day indicates a shift toward recognizing various and broadly defined literacies consistent with sociocultural understandings of literacy. Sociocultural views of literacy understand “literacy” as much broader than just encoding and decoding written text. Literacy includes complex acts of negotiating meaning with a wide range of visual, auditory, and inscribed text. These negotiations and the development of such practices are culturally and socially situated.

Thus, literacy is a social practice. The distinction then between push in for *support* and push in for *instruction* is a subtle, but crucial one. “Pushing in” is the practice of going into a student’s content area class as opposed to “pulling out,” where the student comes to the interventionist. Pushing in for *support* fails to recognize the differences

between “one literacy” focused on skill and decoding and multiple literacies. When pushing in, is my intent to connect isolated skill work (from the O-G program) with Mattie’s content area work? If so, then I also have to question if this serves to continue to position Mattie as deficient by presuming his “failures” will follow him wherever he goes. I also have to question whether pushing in with this intent attempts to force connections between skill work and content area work that are not relevant or meaningful to him. As much as I would love to unquestioningly believe pushing in for *support* is “best practice,” I cannot fail to leave it as beyond reproach.

Another troubling spot within Responsive Instruction that does not dislodge deeply held perceptions of “struggling reader” is the call for content area material to be *at a student’s reading level* across their day (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Brozo, 2011). The intent of this practice is honorable as it is argued that readers should not be denied access to content area information because they are unable to manage the difficulty of the text provided. Thus, adolescents who struggle with reading will find they are unable to compete for the privileges that come with grade-level performance. Additionally, the presumption is that students have the potential to reach grade-level placement (as typically determined through a standardized or universal screening assessment) if they receive appropriate instruction from a school culture that takes developmental characteristics into account (Alvermann, 2001). However, I find notions of *reading level* problematic when considered from my social constructivist philosophical roots.

The underlying and rather subtle assumptions here are that (1) a grade-level/developmental level can be accurately ¨determined; and (2) a student who ¨reads below grade level¨ is locked into that particular iteration of ¨reading level¨ throughout their day. Through poststructural framings of discourse, understandings of “reading level” can be recognized as a tool for regulating a regime of truth around definitions of “literate” (Kontovourki, 2012). Further, my understandings of poststructural theorizing of discourse and knowledge lead me to understand the negotiation of meaning to be far

more complex than can be accounted for with controlled vocabulary and syntactic structure found within "leveled text."

What is perhaps forgotten in this directive is the notion of multiplicity and multidimensionality of reading ability. If students negotiate shifting identities across literacy domains, they will bring varying degrees of prior knowledge, vocabulary, and efficacy of content to those varying contexts they encounter. Because of the multiple literacies students have to call upon, they may demonstrate difficulty navigating text within one context and not another. Sarigianides et al. (2017) maintain that expecting students who struggle with one literacy to have difficulty with all literacies is a pervasive myth. Rather, students may exhibit varying competencies in varying discourse communities. Thus, the practice of leveling students´ reading material across their day serves to maintain the singular, stable category of ¨struggling reader¨ within Responsive Instruction. I actively reject this particular practice. But I am also aware there are other practices, language, or ways of thinking about students that perhaps are subtly connected to assumptions of the "struggling reader."

I wonder at my reliance on assessments and evidence—even my revision of evidence as discussed above—to frame my understanding of students and make subsequent instructional decisions. The language of testing found in traditional RTI is not only difficult to escape, it is enticing. I explicitly rely on assessments to provide me a language with which to discuss students with other teachers. I rely on my interpretations of evidence to help me make instructional decisions and set goals for and with students. There is a strange sense of comfort and surety in this language. While I seek to discuss students in more complex ways that consider their values, goals, and strengths instead of within a categorical summation, I struggle to rework my own reliance on neoliberal expectations and values so deeply embedded in my own vernacular. Even within a reframed Response to Instruction perspective, I return to *district benchmark assessments* to help me determine the student is *below his peers.* I make instructional decisions based

on demonstrated growth in *progress monitoring measures*. While I must consider this language use through the lens of what is mandated—returning to my original question of what I can reject and what I must operate within—I must also consider through the lens of how this language continues contributing to a perspective of the student framed by deficit, deficiency, and handicap.

I wonder how my own reliance on the language of testing also reifies assumptions of adolescent literacy identities as singular, static, and stable (Sarigianides et al., 2017). While I reject the ways the designation of a reading level locks students into stable identity categories, have I not produced the same effect? The very existence of a "Reading Immersion" class signals a "deficiency" that warrants "remediation." Even as the intention behind the creation of Reading Immersion was to break apart the singularity of skill-based intervention, do I not use the terms "reluctant," "disengaged," or "struggling" when discussing members of the class? I wonder if I know another language. How can I use that to mitigate my assumptions and see students through strengths, effort, and potential?

Locus of Control

Responsive Instruction also specifically calls for the recognition of students as a resource in their own learning. The intent of Responsive Instruction is to *respond* to students: their interests, their values, their priorities, their goals. I maintain that neoliberal priorities and dominant discourses of surveillance of youth make this extremely difficult to accomplish. Within neoliberal ideology, definitions of knowledge have progressed from student/teacher to school, to district, to state, to federal control (Gorlewski, 2011). With that upward push of what knowledge counts, we see a push down of learning priorities: from government-regulated standards to standardized testing, to curriculum expectations to what the teacher will teach and what the student will learn. Even within Responsive Instruction, the control of the learning context and learning pathways belongs

in places other than with the student. The very words *Responsive Instruction* indicate an assumption that learning is happening as a direct result of instruction. Student failure to learn then indicates that a change in instruction is needed.

Connected to the remnants of neoliberal priorities, the threads of discourses of surveillance remain persistence as the locus of control remains teacher-centric in Responsive Instruction. I return to Sarigianides et al. (2017) as well as Lesko (2012) for their discussion of dominant perceptions of youth. Because, they argue, adolescents are perceived to be biologically deficient, the negative meaning mapped onto their bodies is relied upon as a rationale for surveillance as protection against themselves. Youth are not capable of considering long-term consequences; youth are at the mercy of raging hormones; youth are preternaturally irresponsible and impulsive. Further, adolescents are at the mercy of the socially constructed assumption that they do not have the biological reasoning power to exercise critical resistance and agency. Coupled with the neoliberal logic that trust is unrealistic, surveillance for monitoring and producing appropriate behaviors (or learning in this case) is perceived as necessary (Davies, 2003, 2004; Foucault, 1995). This leaves adolescents at the center of a double indemnity—not only are they ruled by discourses that unabashedly expect surveillance, they are within a category of youth that requires even more surveillance. Thus, the emphasis on teacher action inherent in Responsive Instruction reveals the underlying and unchallenged assumptions that control of learning remains with the teacher.

In my work with Mattie, Jess, and others, my language leaves untroubled where the control is: "*I* evaluated his growth..."; "*I* wanted to initiate a conversation..."; "*I* wanted her to see...." The responsibility for learning—and the decision-making around what is learned, when, and how—rests with me as *I* respond to those mandates that are pushed down on me from the district, legislation, etc. While I pay attention to my students' emotions and affect, I fail to honor them. Thus, my response to my students is constricted. I respond to their identities as "school-literate"—or rather, "not quite school-

literate." I struggle to truly respond to the spaces students may attempt to open to be another version of themselves through their resistance, response, or reaction to our work. In this way, I struggle to respond to *them.*

Disciplinary Literacy—Almost, but Not Quite

A focus on disciplinary literacy, with its emphasis on discourse communities and multiple literacies, does move the conversation away from many neoliberal tenets that rule traditional RTI. However, leaning into Taubman (2009), Gorwleski (2011), Davies (2003, 2005), and others, I contend that dominant ideologies are so pervasive that neoliberal assumptions continue to trace through this approach to literacy support. For one, disciplinary literacy is ruled by standards. As discussed above, the CCSS provides support for a disciplinary literacy approach. In turn, the literacies that various disciplines and domains are constrained to are limited to those allowable within the CCSS. For example, the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) have been adopted in this district. The NGSS writers explicitly connect to the CCSS and identified key literacy connections to the specific content demands outlined in NGSS (Lee, 2017; NGSS, Appendix M, 2013). *What* teachers teach within each discipline is still prescribed within very narrow parameters (Apple, 2011). Thus, while disciplinary literacy may move literacy instruction beyond the ELA classroom, it still does not leave room for new literacies (Gee, 2004; Jenkins, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) or other ways of knowing and being literate (Anzaldua, 1987; Bloome & Encisco, 2006; Campano, 2007; Dyson, 1997; Heath & Mangiola, 1991; Kliewer, 2008; Lewis, 2001; Seiter, 2005; Wheeler et al., 2004).

For Mattie, his out-of-school literacy proficiencies related to athletics and sports become what Perry (2006) refers to as hidden literacies. Hidden literacies are those that may not be recognized, valued, or utilized in school but represent a large portion of the knowledge a student brings to school. "To ignore these multiple literacies is to ignore a

major part of the child, what he values, and what he knows" (p. 330). Mattie has few opportunities in our literacy work together to utilize his knowledge of popular culture and sports because, even though I recognize this aspect of his multiple literacies, I have not intentionally utilized it or invited him to tap those hidden literacies. It's no wonder he struggles to see the relevance of the support I put before him.

Another assumption within disciplinary literacy is that content area teachers are prepared, or even willing, to initiate students into disciplinary discourse communities. Disciplinary literacy requires literacy instruction to occur across content areas, yet under common middle school organizational structures, content area teachers tend to operate in silos of departmentalization. Content area teachers who specialize in biology, geography, or geometry "can be identified as highly qualified according to NCLB standards while lacking any meaningful training in reading and writing instruction" (Brozo, 2011, p. 40). Additionally, teachers who are highly knowledgeable in their field of study may have inferred the literacies inherent in their domain without realizing it. Thus, they may not realize that the students whom they are instructing may not also be inferring those literacies. As Mattie's science teacher lamented to me, "I didn't learn this in school, so why do I have to teach it?" She was struggling to recognize her own proficiencies within the domain of science as *a* "literacy." Consequently, she was not recognizing her students' need to develop that same proficiency.

Disciplinary literacy requires content teachers to absorb responsibility for explicitly teaching domain-specific skills, but increasing pressure to ensure student achievement within content areas from accountability and audit culture leaves little room for "remediation." The irony here is that curricular norms founded in a testing craze steadily squeeze out not only out-of-school literacies or hidden literacies, but those same norms can also squeeze out in-school literacies connected to content areas. The effect is a further reduction of curriculum toward preferential knowledge. Given these pressures, it

can be very challenging to overcome the resistance of secondary teachers to incorporate Responsive Literacy practices that emphasize disciplinary literacy into instruction.

Subjectivities of Teacher: Still an Enforcer

I remain an enforcer within Responsive Instruction. Instead of enforcing a prescribed intervention program, singular definitions of "literacy," or a system of intervention, I continue to enforce curriculum standards through the expectations of disciplinary literacy. As I consider the issues of surveillance discussed above, I cannot ignore the tight connections between disciplinary literacy and the CCSS. I retain the subject position of teacher who enforces assumptions around what knowledge is worth knowing, and when and how it must be mastered, and in-school literacies. While perhaps no longer simply a conduit through which intervention programs are delivered to students, I am a different kind of enforcer. For Mattie, I enforce standards, privileged in-school literacy … even down to the types of skills and knowledge valued within in-school literacy (orthographies, discrete skills, etc.).

I also remain an enforcer of the system of MTSS in this building. In this role, I cannot get away from universal screening, tiered intervention, and progress monitoring. I am expected to organize and run data meetings with teaching teams. I am expected to lead teaching teams through the MTSS process as outlined in district documents. I am expected to design, monitor, and administer interventions with students. I am expected to monitor assessment data building-wide and act as "assessment coordinator."

With a focus on disciplinary literacy, Responsive Instruction heightens the coaching responsibility of the role and thus adds another enforcing position. From this perspective, instead of tackling students' reading and writing growth within my own small space of their day, I must work with content area teachers to develop instruction to support literacy within their content. School culture issues related to teacher identity and

efficacy may develop with pushing teachers into instructional roles they are not comfortable with. In the role of Literacy Specialist, the work to coach teachers into disciplinary literacy does fall to me. Positioned as an enforcer even within Responsive Instruction, it truly feels as if I can never truly break free of the threads that tie every aspect of my work to dominant discursive assumptions that continue to overlay my sense of freedom with tension and anxiety as Davies suggested (2003). How can I coach teachers who feel similarly to Mattie's science teacher and wonder, "Why do I have to teach this?" If I value a collaborative approach to coaching, how can I coach into teachers' desires, interests, and needs as they perceive them, not as an accountability measure?

I return to concerns of subjectivities. In particular, I want to consider subjectivities as re/constructed with/in language in socially specific ways. I consider that it is language that enables us to think, speak, and give meaning to the world around us. But language is unstable and unreliable (Britzman, 1994). As discussed in Chapter III, Weedon (1997) explains that the constitutive and discursive nature of subject positions indicates they are always in progress and open to challenge as the discourses within which we move dictate the availability of certain subject positions and not others. Relying on Althusser, Weedon (1997) illustrates poststructuralism's double move wherein the subject exhibits agency as s/he constructs "the self" by taking up available discourses and cultural practices. At the same time, the subject is subjected by or forced into subjectivity by those same discourses and practices.

As such, people are capable of exercising choice in relation to discursive practices, even as they are constituted by those same discourses (Butler, 1992; Davies & Harré, 1990; Foucault, 1990). Since subjects most often take up or resist subject positions that are already available in discursive formations, and are obligated to work with/in those positions, individual responses to available subject positions may be an acceptance, a rejection, or resistance with compliance—or any combination therein and beyond. Who

one "is" is always an open question with a shifting answer depending on the positions made available within discursive practices. With a decentered subject, the possibility of ascribing alternative meaning to our experiences exists.

As Foucault (1990) argues for a concept of power that enables and/or constrains the negotiation of positions, the notion of "resistance" automatically implies "agency." Because he considers power as relational, it is not possessed. Rather, it exists in relation and is at play. While disciplinary power works invisibly to regulate, relational power is complex, unbalanced, and constantly shifting. Foucault is careful to critique the idea of power as a possession and the concomitant belief that those who possess power intentionally control and wield that power over subjects with no agency. Foucault admonishes us not just to see power as repressing or excluding. He rethinks power as a complex relational dynamic operating and being "exercised" in many directions simultaneously within discourse as well as within and about the subjects of those discourses. "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1990, p. 93). The force relations that constitute power within a discourse are not orderly or tidy. They are multiple, unequal, local, and unstable (Foucault, 1980).

Foucault also indicates that in power relations, there is always the possibility of resistance. As Foucault (1990) conceives power/resistance/freedom as deeply intertwined, one cannot exist without the other. For power relations to come into play, there must be freedom on both sides. Freedom is exercised through resistance. If one can never be outside power relations, resistance is always possible and power relations shift with resistance (St. Pierre, 2000). Just as there are multiplicities of power relations, there are multiplicities of resistances. Resistance is distributed in irregular fashion as subjects revolt within everyday, concrete practices through an endless questioning of experiences. And yet in rebelling against those ways, we too are already defined, categorized, and classified in certain, often dominate ways, and not others. Resistance is then local,

unpredictable, and constant (Foucault, 1990). And in rebelling against those ways we are already defined and categorized and classified, freedom is exercised. St. Pierre (2000) argues, “We have the ability to analyze, contest, and change practices that are being used to construct ourselves and the world, as well as the practices we ourselves are using” (p. 493).

Thus, it is useful to think about the relational and disciplinary power that enables or constrains subjectivities within Response to Instruction. I can actively resist the subject positions made available to me within both RTI and a Responsive Instruction approach. I don’t have control over the system that dictates *what* I do, but I do have control over *how* I engage those expectations. I can perhaps mitigate the tensions of being “driven by data” through my own approach to conversations about universal screening and mandated assessments. I can perhaps choose to address these “data” as low-stakes and refuse their role in key-holing students into prescribed labels of “proficient,” “struggling,” etc. I can perhaps choose to focus on the assessment data as one small piece of what is known about a student. I can perhaps rely on multiple pieces of evidence, including work samples, attitudes, classroom observations, conversations with students, to help me push against the boundaries of a label through the language I use with students and teachers when discussing data. I can perhaps frame them as one of many indicators of growth as well as support students’ ownership of the “results” of such assessments. By partnering with students to make choices of areas they want to work together, I can seek to push back on a label that only serves to ensure that intervention will be done *to* them instead of *with* them.

