Teaching Beyond the Pandemic: (re)imagining culturally relevant teaching through multiliteracies

By

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Table of Contents

"Well, that's just the way it is, some things'll never change"
- Bruce Hornsby from *The Way it is*

Chapter 1: Introduction

Origins of "good teaching"

Conceptions of "good teaching" or a "good teacher" have changed over time and have often been contested (e.g., Robinson, 2017; Stolz, 2018; Warner, 2016). It is complicated and problematic to fixate upon a notion of good teaching, which also assumes that there is an opposite – bad teaching. One complication involves the arbiters of acceptability: *who* determines what good or bad teaching Looks like when enacted in practice. Another problem with locating a definition of "good teaching" in time or space is that it assumes good teaching is that good teaching is universal and can be applied to various contexts.

To avoid a smattering of critical inquiry, I wish to expand beyond good teaching and being a good teacher by thinking about the intellectual pursuit of understanding good teaching, why stakeholders and actors within education are so enthralled with good teaching, and what ultimately this fascination offers preservice teachers beyond their preparation programs and the students they will serve in their classrooms. To do this, I am borrowing a bit from an autoethnographic approach, using my own teaching journey to unpack notions around "good teaching" and how this experience evolved toward my research questions for my study of meaning making processed among preservice teachers. Before presenting my research questions, it is important to engage first with my own history and interest in this topic. Doing so establishes a context of intersecting positionalities I carry into the work of expanding beyond conceptions of good teaching. This background also establishes the origins of this work.

My teaching journey is filled with complicated intersection of many short comings and successes. In quick reflection, much of my earlier journey was riddled with the former. As I reflect on my journey to the present, I recognize that my perspective is only one and my own. I approach this reflection as a means to bring forward my own values and question the dominant norms under which my journey takes place. In the spirit of critical literacy, my reflection reveals my reading of the world and opens conversations around "what is and has always been." Moving toward a dialogue that includes multiple readings of the world leads to continually challenging the (re)production of dominant literacies (Freire, 1987). Consequently, critical literacy is focused on not accepting unquestioned norms, avoiding shrugging the shoulders with deference or indifference (that's just the way it is/some things'll never change). My reading of the world is only one of many.

Graduating in the fall brought great anxiety to my efforts in securing a teaching position. I graduated from a state school that was touted as housing one of the premiere teacher education programs in the state (at least that is what was advertised and relayed to prospective students). I felt confident that I carried a reputation of a program behind me, as if the name of the school on my resume had some influence. Nonetheless, graduating in the middle of the academic year did not help my search. I was fortunate enough to be "offered" a position as a long-term substitute in a middle school of a local urban school district. "Offered" is not quite the accurate description of how I acquired this temporary position. I showed up to substitute for a teacher in the building and the drama that ensued that same day forced the principal's assistant[1] to request that I substitute until the end of the school year (it was April). Allegedly, the teacher I was substituting for unexpectedly took another position and was leaving to advance their career pathway. Lucky me, right? What I did not know was that that teacher was the most beloved

[1] I never met the principal until a month into substituting for that classroom. He did not even know my name or why I was there until his assistant explained the situation to him. He seemed relieved that he did not have to involve himself in hiring another teacher before the end of the school year.

teacher in the building, and I was taking over their class for the last two months of the school year, fresh out of undergrad.

In retrospect, this was a very awkward position to be put in, but I made the best of it that I could. I am not sure what became of that particular class of students, but one of my teacher partners at the school assured me that "the kids liked and respected me." To this day, I am not sure if that was a genuinely accurate observation, but I did feel somewhat accomplished given the circumstances. I do not recall a lot of "instructional" successes. That is, I cannot remember teaching a lesson that I felt really good about or that students were particularly engaged in. What I do remember is sitting alone in my classroom during lunch for the first two weeks of my short stay. About three or four weeks in, several students asked to have lunch in my classroom. I obliged. Soon after, I had about a dozen students in my room during lunch, every day. I must have been doing something to connect with them.

I applied for that same position, knowing it would be vacant for the following year – I did not even get a request for an interview. I was back to where I started just a few months prior. I spent the next few years day-to-day substitute teaching and taught one semester as a long-term substitute teacher in another school district. Opportunities came and went (some closer than others), but the prestige-carrying candidate was not offered a full-time position. *That's just the way it was.*

After a few frustrating years, the time finally came. To make a long story short, a series of events leaning in my favor led to my first full-time teaching position - a veteran teacher retired in the middle of the school year due to medical complications and two candidates were offered the position before I was even interviewed, both previous candidates turned down their respective offers. I will never forget the first words the principal uttered to me once I accepted the position: "You have some big shoes to fill." The veteran teacher I was replacing had an almost larger-than-life reputation in the high school. He was one of the senior members of the

English department, and the students loved him. I remember being transported years back to that urban middle school in April. Lucky me, right? It was better this time.

Fast forward a few more years, and I had achieved my tenure status. One of the first privileges I took advantage of my first year of tenure was selecting my own performance evaluation method. Aside from the scheduled administrative observations, the faculty had the choice of action research, a book study, or an alternative proposal. One of my close colleagues (Loren) suggested that we partner to do an action research project.

Loren and I found common ground soon after I was hired to teach in the English department. She had already been teaching in the building for three years, but my first year was her introduction to teaching junior-level English. Our personalities and approaches to teaching and English content were strikingly similar. It was also convenient that we both taught junior sections of two of the three available English tracks in our building (general and college preparatory). At that time, our high school had trimester scheduling and only required students to have two trimesters of English. Consequently, many students had both Loren and I as their English teachers in a single year. This prompted us to examine how having two different English teachers affected student outcomes in that particular year.[2] The ultimate goal was to evaluate the effectiveness of our teaching and to identify areas of improvement, since the trimester schedule presented some issues with consistent instruction among teachers. The English department was not the only department inhibited by the trimester schedule, so this was a project that had implications beyond our own classrooms.

Our project revealed some interesting findings, but generally students transitioning between Loren and my classrooms seemed to have little impact on their outcomes in our classes – positively or negatively. We had similar assessments, content progressions, and classroom structures. We were not concerned about the styles of our teaching because our styles were very

[2] Our action research question was "How does trimester scheduling impact student outcomes in English 11?"

similar, as well. Overall, the project was a bit underwhelming in confirming our hypothesis concerning the limitations of the trimester schedule. However, we did have a moment of interest revolving around one student.

Jacob was a tough guy. He had a bit of a rebellious reputation among teachers. He had no observable, consistent peer group, but he seemed to get along with other students. Loren had Jacob the first trimester of the year; she would talk about him all the time. He was disrespectful and spiteful. He rarely did assignments and was unwilling to engage in the class in productive ways. On several occasions, he simply put his head down and slept through most of the class. This happened amidst a classroom atmosphere that was fun and energetic because that was the kind of person Loren was. As we concluded the first trimester, I noticed that Jacob was on my roster for the following trimester. I do not recall doing anything intentional or preparing for Jacob's reputation to take hold in my classroom, but I do remember the first couple of weeks being a bit awkward.

Imagine having to start all over with a new group of students, while there are others with whom relationships had already been established in the same class – in late October. Within trimester scheduling, the first two weeks were always a bit rough in terms of gaining some momentum and trust among students, but my first noticing was that Jacob participated in my class. He was not an avid hand-raiser, but he would silently sit in the back of the classroom and from time to time he would chime in with his angsty, yet confident, voice. [3] He had some productive curiosities, and I was very surprised by his level of engagement. I only saw short bursts of disruptive behavior. Though Jacob's engagement was somewhat unpredictable, I did not appear to be dealing with the same person whom Loren had described. I relayed my experiences with Jacob to Loren and received her utter disbelief. We discussed it and tried to

[3] "Not that anyone cares, but I think…" Jacob's voice still resonates in my memory as being on a line between wanting to be a part of the conversation but not wanting to give off the vibe that he cared about what people thought of his opinions. He very well could not have cared less about the opinions of others, but his voice sounded "angsty" in the sense that he wanted to contribute but was unsure that what he said would make sense to others, especially on topics relating to class and various social hierarchies.

rationalize it, but we could not seem to agree or arrive at a mutual conclusion. We were missing something, a way for us to dig a little deeper. Maybe our original question was no longer compatible with our discussion. Maybe we lacked the language to talk about this moment in a productive way. Our conversation ended in frustration. I recall Loren saying, "I guess he responds better to men." *Some things'll never change*.

After that year, I remember several other instances of students' inconsistent classroom behaviors between and among groups of teachers, myself included. I must admit that I was not always the beneficiary of favorable student dispositions. At times, I was left scratching my head wondering what was causing these phenomena. It has been over a decade since Loren and I conducted that action research project, and the same question continues to bother me to this day: what is good teaching and how do we know when it is happening?

I wish to reiterate the importance of this personal narrative in relation to this work. It is a very condensed story about my personal and professional struggles early in my teaching career, but I want to unpack the notion of good teaching. More specifically, I want to examine how I viewed good teaching and what was communicated to me as a construct/model of a good teacher.

Substituting at the urban middle school was filled with complications and a variety of factors that contributed to my unsuccessful attempt to become a faculty member of the building. However, I walked away from that experience remembering the social connections I made with students, which could have translated to more successes in the academic pursuits of the class. I reflected on that experience feeling that my rejection for the position was related to not being good enough to consider. This sentiment was communicated to me countless times as I filed dozens of applications and participated in several interviews, only to be passed over by a more "experienced candidate."[4] Administrators look for good teachers.

[4] On two occasions, I made it to the final round of interviews. In both instances, the interviewing principals told me that they were impressed with me, but they were leaning toward hiring another finalist with more experience.

Once I secured a full-time position, this notion of good teaching never really died. It just reappeared in other forms. Even as a full-time teacher, I was teaching in a system that looked at me as a means for production and reproduction. As a means toward production, I was expected to impart skills onto students so that they would be "college and career ready." Though I received a choice of my evaluation method, I was monitored to ensure that my focus remained on the technical aspects of my job (e.g., teaching Shakespeare, equipping students with effective writing skills). Simultaneously, I was reproducing these very expectations with my students. I was held accountable for the technical work I was doing, and students' grades were tethered to their technical performances. At the very least, students could do well in school in relation to their level of compliance.

Furthermore, this reproduction has been in motion for generations. During parent-teacher conferences, most parents, even the most well-meaning and supportive, were drawn to their children's grades, tying their futures and hopes for their children in these one-dimensional numerical metrics. Unfortunately, parents also tended to associate grades with teacher performance. If a student does well, that must mean that the teacher is doing their job. Conversely, students fail because they have "bad" teachers. In the public school system and within the communities they serve, there is pervasive and limited language around what good teaching is and what a good teacher does.

Loren's concluding words from our action research project ("I guess he responds better to men") left me speechless. Aside from the fact that I had no productive response, I was at a loss for any explanation. I suppose our gender differences could have contributed to the difference in experience with Jacob. I suppose the schedule change, physical environment, and time of year could have contributed to our different experiences with Jacob. So much time has lapsed since that year, and I am not sure that I could provide any further insight into that moment from my current vantage point. What I am left to reflect on is whether I had the capacity and language to think about that moment differently. Loren and I were thinking about

that moment within the context we were part of (the school and teaching). When that perspective did not yield satisfying explanations, we were left to resort to lower hanging fruit (students respond to teacher gender identities differently). This is not to say that gender, among other identities (social, political, cultural, or linguistic), does not intersect throughout and variably interact within teacher-student relationships. In fact, these diverse qualities are central to knowing and building trust with students, but we lacked the language and space to pursue inquiry at a deeper, actionable level. Consequently, Loren and I used identity to bring swift closure to a deteriorating discussion. Regrettably, these student phenomena came and went throughout the years, leaving us with a sense of shrugged shoulders and defeated attitudes – *that's just the way it is*.

There is nothing I can do to change the past. I cannot go back and ask Jacob why he responded differently to Loren. I cannot go back and change the course of our conversation about Jacob's behavior. In the present, I think about how relationships contribute to conceptions and indicators of good teaching. Does a positive relationship indicate that good teaching is happening? What is the role and purpose of relationships in good teaching practices? Though I cannot account for these past instances, I can reflect and move forward with my critical questions.

Toward a Critical Pedagogy

I have never been one to simply accept something for its own sake. My earliest memories of grade school were filled with questions and curiosities. In third grade, I had one of the most patient and graceful teachers, Mrs. King. I recall her being such a caring teacher and one who was genuinely interested in every student. Among my childhood memories, being in her classroom is one of the most prominent. At the end of the year, Mrs. King gave superlative awards to everyone. In great anticipation of my recognition, I wondered what I was going to be known for: the funniest, the smartest, the kindest. When Mrs. King called my name, she

announced that I had received the award for “asking the most questions.” The obligatory clapping from the class was the backdrop to my confusion. I reluctantly accepted the certificate and quickly asked, “Is this a good award?” Mrs. King chuckled (surely at the irony of the moment) and retorted without hesitation and with the most loving tone, “Yes. You keep on asking all the questions you want to find the answers you need.”

My experiences and relationships with Jacob and other students fascinate my curiosity of the value of connections and roles between teachers and students. I never felt comfortable with the idea that I needed to constantly prove my worth and capacity to teach by passing authoritatively designed exams (PRAXIS). I never felt comfortable tying students’ worth to passing authoritatively designed exams (state standardized tests). There is a long list of other discomforts I experienced early in my teaching career, but I continued to follow through with my obligations, while doing my best to serve the interests of my students. I struggled with this tension for many years, but I developed work-arounds – finding ways to engage in disruptive compliance (e.g., teaching the five-paragraph essay while encouraging students to reformat the essay into other genres or forms to convey their ideas). Toward the end of my ten years of teaching high school English, I realized that I was not asking questions for curiosity. I was asking questions to move toward change, but I still lacked the language and space to make sense of my practice.

Transitioning from teaching high school to teacher education gave me space to reflect on and make sense of my practice as a teacher. I am grateful for the privilege to work with preservice teachers. Admittedly, I was intimidated to work with undergraduate and graduate students. As a high school teacher, I worked and lived in the community that I served. For the most part, students shared common values and life experiences, making it easier for me to relate to and build relationships with students. In a college setting, students come from various communities and lived experiences well beyond the communities within the college itself. Consequently, I felt anxious as to how I could effectively build relationships with students. Much

to my surprise, my conception of teaching in higher education was unfounded. Working with preservice teachers has encouraged me to be more curious about the expectations that are placed on preservice teachers by preparation programs, the kinds of understandings that develop from preservice teachers' professional and personal responses to such expectations, and how these understandings manifest and further evolve (or not) in their classrooms.

As I am asking more questions, I notice that the language I am using to ask and answer questions is more expansive than it was while teaching high school English. I have the space, time, and perspective to look at teacher practice (unlike my dispositions as a classroom teacher) and poke at pedagogy in a way that challenges unquestioned norms and expectations. Culturally relevant pedagogy provided language that affirms the things that make sense for me in the classroom. To be honest, I had no idea what culturally relevant pedagogy was or who Gloria Ladson-Billings was before transitioning to teacher education. Fortunately, culturally relevant pedagogy is the "word" (to borrow from Freire) that enables me to "read the world" with more confidence, clarity, and purpose (more on this later).

What has not changed over the course of my teaching journey is my interest in the notion of good teaching. I have no problem with teachers wanting to be "good teachers", but I want to be cautious about whose version of "good teaching" is being prioritized. I want to be cautious about whom "good teaching" serves and how we, as educators, know when good teaching is happening. When we start to think about teaching and working with students as a privilege, we start to think about students, and our relationships with them, differently.

Research Questions

Working alongside preservice teachers is a great privilege and honor for me. It is inspiring to hear people's stories and experiences that have led them to teaching. As expected, there are aspects of these teachers' journeys that reflect pieces of my own teaching journey. An

aspect of their experiences that leads me to discussing my research questions relates to their language and capacity to articulate their practice and leverage it in service of students.

I notice a tendency among preservice teachers to acknowledge culturally relevant pedagogy (i.e., name-dropping it in their lesson plans), but there lacks a substance in their instruction during field observations. The most common example that comes to mind is student choice. Many student teachers have diverse classrooms and offer students choice in novels or other types of print relating to a particular concept, idea, or skill. It appears that this is the most obvious way to account for students' diverse backgrounds, but beyond choice students are not engaging with the text in meaningful or nuanced ways that connect with their particular ways of knowing and being. Nor did they offer a sustained critical engagement to enhance their funds of knowledge with the content. These observations offer a new course of thinking in regard to "good teaching" and my research question(s):

How do preservice teachers analyze tensions of practice they encounter and what do they draw upon to develop solutions or innovations?

- *How are they talking about their practice and what does this say about the processes by which they adapt their teaching?*
- *What structures or agents are assisting and/or inhibiting preservice teachers from engaging with culturally responsive practice?*

In the next chapter, I examine existing literature around culturally relevant pedagogy and its various iterations. A nuanced aspect of the literature review examines current understandings and research around literacy, as well as proposing links to and the utility of a framework that combines culturally relevant pedagogy and multiliteracies theory. I am developing a framework that augments culturally relevant pedagogy within teacher education and tries to better understand and account for the meaning-making processes (multiliteracies) that preservice teachers engage with during and after their teacher preparation programs. Doing so allows teacher educators to better model culturally relevant pedagogy for preservice teachers.

It is incumbent upon teacher educators to deliberately model the very mindsets and practices that are expected of preservice teachers. Can teacher education reasonably expect preservice teachers to be culturally relevant educators if they do not experience culturally relevant teaching within their own teacher preparation programs? This is not to say that teacher education needs further scrutiny. Rather, the values and tenets of teacher education should be communicated, demonstrated, and lived in and throughout respective programs. The core of this project seeks to understand the relationship between multiliteracies (interconnected meaning-making processes) and culturally relevant pedagogy. It is my hope that this framework can get at how misconceptions/misappropriations of culturally relevant pedagogy are (re)produced in teacher education and can shift toward a productive, relationally based mindset that informs worldviews and practices that impact teacher-student relationships in the classroom. Although this work focuses on preservice teachers, this work ultimately has an eye toward better serving youth, their families, and their communities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The history of education in the United States has not been sympathetic toward varying cultures and intersecting identities of students or educators. From boarding schools that promised indigenous tribes that their children would enjoy a modern education, through Jim Crow and school desegregation, to modern education policies that responded to the threat of intellectual mediocrity (or worse) amidst global competition (e.g., National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, *A Nation at Risk*), the goal of education has been and continues to be an institution of monoculture and assumed identity. That is, in order to be successful in school, students are expected to acquire an academic identity that is steeped in the values and normativity of a dominant, mainstream culture and language. In this mainstream culture (monoculture), there is a way of speaking and knowing. Through the literature review, I will discuss more at length how this narrowness has filtered into concepts of literacy and being literate.

Focusing on ways that literacy is narrowly viewed as a technical skill is an important part of this literature review because it allows discussion around how mainstream monoculture becomes possible or rationalized. Understanding that schools are steeped in dominant forms (e.g., *good* students follow the rules, *bad* students do not do their assignments, reading these books are *good for you*) does little to elevate discourse around why these forms are oppressive and how to work in spite of them, if not dismantle them. Examining literacy as a process of meaning making opens up ideas about what counts as literacy and who determines illiteracy, as well as structures that are used to "correct" illiterate practices (e.g., remediation for basic level/below-grade readers). Literacy/Multiliteracies functions throughout this work from theoretical aspects of the literature review, through the methodology, to data analysis and the practical means by which I continue thinking about how to push the boundaries of how preservice teachers conceive of and practice culturally relevant pedagogy.

In the following sections, I will discuss ways school literacy is limited in its scope of defining and measuring student competencies. Afterward, I will explore other conceptualizations of literacies that move beyond rigid school literacy (traditional literacy). I will then move into literature discussing culturally relevant pedagogy and how culturally responsive teaching, an iteration of culturally relevant pedagogy, aligns with Gloria Ladson-Billings' original formulation of her teaching framework. Ultimately, I am building a framework that challenges and moves beyond narrow views of culture and language, encouraging teacher practice to productively and collaboratively define spaces and opportunities for students to thrive in their intellectual pursuits and cultural competencies (Ladson-Billing, 1995; Muhammad, 2020).

Traditional Literacy, School-Centric, and Socio-Centric Discourses

Traditionally, reading and literacy are often thought to be interchangeable. Being able to read and doing the act of reading signals proficiency in schools. A student who is reading independently, and does it consistently, reflects a particular kind of student – a kind of student that most teachers "don't have to worry about" (O'Brien, Stewart, & Beach, 2008). Therefore, the focus of teacher attention falls on *struggling readers*. These students, like their "skilled" peers, are categorized as being a particular kind of student. However, the *struggling reader* is the kind of student that teachers *have* to worry about. Students who *struggle* with reading typically do not perform well on standardized tests and are placed in interventionist environments in an effort to "catch them up" with their *proficient* peers. Reading is a school performance. There are routines, patterns, and expectations to be "good readers." At the elementary level, reading skills and strategies that are taught to young children often involve phrases such as, "what good readers do." At the high school level, certain words and phrases – such as basic, proficient, and advanced/honors – carry certain negative connotations though they are intended to encourage students to perform at improved academic levels.

Another unproductive aspect of traditional notions of reading/literacy is its supposed neutrality (Alvermann, 2008). Neutrality offers a circumvention of scrutiny because its intention is unbiased and rooted in apparent equality. For example, tests are neutral in order to promote equality – in the sense that all students are taking the same test and are progressing toward the same outcomes. Here, neutrality is associated with equality, which manifests through good intentions. Similar to reading performance, testing reflects a particular image of what students should be or aspire to be. Standardized tests communicate an ideal of academic success. Pass the test, you are successful. Fail the test, you need remediation. Testing is a taxonomical tool that organizes students and delivers clear stratification (Burroughs and Smagorinsky, 2008) and preference for certain kinds of people. Although traditional notions around literacy are neutral and aimed toward equality, these ideals are rooted in a narrow view of literacy and a commitment to upholding mainstream values and ways of knowing.

If a narrow view of literacy perpetuates notions of equal access in schools, such as reading, then perhaps a solution lies in looking at factors that exist outside of the school (e.g., socioeconomic or sociocultural contexts). Unfortunately, seeking solutions outside of the school does not guarantee promising or different results. Street (1998) examines ethnographies of literacy and research in social linguistics in an effort to understand conflicting ideals and approaches toward literacy. He identifies that *socio-centric* and *school-centric* discourses create a polarization within communities. The *socio-centric* view favors conditions outside of school (at home, local economy, family history, etc.) to account for the academic shortcomings of students. That is, students can be perceived to fail in school because of factors relating to their lives outside of school. If students live in communities that experience high crime rates, lack economic opportunities and access to basic necessities (e.g., housing and food), a *socio-centric* view would account for students' failures as a result of these community factors. However, I would imagine that *socio-centric* views would attribute success of students from these communities to happen in spite of outside conditions, which would be contradictory and raise

questions about why some students are successful and others are not if they are from the same or similar communities. On the other hand, the *school-centric* view focuses on the achievements and circumstances that exist within the school, divorced from outside influence (i.e., community). Therefore, students are valued as successful if they adequately perform school acts (passing tests, being compliant, being engaged) despite difficult home circumstances.

Although it seems there is an argument in favor of a balance between *socio-* and *school-centric* discourses, Street (1998) suggests moving beyond this polarization because these two discourses are not adequate in responding to the needs of students and recognizing their assets. *Socio-centric* discourse discredits students' assets to be successful in intellectual pursuits. That is, their environments are presumed to control more of their educational destiny than their capacity to succeed. On the other hand, *school-centric* discourse narrowly defines what success looks like and who has access to academic opportunities, acting as a gatekeeper for learning and knowledge. Neither discourse intellectually moves beyond traditional conceptions of literacy, and students are simultaneously valued and undervalued from both perspectives. In order to discuss what is necessary to move in a productive direction that can adequately respond to the assets students have both at home and in schools, I offer another example of how traditional conceptions of literacy limit children's clever and dynamic processes toward understanding.

A few years ago, I recall a moment when my daughter asked me about the meaning of the word *coward*. She had read it in one of her leisure books. She could not quite figure it out and felt rather silly that the only thing that came to mind was cows. Instead of having her contextually define the word within her reading, I asked her where else she recalled hearing the word to help her think about its meaning. She thought for a moment and recalled that it came from a television show she had watched the other day. The line she recalled was, "Don't be a coward. Get in there!" (I honestly do not know what show this came from!). She continued to ponder, and then she realized she had heard coward used in another story, *The Wizard of Oz*.

“Does coward have anything to do with cowardly, like the cowardly lion?”, she asked with great anticipation. I affirmed her suspicion. Afterward, she proceeded to proclaim the meaning of coward to be someone who is easily frightened, but she did not stop there. She continued to place this definition in context of her leisure reading (*Judy Moody* by Megan McDonald) and connected coward as a quality associated with Mr. Wormwood, who is a character in *Matilda* by Roald Dahl, further affirming her understanding of coward – which she was relieved had nothing to do with cows.

This moment can help make visible the limitations of employing *socio-centric* and *school-centric* discourses. From a *socio-centric* position, my daughter’s success would be accounted for because of the mediating relationship between her and me, as an expert adult. Because she has access to resources at home, including her recollections of the word from other texts, she successfully navigates this inquiry. From a *school-centric* position, she may be considered unsuccessful because she does not contextually understand the meaning of coward right at the moment of reading it. The thinking and play that took place among resources and people is a generative and organic process that does not fit neatly within a standard lesson plan about strategies to use for decoding and understanding unfamiliar words in print. Though she may be praised in school for her eventual realization and the creativity of her process, the skills she used to arrive there are based on authentic real-world questions, which are more difficult to catch, much less use, in systematic and explicit reading instruction. In other words, organic and generative instructional moments are not as valued within *school-centric* systems that favor traditional views of literacy, primarily within standardized learning contexts. It also is clear that students’ unique processes and ways of knowing are not fully valued or credited within *socio-centric* discourse, which overlooks the skills and capacities that a student may possess to achieve because it focuses more on environmental or circumstantial variables (e.g., home life, resources, socioeconomics, family history, etc.).

Imagine crediting MacGyver's successes, not because of his creativity or skills, but in the fact that he seems to always find himself in an environment where resources are available to make a surprising escape. Yet, MacGyver would be out of luck in *school-centric* discourse, which discredits students' skills if they are not explicitly connected to the processes and sequences that are taught in schools. Such a limited and strict sequence is not compatible given the unorthodox methods that he has to employ to escape seemingly inescapable situations. Another example of success in spite of *school-centric* expectations involves solving proofs in geometry that require a set of steps and process. There are bits of knowledge about congruency and shape properties that are necessary to prove or disprove certain geometric equations (angle A is equal to angle C). As a tenth-grade geometry student, I recall solving an equation in less steps than was prescribed in a homework assignment. My teacher confirmed it was correct, but I did not follow the steps of the current lesson we were covering. Apparently, I had invoked a property we did not learn in class yet, and therefore my success was discredited.

It seems difficult to imagine a scenario that blends *socio-centric* and *school-centric* discourses to account for students' academic successes and shortcomings because they both, in some way, discredit student skills and capacities. What framework is available to address this impasse of conflicting discourses? The following section examines how the literature reconciles this impasse through multiliteracies in contrast to traditional literacy conceptions.

Widening our Theoretical Apertures

To this point, I have argued that traditional ideas around literacy are fairly narrow in regard to ensuring all students have access to intellectual opportunities and equitable resources to address long-standing social inequalities. In education, there is a conscious struggle in practice to honor the backgrounds and values that students bring with them to the classroom, while preparing students to be "lifelong learners" beyond formal k-12 education (Caraballo, 2018). What is the path from here? How do teachers and teacher educators move beyond this

trap of traditional conceptualization without sacrificing authentic opportunities to intellectually engage students? First, the literacy aperture needs to be widened (Hammond, 2015). No matter the intentions or techniques, teaching within a narrow view of literacy can stifle any attempt to meaningfully engage with students. At best, teachers may incorporate some interesting classroom activities but at the expense of responsive, situated learning. To widen the literacy lens, Paulo Freire's dialogic theory, which dichotomizes a "banking" method of teaching against a co-constructive discourse relationship between teachers and students, and his emancipatory pedagogy provide language and purpose in seeing literacy as more than a mechanical skill (e.g., reading, writing, speaking) harnessed by trained technocrats (teachers and students).

In order to engage specifically with Freire's conception of literacy, his theory and dream of emancipatory literacy is most pertinent to establishing a wider, more meaning-filled view of literacy. An important aspect of his emancipatory framework regarding literacy is that "reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35). On the surface, Freire is suggesting that the act of reading is a continual process of knowing. Additionally, the act of reading is and should not be separate from sociocultural contexts (i.e., the world) through which readers are engaging with text (i.e., the word).[5]

Freire goes deeper with the relationship between the word and the world. The reader and reality. To fully appreciate the weight of Freire's critical pedagogy, and, therefore, his ideas about literacy and illiteracy, it is crucial to understand the role of dialectical relationships in the process of liberatory education. To be more specific, Freire viewed this dialectic in terms of human agency - subjectivity vs. objectivity.

[5] From this point forward, text I will refer to any variety of print, digital, auditory, visual, tactile, or otherwise sensory mediums that are either read/viewed/heard or written/produced/composed.

In a turn-taking format within their co-authored book *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, Donaldo Macedo and Paulo Freire (1987) engage in various discussions around critical pedagogy and issues that arise for such a pedagogy to take hold in various contexts, such as in the United States. They discuss the topic of human agency in an effort to establish critical pedagogy and "transformative acts." From this discussion, Freire (1987) prioritizes the reinvention of production (what to make and for whom) to avoid merely shifting power from one side to another.

> The reinvention of power that passes through the reinvention of production cannot take place without the amplification of voices that participate in the productive act…and the reinvention of the productive act takes place to the degree that people's discourse is legitimized in terms of people's wishes, decisions, and dreams, not merely empty words. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 55).

For Freire, redistribution of power does not lead to radical change. In order to engage in radical change, power should be reinvented through prioritizing the transformation of productive acts that include the voices of those who previously held little or no power. In this process, human agency becomes more apparent among those who were previously objects and not subjects. Therefore, critical pedagogy requires realizing people as subjects (meaning makers), not as objects.

The work of critical pedagogy does not end with human agency. That is, recognizing people as subjects can also be counterproductive if that subjectivity takes on an "individualistic framework" (Freire & Macedo, 1978) . The individualization of a subject removes that subject from crucial social contexts, which inhibit the subject's self-consciousness in relation to others.

> [The individualistic position] dichotomizes the individual from the social. Generally, this cannot be accomplished, since it is not viable to do so…The comprehension of the social is always determined by the comprehension of the individual. In this sense, the

> individualistic position works against the comprehension of the real role of human agency. Human Agency makes sense and flourishes only when subjectivity is understood in its dialectical, contradictory, dynamic relationship with objectivity, from which it derives. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 58-59)

An individualistic framing of a person as a subject is counterproductive to critical pedagogy because it privileges the person, as an individual, absent from a social connection. Additionally, the individual is not confronted with their dialectic relationship with objectivity.

Freire's dialectic (2018) describes a process by which the oppressed achieve a consciousness that they are subjects, who internalize the oppressor within their own being and knowing. The dialectical relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is one of interdependence. The oppressor cannot be in power and control unless there are people (objects) who acknowledge and prop up those in power. Conversely, the oppressed understand their own existence in relation to their oppressors. Liberation for the oppressed comes through a process of consciousness that overcomes the dominant language and systems of the oppressor to maintain unilateral power. However, liberation is not exclusive for the oppressed. The oppressor also encounters liberation in pursuit of restoring their own humanity alongside the humanity of the oppressed. Through this co-liberation, the oppressive systems in place (production) can be collaboratively reimagined by the oppressed and oppressor because they both realize that their own perceptions and languages of their dialectic relationships are based on dehumanizing the other.

To ensure that people are recognized as productive subjects– not as domesticated objects for exploitative purposes – there is a necessary reckoning with their dialectical relationships. Freire (2018) does not view dialectics as synonymous with opposites, in the sense that they are separate entities, a dichotomy. This separation encourages a "me vs. them" mentality that leads to violence of one over another. Such a dichotomous treatment of people is rigid, not

productive, and does not lead to transformative outcomes. To illustrate the difference between dialectics and dichotomies, let us consider the relationship between a teacher and students. In a dichotomy, the teacher is the authority. The one who is responsible for students in their care. It is through their expertise and experience that they evaluate the progress of students. Students, then, are the teacher's opposite. Instead of being an authority, students are amateurs. As amateurs, they do not possess knowledge, experience, or responsibility. They are "empty vessels" waiting to be filled (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Freire, 2018). In a dialectic, the teacher is still the authority. They possess experience and expertise. However, the teacher also realizes that at one time, they were not a teacher. They were a student. Students, on the other hand, have their own unique experiences and expertise, but they may not possess certain skills, yet that afford them the confidence and flexibility to transfer between/among various forms of discourse for particular purposes (e.g., translanguaging between informal social talk with peers while collaborating on a grant being presented to an institutional board). They also recognize that the teacher has their own experiences, expertise, and language that is particular to their training as a teacher.

This example of the teacher-student dichotomy and dialectic is ideal and simple, but it shows differing perceptions of both teachers and students. It is important to recognize that simply reflecting on notions of human agency - who is and who is not a subject – does not lead to transformative outcomes. Even in a dialectic relationship, the teacher remembers their experience as a student, and the student sees the teacher as an expert to learn from. Consequently, the teacher teachers and students learn. If it is crucial to recognize our opposites (dialectic relationships), why then would the outcome of teachers teaching and students learning be the same as a dichotomous relationship? What is the advantage of viewing relationships as dialectic? A dichotomous relationship views entities as separate and *independent*. They exist not because of one another; they merely exist in the same spaces. There is no reason or utility for creating a connection. Dialectic relationships, on the other hand,

establish entities as *interdependent* – one exists because of the other. It is through a consciousness of this interdependence *and* action that liberation is possible and moves beyond teachers *just* teaching and students *just learning*.[6]

Interdependent relationships are present throughout Freire's work (e.g., dialectics, dialogue, praxis). It is no surprise, then, that Freire's conceptions of literacy, the capacity to reflect on and act upon the word and the world, involves an interdependent connect between dialectics and dialogue. This relationship is driven by what Freire (1987, 2018) refers to as praxis.

> An unauthentic word, one which is unable to transform reality, results when dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*, into an alienated and alienating "blah." It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action. On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into *activism*. The latter – action for action's sake – negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. (Freire, 2018, p. 87-88).

Balance is a central theme within relationships that Freire describes. The balance between reflection (a consciousness of self in relation to others) and action (humanizing transformation) is the sum towards praxis, where meaningful words lead to *and* are informed by meaningful action. To refer back to the teacher-student dialectic relationship, the teacher's consciousness about their own authority and previous experience as an amateur means little without action that invites students to be heard, seen, and felt as valued, active participants of learning

[6] For Freire, liberation is the permanent humanization of the dehumanized.

communities. Similarly, students' consciousnesses of their current objectivity and their desire to be valued, active participants are negated without measured action that transforms learning communities to be sites of liberation for both the oppressed and the oppressor.

To this point, I have reviewed Freire's theoretical premises for dialectics and praxis (reflection and action), as part of his dialogic theory. The question that remains is how do we act upon dialectics and praxis toward transformative outcomes? I have purposely reserved talking about dialogue because it is the pragmatic arm of the theoretical foundation of dialogic theory. Freire sees the world and the word as means of consciousness. Additionally, he says:

> We can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* it or *rewriting* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35)

Understanding literacy as a dynamic process that is being "written and rewritten" should be grounded in a critical, humanizing pedagogy. Referring back to the teacher-student relationship, a humanizing pedagogy sees students as valued, active participants in a learning community – who are teaching *and* learning. A dehumanizing pedagogy sees students as "empty vessels" that require "deposits" of skills and knowledge from their authoritative teachers (Freire & Macedo 1987; Freire, 2018).

Freire (2018) describes the banking method (depositing ideas in students) as an antithesis to dialogic teaching/learning. Dialogue, then, is the constant, critical practice of interacting *alongside* others.

> If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united

> reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants…It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another. (Freire, 2018, p. 89)

Dialogue is the practice of "uniting reflection and action." Within dialogue, there is space to explore the depths and breadths of others' readings of the word and the world. Dialogic relationships are flexible, evolving connections among people, who seek to be valued and active authors in (re)creating/(re)writing the word and the world. Dialogic theory is driven by a commitment to humanizing pedagogy and co-constructed liberatory practice.

Freire does not specifically talk about the modes through which emancipatory literacy or dialogue takes place. Because he does not refer to specific modes, he does not bound the possibilities of how people's existential sensibilities interact with various texts. This is not a critique of Freire. It is an implicit nod to multiliteracies because he refers to unique experiences among people which inform their perception - reading - of the world. Dialogic relationships allow people to communicate multimodally and interconnectedly, thus encompassing the unique ways of knowing, being, and thinking that we embody.

Now that the theoretical aperture has widened, what comes next? Moving away from traditional views of literacy, which assumes "a universal set of reading and writing skills for decoding and encoding printed text" (Alvermann, 2009, p. 16), it is more possible to (re)imagine literacy as being dynamic and multi-faceted – we are transitioning from literacy to multiliteracies. I wish to reiterate that multiliteracies are not and should not be bound by academic disciplines. Instead, multiliteracies take on various forms and meanings in contexts and moments. They are situated in the means and context through which we interact with text

and the ways that we bring in our own histories and "readings of the world" into the meaning making process.

Multiliteracies Framework

Concretely defining multiliteracies would be contrary to its very nature of being fluid and based in contextualized processes. However, it may be useful to examine and think about multiliteracies through two intersecting dimensions. One, multiliteracies theory (MT) is a way to account for the evolving, unique system of processes and array of texts (not limited to print) that a person uses to make meaning within a specific context and purpose. Two, MT is a set of value-laden practices that tests, affirms, and refines our processes for meaning making. According to The New London Group (1996), "multiliteracies also creates a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, *constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes*" (p. 64, emphasis added). Creating connections with text in its various modalities (print, video, audio, etc.), is a complex process that is geared toward specific purposes and contexts. Also, texts act as tools or resources, not as *things* to be highly regarded in and of themselves (e.g., literary canon).

My daughter's pursuit to define the word coward was driven by a purpose – to confirm that coward did not have anything to do with cows unless they were fearful cows (cowardly cows). In that purpose, her context was reading a book that contained the word but did not reveal the entirety of the word's meaning. As described earlier, she underwent a process of drawing from prior knowledge and experience with other texts (television, film, and other print texts) to begin making sense of coward. In some sense, she enacted a self-dialogic process that involved other texts, memories, and suppositions. As a result of this process, she was able to not only define the word but also to understand its applicability, instantly assigning it to a specific

character in another text (Mr. Wormwood in *Matilda*) that did not explicitly use the word coward(ly) to describe the character.

To further expand on the interconnection of texts in meaning-making processes, O'Brien, Stewart, and Beach (2008) assert that "meaning does not simply reside in the text" (p. 88). Rather, it is part of system or "ecology of practice." Individuals and communities have cultural and linguistic processes that absorb texts to produce meaning in multiple ways and iterations. In this process, we are contending with our experiences, interpretations, values, and environments to develop a "reading" of the world(s) we are imagining. Still, this process is further evolved through the evolutionary nature of texts themselves (i.e., digital literacies, new literacy studies).

Knobel & Lankshear (2014) study new literacies and examine ways that it differs from conventional texts. They identify that there are two dimensions through which this difference exists – technological and ethos. They argue that technology has introduced new ways of interacting with print texts (pixels vs. pages) and that these new modalities of viewing text offer new ways to understand and "read" text (e.g., clicking, typing, searching, scrolling, pop-ups, links, etc.). Certainly, technology more easily connects multiple texts and multiple modalities. However, multiliteracies are not bound to a certain type of text and can encompass several different genres and modes of texts, all traversed and/or held together in the meaning-maker's mind. The beauty of this fluidity is the opportunity for students to produce multimodal and/or multiliteracy texts to create new texts.

The second dimension of examining the nature of multiliteracies relates to what Gee (2004) refers to as *simulations of experiences* (embodied process). Closely aligning with the New London Group's (1996) view of literacies and multiliteracies, Gee (2004) uses simulation as a metaphor to describe the complex process of meaning making.

> We build simulation models to give meaning to our experiences in the world and prepare us for action in the world… They are specifically built and we make them on the spot to help us make sense of and act in specific contexts or with specific texts; they are not "neutral," but capture a given perspective or viewpoint, foregrounding somethings and backgrounding others… (p. 46).

Meaning making through texts is a situated practice. That is, meaning is made in specific contexts and for specific purposes. The additional aspect of multiliteracies theory that Gee adds here is about action - simulations are not about definitions, they are about experience (Gee, 2004). In other words, people create these "simulations" to develop ideas and values. To test what they know and feel. To anticipate the consequences of these experiences in the world outside of their heads. One, among many, distinctions that Gee (2004) notes for model simulations is that they are used to give meaning to language, but model simulations are not language in itself. Making this distinction is critical to understanding the ways in which students make sense of their learning experiences, as well as how teachers perceive and respond to these varying processes. The following section further develops multiliteracies as a process of meaning making and distinguishing it as more than a mode/method of communication.

Multiliteracies Practice – What is missing?

There is a body of literature that is devoted to clarifying or at least urging for more research to get beyond the potential reduction of multiliteracies as an arbitrary form of language/communication (Heertum & Share, 2006; Moje, 2009; Masny & Cole, 2009; Knobel & Lankshear, 2014). Moje (2009) suggests research that distinguishes somewhat muddying perspectives on multiliteracies. She calls for teasing out "new" and "old" literacies because this research and theorizing would greatly benefit how practice enacts theoretical renderings of new

literacies.[7] One of the most recent and significant contributors to new literacy studies (NLS) comes from Knobel & Lankshear (2014), who describe new literacies as "differing from conventional literacies on two dimensions: technically/technologically, and in terms of what [they] call a different 'ethos'" (p. 97). Their focus on the digital and technological character of new literacies seems typical in multiliteracies research within the last decade. However, it seems this is the kind of work that Moje (2009) was insisting on moving beyond. This is not to say that digital literacy is not a legitimate literacy, but it is often misconstrued as "new." Arguably, this fixation with the nuance of technological advancement potentially depreciates the ways in which youth interact with these mediums and the ways teachers observe/understand how students interact with these technological forms (Moje 2009). Simply moving print media to an online format does not negate its quality of being print. This would be a shift in modality.

From Moje's perspective, new literacy could be better conceptualized as new in terms of how certain literacies change with technological advancements. For example, a new app that enables video text-messaging among users should not be considered a new literacy practice. Rather, the ways in which people use that feature and understanding how their communication and outcomes are similar and/or different from other modes they used prior (written/typed text, emojis, GIFs, etc.) would be more significant to multiliteracies research.

Distinguishing between multimodality and multiliteracies is especially significant in teacher practice. Shoffner, Oliveira, & Angus (2010) offer a case study that examines the conceptions of literacies of two high school English teachers, and how they provide space and interaction with multiliteracies in their classrooms. Both teachers acknowledge that students have unique ways of interpretating and making sense of the world. They both build their lessons and activities to provide a multiplicity of texts that are relevant to their students' perceived literacies (e.g., social media, videos, art, music). The authors note that "students were presented

[7] It does not seem that much research has been done in response to Moje's admonition for this research focus.

with new literacies…but rarely participated in them, as they were asked to use traditional literacies to interpret the new literacy activities occurring in their classroom" (p. 86). This study suggests that although the teachers recognized and planned for student multiliteracies, their practice reverted back to a traditional paradigm because the "new' literacies were approached as tools as opposed to focusing on the "norms…that shape meaning making of the symbols offered via the tool" (Moje, 2009, p. 349).

Imagine reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlett Letter* with high school students. This text is linguistically difficult to access, but it is also distant in terms of its social context and history. Using new literacies as a tool to better understand the text could be done by showing documentaries, paintings of the New World settlements or Puritan villages, or perhaps more modern adaptations of the story. The documentaries provide more expert insight into Puritan culture. The paintings/visuals provide a cultural insight to examine Puritan life more closely. The modern adaptation makes the original text's language more accessible. These tools may be intriguing or interesting for students, but they ultimately return to talking about *The Scarlet Letter* as a linguistically, socially, and historically distant text. Instead of encouraging students to make their own connections to the text and/or produce their own texts in reference to the novel (multiliteracies), students often are asked to utilize relevant, modern tools (e.g., audio readings, pictorial depictions, film depictions, abbreviated texts) to gain easier access to texts (multimodality).

To this point, I have discussed multiliteracies as a theoretical vessel to move beyond traditional literacies. It is now appropriate to discuss multiliteracy texts that are coupled with multiliteracy practice. To refer back to Moje (2009), we are not only using a variety of tools and texts (media) to interact with students, but we are also finding ways for students to put into practice (Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2008) their literacies and testing their simulations (Gee, 2004). Understanding multiliteracies as an on-going and evolving process of meaning making

that is not settled within a person or the mind allows us to center students within classroom literacy practices. No matter the subject, discipline, or content, negating the meaning maker (student) makes multiliteracy texts irrelevant. Even the most "engaging" texts are meaningless without someone to read it and interact with it. And from that process, develops new or affirming meaning. Even the concept of *enacting* literacies (Moje, 2009; Burroughs & Smagorinsky, 2008) does not fully embrace students as makers of meaning, respecting and utilizing their capacity to interpret and compose texts of their own. Even if students are respected as meaning makers, what classroom practices encourage students to test and affirm their knowledge and understanding? What practices intellectually and critically engage students in work that goes beyond the text itself? Imagine students reading *The Scarlet Letter,* creating art or text that expresses their reading of Hawthorne's plot/conflicts, and students share their creations among their peers. It is through these student-generated texts that bring a linguistically, socially, and historically distant text closer to a modern audience who continues to see time-traversing themes and conflicts in their everyday lives.

In his introduction to Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo's (1987) *Literacy: reading the word and the world* (1987), Henry Giroux outlines several interconnected and complex "steps", so-to-speak, en route to conditions and dispositions that allow for critical pedagogy to meaningfully be part of teacher practice. At the heart of many points he makes, Giroux continually comes back to a notion of dialogic interaction. Not one person or entity holds all the power. In fact, Freire and Macedo (1987) envision critical practice as dialogic and dialectic in nature. For Freire and Macedo, it seems unlikely to have meaningful and productive learning spaces without being able to acknowledge difference and dialogue through existing tensions. Spaces that are dialogic in nature do not/should not hold power among a minority. Critical pedagogy and practice are possible when teachers and students work alongside one another toward the endless pursuit of learning and in spite of dominant discourses that seek to subvert and silence voices of resistance and progress.

As for the work of teachers, Giroux (1987) provides much insight for critical praxis among teachers, but what he most importantly acknowledges the narrowness of context and expectation that teachers operate in within the American education system. For him, critical literacy is not just about empowering students. It is about empowering teachers…

> as part of a wider project of social and political reconstruction…fundamental to this struggle is the need to redefine the nature of teachers' work and the role of teachers as transformative intellectuals…The notion of intellectual provides a referent for criticizing those forms of management pedagogies, accountability schemes, and teacher-proof curricula that would define teachers merely as *technicians*" (Giroux, 1987, pp. 24-25, emphasis added).

What framework can help us move even further away from teachers as technicians and toward teachers as transformative intellectuals? What empowering and critical literacies can help us theorize traditional literacies, avoid the confusion of instituting multimodality in place of multiliteracies, and practice giving students a space to move beyond the text with their meaning-making processes?[8] In the next section, I examine culturally relevant pedagogy and some of its recent iterations, which I will refer to collectively as culturally responsive praxis, as a way to further expand theories of multiliteracies into the critical literacies of culturally relevant pedagogy.

What is Culture?

Before moving onto reviewing literature around culturally relevant pedagogy, I wish to clarify how I am conceptualizing culture. As I did with literacy, this discussion benefits from identifying important aspects of what culture can be. I refrain from saying "what culture is"

[8] Multimodality is certainly an important aspect of multiliteracy. However, the caution is subverting multiliteracy to multimodality or interchanging them as if they mean the same thing. This would be similar to equating the equipment used in American football to the game of football itself. I could not imagine spectators marveling at the stich work of the footballs or the safety features of players' helmets, much less paying hundreds of dollars to do so.

because so many scholars have either alluded to how culture functions in a particular space or time, clarify what culture is not, or settle on the arbitrariness of culture and how we tend to use it as a superficial identity marker. Culture can be uniquely specific to a people within a given time and space (Varenne, 2008), while also a "catchall" or "culprit" for identifying difference between and among people (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Macedo (1987) expresses culture as a non-autonomous system that is "characterized by social stratification and tensions" (p. 51). Freire (1987) adds to Macedo's conception and sees culture in its intimate connection with objects that it seeks to rationalize, as well as the objects revealing the culture's totality as "cut across by social classes" (p. 52). It is important to see culture not as a fixed object, but as an ongoing and active process of reading and expressing the world.

Understanding culture as an ongoing manifestation, evolving as we carry our history through the present, provides a deeper insight into relationships with others as we create new and nuanced ways of thinking and being alongside one another. Within a teaching context, building relationships with students is more than just knowing what they like and prefer. Building relationships is more than knowing where students are from or where they live. It is more than the social surface that we have immediate access to (think of an iceberg as we see it from above sea level). If teachers are engaged in the work to build relationships with their students, this pursuit permeates through practice and pedagogy. Understanding culture as a process of comprehension and expression, hopefully, leads teachers to seeing students as relational meaning makers, which provides more definitive connections with the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Much of the current scholarship on multiliteracies, digital literacies, and new literacy studies can trace their origins to the late 1980s through the early 2000s. During that timeframe, Gloria Ladson-Billings cultivated *culturally relevant pedagogy* through her seminal research on

the practices of successful teachers of African American students. She sought practical ways to inform the practices of teachers, regardless of race, and identified three major commonalities among the commitments and beliefs of her study's participants: academic success, cultural competence, sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2014). These three domains allow students to find intellectual growth, celebrate their own cultures in relation to others, and take their learning beyond the classroom walls. Culturally relevant pedagogy acknowledges and celebrates the diverse/unique cultures, languages, and intellectual capacities of students through classroom practice.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and multiliteracies theory view literacy in similar ways. They both see literacy as a complex, socially situated, meaning-making practice. Where they diverge involves the role of literacy in meaning making. In MT, it is the responsibility of the individual to produce meaning and assign it to language/texts. However, it is not clear what comes out of that meaning making process other than it is stored away in memory to be recalled when needed (Gee, 2004). For Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) "is designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, curriculum, schooling, and society" (p. 483). In CRP, criticality is the catalyst for practice (Muhammad, 2020). As students and teachers engage in meaning-making processes, they are also critically thinking about where their beliefs, values, and understandings are situated in relation to their communities and environments. Practice is a distinguishing feature of CRP and is especially important to invoke within and through traditional, socio- and school-centric discourses. CRP provides a way to critique the discourses of school and society that devalue people *as well as* the criticality to push further, ask more questions, and lift up the values of traditionally silenced languages, cultures, and identities.

Without criticality, that is closely examining dialectic tensions within environments and evolving identities, there is an increased risk of reducing cultural relevant pedagogy to a

superficial tool that does little to leverage the linguistic and cultural diversities of students and teachers. The most common way this reduction has taken place in classrooms is the almost ad-hoc-like inclusion of literature written by people of color (e.g., Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, the Harlem Renaissance, etc.). Of course, such literature is worthy of intellectual engagement, but many times this body of literature is used as a placeholder for other literary content (e.g., reading *A Raisin in the Sun* instead of *Death of a Salesman*).

Instead of their work being a placeholder, authors of color ought to be the subject of study. Asking critical questions that examine a text and the context under which it was written opens more possibilities for dialogic learning. For example, Olaudah Equiano's narrative about his "interesting life" can be read without any historical context. In an of itself, the narration can be read as other narratives are, as stories. However, reading his narrative as part of a long, oppressive, and violent history can introduce nuanced ways of reading and receiving author's experiences: *why would a former slave write about his own accounts amidst an ongoing slave trade? What were the risks of publishing an autobiography about African experiences in the New World? How does an audience receive and interact with accounts different from their own?* Criticality is a significant aspect of CRP that challenges the ways in which teachers and students interact with texts, as well as the intentions of incorporating texts into the curriculum.

The "Hard Reset"

Much of the current scholarship on multiliteracies, digital literacies, and new literacy studies can trace their origins to the late 1980s through the early 2000s. During that timeframe, Gloria Ladson-Billings cultivated *culturally relevant pedagogy* through her seminal research on

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Previously, I discussed the need to move beyond traditional, narrow views of literacy toward conceptualizations of literacy as multi-faceted, dynamic meaning-making processes. What is important to couple with a conception of multiliteracies is a way to bring action to multiliteracies. What good is an expanded view of multiliteracies if there is no reason or purpose in applying that newly found conception? I liken this to learning a language. Learning a language has many benefits, but what good is learning that language for someone if they do not intend to speak it for particular purposes? Personally, I am (re)learning to speak my mother's native language, Korean. I was stubborn as a child and refused to learn the language of a heritage that has had such a formative impact on my upbringing. As an adult, I am already at a physiological disadvantage as my capacity to acquire language has greatly depreciated since I was a child, but my purpose in learning Korean gives me motivation to continue working toward fluency. It is my goal to have a conversation (many conversations) with my mother in her native language, something that I was not able to do with my Korean grandmother before her passing years ago.

I have established why it is important, especially for preservice teachers, to develop a conception of multiliteracies, and what is now pertinent to discuss is how this conception can be mobilized - put into action through my conception of culturally responsive praxis. In this

section, I will discuss the foundation of culturally responsive praxis, which is built on the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings, Zaretta Hammond, and Gholdy Muhammad. First, I will review the origins of culturally relevant pedagogy and then respond to Ladson-Billings' implicit challenge through her most recent article, *I'm Here for the Hard Re-Set: Post Pandemic Pedagogy to Preserve Our Culture*, to ensure that the original tenets of her theory (academic achievement/student learning, culturally competence, and socio-political/critical consciousness) remain intact through other iterations of her work. In my response to this challenge, I will review how Hammond's *Ready for Rigor* framework and Muhammad's *Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* framework preserve Ladson-Billings' tenets, as well as how my own iteration of Multiliterate Culturally Responsive Praxis (MCRP) holds up to Ladson-Billings' implicit challenge. To conclude this section, I will propose why my conception of culturally relevant pedagogy is important to teacher education and what it offers to teacher educators and preservice teachers.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and its iterations (Gay, 2002; Paris & Alim, 2014; Hammond, 2015; Emdin, 2017; Love, 2019, Muhammad, 2020) has taken on various distinctions, but despite their variances culturally relevant pedagogy aims to understand and act within a framework the acknowledges and makes more visible the cultural and linguistic assets of students. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) more eloquently describes culturally relevant pedagogy as:

> A pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right. (p. 20)

Understanding pedagogy and teaching as a way to leverage assets and understandings of students toward more knowledge production and critical thinking is a such a powerful approach

to learning communities between teachers and students, but there are obstacles and misconceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy that prevent teachers from more fully realizing and imagining their classrooms as spaces for critical-conscience building.

Ladson-Billings (2021) reflects on her original formulation of culturally relevant pedagogy in an effort to "hard-reset" in response to imagining a post-pandemic pedagogy that "preserves culture". As a brief aside, culture is not a "catch-all" or convenient moniker for dominant perceptions of others and their practices. Although culture is a collection of practices, beliefs, and texts that are particular to a group of people who share a set of experiences and truths, Ladson-Billings (2021) asserts that "no one generation is the bearer of the full culture, but each participates in some cultural practices - languages, customs, beliefs, and so forth" (p. 76). This view of culture leans away from over-generalizations of what may appear to be a "cultural thing among people" and allows for more exploration and partnership with others to learn about ourselves and others. Like misconceptions of culture, there have been misconceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy among practitioners and academics.

One of the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy is academic achievement. The most common misconception, according to Ladson-Billings (2021), is "what many teachers, administrators, and even the general public seem to conflate are performance on a state mandated standardized test and student learning" (p. 71). She continues to describe a situation where a fifth-grade teacher works with a student to improve their reading level, which is deemed lower than proficient. The teacher helps the student to achieve rapid, quality, and measurable growth (i.e., the student gained two reading levels in one school year). Despite being able to read on a fourth-grade level by the end of the year, the student is not considered to be proficient because they cannot read at a fifth-grade level, completely not accounting for the growth of that student. Academic achievement is not about standardized, dominant views of success. Yes, there is a degree of academic achievement that relates to acquiring sets of skills (e.g., reading at grade-

level). Yes, skills are necessary to acquire toward more complex, higher order skills (e.g., analysis, critical thinking, synthesis, etc.). The caution here is compromising the growth and needs of students toward learning in pursuit of achievement. Within a framework that favors student learning, the fifth-grade teacher would be credited with tremendous success with their students' learning because that student's reading growth doubled in one year.

According to Ladson-Billings (2021), the "most misunderstood aspect" of culturally relevant pedagogy is cultural competence. She defines cultural competence as, "students are secure in their knowledge and understanding of their own culture - language, traditions, histories, culture, and so forth, AND are developing fluency and facility in at least one other culture" (p. 71). Perhaps, the portion of cultural competence that most lends to misunderstanding relates to representation. As a supervisor, I have visited many classrooms. Upon entering a room, I take note of how the space is decorated, not in the sense of *feng shui* or having an aesthetically appealing space. I look for posters and banners that display educational mantras, reminding students about the importance of learning and acquiring knowledge. For a time, libraries were plastered with posters of celebrities intently posing with a book of their choice. "READ" was printed in big, bold letters to imply that famous people read, and others should read too. Depending upon the month or season, banners would display themes of the month or celebrated holidays (e.g., Native American Heritage Month, Black History Month, Dias de los Muertos). To be fair, my visits to these classrooms were brief and infrequent, but I cannot help but wonder what do students think about these various representations? Do they even notice them?

Representation is the easiest, albeit superficial, way to acknowledge different cultures, languages, world views, and customs. Representation, by itself, *sees* people, but it does not lead to deeper conversations about what is valued about those cultures, languages, world views, and customs. Conversely, representation does not inherently lead to deeper conversations about

oppression and power, as well as conversations about how certain cultures, languages, world views, and customs are not valued. Representation matters. Increasing numbers of texts that are becoming more *visible* (e.g, children's books, non-fiction book, movies, podcasts) are about and/or authored by people of color, but paying lip-service (perhaps more appropriately eye-service) to these texts and not inviting these texts and authors into classrooms (or our personal lives) leaves much to be desired in learning more about other cultures in concert with feeling secure about our own cultures, languages, world views, and customs. "A culturally relevant teacher helps students challenge existing power structures and begin to use culture to make meaning of the curriculum and their own experiences" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 72).

"The most ignored" component of culturally relevant pedagogy is socio-political/critical consciousness. "In plain language this is the 'so what' factor" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 72). Similar to misconceptions of cultural competence, there are missed opportunities in the classroom to attend to the issues and concerns of students' everyday lives. Over the past twenty years, I do not believe that the world has become more interesting, or more is happening than in previous decades. The advent of the Internet and increased accessibility to the World Wide Web, especially through social media, opens up worlds of information and disinformation to students who are trying to develop "intellectual tools to be able to address these present-day concerns" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 72). Ladson-Billings (2021) challenges teachers "to weave the elements of the curriculum into" students' reading and writing of the world. Disappointingly, skills and proficiency take precedence over "problem-centered approach[es] to learning" and instead favor disconnected curriculum that does little to stir the passions, interests, and creativity of students toward meaningful application - "the so what" of their learning.

Gloria Ladson-Billings has greatly impacted the field of education. Her culturally relevant pedagogy serves as a foundation of several iterations since her original formulation, but the one iteration that speaks most directly to operationalizing Ladson-Billings' tenets of

culturally relevant pedagogy for teachers/preservice teachers is culturally responsive teaching. Gay (2002) defines culturally responsive teaching as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). Gay (2002) argues that academic achievement for ethnically diverse students improves when they experience learning "through their own cultural filters" (p. 106). The question that Gay seeks to address is how do teachers do this work? What are practical ways that teachers can leverage the diverse assets of students in the classroom?

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Gay (2002) outlines five essential components of culturally responsive teaching, which center the diverse cultural and experiential assets of ethnically diverse students. The first component is *developing a cultural knowledge base*. Gay (2002) offers guidance on what considerations culturally responsive teachers take on when developing their cultural knowledge bases. She acknowledges that there are many important things to consider, but what is most pertinent are the things that have "direct implications for teaching and learning. Among these are ethnic groups' cultural values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns" (p. 107). Having a cultural knowledge base, not necessary knowing everything or even most about a particular culture or cultures, is important because teachers are immediately de-centering themselves in the interest of their own awareness of who is present in their classrooms and what values their cultures and customs hold in relation to others. For example, Koreans, among many East Asian cultures, greatly value and respect authority, which also is influenced by gender. It would be unreasonable for a male teacher to expect that a Korean student, especially a female student, to approach him regarding further feedback on a graded assignment. Because of Korean's respect for authority and gender norms, the Korean student would view the grade as final and sealed by the authority of her teacher, placing the onus for improvement on herself rather than seeking further explanation or feedback from the teacher.

Having a cultural knowledge base is a key component to respecting and responding to the culture and customs of ethnically diverse students.

A second component of culturally responsive teaching is *designing culturally relevant curricula*. "Culturally responsive teachers know how to determine the multicultural strengths and weaknesses of curriculum designs and instructional materials and make the changes necessary to improve their overall quality" (Gay, 2002, p. 108). In order to do this work, teachers cannot, should not, shy away from controversy. In order to effectively and appropriately address controversy within curriculum, Gay (2002) proposes that teachers "do deep cultural analyses of textbooks and other instructional materials, revise them for better representations of culturally diversity, and provide many opportunities to practice these skills under guided supervision" (p. 108). Alongside the cultural knowledge base, designing relevant curricula requires careful consideration of the texts within curricula and how these texts reflect or reject multicultural representations and values. At the very least, teachers are guiding students through critical processes that interrogate a text's lacking in representing and valuing diverse cultural identities and seeks material that disrupts and resists attempts to suppress ethnic diversity. Being able to guide students through this critical process requires another component of culturally responsive teaching, *demonstrating a cultural caring and building a learning community*.

Building a classroom culture of caring and trusting community brings in a teacher's cultural knowledge base and designs for culturally relevant curricula into a shared space. This is where teachers and students are working together as "partners to improve their [students'] achievement" (Gay, 2002, p. 110). Through these partnerships with students and genuinely caring and accounting for students' ethnic and cultural diversities, teachers are building community through "mutual aid" models that value individuals as contributing, collaborative members of a group - "when the group succeeds or falters, so do its individual members" (Gay,

2002, p. 110). Gay (2002) sees learning communities working together to "understand that knowledge has moral and political elements and consequences, which obligate them [teachers and students] to take social action to promote freedom, equality, and justice for everyone" (p. 110). What makes these communities possible intimately connects with the last two components of culturally responsive teaching, *cross-cultural communication* and *cultural congruity in classroom instruction*.

Working from a cultural knowledge base to design culturally relevant curricula within learning communities built on care and trust requires a capacity among teachers to effectively communicate with their students. How can teachers build communities, curricula, and knowledge bases if they cannot consult with their students in affirming, cross-cultural ways? Gay (2002) acknowledges the challenges of communicating across cultures alongside the variances of sub-cultures. For example, understanding that Koreans, as a broad culture, are deferent and respectful toward authority does not mean that students of Korean heritage are not capable of talking with or negotiating with teachers. As a Korean American, I respected my teachers. However, I also learned how to develop relationships with them that allowed me to voice my opinions and be seen in the classroom. By no means was I a meek and reverent child, except toward my mother. Culture is a complex collection of values, customs, beliefs, and ways of seeing the world and being in it that create sub-cultures within larger culture groups. It is unreasonable to expect teachers to know all the cultural nuances of their students, but what teachers can do is approach their students with care and attention to the ways in which they function in the classroom community in the effort to build culturally specific communication.

Cross-cultural communication also promotes cultural congruity in classroom instruction. Gay (2002) thinks of cultural congruity as operationalizing the "act of teaching" as "matching instructional techniques to the learning styles of diverse students" (p. 112). Some examples can include but are not limited to "topic-chaining (storytelling)…cooperative group learning,

autobiographical case studies…motion, movement, music, and drama" (Gay, 2002). Cultural congruity focuses on the learning styles of students that may be influenced by culture and customs, especially within families and outside-of-school communities students are part of. It would not always be appropriate to place a student who tends to value independent learning among others who are more dependent upon others in their learning communities. However, any decisions, designs for instruction, and cultural congruity are all determined by cultural knowledge bases AND the knowledge of students' communication and learning styles. Of course, the consistent thread that exists in each of these components of culturally responsive teaching is centering students and their cultural and ethnic diversities. I cannot speak for Geneva Gay, but I would suspect that she would acknowledge the daunting task of knowing all students in a very personal way that informs teachers' decisions and designs. However, I would also suspect that she would encourage any teacher to confront these challenges with a mindset of care for and authentic partnership with students.

Culturally responsive teaching is an iteration of culturally relevant pedagogy with a distinct focus on teachers and teacher education. Gay (2002) thoroughly explains, with teachers in mind, practical means of engaging with culturally responsive teaching. That is, culturally responsive teaching builds on the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy with practical means for teachers/preservice teachers to be aware of, design for, build community and communicate with, and collaborate with the multicultural dynamics among students and teachers. It is clear that culturally relevant pedagogy is very much part of the fabric of culturally responsive teaching. To display this close relationship, the following briefly outlines the ways that culturally responsive teaching reflects each of the tenets from the original formulation of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

- *Student learning/academic achievement* is made possible through intentional communication with students to better understand their learning styles, habits, and

interests (*cross-cultural communication)*. This communication informs the careful consideration of how curriculum reflects students' cultural and ethnic diversity and ways in which curriculum texts can be leveraged to best fit the identities of students and their learning styles toward academic success (*designing culturally relevant instruction)*.

- Although the focus of culturally responsive teaching is to reflect the diverse cultural and ethnic identities of students, there are also opportunities to explore both *cultural competence* and *socio-political consciousness* through the diversity of the community of learners. This process emphasizes that "knowledge has moral and political elements and consequences, which obligate them [teachers and students] to take social action to promote freedom, equality, and justice for everyone" (Gay, 2002, p. 110). This work is done within a *community of learners* that is supported toward acquiring/applying/mastering skills and knowledge that are personal, moral, social, cultural, political, and academic in nature.

It is important to establish how culturally responsive teaching reflects the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy in order to make a case for how other iterations of culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching (Ready for Rigor/Hammond and Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy/Muhammad) reflect these tenets. Doing so leads to stronger ties between Multiliterate Culturally Responsive Praxis, which draws collectively from Gay, Hammond, Muhammad, and culturally relevant pedagogy. Ensuring that Multiliterate Culturally Responsive Praxis embodies and values student achievement/learning, cultural competence, and socio-political consciousness sets a firm foundation on which to build nuanced conceptions around multiliteracies and culturally relevant pedagogy. In the next section, I will summarize Hammond and Muhammad's respective culturally responsive frameworks and how they reflect the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Ready for Rigor Framework

Zaretta Hammond combines Neuroscience and culturally responsive teaching in developing her *Ready for Rigor* framework (Hammond, 2015). She acknowledges that most and current educational foundations are rooted in cognitive science. However, Hammond is less interested in the ways that people, particularly children, learn and mediate meaning inside the mind and is more interested in "the brain as a natural learning apparatus" (p. 3). Brain-based learning strategies, she argues, develop a clearer pathway for teachers to provide more practical learning opportunities, while being facilitated by a culturally responsive mindset that values diverse cultural and linguistic assets.

Hammond (2015) cites several examples of teachers expressing "cautionary optimism" throughout her work. That is, teachers seem to be on board with honoring students' languages and cultures. However, according to Hammond, teachers struggle with "how to operationalize culturally responsive pedagogical principles into culturally responsive teaching practices" (p. 16). Hammond recognizes the potential for responsive pedagogy to fall back into traditional teaching/pedagogic paradigms. Theory exists in a way that carries a sense of optimism, but there are not always clear, practical ways to apply theory or to navigate tensions between theory and practice. Students actively make multiple iterations of meaning in relation to texts (theory). The challenge is how do we bring these meaning-making processes into the classroom through meaningful practice.

The *Ready for Rigor* framework contains four interdependent domains (awareness, learning partnerships, information processing, and community of learners and learning environment), each of which promotes an aspect of practice that marries Neuroscience and culturally responsive teaching. Hammond (2015) argues that preparing students for learning requires a process, trust, and daily reminding of students' neuro-systems that the environment is safe. Hammond (2015) discusses the structures and functions of the brain that are relevant to

learning, memory, and information processing. The details of how she uses Neuroscience to inform practice are well documented and compelling, but these details are not entirely relevant to the current discussion. Rather, what is important to take away from this framework is that Neuroscience is a way to understand how students process their environments and social situations. If teachers cannot ease the activating strategies that alert the brain to trigger various bodily processes that mediate stress, it is not too difficult to imagine why students are not learning. Although each domain contributes its own qualities toward Hammond's conception of culturally responsive teaching, Awareness requires the most attention because it acts a foundation for the other three domains.

Culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching value awareness. Awareness of students' diversities and interconnected identities. Awareness of socio-political contexts through which our learning takes place. Awareness of structures and agents that afford and impede access to particular resources. Through her *Ready for Rigor* framework, Hammond (2015) approaches *Awareness* from the perspective of the teacher. She discusses in great detail possible protocols and reflective tools for teachers to examine their cultural lens. Hammond (2015) offers five points of reflection and knowledge that teachers can focus on to develop their cultural lenses. The first is understanding the three levels of culture (surface, shallow, and deep). Surface culture is defined as the level of culture that "is made up of observable and concrete elements of culture such as food, dress, music, and holidays" (p. 22). Shallow culture "is made up of the unspoken rules around everyday social interactions and norms, such as courtesy, attitudes toward elders, nature of friendship, concepts of time, personal space between people, nonverbal communication, rules about eye contact, or appropriate touching" (p. 22). Deep culture "is made up of tacit knowledge and unconscious assumptions that govern our worldview. It contains the cosmology (view of good or bad) that guides ethics, spirituality, health, and theories of group harmony" (p. 23). Understanding these levels of culture allows teachers to filter through the myriad of cultural norms and functions for the purpose of building rapport

and trust with students. Without understanding what culture can look like (surface culture), how people leverage even their assumed or unspoken values (deep culture), or how they put into action these assumed or unspoken values (shallow culture) can stand in the way of teachers' efforts to connect with their students. Without trust, students have little incentive to meaningfully attach themselves to the learning that teachers are facilitating. Of course, in instances where students are compliant in the classroom can be a manifestation of deep culture values around authority or respect for elders, which can easily be misinterpreted as students engaging and taking interest in learning.

The second point of reflection within the awareness domain branches off of understanding levels of culture. Understanding cultural archetypes helps teachers to make sense of students' orientations toward collectivism or individualism and oral or written traditions. Hammond (2015) discusses these archetypes because of their connections to deep culture and the ways that these orientations can easily come into conflict with structures in the classroom. Being aware of human instinct toward community and how students' cultures view community, competition, achievement, and cooperation (to name a few) has tremendous implications on how teachers interact and construct learning opportunities in the classroom. This is also closely connected to the next two points of reflection, building cross-cultural background knowledge and broadening interpretations of culturally and linguistically diverse student behaviors.

The third reflection point Hammond (2015) offers describes is building cross-cultural background knowledge. This focus of building cross-cultural background knowledge is having an inventory of various cultural norms, customs, values, and traditions. There is no expectation to research all cultures and customs, but it would be beneficial to target those cultures and customs represented in classroom spaces. Understanding the communal values of Hmong students and the "topic-chaining" qualities of African American students' narrative speech patterns are important, broad cultural aspects to be aware of before making interpretations of

why Hmong students typically do not stay engaged with independent work or why some of African American boys in a classroom speak out-of-turn with seemingly untamed sequences of events triggered by discussions about their favorite characters in a text. Having a working inventory of cross-cultural knowledge is especially important for the fourth reflection point (broadening interpretations of culturally and linguistically diverse student behaviors) for teachers to be more aware of their own bias and beliefs. Knowing how deeper cultural values manifest into behaviors in the classroom helps to expand the possibilities of teachers' interpretations of these behaviors in the classroom. Case in point, a teacher may be less likely to view Hmong students engaging in communal practices during independent time as disengaged or non-compliant. Instead, a teacher may consider talking with these students about why individual work is expected and ways that they can better understand these values in concert with their desire to work with others. A teacher may be less likely to chastise an African American student for "rambling off-topic" and instead engage in practices that reinforce the most relevant elements of that students' narrative in relation to the content/discussion. Building cross-cultural knowledge and broadening interpretations of students' behaviors reinforces the focus of building community and trust *with* students instead of reacting to cultural misinterpretations.

Lastly, Hammond (2015) strongly advises that teachers take inventory of their triggers and assumptions. This is perhaps the most difficult of the five reflection tools to ensure that culturally responsive teachers are actively working toward disrupting and dismantling behaviors, tendencies, and notions around difference that can cause harm to students and completely crumble attempts to build meaningful relationships and community with students. Reflecting on triggers and assumptions is not an exercise in placing oneself in guilt or shame. It is an opportunity for teachers, and everyone, to honestly assess how they read the world and how that reading of the world facilitates how we write about the world. That is, if a teacher believes that "boys will be boys" at the elementary level what is the likelihood that this teacher

will overlook "boyish" behavior (e.g., play-fighting) and ignore the harm that behavior toward an unsuspecting student? Identifying triggers and assumptions also releases teachers to think about how to better model cultural awareness for their students. It is impossible to know all cultures and customs, much less to act in ways that wholly respect these values all the time. If teachers are open about their willingness to learn about other cultures, it is much easier to work toward co-constructing environments with students that both acknowledge differences among students *and* builds a culture around these diverse values.

The second domain of the *Ready for Rigor* framework is *learning partnerships*, which focuses on "reframing and repositioning student-teacher relationships as the key ingredient in helping culturally and linguistically diverse dependent learners authentically engage [and that] positive relationships help them [students] reach their fullest potential under less stress" (Hammond, 2015, p. 73). This domain calls for relationships to function in multiple ways. Within learning partnerships, relationships function as (1) spaces of care and trust, (2) as a practical demonstration of "hardwired" human proclivities toward community building, and (3) as places of affirmation and vulnerability. Without relationships functioning in these various, interdependent ways, there are lost opportunities for teachers to authentically connect with their students and partner with them in creating learning environments that equally value students and teachers as "emotional and academic" partners (p. 75). For Hammond (2015), there is a learning partnership "equation" that contains three components that work together to create "an unshakable belief that marginalized students not only *can* but *will* improve their school achievement": *rapport* + *alliance* = *cognitive insight* (p. 75). Building rapport with students brings them into safe spaces through which students can more successfully manage challenges and celebrate joy. From this emotional connection made possible by rapport, teachers and students come together to address specific learning needs. The teacher is not simply hovering over students making diagnoses about what they need, they work as partners, which leads to cognitive insight. Because teachers and students are trusting partners, students

feel more comfortable in their vulnerability with their teachers. It is in these vulnerable moments, which are not to be confused with moments of weakness, that teachers can *see* and *hear* students. Even at early ages, students are too often conditioned to exist in compliance - *do this, don't do that, that's right, that's not correct, just keep trying and you will get it*. Teachers need critical insight to make the "invisible visible" and "getting dependent learners to be open and vulnerable enough to show their learning moves begins with rapport" (Hammond, 2015, p. 75).

Having cognitive insight from students within a less stressful environment allows teachers to consider ways more fully in which students process information and how best to strengthen and expand students' *intellective capacities* through deeper, more complex learning. Hammond (2015) defines information processing, the third domain of the *Ready for Rigor* framework, as "the student's ability to take inert facts and concepts and turn them into usable knowledge" (p. 123). However, students do not do this processing of information on their own. Hammond (2015) argues that students (independent learners) acquire skills to work through their learning toward long-term goals of mastery and application. Understanding how students work with information on a physiological level, that is how their brains work with new and existing information, can position teachers more as "conduits that help students process what they are learning", as opposed to being the determinant or stimulus itself for learning (p. 19). This distinction for teachers being a conduit vs. stimulant of student learning is important because of implications for students' roles in learning communities.

A teacher as a stimulant for learning becomes the focal point. The teacher that raps a mnemonic for remembering the parts of a plant cell. The teacher who dresses up as Benjamin Franklin delivering his famed aphorisms. The teacher who mimics the Scottish accent of Macbeth during a soliloquy. These would be, no doubt, entertaining, but what are students doing with this information? They may be entertained, but to what degree are they even

absorbing the information that is overshadowed by the dramatization of the content? Hammond (2015) advocates for understanding information processing as a three-part process: input, elaboration, and application. Hammond provides a wealth of knowledge and practical activities (e.g., ignite, chunk, chew, and review) to further develop information processing among students, but, for the sake of brevity, I will only discuss the three-part process of information processing.

According to Hammond (2015) the brain filters the myriad of information that it is presented with and needs to be "triggered" to store away important information, which can be achieved through auditory, visual, and emotional cues. Once the information moves into the elaboration state, where the information is temporarily stored as working memory. The goal of this stage is to transition the working memory to long-term memory. It is in this stage that "we introduce culturally responsive processing tools: movement, repetition, story, metaphor, or music to help the brain process" (p. 126). After elaboration is the final stage of information processing: application. The focus of this stage is "to apply this new knowledge through deliberate practice and real life application", which leads to neural pathways that secure information as long-term or permanent memory (p. 126). Understanding the process by which the brain filters, stores, and recalls information is critical for culturally responsive teachers. Teachers ought to know their students and develop quality relationships with them in the classroom, but it is upon this foundation of trust that increased information processing is possible. "As memory capacity expands so does intellective capacity and the student's ability to do higher order tasks" (Hammond, 2015, p. 127). Otherwise, renditions of Macbeth's soliloquies are nothing more than a point of interest for students. Distinguishing between teachers as stimulants and conduits is crucial in further developing relationships and community between teachers and students. Teachers as conduits are facilitating content through cultural and linguistic filters alongside students. This role and relationship focus on how students process new information, produce new knowledge, and the skills/tools they use in their learning

processes. Teachers as conduits does not eliminate all possibilities of entertainment in the classroom (dramatizations of content), and instead consider ways to leverage dramatic readings of Macbeth's soliloquies toward critical observations and interpretations about dramatic irony.