Positions of Student: Continued Erasure

Responsive Instruction intentionally seeks to recognize the student as a resource as well as recognize students’ multiple literacies and capabilities. As traditional RTI serves

to objectify students through the singular story of a struggling reader, Responsive Instruction attempts to actively work the multiplicity of identities. This very well-meaning goal is, I argue above, thwarted by the pervasive and dominant views of reading, readers, and adolescents that thread their way through U.S. education structures, practices, and expectations. The language of science, skill, and standardization is so pervasive that there are no other words with which to speak students. In one sense, this language is so dominant as to be invisible, as there seems no other logical language available. Because Responsive Instruction has not—and perhaps cannot—fully wrested itself away from deficit/deficient views of students, there are subsequent lingering effects on student subjectivities that continue to reify the singular story of "struggling reader" and continue to objectify students.

Despite the failure of Responsive Instruction to fully recognize the multiplicity of student reading identities, I do want to acknowledge that which is opened. Through the emphasis on disciplinary literacy, Responsive Instruction does move toward recognizing the varying *in-school* literacies that may be navigated across a student's day. In attempting to see the various subject and domain-specific literacies students utilize *in* school, I do move a step away from the rigid and stable categorization of readers as proficient, struggling, failing, etc. I begin to understand that students may exhibit comfort in utilizing the literacies in one domain over another—thus, students begin to shed some of the overwhelming baggage of being labeled as "struggling." However, as *out-of-school* literacies are still left on the other side of school walls, students are still constructed as limited and "less than."

I see this complexity play out for Mattie and Jess. Learned (2018) suggests that dismantling deficit labels requires shifting attention away from the labels themselves to a focus on how the labels are constructed and disrupted through actors participating in classroom contexts—as has been attempted here. Mattie is constructed as a struggling reader in this context simply because he isn't buying into the school versions of literacy I

am pushing on him. Mattie doesn't see the need for the perceived holes in his orthographic understanding to be filled. The values of the district, demonstrated in a high sensitivity to dyslexia and a push for the Orton-Gillingham approach, overemphasize orthographic skills. Jess's struggles in Social Studies should not necessarily translate to an overall identification of "struggling reader" … but they do! Jess appears to have accepted the assignation "struggling reader." But because students can resist or take up positions and enact identities, Mattie and Jess can discursively re/construct themselves in relation to others (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Chapter VII

MY AUNT SAYS GRAPHIC NOVELS AREN'T REAL BOOKS

My sixth grade students and I each perched on stools around two lab tables shoved together. My best efforts to transform this science classroom into a literacy room could not erase permanent reminders of the original intent of the room. Several sinks interrupt long, black counters running along both sides of the room. A white sanitizing cabinet still hangs on the wall by the door. Long, and rather tall, lab tables that can only really be sat at comfortably with a tall lab stool standing sentry adjacent to each sink. And, my favorite, the large, orange shower head and eyewash station greet guests as they enter the room. I did my best to reclaim or camouflage these various science lab elements. I shoved lab tables together and configured them in clusters in the center of the room. I brought in bookshelves, comfortable seating, and lots and lots of books. I even hung a plastic skeleton from the shower and surrounded him by a suspended shower curtain, referring to him as our "skeleton in the shower, Dr. McCoy." Dr. McCoy recommends books, gives free hugs, and is a favorite figure in the room. I feel rather proud of the transformation. But we still sit on tall lab stools around those high, black tables.

A Shared Practice

Given the freedom to design the content as well as the space of my Reading Immersion class as I saw fit, I consulted Allington (2009), who correlated the amount of time spent reading independently with reading growth. Again, in 2011, Allington

purports that what struggling readers need most is a volume of text they not only *can* read but *want* to read. Engaged practice matters. The overarching purpose of this course thus is “to strengthen access to text in order to increase engagement and joy in reading.” I even have that written on a banner on the classroom wall. By “access,” I am referring to texts students *want* to read, that are relevant to their lived experiences, as well as texts that take them outside of their own worlds. But “access” also refers to habits and practices that support students’ varying meaning-making efforts.

Building on Allington’s thinking in his book, *Readicide*, Gallagher (2009) presents the argument that the very instruction we use to teach reading at the secondary levels denies students authentic experiences with reading that are foundational to growth. “We give struggling students a treatment that does not work, and worse, a treatment that turns them off to reading.” (p. 23). Operating from the position that my students needed authentic and engaging reading in school, I intentionally designed the Reading Immersion course as a space for prolonged, engaged, independent reading. My role, following Nancie Atwell’s lead (1998, 2007) is to act as mentor, mediator, and model for my students. I seek to surround them with lots of high-interest books, lots of reading choices, lots of time for reading, and lots of opportunities to share the reading experience together.

Sitting around those high black tables, seven sixth grade students and I came together toward the end of a particular class period to hear Sloane share a Book Talk. The implementation of Book Talks began as a means to share reading experiences. While our class time is primarily devoted to independent reading, when any student finishes a book she/he/they really love, we celebrated by allowing that student to share with us a quick summary, the major themes, as well as what is loved or why the book is recommended. We call this three- to five-minute sharing of the book a “Book Talk.” The title of that book also, then, goes up on our ever-growing bulletin board of “Books we Love.” I first encountered the practice of a Book Talk in the work of my reading middle grade and secondary teacher mentors—Nancie Atwell (1998, 2007), Donalyn Miller (2010), and

Penny Kittle (2013). Explaining that growth as a reader must involve not only deep engagement with text, but also engagement with other readers, these mentors suggest ways to celebrate books, reading successes, and fellow readers through routines such as book talks, making favorite books visible, and conferring with readers individually.

Sloane liked to give book talks. Toward the end of the school year, she asked almost every day if she could share her most recent read with us. Sometimes, even, she wanted to share a book she had read some time ago. For Sloane, Book Talks were a big deal.

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Robin: *Thank you, Sloane, for that book talk on Smile.*[1] *Any thoughts, questions, or comments for Sloane?*

Amy: *I read that book! It's really good.*

Sloane: *Yeah, my aunt says graphic novels aren't real books, but I like them.*

Katie: *I read all three of those books. They're really good.*

Who Counts?

In the pause of this snippet of conversation, what plays through my mind is a scene I did not witness but that was reported to me. Sloane was walking through the hallway carrying a book she had chosen for independent reading. As she passed an English teacher in the hallway, the teacher noticed the book in Sloane's hands: *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. Believing the book to be too mature for Sloane and concerned with the choice, the teacher inquired, "Are you reading that?" To which Sloane replied, "I started it, but now I'm reading something else."

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[1]Telgemeier, R. (2014). *Smile*. Scholastic.

“Oh. Ok,” the teacher replied. “I was thinking that book might be too old for you.” As Sloane continued in the hallway, a second teacher who had witnessed the exchange commented to the first teacher, “Don’t worry, she (referring to Sloane) doesn’t really read.”

Interlude: Bad Memory

I remembered something yesterday.

Not a good memory.

Years and years ago, when teaching first grade, I said to a six-year-old child who wanted to read aloud to the class…”But you can’t read.” Those words slipped right out of my mouth before I could tighten my lips. I regretted them so much I blocked out saying them. I denied that I could be so thoughtless to a child. The memory of those words hauntingly comes back as I write this piece about Sloane. The shock I feel at another teacher’s condemnation of a child is tempered by my own guilt. I’ve also been careless with my words. I am not above reproach. You who are without sin, cast the first stone.

***

As these exchanges play back in my mind, I consider all those multiple, competing, and overlapping discourses within the broad arenas of discourses of literacy as they (differently) position Sloane’s status as a reader. According to *school discourses* in this context, Sloane is a non-reader. Curriculum guidelines expect sixth grade students to read eight to ten full-length independently chosen novels, two whole class (core) novels, and at least two book club titles each year. Whole class novels, book club titles are pre-determined, and independent texts are chosen from within genre or theme guidelines by a curriculum team made up of literacy teachers (including myself), English department leaders, and district administrators. From within “curriculum statements,” a reader is someone who reads assigned texts. A reader is someone who finishes books she

begins. A reader is someone who reads “grade-level text.” A reader is someone who reads sanctioned, novel-length, popular titles. Sloane was perceived as not meeting these expectations. The MTSS documentation in this district states, “Any student who demonstrates below expected performance” is a candidate for intervening actions to usher her or him into status of reader. The goal of MTSS is to bring “into the norm.” Thus, “who gets to be a reader” in this context are those who fit a narrow, and often assumed, definition connected to parameters established by pre-determined and supposedly agreed-upon-by-all curriculum, assessments, and standards.

The concept of the discursive field via Foucault (1980, 1990) allows us to connect relationships among language, social institutions, knowledge, truth, and power. Social structures and processes organized through institutions and practices are located in and structured by discursive fields. Meanings are created within discursive fields. Each consists of complex as well as competing ways to give differing meanings to the world. Some of these discursive fields reinforce already supposedly established identities and subjectivities of Sloane, her peers, and myself. These discourses also conflict and constrain knowledge productions, dissent, and difference as well as function too as the exercising of power.

According to Foucault (1990), statements are articulations that function with constitutive effects such as speaking into existence a recognizable object of discourse. Statements at work within this event include those of the curriculum expectations, those of MTSS standards and processes, spoken statements of the teachers, as well as statements from Sloane’s family. Positioning Sloane as not meeting these expectations of “being a reader” is explicitly stated by the teachers in the above exchange. First, the teacher’s question of the appropriateness of Sloane’s book choice that initiated the exchange implicitly signifies that Sloane is not capable of making appropriate choices for herself; the book she carried was “too mature” for her. Next, the second teacher indicates that by making the choices for herself from a wide variety of books, including graphic

novels as well as YA books, over assigned classroom texts, Sloane did not concede to the norm. Additionally, Sloane's aunt's statement, "graphic novels aren't real books," implies that Sloane does not make appropriate reading choices. This implication questions her status as an appropriate reader. Positioning her this way is also implicitly supported by her presence in the reading immersion class—a class designed to support students' engagement, stamina, and fluency. It was thus perceived that Sloane needed guidance to make book choices.

Julie Gorlewski (2011) traces the ways neoliberal ideology has altered our processes and practices of schooling, education, literacy, and language. Predominantly, only that which can be measured is important. This, then, leads to narrow parameters of justified core knowledge. What is considered "reading" and who is designated "a reader" are constrained. Neoliberalism undermines students' perceptions of themselves as autonomous, intelligent, creative, and intellectual. The identities that are available for assignation within dominant discourses ruled by neoliberal ideology are those that conform to identities that affiliate with standardized and measurable knowledge. Thus, the very definition of being a reader—who can be a reader and what counts as reading—is limited. Within the discursive field of literacy education in the U.S., dominated in particular by neoliberal thinking that most often only values measurable-only evidence of academic progress and "success," the articulations that "She doesn't read," the type of book Sloane preferred was not real reading, and Sloane's required attendance in the reading immersion class—a space intended for intervention toward the norm—all speak toward the knowledges and practices through which she must be disciplined (Graham, 2005).

While examining ways words and phrases that we hear in classrooms position students, Peter Johnston (in *Choice Words*, 2004) claims, "The language that teachers (and their students) use in classrooms is a big deal" (p. 10). Words and phrases exert power over classroom conversations, "and thus over students' literate and intellectual

development" (p. 10). From poststructural perspectives on language, words used in classrooms are constitutive, not representational; words work to create identities and subjectivities (Weedon, 1997). Since language is where forms of social organization and consequences are defined and contested, meaning is constructed within dominant discourses that frame, affect, and help to construct certain cultural and social practices and not others.

Thus, the reading acts Sloane engages in are deemed unjustified within the family of statements that define readers—the statements that constitute Sloane as a recognizable object: a non-reader, reluctant reader, or ineffectual reader compete with discourses that produce her. The practices of MTSS, the practices of the English Language curriculum, the instruction in those classrooms produce Sloane through the words "disengaged reader" or "non-reader" because of her book choices. The effect of these various statements is that Sloane was a student who had been branded reluctant, and consequently, was a struggling student because of her reading habits that did not fit the sanctioned expectations of who a typical middle-grade reader is.

These statements about Sloane, as well as her positioning as a non-reader, are assumptions that can be contested. In our literacy space, Sloane was viewed as a prolific reader and discusser of books. As mentioned above, she was eager to offer "Book Talks" to her classmates. Her Book Talks demonstrated plot, character, and theme, but they also demonstrated an authentic and energetic engagement with the text. To her peers in this space, she was a leader in our literate community. Sloane herself speaks against her assigned status as a non-reader as she states, "…but I like them," in an effort to dismiss her aunt's disapproval of her text choices. She repeats the statement her aunt made to us, as she seeks to open a space where the implicit assumption of that statement would not be supported, In our classroom, I make graphic novels available in abundance; I suggested them to Sloane/and other students; Sloane witnessed others reading them. Sloane was speaking her own subjectivity, in part, because she also was supported by my suggestions

and approval as "the one in charge," regarding her status as a reader. Amy speaks into the space Sloane opens when she affirms Sloane's choice of book, as well as her review. Katelyn also confirms the choice of this book and subsequent titles in the series as "very good."

Literacy educators often refer to "self-efficacy" when considering the development of a sense of self as a reader. Relying on Enlightenment notions of "self," psychologist Albert Bandura (1997, 2006) defined *self-efficacy* as the belief in one's own ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task (Johnston, 2004). The confidence that one can perform successfully in a particular domain and the willingness to engage and persist when confronted with challenges are two sides of self-efficacy. A higher self-efficacy can relate to establishing higher expectations for oneself as well as trying more effective learning strategies (Bruning, Dempsey, Kauffman, McKim, & Zumbrunn, 2013).

For Sloane, self-efficacy cannot be untangled from her subjectivity. That is to say that her sense of herself as a reader, her unconscious thoughts and ever-changing identities as a reader cannot be disconnected from that which is allowable within the discourses in which she operates as a family member, as a student, as a member of our classroom community. Her selves as reader in relation to the worlds in which she moves are constructed in the language—what is spoken and unspoken—within those prevalent schooling and literacy discourses. In this conversation, we see a glimpse of the competing nature of those discourses at play in Sloane's own senses of her subjectivity as literate. In this moment, the meanings that are available not only to her but also to large portions of our teaching staff as well as to my own assumptions, biases, and commitments as literacy specialist are grounded in the discursive fields of Sloane's family expectations, school expectations, and our classroom expectations—which all swirl in variously contradictory and overlapping ways.

What Counts as Reading?

Our conversation continued:

Robin: *Wait a minute, I have a question for you guys. Sloane said her aunt thinks graphic novels aren't real books. What do you guys think about that?*

Collective: No! That's not true.

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The expectations of discourses originating from both Sloane's family and her school discount meaning-making practices that she actively and adeptly engages in. Sloane's preference for graphic novels is discounted as "not real reading" because the texts did not count as "real reading material." In Sloane's report of her aunt's position, I hear dominant understandings of "real text" or text worthy of validation. Within traditional literacies, canonical texts are prized. Texts that are considered "classics," texts that parents can remember reading in their school years, texts that are referenced in popular media are seen as timeless works that induct students into a literate society. Canonical texts are also at the center of debates in educational communities as they are also seen to purport a normative myth—a master narrative (via Lyotard, 1984)—that ignores diverse voices and experiences. The implied message in Sloane's aunt's statement is: Sloane's choices for texts outside the canon indicate her chosen material as unsanctioned.

However, Monnin (2013) describes the ways graphic texts involve a unique vocabulary and anatomy compared to traditional print-based literature that often is complex and demands sophisticated navigation. Growing in popularity among students and increasingly gaining acceptance among educators as not only valuable for recreational reading but also valuable for classroom-related reading and instruction, both as a subject-area resource and as an instructional strategy, graphic novels are gradually

becoming recognized in ways beyond "comics" (Tomasevich, 2013). Definitions of meaning-making that incorporate non-text open up literacy to allow the meaning-making practices required to read graphic novels to count as "literacy" and these types of texts to be "literature." The position that graphic novels are acceptable forms of literature that require complex acts of reading repositions Sloane as a sanctioned reader engaging sanctioned text.

Other discourses are wielded to open spaces for dissent—spaces that are utilized to contest those supposedly "ideal" identities and subjectivities. For Sloane, these are the school structures as well as implicit and explicit expectations that reinforce the statements about her. Donalyn Miller (2010), in *The Book Whisperer*, identifies and rebrands middle-grade readers who are typically categorized as struggling or reluctant readers. She notes three trends in the readers in her classrooms: developing readers, dormant readers, or underground readers. Miller's attempts to rebrand reflect a focus on moving beyond categorizing students according to school performance or standardized reading test performance. I applaud Miller's efforts to see her students from a positive, what CAN they do, stance. I attempt to adopt a similar focus with my students by trying to refuse the terms "struggling" and "reluctant" in my own language about students, even as I find that refusal exceedingly difficult to enact.