The final domain of Hammond's (2015) *Ready for Rigor* framework is *building a community of learners and learning environment,* which is a space that "supports social, emotional, and intellectual safety of all students of color and English learners, but especially those dependent learners who have yet to create for themselves a stronger learner identity and sense of confidence" (p. 142). Although all four domains are interdependent, it would seem that being able to build a classroom community that values students and communicates care, high expectations, and joy is built upon knowing students, creating learning partnerships with students on an individual level, and attending to how students process information toward building their intellective capacity. Hammond (2015) discusses three main components for creating a space that supports students' social, emotional, and learning safety: Ethos, Routines and Rituals, and Student Agency and Voice. Ethos focuses on the classroom as a space that represents values and ideals. Often ethos is taken up as what Hammond (2015) calls "artifacts." "A culturally responsive classroom environment goes beyond decorating the walls with cultural artifacts that highlight the rich history of African Americans, Latinos, or other ethnic groups" (p. 143). Hammond (2015) advocates that the aesthetics of the room reflect students in authentic ways. One example would be purchasing inexpensive prints of contemporary and traditional artists that represent the cultures of students. To commit to a responsive ethos, Hammond (2015) offers a critical question about teacher's classroom aesthetics: "What do we want the environment to 'teach' those who are in it?" (p. 144).

Building on information processing and cultural awareness, the two other components of a responsive learning community, *routines/rituals* and *student agency and voice*, seek to address the practical means of securing students' social, emotional, and intellective safety and

engagement in the classroom. Establishing *routines and rituals* allows students to anticipate how the classroom will function. Some examples of routines and rituals are: reciting a classroom/school mantra at the beginning of class every day, using "call and response" to signal transitions between activities, ending every class with a debrief session can signal expectations to students and remind them of the collective characteristic of their learning environment - students are not competing they are collaborating toward learning.

Working within routines and rituals can empower students toward using their voice and agency in the learning environment. Hammond (2015) argues that language and talk is "one of the primary ways students develop a sense of agency and independence" (p. 148) If students feel safe and they can anticipate opportunities to respectfully and collaboratively speak into a space, then it is incumbent upon culturally responsive teachers to develop talk structures that enable a variety of learners to express their agency and voice. Hammond (2015) describes social talk (structure similar to students' home discourse patterns focused on active, concurrent engagement between speakers and listeners) and academic talk (also called instructional conversation focused on dialogue, questioning, and the sharing of ideas) as practical approaches to ensuring that students not only have agency and voice in the classroom but also have opportunities to flex their ability to switch between various contexts, modes, and purposes of talk structures in the classroom.

Hammond's *Ready for Rigor* framework shows that effective culturally responsive teaching is enacted through awareness, re-conceiving learning partnerships, and building intellective capacity. Each of these principles builds upon the foundation of relationships and how the brain reconciles stress, anxiety, and belonging. Furthermore, Hammond's connection between neuroscience and culturally responsive teaching demonstrates that relationships are not just emotional; they have a physical component. "Relationships exist at the intersection of mind-body. They are the precursor to learning…It becomes imperative to understand how to build

positive social relationships that signal to the brain a sense of physical, psychological, and social safety so that learning is possible" (Hammond, 2015, p. 45). Hammond leverages her knowledge and expertise in neuroscience to better locate how students react to their social, physical, and cultural environments. A word or phrase (you guys vs. you all), a gesture (pointing a finger vs. pronating an open hand), even how classrooms are arranged (desks in rows vs. desks in circles/semi-circles) convey a message as to the values of the space, who is valued, and who is in control of the space. Viewing relationship building in these terms helps teachers to achieve more effective culturally responsive practice.

So, does the *Ready for Rigor* framework reflect the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy? The four domains collectively respond to *academic achievement/student learning* through a commitment to growing intellective capacity (i.e., transitioning students from dependent to independent learners). This effort of growing intellective capacity is specific to each student through the teacher's awareness of diverse cultural and linguistic representations among their students and is fostered through forming learning partnerships between teachers and students to both identify and solve specific academic challenges.

Similarly, learning partnerships and building learning communities contribute to *cultural competence*. The teacher is modeling cultural competence by incorporating routines/rituals and talk structures that sample from cultural and linguistic norms of students instead of enforcing more traditional, less culturally responsive modes of engagement (e.g., sitting in rows, facing the front of the room). From this model, students are exposed to other ways of knowing, being, and expression, as well as ways to collaborate with others from backgrounds that differ from their own.

The third tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy, *socio-political consciousness*, is not clearly reflected in the *Ready for Rigor* framework. There is a much stronger focus on teachers building their own awareness and capacities to support students and model culturally

responsive behaviors, but this is important because there should be a process and emphasis by which teachers are engaging in these meaning-making processes as models for students. How can we expect students to be socio-politically conscious if their own teachers are not modeling or thinking in these ways? How can students embrace this consciousness without the skills and environment to safely express new and liberating ideas? I cannot speak for Hammond, but I surmise that this framework is focused on building the capacities of students toward socio-political consciousness. Hammond (2015) thoroughly covers the dimensions of culture and identifying the socio-political reality that teachers find themselves operating in, or at least Hammond strongly urges teachers to be conscious of the socio-political context of their school communities and national/global realities. Hammond's framework seeks to establish relationships and environments that empower students to disarm their brain functions that arrest them into spaces of compliance, fear, or retreat. People cannot learn or even function in a state of fear, much less act in ways that build trust, vulnerability, and creative freedom with and among others. I would argue that Hammond's framework enables teachers and students to work together, in their own time and community contexts, to pursue socio-political contexts while building relationships/community and intellective capacity.

Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy

Gholdy Muhammad's iteration of culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally and historically responsive literacy (HRL), is an equity framework that focuses on the intellectual, literary histories of African American communities. Because of her historical eye, Muhammad (2020) takes time to overview the legacy of culturally relevant pedagogy in establishing the tenets of her own framework. Building upon the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy, Muhammad (2020) develops historically responsive literacy as "teaching, learning, and leadership beliefs and practices [that] authentically responds to: 1) students' cultural (and other) identities; 2) the cultural (and other) identities of others; 3) the social times (historical and

current)" (p. 49). Additionally, her conception of literacy is consistent with my previous discussion around multiliteracies theory. That is, she attempts to "move beyond the emphasis of defining literacy as solely reading, writing, and language skills" and sees literacies as "layered, nuanced, and complex" (p. 50).

Muhammad (2020), like Hammond, emphasizes the importance of the relational foundation of working with students. When confronted with calls for practical teaching strategies, Muhammad presumes "they [teachers] haven't first cultivated their thinking and love for this work and the students they teach" (p. 56). This presumption can be deduced from teachers' interest in "how do we teach students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds?" instead of grounding their understanding in "what do I need to know and be more aware of before I begin teaching?" Within HRL, it is critical to build "learning partnerships" and learning spaces that offer opportunities for students to co-construct curriculum, move beyond "sanctioned norms", decenter the teacher, and use diverse texts by diverse authors (Hammond, 2015; Muhammad, 2020). Taking up this "pre-teaching" work is paramount in ensuring that HRL, and any culturally relevant practice, does not simply become a tool or thing to use during convenient moments (i.e., focusing on Black authors during Black History Month).

The theoretical foundation of HRL is similar to Hammond's conception of culturally responsive teaching. Both view students as having assets and viable cultures, languages, and literacies – though Hammond does not specifically refer to literacies by name and to the depth that Muhammad does. Both acknowledge that a transformational framework of practice, which includes awareness of self/others and examining sociopolitical contexts, is necessary to engage with students more meaningfully toward intellectual pursuits. What is worth more closely examining is Muhammad's four-point HRL model.

The HRL model has four components, which Muhammad calls *pursuits,* that are "connected to the body of literacy research on cognitive and sociocultural perspective of literacy

development" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 57). She is enacting literacy as pursuits toward a specific aspect of intellectual and personal development for students. It is not simply a theoretically based model. These pursuits *are* based on a theory that Black students take up multiple literacies/identities and mimic the historical legacy of Black literary communities. Muhammad forms these pursuits in connecting literacy expressed by an action: literacy as identity meaning making, literacy as skills, literacy as intellect, and literacy as criticality. In order to think about these pursuits in a practical way, Muhammad suggests teachers ask themselves:

- How will my instruction help students learn something about themselves and/or about others? (identity)
- How will my instruction build students' skills for the content area? (skills)
- How will my instruction build students' knowledge and mental powers? (intellect)
- How will my instruction engage students/ thinking about power and equity and the disruption of oppression? (criticality) (Muhammad, 2020, p. 58).

The HRL model is conceived from the historical literary practices of African American communities and seeks to equitably provide a structure that invites students of color to broadly participate in classroom partnerships. However, this endeavor begins with teachers' commitment, on-going reflection, and awareness of practices that empower them to transform their classrooms *alongside* their students. Although this framework draws its influence from traditions of black excellence that are shied away from in most educational settings (i.e., not focusing exclusively on prominent figures in Black history), Muhammad does not reserve this framework to exclusively benefit African American students. This framework is intended to more concretely define ways teachers can attend to the full lives of students alongside meaning-filled learning in the classroom. It also embodies a notion of critical love (p. 167) that leverages authentic care, concern, compassion, and empathy for children. Through this critical love,

teachers can more confidently begin to address the dynamics and oppression of school structures that tend to communicate student worth from a deficit position, "pushing toward making sure no one experiences marginalization of any kind." (p.168).

Muhammad has clear connections to Hammond and Gay in focusing on ways for teachers to "operationalize" culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching in ways that are authentically and intentionally driven by and for students. It is also apparent that Muhammad draws heavily from the foundation of culturally relevant pedagogy. Each of the *pursuits* that make up the HRL model, like the domains in Hammond's *Ready for Rigor* framework, are interdependent – leading teachers and preservice teachers through reflection and practical action toward culturally responsive teaching. It is no surprise that each of the HRL *pursuits* point back to the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Muhammad's (2020) first *pursuit* in the HRL model is *identity*. Identity is critical within this framework because it draws on the efforts of people of color to reclaim their stories. To leverage their inherent and acquired languages and learning to claim who they are. To navigate opportunities (for all people) "to explore multiple facets of selfhood, but also to learn about the identities of others who may differ" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 67). However, exploring identity for its own sake is not the point. Muhammad draws clear connections between identity and learning. Notions of what identity is and who *needs* to do identity work can greatly misconstrue teachers' interactions and perceptions of students. For example, imagine one student who is a *good* student – reads at grade level, gets good grades, participates in class, and follows the rules. This student can be viewed as successful and bright, and, therefore, the idea that they need to do identity work (i.e., reflect on their culture, values, customs, morals) is not valued, important, or necessary given their academic success. Then, imagine another student who is not a *good* student – reads below grade level, gets less than average grades, is disconnected from and disrupts the class. This student can be viewed as *troubled* and requires additional support or

even school-based services (e.g., special education). In contrast to their academically successful peer, teachers may see identity work as beneficial for this *troubled* student as a way to *identify* problems and solve them. In this example of two students, identity work is rendered down to a method of remediation, correcting something that is not *right*. The first student does not need to explore identity because they already have the skills and experiences to be successful in school. The second student needs identity work as an effort to correct their course and align with classroom expectations (e.g., status quo around reading, speaking, and listening standards). Identity is not a remediation effort or a superficial mechanism to make people feel good about themselves. Muhammad (2020) asserts that:

> Our goal is not just to help students become better test takers or academic achievers, but also for them to gain the confidence to use learning as a personal and sociopolitical tool to thrive in this world and to help them know themselves…It is critically important to push back on standards and practices that are not aligned to what students need most…It is our job as educators to not just teach skills, but also to teach students to know, validate, and celebrate who they are. (p. 69)

Muhammad argues that what students need most is to "see themselves in their learning." Identity is more than seeing the aesthetics of a classroom that reflect faces of color and inspiring quotes from critical figures. Identity is more than reading about the struggles and challenges faced by people across time. Identity is about affirming and growing the ways that people see themselves, where they draw their inspiration from, and who they aspire to be. *Good* students cannot begin to see and celebrate themselves in their learning and successes when they are seen as nothing more than a *smart* student. *Troubled* students cannot begin to see themselves in their learning and

work toward academic success when their ways of knowing, being, and seeing the world are not valued.

The second *pursuit* of the HRL framework is skills. Muhammad (2020) traces the literacy/literary practices of early Black communities in the United States. From this history, it is evident that acquiring the skills to read and write (literacy) were intimately tied to notions of education and learning. In other words, learning is not an accident. Learning is the result of acquiring sets of skills toward specific purposes (e.g., being able to read and write in order to publish works that challenged the institution of slavery and questioned notions of freedom among African slaves). Muhammad (2020) acknowledges complicated perceptions of skills. That is, skills are necessary for specific purposes, but the history of education has seemed to settle with, or at best move slowly through the idea that, skills are fundamental in and of themselves. Conveniently then, skills can be assessed in quantitative ways (e.g., standardized tests). Similar to the previous discussion of narrow and traditional views of literacy, skills become a marker of success as opposed to a bridge to success. Muhammad (2020) urges that students need high-quality teachers who know *and* love the content they teach. This combination of content-knowledge and love for content-knowledge is critical for teachers to see their expertise being leveraged in creative ways that provide opportunities for students to apply their skills in meaningful ways. *What is the utility of writing an argumentative essay if students cannot use this skill to argue for improved outcomes or conditions that matter to them?* Muhammad (2020) concludes about skills saying,

> Our students need the skills to access the knowledge learned; otherwise, knowledge is a confused mass without useful application…teaching skills must also be regarded as a pursuit and not trapped in disengaging small or minor activities in the classroom and school. (pp. 97-98)

Because skills need to be deeply and meaningfully connected to purpose, the *pursuit* of skills is intimately connected to the *pursuit of intellect*.

The third *pursuit* of HRL is intellect, which requires a distinction from intelligence. At a very simple level, intelligence is the perception that a person is educated or possesses a certain mastery of knowledge. To borrow from Howard Gardner's *Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, a professional athlete has *bodily-kinesthetic* intelligence, a Grammy-Award-winning singer has *musical* intelligence, a community outreach coordinator has *interpersonal* intelligence. The purpose of Multiple Intelligence Theory is not to rank or compartmentalize intelligences, rather it is a way to view intelligence as how people display or leverage their knowledge and capacities. Intellect, then, is not the manifestation of knowledge and skills. As Muhammad (2020) describes it, intellect "is what we learn or understand about various topics, concepts, and paradigms" (p. 104). She continues to emphasize that "intellect includes what we want students to become smarter about, but also creates a space for students to apply their learning in authentic ways *connected* to the world" (p. 104, emphasis added). So, intelligence is part of intellect in so far as intelligence is the stuff that people use to understand other aspects of their world. For example, a student exercises intelligence while performing a piece of music, using skills and knowledge of music to perform that piece. That same student pursues *intellect* when in math class and thinking about musical time signatures to better understand fractions or how a Shakespearean Sonnet would sound if accompanied by instrumentation to compliment the sonnet's poetic meter and augment the author's sentiments. Intellectualism is coming from students' own understandings and experiences, but Muhammad (2020) sees the role of teachers in intellectual pursuits as facilitators and creators of intellectual cultures: teachers are carefully considering texts and activities that stimulate "the genius inside of students." This "stimulation of genius" is intentionally building on the pursuits of *identity* and *skills* toward spaces "where children can think across history and develop their own perspectives" (Muhammad, 2020,

p.110). Pursuing intellect, for both teachers and students, is an endeavor that applies skills and knowledge (intelligence) in a variety of creative, ingenious ways. Intellect is purpose in action.

The first three pursuits of the HRL framework provide the mindset (identity of self and others), tools (skills), and action plan (intellect) that teachers need to move toward culturally responsive practices with their students. Is there room or necessity for another pursuit? What else could we possibly fit in? A consistent theme throughout Muhammad's HRL framework is purpose – the "why" behind what we do or do not do. However, "purpose" leaves open too many interpretations. That is, I can do things for my *purpose*, while others can do things for their *purpose*. Or we can ask what is our *purpose* in life? Expressing purpose in these ways may offer space to imagine what is the reason(s) we act or do not act, but understanding purpose in this way does little to advance our sensibilities about the world, especially sensibilities about humanity (i.e., what it means to be human). The fourth pursuit of the HRL framework is criticality. It is through criticality that mindset, tools, and action are given direction – purpose. Muhammad defines criticality as "the capacity to read, write, and think in ways of understanding power, privilege, social justice, and oppression" (p. 120). I hesitate to further describe criticality as a lens through which we can view the world because it limits the scope of what criticality is and can be. Criticality does offer a way to see the world in terms of power, privilege, social justice, and oppression. It is an intentional component of how people process information and learning (e.g., looking at ingredients of a new "environmentally friendly" cleaning product or asking about education policy and leadership philosophy of school board members seeking election). Criticality is not about asking "good" questions or expressing cynicism. According to Muhammad (2020), criticality functions in three ways:

1. "Criticality is feeling for those who are not treated in humane ways regardless of what the law, policy, and norms dictate." (p. 120)
2. "Criticality helps students to tell the difference between facts and truths." (p. 120)

3. “Criticality pushes students to cultivate the tools to dismantle deficit ways of the world and protect themselves.” (p. 121)

To further solidify what criticality is and what it can do for teachers and students, Muhammad (2020) also identifies myths and misconceptions about criticality. First, criticality is not only for marginalized individuals/communities or people of color. Muhammad argues that “the people who need criticality the most become those who share identities with the greatest oppressors of the world” (p. 122). Second, criticality is a conversation among diverse groups of people from different cultures and communities toward social justice for everyone. Conversely, criticality is not “wokeism” or some other far-left agenda to indoctrinate people, especially children. Third, criticality is a lifelong process of evaluation and discernment to “make positive decisions for [ourselves] and [our] communities” (p. 123). Criticality is not a silver bullet that brings down whole institutions and disrupts any and all injustice. Muhammad concludes her thoughts on criticality saying,

> Students need to leave teachers’ classrooms with a stronger sense of criticality in order to survive and thrive in the world. They must also learn to live in a world with others who may not share their racial, gender, or other identities. And we want to make sure our youth become future adults who will work toward humanization and not perpetuate oppressions. (p. 132)

Gholdy Muhammad succinctly summarizes how not only criticality, but the Historically Responsive Literacy framework aligns with Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Within HRL, *student learning and achievement* is centered through efforts to empower students with the mindset (identity), tools (skills), purpose (criticality) and action (intellect) to “survive and thrive in the world”. Students engage in *cultural competence* through examining and celebrating their identities in concert with others in shared spaces. HRL specifically focuses on ways for students to draw from literacy/literary traditions akin and distant to their own in an effort to augment

their own learning experiences while also learning from and with other ways of knowing, being, feeling, and seeing the world. Lastly, HRL facilitates the acquisition and development of skills, experiences, awareness, and relationships with purpose – focusing on students' *sociopolitical consciousness*. To question unfamiliar and unexamined information – to not merely take what is given or seen. To discern truth from fiction – unearthing hidden or skewed facts. To humanize what has been/what is being dehumanized through oppression, power, and privilege. To thrive, not just survive, in a world with others who do share students' "racial, gender, or other identities."

Conclusion

Traditional conceptions of literacy do not provide much space or grace to acknowledge, include, and celebrate the cultural and linguistic assets that students bring with them to the classroom. As a former high school English teacher, I certainly appreciate literature that stands the test of time. Literature that can be relevant and speaks through time. However, this appreciation for literature can become a bit of a rigid facet of teacher preferences that has very real and lasting consequences on pedagogy and teaching practices. Early in my teaching career, I held onto the classics - either because I enjoyed them or felt that students just needed to read them to be "well-rounded." Over time, I noticed that students were willing to comply but not engage. I developed strong enough relationships with them that they were willing to subject themselves (to a point) to reading Shakespearean plays and short stories from the American Romantic period. Needless to say, I was disappointed when they opted to write essays instead of doing creative projects– just to be done with the reading.

The last several years of my high school teaching experience marked an evolution in my pedagogy and practice. I was willing to broaden what I thought was important in the classroom. I remained quirky and committed to forming positive relationships with students, but what changed was a realization that students would never appreciate Walt Whitman, *Frankenstein*,

Shakespeare, and Romanticism in a way that I did – and I stopped trying to make that my *modus operandi*. I still needed to teach them skills, but instead of applying it to the literary canon or whatever books were in the English book room[9], I started to curate readings alongside my students. It began with news articles and current events and quickly spread to manga, graphic novels, Dungeons and Dragons (D&D), Call of Duty (COD), K-pop, and many more texts.

As this practice became more natural and flexible with each group of seniors that I taught, the skills they learned came second to the experience of reading meaningful texts and producing texts with meaning. We were still reading classic print, but students were (re)imagining their social worlds and testing their simulations (Gee, 2004) while reading *and* producing a variety of relevant texts. We read *1984* and talked about gun violence, school shootings, and the politics of gun ownership in the US in context of the Las Vegas shooting in 2017. Students created proposals, poems, journals, news articles, collages, visual timelines, and art to share their fears, their ideas, and their hope in a better, safer future. They did not all agree on the issues we discussed, but they were all involved in articulating their thoughts through their experiences prior to and during their time in our classroom. I can only hope that they carried that collective experience with them to critically address the issues that matter most to them. At the time, I lacked the language to describe what was happening in my classroom. I would ask, "why did that work? How could I begin to describe the transformation of my practice?" I suppose, as Ladson-Billings suggests, "that's just good teaching."

To reiterate, multiliteracies theory and culturally relevant pedagogy are susceptible to reductionist conclusions that multiple cultures and ways of knowing merely exist and are not created through imaginative, unique, and complex ways. Without a framework that understands literacy as dynamic, multifaceted, and evolving and critically examines classroom practices that

[9] Lovingly named "Book Knox" – the door was always locked.

address or attempt to attend to multiliteracies, transformational pedagogy and practice are not as attainable or likely. Furthermore, theories of multiple ways of knowing and being are pushed aside in the interest of maintaining dominant, mainstream literacy, language, and culture. This literature review displays the current ideas and notions around "good teaching" and what is necessary to move toward transformational pedagogy and practice. Therefore, it is clear that teachers/preservice teachers must honor and celebrate difference and teachers/preservice teachers need practical means (tools and purpose) to constantly reevaluate their planning, instructional, and assessment strategies to truly center their students' assets through social justice-oriented education.

Drawing on existing theory and frameworks respectively addressing multiliteracies and culturally relevant pedagogy, a framework is necessary to bridge multiliteracies and culturally relevant pedagogy together. With preservice teachers in mind, bridging multiliteracies and culturally relevant pedagogy can guide teacher educators to better understand the processes by which preservice teachers approach and think about culturally relevant pedagogy and practice, as well as serving preservice teachers in their efforts to be effective culturally relevant educators. It also critically attends to norms and dominant forms within education that reduce culturally relevant pedagogy and ideas about literacy to surface level interpretations of culturally and linguistically diverse people and spaces (e.g., using texts by authors of color as substitutions for texts by authors within the white literary canon). In the next section, I propose a research study of preservice teachers for three purposes:

1) To examine how preservice teachers make sense of their teacher preparation experiences and how these processes translate to practicum experiences.
2) To tell the story of preservice teachers' experiences in their preparation programs to facilitate reasonable and responsive changes within teacher education.
3) To affirm and develop a framework that marries multiliteracies and culturally responsive teaching.

Chapter 3: Methodology

If you are a dreamer, come in,
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,
A Hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer…
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire
For we have some flax-golden tales to spin.
Come in!
Come in!
- Shel Silverstein

Theoretical Overview – Creating a Throughline

To begin this chapter, it is important to consider particular aspects of narrative methodology that builds upon the developing framework of multiliterate culturally responsive praxis (MCRP) framework previously discussed. As part of developing this framework, I want to explore *storytelling*, *experience*, the *relationship between participants and researchers*, *validity and truth*, and *connections between multiliterate culturally responsive praxis and narrative inquiry*. My goal is to make explicit connections between the theoretical framework (MCRP) and the research methodology (narrative inquiry), developing a throughline in this project. It would be sensical and more productive that a theoretical lens weaves throughout a larger work, like a connecting thread throughout a piece of fabric. Otherwise, the defining thread becomes mixed among other threads, perhaps flashy and substantial in its own right, but nonetheless independent and lacking interconnection/cohesion– running the risk of being easily trimmed and disconnected from the whole tapestry as a lose, insignificant thread. After threading the plumbline (Chenail 1997), I briefly overview the structure and design of the research project itself (as approved by IRB). Next, I will discuss data analysis tools and approaches and conclude by acknowledging potential limitations and barriers associated with this project.

Storytelling

As I am writing this section, I find myself, sometimes, in a frenzy, to find the "right" resources. To find the wisdom in words from an inspirational professor or author. To find the thing(s) that complete my thoughts and affirm where I am coming from, where I am, and where I aspire to be. I have been pouring over notes and readings from various methodology/research classes. It is dizzying. So many perspectives, epistemologies, theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and methods send me into a swirl of thought without really getting to the point where I want to be –pulling together a story about preservice teachers.

I do not consider myself to be a *storyteller*. Sure, I *tell* stories about things I have experienced. I share my *stories* with others who may have been present for that moment, or not. However, I am not a storyteller in the sense that I have consciously captured the moments and experiences of others to realize a bigger picture, a greater understanding of something, to share with a broader audience. Riessman (2008) describes narratives as

> often serv[ing] different purposes for individuals than they do for groups, although there is some overlap. Individuals use the narrative form to remember, argue, justify, persuade, engage, entertain, and even mislead an audience. Groups use stories to mobilize others, and to foster a sense of belonging. Narratives do political work. The social role of stories – how they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world – is an important facet of narrative theory…There is, of course, a complicated relationship between narrative, time, and memory for we revise and edit the remembered past to square with our identities in the present. In a dynamic way then, narrative constitutes past experience at the same time it provides ways for individuals to make sense of the past. And stories must always be considered in context, for storytelling occurs at a historical moment with its circulating discourses and power relations. (p. 8)

Riessman (2008) uses *story* and *narrative* interchangeably, but it is clear that storytelling has a purpose and form. Stories are situated in a moment and often recalled in temporal and spatial ways (e.g., I was sitting at this table with a friend, and I think it was just before 8 in the morning when it happened). Even among individuals recounting stories situated within a shared time and space, stories can take various forms, structures, and details. This seemingly incongruous and incredulous outcome has been a point of tension for narrative inquiry, and qualitative methods broadly. However, using narrative to get at the experiences of people's lived stories provides a more complete account of how the past is recounted in the present and leads to the future.

Experience

Clandinin & Connelly have extensively studied and written about educational experience using narrative inquiry, which demonstrates the power of experience and the implicit relationships that exist between researchers and participants. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) refer to the foundation of their work originating in John Dewey's conception of experience. That is, "experience is both personal and social. Both the personal and the social are always present. People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals" (p. 2). In their own studies, Clandinin & Connelly grappled with focusing too much on analyzing their data instead of seeing the whole picture of what experiences were working together and in tension with one another. For them, studying educational experiences required more than just a set of tools and methods. "Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 19).

To further develop the rich entanglements of experience, Roth & Jornet (2014) examine Dewey's and Vygotsky's conceptions of experience in an effort to (re)theorize experience within science education. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) and Roth & Jornet (2014) have similar

interpretations and discussion about Dewey's perspective on experience. Roth and Jornet's discussion of Vygotsky's conception of experience brings another dimension of richness.

> …in a cultural–historical *concrete human* psychological theory, experience constitutes the developmental unit that considers the inner (emotions, consciousness) and outer (material, social environment) as integral parts of one irreducible unit. In fact, Vygotskij's Russian word *pere˘zivanie*, besides experience, also has the English "emotion" or "feeling" as equivalents, so that the English translation of Vygotskij uses "emotional experience" to translate the term. That is, experience—and even more so, the Russian *pere˘zivanie*—integrates the physical–practical, intellectual, and affective moments of the human life form that interpenetrate each other (Roth & Jornet, 2014, p. 108)

The linguistic richness of *perezhivanie*[10], which Vygotsky used to describe experience, accounts for more than just being in a space or time. *Perezhivanie* elicits a sort of history and social recollection that is brought on by a space or time in the present. However, that history and social recollection also is accompanied by an emotional component of "self-conscious understanding" (Bakhurst, 2019, p. 2). Bakhurst (2019) goes on to articulate that experience is not just about a moment to be reflected upon. The moment itself is part of the consciousness of a person and the values assigned to that situated moment. That is, *perezhivanie (*experience) is "value-laden, emotion-inducing, and action-oriented" (p. 4).

Another interesting aspect of Clandinin & Connelly and Roth and Jornet's work is its implicit foundation on relationships and interconnections. Although they do not explicitly use the term "relationships" in relation to the complexities of educational experiences (students'

[10] This spelling of *perezhvanie* seems to be the standard and is transliterated as such in Vyogtosky's lectures in the English translations.

learning impacted by their self-dispositions, teachers, classroom environment, peers, etc.), it is evident that narrative inquiry is a relationship-based method.

> As narrative inquirers we work within the space not only with our participants but also with ourselves. Working in this space means that we become visible with our own lived and told stories. Sometimes, this means that our own unnamed, perhaps secret, stories come to light as much as do those of our participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61-62).

Narrative inquirers cannot and should not disconnect themselves from the very stories they are collecting, especially if the end goal is to create a narrative tapestry that weaves together various stories into a collective narrative. Of course, this narrative does not encompass all experiences, but the stories that researchers tell certainly connect to their own stories.

Participants and Researchers Intertwined

To disavow the interconnections of researchers and participants negates the very principles that individuals may act upon. To be seen may solicit a response different than if in isolation. As a point of reference, I suggest thinking about participants on reality shows. Before *Big Brother, Survivor,* or *the Bachelor/Bachelorette*, the MTV reality show *The Real World* gave housemates a chance to live with total strangers and allow the public to see what happens. The tagline for the show even established the implicit impact of a watchful audience:

> This is the true story of seven strangers picked to live in a house, work together and have their lives taped — to find out what happens when people stop being polite and start getting real. (IMBD.com)

This show pioneered pop culture social experiment entertainment that gave life to today's reality dramas (e.g., *Love is Blind)*. On very rare occasions, an on-set producer becomes involved in the drama. In these moments, an audience can be reminded of the production to goes into these

television shows. As “real” as they are, in the sense that people are genuinely reacting/responding to social situations, the question of authenticity comes into play. How authentic are people’s reactions when they are being watched? Why were these specific people selected to be part of this production?

A roommate of mine from undergrad had an opportunity to go to California and be part of the audience for *The Price is Right* (Bob Barker was hosting at the time). Prior to the show, my roommate described a mixer event where people gathered before the show and received some directions and general expectations from people managing the show’s crew. The mixer lasted about 45 minutes; all the while certain people were mingling through the crowd. To my roommate, it was evident that these particular individuals were employed by *The Price is Right* and were profiling potential contestants in the crowd to see who would be the most entertaining to be put in front of the camera. Although it requires luck and some reasonably informed guessing for contestants to get beyond the bidding round, there are certain personalities who “look” better in front of the camera.

What does reality television have to do with narrative inquirers? My point is not to dramatize or attempt to make narrative inquiry more interesting to employ. Instead, my point is that narrative inquirers understand past and presently lived experiences as interconnected within the dispositions and environments of narrators (participants) within particular contexts (a research study) and others they are interacting with (researchers). Researchers also should acknowledge the impact of contexts and other actors on the narratives that people have to share. In other words, participants talking about their educational experiences with a researcher, who is an educator, has certain influences on what is shared and how vulnerable the participant is throughout the research process. The level of acquaintance that participants have with the researcher also potentially impacts their willingness and vulnerability.

Ignoring how researchers and participants are intertwined certainly leaves researchers open to critique of their narrative analyses. Without accounting for positionality, narrative inquirers negate their own place in the very narratives they are seeking to hear and produce. “In narrative inquiry, it is impossible (or if not impossible, then deliberately self-deceptive) as researcher to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, idealized, inquiring, moralizing self” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 62). As previously stated, narrative inquiries are storytellers. They weave together stories to create a collective narrative about lived experience – trying to better understand the phenomena within a given moment, context, and/or people. Clandinin and Connelly urge researchers to create narrative tapestries with care by accepting their place among narrators and their narratives, while balancing the temptation to develop a convenient truth that serves a singular, convenient self-purpose. As a researcher, having a consciousness of this tension is paramount to serving the bigger story.

Validity and truth

Before concluding this discussion by explicitly mapping the touch points between culturally responsive teaching and narrative inquiry, I would like to spend a moment to address if truths exist in narratives and their relationship to a larger story that narrative inquirers build. Andrews (2014) develops the idea of narrative imagination as something that narrators and listeners engage in on varying levels and purposes. Essentially, a person’s story is not a complete recollection of a moment or event. Rather, Andrews (2014) supports the idea that a story is shared, and a narrative can be formed through the telling of and listening to a story. That is, as a narrator shares their memories of a traumatic/impactful moment in their lives, the listener (ideally) is visualizing in their own mind’s eye the various senses attached to the narrator’s experience. What could happen is that the listener adds their own dimensions onto the original casting of the story. “When we revisit the past, as we do when we tell stories about our lives, it is our imaginative urge which gives us the ability to contemplate a world that might have been, as

well as one which might still be" (p. 4). Andrews (2014) goes onto suggest that the crux of sharing our stories is not about getting at a truth. Rather, it is about imagining what has happened, how we are dealing with it, and what we hope for in the future. As narrative inquirers, accepting this premise of narrators and their stories requires us to hear and engage with these stories as part of a process of "ongoing change and perpetual becoming" (p. 6). No one truth, then, can be an outcome of a narrative.

What implications do these notions around truth have on narrative inquiry? Perhaps an initial thought concerns validity – how true or real is this story? Epistemologically, narrative inquiry is not a positivist methodology. Across many resources on narrative inquiry, especially among those cited in this work, I have yet to see that narrative inquiry is or ought to be focused on truth-seeking. A valid concern in employing narrative inquiry relates to the pertinence that a particular story or stories may have in relation to a research agenda. However, if the goal is to satisfy a predetermined research agenda or theoretical conception, perhaps narrative inquiry is not the most fitting methodology. Additionally, determining a research agenda or focus prior to collecting stories can be helpful in developing the kinds of interactions and questions participants are asked in relation to the original inquiry. The caution, here, is the inflexibility of the research agenda/question itself. That is, how set are the research questions? Are the questions demanding a particular type or substance of story to be told? What temptations for a researcher may arise in "imagining" and creating a narrative that departs from the character of the stories originally told?

Touchpoints

To this point, I have discussed narrative inquiry as having qualities that empower input from research participants and provide some freedom and room for the imagination of researchers in their approaches to qualitative research. To further strengthen the tapestry of this work, I wish to establish touchpoints between MCRP and narrative inquiry. Identifying these

touchpoints helps to maintain the continuing commitment to posture this research project as an endeavor to better understand and serve preservice teachers and their educational experiences. Maintaining such a commitment, I think, is accountability for me, as a researcher, to honor the stories that participants are willing to share. It is their stories that provide a fragile, vulnerable, momentary look into their lived experiences as preservice teachers. Without these potentially raw expressions about their educational experiences and perceptions of teaching, it may be difficult to develop authentic ways to address the evolving, and sometimes hidden, needs of preservice teachers. The following are three touchpoints that exist between MCRP and narrative inquiry. MCRP and narrative inquiry are:

1) Relational. If we understand stories to be momentary and intentional representations of the past, we must also understand that getting at these stories and experiences is not simply asking good questions. Culturally relevant pedagogy, the foundation of MCRP, is not about manipulation. It is about creating a community, a collaborative of individuals trying to make sense of a particular thing. Building relationships with people is the cornerstone to developing trust in a process that seems somewhat fabricated and mechanical (e.g., interviews). Being relational requires a researcher to be focused on the individual and not what their story can offer to the work. Being relational offers room to empathize and sympathize with a participant. It is this humanizing compassion that also filters into how these stories are later used to construct a larger narrative – not for truth but for understanding.
2) Situated through context, history, experience, and processes of meaning making. No one story is a complete representation of a moment or people nor is it a monolith of experience. A person's story represents a process of meaning making since an event or idea has been conceived. Attached to that meaning-making process is a myriad of factors and forms that contribute to a person's interpretations of an event or idea in process. Accounting for as much of these highly contextualized attributes of people's stories,

identities, and ways of knowing/being provide space in better serving and understanding the lived experiences of others.

3) Deeper than the surface. MCRP and narrative inquiry can easily be reduced and/or dismissed at the surface level. MCRP can be rendered as a set of tools to better engage with students (though I have hopefully made it abundantly clear that this framework is based on foundations that are more than just "tricks of the trade"). Similarly, narrative inquiry can be seen as a method or methodology to "extract" information from participants, which greatly conflicts with previous discussions around narrative as a mechanism for highly contextualized, complex meaning making. In fact, both MCRP and narrative inquiry see people beyond the surface of their being and their words. Stories are more than just words. People are more than just lived experiences. Students' educational experiences are more than the words used to express them. The stories students tell are the emotional, physical, and intellectual negotiations they undergo to make meaning – to make sense of their experiences. To the extent that participants are willing to share their experiences and potentially be vulnerable, researchers must approach narrative inquiry with compassion, care, and respect.

Earlier, I expressed that I do not consider myself to be a storyteller. However, this project is my first documented attempt to bring together stories that hopefully provide richer insight into the educational experiences among preservice teachers, which are connected to my own experiences. Reismann (2008) offers that "just as interview participants tell stories, investigators construct stories from their data" (p. 4). It is my responsibility to honor and serve the stories that participants willingly share about their experiences and reflections on teaching. It is my earnest intention to develop a narrative that delicately weaves together the stories of preservice teachers and their ideas about their own learning and pedagogical approaches. The goal is to understand where preservice teachers have been, where they are, and where they want to go.

Data Collection, procedures, and rationale

The following outlines the procedures and rationale for the design and implementation of the study. The complete IRB application accompanies this proposal via a separate PDF document. The consent form, PST recruitment email script, and the semi-structured interview questions can be found in the Appendices.

Overall purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to examine how preservice teachers are developing their practice and pedagogy amidst an unprecedented social and political climate. The study seeks to address two broad questions: (1) How do secondary preservice teachers envision the best kind of teaching today? (2) How do secondary preservice teachers analyze the problems of practice they are seeing and what do they draw upon to develop solutions or innovations?" The research questions stated in the first chapter were formulated after I conducted the interviews to better respond to and capture what PSTs were sharing in their interviews. Even if I had developed those specific research questions prior to conducting interviews, I would have made these broader questions (from the IRB) intentionally different from, yet related to, my intended research questions in the first chapter. Sharing these two broader questions with preservice teachers instead of my specific research questions would provide space for PSTs to explore their thoughts and ideas more freely without feeling obligated to speak to what I wanted to uncover.

Procedures and interventions that will be performed: In order to avoid conflicts of interest and breach of status relationships because I serve as a field supervisor for the secondary English cohort. I will not recruit students in the cohort whom I directly supervise. Recruitment emails will be sent to the remainder of the English cohort and preservice teachers in the other discipline cohorts (i.e., social studies, science, and math) to solicit participation in the study. Observations of Three Lakes University (TLU) settings (i.e., classes, seminars, formal program

meetings) was part of the original plan and procedures, but due to COVID policies and access to TLU classrooms, the sole method of data collection was virtually based interviews. Interviews will be conducted three times over the course of the academic year. The first interview will take place before the start of the Fall semester. The second will be at the midpoint transition between Fall and Spring semesters. The third interview will be conducted at or towards the end of the Spring semester. All interviews will take place during non-instructional or classroom times. Interviews will be scheduled for times that do not conflict or impede their programmatic obligations. All interviews will be conducted via an online meeting platform. Only interviews with preservice teachers will be recorded, and only the audio portions of the interview sessions will be saved and used for analysis.