In my response to Sloane, I actively take up the space that she opens. I also seek to reposition her status as a reader. Leaning into both Miller (2010) and Gallagher (2009), I know I can exercise a power in my position as the "reading teacher" (a role of authority and expertise). I can affirm or negate Sloane's status as a reader in ways that will hinder or support her subjectivities. Thus, the act of "empowering" is an exercise of power. But my exercise of power is not pure … in asking students to "define books," we open some understandings of reading texts but close off others.

Pushing Back

Robin: *Ok, ok, one at a time. What makes something a "real" book?*

Gustin: *Well, they have words just like other books, they have a story and characters just like other books. They have a cover and title and author. So I think they are real books.*

Robin: *Ok, so let's think about what characteristics do "books" have?*

Katie: *Author, plot, characters, covers, words, pictures, stories, theme or message…*

Robin: *So books tell stories, with plots, characters, conflicts…*

Collective: Yeah.

Robin: *And do graphic novels have all those things?*

Collective: Yeah

Niko: *They just have pictures and words instead of just the pictures.*

I wonder, in seeking to open space for pushing back on assumptions, what other spaces or challenges am I closing off? I also wonder**:** What did I impose? My understandings and beliefs about literacy theories as well as values of good literacy practice**s** swirl through the exchange: the value of immersion in text; the importance of student choice; the crucial recognition of identity as a reader for adolescent readers as well as how that is built; unique understandings of adolescent literacy; and sociocultural understandings of what constitutes a text. But in our conversation, I also lean into traditionally expected terms of books as containing specific and particular elements. We reify the school discourses that still most often in U.S. educative contexts define literary texts: author, plot, characters, covers, words, stories, theme, and message. My statement, "So books tell stories, with plots, characters, conflicts," leaves untroubled the limits placed on definitions of "books" by unstated assumptions in Language Arts classrooms. What is "closed off" with this line of thinking? What limits have we placed on justified

texts to be read with our definitions of “real” books? We have left visual or multimodal texts out. These texts are pervasive in my students’ worlds.

Interlude: Fortnite

It is Friday. Friday is game day for my seventh grade Reading Immersion class. This group of six students and I have an agreement. On Fridays, if they give me a solid 20 minutes of independent reading time, they have the option of playing a game together for the last 20 minutes. This little group has bonded over the two years they have been together in my reading immersion class. Equally split boys and girls, on different teams, and not even in the same friend groups, these students have developed into a tight-knit little community—at least from my perspective—in my room.

I think my mind wandered a little. I didn’t tune in again until I noticed comments about Fortnite Season 4/ (a popular video game) kept making their way into the game. “What will the new resource in the next version of Fortnite be?” “Where will the additional level take you?” Other comments specific to the game wove their way through their play.

I had to ask my son to explain Fortnite to me. Fortnite is a multiplayer online shooter game. In the game, 100 players leap out of a plane onto a small island and fight until there is a single winner (think Hunger Games). As is typical with shooter games, weapons and other items are hidden around the island. As players explore the island, they can discover and collect these resources. When a winner emerges, that season is over and a new one is released. Each season introduces new resources to be discovered. As with other online multiplayer games, players may compete in teams or squads, communicating via headsets and microphones. Many players stream their play for others to watch, thus the popularity of the game far beyond the 100 players.

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The sense I make of my students' literacy practices is also informed by ideas of multiliteracies and multimodality. The New London Group (1996) introduced New Literacy Studies as a theoretical and pedagogical revision to Literacy that acknowledged linguistic diversity and multimodal forms of linguistic expression and representation. New Literacy Studies argue that reading and writing must be viewed as social and cultural practices with economic, historical, and political implications (Gee, 2007; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). What are considered as literacy acts should be broadened to include a wide variety of texts that span contexts beyond school. Multiliteracies argue that literacy instruction must help students negotiate the multitude of meaning-making systems that permeate everyday life (Handsfield, 2016). This also indicates that multiliteracies are incompatible with basic skills, one-size-fits-all instruction, which are pushed to the forefront through neoliberal values in literacy (Handsfield, 2016).

Under the umbrella of New Literacies, the concept of multimodality finds purchase. Multimodal texts are those that include words, images, sounds, music, movement, and/or sensations to create meanings as well as to promote the further creation of meanings. Within multimodality, literacy and being literate encompass the ability to navigate a literate world not bound by text alone; the ability to construct meaning from visual images is valued, even recognized as necessary. The video gaming, fan fiction writing, blogging, and social media use my students regularly engage in become sanctioned reading practices. James Paul Gee (2007) builds a theory of learning in video gaming that matches the modern, high-tech, global worlds adolescents live in time, often more so than the theories of learning relied on in schools. I see this line of thinking play out for my students daily as *Fortnite* and other multimodal texts wind their way into their school worlds.

What Else?

Robin: *Wait, though … let's think about what reading is. Do you read other things other than just words?*

Several: *No*

Robin: *Really?*

Gustin: *Besides books? Well, newspapers, magazines.*

Robin: *Exactly! What other things can we read?*

Niko: *Well, you can read signs.*

Robin: *Great point! Can we read other things?*

pause

Robin: *What about faces? Can we read other people's faces?*

Sloane: *Oh yes, we can tell if someone is mad or sad.*

All: *(chiming in with various facial expressions we can read, demonstrating some as well)*

Robin: *So can we call reading any time we make meaning out of something we look at?*

pause

Robin: *I mean, if we can make meaning out of facial expressions and signs and pictures like we do with words, can we call all of that reading?*

dismissal bell rings; students begin to collect belongings

Robin: *Ok, have a great Spring Break everyone! See you in a week.*

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In the brief space at the end of this conversation, we begin to contemplate a definition of reading expanded beyond novels. My assumptions around what counts as literature bump against traditional canonical expectations and give a trajectory to the line

of questioning I follow with the students. It asks students to interpret their experiences with what is allowed and not allowed to be literature. As we discuss, we socially, culturally, and historically negotiate the meaning we assign to those definitions—what we accept and what we refuse. Thus, we are actively constructing our understanding of literature based on what we have experienced as reading or meaning-making experiences. We reason our way through our experiences to an understanding that challenges that which is typically presumed in our school worlds and, in this case, even personal/family worlds. In choosing to pursue this line of questioning, as opposed to moving on, I was intentionally recognizing my students' prior experiences and leading them through a weaving that led to a statement that confirmed the contestation Sloane opened. I was asking for students' suppositions/points of view and using them as the starting place, and then, through the questioning process, I picked up a line of reasoning Sloane opened up to a space where preferences for various texts and various meaning-making activities are sanctioned.

Tracing Discourses to Challenge the Norm

Since Foucault's work encourages us to focus on interrogating the processes by which discourses do their work, I can trace the competition of discourses as they play out in this exchange between myself and my students. The attempt here is to question the relations among statements in accepted categories within discursive fields. Normalization of appropriate or desired behavior is one "productive" effect of the circulation of power within discursive regimes.

For Sloane, the discourses of school that dictate what is "literate" and what is "literature" alongside the discourses of "intervention" seek to correct or intervene on her reading behavior/preferences. These discourses have come to be "normal and natural" to the extent that it only makes sense to respond to Sloane's reading habits and preferences

with an aim of correction. Thus, her status becomes a produced effect of the circulation of normalizing statements. Dominant discourses of literacy (under neoliberal influences) regulate, sort, and limit access to literacies and identities. Under normalizing statements born within discursive fields, Sloane's preferences and behaviors as a reader become distinguished as abnormal and, thus, sanctioned for intervention to bring to conformity.

But Sloane's exercise of freedom through this revolt in everyday, concrete practice is a rebellion against the way she is defined and categorized—as well as how she performs these as well, how she indeed comes to "regard" herself. Sloane, her peers, and I take up and engage in redefining what is allowable and sanctioned in our practices as readers. We tap competing discourses available to us as resistance to taken-for-granted assumptions about reading identities and sanctioned texts. But this resistance is not "pure." Elements of traditional assumptions about text (plot, theme, characters, etc.) are deeply embedded and difficult to dislodge—especially for me.

Chapter VIII

THE WRONG BOOK

This is hard to write about. I handed Malika the book *Skinny*.

A key assumption I bring to my practice is that, alongside being able to choose their own reading material, students should have a wide variety of books available to them. If I accept that literacies are multiple, that reading identities are shifting, that motivation is key for adolescent readers, then it only makes sense to me that students have ownership over reading material. Practices of keeping readers within particular "levels" of books, assigned readers, or even core or whole class novels are, I have long felt, anathema to the philosophical underpinnings of my perspectives on literacy. I lean into many writers (Alvermann, 2005; Guthrie, Wigfield & Von Stecker, 2000; Learned, 2018) who have made it clear that instructional approaches are important but don't directly impact student achievement as much as the level of student engagement. I agree that engagement is the mediating factor through which classroom instruction has an impact. To increase engagement, I reason, students must be interested in reading material.

In her study of struggling middle-grade readers, Hall (2010) found that students may feel they have to choose between improving their reading abilities and being socially positioned in a negative light. Students may, then, *choose* not to read in order to maintain a social position. Attempts to support students with "easier" texts may actually play into students' decisions not to engage in reading tasks. Or, as Taboada Barber et al. (2015) noted, students may not struggle with literacy skills but may be reluctant to engage with school-related texts and may disengage from school reading. To combat these effects,

encourage engagement, and acknowledge views of literacy as multiple, I see my responsibility is to open a wide range of content, ideas, complexity, genres, modes, etc. in the reading choices I make available in my Literacy Lab.

Early in my tenure in this building, I was surprised to find that *all* English Language Arts instruction was focused around core/whole-class novels, with little to no student choice. Over time, curriculum shifts initiated by myself and other "literacy leaders" in the district have attempted to balance out whole class novel experiences with book clubs and independent reading. I have attempted to support this shift not only through my contribution to curriculum writing but also by example. My classroom hosts a growing, 1,300+ book library. And I read *a lot* of middle-grade and young adult material.

Often, my students who are categorized as resistant readers simply don't know what they like to read. Either they are unfamiliar with what is available or they have been told what to read for so long that they don't know what they even like. Suggesting books in an attempt to help readers find something they may like is a daily event in my Literacy Lab. The conversation typically goes something along the lines of…

"Tell me the last book you enjoyed…" or,

"What topics, hobbies, etc. are you into…" or,

"What kinds of genres, stories, or characters do you like…? or even,

"Tell me what you know you *don't* like…"

I typically help a student build a small stack of book choices. And I don't shy away from what could be considered "edgy" or "mature" titles. Too often, students who have had negative experiences with books or who don't enjoy reading have developed poor self-perceptions of themselves as readers. This phenomenon is well documented (Alvermann, 2001; Learned, 2018). For some, being able to read something considered "mature" or "edgy" is a boost to their sense of "being a reader." My experiences have taught me that if a self-selected book is the wrong one for a student, they simply won't

read it. No harm done. But if “bad” language or a little violence keeps a student who wasn’t reading engaged in a book, then mission accomplished.

Most of the time, this approach works out. But I also recognize it is risky. Not because an administrator or a parent may object to a student’s reading choice (it was the student’s own choice, after all—I didn’t assign it), although colleagues have expressed that fear as a hindrance. Rather, risky because any reader’s interaction with a text is unpredictable.

One day, I handed Malika *Skinny*.

Skinny is based on Donna Cooner’s own struggle with her weight and body image. The main character, Ever, is obese and is extremely self-conscious about her size. There is a persistent voice in her head, named Skinny, who torments Ever with criticism of her size and shape as well as other people’s perceptions of her. Skinny’s voice is so strong that Skinny becomes a character all her own.

In addition to battling her personal demon, Ever struggles with the underlying emotions that have contributed to her weight. She associates food with her mother’s love, as her mother would show her love with treats. Now that her mother has passed away, Ever deals with her grief and loneliness by seeking comfort in food.

But Ever has had enough. After struggling with yoyo dieting, she makes the irreversible choice to have stomach reduction surgery. As she slowly begins to lose weight, she also addresses the underlying emotional issues that contribute to her unhealthy relationship with food. In one pivotal scene, she confronts Skinny and is able to banish her demon.

Interlude

My mother took me to my first Weight Watchers meeting when I was 12 … maybe 13. I do know I was in middle school. I don’t remember how it came about that I agreed

to go. I do remember a strong negative physical response to attending. I felt nauseous. I think I believed that I should want to go because my mom wanted me to go. But I didn't. I remember being on the edge of emotion the entire meeting. How mortifying to be the youngest one in the room. Wasn't everyone staring at me? We joined a line for weigh-in before the meeting started. What twisted abuse is a public weighing? What twisted culture presumes weight is a source of embarrassment? I look back now and wonder if this is what abusive relationships feel like. To have a sense deep in your gut that something is not right, but working to convince yourself it is ok. because someone who has power and authority over you says it's ok? Or maybe even feeling I am wrong because I don't want this? I should … I deserve it.

My distorted relationship with food, body image, and diets was a long time growing. I grew up in sun-drenched, Hollywood-shaded southern California. Bleach-blonde, tan, swimsuit-worthy bodies were idolized. By my senior year, I became obsessed with exercise and hunger. My mom once told me, "Hunger is your friend." If I wasn't hungry, I was gaining weight. If I could finish the day and say, "I only ate … all day," then I had won. I began to crave that hollow feeling in the pit of my stomach. Then, I had control. Then, the pounds were floating off. Then, was the best time to go swim laps or walk five miles. Crossing my high school campus one day, a friend's mom saw me and exclaimed, "Robin, I almost didn't' recognize you—you've lost a lot of weight!" I won.

My obsession with hunger was short-lived. I can't speak to how or why—but I think I simply grew tired. But I never grew content with my body. Through college; through auto-immune disease; through four pregnancies—never have I felt good about my width, my shape, my clothing size. These are my constant demons. I exercise, I shoot for healthy eating, I don't use a scale, I tell myself, "I am more than my weight," like a mantra. But I constantly compare. I scrutinize my reflection furtively in windows. I groan at the dimples of cellulite on my thighs. I can't shake the nagging in the back of my mind that whispers, "If only I were thin, I would truly be happy."

As an adolescent and young adult, my own daughter has grown aware of cultural dictums of weight and body. Desperately wanting to support a healthy body image in her, I continue to confront my own distorted view. But she is already aware of my demons. "Not that you're fat mom, 'cuz you're not fat," she whispers, patting my back as I sigh for, once again, I cannot get a pair of boots to zip around my calf in the department store. It is only a matter of time before she takes my insecurities and holds them up to herself. I fear she will adopt them. Recently she has become aware of her pre-adolescent weight gain. I recognize the chubby cheek, rounded belly look of a body preparing to lengthen and elongate. Looking at pictures of her older brothers at her age, I can call it what it is. Those boys are long and lean now. But she doesn't know that. All she knows is that the Wii has told her she is on the verge of being overweight (she's not). All she knows is the discourse of dissatisfaction her mother has lived in all these years. All she knows is the bombardment of media images defining beauty.

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My reading of *Skinny* was emotional. Dominant norms around body image that I work to resist were thrust front and center in my reading. I appreciated that Ever seemed to understand that her happiness was not sourced in her size and shape as she began to realize that she was so much more than her size. I found it satisfying to read Ever confront her demon. But I was also conflicted about Ever's decision to pursue a surgical option. I worried that Donna Cooner did not foster a healthy body image through her story but supported common assumptions that skinny really is better. It wasn't about health. It wasn't about strength. It wasn't about self-acceptance. It was about size—perpetuating assumptions that skinny equals happy.

When I handed *Skinny* to Malika, my personal demons were not far away. I carefully shared my concerns about the story with her ... I told her I wasn't sure I liked it and I was anxious to discuss it with her. As she read it, I checked in with her periodically.

"Why *wouldn't* she have the surgery if she was that fat? I would do that if I was that fat!" she exclaimed to me one day.

I worried Malika seemed unable to disentangle Ever's body image from her inner self work. The critical event of coming to terms with Skinny and the emotional damage Skinny was causing Ever seemed lost on Malika. I tried to push back on her impressions—to encourage her to think about those deeper personal issues the character was dealing with.

At the end of the quarter, Malika left my class. I didn't see her regularly other than in the hallway or when she would stop by for a mint from the jar I keep on the counter. I began to notice she seemed a little thinner. And then the next time I saw her she was noticeably thinner. After spring break, I hardly recognized her she had lost so much weight. At a team meeting, the counselor mentioned she was diagnosed with an eating disorder and was working with a nutritionist. My heart sank … I had handed her *Skinny.*

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Because the production and maintenance of truth statements within discursive fields was an important consideration of analysis for Foucault, he was interested in the very nature of knowledge. Within his archeological work, Foucault (1972) explicated two types of knowledge: *savoir* and *connaissance*. *Savoir* represents an underlying, but explicit or formal, knowledge constructed within broad discursive conditions such as philosophical ideas or commercial practices. *Savior* is constructed knowledge about oneself produced in experience and relations with others, which in turn defines the way a subject participates in the world (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). *Savoir* is necessary for the development of *connaissance*, or formal bodies of knowledge such as scientific fields of study, philosophical theories, or religious justifications (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005). *Connaissance* is received knowledge and serves to maintain a fixed self as defined by its Other (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Foucault purported that disciplines of study do not simply emerge out of historical trajectories. Rather, they are embedded in and developed

through conditions of possibility. Thus, a study of any knowledge base must address both *savoir* and *connaissance*.

> In other words, formal knowledges emerge, substantially, from a broad array of complex irrational sources or conditions, and this more complex, messier, more ambiguous "condition[s] of possibility" undermines the modernist rational "story" or "meta-narrative" of formal knowledges. (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005, p. 847)

Informed by Foucault's theorizing, knowledge in poststructural thinking is sourced from particular locations in particular bodies with particular feelings and thoughts that are made possible in particular sociocultural-spatial contexts (St. Pierre, 2000). Knowledge is discursively produced within complex contexts. There cannot be an emergence of knowledge that is "natural" or based on rationality, cause and effect, or scientific rigor. Thus, knowledge must always be considered partial, local, and historical; we can know "something" without claiming to know everything (St. Pierre, 2000). Truth can exist, but only as multiple, contingent truths.

A Bodied Reader

Building on feminist philosophers (e.g., Bordo, 1993, 2004; Butler, 2002), many writers have explored the nature of meaning-making as embodied (Burnett et al., 2014; Siegel, 2015). Theory and research that look to bodies and embodiment to explore the social and political on perspectives of literacy consider how literacies and bodies are inextricably intermixed and intertwined (Johnson & Kontovourki, 2015). It can be argued that the relationship between texts and subjective or felt experience perhaps directs our attention to the way texts anchor emotions. Johnson and Kontovourki propose four ways of reading literacies as embodied:

1. Reading the ways literacy practices discipline the body.
2. Reading the ways literacy practices shape and recognize embodied meaning-making across time and space within discourse.

3. Reading the ways social texts make bodies, so bodies may be re-made as social texts.
4. Reading the ways bodies are mobile, affective, and indeterminate, and subsequently, so are literacies.

With these readings in mind, I am mindful of the limits placed on conversations about text and books in schools, even within my own classrooms.

But these readings do not occur in a vacuum. Sylvia Blood (2004) works from a Foucauldian informed position on discourse, knowledge, and power to critique experimental psychology's perspective and research into 'body image' as dominated by conversations of "distortion" or "dissatisfaction." She critiques the pervasive perspective that eating disorders, body image dissatisfaction, are pathologies that reside within the cognition of individual women. Such a perspective reproduces dominant assumptions about women's bodies. To contrast, Blood presents a discursive construction of body image informed by Foucault's conceptions of power relations that constitute knowledge claims. She explores the ways "body image" discourses have material effects that produce a particular body/subjectivity. Power relations and technologies of power inscribe human bodies in particular ways. As such, the body becomes the site of discursive struggles between different power/knowledge regimes. "A range of discourses of femininity, sexuality, self-improvement, self-acceptance, as well as body image discourse, to name a few, converge on the female body in contemporary Western society" (p. 51). Further, these discursive formations often position women in contradictory ways such as when discourses of self-improvement collide with discourses of self-acceptance. However, Blood argues, notions of body image and body image dissatisfaction/ disturbance as defined by social psychology have become the dominant resource for understanding the complex embodied experiences of women and girls.

These readings of embodiment coupled with Blood's Foucauldian interpretation of "body image" deftly and explicitly inform my interpretation of the nexus of my reading

and Malika's reading of *Skinny*. While the perspectives represented in these readings are complex, my aim here is to briefly work off conceptions of embodiment in literacy and discursive constructions to recognize literacy as far beyond a cognitive exercise. I work from them as I seek to explore the way a reader—a reader encased in a body, a reader inextricably entwined with that body, a reader and body ruled by perspectives of dominant discourses—"reads" a particular text, a text also interwoven with discourses of the body.

To be very, very clear, I cannot, in any way, shape, or form, conclude a causal relationship between Malika's reading of *Skinny* and the diagnosis of an eating disorder. To do so would be a minimization of Malika, her life, as well as the complex and unknowable nature of personal relationships with body image. What I can, however, draw are what I perceive to be connections between Malika's positioning within dominant discourses on desirable bodies, my positioning within those same discourses, and the disruption or reproduction of those discourses within the text, *Skinny.*

Muzillo (2010) problematizes the practice of asking students to take on the perspectives or identities of others when teaching literature. One concern for her is that perspective-taking is often oversimplified. As the Common Core State Standards expect students to engage in levels of discourse that call for perspective-taking as a literacy skill, Muzillo raises cautions over the ethics and pragmatics of such practices, particularly in tendencies to Other within processes of perspective-taking exercises. She questions: To what end and at what cost do we attempt perspective-taking? In particular, Muzillo worries at the unanticipated cognitive and affective demands as unexamined ethics of requiring identification with another. Confounding the process of perspective-taking even further is that the teacher is also constructing ways of seeing. I see Muzillo's concerns play out in my own and Malika's readings of *Skinny*.

As I read *Skinny* as failing to trouble the dominant discourse of a particular desirable body size, resulting from a pathological or disturbed mindset, I understand the

book as adhering to psychological views of "body image" housed in cognition. As Ever confronts her demon, Skinny, she confronts negative messages about herself she has embraced. But she fails to confront where those body image expectations source from. She leaves untroubled the assumption that her dissatisfaction with herself is a problem within her own thinking.

The failure, as I see it, of *Skinny* is in not suggesting that perhaps the dissatisfaction Ever feels with her size is housed not within her mind, but within the social and cultural normations that defined a desirable body as within particular boundaries in the first place. I find those same assumptions within my own lived experiences around body image. My own demons may not be dead, but I recognize their place of birth as largely outside of me.

Malika's perspective on Ever's mindset about her body and her decision to take permanent measures to change can be interpreted from her comment, "Why wouldn't she have that surgery?" Malika sees the choice to take the permanent and risky step of surgery as rational, obvious, and commonsensical. Her perspective demonstrates an acceptance of normative statements that a slender, un-curvy physique is desirable, pleasurable, and a source of happiness. Her positioning within these body image discourses makes unavailable to her the possibility of disrupting or pushing back on what I read as Donna Cooney's messages that reify dominant norms.

From this perspective of both our readings as within discursive constructions, I can cast Muzillo's (2010) concerns with demanding perspective-taking in literacy through an additional lens. Not only do I see an othering of people of a particular size and shape, I see the interpretation of Ever's experiences with body image as bound, and thus singular, by the dominant available discourses on desirable female shape and size. I can only wonder if Malika's reading of *Skinny* supported pre-existing presumptions that skinniness equals happiness. What were the voices already echoing inside her head, and how did the book support those voices?

My thinking on my own and Malika's reading of *Skinny* is further complicated by Mallozzi's (2015) study of the disciplining of English teachers' bodies. Mallozzi begins from the assumption that the discipline of teaching English encompasses an expectation of teacher self-disclosure and modeling of human ideals in the interest of teaching our students how to interact with texts that opens teachers and their bodies up to discipline. Our bodies do the work of teaching, but teachers are restricted in how we call attention to our bodies. Mallozzi argues that the feminist mantra "the personal is political" encapsulates the inability to detangle one's daily life from one's values, and when an English teacher's job is to provide texts (including, by default, the body-text) about what it means to be human, the false dichotomies of political/personal, professional/personal, public/private, and mind/body become matters of pedagogy. Thus, teachers who commit to "enter the classroom 'whole' and not as 'disembodied spirit[s]'" (hooks, 1994, p. 193) are making political statements about who is (and which bodies are) able to be visible and count in English classrooms as texts of human experience.

Mallozzi (2015) also indicates that embodied pedagogies subvert the mind/body split as well as address learner individualities in the classroom through ethical modeling as a way to understand what it means to be human. English teachers may be especially poised to do this, based on the current standards (NCTE, 2012) as well as in the content area's history of disciplining learners in spirit and body. The purposeful mixing of personal with professional, private with public, and mind with body requires care, not because these minglings are not already happening (they are), but because teachers need to be savvy about how to handle the mix. Doing so challenges the misconception of English classrooms as naturally safe spaces, the false illusion that sharing human experiences toward understanding automatically erases animosity around people's embodied differences (Mallozzi, 2015).

The Perils of Recommending

I have always assumed the benevolence of books. Reading the lives of others can help us absorb appreciations for others and ourselves and make us better people. The metaphor of books as windows, mirrors, and sliding doors (Bishop, 1990) appeals to me. Bishop purports that books as windows help readers engage in exploring differences by examining the realities of others. Books as mirrors represent opportunities to reflect on selves through characters. Books as sliding doors enable students to walk through in imagination and become part of the story, experiencing characters and settings on an emotional and intellectual level. These categorizations of reading texts appeal to my relationships with books. For me, literature is indeed an invitation "to a passionate engagement with the human experience" (Probst, 2000, p. 8). In literature, I find invitations to speak thoughts and feelings, invitations to listen, dialogue, and explore issues, and invitations to engage intellectual inquiry (Probst, 2000). I passionately seek to extend these invitations to my students. Books are, after all, good.

This is a risky assumption. As much as I go underground, off-script, or rogue in opening up reading options for students without restriction and maintain a classroom library rich with diverse perspectives, the nagging dangers are ever-present: when a student sees a reflection in a character that reifies a harmful or unhealthy perception; or when a sliding door issues an invitation to a place that disrupts to the point of trauma; or when a mirror only serves to highlight categories of "the same" or of difference and other. Further, from poststructural perspectives, I worry the categorizations of windows and doors minimize the complex interactions and negotiations of selves, discourses, difference, and knowledge I believe are inherent in reading. I feel compelled to explore other perils of openly and unhesitatingly recommending books.

I'm mindful that recommending books represents a wielding of positional power. One implication of Foucault's perspective on knowledge and knowledge production

within discourse is that the process becomes interwoven with power. Foucault (1990) specifically states, “It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (p. 100). He defines power as “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” (p. 92). Power, in Foucault’s view, is a continuous process of struggle and confrontation between those force relations, the support these force relations find in each other, and the strategies in which they take effect.

As such a complex social function, Foucault saw power as productive: producing forms of not only knowledge but discourse and subjects as well. Since Foucault theorized that knowledge formation occurs within relations of power, he sought to explore the functions of power as it produces knowledge, how people are understood, and how knowledge is constructed about people. Foucault (1972) was particularly interested in exploring the productive relationship between truth and knowledge, specifically, the conditions necessary for statements of knowledge to become truths. He sought to study the history of knowledge statements and describe the system of rules that make certain statements possible and others not. Foucault saw knowledge as constructed within the play of power relations circulating within discourses and cultural practices. He thus explored knowledge production by examining the historical conditions, assumptions, and power relations that allowed that knowledge to be produced (St. Pierre, 2000).

As the classroom teacher, the literacy mentor, the book recommender, I operate within a school-sanctioned position of power over students. In this position, I am the knower of books. No matter how much choice I “grant” students, or how open I attempt to remain to multiple literate identities, or how much I seek to recognize and respect students’ agentic acts, the binary of teacher/student is impossible to completely refuse. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989), in her pivotal work, “Why Doesn’t This Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy,” argues that the notion of “empowerment”—or breaking the teacher/student binary—is actually a myth that reifies

relations of domination. Hallmarks of critical pedagogy that is meant to break patterns of domination, Ellsworth suggests that "empowerment" rests on notions of an ideal, rational, self—concepts that are the object of fundamental critiques upon which my poststructural inflected position rests. Additionally, Ellsworth troubles the very notion that power relations can be "flattened" within discursive fields that institutionalize power hierarchies—institutions such as classrooms within schools.

The knowledge statements allowable in such a power relationship remind me again of my struggles to teach from a critical literacy perspective … in attempting to encourage students to see the power, positioning, and perspectives available and unavailable in texts we read, I struggled to simply not impose *my* reading of the text. In the act of recommending, I exercise my perceptions of what a student *should* like. I run the risk of sanctioning certain texts over others. I recognize that, given the strength of the teacher/student binary, a student may not feel the freedom to refuse whenever I recommend. Within that positioning is a perception of responsibility. Buchanan (2015) indicates that accountability not only emphasizes measurable performance but also individual responsibility for student success. If I aim to positively influence students' engagement with text as well as their identities as literate individuals, I recognize that I am seeking to support their success as defined beyond measurable, quantifiable, standardized expectations. A different kind of accountability—but accountability nonetheless.

Another nagging peril of recommending lies in the danger of missing someone or something. As a classroom teacher, literacy coach, interventionist, and even parent, my desire has always been to curate a classroom library that reflects diverse faces, voices, and experiences. Early in my career, this translated largely into incorporating multicultural texts. Over time, I recognized that "diversity" in my classroom library must incorporate considerations of power negotiations, perspectives, equity, and justice in contexts closer to my students' own. Does not equity begin on our own doorsteps? From

this position, I began to search for the silenced voices and experiences within my community that failed to be represented in texts I made available to students. Books that represented the experiences and voices of adolescents who identify as LGBT+ quickly surfaced as a hole in my collection. My attention to this gap has led to a continuous and concerted effort to search for other gaps. Who or what is left out? But I have the overwhelming realization there never can be full and complete representation. If I accept the impossibility of stable identity categories, if I accept there is no full and complete representation of any experience or "story," then I must accept the necessary incompleteness of the "stories" I can offer students in the form of books.

I see that another further peril of recommending is the recognition that I must attend to how texts position students within discursive frames (Dinkins & Englert, 2015). Our readings are far bigger, more complicated, more unpredictable than any learning goals I may have for students. Even beyond that, I must also consider my positioning with a text as well as the discourses that position me. As I consider my positioning within "body image" discourses and my interpretations/reactions to *Skinny*, I'm reminded of the incredible complexity of literacy teaching within a context governed by a neoliberal gaze (Apple, 2011; Buchanan, 2015; Taubman, 2009). A continuing challenge to standardization must be in the explications of how the work of teaching, of interacting with other humans, is incredibly complex. The overwhelming weight my own history bears in my interaction with a text and with Malika cannot be evaluated, measured, or even fully known. Thus, the challenge to neoliberal discourses that seek to impose a "norm" of knowing and being within schools must come from constant, continued, relentless explorations of the unimaginable, (im)possible lived experiences of teachers and students within classroom walls.

INTERMEZZO 3

Reading about Burnett and Merchant's (2016) conception of stacking stories technique as a way to represent w/ multiplicity; commented in the article that the gaps between the stacked stories are almost more important than what is in the stories themselves; made me think of the concept of "gutters" in graphic novels. The gutter is the white space between panes and panels. But the gutter is not the absence of meaning—plot, character, dialogue, setting happens in the gutter and the reader must interpret that meaning as they make the jump from one pane/panel to the next. What happens in the gutter is a highly interpretive meaning-making process for the reader. So I'm thinking of how I will attend to the gutter in the representations of my literacy "stories" … what is left out, intentionally or unintentionally; what is left to my reader? How can I attend to the gutter without trying to impose certainty? The difficulty is that, as the researcher of self, I am biased … I do have an "image" I desire to maintain … there are parts of my practice and self I'm not exactly keen to broadcast to the world. Maybe I'm beginning to understand self-reflexivity … I have to be vigorously self-aware of those parts I want to hide and those I'm willing to make visible.

Chapter IX

MORE BOOK TALKS

Perched on our stools around our black lab tables, my small group of seventh graders listened politely as Charlie shared about his book, Ark Angel *by Anthony Horowitz. This was Charlie's first Book Talk, and he wasn't exactly thrilled to be doing one. But he and I had made a deal that he would share at least one book before the end of the year. I think he just wanted to get this over with. As this was one of the first full-length novels that he chose (not assigned to him) and voluntarily completed, this felt like a celebration of accomplishment. Up to this book, Charlie struggled to find something beyond graphic novels and* Diary of a Wimpy Kid *that held his attention. While I am a fan of graphic novels and am happy when a student reads ANY book, I also want them to stretch themselves as readers. Sometimes moving beyond a graphic novel is a good stretch for a student.*

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The pervasive expectation within the ELA department in this building is that independent reading must come with a project assignment. Students' independent reading is valued as long as it falls within the lines of accountability. English teachers consistently utilize the language of "these students…" and "lack of effort…" when referring to their students as readers. They lament to me that, unless they impose some level of grading or assignment, students won't read: "These kids, I have to have some

way of keeping them accountable—some way they prove they read the book. Or else they will just fake it."