Potential benefits/insight: The study will offer insight into how preservice teachers are envisioning effective teaching in socially distant formats, and what factors contribute to how they view their practice and pedagogy, as well as how they analyze problems of practice and develop solutions. The study does not directly benefit the participants of the study.

Describe how all risks will be minimized: During data collection, all electronic data, including field notes, audio recorded interviews, and analytic memos will be stored digitally on a password-protected computer. All files will be backed up on an external hard drive, which is encrypted and password protected. Files will also be saved on a university BOX account, which is only shared between and accessible to the Principal Investigator (Dawnene Hassett) and myself. Any physical notes produced for and from this study will be locked and secured in a private secure location. Because of the Pandemic, no public or shared office spaces will be used to store or create data. Preservice teachers who participate will be given pseudonyms and no identifiable information will be present in field notes or interview recordings. Interviews will be conducted via an online meeting platform and only the audio recording of the sessions will be stored and used for data analysis.

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria: All participants are enrolled in the Secondary Education Program at Three Lakes University as part of the cohorts of the 2020- 2021 and 2021-2022 academic year. Anyone who is enrolled in the Secondary Education Program at Three Lakes University, except those whom I directly supervise, will be invited to participate in the study. Any participants can withdraw their consent and/or participation at any time. The target number of participants is 8 (2 preservice teachers from each content area: math, science, social studies, and English).

Although I conducted research over the course of two cohorts, my data analysis focused mostly on the 2021-2022 cohort because more participants came from that cohort and spanned across all content areas in the secondary program.

Recruitment Plan: Students currently participating in their full-time student teaching placements and are not part of my supervising group will be solicited by email for their consent to participate in the study. The email communication will include the purpose and scope of the study, as well as an invitation to ask further questions before giving consent. For the 2020-2021 cohort, email communication will be the primary recruitment tool given social distancing measures in place. For the 2021-2022, I will establish, hopefully, in-person contact during seminar and orientation spaces to connect with students across all disciplines within the larger cohort to solicit participation in the study. Any recruitment efforts will abide by the COVID mitigation policies of the university. I am communicating with the Chair of the secondary education department and the senior student services coordinator to ensure that appropriate communication channels are used in this process to ensure transparency of the project with all instructors, supervisors, faculty, and staff.

Privacy: Transcriptions will be stored on TLU Box indefinitely. Data will be coded to remove direct identifiers and the link to the code will be stored in a separate file accessible only via password. Data stored on laptops and portable drives will be secured in a private location and

will only be shared between approved personnel. The laptop is password-protected, and folders are also password-protected and encrypted. The portable drive is used as a backup source and will be locked in a secure, private location after each back up session. All original documentation will be digitally stored in a project-owned TLU Box account.

Informed Consent: The study will be explained, briefly, to preservice teachers through a recruitment email and the formal consent form also contains pertinent information that is condensed from this larger procedural narrative. They are invited to ask any follow-up questions or voice concerns before formally giving consent to participate. All consent forms will be sent digitally. If participants are not able to digitally sign the consent form or prefer a physical copy, I will mail a consent form to be physically signed by the participant. Research will begin once consent forms have been received.

Retaining Audio Recordings: The audio recordings will be retained beyond the conclusion of the study for the purpose of in-depth analysis of the recordings. Discourse analysis is a primary analytic tool this study will incorporate, which often necessitates re-listening to portions of discourse that is present in the data.

Participants: Participants will be recruited during the summer terms from the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 teacher cohorts in accordance with the recruitment plan outlined previously. Ideally, the recruitment process will span across all disciplines in the secondary education program (science, math, English, social studies).

Data Analysis

To this point, I have discussed the theoretical framing of this research project, which has epistemological touch points with the narrative methodology that I wish to employ in this study. The goal of this project is to better understand how the meaning-making processes (multiliteracies) that preservice teachers are bringing with them into teacher preparation

programs interact with their learning within the program, and what implications this process has on preservice teachers' ideas and practices relating to "good teaching", more specifically how they are conceiving of and practicing culturally responsive teaching.[11] Although I advocate for preservice teachers to consciously be culturally responsive educators, a more productive place to begin encouraging preservice teachers is understanding what they know and value in relation to culturally responsive pedagogy, as well as how culturally responsive pedagogy aligns with or does not align with their own ways of knowing and being.

When I was developing ideas for my research, I was determined to find out what "good teaching" really means and how it can be harnessed. Dating back to teaching high school English, I often wondered, "what am I doing that works? How and why do some kids do well with certain teachers and not others?" Had I stayed in the classroom, I may have continued to attribute this phenomenon to forces beyond my control and understanding. What I did not realize, nor was I encouraged to do, was to challenge and push into wonderings like these. To question the unquestionable. To seek a path of understanding through what seemed rather obvious. As I have worked with preservice teachers and have had the privilege to step out of the classroom to look into it, I am convinced that the answer to my questions is not the point. Rather, I wonder what exists beyond my own immediate knowing. What else is out there that speaks to what I am curious about? Surely, I cannot be the only person asking these questions. And if I am, I invite others to join me in these conversations and wonderings.

My daughters ask me the most profound questions at the worst possible times. By worst times, I mean right before bed – giving me a limited amount of time to address the question but also doing it in a way they can remotely understand and not fill their heads with too much stimulus. Just as a disclaimer, I often fail to do a good job in some aspects of answering their

[11] I am using culturally responsive teaching in the research questions and here to reflect the current framework used in the secondary education program.

questions. I either keep them up past their bedtimes or have to retreat and regroup in the hopes of developing a more quality response the next day. One evening, my younger daughter asked me, “Daddy, what is your job?” Now, we have had this question come up many times. I have told her, to this point, that I am studying to be a master teacher. To this eight-year-old child, that meant nothing. Her friends’ fathers are managers, engineers, financial representatives, and other jobs that have definitive titles. Much of what I tell her about my job is descriptive. My reply in this particular instance was, “I ask a lot of questions.” My daughter retorts, “Do you ever have answers?” I was, and still am, struck by the wisdom of my darling child. To her, she very well could have meant that questions should have answers. However, I took this moment as a point of reflection. Why do I ask questions and what are my expectations in regard to answers? When I get answers, what do I do with them? For whom are these answers for? I could continue into a spiral of questioning that would get me nowhere. However, I think this anecdote is useful to discuss my approach to data analysis.

Before I began data collection and analysis, I thought it would be presumptive to have a plan to extract the very things that would answer my research questions. I had my initial ideas and hunches about how participants would make sense of their experiences. Did I hope that my initial suspicions were confirmed? Yes. Did I hope that my data reflected promising wisdom to shape my thinking and practice? Of course. Yet, I cannot have these expectations. If I approach this research project as an affirmational endeavor that elevates my ideas and theories, where does that leave my participants? I am grateful to those who gave of their time and energy, to invite me into their lives and experiences. To view my participant partners as objects to extract information from and then manipulate their words to fit what I think is being said or referred to, or at worst to construct my own convenient truths, seems superbly disrespectful and unethical.

My data analysis takes influence from Charmaz (2008) and Gee (2204). Although I would not necessarily characterize my methodology as constructivist grounded theory, Charmaz

develops an approach to research that shares sensibilities with connections I have made between MCRP and narrative inquiry. Gee provides discourse analysis tools and language that shape the coding schemes and processes for data analysis.

Charmaz (2008) develops a rationale for a constructivist approach to grounded theory. She develops her own take on grounded theory (constructivist grounded theory) by describing a dichotomy within grounded theory – constructivist and objectivist. Objectivist grounded theory suggests that theory comes from data. That is, the emergent strategies that grounded theory uses to extract meaning from data then turns into theoretical concepts that can "speak for themselves" and are devoid of any contextual considerations. For Charmaz (2008) the aim of more traditional conceptions of grounded theory is to find a truth that then can be generalized to other situations. In a constructivist approach to research, there are four assumptions:

> (1) Reality is multiple, processual, and constructed—but constructed under particular conditions; (2) the research process emerges from interaction; (3) it takes into account the researcher's positionality, as well as that of the research participants; (4) the researcher and researched coconstruct the data—data are a *product* of the research process, not simply observed objects of it. (Charmaz, 2008, p. 402)

Constructivist approaches to research do not center the researcher, but critically urge the conscious recognition of the presence and impact a researcher has on the research process (design, rationale, interpretation). Through this approach, there is a further throughline to establish a relational characteristic of this work. I am not just a graduate student doing research. I am not just a teacher educator who is curious about how preservice teachers make sense of their own learning/experiences to be educators. I am asking preservice teachers to share their experiences, lived stories, and hopes for what is to come. It is my responsibility to be in partnership with, not in control of, participant partners. After all, what good are these teachers'

stories if their voices are not privileged in the research process? I would argue that the stories would lack authenticity.

If the goal of this research is to privilege the voices of preservice teachers to better understand how their meaning-making processes impact their conceptions of what "good teaching" is, should, or could be, what analysis tools will be used to look at the narratives of preservice teachers and what is the purpose of that analysis? James Gee (2004) provides a framework for analysis through discourse analysis methods, while maintaining theoretical and epistemological throughlines established earlier.

Though his focus is language use, Gee's (2004) conceptions of language are infused with a multitude of other factors and characteristics that provide a richness to be examined more deeply than simply the words that are used within a given moment. Gee (2004) asserts,

> In language, there are important connections among saying (informing), doing (action), and being (identity). If I say anything to you, you cannot really understand it fully if you do not know what I am trying to do and who I am trying to be by saying it. To understand anything fully you need to know who is saying it and what the person saying it is trying to do. (p. 2)

The interconnected notions of saying, doing, and being within discourses and conversations is a useful framing for data analysis. Seeing stories as having specific purposes in certain moments (Andrews, 2014) needs to continue through to the analyses of participants' narratives. Otherwise, why call them stories? If the narrator's ways of saying, doing, and being are not considered, what is left is a shell of disoriented words that do not allow for interpretation beyond what a researcher may want to achieve. In short, the research participants are removed from the analysis process. In this research project, it is essential to consider a person's saying, doing, and being as much as the stories and words they share. "These things we do and are (identities) then come to exist in the world and they, too, bring about other things in the world.

We use language to build things in the world and to engage in world building" (Gee, 2004, p. 16).

Gee (2004) makes it clear that language is a medium through which we build our worlds. We build understandings. We build norms. We build meaning. We build identities. We build power. There is a myriad of possibilities that we construct through meaning-making processes. Language is one portion of that meaning-making process. For Gee (2004), language carries with it the histories, logics, and practices of people. Because language is interconnected and complex, it stands to reason that an analysis framework is necessary to intentionally capture these various elements in language (stories). However, it may appear conflicting to suggest a plan of action for analysis if we wish to privilege the voice of narrators and their stories. It is because narrators and their stories are privileged in this study that an analysis framework is necessary to fully account for the complexities and interconnections within the stories themselves and the relationships between participants and myself.

Graue & Walsh (1998) reiterate the complex and recursive nature of interpretive process. "Interpretation is in the eye of the beholder, framed by disciplinary traditions and perspectives on what it means to understand 'reality'" (p. 161). In one hand, I hold this belief that I should work collaboratively with participants to better understand the realities of preservice teachers through their voices. In the other hand, I hold onto this commitment to present participants narratives in a way that will be taken seriously because of the process and clarity of data analysis and presentation. I find comfort and inspiration in the idea that interpretation is filled with complex dichotomies. "Interpretation is both taking apart and putting together, it is analytic and synthetic, it is descriptive and evocative, and it is beauty and beast…it is romantic science – poetic but filled with hard work and drudgery, creative and analytic" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 161).

As long as I can remember, I have always preferred balance. I do not consider myself to be particularly extreme in anything, which is not the same as being emboldened or impassioned about things. I love my children endlessly and want to laugh with them any chance I get, but I do not shy away from moments that require discipline for my children (e.g., repeated reminders about respect and responsibility). At a time in my youth when I dove deep into *Magic: The Gathering*[12], I created balanced decks to be prepared for a variety of opponents and circumstances. Of course, I was not always successful against all scenarios and opponents, but I did fairly well in most cases. Through my teaching, I balance the rigor of content and humanizing pedagogy, working towards deeper understandings of what good teaching is while attending to the developmental needs and stages of each of my students. Even in my mixed heritage I have had to balance two cultures, which at times were at odds with one another. *Should I accept the grade I have been given by a teacher and simply commit to self-improvement or do I consult the teacher about the grade that I feel does not completely reflect the quality and effort of my work?* Balance is what makes sense for me. It allows me to adapt more quickly to unforeseen circumstances. Balance allows me to see things from a level plane that would potentially be obscured or skewed from more extreme positions (it is difficult to appreciate the steep elevations of a mountain when hovering well above its peaks).

Consequently, I approach my data analysis with balance. I do want to establish a procedure and clear path for how to collect and analyze data that is accessible to others who engage with this work. I also wish to find ways to present and interpret data that preserves the voices of my participant partners. Although they are not actively part of the data analysis stage of this research, I intend to find ways to respect their words and expressions as closely to how they wish to be represented, as competent, compassionate, and reflective educators.

[12] A role-playing card game through which players build decks of cards to duel other players. Decks contain a mixture of curses, charms, relics, and characters to inflict damage or protect a player and their assets toward the goal of depleting their opponent's life count to zero.

Returning to Gee (2004) and his ideas about how language is leveraged to build worlds, I wanted to approach my data analysis to account for and privilege the ways that participants reflected about their experiences. I wanted to build a coding scheme through which to "chunk data" (Graue & Walsh, 1998), but I wanted that coding language to originate from participants' words. The first phase of data analysis begins with inductive analysis, allowing codes to emerge from participants' interviews (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). At this phase, I wanted to address the question: *what are participants thinking about/talking about the most?* I reviewed all interviews from participants to identify the *patterns, salience, and threads* (Graue & Walsh, 1998) of the interview data. After this initial review of interviews, I compared my memos and notes across all participants to identify what emerged as patterns, salience, and threads (i.e., what participants were talking about the most). From this initial inductive analysis, twelve codes emerged (refer to Table 1 in Appendix D). Once I established this coding scheme, I applied the scheme to a second round of reviewing participants' interviews. The coding scheme frequency and individual participant frequencies for each code are displayed through tables 2 and 3, respectively in Appendix E and F.

After the inductive analysis phase, I shifted my focus to another question regarding participants' interviews: *In what ways are participants thinking/talking about literacy and culturally responsive teaching?* This shift moves into the deductive phase of my data analysis. After analyzing emerging data from participant interviews, I was interested in how, if at all, participants bringing in any language or understandings of their teacher preparation in terms of literacy and culturally responsive teaching. I revisited my theoretical framework for Multiliterate Culturally Responsive Praxis to develop a coding scheme (Appendix G, Table 4). Creating codes from this theoretical framework is an opportunity to see how Multiliterate Culturally Responsive Praxis maps onto what participants are sharing through their narratives (refer to Appendix H and I for deductive coding frequency). Because Multiliterate Culturally Responsive Praxis marries multiliteracies theory and culturally relevant pedagogies, the coding scheme is reflective

of these two aspects of the MCRP framework. What is worth noting is the overlap in language and pursuits.

From multiliteracies theory, I drew from Freire & Macedo (1987), the New London Group (1996), Street (1998), and Gee (2004, 2015) to develop the multiliteracies side of the coding scheme. I constructed *Modality, Technical Skills, Meaning Making, Identity, and Liberation and Power* as codes to examine in what ways participants thought about or talked about literacy. I expected *Modality* and *Technical Skills* to be more common because these codes reflect ways that literacy can be articulated and embedded in language and practice. Of the codes, I expected that *Liberation and Power* may be the least talked about aspect of literacy because Freire's articulations about emancipatory literacy are not fully realized or supported in practice through public schooling (i.e., preoccupation with standardized notions of literacy/traditional views of literacy). The purpose of this coding scheme was to examine participants' conceptions of literacy more closely, especially as literacy applies to their content areas.

From culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching, I drew directly from Hammond's (2015) *Ready for Rigor* framework (*Awareness, Learning Partnerships, Information Processing, and Community of Learners and Learning Environment)* and Muhammad's (2020) *Historically Responsive Literacy* framework (*Identity, Skills, Criticality, Intellectualism)* to develop the portion of the coding scheme focusing on culturally responsive teaching. Similar to the multiliteracies side of the deductive coding scheme, I constructed this portion of the coding scheme to examine in what ways participants thought about or talked about culturally responsive pedagogy. I combined *Identity and Awareness* and *Intellectualism and Information Processing* because these domains operated fairly close in terms of their purposes/aims in their respective frameworks. I also want to note the overlap between both aspects of the deductive coding scheme. There are three codes that overlap between

multiliteracies and culturally responsive pedagogy: Identity, Skills, and Criticality/Liberation and Power. Upon initial reflection, this overlap speaks to the connections and bridging of ideologies between these multiliteracies and culturally responsive pedagogy.

After completing the deductive phase, I then moved into considering how to organize and present my analysis. Throughout my analysis phases, I took vigorous notes and memos of interviews from transcribing through the deductive phase (I reviewed each participant's interview sets four times!). With so much information to sift through, it seemed rather tedious and dull to simply chart out my notes to create a written analysis (I cannot imagine that being interesting to read either). I wondered in what way can I share my analysis that is accessible and interests readers while honoring the voices of my participant partners in a collective narrative about their experiences as preservice teachers. Graue & Walsh (1998) affirmed my commitments and values through employing creative interpretive forms, vignettes.

> What we must do instead [of simply rewriting fieldnotes and memos] is to translate our fieldnotes and headnotes into forms that are persuasive, accessible, and finely crafted. We must choose the story we wish to tell; frame it rhetorically, analytically, and narratively so that is of interest some imagined readers; and develop arguments/images that facilitate that telling. These are all matters of authorial choice that represent how we think about the world and our responsibility as writers…Vignettes are snapshots or mini-movies of a setting, a person, or an event. They tell a story that illustrates an interpretive theme within a research paper. Vignettes sketch images that through their detail illuminate ideas that seem inherently related to "being there." (p. 220)

Presenting data as a vignette also serves as a way to "crystalize" analysis, to make sure that I, as the researcher, see and understand the story that I am trying to frame. As I pondered ways to develop a vignette, I revisited the inductive phase of my analysis work and looked at the coding scheme. I noticed that some codes could be further categorized into themes.

Most participants talked about their own experiences as learners and students, which had close ties to the ways that they talked about their compassion for students and about issues of equity and inclusion. Many of these experiences and ideas were formulated before participants applied and enrolled in the secondary education program, which led me to create the first thematic vignette of *Dispositions*. The second thematic vignette, *Expectations*, came from the ways that participants talked about their perceptions of teaching and valuing community and building relationships with students in concert with their desire to have practical means to balance their ideals with instruction. These values and ideas developed mostly during their practicum experiences. The third thematic vignette, *Outcomes/Action*, came from an unexpected and profound noticing (which I go into more depth in the next chapter). Participants, whether talking about their dispositions or expectations, expressed their experiences and understandings mostly through the things they were or imagined themselves doing. For example, Louis, who was one of the most upfront about his values around building community with students, imagined education as an "adventure" (as he referred to it). That is, learning should be about exploration and finding creative ways to engage further with newfound knowledge. Louis expressed his values and ideals through the things he can do for students. Although he talked about partnering with students and including them in the classroom, the particular ways that students participated in these real and imagined spaces was less clear than the things that he was doing or imagined himself doing in the classroom. Among all participants, it seemed that the role of students (i.e., students actively participating and included in the classroom) was assumed to take place given the equity and inclusion focus of teachers' roles and actions. In other words, because participants valued students' diverse backgrounds, their students, by connection to caring and compassionate teachers, would benefit through their inherent desire to be part of the classroom.

In the next chapter, I will present my data analysis through two forms, impressionistic vignettes and corresponding interpretations. Instead of presenting data and information as a

hodgepodge of snippets from participants' interviews, each interview session is reconstructed as a fictional group interview session, imagining all participants from the 2021-2022 cohort attending via an online meeting platform over the course of the academic year (Fall, Midpoint, Spring). Each fictional interview corresponds to a thematic vignette. For example, the first fictional interview session will reflect text from participants' first interviews before the start of the Fall semester and will focus on the theme of *dispositions* expressed among participants at that time. There are times that interview text is used out of sequence (e.g., text from the first interview session is used in the third fictional interview session). These out-of-sequence texts occur infrequently and are done for very specific, intentional purposes to advance the narrative as authentically as possible.

The fictional interviews contain a mixture of narrative elements to combine significant and relevant portions of participants' interviews into a single, coherent conversation. As much as possible, participants' exact words are used and cited via endnotes displayed at the conclusion of each fictional vignette (to avoid text distractions). In order to make participants' interview responses more accessible to readers, there are many instances where participants' quoted responses are altered. However, these alterations are crafted in a way that do not misrepresent participants' intended meanings, nor are they altered in a way that suggests speculative meaning through participants' words. Any alterations to quoted text from participants' individual interviews are intended to fit into the narrative fiction to create authentic conversation among participants. There are moments when participants' words are fictionalized. These fictionalized portions of participants' responses are meant to carry narrative functions. For example:

> "And that's why education ended up being important to me, but no one said that that's what education is for." 3
>
> "*I am not sure if that totally makes sense. It's a bit of a ramble*," says Louis expressing his unease as to whether he addressed the question. He follows up to complete his

> thought in relation to the original question about why he is drawn to teaching. "But I really want to just…I want to explain what I'm doing every step of the way when I'm teaching because I felt like so much of my education experiences communicated that 'you need to do this because I'm saying you need to do this and it's for your own good, and you're smart enough to handle it.' And I hated all those reasons." 3
>
> *"That makes total sense*," says Nancy. "*I totally get that. For me, I had a different experience because I heard all those reasons all the time. My parents were teachers, and we talked about that stuff constantly, and it actually pushed me away, a little, from wanting to be a teacher*." Louis, while muted, mouths "thanks" and nodding in appreciation of Nancy's affirming response.

In this sample, Louis' direct words are quoted and cited in the first underlined sentence (no underlining will be present in the narrative text). I fictionalize Louis saying, ""*I am not sure if that totally makes sense. It's a bit of a ramble*" as a transitional statement to the next quoted section of this sample. There are also other instances where participants' words are fictional to carry conversational functions. Nancy's fictitiously responds to Louis (""*That makes total sense*," says Nancy. "*I totally get that…)* as a way to build connections between these participants and, in this case, to transition to Nancy responding to the prompt (i.e., What drew you to teaching?).

After each impressionistic vignette there is a corresponding interpretation section. Through these interpretations, I construct my analysis through the fictional works, further elaborating with more samples from participants' interviews or diving deeper into the quoted text from the vignettes.

I realize there is risk in presenting data in creative/fictional form. Graue & Walsh (1998) certainly advocate for methods of inquiry that push the boundaries of research and writing

within research, but there is also caution in terms of authorship and authority when utilizing more creative methods (vignettes) to present data.

> On one hand, those who work from a realist perspective would distrust the leap from direct observation to the creation of an event or interaction. The enactment of a fictional interpretation would move work from research to mere writing. On the other hand, some proponents of narrative might see it as the ultimate usurpation of voice - the researcher absenting the participant to such a degree as to avoid needing observed interaction as a basis for interpretation." (p. 227)

The choice to represent data as more than just the words of participants invokes the need to more accurately and intentionally represent people rather than words as data. It is mechanical to present information that does not capture the context through which participants are thinking and speaking about their ideals, values, and perspectives. Although each of these participants shared their experiences through individual interviews, crafting a fictional context through which participants share their experiences does not create distrust nor does it usurp the voice of participants. In fact, their direct words are still front and center through each of the vignettes and the fictional event provides a context through which participants' words can be more meaningfully connected to one another.

Graue & Walsh (1998) contend that "writing is not a neutral activity, reporting the facts. It is strategically undertaken to tell a particular story to a particular audience" (p. 211). Fictionalizing a collaborative group interview positions writing as a form of inquiry and interpretation. Richardson (1998) provides a powerful incentive to think about writing as a method of inquiry for the work researchers do and reflexively know about themselves. "Although we usually think about writing as a mode of 'telling' about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of 'knowing' - a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 345). Richardson goes on to suggest that diverse forms of

writing lead to nuanced interpretations while also directly linking researchers' relationships with their topics and interpretations. Writing is both a method of and tool for interpretation. Writing is an expression of interpretive processes.

By fictionalizing the space in which participants share their stories, I argue that their words and earnestness are not compromised. I argue that I do not privilege myself and my purposes over those who graciously gave of their time to partner with me in this work. This format allows me, as a researcher, to accomplish three - equally important - dimensions of interpretive work.

1. Consider how to invite readers into an interpretative space and connect with participants.
2. More fully display my interpretive process.
3. Respect the ideas, values, perspectives, and humanity of research partners.

So, what is the story that I wish to tell and to whom am I telling this story? Committing to write about my research in a format that invites playful genres (impressionistic vignettes) connects me to an audience and research partners. I am not writing in a convention that privileges truth and conclusions. I am not writing in a way that dismisses or conveniently picks from people's real and earnest stories. No interpretive work is perfect, but it is my responsibility and privilege to be a researcher, writer, and educator who fully engages with my own purposes in concert with how an audience reads my work and how well I preserve the humanity of my partners.

Conclusion

To this point, I have not mentioned the elephant in the room - or should I say perching upon the globe. When I first I began conceiving of this project, the COVID-19 Pandemic was

crippling the world. I am interested to see how participants talk about their ideas about teaching in relation to or lacking in connection with COVID-19, but I have no expectation that participants will be thinking about their experiences in connection with COVID. The two cohorts of focus may have different experiences and responses with the pandemic, but it is important to recognize that this moment is continuing to shape our ideas of ourselves, others, and the worlds we create (Gee, 2004). For me, I am especially more attuned to others' political aims through their ideas and language. I am particularly discouraged that being republican, Christian, and conservative all may be interchangeable identities and create a political, symbolic barrier that disrupts any productive dialogue toward understanding – as opposed to being right or "in the truth." This moment we live in is polarizing, yet there are experiences of hope and unity.

Through terrible fits of violence, people have banded together in solidarity. People have stood up and stood out to bring attention to what has been hidden – to call for action and reform. New precedents have been set - Derek Chauvin, a former police officer, convicted for the murder of George Floyd. Milestones have been achieved – the Honorable Ketanji Brown Jackson confirmed as the first black woman to serve on the US Supreme Court. Despite the polarization and precedents that have come since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we cannot forget how this global health issue shapes our perceptions, hopes, histories, and habits. Although there are growing trends toward returning to "normal", it is difficult to gauge how long-standing COVID will continue to affect our lives– either directly or residually. It is paramount to not ease ourselves into so much comfort that we forget to question what seems obvious or unquestionable.

Because COVID still impacts participation and safety at Three Lakes University, I do acknowledge potential limitations in what data I collected. Other than interviews, I would have conducted observations of methods classes and collected artifacts that relate to participants'

classroom and practicum experiences (i.e., written work from course work, lesson plan reflections, etc.). However, I did not pursue these additional data collection methods in order avoid further agitation or complication of social distancing efforts and personal comforts with how spaces are managed on campus.

I also acknowledge that primarily soliciting preservice teachers as participants is risky. The secondary program is a 14-month intense and packed schedule. Every term, preservice teachers have some form of practicum experience alongside course work. Although it is a graduate level program and carries with it a certain level of expectation, the program does not lend itself to flexibility in terms of time. Therefore, asking preservice teachers to offer more of their time and energy can be exhausting for them. During this process, I sincerely made the effort to accommodate and affirm participants' needs for space and flexibility. Although my research is important to me, I do not presume that same expectation on those who choose to participate. When I have communicated in this way with student teachers that I have supervised, I have experienced positive responses and increased connections with them. There is not much time to develop quality relationships with preservice teachers, especially if they are outside of the English content group. However, I believe that my approach to this project and transparent communication can offset some of the potential barriers related to recruitment and participation.

I often think about my former high school students. Every time I step foot in a high school to observe a student teacher, I am filled with memories of my own classroom. When I tell people that I used to teach high school English, they often respond with something to the effect of "good for you." I am unsure if people mean, "good for you that you taught high schoolers" or "good for you that you got out of teaching high schoolers." I would imagine more align with the latter sentiment. Regardless, I loved every day with my students. It is because of them I chose to

move in a direction with my professional journey to serve students in a way I could not in my own 30 square foot classroom.

I am not arrogant or naïve to believe that I can reform and change how teachers teach. I cannot prescribe good teaching methods to preservice teachers. What I can do is position myself to better understand their histories and literacies - to challenge them to think beyond themselves without forgetting where they come from. Encouraging student teachers to think about their own schooling experiences in concert with those of their practicum students, and the theoretical work they are doing in their preparation courses, hopefully, creates a space for them to critically examine what works and what does not work– as well as to question the logics and practices that make these things work and not work.

Despite my focus on preservice teachers, my work and passion return to students. We, as teacher educators and k-12 educators, should acknowledge more explicitly that our work is more than just social justice and cultural relevance. Our responsibility is to see the humanity of students and guide them toward meaningful opportunities to see themselves in their worlds and critically challenge spaces and times where and when they do not see themselves represented or valued. We also must engage in critical questions of when, where, and why they are over(under)represented and valued differently than others. If we cannot encourage and support student teachers in seeing this work in their preparation experiences, how can we expect them to engage in the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy with their own students? I am not sure what will come from this research, but my focus will remain on how to make productive connections with our histories, our presents, and futures in the interest of serving our learning communities.

Chapter 4: Thematic Vignettes

Dispositions

While an instructor for a methods class in teaching English language arts, I enjoyed a particular project that brought students to a deeper understanding of their students and encouraged them to explore more of their school communities beyond the schools. Students inquired about their practicum students' literacy lives, asking about their interests and activities - in and out of school. This was a difficult assignment for many students, not because they were not capable or interested in the assignment. Students struggled with the relevance of the assignment. *Why am I being asked to know about the demographics and neighborhoods of the school I am placed at? Why do I need to know what television shows or movies these students are watching - aren't we supposed to ask them about their reading habits at home?* I appreciated their initial push back because it was an opportunity to engage in critical conversation about literacy and how it exists among social groups and classes of people, but I chose to prolong this opportunity in the interest of focusing their attention on the task of learning more about their students.

The components of this assignment required attention across the semester, so students did not stop thinking or working with the literacy lives of their focal students. One of the highlights of this experience, for me, was seeing the realization - the light bulb moment - that occurred at various stages of the project. Some hit that moment early, while most encountered it towards the middle or end of the semester. No matter the timing, the joy of seeing that realization that students live full lives outside of school, which greatly impacts their capacities in school. There is no mystical barrier that strips them of their literacy lives once they enter the school. Preservice teachers realized, if they had not before taking that class, that their students come to school with their literacy lives and constantly are testing and affirming their experiences

and interests throughout the school day. Maybe recess is desirable on a practical level for students, but it also may be a rare moment for them to read Manga, shout out their favorite Bad Bunny song lyrics, or rehash their theories about the upcoming season of *Stranger Things*.

Examining the literacy lives of students more closely enabled preservice teachers to understand the habits and texts that their students found value in. Through these practices, preservice teachers more consciously considered how their lesson designs, instructional choices, and assessments leveraged students' assets or not. As the instructor watching preservice teachers grow in this way, I also realized more clearly that preservice teachers come into their teacher preparation programs with their own values, experiences, and interests. In both teaching and research, I would be remiss in not thinking about the dispositions of preservice teachers.

Disposition emerges from the inductive data analysis phase encompassing varied experiences, awareness, and processes of meaning making. Despite this variety, participants shared values around compassion and equity/inclusion. Overall, there is an overlap among the ways in which participants talk about their backgrounds and values. The following sections cover the sub-themes that make up the dispositions vignette: *teacher experiences as a learner/student, compassion, equity/inclusion, identity/awareness, meaning making*. These sub-themes derive from the inductive and deductive coding schemes. In order to privilege participants' voices, I am presenting representative data for each of these sub-themes through what Graue (1998) refers to as an impressionistic tale. In an effort to weave together a collective narrative, I see it as necessary to format the data display in way that allows the participants' words to be captured as authentically as possible and without format distractions (i.e., constant in text citations and unnatural breaks in text). I will conclude the disposition vignette with an interpretation section framed as a confessional tale. That is, inserting myself visibly back into

the work through a dialogic framing to interpret the collective narrative developed through the impressionistic scene (Graue 1998).

Impressionistic Scene #1

Virtual-meeting etiquette and norms, as I understand and experience them, greatly impact my assumptions about meetings and how people can and should interact with one another. Meetings hardly start on time. Technology always presents potential barriers to accessing virtual meetings (e.g., unplanned updates, application crashes, low batteries for mobile/laptop devices). Depending upon home office environments, distractions can certainly lead to less engagement and productive meetings. We can hide behind muted audio and video feeds. However, in exchange, we are given a way to converse with others through personal/direct chats, which we hope does not accidentally cross over into the main chat space for the entire group. Despite the many nuances of digital meeting platforms, I do not think most would contend with the commute and parking demands of virtual meetings. As I prepare my own virtual meeting, I am constantly thinking about ways to make the digital space convenient, comfortable, and flexible. I am also thinking about how my own expectations for meetings can get in the way of productive collaborations.

I have my morning coffee in-hand and sign in as the host of a meeting to which I am inviting six participants to talk about their experiences as student teachers. I am excited to sit down with them and hear about their backgrounds, experiences, values, and dreams of the future. However, I cannot possibly cover so much ground through a single meeting; this is the first of three scheduled times we will meet together. Our first session together is before the start of the fall semester before preservice teachers begin their first round of two practicum experiences. I

purposely scheduled our first meeting within this time frame to get a sense of who they are and what these candidates have experienced as students and/or young professionals.

The time strikes the top of the hour, no one has signed in yet - virtual meeting etiquette at its finest. However, within 30 seconds, Louis, Kate, Anna, and Nancy are logging in, prompting me to permit them to enter the meeting space. We all say hello over top of one another. Amidst the greetings, Susan enters, “I am so sorry. I had another meeting with my CT, and it ran a little over,” she says seemingly out of breath as if she was sprinting. “No worries,” I say with a smile, “everyone was just saying hello and getting settled.” Judy is the last member of our community to join, but I move the meeting forward until she is able to join us. “Thank you, all, for making space in your busy schedules to meet today. We will get started, and I am sure Judy will join us shortly. This is one of three times we will meet together and share about our experiences. I hope we can be open and welcoming to each other’s experiences, values, and ideas. This is a unique space where we are sharing with one another, but I hope we can find community among ourselves as we partner in this work.” Five minutes past the hour, I am prompted to admit Judy into the meeting. Even more apologetic than Susan, Judy appears on the screen somewhat frazzled and apologizing, “I am so sorry. I would have been on time, but my computer decided that it needed to be updated before letting me log on. Did I miss anything?”

“Absolutely! No worries. We were just getting started,” I quickly retort to ease Judy’s discomfort with her less than desirable first impression to the group. I resume introductions and explain why we are meeting and continue to thank them for their partnership in this work. “Today, I want focus on you all and your own experiences in the classroom. Historically, the secondary program gets a variety of experiences through its preservice candidates. Many have some teaching experience through informal interactions, such as tutoring or after school

volunteer work. While others have had experience teaching English abroad or through AmeriCorps or Teach for America, domestically. Some come to the program straight out of undergrad, without any formal teacher training or experience. All of this is perfectly fine, and I am interested in hearing about your own educational journeys and how you have come to this program wanting to be teachers."

All six participants have their videos on and listen intently. "Before we get started, I want to make sure that this space is safe and confidential. What is said here, stays here. Although I am recording this session with your permission, none of the information you share will be displayed to others, and I ask that we, as a community, also protect the confidentiality of each person in this community. At no time are you obligated to answer each and all of the questions we will cover today, but I do encourage you all to share as you feel comfortable and that you are free to respond in connection with other's responses." Everyone nods in understanding. "Just so everyone knows, there is a lot of noise going on outside. So, if it is difficult to hear me or the noise is distracting I will stay muted until it is safe to say something," Judy says with a slight nervous amusement in her voice. I see others laughing and smiling, but it is odd not to hear the breath of humor among the group. "Thank you for the notice. Hopefully, the noise will subside. Feel free to write anything in the chat if you wish to participate in that way," I offer as a transition into our formal time together.

"To structure our time together, I have some questions I would like to ask you all to consider responding to. However, don't feel obligated to answer or respond to each question. Please feel free to participate as you feel led or comfortable. Although I just extended an invitation to Judy to participate by chat if the noise level around her does not improve, I wish to extend the same invitation for any of you to participate through the chat with responses and/or

questions. Before we begin, is it okay if I record this session? The video portion of the recording will not be stored or viewed for the purposes of this project. As a reminder, your identity is protected through pseudonyms and anything you share today will be carefully scrubbed of any identifiable information though there is a slight risk or possibility that you can be identified through this work." Judy inserts a "thumbs-up" symbol in the chat, while others nod and raise their thumbs in approval.