The logic that accountability measures equate to accountable readers is faulty. The assumption that anything worth reading is worth reporting on is also faulty. In Readicide, Gallagher (2009) neatly argues against a vision of reading in schools that maintains tight controls over students' reading lives. He builds the case that such common practices employed in ELA classrooms actually serve to kill the reading experience for students—working against the aims and goals many teachers have for their students. Resting on the view that engagement with text is an essential foundation for readers, Gallagher (and many others) indicates that freedom is crucial for fostering engagement. Thus, accountability measures simply lead to unauthentic and disengaged reading. Many, many times, I've overheard students discussing reading assignments in my classroom. "Oh, I totally didn't read that," is not an uncommon statement.

Buchanan (2015) suggests that the culture of a school, the ideological and pedagogical positions made available for teachers mediate how teachers experience and react to accountability policies**.** In this context, through expectations of accountable readers, it appears neoliberal-born ideologies have become normated to the extent that teachers extend that thinking to their practices with students. Because accountability and an emphasis on performance mandate particular practices, ways of going about business in education have become "common-sense." Buchanan found that teachers in her study become inclined to engage social practices that align with the dominant frames. This appears to be the case with practices around independent reading in this context as well. It is difficult to argue against the common-sense rationale of accountable readers.

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Charlie talked us through the key elements of Ark Angel. *I asked him to elaborate on the internal versus external conflict he noted in the book. His first response was focused on the external motivation of the character. I pushed him a little, "So what is it*

inside Alex Ryder that challenges him or causes him to question that which is around him?" Later, I asked Charlie what he thought the theme of the book was. "Well," he responded, "I think it's that if you work really hard you can overcome stuff in your life that you may not like."

***

Another predominant view in this context is that English Language Arts should focus on teaching Literary Analysis. Curriculum maps reflect an emphasis on elements of plot, characterization, theme, and literary devices. The purpose of having students read core/whole-class novels is to be able to recognize and analyze these elements of text. Such a reading constitutes a close reading consistent with the demands of CCSS. Within instructional practices around literary analysis in classrooms I have worked in, implicit assumptions of a "correct" interpretation of text pervade. Interpretations of literary elements and devices that slip outside the expected are implicitly discouraged.

This enactment of literary analysis mirrors much of what Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O'Dell (2018) describe as traditional views of analysis in their text, *Beyond Literary Analysis*. This analysis typifies seek-and-find strategies to "find" *the* "deeper meaning" of a text that can be judged right or wrong by the teacher. Reminiscent of a scientific, formulaic pattern searching that can "reveal" or "uncover." They connect this kind of reading to New Criticism, which attempted to make literary study more like science through close reading in order to identify the parts and pieces of a text. In this kind of reading and analysis, students are asked to ignore the selves they bring to a reading and interpretation of a text. The debate around using/not using first person in writing such an analysis rages within our department; a debate that essentially is about how much of their selves we allow students to bring to their reading, their writing, and our classrooms. The problem with such a singular and limiting practice of literary analysis, as Marchetti and O'Dell see it, is that it does not support authentic, passionate,

personal engagement with text. I also worry that it ignores the diverse and differing "selves" students and teachers bring into literary practices.

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For this particular seventh grade class, discussing the theme of a book had proven challenging. We had multiple conversations early in the year covering the purpose of noting theme as well as ways to think about the theme of a book. They struggled to move beyond "the message" or "the lesson" of a text. This group had been together with me for the second half of sixth grade. Our focus had been on finishing books, since many of them had not developed habitual reading practices that supported stamina, but also discussing plot elements in their chosen books. This year, I found their conversations about plot in their books had grown significantly as they were able to provide a synopsis of the text that covered key plot elements. So I moved our conversations within book talks toward deeper elements of their novels—themes, author's purpose, and perspective.

"Ok, let's distill that a little. First, start with the conflict. What is it that gets in the way of what Alex (the main character in Charlie's book) wants? Then, let's think about what Alex does to get what he wants and what he learns along the way. Based on that, let's think about one word that we could use to describe what this book is about. What is the author saying about that word? Now, what do you think the theme of this book may be?"

Charlie paused briefly. "You can't always get what you want."

***

The dominance of "school" literacies--constructed in this context largely through the language of literary analysis—is hard to break away from. Despite my own stated goals and aims within the Reading Immersion class and the instructional practices of Book Talks, in the end, I push Charlie's understanding of his text toward the school- and standards-sanctioned ways of thinking about texts--identifying conflict and theme. Relying on Buchanan (2015) and Galloway and Lesaux (2014), I recognize that literacy

professional roles are often utilized as a technique toward uniformity and conformity to a norm. In this conversation with Charlie, as I am pushing his thinking about his text that falls within the parameters of literary analysis, I am disallowing divergent or unexpected ways for him to think about that text. And in the same way Buchanan (2015) noted that teachers found validation for their success within those same measures they criticized, I feel satisfaction—even pride—in the way Charlie can identify a theme that fits into school discourses. I know he will be asked to do so in eighth grade next year. I worry about my reputation as a literacy specialist if it is perceived I could not instill this skill in him.

As I continue to struggle to make "sense of" the underlying dominant versions of literacy practice, given U.S. education's primarily positivist and/or constructivist assumptions**,** I continue to experience tensions in fresh ways. As I navigate these, and other, tensions, I find the negotiations of when to go underground and when to be swept along tremendously draining. Navigation takes enormous energy. Some days I haven't the fight. Some spaces, some practice, some expectations warrant a full-out revolt, while some warrant a gentle pressure. These negotiations are themselves a tension. If I aim to explore those moments of tension and the discourses at play within those moments, I cannot ignore the many, many moments similar to this one with Charlie where I accept the dominant. But I also recognize that in that acceptance—there is the acknowledgment that there IS something else I COULD choose.

INTERMEZZO 4

I wasn't exactly fond of reading my own thoughts. In some places, I saw my naiveté … in others I, honestly, was a little appalled at my reactions and emotions. If writing in such a fashion creates a window into the soul, I'm not sure that's a window I relish peering into. I guess I'm grateful that as the researcher, I get to pick and choose what I put out to the world … some of that is downright embarrassing. Therein lies the trouble: isn't part of the deal of autobiographical work that the gorgeous, as well as the ugly, is on the table for full viewing? The difficulty is that, as the researcher of self, I am biased … I do have an "image" I want to maintain … there are parts of my practice and self I'm not exactly keen to broadcast to the world. Maybe I'm beginning to understand self-reflexivity … I have to be vigorously self-aware of those parts I want to hide and those I'm willing to make visible. Not sure that's completely possible.

As I type them up, I'm reliving these moments—and all the accompanying emotions. I celebrate with elation and I fall apart in frustration … and find I need a whole lot of breaks as I type. I can't experience all these moments all over again in quick succession. I need time in between to "recover." I absolutely cannot engage this data objectively—or without really engaging it. I'm thinking this data all over again and can't help but question it, look for the entry points for analysis, question my own choices, feel chagrin at my own voice. I guess this is a first step in analysis? "Experiencing" the data again? What is to come? Experiencing the data again and again and again … so exhausting.

Chapter X

AN UNENDING

I don't know how to quit this. Like a fetus, this project has lived with and in me for so long. I write in the shower. I write when I drive to work. I write when I walk, when I pull weeds, when I sleep. I find tidbits to weave in from songs, conversations, books, even movies. My children have asked me, "What will you do when you don't have a dissertation to write anymore?" I don't know.

The thinking with theory around these (and many more) moments of tension could continue indefinitely. Without concrete findings, complete narratives, or stable identity categories, there is always another and another and another. Unending. Between the no longer and the not yet. But sometime, somehow, I must simply stop. After 250 pages, I must stop. So, without a "final," I offer a caesura.[1] In this caesura, I consider current "unconclusions," limitations, and potential implications.

Why Bother?

To consider any "unconclusions," I must return to the questions that initiated this study. I wondered at how tracing the interweaving effects of discourses at play in my own practices may push back on my own assumptions. I wondered at my own frantic search for spaces to go underground. I also wondered at how exploring and deeply reflecting on the im/possibilities of my work in the role of Literacy Specialist may allow speaking what has been unsayable within dominant discourses. Now I wonder at "so what?" If any

"stories" that I construct out of my interpretations of investigations into my assumptions, beliefs, and values as well as dominant discourses infused in my work as literacy specialist have no nice, neat "conclusions," … why bother? What is the usefulness of such a consideration?

I struggle with the notion of findings. Not because I believe I want them, but mostly when fellow colleagues (well-intentioned) inquire about my findings. I know what they are asking. I know it is also something I cannot provide because I'm choosing to situate this research within a perspective that pushes back on assumptions about research and methodology that give the notion of findings purchase. I am compelled to be explicit about what I am trying to do without attempting to dictate what is to be done or to articulate what I supposedly "found" as the expectations of standard, conventional qualitative research may demand. In my efforts to use theory to engage in struggles, re-see, and undermine what is mostly invisible in prevailing practices, I am calling into question what is presumed, accepted, and uncontested (Graham, 2005).

And yet, I still wonder—was all the effort of writing this worth something? Living the questions was the intention. So many moments within the writing felt like chasing rabbit trails. Tracing the dominant discourses through everyday events so often leads back into and over territory crossed and re-crossed. Did I get anywhere? No. But getting somewhere was not an intention to begin with. Other than the assurance that resistance is NOT futile, really, it's come down to more questions.

A metaphor is helpful in clarifying the "so what?" of such an inquiry. I walk in the early winter morning dark. The pull of the bed is strong on chilly mornings, but the reward of the peace and still outside does indeed make the effort of getting out worth it. The dark is often hard to take. It slowly and daily deepens as the sun drops its annual trek across my horizon. Sometimes the still is so strong it takes my breath away. Occasionally the weight of the quiet dark frightens me. I debate leaving my flashlight off and simply allowing my eyes to adjust as I make my way down very familiar lanes. In the end, the

reality of potholes in the road and the possibility of a twisted ankle win out. Click. A circle of light on the ground appears. I can make my way comfortably in this traveling circle as the predictability of its circumference moves forward with me. My gaze stays steadily downward, fixed on this circle of light illuminating one step at a time. It's easy to stay here, in this little circle of light. My gait becomes steady as I focus on one step at a time; my mind wanders.

I wonder—what do I miss when I keep my focus down within that which I can easily see? I force my eyes to refocus up and out. Pushing the limit of my vision beyond that little circle of light, I catch the squirrel skittering across my path. I glimpse the deer hiding in the trees alongside the road. I am warned of the dancing pinprick of light far ahead that indicates a fellow early morning runner. The faint glow in the distance that wraps its way around my horizon indicates the sun is beginning its morning push up into the sky. That line slowly grows higher and higher, and the landscape around me takes on fewer and fewer shadows. This I see when I force my eyes to look up and beyond.

I consider my teaching life. It is easy to keep my gaze fixed on that which is clear—that which is predictable within the lighted pool of my own, comfortable practices. I can go along, focusing on that which I can readily "see" and never lift my gaze to question: What else is out there? What perspective do I gain by looking beyond the comfortable, the readily available? What do I re-see? How does that broader perspective impact each step I take?

I am learning from feminist poststructural thinkers that those questions are often more important than the answers. Interpretations of what we often take to be "personal experiences" can and should be the basis for troubling ourselves and our world, and disrupting that which we readily accept allows a re-envisioning of the way things are and the way they must be—the "not yet" and the "no longer" (Lather, 1991, p. 89). I am learning that a first and necessary step in counteracting the force of any discourse is to recognize its power to construct (Davies, 2003). "We must find the lines of fault in and

fracture those discourses. And then, in those spaces of fracture, speak new discourses, new subject positions, into existence" (Davies, 2005, p. 1).

So one aim in an inquiry such as the one I attempt here is to make visible a way of living as an educator who embraces the questions: Questions that stem from looking beyond the small pool of light that makes visible my daily experience. Questions about assumptions I take for granted around literacy learning, professional learning, teacher growth, and how it all "should" work in our current educational context. Instead of seeking to resolve the tensions I live in this work, I seek to trace their constructions.

I read *Educated* by Tara Westover not long ago. The whole text is compelling. Not just the radical and non-conforming nature of her upbringing that shocks, but the long and painful process of wresting herself free from narratives her father indoctrinated her with that threaded their way through her subjectivity and identities. Tara's description of finding herself back in accepted ways of being within the physical location of her home and struggling with the very comfortableness of those ways of being is disconcerting to read. The allowable ways to be "woman" in her parents' home were so completely oppositional to the ways of being a woman she discovered in the "outside" world. The nature of taken-for-granted assumptions that ruled what was and was not allowed for her in her parents' home is so glaringly obvious to the outside observer for whom those assumptions are so foreign. But the reverse was also true for Tara. When she left her home and entered a world that found the discourses that ruled her life radical, she struggled with her own foreignness. Her struggle to not let go of her home—the familiar—what she associated with family loyalty and love, even as those things became increasingly difficult to rectify with her expanding worldview, was heartbreaking.

A Foucauldian informed tracing of discourses at play and subsequent power negotiations and subjectivities would be "easy" with her story; at least to the outside observer. Not so for Tara, who lived in those discourses, negotiations, and subjectivities. Considering my own attempts to engage the questions of this study in my own teaching

life, I recognize the difficulty of such a task. I am blind to what I am immersed in. There are ramifications from engaging such processes of questioning that are not to be taken lightly. But I am left with the sense as well that the work cannot be left undone as I consider how a single narrative was harmful to Tara. I accept that a single narrative of any role is harmful.

Foucault's conceptions of power, knowledge, and discourse challenge Enlightenment assumptions about truth, knowledge, and knowing. For him, rational thought and scientific investigation do not reveal hidden "truth." Rather, they constitute power mechanisms operating within discourses that selectively highlight certain ideas or hypotheses while simultaneously concealing alternative and contradictory "truths" or "knowledges." Definitive knowledge and truth of a particular subject matter begin to crumble under this analytic gaze. Therefore, resistance to the dominant at the level of the individual subject can constitute initial signals of the possibilities of production of alternative forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1972, 1980). If I follow Foucault's charge to look to historically specific discursive relations and social practices that form subjectivity and that change with shifts in the wide range of discursive fields, then I can begin to glimpse some of what was unseen—the ways I, as an individual, am the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity (Weedon, 1997).

Weedon (1997) indicates that the work for poststructural feminist is to understand the intricate network and inter-relations of discourses, the sites they are articulated in, and the institutionally legitimate forms of knowledge they afford. Bronwyn Davies (2000) suggests that such an analysis may reveal entrapment in ways of being. Acknowledging contradictions that are constituted within available discourses—instead of from contradictory selves—makes it "possible to examine the contradictory elements of one's subjectivity" (p. 71). Since the subject in poststructuralist thinking is socially constructed in discursive practices, she also exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent. She is capable of resistance within the clash between contradictory subject positions and

practices. She is also capable of reflecting upon the discursive relations, which constitute her and the society in which she lives, in order to develop strategies that contest hegemonic assumptions and the social practices they guarantee. So in this "unending," in lieu of "findings," I attempt to crystalize those re-visions, ever-questions, fractures, and disruptions to offer "unconclusions."

"Unconclusions"

Repeatedly in this writing, I note the dangers of the work. Because the place I stake is not a simple binary of acceptance or rejection, it is rather a complex dance of "this I will accept here, but reject there; this I will reject there, but accept here"—I am ever mindful of the perils of choices I make. Not just for myself, but for others—particularly students—in the trenches with me. Unintended consequences abound within my best teaching intentions as well as the practices I actively accept or reject. I purport that the dominant discourses of neoliberal ideology contribute to the complexity of the work, and within the instructional decisions that find purchase in those dominant discourses, there are pitfalls I can never be fully aware of. If I choose to go underground in an effort to "practice my beliefs," I can never fully know what may be risked or sacrificed. And if I choose to accept any of that which is thrust on me by the swirling dominant discourses in an effort toward self-preservation—I want to keep my job, after all—what options, opportunities, or other may be lost? The only "unconclusion" I may draw here is that there really is no "safe house" toward which I can seek escape.

Additionally, as I consider the many moments of tension I explore here, I am struck with my inability to disentangle my own subjectivities with my students. Because subjectivity becomes processes of continual re/constitution of subjects' selves within and through language as expressed in and a part of specific historical, socio-cultural contexts. Subjectivity is precarious, contradictory, and in process. It is constantly reconstituted

every time we think or speak (Weedon, 1997). And, as Foucault argued, power relies on relations to advance, multiply, and branch out into social networks; thus discourses become the site of analysis of power as power and knowledge "play" (Foucault et al., 2008). But this also becomes the space where power and knowledge can be critiqued and challenged.