After starting the recording - *recording now in progress* - I ask my first question to get our discussion started, "How would you describe your schooling experiences? You can think about this in a k-12 context, your experiences in undergrad, or even in this program. Feel free to also share how these experiences have shaped you as a learner/student." After slight hesitation among the group over who will break the ice, Anna unmutes prefacing her response by saying that she has gaps in memory about her childhood/growing up because of personal trauma. She shares, "But what I do remember is I always really loved school and learning. And I'm not sure if it's just because I just naturally want to learn or if it's because I was happy to not be at home. So, I just kind of threw myself into things outside of being home, like, sports, the library reading thing where you can read so many books and get prizes, things like that. So, pretty early on in elementary school, I got put in the gifted and talented track, which I'm now learning is really not great. As I got older, I remember doing some leadership things in the summers, like camps and everything. I'm still not 100% sure how they chose people for that to be honest. But I've always been a social person. So, maybe that was part of it. Thinking about myself as a learner, I catch on to things fairly quickly. And I remember helping other students think of things in different ways and finding better ways to communicate what we were learning to them. That was one of my things I did throughout school and when I was working in industry. I'm usually really good at

picking up computer skills. So, I did some trainings for people and created things to help my older coworker who didn't quite get Power Point."[1]

There is another moment of hesitation among the group. I break the silence reassuring everyone that our session is more of an open forum and not a ritualistic round that requires everyone to speak to a particular prompt. Louis and Kate both unmute almost simultaneously and begin to talk over one another before abruptly stopping in an effort to allow the other to speak again, restarting the entire sequence. They both laugh and Louis offers that Kate speaks first. She appreciates the gesture and shares her experiences in a k-12 context. "Thinking about K through 12. It was interesting because I went to a private school for K through six. So, there wasn't enough students in the school, I guess, to have full-on classes of like, different tracks. However, I remember being in first grade and my teacher was like, "Oh, she's reading at a really high reading level. So, I'm gonna give her…all of these chapter books to read." And so, since I was little, I've kind of always been tracked on a higher academic plane than maybe some of my peers. That changed a little bit in middle school. Well, maybe more in high school. I was in higher-level language arts in middle school, and also, technically, the higher-level math. So, I've always been more of a reading/writing type person. I think that throughout middle school I really gravitated towards that because I really liked my language arts teacher. She was really influential in my, honestly, decision to become a teacher. She, I remember at the end of eighth grade, told me that I reminded her of herself when she was younger. And that really made me so happy because I really looked up to her. And ever since then, I focused more on my English classes than any of my other classes. I mean, I worked pretty hard in my social studies classes. But in terms of science and math, I tried my best, but it was never anything that I was super interested in."[2]

Louis nods in agreement, prefacing his response by making connections to Kate's experience and feelings of being tracked in school. "So, I think I had a pretty unique educational experience, which is kind of what made me want to be a teacher because it was right at the end of my elementary years. In fifth grade, I got tracked into this super exclusive advanced program. I don't know if it was like a magnet school within the public school, but it was known as magnet. And there were only, like, seven other kids in the whole district. You had to take a test to get in. And I remember some of my friends were gifted and talented throughout elementary school and took the test. And I was heartbroken because they didn't get in, and I only beat them by a couple points on the test. So, I thought it was really stupid that I would get to go. But anyway, I got there. And it was during this transition between elementary and middle school, but because it was advanced we started doing more middle school level stuff. And I really got turned off by English and social studies specifically because...well, for one it was when you started getting books assigned to you. And because my dad read so much fantasy and I was really influenced by the fantasy genre, I was, like, 'these aren't books. Why would I want to ever read this?' And I hated that I had to read these books. And also all the kids that were in the class, their parents were engineers or teachers or, like, doctors and then my dad was an electrician. So, I just didn't know those books existed. And I kind of proudly started to wear the moniker of being, like, the dumbest smart-kid in the school because I could just tell that I was missing something. So I kind of internalized this idea that I'm not an English/social studies guy. I'm the math/science guy because that's something I could do. I kind of had the too cool for school attitude. But because I was tracked, I had good grades, and everything looked good because I was taking really advanced courses. But I really hated all the work." [3]

The aim of the session is to create an authentic and comfortable space for participants to engage and part of that process is allowing room for silence or passing on participation. However, I want to encourage everyone to share in this portion of the session. Judy and Nancy do not appear eager to share, but Susan quickly jumps in and decides to talk more about herself as a learner since others have shared specifically about their schooling experiences. “I feel like I honestly don't have just one way that I learned. I really like taking notes. I like to be organized. Those things really help me. We’ve also been learning a lot about active and collaborative teaching, and I, now in retrospect, realize that I do really well when I'm working with groups, and I do really well when I have the material and I'm teaching another peer of mine the material. Like, in class, I would partner up with other peers, and we would take turns explaining concepts to each other. And I really like writing. I really like vocalizing because I think it makes you think through what you wrote down in different ways and reflect on it while you're speaking out loud. I feel like I've done most of that throughout my entire education. I really like to learn so I pushed myself to take harder classes throughout my educational experience. I didn't just ride the line. I tried to do things that challenged me. When a lot my peers complained about the workload and stuff, like, obviously I did too, but I actually kind of liked it because I felt I had my best moments and my best thoughts and my best conversations when I'm engaged in academic work or learning new things because it's just new things to talk about and get new perspectives on with the people around me.”[4]

Judy immediately follows Susan’s lead with her own identity as a learner. “Yeah…I would say as a student, I was kind of a perfectionist. I guess socially kind of quiet, but I loved answering questions in class. And I loved class discussions. I liked to sit in the front row, to raise my hand. But at the same time, I was never a student who wanted to really be friends with my

teachers. I really enjoyed kind of that boundary of, like, ‘you are the teacher, I'm the student.’ Or not friends, but you know, I didn’t feel it was necessary to build a more meaningful relationship with them. School was exciting to me. It was also stressful and anxiety-laden and all of the kind of developmental teen ways. I would say I'm an anxious, curious student.” [5]

Nancy prefaces her perspective with a unique experience - at least unique among this group - of growing up with parents as educators. “Yeah, I would say all my memories are positive. Something that's been very formative for me is that both my parents are educators. I mean, there were times that if I had a teacher that was giving me a detention for something, my parents, 100%, would say, ‘You deserve that detention. The educator knows best.’ So, I think that that's been very formative where my school experience definitely transcended into home. My parents always were asking about school. They were always talking like K 12 educators. So, they're always talking about their schools. So, it wasn't just, ‘oh, it's three o'clock, we’re going to stop thinking about school.’ If something happened at school we're gonna debrief it to death probably. But yeah, my schooling experience was pretty positive.” [6]

As Nancy finishes sharing, everyone else is smiling and nodding in appreciation of the connections that can already be made through these short individual tales. Everyone seems to have had a fairly positive experience with education or has had a sort of epiphany about their education, but I am curious at this point as to what draws people to teaching. I unmute myself and thank everyone for their responses. “Thank you so much for sharing those experiences. So, I am curious. Would anyone like to share more about how your experiences led to your decision to be a teacher? Feel free to also talk about, if you like, what drew you to apply specifically to this program.”

Kate reiterates that her interest in language arts comes from the influence of her beloved 8th grade teacher and about her disinterest in science and math. She then continues to share about her college experience to further augment her becoming-a-teacher story. “Going into college, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I thought I wanted to be an English major. And then I ended up being an English major, but I also had two other majors that kind of just developed alongside of my English major because I took a lot of classes that incorporated that stuff.”[2] Kate continues talking about her process toward becoming an English teacher through reflecting on her post-secondary experience. “And I think college was where I really started to learn critical thinking skills. Which is unfortunate because that should have been something that was more prevalent in even in, like, elementary school. But since I was tracked and told, like, ‘oh, you're a smart kid’, I was never taught to question what a ‘smart kid’ really means. And then once I got to college, I was, like, ‘well, what does it mean that I was tracked in this way?’ I thought more critically about what my socioeconomic status had to do with that, what my race had to do with that, even what my gender had to do with that.”[2]

Louis immediately unmutes, signaling a connection with Kate’s experience. He says, “Yeah. I think the big ticket for me in college was when I realized how education can be really important and no one had explicitly told me that. I was always in classes with kids who were…whose parents were college educated, while, my educational experience was, sitting on a bed reading Dr. Seuss with my dad. And then it's, like, ‘Hey, if you go to college, that'd be great.’ But I never knew why. College just seemed to be what everyone else wanted to do. I didn't know that you can be an active member in your community. Even now, I have a hard time believing that I have any civic power or anything because that was just so divorced from my family's conception of the world. My parents just kind of lived their life and then didn't think that

they could control much outside of the household. I think college is when I discovered that education can be a form of power, and then a way to wield that power is literacy and wielding language and being a good writer and all that kind of stuff. It'd be really cool if kids that don't get that messaging innately within their household could just be explicitly told that and if that is the route they want to go down to know that it's possible to secure a better future. And that's why education ended up being important to me, but no one said that that's what education is for."[3]

"I am not sure if that totally makes sense. It's a bit of a ramble," says Louis expressing his unease as to whether he addressed the question. He follows up to complete his thought in relation to the original question about why he is drawn to teaching. "But I really want to just...I want to explain what I'm doing every step of the way when I'm teaching because I felt like so much of my education experiences communicated that 'you need to do this because I'm saying you need to do this and it's for your own good, and you're smart enough to handle it.' And I hated all those reasons."[3]

"That makes total sense," says Nancy. "I totally get that. For me, I had a different experience because I heard all those reasons all the time. My parents were teachers, and we talked about that stuff constantly, and it actually pushed me away, a little, from wanting to be a teacher." Louis, while muted, mouths "thanks" and nodding in appreciation of Nancy's affirming response. I ask Nancy, "So what drew you to teaching since your parents seemed to inadvertently steer you away?" Nancy chuckles and says, "I think the only way that it was really on my conscious was when I was completely swearing to them that I would never become a teacher. So, I think the biggest thing I got from that was that I wanted to have a job that I felt had a purpose or, like, some sort of meaning but then, also, just made me want to get out of bed in the morning. In undergrad going to the career fairs and everything, I was looking at all these corporations like,

‘oh, you can work R&D [research and development] at P&G [Proctor and Gamble].’ And I was, like, ‘okay, that would be cool.’ I think that I was just so dead set on being independent, but independent being something that no one in my family has ever done before. And then there was a kind of switch where I thought that I could be independent and still do something that my parents are doing and, like, take the best of that but not have to follow everything that they exactly did. And they have never pressured me to become a teacher. So, I think that was almost maturity, I would say - realizing that I can do things I want to do without having to consider what other people have done or are doing. And then switching into possibly seeing myself as a teacher, I tutored my senior year of college and then getting to do City Year. And I really just enjoyed working with students and specifically in a classroom. I think math is so foundational to so many other content areas, and I think’s really important to functionality in the real world that I, in my own experience, I just saw that there is such a need for really good and competent math teachers.”[6]

I refrain from interjecting in order to allow others to participate in this engaging discussion. Silence hangs over the digital space, but I do not perceive it as an awkward silence. It is apparent that everyone is thinking about this question in earnest, and I suspect that some may not have fully articulated their interest in being a teacher. As I motion toward the audio icon to unmute, Judy breaks the silence by sharing about her perceived ignorance as a student. She says, “I didn't have to think about being me, as a student. Just even the bureaucracy involved in having the designation of being an English language learner, just the different adults that you're interacting with and the different classes that you have to take. I didn't have to think about that. Even being in the classroom, thinking about vocabulary, or just how people interact with one another. Or having an IEP [Individual Education Plan], I didn't know about that, as a student. I

didn't have to think about it. So, I definitely came across a lot of those things as a para. And it was really beneficial for reflection because a lot of my time in AmeriCorps and as a para, I was doing push-ins. And if a teacher was lecturing that day, I was just kind of sitting there observing and reflecting through the lens of where a student's English language learning is at and viewing this content through what they might be experiencing and what supports they might need. So mostly, that was observation. Now, I think it's interesting because like we said earlier about being critical, you can observe something and critique it to the moon, but then actually doing it is a different story. So, I think that's the leg that I'm on now, where I feel like I've had all of these reflections and ideas about things. And knowing also that I cannot possibly have observed everything. So, that's my journey so far."[5]

"Thank you for sharing, Judy. I really appreciate the honesty about how you talk about your journey to teaching and that you are on a particular leg of that journey. It is clear that you are a curious person, so I am wondering how you, or anyone here, concluded not to become a teacher but also to choose a social justice-oriented program, such as the secondary program here at Three Lakes." "If it's okay, I can continue with a thought connected to what I just shared." Judy continues by reflecting back on her schooling experience. "So, I grew up in Minnesota. I went to a pretty diverse high school that was heavily tracked. So, the school that I was in was in a community with a lot of high achieving, white liberal families. So, that was kind of the 9-12 experience. And then I don't know, k -12, or K- 8, k -5, I was in a cozy neighborhood school. And then 6-8, I transferred to a middle school that was very different. And was majority, like, black students, and Hmong students, and was pretty underfunded…just not a great time. Not because of the students themselves, but just because of how...I entered that school and immediately I was like, 'Oh, something is not right here. Why am I in another school and

suddenly, because the kids look different, this is a completely different space.' Things were just policed more often, like, classroom management was more of the point of school rather than learning. And that felt really unfair and wrong to me, even at the time. And I don't think as a 12-year-old, I didn't have explanations for that. But I mean, I knew racism existed. And I was like, 'hmm, this seems weird and bad. This doesn't feel good to be here.' And the school should feel good." 5 Judy pauses for a moment. After collecting her thoughts, she continues, "I think as a human, it's important to care about people that you don't know. And it's important to care about those who you know and love as well. But to extend that care to everyone is something I really value. And so, I think where social justice comes into that is that... as a person who studied history, specifically US history, the way things are set up doesn't privilege others and/or privileges a select few. And I think that's deeply unfair. Maybe that's too basic. But growing up, I was a student in public education. And I felt like I saw inequity really firsthand. And I was a young, white girl with class privilege. It was startling and, and I wondered why my schools were segregated, both between schools and within schools. And I think those 'why' questions pushed me to study that more and then pushed me to be an educator, as well. And so, I knew that also within education, you didn't want to fall into the trap of being a white-savior educator either. And so, it was important to me to have a teacher education program that was grounded in social justice values and anti-racist values."[7]

Nancy visibly nods in total agreement and says, "Yeah. I also recognize that I am a white female with class privilege, but social justice and equity are really important to me." She continues sharing within the context of her experience through City Year - a teaching experience program offered through AmeriCorps - "I wanted to be a very good teacher and, as a white woman, I wanted to also be qualified not just have the position of being able to accomplish social

justice, like, in air quotes." Nancy gestures quotations marks using both hands. "It really seemed that City year cared about equity for all students. Whether that be income or race or gender. But City Year really knew how to voice those values, but they also identified real ways to achieve those values like, 'We're doing this to accomplish this.' 'We're doing this because this is being neglected.' And I had never been in an environment that explicitly named the things that were socially unjust. And I realized that if you can't name it, you can't do anything about it. And I needed that explicit acknowledgment. And then this program specifically, I thought really balanced the ideology with the actual teacher training, which I thought was really unique for a graduate program. I'm sure there's some out there that do similar things but, I wanted that deeper understanding with the very tangible like, 'you're in a classroom', to actually learn that way as well."[6]

I realize that we are nearing the end of our allotted time together, so I begin wrapping up the session. "Thank you Nancy and Judy for sharing your experiences and finding overlapping values between yourselves and the program here. I anticipate hearing more about how your experiences in the program are providing space to continue growing and affirming these social justice values you are coming into the program with. Before we officially conclude our time together, does anyone else have any additional comments, questions, or follow up from the topics we have covered today?" Comically, I scan my computer screen to pick up on any visual cues from anyone who wishes to add any final words, as if I expect to make eye contact with any participants. Susan offers her final thoughts saying, "I didn't say much today, but it's really interesting to hear about how we all have come to want to be teachers and also coming to this program. It's good to know that I am not the only person who still views teaching as a noble profession." "Same here," says Louis. "I also appreciate all of you, and like Susan said, I felt

kind of like being on an island about my own ideas about teaching. So, it's good to be with others who care about education and teaching in similar ways that I do." I continue pausing to allow anyone else to contribute, but there is collective satisfaction with Susan and Louis' final words. I conclude our time together: "Thank you, again, for attending and participating in this space today. I look forward to the next time we all get together after the fall semester concludes. In our next session, we will share about our experiences in your fall placements, as well as revisit some of the things we covered from today's session. I will be in touch about scheduling a day that works for everyone to attend. If you have any questions or need anything, I will hang around for a bit. If not, feel free to sign off and we will see you next time. Best wishes as you start the fall semester."

One-by-one, everyone signs off with a mix of waving gestures and "thank you" messages popping up in the chat. I am left to stare at my reflection as the last attendant.

Interpretation – Dispositions

Talking about the dispositions of these preservice teachers provides a view into what values and beliefs aspiring educators are bringing to their preparation experiences. Understanding these dispositions enables more explicit conversations and efforts toward addressing relevant issues that may impact learning throughout their preparation program. Most notably, as I expected, each participant expressed a sense of joy and fulfillment during their k-12 and/or undergraduate experiences. There is a sense of accomplishment that is part of their educational experiences to-date. Louis is the only participant who talked about his personal struggles with education. Although, he eventually talked about his epiphany during his undergraduate education that education empowers people, he expressed contempt for his k-12 experiences because of his status as a highly tracked, "smart" student. Louis shares that he

lacked a sense of purpose and connection to his education. His earliest experience with literacy (reading) was reading books with his dad and imitating his dad's routine of reading a fantasy novel after coming home from work. Louis' love of fantasy was excluded from his literacy experiences in school, further aggravating his disdain for being a "smart kid."

This sentiment of being labeled as "smart" is not unique to Louis. Judy expressed her love of class discussions and being a curious student, which I assume gave her social and academic privileges in school. Anna saw school as a release from trauma-filled home life, but she enjoyed learning, being involved in clubs/activities, and fueling her desire to have social interactions with others, as well sharing her knowledge and expertise. Kate was labeled as a "smart" child from a very early age in school and was subsequently placed in advanced-level classes beginning in middle school. She shared about her love of reading and writing, which undoubtedly was influenced by her beloved 8th grade teacher, who inspired Kate to explore teaching as a profession. Susan talked more about herself as a learner. However, she mentioned that she enjoys the challenge of enrolling in rigorous classes and taking academic risks despite the tendency among her peers to shy away from such opportunities. In all likelihood, Susan would have been viewed as a "smart" student. Nancy had a unique educational experience because her parents are educators. Although she admitted that her overall education experience was positive, Nancy recounted a general sense of exasperation when her parents would bring home their educator-selves and "debrief" the day. Consequently, Nancy has been steeped in educator language and perspective. I would imagine that this experience gave her an advantage in navigating school.

It was apparent that all the PSTs, in some way, saw their educational experiences in a positive light. Most enjoyed their experience from an early age, while others found more gratification and maturity later in their educational journeys. As a result of these generally positive experiences, Kate, Louis, Nancy, and Judy expressed compassionate sensibilities that

led them to explore teaching more seriously. Of these four participants, Kate shared the most positive educational experience, but her undergraduate experience provided a realization about what was missing from her k-12 education. She shared that she was not encouraged to think about what it meant to be a "smart kid" or what were the implications of school tracking. It was not until college that Kate was exposed to critical thinking, which she lamented did not happen for her at an early age. Her sentiment implies that there may be other students who are not engaging with critical thinking, but she does not explicitly state that as her assumption or opinion.

Louis had a similar experience in reckoning with gaps in his k-12 education. Like Kate, Louis discovered in college that "education can be a form of power." Being a son of working-class parents, Louis was the first in his nuclear family to go to college and realized that civic empowerment is possible despite his family's focus on the household. For Louis, education and literacy were "successful tools" to help him "secure a better future." He continued to assert that his goal for teaching was to explicitly share with students that education and literacy are important and are helpful in creating pathways of success. There is compassion that comes from Louis' experiences because he detested the pedagogical choices of his teachers (e.g., you are smart enough to handle it). I imagine that Louis would not question the capacity of students to engage with content. What he would value is to help students discover what education and literacy can do for them, as opposed to how they can demonstrate their intelligence for the sake of education and literacy.

Nancy's experience was interesting because she initially did not want to be a teacher and wanted to do something as distant as possible from teaching. She shared that she wanted to have purpose in her chosen profession, something that drove her out of bed in the morning. She credited her desire to reconsider teaching because of her lack of interest in corporate environments, maturity, and her experience with City Year. It was during her experience in City

Year experience that she realized that she could do something that was independent of her parents' pathways and do something meaningful. Although her training is in science, Nancy has a strong affinity for mathematics and saw first-hand the inequity of providing students with the necessary resources to gain access to math education. Much of her role in the City Year experience was observing with limited teaching/participation in the content of the class she served in. However, this role enabled her to fully observe and reflect on what was happening and not happening in this math classroom. Nancy's compassion comes from this experience, leading her to understand that "there is such a need for really good and competent math teachers." Her realization brings forth critical attention to how students are organized and perceived in schools, while not indicting the teacher she served with during City Year. Nancy expressed compassion for students who were not able to access, what she refers to as, a "really important functionality in the real world."

Of the four participants who expressed compassion (Kate, Louis, Nancy, and Judy), Judy was the most explicit in her experiences and what she hopes to do as a teacher. Similar to Nancy's experience with City Year, Judy had opportunities to serve, observe, and reflect as a para-professional teacher and as a guest teacher through AmeriCorps. These experiences further validated and augmented her experiences as an elementary school student. As a young student, she witnessed startling differences when she switched schools, realizing that the amount of diversity was somehow connected to the quality and focus of education within that school (i.e., more diverse students equal more policing and classroom management). Judy admitted that she had a limited language to articulate what she was seeing, but her experience, later, as a young professional helped to address her earlier limitations. She was able to reflect on her own experiences more fully, or rather ignorance, as a student. Judy expressed, "I didn't have to think about being me, as a student, having the designation of being an English language learner or even having an IEP. I didn't know about that, as a student. I didn't have to think about it." Her invisibility as a student made her aware of her privilege and place in the school. Because she did

not have the experience of being a language learner or having an IEP (at most she was labeled as a “smart” student), she was shielded from the bureaucracy of the school and the difficulty in navigating a system to access resources. Because of Judy’s reflection, she tethers her experiences and ideals to social justice and equity. For Judy, becoming a teacher enabled her to mobilize her compassion into action through social justice.

Judy shared that she came to teaching because she wanted to move past the critique of education. She sees teaching as a mode of action to address the issues that she observed in the classroom as a paraprofessional. Of all the participants, Judy refers to social justice quite frequently, and it serves as a foundation on which she builds her ideals and pedagogy. Her early school experiences influenced Judy to study US history, which led her to further realizations about institutional and structural oppression that privilege a select few. Consequently, after her undergraduate education, she sought out teacher education programs that held social justice values. Judy’s commitment to social justice, equity, and inclusion is succinctly articulated through her values: “I think as a human, it's important to care about people that you don't know. As a person who studied history, specifically US history, the way things are set up doesn’t privilege others and/or privileges a select few. And I think that's deeply unfair. And so, it was important to me to have a teacher education program that was grounded in social justice values and anti-racist values.”[5]

Nancy shares similar experiences and perspectives with Judy. Both recognize their class and racial privilege and speculate how that impacts their ability to teach effectively. Both worked within teaching opportunities within AmeriCorps, which afforded the space to observe and reflect on the realities of the classroom - thus informing their own ideas and values around teaching. Nancy’s experience in the City Year program provided an opportunity to more authentically and explicitly interrogate social justice issues in the classroom. Where Judy and Nancy diverge relates to content. For Nancy, content competency is among the foremost themes

in how she talks about her experiences and values. Even though she has a science background, her affinity for and proficiency in mathematics coupled with her newfound social justice values compelled her to enroll in the secondary program at Three Lakes. Nancy's interest in the program was the balance between ideology and practice. Nancy already had a social justice framework. What she desired was a way to bring that framework to the classroom, combining her commitment to content competence and her renewed outlook on equity and inclusion.

Examining dispositions provides insight into what values, experiences, and ideals have led these participants to seek out teaching and learning within a social-justice oriented program. It is clear that these participants value their own experiences as learners and students, which further informs their realization that not all students have these experiences or privileges. Whether spending a year serving in an urban teaching experience program or coming right out of undergraduate education, these participants are eager to learn what "good teaching" is, but more importantly they are carrying with them their dispositions (values, perspectives, experiences, and ideals). Understanding what these dispositions are further informs the instructional decisions made by teacher educators.

Expectations of Preservice Teachers

Thinking back on my experiences as a preservice teacher, I remember some of the expectations I had and can now see how shallow some of those expectations were. I expected my professors to be knowledgeable and experienced. I expected to draw inspiration from them as I learned to craft my own lessons and unit plans. I expected to know what "good teaching" was. During my final semester before full-time student teaching, my expectation bubble burst. My advanced methods instructor was a wonderfully talented person. She had a dual degree in French and English and was licensed to teach both subjects prior to her transition to higher education.

She would always share personal stories about her most memorable students, and it was inspiring to have a professor who had been teaching in the classroom for several years. When it came time to build our own unit plans that were to be submitted by the end of the semester as our final project, I went to her for guidance on what to do. I had never done such a thing and was at a loss for what to do. Naturally, I looked to her for inspiration. I expected that she would tell me about a unit she had done with her students or maybe she would share an idea about something really great to do with poetry in a high school context. When I went to her office hours in search of inspiration, one of few things she said was, "What do you want to do?" I do not recall exactly how I responded, but I imagine that I felt disappointed. Was it unreasonable to expect concrete guidance or methods from my professor, who I believed to be a brilliant teacher? Was it unreasonable to feel left down in that moment?

I can certainly empathize with the practical nature of preservice teachers' expectations, and it is no surprise that many student teachers that I have worked with express this sense of "tell me how to do it." My initial suspicion for this expectation was that many preservice teachers are "good" students. That is, they did well in school and were generally high achievers. To be put in a situation that does not have concrete answers or structures that lead to definitive markers of success can understandably be frustrating. As I have conversations with my participant partners, I am beginning to see expectations differently. I can see that I am projecting my own experiences onto my interactions with preservice teachers. Could there be others who have similar expectations as I had as a preservice teacher, yes. However, this group is displaying other motivations for their expectations and ideas about teaching. I am grateful that their motivations and expectations differ from mine.

The next thematic vignette focuses on expectations. Now that we have explored participants' dispositions, the things that they carry with them into teacher preparation, it will be interesting to see how they leverage and process these dispositions in concert with their learning and practicum experiences. I anticipate that during their first practicum experiences, especially since many of these participants have had informal experiences working with youth, is where they will begin to wrestle with tensions between theory and practice. I have no doubt that they learned valuable theory that affirmed and challenged their ideas. What will be interesting and unique to each participant is the process and tools they use to negotiate the tensions that arise. As part of this process, I also anticipate that participants have some expectations of the program or their practicum experiences to help them grow and develop as aspiring educators. I am interested in how these expectations are informed by their dispositions. That is, I am curious as to how their ideals form assumptions about school, learning, education, teaching, and students.

Impressionistic Scene #2

Celebrating the "New Year" comes in many different forms and rituals. When I was younger and first married, my wife and I would imagine being in Times Square among all the New Yorkers eager for a fresh start (we never committed to going). At that time, I thought of the New Year as a reset, trying to accomplish more than I did the previous year, to be better in some way. After my children were born and our family began to form our own New Year's traditions, I reflected on my memories of celebrating the Lunar New Year as a child. My mother would prepare mountains of food, days in advance of the celebration. We often went to the Korean church that my mother attended to celebrate with the Korean congregation because no one's house was large enough to accommodate the people or the food and festivities. There was so much food. All of my favorites were part of a multi-hour grazing session that lasted well into the night amidst all the games and fellowship. Although the more traditional Koreans dressed more

formally, many of the younger generations were encouraged to wear something nice but something that was our favorite thing to wear. A nuanced aspect of our New Year celebration was not about resetting or regret. The Lunar New Year was a symbol of hope, we looked forward to the New Year and our rituals symbolized our simultaneous hope for good fortune and recognizing that we are already blessed with the good fortunes of the previous year.

As I prepare to meet with Louis, Kate, Anna, Nancy, Susan, and Judy again, I wish to bring this concept of thankfulness and hope into our time together. These participants have spent the last semester in their first of two practicum experiences. The fall semester is further divided into two smaller experiences, but student teachers remain in the same classroom for the duration of the semester. The first portion of the fall experience is focused on observation and reflection. Student teachers spend approximately 5 hours per week in their practicum classrooms. For three to four weeks, they are observing the teaching and classroom structures of their cooperating teachers (CTs) and reflecting on these observations in concert with their fall coursework. After this portion of the experience, PSTs move into the part-time portion of the practicum experience. At this time, PSTs are spending 15-20 hours per week and encouraged to be present during their CTs planning hours and/or consecutive teaching of content sections. They are also taking on a more active role in their classrooms, but they are not expected to teach, plan, or lead a lesson on their own. They are encouraged to be present and to contribute to planning sessions, assisting their CTs in facilitating instruction, and working with students in small groups. This experience can be initially overwhelming for student teachers, and it is difficult to capture everything that happens in the classroom. Because there is so much to observe and reflect upon, I think it is apropos to encourage these participants to think about their experiences in terms of thankfulness and hope.

I log into our virtual meeting space about 10 minutes before our scheduled meeting begins. The chill in the air is a sharp reminder of the reputation of Midwest winters - cold is not

a strong enough word to describe it. I would much rather physically be in a room with everyone, but it is days like this that I am grateful for virtual meetings. I get comfortable and wait for people to join although I doubt that anyone will sign in until the top of the hour. I am pleasantly surprised to see that Kate joins the meeting five minutes early. Her video and sound are both muted. I say, “Good afternoon, Kate. We will get started soon.” A message pops up on my computer taskbar, it is a typed message from Kate, “Hi!!” A couple of minutes pass, and I see that two others are joining the meeting,Anna and Susan. “Good afternoon, Anna and Susan,” I say as their virtual squares show their names. “Hello,” Anna says unmuting her audio but keeping her video muted for the moment. I don’t get a response from Susan, so I type my greeting in the chat, “Hello, Susan. Thanks for joining us today.” A response comes a few seconds later from Susan, “Hello!” It is now two minutes until the top of the hour. I suspect the other half of the group will show up at the stroke of 2:00 pm.

Louis enters the room. His video flickers on as quickly as he entered. He begins to speak, but he is muted. I can see him mouthing “hello.” “ Hello! Can you hear me, okay? You are muted, Louis,” I say to greet him and acknowledge that he is trying to greet the group in return.” Nancy and Judy both enter the room as Louis says, “Sorry about that. I keep forgetting to unmute before I open my mouth.” There is a collective laugh from those who are unmuted and exchanging “hellos” as Louis audibly speaks. “Did I miss something?” Judy inquires to ensure that she is not left out of the calamity. “Not at all. It never ceases to be amusing when people try to talk and they are still muted, and then you have to go through telling them they are muted.” Judy accepts my response with a thumbs up. Anna offers an anecdote from this past semester. “This one time, we had a student talk for about 30 seconds before he realized that he was muted. Apparently, he had a really great thought but, he quickly forgot what it was by the time we told him he was muted and to repeat himself. I felt so bad. But, yeah, frustrating.”

We are settled, and I greet the whole group as the remainder of muted videos flicker to reveal the other participants. “Thank you so much for making time to meet together again. I hope you have a cozy spot and a warm drink to get you through this cold, winter day.” Without prompting and almost as if coordinated ahead of time, Judy, Anna, and Kate all reach for their nearby, steaming mugs to share images of their warm drinks. “There you go!” I say. Out of solidarity I reach for my own coffee mug to bear with my winter partners. “Hopefully, you are not in a cold basement, like me. I especially need this to keep me warm. Well, I appreciate your time in getting together for our second group session. Last time, we met before the start of the fall semester and talked about why or what influenced you to be teachers. Today, we are going to continue talking about your experiences since you have now gone through your first semester of student teaching. Similar to last time, I have some questions that I will be using to guide our conversation today, but I want to be flexible and talk about the things that come to mind. Either from the questions I ask and/or from what your peers share about their experiences. During our time this afternoon, feel free to share as you feel led or are comfortable. What is shared here is confidential and your identity will be kept as anonymous as possible, but there is a slight risk of identification as this work becomes more public. Is it okay if I record today’s session?” Everyone nods in agreement, and I see a couple of “thumbs up” appear in the chat window from Nancy and Louis.

“To begin our time together, I thought it would be beneficial to take a moment and think about your experiences in the classroom this past semester. I invite anyone to share about a success or something you really appreciated about your time in the classroom.” I allow some time to pass and observe everyone doing various gestures to signal thinking back on the semester. Some are looking up, while others are pensively gazing into the distance. No one seems particularly eager to start, but Kate decides to break the ice and share what she appreciated about her practicum experience. “I would love anytime that we would do a daily share, or weekend share. And I got to lead it with the students. Because I felt as though I could

really, you know, make little conversation and connect with students. And I pretty consistently would lead all of seventh hour. And I think that I really built a strong relationship with a lot of those students. Some of the highlights were the kids thought I was, like, 18 or 19 years old. And I was like, 'No, I'm 23.' That was funny. And one time when Mary, my supervisor, came to observe, there were some students that, she said, turned around and were like, 'We love Miss Kate so much. We love her more than our regular teacher.' Which, you know, I was, like, 'Guys, you don't have to say that. That's not necessary.' But they're all really, really sweet kids. And I loved them. And, yeah, towards the end of the semester, I felt like I was really, you know, getting along with them so well."[2]

"Thank you for sharing about your experience. I am glad to hear that the students enjoyed having you there and were even willing to prop you up when your supervisor came to visit. Would anyone else like to share their moments of joy or something you appreciated about your time in the classroom?" I ask to hopefully gain some momentum in encouraging others to share. Nancy comments, "I don't mean this to be negative in any way, but I think we all have probably had to deal with classroom behaviors of some sort. I don't know about you all, but I definitely learned a lot about how to manage a space, which is something I have not had any experience with." She continues, "I don't want to, like, harp too much on behavior because I don't think this is a unique struggle that I have, but if someone was doing disruptive behavior, and I asked them to stop, and they keep doing it, there is no right answer from there on out. And I would say with my fifth hour, the one class I interacted with the most, I have really good rapport with that group. I think that there is a mutual respect and stuff like that. So, you know, as time went on, it was easier to ask the students to stop. I think I also learned that you can't just say, 'Stop doing that.' It's, like, you almost have to redirect, you know? We made a seating chart, too, but we were conscious of pairing so every student had at least one friend at the table. And that worked really well. And then we forced them all to sit in the front rows of the room. The first day they kind of grumbled and groaned. And then the second day, it's, like, 'Oh, my God,

this is how it's going to be. I'm not going to sit there.' I think it would have been really easy for me to just be like, 'Oh, the next day, we're having a workday. Sit wherever you want.' But I feel like I just kept trying. And it totally helped that I had a good relationship with the students. But things like that is what you expect to run into as a teacher. And it's the first time I've ever had to deal with it directly. So, I learned a lot."[6]

"Thank you, Nancy. I would love to come back to what you mentioned a few times and what Kate alluded to about building relationships later. Anyone else before we move forward with our conversation today?" I offer a final opportunity for someone to share before thinking about when and how I want to return to this idea of building community and relationships with students. "I feel like I have learned a lot about communicating more effectively with students." Susan says. I follow up saying, "Great! Could you tell us more about what you learned or more about communicating with students?" Susan starts by providing context for the school she was placed at. "So, Stone Prairie Middle School has students with diverse backgrounds and needs. So, there's about 40% of kids who have IEPs. There's 25 ESL students and/or that are receiving services actively. And then we have a huge population of LGBTQIA+ students. And it's an all-inclusive model - no one is pulled out. They don't do that. So, we're always thinking about different populations of students, and trying to represent them. Not only to accommodate their learning experience but mold our curriculum to meet their needs." She continues, "So, communication was such an important part of my experience in Stone Prairie because I literally did not know what a lot of students were experiencing because I never had to think about that stuff. A great example of this was Thanksgiving break. And even now during winter break a lot of our students have instability at home. So, breaks, I mean, for a lot of kids are really great because it's time off to enjoy, and then for some, it's like, they don't know where their meals are coming from or they're going to be alone. So, we did a lot of priming for Thanksgiving break, talking about how it's okay to feel however you want to feel. Like, we recognized that this is different for everyone. And some people like this, and some people don't. And it's also a routine

change. And that can be a lot for kids who need structure. So, communicating with kids seems like a basic thing, but being in that environment really helped me to see how important even simple things like communication can be for kids. And literally asking them what they need, and then also meeting them on a mutual playing field."[4]

"Yeah. I really appreciate you sharing that. It is so easy to forget about communicating with students, right? Especially in a way that is accessible and earnest to them. Again, I really want to come back to this idea of relationship and community building Susan, Nancy, and Kate have talked about later in our time together, but I would like to get into our first topic for today, which Susan conveniently set up for us!" Susan interjects, "I totally meant to do that!" I still can't get over the silence of laughter that exists in virtual spaces, but I suppose it allows room to appreciate the physical aspect of laughing, to pay more attention to the power of joy that can settle people into comfort. "Of course, you did," I sarcastically say to the group. "As Susan so intentionally set up for us, I am curious about what comes to mind from this past semester when you think about what you have learned." I sense that this may be closely related to the opening question of inviting participants to share about any highlights from their practicum experiences. I clarify by saying, "What was something that surprised you. Susan shared about not having to think about the needs of her students because she had not experienced them or knew anyone who experienced them. Does anyone else have any learning moments, big takeaways, or surprising realizations from this past semester?"

I am expecting, somewhat, the group to lean back into the community and relationship building that was mentioned to start our session. But it may be unreasonable to expect that student teachers, at least this early in their practicum experiences, to find what may be defined as successes in the classroom. I am sure they all developed positive relationships, and some have even taken on instructional roles. However, the goal of this early experience is to acquaint them with being in a classroom and seeing it from the privileged vantage point of an in-community

observer. They are not merely there to watch teaching and learning happen. They are there to think critically about what is happening and the iterative consequences of teacher and student interactions. Therefore, formulating their own ideas about “good teaching.”

“I guess some of the theories we've been talking about, culturally responsive pedagogy or culturally sustaining pedagogy…” Louis pauses a moment to collect his thoughts before continuing. “I feel like we were given a million different definitions of what it is, and, like, what it looks like, all that kind of stuff. So, I feel like my conception of what education should be to begin with, is at least a cousin to what we're being taught is best practice. So, realizing that it's at least somewhat related to student-driven education. And, and I think that there's opportunity for it to be directly related to a student's culture. Should the student have the agency over their education? I think those kinds of connections have made it less so that I feel alone on a war front. And I'm like, ‘oh, everyone's here. I'm not so crazy.’”[3]

“That’s really interesting!” I say. I can also see that others are perked up by something Louis has said, but I quickly insert a request for Louis to further develop his thought. "I recall from our last session that it was not until later in your education experience that you realized that education and literacy provide opportunities to have power and social mobility. Knowing that is something of value to you, what were some expectations you had of being in a university space learning these theories about teaching and learning and being in a middle school classroom seeing teaching and learning happening?” Louis takes a moment to develop his response. He unmutes and says, “I am a very practical person. So, I want to be given tools. And then I want to be able to use my time as a student teacher to try out the tools, and I want to be able to look to my supervisors for support and to be able to bounce off my own observations about how I use the tools in the classroom. And then perhaps maybe renovate the tools or maybe discuss why certain tools aren't working. Even another step would be looking to my fellow student teachers about what works for them. One thing I like about the program is the practical

aspect where you we get to go in and try these things out and it doesn't get theoretical. I also want to be able to bring it back and understand why certain things aren't working and troubleshoot that. So yeah, I've definitely felt like a lot of my personal values have certainly been affirmed by the coursework in the program. Because it really does emphasize that you have to know your students in order to teach them well."[3]

"Thank you for responding to that, and I am sorry if that put you on the spot a bit. I also realize that others may have wanted to follow up or maybe connected with something Louis shared." Everyone is muted, but a crossed-out microphone symbol quickly appears active as Anna shares about her methods classes this semester. "I think inclusive ed was really helpful for thinking about how not accommodating we are as a society to people who are different. So, that was really eye-opening because even though I have relatives who have autism, having a small exposure to people with disabilities doesn't really give you that lens that you need to be able to really see what's happening or what's not happening. Just having examples of things that can be helpful for people was really good for me because I don't have a disability, so it's not something that you always think about, which is kind of terrible. We did presentations on a bunch of different disabilities. I think those are really helpful because it also gave us resources that we could use, which I have all of them bookmarked. I appreciate having a real-life example of, 'hey, this is a thing. If this comes up, there are things you can do to make it better for students.' Our social justice course exposed…being able to see a system, and then how, as a system, how we've kind of historically treated people of color and how that's kind of trickled down into society as a whole, in a modern way because it's a lot more subtle. So, being able to pick up some of those subtleties was really helpful."[1]

"Yeah, going along with that, I think our methods courses brought to my attention things that I didn't think, or I didn't consider thinking about before. I was so dead set on being a good math teacher who communicated content clearly with students and at least communicated to

students that math can be useful and that they can do math." Nancy continues building on Anna's thoughts on methods courses. "I think methods was tough only because I had to use the curriculum that was handed to me pretty adherently. So, I would say I was more conscious of things I learned in methods like, am I talking to every student every day? Or like, how I move around the room, which in my past experiences with classrooms, I was very, I think, susceptible to be like, 'Okay, well, this kid I know is going to talk to me, so I'm going to work with them.' I've been conscious of that, and I didn't really think that anything made me feel awkward in the classroom, but maybe approaching students that I thought, you know, didn't like me or something, but I've definitely gotten better at that. And then everything pertaining to ESL was pretty new. I feel like my intuition when speaking with…people who are learning English or, you know, speak another language at home or something, I had good intuition during those interactions but like being more conscious of, okay, 'why are you doing this in this context?' Or like, 'would it be helpful to have something on the board that they can look at?' I feel like I've been more conscious of that, too."[6]

"Thank you Anna and Nancy for sharing your experiences in methods. I just wanted to clarify and summarize what you both shared about your methods courses, and please correct me if I am wrong. For you, Anna, you appreciated that your methods courses helped you to see things that you may not have noticed, such as how people with disabilities are and are not accommodated appropriately given their specific needs and how systems of oppression have historically existed and continue to exist in the present, just in more subtle ways. And, Nancy, you experienced the benefits of what your methods courses offered, but also felt this sense of reflection on how you tend to operate in the classroom and the need to move beyond some of those tendencies. The specific example you gave was that you are more likely to talk or engage with students who you perceived would talk to you or liked you. And your experiences this fall have challenged you to find ways to get out of that habit or mindset. Does that seem like an accurate summary for you both?" Nancy responds with a nod, affirming my recap of her words.

Anna augments my summary saying, “Yeah, that’s accurate. I guess now that I am thinking about it…I really appreciate being able to see what I was not as conscious of before.” Anna pauses seemingly to think through her following words. “There was some tension just not knowing how to apply the theories. So, I understand that all the theories and kind of drivers that you can use are dependent on the context and there's no way anyone could ever possibly tell us like, ‘Oh, here's a bajillion contexts, here's what you can do.’ But having some kind of more explicit guidance with examples would have been helpful.”[1]

“That is a very valid point. So much of our teaching is based on our classroom diversities, and there is this tension that exists with theory that tries to generalize certain principles within the real-world, so to speak, that we are actually teaching in. Sometimes these things are totally compatible or at other times require retooling, as Louis, I think, mentioned earlier.” I can see that this tension between theory and practice is picking up more momentum as these student teachers shift from thinking about how their coursework has been enlightening to interrogating how compatible their theoretical learning is with their practicum experiences. Judy unmutes and begins sharing her thoughts. “I think that I had some frustrations this semester because I felt like I was in this unique position - in a newcomer class. I think there was one other person in my cohort who was in a similar position. And then I had this cobbled-together situation. So, I always kind of felt like I was just trying to get my bearings, which I'm sure a lot of graduate students are feeling at this point of the program. Sometimes I felt like in my social studies methods class, it wasn't like, relevant to what I was doing in my sheltered class. Although I totally found useful things from my methods class, it just wasn't always directly applicable.”[5]

I interject to ask a clarifying question. “That is interesting. Could you share a little context about your…what was the word you used?” “Unique?” Judy questions whether this is the word I am failing to think of. “No,” I negate Judy’s response trying to remember what word she used to describe her unique experience. “Cobbled-together?” Judy successfully responds with

the missing word. “Yes! I’m sorry I couldn’t think of it. Let me start again. Could you share some context about your ‘cobbled-together’ experience and how that contributed to you feeling like you couldn’t quite get your bearings?” Judy nods, “Yes, I don’t mind at all.” She continues, “Well, a major part of it was the unique nature of this sheltered class. And so, in many ways…there's a lot of research about how sheltered classes inhibit growth of emergent bilinguals, and how they can be really like, basically segregated. But it was interesting to know that intellectually and then be in that space and see the community that these students have built within this kind of smaller group of kids because they, for the newcomers, they're going from class to class all together. So, they have this very supportive environment for one another. That was really interesting to see. And, because a lot of them are at similar levels in their language learning process, there was a lot of support for one another, and because the community was so strong they were able to take risks in really cool ways. That I don't think you always see, especially in a high school, where classes are big, or students are changing all the time, you know?”[5] There is a collective nod to acknowledge that we are following Judy’s thought process.

“Nothing is binary. It wasn't like *this* is ineffective for *these* newcomer emergent bilinguals. And it wasn't like *this* is effective for *these* newcomer emergent bilinguals all the time. So, there's just little things that are really powerful about the newcomer, sheltered class. And there were some things that were powerful in a less positive way. Even though they had built this really wonderful community, I also only ever saw them hanging out together. They ate lunch together. They hung out after school together. They were always together, which I think is lovely, and wonderful. But they weren't integrated into the school community or speaking English with other students. So, there are a lot of truths in the data, obviously. There's always going to be…you know, we're all human. So, there's always going to be good and bad things and neutral things.”[5]

"Thank you for sharing more about your classroom context and," I begin to transition but Judy signals that she has more to add to her response. "Can I just clarify one thing before we move on? Sorry, everyone." Judy politely interrupts hoping to conclude her thoughts on a more positive note. "Of course, and please do not be sorry. This space is for all of us." I mute myself to signal that she has the floor. "Thanks. I just want to say that I have learned a lot from being in my classroom this past semester, as well as in our methods classes. Even though many things were not directly applicable, I still found value in those courses." Judy pensively pauses. "I'm trying to think of some things that I used from methods. We talked about thinking critically about the Lewis and Clark curriculum for the First Nations class that I lead briefly. We talked a lot about like, modifying primary sources in a way that was faithful to the source but made it more accessible to students. And so, I did that within the Lewis and Clark curriculum, and I definitely could see that being done for emergent bilinguals. So, adapting primary sources was a big one. Using maps was another big one. How to analyze maps and the subjectivity of maps in that First Nations course. Generally, we were always talking about culturally sustaining pedagogy. And I think that was like, very broadly on my mind when I was lesson planning, but also just in interactions with students, like, 'how can I know about my students? How can I leverage their interests?' Or, you know, identities in our relationship or in the curriculum, or whatever. And that was a big part of the sheltered course, as well. Oh my gosh. Sometimes with this program, it's just so much, you know? And I'm trying to think back on it. I know that I learned things."[5]

To avoid speaking over one another, Kate and Susan populate the chat with their empathetic sentiments with a mixture of words and emojis. While muted, Judy mouths thank you and also displays her appreciation in the chat. "Thank you, Judy, for sharing. You bring up very valid points about the difficult task of taking what you learn in methods and seeing what parts of that can be relevant and apply to your particular classroom context. It can be a tricky dance to do, but it seems that you are engaging in that process for the benefit of connecting with

students and providing them with meaningful learning opportunities." Judy nods in agreement with my words of thanks for her perspective. I did not anticipate that these participants would spend time talking about their methods courses, but it brings some new curiosities to mind. Originally, I planned to continue talking about what they saw in their classrooms and gleaning what they learned from their practicum experiences, but I see an opportunity to dig more into their expectations for this past semester and what are their perceptions of teaching.

"I appreciate what you all are sharing and also ways that you are empathizing with one another. Even though this semester has been jam-packed with so much stuff to take in, it seems that you are all processing and reflecting in meaningful and critical ways. That is such an important part of what we do, as educators, and I hope you are encouraged to continue doing that reflective work as you progress not only in this program but as you find your way into your own classrooms, teaching full-time. Because what you have shared is so interesting, I would like to explore something with you all before we end our time today talking about building relationships and community in your practicum experiences. I am curious about what you all think about teaching. In our last session, all of you shared significant moments from your own experiences as younger learners and even as students now in this program. And you expressed values about teaching that came out of those significant moments, but I would like to explore more about how you envision teaching either as an ideal you imagine or as it was presented in the experiences you had this past semester. I threw a lot out there, but does that make sense, or do I need to clarify?"

"Wait-time" can be a struggle for me at times. I want to wait and give some pause for people to think before reengaging in conversation, but I have also realized that prolonged waiting can cause some discomfort - to the point that non-verbal utterances, such as coughing, readjusting posture, or fidgeting with objects are used to introduce something other than silence into the shared space. With everyone muted in our virtual space, I am left to take in only my own

physical surroundings, waiting for others to reengage. “I’m a practical person, so I tend to analyze things as they are and less about what I imagine them to be.” Louis responds without needing any further clarification of my prompt to the group. “I don't know how radical they are anymore. But from my own experience I didn't feel like I got much out of education in middle school and high school. And it wasn't until I got to college where I really started to get an interest in learning for myself, I guess. And I was trying to figure out why that was. Originally, I just had this vague idea that students need to be the focus of it, like everything. And who really cares what education looks like, as long as education is happening, and the students are deciding what that education looks like. But now, I've kind of realized that it's something closer to…that education is like an adventure. It should be something fun. It should be something that's undertaken. And I think we need to figure out ways to present a student's education to them not as something that I as a teacher, I'm like, ‘I would love for you to do *this*, *this,* and *this*.’ It's more like, ‘what do you want to do? And how can I help you do it?’ What would make it a fulfilling and meaningful use of students’ time within a school context that will make them a more well-rounded and productive member of society, generally? And won't make them hate the whole process?”[3] Louis continues, “And this might be a totally different thing, but I also think about how teachers are not taken seriously in their work. They are seen as dispensable, or at best replaceable.” Louis pauses, but I am not sure if he has completed his thought. I ask, “With that last part, do you mind talking about what you mean by teachers being dispensable or replaceable?”

“Because of my own experiences, I had a particular view of education and the way that education was presented to me. Now that I have had a chance to spend time in a classroom with a CT, who definitely is not a teacher who wields total control and determines what a classroom looks like and the learning that happens there…being in that environment gave me a chance to think about what I thought teaching was and how it can actually be practiced. With that, I have also heard complaints among teachers about feeling limited in being able to do their jobs

effectively. I don't want to mention anything specific that I heard or who said things." Louis pauses. "Do you mind maybe generalizing what kinds of things that you heard that seem to prevent teachers from doing the work that they want to do?" I attempt to keep the conversation going without compromising Louis' decision to not divulge too much information about the teachers he worked with in his practicum site. He thinks for a moment before continuing to share. "It just seems kind of infantilizing. And it's one of those things where it's hard to do your job when you're not trusted to do your job. When someone jumps over your head and tries to say what's better for the students, unless they have relationships with the students. Otherwise, it just disrespects the teacher and their connections with students. A very large part of being a teacher, which is being able to be the ones that get to know students and make those kind of spur of the moment decisions, or even not spur the moment decisions, that create good opportunities for learning. It just suggests that we could put education on a CD-ROM and give it to people and that's all we need. And I think that is a big mistake."[3]

"Thank you, Louis. I hope I did not urge you beyond your comfort level in sharing about those difficulties that teachers at your practicum site talked about. What you describe is certainly frustrating, to say the least. However, I think even in those moments we need to find ways to do right by students, and I know some of the teachers in that building. They are, without a doubt, dedicated to the students in that building and they work very hard to make sure that their students are seen and feel part of the learning space - not simply subjected to it." Louis responds, "No, not at all. And I completely agree. I never doubted that those teachers really cared about their students. There are just times, as you said, that they get frustrated by the hierarchy of schools."

"One thing I have thought about a lot because of my personal experiences is what my non-negotiable values are. I think this relates to what you are saying, Louis, that teachers should have a set of principles that guide their actions despite not being respected as professionals. Of

course, it is important to be student-centered and culturally relevant. But I think it's so important to have values that are non-negotiable and do not change because they keep us focused on our students." Kate continues, "I think what's important to me is realizing that there's no unteachable student. There's no throwaway student. There's no student that isn't worth it to educate. I've seen that happen in my own schooling experience and in my own family. My brother has ADHD, and he's on the autism spectrum. And a lot of his teachers in high school, they would just give him packets. And he didn't do well in school, at all. And it didn't really even seem like they cared very much. And that really, really frustrates me because he's an incredibly smart and passionate kid who just has special interest in things that maybe weren't being taught to him in school. And he never really got a chance to share those interests in school. He's a great writer, he loves baseball, and he wants to write about baseball. I read one of his articles before he posted it on Reddit, and it got a lot of up-votes. And yeah, he's a really intelligent kid. But he just didn't have a chance in school to hone that, his abilities. And so, I think that's something that's definitely non-negotiable for me is that there are no students that are unteachable. You just have to really get to know them, and see their potential, and help them unlock it, and give them opportunities to share their special knowledge and their special interests. I still don't know really how to do this, but I want to create an environment in which other students can appreciate their peers, special knowledge, and talents, and not make fun of them. So that's something that's really important to me, as I think about my practice."[2]

"I appreciate your personal connection to that value of seeing students as not just teachable but worth teaching. I hope your brother can continue to find outlets that allow him to pursue and deepen his passions and skills. I am not a Reddit user, but that is probably the first time I have heard someone talk about Reddit in a positive way." Kate is still unmuted; her chuckle is audible. As an effort to transition I say, "So, are there any other thoughts about your perceptions of teaching that you glean from your own experiences or that came from your

experiences this past semester?" Almost before finishing my sentence, Susan begins sharing her thoughts on the topic.

"This discussion makes me think about the teachers that I had in high school, not in a bad way. I was fortunate to have great teachers, and one teacher that sticks out to me is my AP gov teacher." Susan mutes and quickly turns her head to sneeze off-camera. "Sorry about that. Let me try again." She restarts, "My AP gov teacher, he was actually really invested outside of the classroom, too, in our lives. He and his wife, who was my photography teacher, would be super present all the time. And they would come to our extracurriculars. They would make a personal effort to have a relationship with us. So, it felt more meaningful, like they were actually invested in us as human beings, not just like, 'here's a lecture memorize this material about the government and then regurgitate.' Whereas I was more used to dry lecturing and then having to like regurgitate material. This was my first introduction to genuine relationship building with a teacher, and then also being pushed to navigate these new ideas. And then I would say with my US History teacher…it was one of the first times I really felt like my own personal representation of being a woman was actually being represented in the classroom setting. And my US history teacher was also a woman, so I knew that it was meaningful. This is maybe not necessarily related to school, but I also saw her at protests downtown. She lived in my parents' neighborhood, and I would see her around and you could just tell she was really invested in what she was teaching, too, and that was really meaningful. I actually was part of a sex-positive club, and sex education club in her classroom. It was like a big thing. And we would learn all about it, talk to people in the community, like sex-positive resources, and then teach the freshmen and sophomores. But we would teach them you know about how to be sexually safe because no one in the health classes weren't doing that. So, I don't know. You could just really tell she believed in what she was doing."[4] Susan looks as if she is not completely satisfied that she has clearly made her point through her personal anecdote. She continues saying, "So, I think it is really important for teachers to be invested in their students' lives outside of the classroom and to

show how what they teach does matter in the real world. You know, my US history teacher going to a protest while in her class we talked about civil disobedience. We didn't really do that. That would have been way too convenient. But does that make sense? We, as teachers, should show our students that what they are learning about does exist outside of the classroom."

"That makes total sense, and I appreciate how you have taken to heart the examples of your former teachers. The challenge is to find ways to do that work in authentic ways, without a sense of obligation." "I totally agree. 100%," says Susan concurring with my sentiments.

Susan interjects saying, "Can I just say something about how difficult it has been to apply teaching strategies in the classroom during COVID? I don't mean to go back to being negative. But what you just said about doing the work of teachers in authentic ways and just generally what people have been sharing about their classroom experiences makes me think about how COVID has limited what I can do or how I do things in the classroom." I affirm Susan's thought process. "Of course. We have not talked about COVID directly, but I appreciate you recognizing the impact COVID is having on your experience in the classroom. Please, continue with your thought. How has COVID impacted your experiences in the classroom?"

"I mean, in a ton of different ways, especially ways that are hidden. But particularly with a lot of the things that we learned in inclusive ed like, ways to teach curriculum, or different activities you can do around the room or with partners or whatever. Like, that's not feasible, because we have to keep kids in their own little spaces and do their own little things. So, it's super limiting in the ways that we can teach and make it interactive. I mean, we found ways around this, right? So, at the university level, we did, like, where you silently read something and then you respond to prompts on different sheets of large, white, like sticky-note papers. You write on one and then you silently go to the next one. You can read what others wrote before you and respond to them or you can write new things, too. So, we kind of shifted and I designed a little lesson/unit thing, after we watched Black Panther, like analyzing it a little bit. And instead

of shifting the kids around, I just shifted the sheets around. So, I ran around the room rotating all that stuff, you know, so that they could do that. And then afterward, I held them up and we talked about them asking kids to share if they wanted to. So, I think it's hard because it's really limiting. And the structure of the actual school is different. I think there's a lot more demand on teachers because not only are you teaching but you're cleaning and you're trying to keep kids safe, and you're doing all of this in very limited ways. I don't know, I've definitely been really frustrated with the limitations of not being able to actually do the activities that I'm learning in school or at the university level with my kids. Because then it's, like, "what do I do?" You know what I mean? So, I don't know, there's so many ways that COVID's affecting everything. I wish I would have been able to see what a middle school classroom looked like before COVID to compare what worked before and how to better adapt things. But this circumstance, it's all I know."[4]

"Susan, you bring valid concerns over the limitations that impact the ways that schools are structured and either allow or not allow certain activities to be possible within the classroom. Does anyone else have similar experience or perhaps just more broadly how the pandemic is impacting your experiences?" As I wait for responses, I am thankful that this topic came up the way it did. In preparing for this session, I was not sure to what degree the pandemic was continuing to impact student teachers. At this time, many schools in the Three Lakes district are doing in-person learning, but they are also connecting with remote students asynchronously. In some cases, schools are doing some concurrent/hybrid classes between remote and in-person students.

"I think that something I've noticed, that has been discouraging," says Judy to move the discussion forward, "and then I'll also get the encouraging part. But what is discouraging is that it seems like post-pandemic school has just continued on. And I think that living in our pandemic life teaching curriculum that's not culturally sustaining, seems even more out of

touch. Because you're not teaching curriculum that's relevant to students, relevant to the world. Like, we have this crisis at our doors every day. And I feel like it's just hard to get anyone to engage with that, even teachers teaching their own curriculum. And so, in that, I think there's an opportunity to, you know, we're all kind of...the pandemic, obviously affects different people in very different ways. But we all are also living through this together, and so how can we find ways to incorporate this crisis into curriculum and not in ways that it's just trauma burden after trauma burden of like, 'let's talk about this terrible stuff.' But, instead, how we all need to celebrate something right now, maybe. So, let's like, figure out where we can find joy in our curriculum, or we all need to talk about how this is affecting our mental health. So how can we talk about that? In a social studies way, how can we talk about mental health over time? These are just the top of my head. But how can we relate our experience of today's crises to history? How can we couch it in social studies?"[5]

Judy then transitions into a more positive impact of COVID from her personal experiences as a teaching paraprofessional. "And then the other thing that I feel like the pandemic brings, that is an affordance in some ways is...I remember when I was a para, and we were on-line, I was talking to parents and grown-ups in students' homes, far more than before. So, they were in the background while I was calling about technology issues,. I would go to their houses and drop stuff off. So, I wonder how now that we're transitioning kind of back and forth, like, how relationships with teachers and staff have, or teachers and families have changed. Maybe there's room for, intimacy isn't the right word, but we've just like, connected in this weird way, you know,? Maybe we can draw on that. But then also, families are probably more stressed than ever before."[5]

I really struggle with moments like this. This can be an opportunity to pursue an important topic that impacts our lives in very dynamic ways, but spending too much time on this single topic may introduce divergent conversations that take us away from productive reflection

on these participant's classroom experiences. As Judy completes her thought, I try to formulate a transition from such a heavy topic to somehow conclude our time together in a timely manner and productive way.

"Thank you, Judy, for sharing your thoughts on this topic. I am sure we can go on for a while about how the pandemic has, is, and will continue to impact us personally and professionally. I really do appreciate your thoughts on how the pandemic has restricted us, but it also affords us opportunities to do or see things differently. I am not sure if others can also attest to this dual nature of COVID, but I can certainly relate to what you are saying. I do want to honor our time today, and there are a couple of things I wanted to discuss with you all. For our next session, I think it will be interesting to revisit this part of our conversation to continue reflecting on how COVID is impacting your experiences in the classroom, but let's table this for now. And I apologize if anyone was ready to jump in with this discussion. It's hard, but I hope we can move forward with our time today and revisit your thoughts on this next time. Is that okay with everyone?" I am so impressed by the flexibility and kindness of this group. Each person, on their own, is so kind and generous with their time. I scan the six square, digital windows on my screen. Each participant is motioning in agreement with my request with thumbs up or affirmative nods.

"I greatly appreciate you all, and I am grateful that we can move forward together. Our next session will run a little longer than the first two sessions, so, hopefully, we will be able to revisit some of these topics that we have not been able to diver deeper into. We started our session talking about things we appreciated about our experiences this past semester, and I think it would be fitting to talk about what we look forward to or we hope for moving forward. But I want to bring back in the relationships and community building that some of you have referenced. So, what do you think relationships will enable you to do better as you think about preparing for your full-time experience that starts in a few weeks?"

Through this session, I sought to incorporate gratitude and hope. Gratitude is certainly a large portion of my attitude toward others, but I also appreciate the kinds of conversations that have come from earnest reflection that are grounded in a sense of thankfulness. Going through this practicum semester can be overwhelming for student teachers, and it is apparent that these student teachers have experienced that stress. However, they have also found things to appreciate - to be thankful for. To end our time, I want to introduce an opportunity for these participants to hope for something, to reflect on their ideals for what is next.

I realize that there is some risk in cold-stopping conversation and restarting in another direction. It is clear that many student teachers are valuing the relationships that they built with their students, which is impressive given the relatively short amount of time they have spent in their practicum classrooms. “I think respecting others is a big thing,” Anna says. She continues, “I'm going to try to make sure I have, no matter what, that we need to respect each other. Because I think that is kind of the problem with debates now. For a lot of people, conversations about certain topics are kind of more about personal attacks, and that's not productive. So, being about respecting others' opinions, making sure that where you're coming from is from a place of honesty and that you want to learn. Being open-minded is a big deal because obviously everyone comes from a different place so your prejudices can really affect you.”[7]

Anna pauses again, longer than before, but she is carefully formulating her next thought to share. I refrain from intervening to allow her space to think. “I also want to do norms in the classroom about people feeling empowered to say like, ‘I don't understand this,’ or ‘I feel like I've been wronged in this way.’ I would like to have my classroom open enough for students to say, ‘I am not comfortable with the situation,’ or ‘I am not comfortable with what you're teaching because XYZ.’ And that would be great because I could continue to grow and the students, as well, to see how their classmates feel about different things and how it impacts them differently. So, I would like to keep doing that. Or at least implement that.”[1] “I think building that classroom

culture, that community of trust is important because I really think, especially with thinking about anti-racist pedagogy, that classroom community and culture is going to be huge with that. Not only just because, I think, that certain issues can be addressed, before blowing up, but I think it'll really help students feel more comfortable being like, "Miss Anna that was not okay." And I'll be like, "Oh, my gosh, you're so right, let's talk about it."[8] Before I get a chance to moderate, Judy unmutes just before Anna finished her final thought, signaling her intention to speak next.

"That is so thoughtful, Anna. What you shared made me think about a situation outside of this past semester, but definitely relates to the importance of building relationships, which leads to the trust and community you were talking about." Judy continues, "When I applied for an AmeriCorps program, the program ended up placing me at a school in the neighborhood where I grew up, which is actually a school that my parents had decided not to send me to, and to petition to go out of the neighborhood school. Which was a whole other story. But I was at that school, working with ELL middle schoolers. And from the beginning, I was like, 'I'm more into this academia idea.' I was interested in teaching as more of a kind of intellectual thing like, this is a thing we do to enlighten people and there are ways to do that efficiently in some way. Like, I didn't think I was really going to be there beyond that intellectual interest. What really drew me in was, yes, the school and academic aspect of it, but mostly the relationship building and having school feel good meant having adults that cared. And that the teachers were very intentional about how they built relationships with students and how they craft lessons. And just knowing that I really love the idea that nothing can happen, nothing meaningful can happen without those kinds of relationships or trust. You know, it's not that you have to have like a fabulous relationship with every student, but it's, like, just kind of that community building I found to be really awesome. And so that really drew me in."[9] "So, when I think about next semester and what I hope for, I really want to focus and invest in what Anna was saying about

building a community that leads to trust between students and me. I ultimately want to be one of those caring adults who is intentional about relationships to have school feel good for kids."

"I was thinking about something similar, too, Judy," Kate follows up after Judy ends her thought. "I am sorry, Judy. Were you still talking or thinking. I didn't mean to interrupt." "No, no," says Judy, "I was done. I mean, I feel like I could talk more, but I was done with that thought. Yeah. I'm done."

Kate resumes her thought, "Like I said, Judy reminded me of the things that I valued coming into the program, from my own experiences. And I just wanted to say that being in this program has been helpful in bringing those values more upfront in what I do. Just having the, not permission, but like, the encouragement to own my values as part of my teaching if that makes sense. Yes, we are doing the anti-racist pedagogy, culturally relevant things." Kate pauses. She looks intently into her screen. It is as if she is trying to make eye contact with everyone in the virtual space for affirmation of what she is saying. I realize that I am nodding as she is doing this. So, I make my acknowledgment more apparent in case her intent is to be validated before moving forward. "If you don't have a trusting relationship with these students, they're not going to be invested in their schoolwork at all. And, you know, how you have to be vulnerable with the students. And also, you know, in terms of inclusive ed, and working with emergent bilingual students, you need to know about their personalities, about their language backgrounds, about their home lives in order to best serve them in the classroom. So yeah, I've definitely felt like a lot of my personal values have certainly been affirmed by the coursework in the program. Because it really does emphasize that you have to know your students in order to teach them well."[2] "So, I really want to continue working on those student-teacher relationships. I hope spending more time in the classroom, you know, being in the school all day instead of just a few hours at a time every other day, gives me more opportunities to really get to know kids."

I wait for others to chime in, but I sense that we have reached a good spot to end in. "Anna, Judy, and Kate, thank you so much for sharing. I appreciate the thoughtfulness of your ideas, and I hope that everyone will have the chance to build quality relationships with your students. I just want to also acknowledge that being a student teacher is not convenient for efforts in relationship building. As Kate said, this past semester your time was limited and not always consistent - at least consistent in the consecutive days or classes you observed and worked in. But I am sure that you still had opportunities to connect with students in some way, and I hope that you continue to be able to form those bonds and trust with students. We did not talk about some of the more specifics of your relationships with students or how that impacted your experiences in the classroom, not that you did not have those moments, but I would like to return to this relationship building topic during our final session. I think it would be interesting to hear how your hopes for building relationships panned out in your classrooms, especially how these relationships impacted other things you did in the classroom."

I conclude today's session with the logistics of our next interview session. "Our last session will take place sometime in June, after the school year ends. I think most of you end around the same time because I realize that one or two of you may not be in TLMSD (Three Lakes Metropolitan School District). Is anyone not placed in TLMSD?" No one affirms my question. "Okay, so you all are placed in TLMSD for the spring. That will make scheduling so nice! I will be in touch about the timing of that session, and I will make sure that we meet before your summer Capstone course starts later in June. Thank you, everyone. I enjoyed our session today, and I hope you all appreciated hearing from one another, as well. If you wish to stick around for any questions or follow ups, I will hang out in the space for a bit to chat with you. Otherwise, have a great rest of your afternoon. Stay warm and best wishes to you as you start your full-time teaching in a couple of weeks. Take care!"

There is a cacophony “goodbye” and “thank you” as everyone unmutes and waves their way to exit the virtual space. Louis writes, “have a great semester everyone!” in the chat. I am never sure how many people see these exiting messages in the chat, but I appreciate the sentiment. Everyone leaves the virtual space, and I end the recording. A dialogue box pops up to warn me not to completely exit out of the virtual meeting application until the session recording has completely rendered.

Interpretation - Expectations

Participants’ expectations vary from wanting to have practical tools to work with to better understanding how to teach content effectively within a social justice framework. Such expectations are not surprising, but what is interesting about this stage of interviews is how participants’ expectations are couched in building relationships. It appears that some did not anticipate how impactful relationships and community building would be in their experiences. For this section of analysis, I focus on how participants are continuing to bring in their own experiences to make sense of their teaching practice (meaning making), then move into the practicality of their experiences, which is tied to their perceptions of teaching, and I will conclude with how they talk about building relationships and community throughout their reflections of their fall semester work.

Meaning Making

In each interview I conducted, I generally began sessions asking student teachers what surprised them or what was a major takeaway from their fall teaching experience. Kate, Nancy, and Susan capture much of what participants talked about - specific, contextual examples of what they enjoyed about their time in their fall placements.

Kate particularly enjoyed her role in leading students through a community building activity (daily/weekend shares). Through these moments, Kate recounted her connections with

students in developing positive relationships. She even commented that students went out of their way to compliment Kate directly to her content supervisor (Mary), at the expense of Kate's cooperating teacher.

During our first interview, Kate talked a lot about her middle school language arts teacher, who had a positive impact on Kate's desire to be an English language arts teacher. From this and other moments across her educational experience, Kate came to appreciate the power of literature and wanted to find ways to bring that experience to her students. In this fall practicum, Kate did not talk about a lesson or content she was involved in. Granted, much of the fall experience is focused on observation and reflection, and with Kate in particular, she also noted her regret in not finding more opportunities to engage with her CT's planning and teaching. Nevertheless, it is interesting that relationship/community building comes up more frequently than utterances about teaching content given her initial disposition of wanting to share her love of literature with students.

Of all the participants, Nancy is the most forthcoming about content competency. Throughout her interviews, she continually returned to how important it is for her to be a competent math teacher. So, I was surprised to see that one of her biggest takeaways from her fall experience was managing a space. The most interesting aspect of her reflection is that she credited her success in managing the classroom to positive rapport with students, which enabled her to productively redirect students and more effectively confront distractions in the classroom. Nancy also referred to her even-keeled nature as an additional factor in her successful navigation of classroom management.

Nancy was placed in a newcomer classroom in a local high school, in which her CT was piloting a new math curriculum. She described a process of implementing the program but also evaluating the clarity of the content and then retooling certain lessons to better accommodate for students' needs. Ultimately, she saw the experience as beneficial as a process for planning

and instruction, as well as being less time-consuming than creating her own lessons. Given Nancy's circumstance of teaching from a prescribed curriculum, she had opportunities to critically think about how the content would be beneficial for students or not, which leads to an increased commitment to know her students beyond an academic level. Nancy's prior classroom experience (e.g., City Year through AmeriCorps) certainly contributed to her acknowledgment of how important positive rapport with students can be, but being in a classroom in which she was welcomed by her CT as a co-teacher/co-planner increased her capacity to establish and appreciate these relationships in connection with her early teaching experience.

Susan's fall experience is representative of what many of the participants encountered during this time. Susan spoke, at length, about her realization and need to be more aware/responsive to a variety of student dispositions that differ from her own. I am sure that she was aware of a variety of ways others experience and interpret the world. However, her fall placement enabled her to interact with students directly and observe how students' educational experiences (e.g., IEPs, language learner services), social dispositions (e.g., food insecurity, lack of structure/routines outside of school), and cultural identities (e.g., students representing a racially and linguistically diverse community) impact their learning. Given this experience, Susan accepted responsibility in needing to improve on her ability to relate to and communicate with students, whose schooling experiences greatly differed from her experiences. Susan's compassionate disposition enabled her to take on this responsibility not as an obligation but as a necessary aspect of her teaching practice, which emphasizes the need to build positive relationships with students.

Practicality

The first interview sessions I had with my participants partners focused on their own experiences and ways that they have engaged with education, as well as their initial ideas and values around teaching and learning. The second session builds on these experiences in concert

with their learning in university spaces and their practicum placements. Through each interview, I encouraged student teachers to consider what tensions they saw between the content of their methods courses and the realities of the classroom spaces they were observing in the fall. Initially, student teachers talked about the benefits of and what they valued from their methods courses. Louis expressed affirmation in his early pedagogical disposition of wanting to be a teacher who is student-centered. Coming to a program that addresses student-centeredness through an equity and inclusion framework validated Louis' perceptions of teaching, and it gave him language and community to continue developing his ideals in concert with practical experience. Ultimately, Louis realized that "you have to know your students in order to teach them well" (Louis, personal communication, January 4, 2022), which links back to notions of relationships and community between teachers and students.

Anna expresses a duality with her relationship with her methods courses. On the one hand, she values the widening of her perspectives around accommodating learners with particular needs. Despite her personal connections with family members who would need specialized access and accommodations, Anna admitted that "having a small exposure to people with disabilities doesn't really give you that lens that you need to be able to really see what's happening or what's not happening" (Anna, personal communication, January 7, 2022). On the other hand, Anna talked about the difficulty in applying theory in practice. She acknowledged that applying theory is contextual and often theories are talked about in decontextualized ways in order to generalize them. But she, at this time, sought more explicit guidance, similar to how her inclusive education class explicitly talked about disability in education spaces and strategies to address inequitable, exclusive practices. Given this duality, theoretical knowledge/learning can be difficult to navigate for preservice teachers who are learning theories and bringing into conversation their own identity work as learners and aspiring teachers. Anna's perception of her methods courses was fairly typical among the other participants.

Judy presented another tension in her experience, but her situation was very specific to her classroom context. I am not sure that she would have reflected on the tension between theory and practice the same way had she not been in a sheltered/newcomer classroom. Throughout Judy's interviews, she continually asked critical questions of theory and practice: "How can we sustain the cultural practices that students have, that families have? How can we sustain linguistic practices? How can we sustain and rely on the funds of knowledge in the community to transform curricula?" (Judy, personal communication, January 6, 2022). Her social justice-oriented focus emphasizes her commitment to equitable teaching and learning, which was affirmed by her experiences in her elementary through high school observations of inequality/inequity.

For Judy, her tension between theory and practice takes shape when she is confronted with a situation, in practice, that counters her intellectual knowledge. Judy generalized research that challenges the practice of sheltered classrooms. That is, students in sheltered classrooms are rarely integrated into the larger school community and do not speak English with other English-speakers, thus limiting their exposure to and growth in acquiring/mastering English. However, Judy's fall placement countered these claims and provided a perspective of how these sheltered spaces can be beneficial, at least for newcomer students. Judy recognized that there was validity in the research, but in practice she saw more than the intellectual rendering of learning experiences among newcomer students. From this widened perspective, Judy must reconcile her intellectual pursuits (how to make social studies culturally sustaining?) with her practice - directly working with students.

Consequently, Judy sought models of how to do this work and felt "frustrated" that she could not find the exact support for bridging her learning in methods and applying it to the classroom. She carried over some specific teaching from methods (Lewis and Clark curriculum) and adapted it to various activities that she did in the classroom. One thing to note also was that

Judy primarily followed the instructional plans and curriculum of her CT. Like most preservice teachers, not just these participants, Judy's "cobbled" together experience and the lack of opportunities to be more of a co-teacher/co-planner alongside her CT left her disoriented and continually asking more questions - "how do I teach social studies in a culturally sustaining way?" Additionally, Judy was not able to more fully explore how to adapt her learning in social studies methods.

I think it is important to remember that the programmatic expectations for the fall practicum suggest that preservice teachers take on teaching and planning roles in a minimum capacity and in partnership with their cooperating teachers. However, it is not expected that student teachers will come out of the fall practicum with direct, whole class teaching experiences. It is encouraged but not expected. It is important to remember this expectation because it is not the expectation that student teachers often have. Judy's frustration indicates her desire to have had more experience from her fall placement. She does not complain about her CT, nor does she criticize the structure and expectations of the program. Rather, she anticipates having to continue grappling with these tensions in the spring during her full-time placement. Given the rapid pace of the program, it appears that Judy is concerned that she is not fully prepared or competent to move into her next placement, which is a completely valid concern.

Perceptions of Teaching

A sub-theme of expectations that builds on practicality relates to participants' perceptions of teaching. Although most of the participants talk about their perceptions of teaching - the participants' perceptions, beliefs, and articulations about the broad obligations, functions, and views of teaching - throughout all of their interview sessions, I am interested in thinking about their perceptions of teaching in conversation with their expectations around practicality. It is evident that these participants value models of and explicit teaching to bridge

theory and practice. I wonder to what degree practicality affirms their perceptions around teaching.

Louis tended to ground his ideals in his own experiences. Unlike most of the other participants and student teachers more broadly, Louis did not have a single figure or an overall pleasant educational experience that led him to teaching. It was not until he discovered that "education is power" and literacy is the means by which that power is attainable that he was drawn to be part of a profession that makes that power through literacy accessible and explicit. This ideal was evident as Louis expressed in his midpoint interview that education is/should be an "adventure, an undertaking." He implied that teaching, as part of an exploratory education, should not only be student-centered but a partnership that leads to a more "fulfilling and meaningful use of students' time" (Louis, personal communication, January 4, 2022). For Louis, teaching is not about the teacher. The teacher's role is facilitating the "meaningful use of students' time" and introduce them to a language and process that enables students to be the authors of their learning. Louis is one of the few participants who talked about students' roles in this direct way.

It is important to note another aspect of Louis' perceptions of teaching. It is less about his perception and more about how teachers and teaching are perceived. I would also note that this perception of teaching comes from Louis' final interview, but I think it is important to include it here for two reasons: 1) it speaks to the current discourse concerning teacher autonomy and 2) it connects preservice teachers' perceptions of teaching to their notions of teacher competency.

Louis shared about teacher complaints that he heard during his practicum experience. Among these complaints, he highlighted the issue of teacher autonomy:

> "It just seems kind of infantilizing [sic]. And it's one of those things where it's hard to do your job when you're not trusted to do your job. When someone jumps over your head

> and tries to say what's better for the students, unless they have relationships with the students. Otherwise, it just disrespects the teacher and their connections with students." (Louis, personal communication, June 13, 2022)

Louis did not share a specific example of how this was happening in his school placement, but it is apparent that the teachers around him felt their expertise and labor were not valued by administration or community members, who believe they are in a more informed position to determine what is "best for students".

Furthermore, Louis' hyperbole of putting "education on a CD-ROM" does reveal aspects of current discourse around teachers and education. Invariably, teachers will encounter others who challenge their teaching methods and content. These challenges can come from administrators and colleagues as well as students, parents, and other members of the school community. Such exchange of ideas is healthy for civic discourse and to the overall free flow of information in a democratic educational system (West, 2022). However, what Louis is referring to is not a free-flowing stream of information through civic conversation. However, civic conversation is being dammed by political, social, and even moral interests held by a powerful minority. Case in point, Florida's Governor, Ron DeSantis, signed H.B.7, also known as the "stop woke act, in April of 2022. This law prohibits educators, k-12 and higher education, from "subjecting individuals to specified concepts under certain circumstances [which] constitutes discrimination based on race, color, sex, or national origin." The measure also requires schools to revise the instruction on the history of African Americans" (FloridaHouse.gov). In other words, it is unlawful for teachers in the state of Florida to discuss matters of race, color, sex, or national origin or teach about African American history in a way that is not consistent with the conservative values of the Florida legislature. Perhaps the most pernicious aspect of this bill is its vague language of what is permissible and what is not. Therefore, there is a "chilling effect" for Florida educators to carefully consider what they can and cannot say (American Civil

Liberties Union, 2022). Consequently, educators' autonomy to leverage their expertise and life experiences, not to mention their state-authorized credentials to teach, are precipitously stifled because teachers are not/cannot be trusted to serve the political interests…the democratic well-being of public schools and the communities they serve.