As I follow Foucault to inquire, in a specific discourse, in a specific historical time and place, what are the immediate power relations at work? How did power relations make discourses possible, and how did discourses enable power relations? How did the exercise of these power relations modify them? How were power relations linked? Thus, who I am in any moment is partially bound by whoever else is in that moment with me. Thus, another "unconclusion" may be that I cannot neglect who *you* may be in that moment of speaking as I consider who *I may be* in that moment. My inability to disentangle my subjectivities from those with whom I work represents both an issue raised in this research as well as a territory worthy of further exploration.

Another consideration in the exploration I have engaged here is that I am mindful of the growing interest in technology and web-based interventions (e.g., Read 180, etc.) to remediate failing reading. Promises that these technology-based interventions are adaptive, thus differentiated, as well as cost-efficient are attractive to resource-strapped districts looking for a quick fix. Alongside other researchers, I suggest, based on the exploration presented here, that working with readers and writers, particularly those positioned as struggling, is so incredibly complex, unpredictable, and unexpected that any attempt to formulate or formalize (even as I have done here) fails to be responsive instruction. I also purport that technology-based interventions cannot possibly attend to the identities and subjectivities of individual students in ways a human being can. I build on Bippert (2019) to raise questions around growing trends to implement digitally based interventions—even those that purport to be "adaptive."

Along the same lines, I join other researchers in noting the difficulties produced from attempting to force rigid RTI processes. None of the students I discussed fell neatly into RTI/MTSS categorizations. None of my interactions with students fell neatly into the steps or RTI. Given such unpredictability and complexity, I continue to wonder how the system can truly be responsive to individuals. I am not the first to raise these concerns. But I am further troubled by issues of inequity that RTI processes were partially intended to address. Given statistics around the over-representation of male students of color in special education programs, I wonder at the ability of RTI to mitigate, complicate, or compound such concerns. Perhaps another "unconclusion" circles around the fact that, faced with the possibility of a digital intervention program being adopted in my own district and increased accountability around RTI, I am forced to confront my own value as a literacy professional educator.

I also must consider the growing interest in the preparation of literacy professionals for the increasingly complex work we are expected to navigate. While research slowly moves into much more complex considerations of literacy professionals' identities, many calls have been made for identity work to be a component of Literacy Professional preparation programs (e.g., Heineke, 2013; McGrath & Bardsley, 2018; Parsons, 2018; Pontrello, 2011). I cannot disagree with this call. While some of these researchers have touched on the nuances and difficulties of preparation, I also suggest that any considerations of identities of educators cannot be separated from an exploration and a challenging of how discourses that rule contexts connect to conceptions and enactments of identities and subjectivities.

Further, given the complexity of the work of literacy professionals, I suggest that we can never fully "prepare" teachers for whatever they may face in their teaching contexts. And yet preparation programs do exist. Perhaps another "unconclusion" is that it may be worth considering how these programs must tool teachers to "live" the work by engaging in a constant cycle of theorizing and critique of the contexts and worlds in

which the work takes place. In the process of conducting this study, it was in explicating those "theories at work" that I began to touch on and challenge my own assumptions. Pontrello (2011) and McGrath and Bardsley (2018) made similar observations. My work, however, adds the crucial layer of consideration of the discursive constructions at play. Such a shift may take the field toward an emphasis on supporting literacy professionals IN the work and away from attempts to prepare FOR the work.

What's Left Out?

Necessarily, in such a project as this, there is much "left out." I return to the concept of gutters in graphic novels. Those white spaces between the panes are not devoid of meaning. A piece of the story "happens" in those white spaces, and it is left to the reader to infer. So too with this writing. There are many gutters. Often, what is left silent speaks more than what is spoken. The silences have meaning. That which contains must necessarily constrain. The moments I analyze are contained by the limits or the vocabulary available to me, the grammatical rules that govern writing conventions, as well as the physical limits of this page. My analysis is limited by the very analytical, epistemological, ontological, and philosophical tools I have taken up or cast aside. But silences stem from limitations of my own perspectives—what I "see," my interpretations of my experiences, are necessarily incomplete. Thus, in consideration of the limitations of this research, I am limited in my consideration.

Interlude

I worry about representation. My record of conversations is from memory. There are several instances where I remember a student speaking, but I don't recall what they said. There was much more to these conversations than I remember. I can't think of this

as a full and complete representation because it isn't. I recognize there really can't be such a thing, but that is an urge I'm fighting … the urge to be transparent, honest, and fully representational. So I'm still troubled by the gaps in my memory … what is left out of the recordings.

I chose to represent the conversation with Sloane as a transcript. I chose not to narrate it. I wanted to try to get the students' voices and words down as best I could. I wonder if that choice is a little dishonest. Does the fact that I put it on paper looking like a transcript send an implicit message that it is an exact representation? I also only included the discussion—I left out the time of year, the classroom environment, the para-educator who leaned against another table and participated nonverbally with head nods, "ah-ha's," and facial expressions. I left out the way Katie's facial expression changed when she began to share her thoughts … how her typical neutral, passive expression became vivid and animated … her eyes lit up! I left out my fear that Gustin would not join the conversation at all. He was so hesitant to join the class in the first place because none of his friends were in it. He was the first boy to join a small group of very enthusiastic and engaged girls. I worried he would be reluctant to join in. I left out how relieved I was when he participated. I left out how this was Sloane's fourth Book Talk … and as she was packing up to leave, she told me she was ready to do another. This child is so anxious to talk about her reading. And she reads so much—why is that not translating into her classroom work? Why is she struggling so much with her own written expression when she seems to be such a prolific reader? And I left out that I fed her breakfast this morning during first period. I left out the part where the bell rang and I called Gustin back to the table, reminding him that I dismiss the class, not the bell.

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I have dealt with only one piece of the Literacy Specialist role: supporting "struggling" readers. There is much else embedded in the job expectations that are sources of tensions. I feel the "coaching" aspect of my current job is the bastard child. It's

the invisible piece of my role. It's hidden. It's on my mind. It's on my administrator's mind. But it's not the visible work like the work I do with students. So it's the work I feel I am constantly having to remind people that I'm supposed to do … and the work I'm constantly justifying. "Yes, it's part of my job description to meet with teachers to help plan instruction." "Yes, it's part of my job to help teachers pace the curriculum." "Yes, it's part of my job to push-in to classrooms to support instruction for all." "Yes, it's my job to support teacher growth." "Yes, it's part of my job to manage assessments." I constantly fight the urge to let go of that coaching work and just do the student support and intervention that everyone expects and seems to want. If I let go of the coaching work in this dissertation too—am I letting *myself* down??

The word "agency" occurs 13 times in this document. Early on, I am clear that agency is a concept critically connected to power, freedom, resistance, and subjectivity within poststructural thinking. Conversations of relations of power and exercises of freedom and who gets to be a subject in particular discourses necessarily lead to considerations and critiques of "agency." However, in focusing my gaze on subjectivities, I have intentionally left out discussions of agency in this analysis. Some may see that as a limitation. It certainly represents a silence.

Issues of race and privilege loom large in their absence of address in my research representation. But race and privilege are not in fact absent. The intersection of race, class, and disability is a rich site for theorizing, exploring, and troubling. As such, the intersection in the context of this research is confounding and compounding—especially as some parents may manipulate RTI, or as educators might weigh decisions within RTI against pressure from specific parents' social privilege, for example. Thus, RTI itself—intended as a tool toward equity—can become a tool wielded in the name of power and privilege. The implications and complexities of subjectivities and identities of educators, parents, and students, as well as relations of power and knowledge, are boundless when considering RTI from such a perspective. Further, explorations of racialized and classed

readings of text and connections to subjectivities of myself and students were also absent from the analysis. But as readers are embodied, so are bodies raced and classed in ways that position them as negotiators of meaning within discourses. The absence of these discussions in this research is a notable limitation as well as a rich territory for further exploration.

I have also only dealt with the lived experiences of one specialist in one context. The possibilities and interpretations for others in similar roles are exponential. So, as discussed early in the research, the intent of researching these questions was not a quest for clarity, nor an effort to ease the tensions. Rather, it was a quest to embrace the messy milieu, to interrupt, disrupt, and question in order to wonder, ponder, and imagine another. Within this limitation is another—I have left out the moments of humor, of joy, of euphoria that often energize and keep me going.

Potentials and Possibilities

Nationally, teachers are stressed. Large-scale demonstrations—including those teachers marching in several of the United States motivated by demands for more resources for their students, for smaller class sizes—are on the rise. West Virginia, Kentucky, Colorado, Oklahoma, Arizona … dotted across the nation, teachers are actively taking a stand for increased wages, larger school budgets, smaller classrooms. Long-term, devoted teachers are leaving the profession and letting communities know in very, very visible ways via social media just why. Teachers, in general, express feelings of being overwhelmed, overworked, and under-appreciated. Pay is degraded, demands are increased, and professionalism is eroded ... to the extent that the son of the current President of the United States encouraged students not to listen to their “loser teachers.” Tensions born of not only dominant discourses that rule education in the U.S., but tensions born also of cultural norms, differences, and selves, tensions born of personal

histories also steeped in those discourses that all rule the daily lived experiences of teachers, are driving teachers out of the profession in droves. Something is very, very wrong.

Poststructurally informed literacy research introduces new ways of thinking and feeling with data that challenge the ontological realism that underpins much research in the social sciences. Readings of lived experience through lenses of dominant discourses urge us to open up to the indeterminate, the ephemeral, the ongoing, and the felt. So, in engaging this study, what I hope to contribute is a little picture of how the dominant national discourses—those tensions—play out for individuals in very personal, deep, and disturbing ways.

I hope this dissertation may also contribute to the current body of literature on literacy by, perhaps, offering an unexplored perspective of “literacy specialist.” That perspective requires troubling the prevalent construction in U.S. education settings. Beginning from the assumption that the role is a public one (Britzman, 1992, 2012) and discursively created in and through neoliberal ideologies (Davies, 2005, 2006; Taubman, 2009) is rather novel in the body of literature. In this research, I explicitly place the work of literacy specialist as directly tied to current ruling discourses in the field of U.S. education, writ large. Some researchers have considered this aspect in relation to teacher and coach interactions (e.g., Zoch, 2015) as well as implications for the role and preparation of specialists (e.g., Heineke, 2013), but few have attempted to connect a focus on dominant discourses to conceptions and constructions of specialists’ “identity and subjectivity.” Specifically tracing interpretations of lived experience of the specialist back to the dominant neoliberal, accountability, and audit discourses may allow for subtle, nuanced examinations of both the concept and possible enactments of “Literacy Specialist.” I thus seek to contribute to movement beyond the primary focus of the past three decades of research that considers the impact of Literacy Specialist roles on students and teachers, a focus that I maintain fails to consider the contextual and

discursive constructions of personal histories or the complex nature of literacy professional work for Literacy Specialists themselves.

I also hope this writing contributes to the body of literature on literacy professional roles by interrogating as well as enacting throughout this text what I contend is a largely missing research approach—that of autobiographical inquiry conceptualized via non-Enlightenment assumptions. Within feminist poststructural thinking, we as educators speak ourselves into existence while discourses simultaneously speak us into existence. The dominant values and ideologies reflect and constitute the discourse within which we make judgments, form desires, and make the world into a particular kind of place (Davies, 2005). Approaching literacy professional roles from feminist, anti-foundational research practices shifts the research inquiry from attempting to discern what something or someone "means" to investigations of how meanings change, how they have become established as normative or have been dismissed, and how such interrogations can yield information about how power is constituted and operates in particular contexts and local situations (Miller, 2000b, 2005, 2010b; Smith & Watson, 2010).

Research methodology typically used to explore literacy specialists has relied predominantly on case study qualitative methods. In searching for research, two self-studies (Perry, 2010; Schiller, 2011) were located. Perry's dissertation focuses on how a high school literacy coach worked with secondary content area teachers as they learned and taught reading strategies, analyzing the coaching process from her own perspective as the coach. While attempting to meet the need for research centered on the perspective of the coach, this work explicitly sought to provide insight into the perceptions of the coach about coaching practice and instructional decision-making. Schiller's dissertation sought to investigate literacy coaching as complex social, discursive, and situated phenomena. She focused on micro-analysis of coaching conversations to explore how teachers and coaches interact in ways that support their learning and how coaches interact effectively with teachers who hold different views of learning. In order to answer these

questions, Schiller attempted to illustrate why and demonstrate how coaching interactions are at times fraught and complex. While affirming a view of coaching as socially co-constructed through language-in-use and providing an expansive view of what constitutes successful literacy coaching, this research did not explore the discursive constructions of subjectivity of either coach or teacher.

Further, studies that explore the literacy specialist role have relied predominantly on sociocultural theories. I acknowledge that there exists much literacy research from sociocultural perspectives that attends to power (e.g., Ghiso, 2011; Kontovourki, 2012; Lewis, 2001; Rainville, 2007; Rainville & Jones, 2008). Others have offered similar critiques of RTI and literacy practices within sociocultural framings. What my research may perhaps contribute to the existing body of work is an explicit, intentional zooming in and out between the discursive fields at play through power and knowledge relations to subjectivities and identities. In such a tracing of discursive threads, the interactions of power, knowledge, subjectivities, and identities with and within each other as well as they ways they are constituted in language illuminate a highly unfixed, complicated, and complicating view.

One distinguishing characteristic of this research is that in relying on autobiographical means, I am, in a sense, a case study of one. In utilizing moments with my students, I do center those moments around particular individuals; however, the students themselves are not the focus of the study. Thus, this study does not fall into similar methodological categories as those described above. I found no in-depth autobiographical or self-study focused on identity and subjectivity that employed poststructural concepts with discursive formations of "the subject." In this sense, this study contributes a perspective not found to date in the body of research on literacy professional roles.

In reviewing the limitations of existing research, Hunt and Handsfield (2013) note that an emphasis on tasks and roles can be problematic as it does not fully recognize or

provide a robust theorization of the power relationships involved in coaching. The bulk of research has explained the roles of literacy specialists within a historical perspective or a model of professional development. While helpful, these perspectives do not make visible the assumptions about identity and power that guide research and interpretations. Focusing too much on roles may limit understanding of the complexities of literacy interactions. They suggest further research is needed to move beyond what literacy specialists ought to do to examine their lived experiences and the intricacies of role performance. This dissertation, in fact, seeks to contribute such a missing perspective through explicitly examining my own interpretations and analysis of my interpretations of my lived experience as subject, as literacy specialist.

All Hope is Not Lost

Writing all this, I waffle between catharsis and exhaustion. Exploring the tensions and impossibilities with a Foucauldian eye toward discourse, power, and knowing lifts my eyes from the tiny pool of light in which I typically cast my gaze. Following the influence of poststructural inflected mentors to write a poststructurally informed autobiographical inquiry means the writing will not be sequential, tidy, or "realist." I seek to "tell" fractured, leaky, ruined moments of literacy work with interrogative writing that reflects contestations with, in, and of the inquiry. I re-read and re-write in order to examine the discursive forces that frame their telling. It is a bit liberating.

The work of teaching is difficult work within current U.S. culture. Considering the larger forces at work within the daily moments is helpful in finding resistance. In re-viewing and re-inscribing representations of events and reflections on those events, I intentionally look for constitutive forces of neoliberal and accountability discourses in the daily work of literacy specialists as they frame subjectivity. I seek to engage the fight for an (im)possible singular and definitive meaning. I seek to emphasize discontinuities,

disjunctures, and jarring moments—it is in those spaces that I find resistance. It is in the resistance that there is freedom. Within the im/possible, there is possibility. Within the non/sense, there is sense. Spaces exist for refusals, spaces exist in which to breathe and speak something new—something that embraces multiplicities, uncertainties, and ambiguities.

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I dreamt again.

I cannot seem to get away from this recurring dream. I nursed an infant. When I woke, I was struck with the knowledge that the infant I was seeking to nurture was not my own. And the breastfeeding of this child may not be fully appreciated. The uneasy sense of this knowledge has stayed with me in recent days. If this infant is associated with my work in the depths of my psyche, why do I feel I don't "own" this work? Is this a manifestation of deep-seated fears of my own inadequacies? That I am a fraud in this work; that I am unqualified to even attempt? I am disturbed. I am uncertain. As I write this, my jaw is locking.