What is also worth noting about Louis' attention to teacher autonomy is its connection to teacher competency. Not only are teachers' ideals not aligned nicely with those of certain community members, therefore there is a lack of trust given to teachers to teach, but there is also a notion of teachers lacking competency. In the secondary program at Three Lakes, we do not often talk about content specific concerns. That is, candidates talk less about what content they should teach and ask more about how to teach content, which is supported by participants' concerns about their capacity to teach.

Susan shares about her placement experience in connection with COVID. Susan is reckoning with her own identity in concert with the identities and challenges that her students embody, and she is continuing to reflect on her ability to relate to and teach students through her instructional practices. Susan was one of three participants at this point of the program who had opportunities to teach and be a frequent contributor to the classroom space. Reflecting on her experience led Susan to suggest, ""I wish I would have been able to see what a middle school classroom looked like before COVID to compare what worked before and how to better adapt things. But this circumstance, it's all I know" (Susan, personal communication, December 6, 2021). Susan senses that there is a better way to do the things she was doing in the classroom. Her example of doing a silent discussion with students did not fare as well as she expected because of COVID restrictions (instead of students moving, Susan adapted the activity to minimize movement for students). Without seeing the activity unfold and further debriefing about how the activity did not measure up, I can only surmise that the activity did not look and feel the same as it was done in her methods class. Susan's desire to see more modeled teaching

techniques that predated COVID is interesting because she feels there is something better than what she is doing. However, I am not sure that would be the case and COVID is having an impact on participants' capacity to reflect on their teaching to celebrate successes and find ways to grow. If their capacity to reflect is impacted in this way, their perceptions of their own competency in the classroom are certainly questionable given the uncertainty of how to teach in this unprecedented era.

It is as if COVID removed a safety net for participants to fall back into. That is, there is something that works well that they can rely on and feel more secure in trying new techniques. However, COVID threw everything out the window and every activity/thing teachers did was experimental, which is not a good feeling even for seasoned teachers. I cannot imagine how amplified this feeling is for PSTs during COVID. It would be no surprise that their mentor teachers would have expressed a sense of things being "better" before COVID. Now living in a mild COVID climate (Where we are in the pandemic, 2022), what happens to teaching innovations? Are we innovating because COVID continues to loom and we must be prepared to deal with certain consequences, or are we able to see students, know them and hear them, to respond to their assets and paths towards growth?[13]

Participants did not mention COVID much until I specifically asked about it during our interviews. Even though the impressionistic scene presents this topic more organically arising from conversation, COVID was not something that came to mind readily. However, once I asked about COVID's impact on their teaching and learning spaces, participants had something to share. Some shared more generally while others had specific experiences with how COVID impacted their learning and teaching spaces. Susan was the most explicit in how it affected her perception of health mandates, especially masking policies because her mother was immune-

[13] I refrain from saying post-COVID as if we have moved beyond COVID and its physical, social, and political disruptiveness.

compromised, and it affected her capacity to implement collaborative learning activities. She had to modify how activities were structured because of physical distancing policies. It appears that buildings generally followed the district guidelines for masking and distancing, but schools had different intensities in which these policies impacted the classroom. Some schools were much more restrictive, while others were more accommodating and allowed certain policies to be flexible in response to their school communities.

For Susan, COVID added an increased tension between what was being taught theoretically and what was practical. Although she did not explicitly say so, it appears that there were not a lot of conversations about how to adapt teaching strategies to COVID protocols. This is not a slight against university instructors, but I think in some ways teaching innovation was greatly stifled by the Pandemic. That is, the capacity to revise teaching and to adapt it to COVID was overshadowed by the desire to "return to normal." Which is why, I think, we need to learn from the Pandemic and move beyond these trenches of complacency toward teaching in ways that make us feel uncomfortable. In many ways, teachers were forced to adopt practices that they were not experts in (e.g., virtual meeting platforms) and became increasingly anxious about their work because they had little control and fortitude to make it work. Susan took it upon herself to adapt the best she could, but I am still left with some uncertainty about how or who inspired them to work in these ways?

COVID has compounded these participants' anxieties around competency. Although none of the participants expressed this explicitly, talking about their perceptions of teaching (focusing on students and being culturally responsive/sustaining) and thinking about the limitations of COVID further puts them in a space where they question their capacity to teach and teach well. I think the pressure is not only linked to participants' being able to teach or plan effectively. I think these participants are concerned about the quality of their work, as if they do not want to "mess up students" - they do not want to inadvertently and adversely affect their

students. Because participants were seeing seasoned teachers struggling to teach during the Pandemic, I wonder to what degree did they question their own competencies. For understandable reasons, their feelings around competency did not surface much throughout conversations aside from reflecting on COVID's impacts on their placement experiences.

Building Relationships and Community

Typically to end my conversations with participants, I do my best to talk or think about joy in some way. Sometimes it is easy to think about what brings us joy, while other circumstances greatly hinder our capacity for positive reflection. During our second interview sessions, I challenged participants to reflect on what their non-negotiable values were or at least what things they hoped to continue building upon as they transitioned to their full-time placements. I prompted participants in this way to see what values they acquired over the course of the fall semester and/or what values were affirmed. I wanted to track what resonated with participants after spending some time in a classroom setting, working directly with students, and applying their learning in these environments. Anna, Judy, and Kate each talked about these values in different ways, but they revealed how building relationships and community impacted their meaning making processes in developing their pedagogy and practice.

Anna's values can be tracked across all three interviews. In our first session, Anna talked about her values in a very general sense (i.e., respecting each other). She recognized respect as a way to have more productive conversations. She also saw respect as a way to honor people's diversity and opinions, especially in a social and political climate that tends to favor dramatic media attention instead of productive conversations. At the midpoint session, Anna's values reflected a structure (i.e., setting classroom norms around respect) that makes respect among students possible. For Anna, this structure involves norms that empower students to express their displeasure (e.g., 'I am not comfortable", 'I don't understand this') and serves as a means to continue growing in her practice. As students share within this classroom culture, Anna has had

opportunities to effectively and specifically respond to students' needs and also reflected on ways to incorporate more careful considerations into her practice to avoid potential conflicts.

Anna's final interview built upon the classroom culture from the previous interview by showcasing her thinking about how such a classroom culture/community of trust can lead toward anti-racist pedagogy. During her full-time placement, Anna experienced working in a community of trust and saw opportunities to dialogue with students about potentially harmful issues/moments. An example she shared involved a Black student to whom Anna referred to as "goofy" because of his comical behavior at the time (i.e., 'you are goofy'). To Anna, she was trying to be more personable with this student in a light-hearted way. The student immediately informed Anna that it was offensive to refer to him and other Black students as "goofy." That student shared that he had been called a racial slur by a teacher earlier in his schooling experience, which was used to address the student's perceived inappropriate behavior. Consequently, the term "goofy" became offensive to that student. Anna was grateful for this exchange and learned from that moment, but she also felt that without the trust that was built in the classroom community, this and other conversations would not be possible. Therefore, without a community of trust Anna could not continue growing to meet the needs of her students, and her students would not feel empowered to safely express their perceptions in the classroom. It is evident that over time Anna's values around dialogue and trust were affirmed and equipped with additional structure and rationale to bring them from a general expression of valuing productive conversations to creating environments that allow these conversations to be possible, as well as what outcomes they can lead to.

Judy takes up relationships and community building differently than Anna. Judy experienced relationships with students as a way to reprioritize her values toward becoming more student-centered and culturally sustaining. During her first interview session, Judy expressed an initial interest in teaching as an intellectual endeavor, which originated in her

undergraduate experience as a sex education peer. During that time, Judy engaged with critical questions around what sex education should be and how it can made accessible to her peers. As a younger student, Judy lacked interest and/or awareness around the importance of student-teacher relationships, and she purposely distanced herself from her middle and high school teachers. As a student, Judy never felt that she "wanted to…really be friends with" her teachers. She said, "I really enjoyed…that boundary of like, 'you were the teacher, I'm the student'" (Judy, personal communication, September 8, 2021). Judy's educational experiences prior to the secondary program influenced her to focus on her individual intellectual endeavors, somewhat disconnected from her learning communities.

This intellectual side of teaching interested Judy until her experience as a paraprofessional in AmeriCorps encouraged her to recognize the importance of building relationships and community. Through that experience, Judy was reminded of one of her core values around school, school should feel good (Judy, personal communication, September 8, 2021). She worked with educators, caring adults, who built relationships with their students and created instructional plans that met students' academic needs, as well as their social-emotional needs. Caring for students as intellectuals and as humans made more sense as an act of social justice than attending to these aspects of students' school experience separately. Through this reflection, I believe Judy realized that she could pursue her academic interests through teaching, but she prioritizes the relationships she builds with students that lead to trust, which allows her to share more of herself with her students and to receive more of them.

Kate's interest in teaching stems from working with high school students as a tutor, as well as the influence of her middle school language arts teacher. In our first interview session, Kate's compassionate nature was one of the most notable themes of her journey to teaching. Kate's values are rooted in the idea that all students matter. Her personal connection to these values exists with her brother's experiences in school, being seen as a student with lower

capabilities when in reality he has a great capacity for writing about his passions. She further expressed these values saying,

> "I just find that every student kind of has, like, a story to tell, and that a lot of the times they feel like it's not important… they feel…inconsequential. And I felt like that before, too. Great teachers bring out that feeling of being important, and it's also great literature that can bring out that feeling of, 'oh, I have a story to tell just like this author does. Just like my teacher does.'" (Kate, personal communication, August 13, 2021)

There is no doubt that Kate is committed to the needs of her students.

After her part time practicum semester, Kate's values, much like Anna's, began to take shape and become more explicitly grounded in her theoretical learning through her methods courses. Kate's values were affirmed and augmented to think about specific aspects of students' assets and how to attend to those assets in practice. What is interesting to note is that amidst this affirmation and augmentation, Kate referenced the importance of knowing about students' "personalities", "language backgrounds", and "about their home lives in order to best serve them in the classroom" (Kate, personal communication, January 13, 2022). She did not mention literature or content as important in her experiences and exchanges with students, which she referenced heavily in our first interview. Kate's experience in the fall practicum was focused on opportunities to build relationships with students, which she tied closely to the content of her methods courses. Instead of just seeing that students have assets to call upon, Kate expressed an augmented view of students' assets in terms of their linguistic and cultural diversities and understood the power of building relationships and community with her students. Even without an emphasis on content teaching, there were students who clearly thought highly of Kate to brag about her while she was being observed by her field supervisor.

The bridge between theory and practice is built with relationships. Theory is just theory because it resides in our thinking and imagined spaces. Practice is practice because we engage in

proximity with content and people. Theory and practice mutually inform the other, but what brings them together more closely is relationships. If we do not have a connection or a reason to practice or innovate in the first place, theory and practice remain isolated from one another. This bridging of theory and practice is demonstrated by the learning and experiences that participants have expressed by the midpoint of their preparation program. This is very encouraging, but the next round of interviews will reveal some barriers and challenges to continue doing relational work, given the increased responsibility and workload of the full-time teaching experience.

Outcomes/Action

Returning to my own teacher preparation experience, I remember one of my methods instructors encouraging our cohort to push the boundaries of our creativity without sacrificing the necessary skills that students need to interact with literature and writing - and with one another. My teaching journey was not an easy one, but I finally landed my career in a place that saw potential in me. I did not want to give that up, so I did the things that I was asked to do with little resistance (i.e., teach this elective, take over this daily duty, cover for this teacher). As an English language arts teacher, I was expected to teach literacy and skills toward literacy. As long as I did that and prepared my students to demonstrate their proficiency my livelihood through teaching would continue. Even though I have experienced challenges of "fitting in" throughout my life, teaching high school English was where I felt I belonged - I fit somewhere.

A few years into my teaching career, I can recall the moment that I realized my selfish reliance on the laurels of classic literature, the literary canon, to provide purpose in the classroom. While teaching a classic novel that was part of the curriculum, my students became increasingly resistant. Mostly, the resistance took passive forms. They did not complete outside

readings or comprehension questions. They did not bring anything interesting from their reading of the text, just what Pink Monkey or SparkNotes told them through summaries and literary analyses. However, on this particular day of realization, several students verbally resisted, “Why are we reading this? What does this have to do with anything?” That moment, the moment I realized that I was selfishly relying on the laurels of classic literature, manifested into one of the most predictable, frustrating evasions an English teacher can utter: “This stuff transcends time. It is good for your well-rounded education that we read and study texts like this.”

It has been quite a long time since I saw my methods mentor, but I am fairly sure, had she witnessed this moment in person, she would have given me a look of surprise and disapproval, the likes of which would rival Dwayne Johnson’s distinctive and dramatic stare, featuring an exaggerated arch of a single eyebrow. Uttering nothing better than, “This is for your own good - do as I say” brings to mind Louis’ experiences in middle and high school. He was disenfranchised by his elevated educational track and showed contempt for the lack of substance and purpose of the content he was asked to consume by his teachers, who presumably uttered the same things I did. I cannot speak for Louis’ teachers, but I began to reflect hard on that moment - I did not want to continue being the teacher that mindlessly followed curriculum because it was “good”. I wanted to do better than that. Thankfully with the support of my department chair and teaching mentor, I revisited the creative work that I had developed years prior. I began to think more earnestly about what I was teaching and if that material was actually something worthwhile. Even after ten years of teaching, I was still (re)imagining ways to teach meaningful, purpose-filled, relevant content that students cared about - and content that could not simply be attended to through Google searches or Wikipedia entries - and moving them forward with critical literacy skills.

My own teaching journey is filled with these types of moments, moments that encouraged me to think more deeply about my practice and how to make it better - suited to students' interests, dispositions, and well-being. This work is certainly not easy, and it is messy. My journey is my own, but I am constantly curious about the connections of my experiences to those of preservice teachers today. It is not my intention to map my experiences onto others. I am curious as to how preservice teachers navigate their own challenges. What brings them to reflect on their practices, and ultimately (hopefully) leads them to re-purpose, re-tool, and re-imagine their teaching?

After talking about their past experiences (dispositions) and reflecting on their growth in the program (expectations), there is a unique opportunity for participants to think about their journeys toward the end of their teacher preparation program and begin to imagine their classrooms as full-time teaching professionals. Surely, even the most in-depth conversations cannot reveal all of the learning that takes place, and some of the learning may take time to manifest through future practices. If such time is necessary to engage with critical aspects of their teaching more fully, I just hope that their epiphanies come much earlier in their careers than my own realizations.

Impressionistic Scene #3

Serving as a supervisor provides many opportunities to interact with student teachers through a variety of roles. Supervisors act as mentors, advisors, confidants, engaged listeners, thought-partners, co-conspirators (in the interest of supporting children and youth), and peers in lifelong learning. For me, it is life-giving to work with people who want to be teachers. It is encouraging to work with people who could pursue, and some have pursued, other vocations but still desire to work with young people in the interest of promoting just, equitable, and inclusive education without sacrificing excellence and high expectations. Even though I have had many

years of experience teaching high school language arts, which I leverage for the benefit of preservice teachers, I am continually learning from and impressed by the resilience and diligence of preservice teachers.

Looking forward to this last session, which takes place after the participants have concluded their full-time student teaching, I anticipate that the participants are experiencing a range of emotions and an even more complex reflective process. I do not think it would be reasonable to expect that these preservice teachers can recall every moment of their practicum experiences much less think about their experiences and particular moments in a way that is productively moving them forward. What I would not be surprised by is the relief of the experience being complete. Surely, they will miss being with their students and soaking in their vibrancy, but I can only imagine the release of pressure of no longer being in a classroom all day (essentially an unpaid internship) and then navigating their own course work. I do still remember the students I worked with as a student teacher, but I also remember how exhausting life was at that time to be both a teacher and a student. This duality of academic/professional identity is more than likely exacerbated by the intensity of this secondary program.

In light of this release and celebration, I want to approach this session thinking about what participants have learned over the course of their practicum experiences. This is a very broad approach, but I want to leave enough space for participants to think about their experiences in their own terms. It is contrary to my methodology and theoretical perspective to extract information from participants. To this point, our conversations have been rich and engaging. Some things that I am curious about have been part of these conversations, but I greatly appreciate other unexpected, but no less interesting, topics and reflections that participants have brought into the interview space.

A few months ago, I wished participants warmth and comfort as they prepared for their full-time student teaching semester, and it is hard to believe that summer is upon us. I am sure so much has happened, and I wonder, even with an extended interview session, how can we possibly fit everything that has happened into our collective space. But I suppose that is not the point - to think and talk about everything that has happened during this past semester. As with the other two sessions, I look forward to hearing about participants' learning, joys, challenges, and hopes for the future.

I sign in for the final session, waiting for others to join - they have another ten minutes until the top of the hour. I still have a reliable cup of coffee next to me, but I admit that its warmth is not as appreciated as it was during the winter. I patiently wait to sip my coffee so I can take in the caffeine without the bite of my steaming drink. I receive a ping that urges me to permit the first participant to join the session. "Hi, Judy! How are you?" I instantly realize that this simple greeting may prompt a loaded response. I need to think of a better way to greet people. "I am fine. I am glad that the semester is over. I mean…well…I will miss the kids," Judy responds earnestly. I try to affirm her mixed feelings saying, "I get it. I always felt that way after each year of teaching. I taught seniors, so I would not see them again unless they came back to visit. So, I missed them after the year was over, but I did not miss the menial tasks for sure." While muted, Judy affirms my response with a nod. The next ping alerts me to let Kate into the space, shortly followed by Nancy. "Hello, Nancy! Hello, Kate!" Their videos are muted, but they both verbally respond saying, "Hello." With two minutes until the top of the hour, Susan and Anna join the meeting. Susan's video is on, but she is not in the frame. Anna's video and unmute, "Hi, everyone!" "Hi, Anna," I say, "Thank you for joining us today." Anna responds, "I don't know how you all are feeling, but I am glad there is one less thing on my plate at the

moment.” By this point everyone’s video displays their emphatic approval of Anna’s expression. “Most definitely,” says Susan as she reappears into her video frame. Kate responds, “Now we just have to graduate and find jobs, yay…” “It never ends does it?” I empathize with Kate’s sentiment - been there, done that. As I go to unmute and greet everyone collectively, Louis enters the meeting. “Hello, everyone!” he says. I reply, “Hello, Louis! Thank you for joining us today.”

“It is hard to believe that we are this close to the end, and I hope that this passed semester was fruitful and productive for you. I am really looking forward to hearing about your experiences and engaging in conversation about your growth and paths forward. I do have some questions in mind, but as we did in the first two sessions I wish to keep the space as open as possible for us to talk and reflect freely in the space together. Before we get started and record our session, does anyone have any questions or concerns either about our session today and/or about recording the session?” I give time for participants to offer their responses. Kate types in the chat, “How long is our session going to be today? I thought you said it would be longer this time. Just wondering.” I respond to Kate’s question, addressing the whole group, “Thank you, Kate, for your question. Yes, our session will be a bit longer today - about an hour. Is that okay with everyone? When I scheduled this time, I tried to make sure everyone was able to attend the whole time, but if something has come up please do not hesitate to head out when you need to. Any other questions or concerns?” I hear no verbal responses, nor do I see anything new in the chat. “Great! Let’s get started.”

“Something we talked about a little from last time related to the amount of time you spent planning and teaching. Now, the goal of the fall semester is to give you time and a space to observe and reflect on what is happening in a classroom. Though you are encouraged to be an active participant, that does not always lead to co-planning or co-teaching opportunities. So, I am

curious as to how you have transitioned into your full-time spaces and have taken on more responsibility. If could, could you talk about how your CT was involved in that transition."

Judy unmutes first and asks, "Should we also share about where our placement was and details about the school?" I take a moment to carefully word my response. I do want to be conscious of time, yet I do not want participants to feel that they cannot talk about the context of their placement as needed. "I will leave that up to you. If you feel that the context of the school is necessary to talk about, please do so. Even if you don't include details at first, there may be space for clarification afterwards. Does that make sense?" Judy nods and responds saying, "That's perfect. I will try to weave in the context as I go, but I think knowing about the school itself is important to what I am thinking about and have thought about a lot this last semester."

Judy continues, "I was at Little Lake Middle School, which is on the southwest side of Three Lakes. I was in a seventh-grade humanities classroom. My CT has been teaching for 15 years and originally taught at East Shore school. So, she kind of had, like, an alternative education background, which was really cool to see. And she was very much a leader at Little Lake. I was involved with a social action club there for students. I was on a school-based leadership team, COLA . The GSA for students was really passionate about social justice education, and you know, anti-racist education. So, that was really cool to collaborate with her. The school itself was pretty chaotic. I think while it was really inspiring to work with her, she had a lot of frustrations with how things were being run. And while the principal there wanted anti-racist education as a primary goal for the whole building, I didn't really see that being enacted. And she had a lot of critiques of that in terms of supporting black student achievement. That wasn't really happening school wide, not necessarily because of teacher failure, but I think there was a sense for my CT and also in my observations that the systems in place and education

that had been deemed racist, for good reason, were just kind of taken away, but then there weren't any systems or structure that was replacing them. And so, students were kind of left in this free-fall. That was actually hurting black students and students of color more than it was supporting them. So, I think that kind of tension was really felt in our classroom, was felt throughout the school. My CT wasn't super happy to be in a seventh-grade humanities classroom, either. She, last year, had taught sixth-grade science and social studies. So, it was honestly a really tough and challenging semester, and she was in a really difficult place, I think, with teaching, and that made it harder for me to be her student teacher sometimes, but also because of her values and her leadership style. So, it was just a really complicated experience, which I know that a lot of student teachers have. But yeah, my students, you always love your students even though things can be so chaotic, and that can be such a bright spot and students at Little Lake were awesome."[5] I can sense that Judy could go on for longer just describing her context, but she seems to be ending her placement context with a definitive point. She concludes, "I say all of that because my semester was rather complicated in good and bad ways. Not necessarily bad as in it should not have happened, but things could have been better. But I learned a lot from being in an environment that had its issues alongside the positive, progressive things they were trying to do. Even though it was sometimes challenging to work with my CT, not because she is a difficult person to work with, there was just a lot of conflicting things going on, but I am glad that I had an opportunity to work with someone who is so dedicated to equity and social justice."

"Thank you, Judy. I really appreciate the context of your placement, which is helpful in understanding the complexity of your experience, especially in your relationship with your CT. I would like to come back to what was happening with your CT in your space in regard to social

justice teaching, but at this time I invite others who want to talk about their transitions into full-time."

"Like what Judy was saying," Susan builds on Judy's experiences, "my experience was pretty complicated. I don't want to give too much detail because this is still kind of a sensitive issue at my placement, sort of. It's done with and things got resolved, but I just want to be cautious." I affirm Susan's willingness to contribute to our discussion while being cautious about the sensitive details of her placement, "I get it, and thank you for your caution. Please share as much or as little as you feel comfortable and is relevant to our discussion."

"My relationship with my CT was fine. We worked fine together." While speaking, Susan is pausing and looking in various directions off-screen to collect her thoughts, presumably to ensure that what she says is not too revealing. "I did a lot of the work which was fine, and that's what my job was supposed to be. But there were multiple instances…just in the few months I was there where he would, like, be dealing with something with admin or something. And he actually at one point called me his life coach because he would just, like, lay all this, emotional stuff on me, and I would just be, like, "okay." And he would just want me to say, like, "what you're doing is okay," even though on a lot of instances I was, like, "I don't really agree with what you're doing." Which I think is why I felt so much pressure…"[4] Susan stops in the middle of her sentence and begins again. "So, let me back up a little bit. To make a long story short, I was asked to teach a lesson that was usually taught by my CT. He was rather insistent that I teach it, but I did not feel very good about it. I won't go into any details about the lesson, but it was uncomfortable for me to teach…yeah. So…sorry. This may not be helpful, but…" I give Susan a little space to navigate her thoughts. I do not want to deter her thought process and willingness to share about her experience, but I also want to make sure she is comfortable. From

what I know of Susan, she likes to contribute to discussion. She is very open about her feelings and thoughts, which comes from a genuine interest in learning and processing. I do not want to disrupt her process of making sense of this moment through publicly sharing her experiences. After a lengthy pause, Susan resumes her thought, trying to bring it back to the discussion at hand, "But one thing I have learned now is, like, never teach something…I will never again do this for something I'm uncomfortable with, even a little, like, absolutely not. But yeah, so in general, like, my whole experience with him was he was so defensive. And I don't know exactly why. When we would have, like, our meetings and stuff. A lot of his...the advice he was giving me was ,like, stuff about how to defend my practice, not, like, how to be better in it, but like how to defend what I was doing. Does that make sense? Like, it was just kind of a confusing relationship…"[4]

"I don't want to speak poorly of anyone…that's not who I am. My relationship with my CT was complicated, but I learned a lot of what not to do and still felt good about the things that I want to do and be as a teacher. Again, to make a long story short, I ended up going back to Stone Prairie where I was placed in the fall to finish out the school year. It was so much better, and I got to see my middle school kids again, which was so great! I missed them a lot! And going back to Stone Prairie helped me get back on track and really focus on the things that I loved doing back in the fall, which were much closer to my values and things that are important to me."

"Thank you, Susan. I did not say this after Judy shared, but you and Judy touch on something that maybe we don't explicitly talk about enough in teacher education, the complexity and impact of your relationships with your CTs. Unfortunately, you and Judy, and maybe others, have wrestled with the complexities of being in someone else's classroom and for whatever

reason you are not able to fully engage with the content itself or use the content in a way that is innovative and/or creative, but most of all in ways that are relevant for students. I just want to say, too, that I really appreciate the professionalism to not engage with negative talk about your CTs, which shows a tremendous maturity on your part. So, thank you for that."

"So, I also appreciate what Judy and Susan are saying. I don't want to keep coming back to this because I do really respect my CT, but I had some ideas about what I wanted to do more of in the spring semester. In the fall, I was placed in a classroom that was piloting a new math curriculum, so I was pretty limited in what I could do at the time. But I made the best of it." Nancy continues as cautiously as Judy and Susan had previously. "I think group work, or, like implementing more games or something like that would have been great to do in the spring. I had big ambitions, I think to implement more of those interactive things as, like, a routine thing. I wasn't devastated when this didn't happen, but, I just had to realign my expectations once I got to see what the classroom looked like. My CT was very supportive of me leading the class but in terms of trying new things out it wasn't...she was always… a little bit uncomfortable by some ideas I had and we kind of made it work somewhere in between. But looking at the lessons I made. Some of the more creative ones and ones I'm proud of actually happened, like, more towards the beginning of the semester. So, I had kind of…for lack of a better word kind of gotten complacent, just, like, 'Okay, this is the way we're going to do it.' And I think going forward...more collaboration with other teachers would have been nice. It was basically just me and my CT trying to implement worksheet-based stuff throughout the semester."[6]

I quickly interject for clarity before we get farther in this discussion, "Would you mind sharing a little more about these worksheet-based lessons you tended to teach and perhaps why that was something comfortable for your CT." Nancy pensively leans in closer to her camera and

shifts her gaze off camera. She says, “I don’t know how common this is, but I am starting to think that this happens more often than I thought.” Nancy pauses again to gather her thoughts and then restarts, “My CT prefers to teach science, and she normally has a split schedule. It just so happened this year she got only math. When I was in City Year with AmeriCorps, I was placed with a middle school science teacher, who was expected to teach math to one of the lowest tracked classes in that grade. It was difficult to be in that classroom, not because the teacher couldn’t teach or didn’t care about teaching. It was difficult because she clearly was not comfortable teaching the content. And I know I have said several times before, and it is ironic that I have a science background and I am in a math cohort to teach math, but I have a really strong grasp of mathematics, and I want to be able to share that with students in a way that encourages them to think about and use math in ways that maybe that haven’t before that are more relevant and productive.” Nancy pauses again, perhaps realizing that she may be veering toward a tangent.

“My CT was very upfront about her discomfort about teaching math. It was easy to see where her discomfort was in the actual math, like, the content background. So then, kind of staying in, the ‘safe zone’ was very much like, we use the College Preparatory Math worksheet. From time to time, we would change some of the questions, maybe not. And then stand at the document camera and annotate and then go through most of the questions with students. And then have one question they could try themselves. That was kind of the class. We did better as the semester on, but I would say, like, that was what I was kind of walking into.” I do not want to push any further into this circumstance in order to avoid any potential negative space where we are talking about CTs and their practices. It is clear that there is more to the situation, presenting challenges for these participants to be creative in the classroom.

"So, I think an important part of my transition to full-time placement was my relationship with my CT." Kate comes forward to offer her perspective, starting with some context from her fall placement. "I think that I'm not gonna say that my CT and I had a bad relationship. We didn't. We got along. And I think that she gave me some good feedback, but I just felt like we never really clicked over the semester. So that was kind of hard to have my mentor be someone that I didn't necessarily click with personality-wise. Sometimes I would be a little shy asking my CT questions. That's something that I regret. I wish that I would have asked her a lot more questions about the ways that she does things and her rationales. And I also wish that I would have taken more initiative in terms of lesson planning. My CT was a very organized person, she, basically, had the whole semester planned out."[2] Kate pauses with the same cautious motivation that Judy and Susan exercised previously. She continues, "Heading into the spring semester, I was a little worried that I did not have a lot of experience with lesson planning, at least with material that was my own. The relationship part of the experience came naturally to me, and I was very confident in my ability to connect with students personally, but I would have liked to have been more active in that space." I interject, "Do you mean you wish you had done more in your fall placement to prepare for your spring placement, correct? I just want to make sure I am not confusing anything." Before I could finish my sentence, Kate responds affirming my understanding and continues talking about her transition to full-time student teaching. "Yes, that's right. And in my full-time placement, we, my CT and I, were both kind of in a in a new space together. So, she had been solely a reading interventionist for the previous eight years, and this was her first year back in the classroom. So, it was her first time, like, teaching in a classroom since the pandemic happened. And both of us, I guess, we were getting into something that we didn't have a whole ton of experience with. Like, she hadn't been teaching since, I don't

know, eight years before. And I had never taught in a middle school before and I think just because of that we were…not that we were on the same level, obviously. She was still my mentor, and she knew so much more than I did. And she taught me so much, but I feel like we just had, like, similar perspectives on things. We came to the classroom every day not knowing how things would go and we were like, 'That's okay.' We were okay not knowing everything, and it's okay to just try to get through the day sometimes. It doesn't have to be perfect. And so, I really, really appreciated that about her because she didn't hold me to like a super, unattainable standard. She just took me for what I was, and she was really appreciative of everything that I did for the kids and for curriculum and stuff. We planned a lot together for curriculum, but she also let me do a lot of stuff on my own, which was really, really awesome. I didn't experience that a whole lot in fall. My CT had her curriculum and she was gonna stick to it. But because my CT was also new to teaching eighth grade humanities, she didn't have a set curriculum that she followed every single year, and that she was super attached to it. We just kind of…we took what a few of the other eighth grade humanities teachers were doing, and we would tweak it, or modify it, or just do our own thing sometimes."[2]

"Thank you, Kate. I am glad to hear that your transition and success in your full-time semester was a positive one, especially one that was facilitated well by your CT. Hindsight is 20/20, right? I appreciate your honesty that you could have taken more initiative with your CT in the fall, but it seems that there were some barriers in doing that. You talked about your CT being a very organized person and someone who you did not click with, personally. Not that you have to be 'besties' with your CTs, but I am sure you felt a little intimidated because of the lack of 'clicking' and you not wanting to step on what your CT had already established in her classroom. I am sorry. I feel like I am putting words in your mouth, Kate." Kate is still unmuted and shakes

her head in negation. “No, no. Not at all. I think that’s certainly part of it, right. As people have said before, being a student and teacher is complicated enough. But then you add the additional element of being in a veteran teacher’s classroom - that’s a little intimidating. I don’t want to infringe on what that teacher is doing. I mean, I am there to learn from a mentor teacher. So yeah, I think I just got caught up in the moment, and I just needed to self-advocate more or better than I did. But it all worked out, and I am actually going to be teaching that same class next year. So, my CT and I get to be colleagues!” Everyone is muted, but it is evident from gestures of clapping and thumbs up that we are all excited for Kate’s good news. “Thank you again for sharing, and congratulations on landing a job! Anyone want to follow that one up?” Kate is the only person unmuted, besides me, and her audible, sheepish laugh leads to her saying, “I am sorry. I am just excited about working with the wonderful people that were so supportive of me at Little Lake. I didn’t mean to be so forward.” A few people write in the chat expressing their support for Kate. Judy writes, “I am so happy for you. No need to apologize.”

“I guess I can try to follow that up,” says Louis dryly with an endearing grin. “Coming into the program, I thought that I had kind of rather radical ideas of what teaching should look like. And I guess being, at least based off my own experience, and then coming into the program, it's like, we're given so many examples of what teaching can look like. It's given me a confidence to play around with what teaching can look like. I kind of talked that game in my head, but once I got in the classroom, I was still, like, "well, I have no idea what I'm doing." And I would really hate to mess up a student's educational journey by being just a completely incompetent teacher in comparison to my CT. So, it took me a little bit to work toward having some small victories, and then having those small victories affirmed by given the freedom to try out my ideas, and then seeing that some of those ideas worked. And then seeing how the ideas that didn't work, well,

failed. And then kind of constraining this kind of vague, radical idea of what education is, and just kind of slowly narrowing it down to something a little more precise and communicable."[3]

Louis pauses and then pivots to talking about his transition to full-time student teaching. "The weird part about my experience at Independence high school was I did feel like Lori, my CT, and I were in our own little vacuum as the English 4 people. Because the people we worked with were doing overloaded schedules, so they didn't have time to talk to us really. And our office isn't with anyone. And I'm realizing after the fact that maybe I took control of everything a little too quickly, like, within a month or two. So, I didn't get a good sense of what the English classroom at Independence would look like if it wasn't me doing it because I was kind of working in a vacuum. And Lori kind of just wanted to give me freedom and she wanted to do what I wanted to do and then only, like, give me nudges to make it better. She would tell me, like, what, how she's done in the past. And she would give me rubrics and stuff, but she gave me pretty much complete freedom."[3]

"Thank you, Louis. I really appreciate all of you sharing what I am sure amounts to a mere snippet of your experiences this past semester. What I am hearing is that you all had very different experiences with your CTs and with your students. I am curious then…Louis if you don't mind commenting first because what you said at end about Lori, your CT, giving you freedom to roam, so to speak, which I think relates to my curiosity about how your experiences have shaped your ideas about what the role of teachers or functions of teachers now that you have spent a considerable amount of time in the classroom as, at the very least, co-teachers. Does that make sense? Louis, if you need some time think through or if anyone else would like to jump in, please feel free." Louis hesitates but offers others to jump into the conversation first. No one takes the offer, but Louis graciously begins to share about his thoughts on the roles of

teachers. “I guess my own personal ideal as a teacher before student teaching was…I really want to be as…to have as much humility as possible. I really want to learn from my students, and I want to be able to perhaps transform whatever I'm teaching at the drop of a dime based off the feedback I'm getting from my students. I want to be very, like, not to get too idealistic, but I really like Socratic discussions, stuff like that. I really like sitting in a circle, perhaps reading a book, going through maybe some big ideas in the book, and then having the students question each other and then them questioning me, and then me questioning them, and then we're all as vulnerable to each other as we can be, and we all have the power to redirect the conversation, and to try and find truth ourselves as, like, a cooperative unit. I think so much of life is trying to find truth in a cooperative manner because we all have little bits of it. And not everyone has the whole picture, I think. I think is so important to be able to negotiate truth, and that's something I really want kids to learn because I think it's also empowering and to not be like, ‘This is truth. Learn it.’ And to be more like, ‘This could be truth. Now, what do you think of it? And then how does that stand up to what everyone else thinks about it? And can it survive that process? What you think?’”[3]

I am really intrigued by Louis’ idea about navigating truth, and I am about to interject with a question for clarity, but Louis quickly continues to share a turning point in his thinking, which addresses my clarifying question. “I love teaching, and I love education. And I feel like teachers don't get professional respect anymore. And I felt a qualitative difference between the high school environment and the middle school environment. And I just felt like there was a….higher demand that I should be, like, this more professional, organized kind of more clinical kind of person. I think it was maybe partially based off seeing some of the stuff that Lori makes, which is...it's a lot more… like, “do this”, like, a lot of work time. And that work time is

structured in a way that makes learning feel like students are in a machine. And I just…I…that isn't how I want to teach. But I felt like that's how I had to teach because it's high school now and this is what high schoolers expect from their teachers. And because I didn't have good relationships with the students, at first, there wasn't a whole lot of excitement when I tried to rock the boat. Like, they're kind of like, 'Okay, don't bother me. Mr. L. Just give me the worksheet like Ms. L. We'll be good.'"[3]

"Louis, that is some great insight and reflection that you have done about how you see your role as a teacher. So, do you think that you are still holding onto those ideals of learning being more like a Socratic space or have the structures of your most recent teaching experience changed that for you?" Louis takes a moment to think and then responds, "I really love old books, books that people consider to be 'the great books.' Those are what got me into education, and I would love to spark an interest in one other person at some point in my life. But I quickly realized that I'm gonna have to rethink…that isn't my whole teaching practice is just being able to draw on these like wonderful pieces of art and philosophy and literature. And that isn't going to be all I can teach. If I want all of my students to be engaged with what we're doing, if I'm ever gonna want to get to that, especially nowadays, I feel like I'm gonna need to build a lot of trust and build a lot of skills. I feel like nowadays, we don't prepare students to read Plato, you know? So just kind of like realizing that if I ever want to do that, I might need more practice."[3]

Before moving on, I sense that Louis is not quite done wrapping up his thoughts. What I have come to appreciate and anticipate about Louis is his consciousness about what he is saying and wanting to communicate a clear thought. He has a lot to say on certain topics, and he is very thoughtful about the point that he is trying to make. Louis continues in an effort to conclude his thoughts, "And then I think I was kind of stopped cold by like all the theories we got thrown on

us at the beginning of fall. But then, I realized that students were actually all along why I wanted to be a teacher and really…seeing all the theories begin to make sense when I started from thinking about the students and realizing that my own teaching made a lot more sense if I thought about the students first. I think that was the big change. And I think it was kind of less, per se, a change in my thinking and more so a discovery of this is what I was actually thinking all along."[3]

"That is what I have been thinking a lot about too," says Susan in agreement with Louis. "Students are and should be the center of what we do and how we do things. It just makes sense, right? What Louis said made me think about a situation that I had during my fall placement involving two students who got into a fight. It was nothing major, no one really got hurt. It just got out of control, fast. Long story short, I tried to break up the fight and my mask was slapped off of my face. Again, I didn't get hurt, and I was not bothered by it. I grew up roughing around with my brother. It wasn't a big deal to me, but there were a lot of meetings to attend afterward to debrief about the fight." Similar to her earlier sharing of a more sensitive moment during her full-time placement, Susan is carefully crafting what she says and wishes to be relevant to the conversation. "Honestly, the fight thing was mainly instincts. I didn't want them to hurt each other. I think a lot of that feeling for me has to do with wanting to create a safe physical and mental classroom community. So, if people are mentally distressed, or like, having high emotions, that can be disrupting, and I don't want them to feel that way because that means that the classroom is not as safe for us anymore. And with the two students physically fighting and hurting each other…like, absolutely not! This is a classroom that I want to be safe. So, I think maybe part of me felt obligated to try and stop the fight and attend all those meetings because I want to keep this communal, safe environment where kids can open up and tell me about their

whatever is going on and feel safe to do that without worrying about anything. I remember in one of the meetings with the students after the fight, I said to them, 'y'all are better than this. I know both of you. And you're so much better than this. This does not reflect who you are. So, it doesn't make any sense to me.' It's like, I hold high expectations of them. Sometimes I would say to my students that you should act like an adult, or you are like an adult, you can do this. When I said that, they would always laugh. They're like, 'we're not adults.' And I'm, like, 'oh, I forget that you guys are so young.' They're like 12 And I'm saying to them 'be an adult.'" 4 Susan pauses. She smiles and appears to be lost in thought about the joys she experienced in her middle school placement. She continues, "So yeah, I think a lot about how students are so much the center of what I do and how I want my classroom to be a safe, comfortable space. And I want to uphold that however I can."[4]

"To add on to that," Judy immediately builds on Susan's idea about student-centeredness, "I had an interesting shift in perspective. Since we have been talking about our experiences as students, well, we still are students, right? *Student*-teachers?" Judy emphasizes the word student in saying "student-teachers" to drive her point. "Yeah, I think that I, as a student, I didn't feel like it was my job to build a relationship with the teacher. And I also was the kind of student where I was just kind of going to be fine no matter what. So that draw didn't feel necessary all the time. Or at least, that's how I projected it onto teachers…'it's gonna be fine. Don't need to worry. Let's move on.' Being on the other side of the desk, I think that burden kind of shifts, and I wanted to take that really seriously. I'm the adult in the room, and/or one of the adults in the room, and, therefore responsible for setting the tone of how this community is going to be and who the stakeholders are, and how you're going to invite them in, no matter if they're a, quote/unquote, good student or not or perceive themselves that way or whatever."[7]

"Thank you, Judy. So, for you, you did not see the value in relationships with teachers as an important aspect of your schooling experience, but as a teacher you take that relationship between teachers and students seriously. So, what would it have taken for you to see those relationships as important when you were in middle or high school?" I ask this question wondering if Judy sees her values shifting or is her thinking a product of a shift in her role in the classroom. Judy responds, "You know, I don't know that I would have ever seen relationships as important as I do now while I was a student, a younger student. Like I said, relationships or not I would have been fine. I felt independent enough that I knew what I needed, and I knew how to get there. I realize, now, that not all kids have that capacity or access to resources. Not because I am smarter or other kids are not smart enough. I had advantages that helped me navigate those things and, essentially, go through school with minimal barriers. Not all kids have that experience and not all kids like the school the way I did. I don't know for sure, but that's how I would answer that." "That's fair," I say. "It's interesting how our thinking changes over time, and we can look back at our former selves and still not quite know what would have changed our thinking in a particular stage of our lives. I get that, and I appreciate your honesty in your response. I didn't mean to put you on the spot." "No worries," says Judy. "I guess the point I want to make is that students are the center of what we do, as teachers. Yes, it is our responsibility to care for and create an environment that is good for all kids. And I am not sure how prevalent this is today, but maybe there aren't enough opportunities for students to feel like they are the center of classrooms. Sure, teachers care about them, but what makes students feel good about their place in the classroom?"