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Appendix A

Coaching Model Comparison Chart

Behaviorist/Mechanistic Models: Goal is to impact the implementation/practices of the teacher							
	Primary Authors	**Definition**	**Purpose/ Goal**	**Underlying Assumptions**	**Theoretical Foundations**	**Process/ Procedures**	
Peer Coaching	Joyce & Showers	One of the first coaching models to appear in the literature; has experienced some shifts in the last 2 decades; only one element of an overall school improvement initiative; meant to support transfer of new learning to practice;	Aim is improving teacher practices within broader school improvement initiative.	Principles of peer coaching: all teachers much agree to be members of study teams; following a specific process builds collaborative and supported professional learning.	Based on adult learning theory that supports on-site, continuous, practice-centered professional learning.	Primarily planning and developing curriculum and instruction in pursuit of shared goals; teachers working together – one is teaching, others observes;	The teacher/coach is positioned as one who moves colleagues from a deficit understanding to expert application through a specific collaborative process.
Instructional Coaching	Knight	Coaching is a means to increase teacher effectiveness within district reform efforts.	Teacher adoption of scientifically proven practices and effective implementation to help students learn more effectively	Teaching effectiveness can be captured in scientific ways and those practices will increase student achievement regardless of contextual factors.	Partnership Philosophy(culled from adult ed., cultural anthropology, organizational theory: articulated in seven principles: equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis & reciprocity	Coach provides intensive, differentiated support to teachers so they are able to implement proven practices; coaching may cover the Big Four: specific teaching practices, content, classroom management, & assessment; Eight components: enroll, identify, explain, model, observe, explore, refine, & reflect.	Work for the coaches is to focus on effective instruction as evidenced by student learning; to do so, coaches must embody a broad range of skills.

Behaviorist/Mechanistic Models: Goal is to impact the implementation/practices of the teacher							
	Primary Authors	**Definition**	**Purpose/ Goal**	**Underlying Assumptions**	**Theoretical Foundations**	**Process/ Procedures**	
Literacy Coaching*	MacKenna & Walpole	Connected to Reading First Initiative; coaching is a strategy implementing a professional support system for teachers, a system that includes research or theory, demonstration, practice, and feedback;	Goal is to improve teaching and learning; developing expertise in teachers;	Multiple models of coaching are needed and each context must choose or build the model most appropriate for the context; not one right coaching model for all settings; coaching assumes many problems in student achievement are likely related to poor instruction (*these authors unproblematically accept this)*	Placed within adult education principles and adult learning theory;	Whatever specific model is adopted in a context, it must include: establishing a role for the coach, building knowledge for teachers, choosing instructional strategies, making instructional plans, reflecting on instructional quality, assessing student learning	Overall, treat the coach as change agent or reform agent in a specific context;

Cognitive Models: Purpose is to impact the teacher's thinking, decision-making, and reflection							
	Primary Authors	**Definition**	**Purpose/Goal**	**Underlying Assumptions**	**Theoretical Foundations**	**Process/ Procedures**	**Identity Implications**
Differentiated Coaching	Kise; Moran	Actually several different models often lumped under the term; any coaching framework that differentiates the process, the content, or the product of the coaching encounter in response to the teacher's needs. Can be layered into various other coaching models	Responsive and teacher directed/specific professional learning; the teacher sets the agenda for the professional collaboration/learning with the coach; coach offers a continuum of customized learning opportunities to support teachers in the acquisition and use of specific knowledge, skills, and strategies;	Teacher resistance to coaching stems from a mismatch between the learning/personality style of the teacher and the delivery of the professional learning; learning agenda tied to greater reform, program development efforts and largely orchestrated by the coach	Based on personality type theory and learning theory	Four step framework: coach draws a hypothesis about teacher's learning/personality style, coach identifies teacher beliefs, coach and teacher together identify the problem the teacher wants to solve, coach and teacher develop a coaching plan	puts the onus on the coach to appropriately meet the needs of the teacher; coach h must adopt a stance/persona/identity to match the teacher and thus foster change;
Cognitive Coaching	Costa & Garmston	Change in thought/perspective of the teacher will result in change in teaching behavior and move towards more effective instruction; if teachers change their higher-order functioning, they will improve the way they teach and students, in turn, will have significantly better learning experiences	Purpose is to develop self-directed people by building workplace cultures that value reflection, complex thinking, and transformational learning; Intended to support teacher's thinking and self-directedness; three main goals: establishing and maintaining trust, facilitating mutual learning, enhancing teacher holonomy;	Grounded in the belief that the thought processes of the teacher are what drive practice; instead of focusing on compliance, CC seeks to develop people who are self-sufficient, resourceful, naturally driven to lean and grow;	Built on five states of mind: efficacy, flexibility, consciousness, craftsmanship, and interdependence;	Three phases of coaching process: the planning conference, the classroom observation, and the reflecting conference; coaches use a process to improve the thinking practices of the teachers by exploring the teachers states of mind to create new possibilities, new thinking, and new resources	CC impacts teacher identity because through the process teachers see themselves differently professionally – not as one who receives feedback on effectiveness, but one who autonomously and consciously developed those insights

Cognitive Models: Purpose is to impact the teacher's thinking, decision-making, and reflection							
	Primary Authors	**Definition**	**Purpose/Goal**	**Underlying Assumptions**	**Theoretical Foundations**	**Process/ Procedures**	**Identity Implications**
Content Coaching	Staub	To improve learning by focusing on relevant, important, rich content to be instructed; "Content coaching is an iterative process centering on thoughtful lesson design skilled enactment of lessons, reflective analysis of student learning and the use of that analysis to construct ensuing lessons (p. 115);	Improved instruction significantly improves learning; Provoke changes in thinking and place teacher professionalism and evidence of student learning at heart of all interactions; NOT attempt to manipulate teacher to think a certain way – rather meet the teacher where they are at and co-create ways to plan, implement, and reflect on lessons; based on incremental theory of intelligence – we can become smarter by becoming cognizant of who we are as learners and applying the right kinds of effort and metacognitive strategies; NOT about implementing a specific curriculum, program, etc. – although those tools are implemented in the process of coaching;	Effort creates intelligence; mindful engagement over fidelity;	Effort-based principles of learning and systems theory; built on basic principles accountable talk, self-management of learning, socializing intelligence, and learning as apprenticeship	Planning preconference, lesson design, teachers and coaches working together in various ways during the lesson, & post conference reflection; coaches focus on asking questions that engender dialogue to provoke changing in thinking	As knowledgeable experts in content, coaches support teachers' efforts to increase intelligence within content.

Cognitive Models: Purpose is to impact the teacher's thinking, decision-making, and reflection							
	Primary Authors	**Definition**	**Purpose/Goal**	**Underlying Assumptions**	**Theoretical Foundations**	**Process/ Procedures**	**Identity Implications**
Student-centered Coaching	Sweeney	Student-centered coaching is about setting specific learning targets for students that are rooted in standards and curriculum and working collaboratively with teachers to ensure targets are met.	Specific goals for student learning that are measurable and impact student achievement.	Coaching focused on teacher practice should not presume to impact student learning; coaching should focus on student learning. Data, student work, and evidence of student's learning are the primary means of evaluating instructional success.	Underpinning this conception of coaching is the notion that the ultimate goal of schools is student learning – all work with teachers should center on that focus. Learning is defined as standardized understandings of achievement.	Coaching conversations within a reflective cycle of determining learning sought analyzing evidence of learning, determining actions teachers will take, and reflective evaluation of instructional practice tied to student achievement.	Coach is positioned as a partner who supports the teacher in meeting his or her goals for students.

Transformative Models: Purpose is to transform/reform the entire system of education inside out by transforming teachers' way of being, thinking, and practicing teaching.
*note this is different than models that are tied to specific programmatic or reform initiatives within a specific context.

	Primary Authors	**Definition**	**Purpose/Goal**	**Underlying Assumptions**	**Theoretical Foundations**	**Process/ Procedures**	**Identity Implications**
Literacy Coaching*[1]	Toll	Actively distinguishes her conception of coaching away from other literacy coaching models with her Coach as a fresh alternative : coaches initiate the process of coaching (various ways) but the content of the coaching is determined solely by the teachers; adding to, but not replicating the work of supervisors, professional developers, reading specialists, and other professional roles already in existence	The aim of coaching is to build on teacher's strengths to explicitly make schools make more sense for the students and teachers that inhabit them;	Teacher agency is foundational for schools to make sense for both students and teachers; coaching cannot exist in isolation – it must be a highly contextualized piece of an overall dynamic.	Relies on Foucault to trace the power negotiations embedded in coaching transactions; leans of Vygotsky's semiotic mediation to illustrate identity work occurring during coach and teacher interactions; leans of complexity science to make sense of the various school contexts;	Coaches engage three broad areas of activity: intervening, leading, and partnering; teacher agency must be paramount – all work of the coach is meant to support teacher agency; one model of coaching is inappropriate as in order to be responsive to teachers and contexts, coaches must have a broad range to draw on.	The coach is positioned as a relationship builder and partner to teachers who is responsive to teachers' interests and desires

*Literacy coaching appears in multiple places on the chart as many authors have published various iterations of coaching under the moniker "Literacy Coaching". The models represented on this chart represent the conceptions of authors who have published multiple books or articles on their conception and developed it over time.

Transformative Models: Purpose is to transform/reform the entire system of education inside out by transforming teachers' way of being, thinking, and practicing teaching.

*note this is different than models that are tied to specific programmatic or reform initiatives within a specific context.

	Primary Authors	**Definition**	**Purpose/Goal**	**Underlying Assumptions**	**Theoretical Foundations**	**Process/ Procedures**	**Identity Implications**
Evocative Coaching	Tschannen-Moran	"Calling forth motivation and movement in people, through conversation and a way of being, so they achieve desired outcome and enhance their quality of life." (p. 7)	To inspire motivation and movement without provoking resistance or power struggles; not about increasing teachers' effectiveness or reaching specific goals.	Coach as a whisperer, a way of being; assumes professional desire personal professional growth;	Built on theories of adult learning and growth-fostering psychology	4 step process: story, empathy, inquiry, & design that builds self-efficacy through awareness, trust, and experimentation ; coaches tap into 5 aspects to support teachers finding their voice: consciousness, connection, competence, contribution, and creativity	Coaches role is to support life-long professional growth and evoke transformational shifts; coaches have to adopt various identities in order to affect teachers.
Transformat ive Coaching	Aguilar	Coaching is both method and a theory leveraged for remaking schools.	Coaching for transformational change & remaking schools from within; intention is to impact teachers' ways of being (intellect, behavior, practices, beliefs, values, and feelings) an educator. Ultimate goals not tied to outcomes, effectiveness,, or achievement.	Coaching must be contextualized within a broader conversation to save or reform public education; coaching is a political stance;	Based on systems thinking, and the potential for leveraging connections towards change and growth while unattached to an outcome.	While possibly drawing on strategies from directive and facilitative coaching strategies, and cognitive coaching, the coach utilizes a broad range of processes and scope.	The coach is positioned as a linchpin for change not only with individuals, but within broader systems of schools, communities, and society at large.

Appendix B

ILA/NCTE Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals-Reading/Literacy Specialist

READING/LITERACY SPECIALIST				
Standard	**Component 1**	**Component 2**	**Component 3**	**Component 4**
STANDARD 3: ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION Candidates understand, select, and use valid, reliable, fair, and appropriate assessment tools to screen, diagnose, and measure student literacy achievement; inform instruction and evaluate interventions; assist teachers in their understanding and use of assessment results; advocate for appropriate literacy practices to relevant stakeholders.	**3.1** Candidates understand the purposes, attributes, formats, strengths/limitations (including validity, reliability, inherent language, dialect, cultural bias), and influences of various types of tools in a comprehensive literacy and language assessment system and apply that knowledge to using assessment tools.	**3.2** Candidates collaborate with colleagues to administer, interpret, and use data for decision making about student assessment, instruction, intervention, and evaluation for individual and groups of students.	**3.3** Candidates participate in and lead professional learning experiences to assist teachers in selecting, administering, analyzing, interpreting assessments, and using results for instructional decision making in classrooms and schools.	**3.4** Candidates, using both written and oral communication, explain assessment results and advocate for appropriate literacy and language practices to a variety of stakeholders, including students, administrators, teachers, other educators, and parents/guardians.
STANDARD 4: DIVERSITY AND EQUITY Candidates demonstrate knowledge of research, relevant theories, pedagogies, and essential concepts of diversity and equity; demonstrate an understanding of themselves and others as cultural beings; create classrooms and schools that are inclusive and affirming; advocate for equity at school, district, and community levels.	**4.1** Candidates demonstrate knowledge of foundational theories about diverse learners, equity, and culturally responsive instruction.	**4.2** Candidates demonstrate understanding of themselves and others as cultural beings through their pedagogy and interactions with individuals both within and outside of the school community.	**4.3** Candidates create and advocate for inclusive and affirming classroom and school environments by designing and implementing instruction that is culturally responsive and acknowledges and values the diversity in their school and in society.	**4.4** Candidates advocate for equity at school, district, and community levels.

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READING/LITERACY SPECIALIST				
Standard	**Component 1**	**Component 2**	**Component 3**	**Component 4**
STANDARD 5: LEARNERS AND THE LITERACY ENVIRONMENT Candidates meet the developmental needs of all learners and collaborate with school personnel to use a variety of print and digital materials to engage and motivate all learners; integrate digital technologies in appropriate, safe, and effective ways; foster a positive climate that supports a literacy-rich learning environment.	**5.1** Candidates, in consultation with families and colleagues, meet the developmental needs of all learners (e.g., English learners, those with difficulties learning to read, the gifted), taking into consideration physical, social, emotional, cultural, and intellectual factors.	**5.2** Candidates collaborate with school personnel and provide opportunities for student choice and engagement with a variety of print and digital materials to engage and motivate all learners.	**5.3** Candidates integrate digital technologies into their literacy instruction in appropriate, safe, and effective ways and assist colleagues in these efforts.	**5.4** Candidates facilitate efforts to foster a positive climate that supports the physical and social literacy-rich learning environment, including knowledge of routines, grouping structures, and social interactions.
STANDARD 6: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP Candidates demonstrate the ability to be reflective literacy professionals, who apply their knowledge of adult learning to work collaboratively with colleagues; demonstrate their leadership and facilitation skills; advocate on behalf of teachers, students, families, and communities.	**6.1** Candidates demonstrate the ability to reflect on their professional practices, belong to professional organizations, and are critical consumers of research, policy, and practice.	**6.2** Candidates use their knowledge of adult learning to engage in collaborative decision making with colleagues to design, align, and assess instructional practices and interventions within and across classrooms.	**6.3** Candidates develop, refine, and demonstrate leadership and facilitation skills when working with individuals and groups.	**6.4** Candidates consult with and advocate on behalf of teachers, students, families, and communities for effective literacy practices and policies.
STANDARD 7: PRACTICUM/CLINICAL EXPERIENCES Candidates complete supervised, integrated, extended practica/clinical experiences that include intervention work with students and working with their peers and experienced colleagues; practica include ongoing experiences in school-based setting(s); supervision includes observation and ongoing feedback by qualified supervisors.	**7.1** Candidates work with individual and small groups of students at various grade levels to assess students' literacy strengths and needs, develop literacy intervention plans, implement instructional plans, create supportive literacy learning environments, and assess impact on student learning. Settings may include a candidate's own classroom, literacy clinic, other school, or community settings.	**7.2** Candidates collaborate with and coach peers and experienced colleagues to develop, reflect on, and study their own and others' teaching practices.	**7.3** Candidates have ongoing opportunities for authentic, school-based practicum experiences.	**7.4** Candidates receive supervision, including observation (in-person, computer assisted, or video analysis) and ongoing feedback during their practicum/clinical experiences by supervisors who understand literacy processes, have literacy content knowledge, understand literacy assessment and evidence-based instructional strategies and, preferably, have experience as reading/literacy specialists.

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Appendix C

SRBI in CT Overview

Overview of SRBI

Broad Definition

Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) emphasize successful instruction for all students through high-quality **core general education practices**, as well as targeted interventions for students experiencing learning, social-emotional or behavioral difficulties. Core general education practices include comprehensive curriculums in key academic areas, effective instructional strategies, creation and maintenance of a positive and safe school climate, and a comprehensive system of social-emotional learning and behavioral supports (Bluestein, 2001; Greenberg et al., 2003; Wessler and Preble, 2003). Interventions are scientific and research-based as much as possible (i.e., to the extent that research exists to inform their selection or development). The focus of SRBI involves instruction and interventions in general education at the onset of concern about student performance. However, professionals who provide special education play a vital role in serving as a fundamental resource for general educators in implementing SRBI and in helping to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Key elements of SRBI include the following:

- Core general education curriculums that are comprehensive in addressing a range of essential competencies in each academic domain, culturally relevant and research-based to the extent that research exists to inform their selection or development
- A schoolwide or districtwide **comprehensive system of social-emotional learning and behavioral supports**
- Strategies for assuring that educators are modeling respectful and ethical behaviors, fostering student engagement and connectedness to school, and assessing the quality of the overall **school climate** so that students experience physical, social-emotional and intellectual safety
- The use of research-based, effective instructional strategies both within and across a variety of academic domains
- Differentiation of instruction for all learners, including students performing above and below grade-level expectations and English language learners (ELLs)

- Differentiation of instruction for all learners, including students performing above and below grade-level expectations and English language learners (ELLs)

- Universal common assessments of all students that enable teachers to monitor academic and social progress, and identify those who are experiencing difficulty early
- Early intervention for students experiencing academic, social-emotional and/or behavioral difficulties to prevent the development of more serious educational issues later on

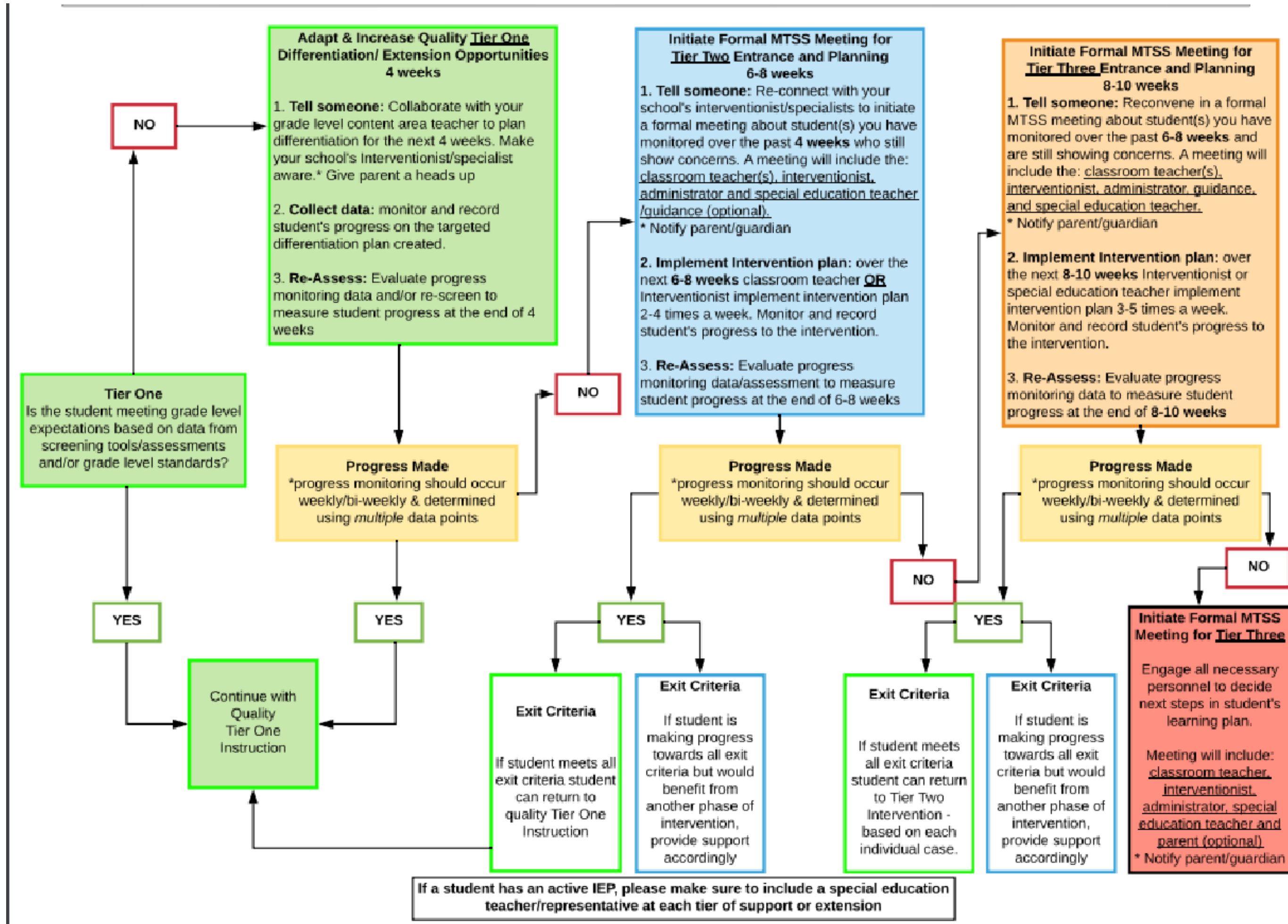
- Educational decision making (academic and social/behavioral) driven by data involving students' growth and performance relative to peers; data are carefully and collaboratively analyzed by teams of educators (e.g., data teams, early intervention teams), with the results applied not only to inform instruction for individual students, but also to evaluate and improve core general education practices and the overall efficacy of interventions

- A continuum of support that is part of the general education system, with increasing intensity and/or individualization across multiple tiers

- A systemic schoolwide or districtwide approach to core educational practices in which teachers within a grade use the same **common formative assessments** for all students (academic and social/behavioral), address the same curricular and social-emotional competencies, and share the same behavioral expectations; assessments, curricular and social-emotional competencies and behavioral expectations also are well-coordinated across all grades

Appendix D

MTSS Process Overview



Appendix E

RTI Fidelity of Implementation Rubric

		assessments, diagnostic assessment data, short-term progress monitoring) to verify decisions about whether a student is or is not at risk.	data, short-term progress monitoring) to verify decisions about whether a student is or is not at risk.
Progress Monitoring*—Ongoing and frequent monitoring of progress quantifies rates of improvement and informs instructional practice and the development of individualized programs. Measures are appropriate for the student's grade and/or skill level.*			
Progress-Monitoring Tools	Selected progress-monitoring tools meet no more than one of the following criteria: (1) have sufficient number of alternate forms of equal and controlled difficulty to allow for progress monitoring at recommended intervals based on intervention level; (2) specify minimum acceptable growth; (3) provide benchmarks for minimum acceptable end-of-year performance; and (4) reliability and validity information for the performance-level score is available.	Selected progress-monitoring tools meet two or three of the following criteria: (1) have sufficient number of alternate forms of equal and controlled difficulty to allow for progress monitoring at recommended intervals based on intervention level; (2) specify minimum acceptable growth; (3) provide benchmarks for minimum acceptable end-of-year performance; and (4) reliability and validity information for the performance-level score is available.	Selected progress-monitoring tools meet all of the following criteria: (1) have sufficient number of alternate forms of equal and controlled difficulty to allow for progress monitoring at recommended intervals based on intervention level; (2) specify minimum acceptable growth; (3) provide benchmarks for minimum acceptable end-of-year performance; and (4) reliability and validity information for the performance-level score is available and staff is able to articulate the supporting evidence.
Progress-Monitoring Process	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) progress monitoring occurs at least monthly for students receiving secondary-level intervention and at least weekly for students receiving intensive intervention; and (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., appropriate students are tested, scores are accurate, decision-making rules are applied consistently).	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) progress monitoring occurs at least monthly for students receiving secondary-level intervention and at least weekly for students receiving intensive intervention; and (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., appropriate students are tested, scores are accurate, decision-making rules are applied consistently).	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) progress monitoring occurs at least monthly for students receiving secondary-level intervention and at least weekly for students receiving intensive intervention; and (2) procedures are in place to ensure implementation accuracy (i.e., appropriate students are tested, scores are accurate, decision-making rules are applied consistently).

Multilevel Instruction*—The RTI framework includes a school-wide, multilevel system of instruction and interventions for preventing school failure. Commonly represented by the three-tiered triangle, multilevel instruction also is known as the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS).*			
Measures	**1**	**3**	**5**
***Primary-Level Instruction/Core Curriculum* (Tier I)**			
Research-Based Curriculum Materials	Few core curriculum materials are research based for the target population of learners (including subgroups).	Some core curriculum materials are research based for the target population of learners (including subgroups).	All core curriculum materials are research based for the target population of learners (including subgroups).
Articulation of Teaching and Learning (in and across grade levels)	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) teaching and learning objectives are well articulated from one grade to another; and (2) teaching and learning is well articulated within grade levels so that students have highly similar experiences, regardless of their assigned teacher.	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) teaching and learning objectives are well articulated from one grade to another; and (2) teaching and learning is well articulated within grade levels so that students have highly similar experiences, regardless of their assigned teacher.	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) teaching and learning objectives are well articulated from one grade to another; and (2) teaching and learning is well articulated within grade levels so that students have highly similar experiences, regardless of their assigned teacher.
Differentiated Instruction	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) interviewed staff can describe how most teachers in the school differentiate instruction for students on, below, or above grade level; and (2) interviewed staff can explain how most teachers in the school use student data to identify and address the needs of students.	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) interviewed staff can describe how most teachers in the school differentiate instruction for students on, below, or above grade level; and (2) interviewed staff can explain how most teachers in the school use student data to identify and address the needs of students.	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) interviewed staff can describe how most teachers in the school differentiate instruction for students on, below, or above grade level; and (2) interviewed staff can explain how most teachers in the school use data to identify and address the needs of students.
Standards-Based	The core curriculum (reading and mathematics) is not aligned with the Common Core or other state standards.	The core curriculum (reading and mathematics) is partially aligned with the Common Core or other state standards.	The core curriculum (reading and mathematics) is aligned with the Common Core or other state standards.

	culturally and linguistically relevant (1) instructional practices, (2) assessments, and (3) intervention programs.	culturally and linguistically relevant (1) instructional practices, (2) assessments, and (3) intervention programs.	culturally and linguistically relevant (1) instructional practices, (2) assessments, and (3) intervention programs.
Communications With and Involvement of Parents	One or none of the following conditions is met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI is shared with parents; (2) a coherent mechanism is implemented for updating parents on the progress of their child who is receiving secondary or intensive interventions; and (3) parents are involved during decision making regarding the progress of students receiving intensive intervention.	Two of the following conditions are met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI is shared with parents; (2) a coherent mechanism is implemented for updating parents on the progress of their child who is receiving secondary or intensive interventions; and (3) parents are involved during decision making regarding the progress of students receiving intensive intervention.	All of the following conditions are met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI is shared with parents; (2) a coherent mechanism is implemented for updating parents on the progress of their child who is receiving secondary or intensive interventions; and (3) parents are informed about decision making regarding the progress of students receiving intensive intervention.
Communication With and Involvement of All Staff	One or none of the following conditions is met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI and data-based decision- making process is shared with staff; (2) a system is in place to keep staff informed; and (3) teacher teams collaborate frequently.	At least two of the following conditions are met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI and data-based decision-making process is shared with staff; (2) a system is in place to keep staff informed; and (3) teacher teams collaborate frequently.	All of the following conditions are met: (1) a description of the school's essential components of RTI and data-based decision- making process is shared with staff; (2) a system is in place to keep staff informed; and (3) teacher teams collaborate frequently.
RTI Teams	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) the RTI team is representative of all key stakeholders; (2) structures and clear processes are in place to guide decision making; and (3) time is set aside for the team to meet regularly.	At least two of the following conditions are met: (1) the RTI team is representative of all key stakeholders; (2) structures and clear processes are in place to guide decision making; and (3) time is set aside for the team to meet regularly.	All of the following conditions are met: (1) the RTI team is representative of all key stakeholders; (2) structures and clear processes are in place to guide decision making; and (3)time is set aside for the team to meet regularly.

Intensive Intervention*—Individualized with a focus on the academic needs of students with disabilities and those significantly below grade level* **(Tier III)**			
Data-Based Interventions Adapted Based on Student Need	Intensive interventions are not more intensive (e.g., no increase in duration or frequency, change in interventionist, change in group size, or change in intervention) than secondary interventions.	Intensive interventions are more intensive than secondary interventions based only on preset methods to increase intensity (e.g., sole reliance on increased duration or frequency, change in interventionist, decreased group size, or change in intervention program).	Intensive interventions are more intensive than secondary interventions and are adapted to address individual student needs in a number of ways (e.g., increased duration or frequency, change in interventionist, decreased group size, change in instructional delivery, and change in type of intervention) through an iterative manner based on student data.
Instructional Characteristics	None of the following conditions is met: (1) the intervention is individualized; (2) intensive interventions are led by well-trained staff experienced in individualizing instruction based on student data; and (3) the group size is optimal (according to research) for the age and needs of students.	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) the intervention is individualized; (2) intensive interventions are led by well-trained staff experienced in individualizing instruction based on student data; and (3) the group size is optimal (according to research) for the age and needs of students.	All of the following conditions are met: (1) the intervention is individualized; (2) intensive interventions are led by well-trained staff experienced in individualizing instruction based on student data; and (3) the group size is optimal (according to research) for the age and needs of students.
Relationship to Primary	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) decisions regarding student participation in both core instruction and intensive intervention are made on a case-by-case basis, according to student need; and (2) intensive interventions are aligned to the specific skill needs of students to help them make progress toward core curriculum standards.	Only one of the following conditions is met: (1) decisions regarding student participation in both core instruction and intensive intervention are made on a case-by-case basis, according to student need; and (2) intensive interventions address the general education curriculum in an appropriate manner for students.	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) decisions regarding student participation in both core instruction and intensive intervention are made on a case-by-case basis, according to student need; and (2) intensive interventions address the general education curriculum in an appropriate manner for students.

Infrastructure and Support Mechanisms*—Knowledge, resources, and organizational structures necessary to operationalize all components of RTI in a unified system to meet the established goals.*			
Measures	**1**	**3**	**5**
Prevention Focus	Staff generally perceives RTI as a program that solely supports the prereferral process for special education.	Some staff understand that RTI is a framework to prevent all students, including students with disabilities, from having academic problems.	All staff understand that RTI is a framework to prevent all students, including students with disabilities, from having academic problems.
Leadership Personnel	Decisions and actions by school and district leaders undermine the effectiveness of the essential components of the RTI framework at the school.	Decisions and actions by school and district leaders are inconsistent and only somewhat supportive of the essential components of the RTI framework at the school; support for RTI implementation is not very evident.	Decisions and actions by school and district leaders proactively support the essential components of the RTI framework at the school, and help make the RTI framework more effective; support for RTI implementation is a high priority.
School-Based Professional Development	The school has no well-defined, school-based professional development mechanism to support continuous improvement of instructional practice, data-based decision making, and delivery of interventions.	Some forms of school-based professional development are available, but most are not consistent or job embedded to ensure continuous improvement in instructional practice, data-based decision making, and delivery of interventions.	School-based professional development is institutionalized and structured so that all teachers continuously examine, reflect upon, and improve instructional practice, data-based decision making, and delivery of interventions.
Schedules	School wide schedules are not aligned to support multiple levels of intervention based on student need; inadequate time is available for interventions.	School wide schedules are partially aligned to support multiple levels of intervention based on student need; some additional time is built in for interventions.	School wide schedules are aligned to support multiple levels of intervention based on student need; adequate additional time is built in for interventions.
Resources	Resources (e.g., funds, programs) are not allocated to support RTI implementation.	Resources (e.g., funds, programs) are partially allocated to support RTI implementation.	Resources (e.g., funds, programs) are adequately allocated to support RTI implementation.
Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness	One or none of the following conditions is met: Staff can articulate information and factors that they consider when adopting	Two of the following conditions are met: Staff can articulate information and factors that they consider when adopting	All three of the following conditions are met: Staff can articulate information and factors that they consider when adopting

Fidelity and Evaluation*—System for collecting and analyzing data to measure fidelity and effectiveness of the RTI model.*			
Measures	**1**	**3**	**5**
Fidelity	Neither of the following conditions is met: (1) procedures are in place to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the core curriculum and secondary and intensive interventions; and (2) procedures are in place to monitor the processes of administering and analyzing assessments.	One of the following conditions is met: (1) procedures are in place to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the core curriculum and secondary and intensive interventions; and (2) procedures are in place to monitor the processes of administering and analyzing assessments.	Both of the following conditions are met: (1) procedures are in place to monitor the fidelity of implementation of the core curriculum and secondary and intensive interventions; and (2) procedures are in place to monitor the processes of administering and analyzing assessments.
Evaluation	None of the following conditions are met: (1) an evaluation plan is in place to monitor short- and long-term goals; (2) student data are reviewed for all students and subgroups of students across the essential components to evaluate effectiveness of the RTI framework (i.e., core curriculum is effective, interventions are effective, screening process is effective); and (3) implementation data (e.g., walk-throughs) are reviewed to monitor fidelity and efficiency across all components of the RTI framework.	At least one of the following conditions is met: (1) an evaluation plan is in place to monitor short- and long-term goals; (2) student data are reviewed for all students and subgroups of students across the essential components to evaluate effectiveness of the RTI framework (i.e., core curriculum is effective, interventions are effective, screening process is effective); and (3) implementation data (e.g., walk-throughs) are reviewed to monitor fidelity and efficiency across all components of the RTI framework.	All of the following conditions are met: (1) an evaluation plan is in place to monitor short- and long-term goals; (2) student data are reviewed for all students and subgroups of students across the essential components to evaluate effectiveness of the RTI framework (i.e., core curriculum is effective, interventions are effective, screening process is effective); and (3) implementation data (e.g., walk-throughs) are reviewed to monitor fidelity and efficiency across all components of the RTI framework.