"That is a profound question. I really like how you came to that wondering. I think a response to that relates to something everyone who has spoken so far has alluded to. But I want

to open up the space to that question, what makes students feel good about their place in the classroom? I have my own thoughts, but I will keep that to myself, for now."

"Sorry about that. I started talking before I unmuted myself." Laughing at herself, Anna unmutes and begins to share her thoughts on how students can feel good about their place in the classroom. "I really want to focus on the deep learning of science. So, thinking about, how do scientists know what they know? Which I think I was able to get into a little bit when I taught about evolution this past semester, which was nice. But I want to let the kids explore what they want to explore, and sort of using their own lens to explore and create scientific knowledge is something that I want to do better. But I think it also comes down to having that support. And sort of being able to see, like, what does this look like when it's done correctly? I think a way that science has been traditionally taught is a big hindrance. So, there's this really nice diagram that Parker Palmer uses. And teachers are up here at the top," Anna gestures with her one hand elevated above her head, "and then student." Anna uses her hand to gesture the position of students being below the teacher, which Anna continues to represent with her elevated hand. She continues, "And then way at the top is, like, the science." Anna uses her already elevated to gesture even higher the position of science as the object or subject above teacher and student. "So, it's like, the teacher is the only one who has real access to the science. And then they're just the ones distributing it to the students. Where in reality, it should be everyone has equal access to the science and gets to really mess with it and gets to experience it, gets to explore it. It's not just like, 'Oh, if you have this sort of academic background, you're the one who gets to distribute the knowledge.' It's like, 'No, we're all building this knowledge together. I don't know all the science.' There's no way any one person could know all the science, it's impossible. Because it's so abstract. There's so much detail. If you go into any one specific field, you can go into such

detail; it would just blow your mind. It takes so many years of study, and so many papers, and so many…it's overwhelming to think about. So, tradition, that traditional structure of just an absolute mind dump of information from the teacher of like, "this is science, here it is," is really impersonal and does not include the students as explorers and producers of scientific knowledge."[1] Anna pauses a moment, almost to catch her breath. "Sorry. I'll get off my soap box now, I could go on about that for a while. But the point is that students, in a science classroom, feel more included when they are treated as equals and producers of scientific knowledge. I can't imagine it feels good for them to sit and get a ton of information and wonder what to do with it or to care about it. I know that wouldn't make me feel good, so I don't want to do that to students."

"What you said is so true, and I think it connects so well to other areas too, right?" Kate affirms Anna's concluding statement and Anna briefly responds, "Yes! Of course." Kate continues, "This is such a good question to think about because it forces you to think not about what is good for students but what makes them feel good and what can we, as teachers, offer them instead of forcing them to do. And what you said, Anna, about letting students explore science is such a fantastic idea, but I get how it seems fairly obvious like, 'why wouldn't we do that in the first place?'" Kate gestures to Anna in a way that reflects Kate's perspective in her virtual space, but from my perspective she is pointing to Susan. "So, when I think about my own placement and things that my CT and I did together…well there were lots of things we tried to do." Kate pauses, seemingly to find a single example that is relevant to our conversation. "A lot of the stuff that we would do was like mini-research projects, and a lot of just putting the onus on the students to learn on their own, and I don't know if they'd like that. I don't know. At this point, maybe that worked a couple of years ago, but right now, I think students need a little bit more

guidance in their learning rather than just, ‘okay, here's the instructions. Now you go teach yourself about the American Revolution.’ So that's something also that I want to, like, work on next year is finding ways to have more structured activities rather than just unstructured work time for students because I think that also leads them to get distracted more easily, too.”[2]

“I remember you saying that you and your CT were in a unique place together in that neither of you had taught humanities before, right?” I ask Kate for clarification before pursuing my main question. Kate answers, “Yes. That’s right.” I follow up asking, “how did that circumstance lead to some of the things you did? What were some resources that you used or in what ways did you feel stuck, like you couldn’t really do the things that you wanted to do that would be better students?”

Kate needs little time to respond. “Well, the time that I saw my students spend reading and writing in the spring has really pushed me to want to make a change in my own practice for the fall. I…there was just not a whole lot of writing going on in the classroom. I think a lot of it was we made assumptions that students knew how to write in a certain way. We were like, ‘Oh, they can write in a persuasive way. They can write in an argumentative way.’ But I don't know if that's necessarily, like, I just don't know if they have that knowledge. And so, I think that going into the fall after experiencing lack of enthusiasm for reading and writing, I just want to make it, like, casual. I don't want them to think that it is something that is a performance in any way. I want them to I want to do journal writing. I want to do quick writes, when they come into the classroom, I want them to just be writing, like, all the time because they just wasn't really part of our curriculum. I think my CT and I will probably work together to make more meaningful writing assignments for the students and to just make writing a part of their everyday lives because right now it's not really…I mean, obviously, they're writing. They're writing texts and

emails and stuff to family and friends and their teachers. But I want them to write for themselves, too. I want them to write in a reflective way. And I want them to draw on their experiences and be able to write about them in a narrative, artistic way. And so that's something that I did in middle school and loved. I loved writing poetry in middle school. I loved doing these narrative projects where we had to think about an experience that really stuck with us. So, I think that's something that maybe because it's not a pure ELA class, that's why it wasn't happening as much, but I don't know…there's a lot of writing in social studies. And so yeah, I think that's something that I'm inspired to do, to get students to write more because I saw firsthand that it's not something that they really enjoy doing because they probably feel a lot of pressure to write in a certain way or it's just they don't really write for themselves. They write for their teachers, and I want them to write for themselves. And I want them to understand that they don't have to write to please me. They can write to express themselves."[2]

"Thank you, Kate. I am encouraged by your focus on bringing this goal to bear on your teaching next year. Obviously, the school year is now over and there is not anything to be done now. But, you have taken this experience and you are already thinking and planning for next year, which is great, and I hope that students can appreciate the opportunities that you will give them to write for themselves." "I hope so, too!" says Kate with a hope-filled excitement in her voice.

I realize that Nancy has not had an opportunity to join our conversation. I normally do not like to call on people to participate, especially if their mode of learning is listening to conversations and processing silently, but I decide to explicitly invite Nancy to speak into the space. I am curious as to what math perspective she can bring to our conversation. I say, "Nancy, as our resident math teacher, is anything that we have been talking about that resonates with you

or that you would like to add onto?" Nancy does not unmute right away; she takes some time to ponder a response. I follow up saying, "If you don't have anything at the moment, please do not feel obligated to contribute. I just want to make sure everyone has an opportunity to share what they feel is relevant in the space." "No, it's fine," says Nancy, "I don't mind. I have been thinking about your question about what makes students feel good in the classroom. And I think it comes down to students feeling, not just being seen, but that they see the world happening in the classroom. Does that make sense?"

I can see where Nancy wants to go with the conversation. She is referring to being relevant in the classroom, making the classroom reflect what is happening in the world, as opposed to completely isolating what is done in the classroom from real-world contexts. I encourage Nancy to expand on that thought and share with us ways that she imagines students feeling more connected with the world.

"I think math has this reputation that it doesn't connect with the world in a lot of ways. And to a point, yeah, I think it is difficult to connect math to some political and social things, things that have huge impacts on our lives." Nancy pauses. I am in anticipation of where she is going with her response. "I'm just gonna speak to me, and like, how I perceive what we talk about and things like that. But it almost forces me to have a more genuine conversation about what's happening, if I'm not thinking about how I can connect it to the lesson. And, you know, I think it's two different conversations when we talk about culturally relevant lessons compared to real-world events. During my City Year, I was in a classroom the day after the Capitol got stormed in January last year. And I remember, the teacher I worked with didn't even acknowledge that at all. And I was just so blown away about it. How could you not even just mention it? You are also a person that has watched the news today? I think just watching that

happen, where I was like, ‘wow…the least I can do is just say something about it.’ And I think that just makes the classroom that much closer to being more connected to the community or to what's going on. It’s not necessarily connected to the content itself. And it's also geometry….I just don't want to be cheap when talking about these topics.”[8] I seek a little clarification from Nancy asking, “When you say that you don’t want to be cheap when talking about these topics, could you dig into that a little more. I am sorry. Now that I have roped you into this conversation I am barraging you with all these questions, but I find what you are saying to be so valuable.” Nancy nods, affirming her willingness to address my request.

“Especially with geometry, it would be a big stretch to find a way to connect that to something like the Capital Riot. And I think it would be cheap to find a really superficial connection that doesn’t even get to the heart of the issue. Geometry is not going to get us to talk about anti-democracy or why people feel entitled to inflict violence on others. So, I feel it’s better to just talk about those real-world things, as they are, and not feel bad about it not connecting with the math content. It doesn’t need to be a whole class thing, but, going back to that teacher I worked with who did not even mention the storming of the Capitol, the least that can be done is making sure that students are aware of what’s going on and why it’s important to know about. I just…it makes the classroom feel more authentic, and not that things like that should make students feel good but at least they are not isolated from the world.”

“I will say that one of the ways that math teaching can be better is finding relevant or real ways to apply it, maybe even ways that students can use it in everyday life,” Nancy pivots to talk about how math content can and should be relevant. “I think in a typical math classroom, you give students worksheets and if they can do it exactly how they did on the worksheet when you give them a test, then that's how you determine if they know the content. But a deep

understanding of math would be working with the material. I've seen some cool project-based things. In geometry one example was like, designing a neighborhood with grocery stores and thinking about what would be the most efficient way for everybody to have access to the grocery store and the gas station and all these different things. That's just one example of demonstrating the learning by working with the material. We teach linear equations, ratios, fractions, all these different things as completely separate topics. And, really, it's all the exact same thing. So, I feel like being a bit more…less label-ly and more conceptual, like, describing topics from the get-go without using vocab maybe would be even more beneficial and then identifying vocab later. Until I took my ESL classes, I hadn't really thought about vocab in a way that makes it incomprehensible. If you're providing a list of words with a definition next to it, that doesn't give you a working understanding until you actually know what the word is, and then you can put the word to it. So, certain activities can allows students to interact with the actual concept instead of just knowing how to define it or even recognize it in use, at least in use on paper."[6]

"Nancy, thank you for that thoughtful glimpse into your experience and philosophy around teaching deeper, or math content that is more conceptual and applicable. I am not a math person, nor am I qualified to speak about such things, but I really appreciate the way you talk about math and not wanting it to be cheapened in its connections with the world or how students get to interact with it. I can only hope that my children are encouraged to engage with math in the ways that you are talking about, in these conceptual ways. I certainly would have appreciated that level of interaction in middle and high school."

"We are getting toward the end of our time today, and I wish to be mindful of your time." There is so much I would love to talk more at length about this discussion. I want to know more about what happened in their placements that brought them joy and also the things that were

challenging. I would love to hear how these participants felt they have grown since the beginning of the program, but there is not enough time in this space to explore and share those moments - although I can see snippets of these areas throughout our conversations so far.

"I think what Nancy was saying about being more relevant with content and finding ways to bring in the real world is a segue another wondering that I would love to hear you engage with. Similar to what Nancy and Anna shared about deeper content learning, I am curious as to how you imagine critical thinking, that is how students are thinking critically about the world, about content, about their own conceptions and ideas. What does critical thinking look like in your classroom? You can certainly draw from your experiences in your practicum semesters, and you can think about what you would like critical thinking to look like in your own classrooms as first-year teachers."

At some point, all of the participants have at least alluded to ideas around critical thinking, either from their own experiences or from their renewed perspectives brought on by the program. At this point, I am curious more about how critical thinking is taken up/put into action among these participants and moving beyond critical thinking as a thought experiment.

"I think about my own schooling experiences, and even my work experience in corporate labs, " Anna reflects, "I was one of those *gifted and talented* students growing up, and it has taken a lot to try to unlearn a lot of that competitive, elitist, privileged perspective. And, I mean, what did I really do while in school? Apart from…yeah, I have my degrees, and I went to a decent school, blah, blah, blah. But do I feel like I know any more than anyone else? No. In fact, I feel like I know less because I feel like I got rushed through school to try to get as much AP credits as possible. So, I didn't have to pay as much for college and, so I could graduate early and blah, blah, which I did. I did all that, whatever. But it wasn't worth it."

"I am curious, Anna," I interject asking, "how would your schooling experience have been "worth it" or what would have made your experiences more meaningful?" Anna scrunches her nose and purses her lips in thought. She retorts, "I am not sure if anything would have made it better just because that's how school was structured for me. If you want to get a good job and be successful, take these classes, get good grades, and you will live happily ever after. There was a system to get stuff and that was communicated in so many ways, so many detrimental ways. But no matter how many degrees I have or how much I think I know, there is just too much knowledge out there to know everything, and the minute that we think we know it all something comes along to completely destroy that. I mean, science is an evolving thing, right? We discover new stuff about stuff we thought we already figured out. If anything would have made my schooling experience *better,"* Anna displays air quotes with her hands to signal her doubtful imagining, "I think just focusing on deeper content learning would have been a great start. I mean, the classes I took were hard because we were expected to know all of this stuff and pass these tests, but that is not deep learning."

Anna pauses briefly as if to pivot to another thought. "One of the things I did in my fall placement that starts to get at this idea of deeper content learning was for a student in environmental science who really didn't want to be there. For the last project, I had him do more of a social justice unit/presentation. So, the whole theme was climate change and having students think about wildlife and climate change. For example, they were thinking about how does climate change affect wildlife. I was like, 'Well, I know for a fact that this student isn't going to want to do this because he really doesn't care about wildlife.' Instead, I was like, "Okay, well, how does climate change affect this group of people?" Because I want him to be able to make the connection that climate change affects people who have lower social-economic statuses, people

who are typically marginalized. Climate change affects these grounds more than people who are better off/not marginalized, ex cetera. So, that was one thing that I still want to bring with me into my own classroom, but I also think it would have been valuable for all the other students to have done that. So, instead of just differentiating for one student, I would have designed that project for a whole group."[9]

"Thank you for sharing, Anna. Although we cannot always rectify the shortcomings of our education experiences, I think teachers have the unique opportunity to carry on legacies that have positively impacted them, as well as disrupt the barriers that have left many of us desiring more of our education. I also appreciate you looking forward to your own classroom, building upon the successes you had with one student and thinking about how to expand that to whole classes. Does anyone else have a recent experience engaging with critical thinking in the classroom or how they imagine it in their own classrooms moving forward?" I am sure that all of the participants have something in mind to share, but I also realize that this may not be a relevant experience for all of the participants, much less student teachers more broadly. I wonder how many student teachers, like myself as an undergraduate student, struggled to stay afloat. For me, the goal was to get through the day. I am sure I was encouraged to incorporate "higher levels" of thinking and criticality during my student teaching, but I don't remember experiencing a moment like Anna shared, not because my experience was such a long time ago but because that was not part of my focus at the time.

"I have one if no one else is sharing," says Susan to break the silence among the group. "Yes. Please share," I retort. Susan shares, "It sticks out to me because planning it was so fun. So, I taught this lesson about anti-racist children's books and in my modern US history class. I brought in a Ruby Bridges video where she is speaking to Congress because they're trying to

repeal her books in a lot of states, trying to ban them. So, we looked at book bans and the harm of them and who's being banned and all that stuff. So, I spent hours reading children's books and putting together these resources and, like, strategically planning which students go with, with what books depending on ability. So, I spent a really long time making this lesson and the kids loved it. I had so much fun watching them read out loud to each other…I mean, high schoolers, you'll never see that. So, I adored that, and plus they were so into it. After they would read their books. I had them do this whole analysis of it, too. Like, it wasn't just like, 'read a book and tell me why it's important.'"[4]

I appreciate Susan's excitement about this moment. It is inspiring to hear that student teachers are not just trying to survive; they are compelled to do things that help them and their students thrive. I was not there to witness this lesson, but I can imagine the surprise and interest of students engaging in this lesson, as well as the look of delight from Susan that her hard work paid off. Susan continues, "So, while I was in my high school placement, I took the opportunity while I was there to put in women's voice and different religions and, queer identity and, different, like, anti-racist stuff as well. So, I kind of wanted something, like, new and fresh that…it just felt fun and different in a way that was, like, could still be historical, but also looking at current things as well. And brought in things to show them, like, representation for kids matters and having them reflect on their own education. So, I think because it was, like, one culturally relevant, relevant to them, like, at their current moment, but also could be historical. It felt really important. And they're doing this student-centered work of working together to figure out, like, why did representation matter? Why does this stuff happen? Instead of me just being like, 'this is what we should know.' One student asked for a bibliography of the books I researched for the children's book lesson so she could buy them for her local community center.

So, it was heartwarming to see that critical work happen at the high school level because of something I put a lot of work into and that kids actually enjoyed doing it, too."[4]

"It is such a great feeling when you are doing something you care about, have put a lot of energy into, and you see that kids are benefiting from it. Or at least they are enjoying what you created. I am glad that you had that opportunity, and even though we did not hear from everyone specifically about this critical thinking topic I hope that you feel equipped and encouraged to incorporate criticality into your classrooms as much as possible." I pause and see several nods from participants. I am sure that everyone could offer a specific example, but I really want to spend more time together by celebrating the things that they felt proud about or something that made an impression on them.

"Again, I want to honor your time, for which I am very grateful. I feel privileged to be sharing this space with you all, and I wish we could spend even more time reflecting on your experiences because they hold so much value and joy. To conclude our time together, I would like to ask each of you to think about a moment that you are particularly proud of or something that you would say is the highlight of your student teaching experience. I know, it may be difficult to pick one, but I encourage each of you to share about a moment that made an impression on you."

"I don't have a specific moment, more like little moments or victories," says Louis unsure if this is a sufficient offering to the group. "Yes!," I say, "that is great. Please share!" Louis continues, "I began full-time teaching feeling that the only capacity in which I was having meaningful interactions with teachers was one-on one interactions with students. And I just wasn't able to teach a whole class, as a group. It's difficult for me to act as an authority to people who I don't know, and it was especially true when I would be in front of students. One thing I

did to help me feel more comfortable in front of kids until I got to know them was writing scripts, like notes that remind me of what I need to say when I get kind of lost or nervous. I first did that in the fall, but I found myself having to write scripts again at the beginning of second semester. I did write scripts again, in the spring semester, up until I knew the names of all of my students. And then once I knew the names of all my students, then for some reason, it just became easy for me once again. So, it's those little moments that made me realize that I almost cannot teach unless I know my students."[3]

"Thank you for sharing, Louis." I say while Louis almost overlaps my last word saying, "I know…I know it is not super specific, but I am constantly reminded that students are and should be the center of what I do. And there are so many other moments, like you said, it's hard to just pick one. So, that kind of summarizes what was important to me." "I get that," I say affirmingly, "I really appreciate the thoughtfulness of reflective sharing." I do not verbally prompt anyone to follow up. Over the course of these interviews, I have learned to let silence drive participation.

"I feel the same way, Louis," says Susan breaking the silence. "I've experienced so much. I always just come back to Stone Prairie because Stone Prairie is so diverse in language and socioeconomic status, ability, and race and literally every aspect. Yet, it felt like the most community based, you know? Especially because I was working with a cooperating teacher who was queer and biracial and, super empowered. She's amazing! So, I was seeing teaching through this whole different lens, which I really liked. I think that it's really important to learn who your students are, and I feel a lot more comfortable taking the time to do that to then inform my pedagogy, which is I think, where the disconnect was at the high school. It was so hard to get to know the kids, and we didn't take the time to do it. So, then I just felt disconnected from the

work we were doing, versus working with a small group of students and being able to really get to know them on a basic level, like, 'Who are you? What are your interests? What are you into? How can I make this part of what we're doing? How can we make this choice-based so that you can read that comic book?' I tend to look at Hartford as a negative moment, but that placement experience has taught me so much about what I don't necessarily want to do and having that experience is so important. There are a lot of educators at Hartford High School I love and learned a lot from. So, I do not want to discredit that at all. It's hard to pinpoint exactly, but I do really, really think that no matter who the kid is, no matter what their strengths or weaknesses, abilities, whatever it is, getting to know them first is so important. And I think that's the basis of all the work that you do as a teacher."[4]

"Thank you, Susan. You and Louis definitely seem to have had a strong focus on getting to know students. I hope that translated to positive relationships with them, as well as productive classroom environments." Yes! I loved the kids I worked with!" excitedly retorts Susan. Louis writes in the chat, "Absolutely!" A brief silence settles over our shared virtual space before a scratchy static fills my ears. "Sorry! I was going to start sharing something and then I realized I needed to move something off of my desk, but I did not unmute myself before doing that. So sorry. So many things," says Nancy as she is still trying to move the source of the noise from her workspace.

The scratching stops and Nancy continues, "I think a lot of times when we're talking about relationship building, we're talking a lot about ways that you can get to know my students, and that's super important. But then also, the flip side is letting students see me as a person, too." I see several people nodding in approval of Nancy's perspective. "Even me as a teacher being very upfront…we joked around saying like, 'Oh, yeah, I'm not getting paid to be here.' And

they'd be like, ‘Oh, my gosh, if I wasn't even paid to be here, I'd be gone.’ That's just one example. But like, you know, having conversations like, student going to a concert and talking about a concert. I feel like actually getting to relationship building and personal interactions is definitely a strength of mine, inside and outside the classroom. So, capitalizing on that was huge. I think it’s also important to develop trust, where they were willing to kind of take risks or do things in the classroom that I asked them to do because they trusted me. I had one student in particular, he would kind of just stop and give up when he didn't understand things and that's human nature, right? And then I got to know him a bit better and then he would just be trying something by himself and like, it would be, completely wrong,” Nancy chortles, “but then I'd come over and see that he had done a whole page just trying different things out. You literally can't ask for more than that. Like, that was the most touching thing seeing him try while making mistakes, feeling not at all embarrassed. And I did the same thing, being open with them about the things I did and did not do well. I feel like they had seen that I was willing to put a lot of effort and then they tried to do the same.”[4] Susan pauses briefly trying to find a way to summarize and conclude her thoughts. “And it’s all because of trust that comes from building those relationships, not because you want the kids to like you, but you genuinely care about them and the things they are doing. Kids see that and respond to that pretty positively, I think.”

Almost in anticipation of the upcoming silence, Anna jumps right in saying, “That is so true. Building that trust is really important and comes from caring about the things students care about. I had a student who was going through some gender transition,” Anna pauses to call upon her memory of the student, whom she is thinking about. “I only knew this student was going through a transition because at the beginning of the semester, their pronouns were just they/ them. And then I noticed on a review paper that they turned in that it changed to

they/them/he/him. So, I pulled them out of class just to be like, ‘Hey, I just wanted to have a conversation just because I noticed that you wrote these pronouns on your paper. I just want to make sure that I'm calling you the right pronouns. And when do you want me to use these pronouns? And if someone called you the wrong pronouns, do you want me to correct them?’ So, we had that conversation to make sure that I was very focused on using the right pronouns. But they were also like a really good student, like, really great at participating and always turning in super, top-notch work. And I had talked to my CT, Tori, about the student and kind of knew that they had an older brother who was going into, like, engineering or something like that, and that they had a lot of pressure from their parents to kind of go into something similar. But they want to do theater. So, I made sure, whenever I could, to be supportive of that. Later in the semester, it was teacher appreciation week or something, they gave my CT and me a really sweet note. I took a picture of it because Tori has a hard copy addressed to both of us. I was like, ‘Oh my gosh, like, this is so nice.’ And they had written on it, like, especially to like miss…which I should find it read it, too, because it's literally so sweet.”[1]

Anna leans off screen momentarily to retrieve her phone. She searches for the image of the card that this student had written for Anna and her CT. She finds the image and continues, “It says, ‘Thank you for being the amazing supportive teacher that you are.’ That is to both Tori and me. And then it says, ‘Thanks to Miss Anna. Thank you for just being plain awesome. I know you were just a student teacher, but you are one of the best teachers I've ever had. Thank you both." I was like, ‘Alright! I gotta be doing something right for a really cool student to be giving me props like that.’”[1]

“Thank you for sharing, Anna. I don’t think you should be too surprised. At least from what I have heard about your experiences, I am not surprised that a student took the time to do

that for you. Kudos to you!" Anna seems reluctant to accept the affirmation, but she says, "Thank you. I really appreciate that. Sometimes it just feels like I could do more or do things better. But then stuff like this," Anna waves her phone to gesture toward the thank you note that she read from her student earlier, "reminds me that I'm doing alright."

"I also had a student who I connected with. I mean, I had good relationships with many of my students, but there was one in particular who sticks out to me," says Kate, "he was going through a lot of things in his personal life. I had heard from my CT that before I started for second semester, he had gotten into a fight. And so, there was a group of students who were kind of harassing him at school and stuff, and he was just having a lot of personal issues in that way. So, he told me he was also having a lot of issues with not just peers and stuff, but internally. He wasn't eating very much, and he would always talk about how tired he felt. And so, one day after school, I asked him, "If you want to, you know, stay after school and just have a conversation with me, I'm here for you." One day, he stayed after school, and we talked for like 15 minutes. I was able to point him in the direction of getting help, but I didn't necessarily give him a ton of advice because I am not a therapist. Like, I can listen to his problems, which I did. I was really proud of the fact that I was able to listen and empathize with him and point him in the direction of getting help but not necessarily take on that role that I know that I'm not equipped to give, you know, proper mental health advice. It was just a really powerful conversation that I had with him. We both ended up tearing up and yeah…And then at the end of the year, my CT gave me this book that all of the students, like, wrote something to me and one of the things that this student wrote was like, "Thank you for being the most amazing teacher and therapist." So, it was it was super cute, and he told me multiple times after that, he was like, "Miss Kate some of the stuff that you said to me I really think about a lot and, and it makes me almost cry because it

means so much to me." I'm so proud of the way that I was able to handle that and not stress myself out and feel like I have to drop everything and take care of this child. Instead, I was able to point him into the direction of people who can help him, like our amazing school counselors, and it's their job to help them in that way. And I made a really strong connection with him on a personal level, too."[2]

"My CT gave me a book at the end of the semester, too! How funny is that? It must be a Little Lake thing," says Nancy connecting with Kate's gift from her CT. Both Kate and Nancy were placed at Little Lake Middle School during their full-time student teaching. Kate responds, "It was so sweet to read all those comments. I will keep that forever and probably have to keep reading it all the time!" Both Nancy and Kate laugh.

Judy is the only one who has yet to share a highlight from student teaching. Judy has been intently listening to others. I am sure she is aware that she is the last person to speak, but she takes her time to think about what she wishes to share with the group. "I really appreciate what everyone has shared. It's all really inspiring," says Judy, "I think I am going to cheat just a little. It's hard to think about a single student or moment, but I'm thinking about a collection of things that have really helped me think about the things that should be important and present in my classroom. Lately, I have been thinking about," Judy momentarily delays her next thought and then continues, "how to put in place systems that are still true to my social justice values but provide a structure to the classroom. A big takeaway for me is that structure doesn't have to equal bad and that it can be really good, but how do I do that in a way that's not punitive, that has consequences that are logical, and help students grow and learn as holistic humans? A couple of things come to mind. One of which is having the ability to have circles in my classroom. So, in my student teaching last semester, midway through the semester we started teaching pretty

exclusively in small circles, and it was really cool to see students interact with each other that way. And so, having even the ability to check in a circle for students. I know it sounds small, but it really made a difference in terms of me coming into the space as more of a peer and students being able to, like, acknowledge each other. Another thing that comes to mind is including student voice. So, checking in with students about how things are going, what they want to do next, what questions they have, and incorporating them in decision-making processes when it comes to curriculum and instructional practices. And I think one way to do that would be to prioritize collaboration through something like inquiry-based learning or inquiry-based groups. And not just prioritizing students collaborating with one another and me, but also finding my people in a school space to collaborate with will be really important. And then I think the last piece when it comes to culturally sustaining pedagogy is to develop a practice of sustaining communication with parents and family members in a way that's authentic and not just about potential issues or points for growth in the classroom. It also should be about what their goals are for students and what's going well."[5]

"Wow! Thank you for sharing, Judy!" I am thoroughly impressed with this group of preservice teachers. They approach their practice and growth with such humility and understanding that they will not always "get it right", but because of their humility they are able to receive feedback and respond in earnest to the interests and wellbeing of students. I cannot say that all student teachers feel that they are in environments or have dispositions that allow them to more fully appreciate the process of learning they go through, but it is evident, through the experiences of these participants, of what can happen when preservice teachers are equipped with theoretical foundations that they affirm and test within practicum environments that are supportive and offer guided autonomy toward growth and learning.

"Thank you, everyone, for so thoughtfully sharing your experiences and ideas today and throughout all of our sessions together. I can't thank you enough for giving of your precious time to partner with me in this work. Without you all, I have nothing to do or talk about. So many and endless thanks for allowing me to come alongside you and share some of these experiences with you. This concludes our time together, and I look forward to going back through these interviews and sourcing your words and thoughts as I put together this research. But, most of all, I am inspired to find ways to improve myself as I continue to work with preservice teachers, like yourselves. Your input will shape my work and potentially impact future cohorts of preservice teachers. If any of you would like to stay in touch, please provide your personal email in the chat. I will make sure to reach out with updates and opportunities to engage with member checking, which I will explain in a future communication. If anything, I am really excited to hear about your journeys beyond this program. Thank you again for partnering in this work. I look forward to touching base with you later in the summer. I will be around if you want to chat. Otherwise, best wishes to you as you prepare for your summer course work and your job searches. Be safe and live well!"

As I conclude the meeting, I see that everyone shared their personal email addresses to stay in touch, which I fully intend to keep up with. I am so grateful to this group and the work they are committed to doing in their classrooms. One by one, people sign off from the meeting as they say, "Thank you!" "Take care!" "Have a great summer!" As before, my video image is the only square left in the virtual space on my computer screen. I sigh - a little relief but mostly a feeling of commencement and anticipation of a long process ahead. I look forward to it though. It will be taxing, but I can't imagine a better set of people to draw wisdom and insight from.

Interpretation – Outcomes/Actions

The past two interview sessions focused on the values and experiences of participants and how their values were affirmed and tested through their practicum work. Although there is still much of their dispositions and expectations coming through their final interviews, participants are thinking about these things while imagining what their own classrooms will look like. This third session contains a lot of reflection not just on the full-time student teaching semester. Participants tended to look at their experience overall, going back to some of the moments they experienced from their fall placements. This is interesting to note because it indicates a collecting of their experience to imagine what they can or would like to do better moving forward. Every participant, as do many student teachers, reflected on how to make their practice better. The elements that come out of this last session that are worth noting are participant's ideas and conceptions of: learning partnerships, roles of teachers and roles of students, criticality, and intellectualism.

In the following sections, I will define each element, discuss its significance to the overall theme (outcomes and action), reflect on the participants narratives around these elements, and conclude the interpretation by talking about the implied or more silent aspects of what these preservice teachers are thinking and talking about. As with other interpretations, it is not my intention to find fault with student teachers. My goal is to better understand the values that preservice teachers hold coming into and working throughout their experiences in teacher preparation, how they practice teaching with these values in mind and what other values do they develop, and how do they envision their own classrooms as full-time professionals. Understanding this sense-making process provides insights into ways that preservice teachers develop their pedagogy and how they navigate challenges in their practice in relation to their established and/or evolving values.

Learning partnerships are an interesting aspect of these participant's practicum experiences. These relationships are complex, filled with intersecting interests and values that can have a tremendous impact on a teacher's development. As a supervisor and instructor in the secondary program, I have had the opportunity to work with fantastic CTs (cooperating teachers). They continually return year-after-year to mentor student teachers. Many are excited to partner with the program to support aspiring educators. I have also worked with some mentor teachers who are not as excited to partner with student teachers as much as to have another adult in the room. Although the teaching faculty do their best to coordinate placements that suit the interests and personalities of both the PST and CT, matches sometimes do not work out well, while other pairings create long lasting connections and partnerships - especially if that PST is hired the following fall after their program is complete. From my experience, I would say that most learning partnerships between PSTs and CTs are amiable, functional, and generally supportive. Looking more closely at how PSTs navigate and think about learning partnerships with their mentors provides deeper insights into their ideas about partnerships with their students, which connects with their conceptions and practices around the roles of teachers and the roles of students. This connection will be discussed later.

Of all the participants, Judy's description of her relationship with her CT is fairly typical. She greatly respected her mentor and engaged with her in conversations around teaching and the school climate. Judy's CT had her frustrations with certain administrative policies and structures that impacted her classroom in what seemed to be fairly negative ways (e.g., lack of structure to ensure students are attending class in removal of punitive policies). Judy does not talk about the personal aspect of their relationship. It is unclear to the extent to which they connected on a level beyond the professional context. At one point, Judy mentions that there were several challenges at play in her placement. There was a lack of accountability from administration for students who were not consistently in class, which was the result of the removal of punitive disciplinary measures previously enforced and without a suitable structure

to replace it. This caused tension between students and teachers, as well as teachers and administration. Another challenge of Judy's placement involved the displeasure of her CT in teaching humanities. Her CT previously taught science and social studies but switched entirely to a humanities teaching load for this school year. Lastly, Judy noted that her CT tended to take on her workload single-handedly instead of partnering with others. I cannot speak to the grade-level relationships that Judy's CT had with colleagues, but it would appear there was a rift in these partnerships that compels Judy's mentor to work more in isolation, which also affects Judy's capacity to work with her. Judy stated that "it was honestly a really tough and challenging semester, and she was in a really difficult place, I think, with teaching, and that made it harder for me to be her student teacher sometimes" (Judy, personal communication, July 6, 2022).

Louis, Nancy, and Susan had somewhat vague descriptions of their relationships with their CTs, or at least did not seem to glean much from these relationships. In his final interview, Louis continued to reflect on his teaching experiences as a whole, comparing himself to his CTs and expressing a notion of incompetence or lacking skill in his teaching. However, Louis does feel grateful for the freedom to explore his teaching identity and style. Both his middle and high school placements provided freedom to roam, so to speak. He was able to craft his own lessons and receive constructive feedback from his mentors. However, Louis does not really talk about his relationships with his CTs in terms of partnership or co-creating in the classroom. At the very least, these relationships seem amiable and supportive, which greatly contributed to his growth.

When talking about her relationship with her CT, Nancy, like Louis, expressed a general support for Nancy's growth, but unlike Louis' teaching freedom, Nancy's CT was not willing to fully endorse some of Nancy's instructional ideas. Consequently, Nancy was willing to compromise, even more favorably toward what her CT preferred (i.e., working from prescribed, rote curriculum). This type of partnership/relationship between CTs and PSTs can be tricky and

detrimental to PSTs developments and teaching experiences. I completely respect the authority and discretion of CTs, but I think from a PST perspective this inhibits authentic conversations around practice and (re)imagining the classroom space toward creative and relevant experiences for students. In this way, PSTs are still viewed as students as opposed to developing professionals, limiting their own expertise and intellectual pursuits in the interest of avoiding conflict. In all fairness, Nancy's mentor was not a math teacher. Ironically, Nancy has continually worked with mentors who are not primarily math teachers, which is what drives Nancy to focus on her competence as a math teacher. As a result of Nancy's CT being uncomfortable with math content, she lived in a "safe zone" and students' learning experiences were then relegated to traditional, rote methods of math instruction (e.g., worksheets and repetition). It seemed that Nancy and her mentor were trying to survive rather than thrive through the content. Similar to Louis, Nancy did not specifically talk about her relationship with her CT, but it appears that their relationship was professional, and they worked well enough together that Nancy could do some creative things in the classroom, more so as time went on.

Susan's full-time experience demonstrates on a different level the complexities and variables that can exist in PST-CT relationships. First, there is much more to the story that Susan shared about her experiences in her high school placement and about a certain moment that caused social-emotional harm in her classroom. With respect to her and those students, I am choosing not to share more of those details. However, I think it is still important to examine the relationship between Susan and her mentors, considering the vast differences in relationships she had between her fall and spring CTs. In the fall, Susan described in previous interviews how enlightening, eye-opening, and wonderful it was to be at Stone Prairie Middle School. That experience was such a formative part of Susan's teaching journey because of the diversity among students and the disposition and values of her CT, whom Susan greatly respected and seemed to have a good relationship with. During the spring semester, Susan was paired with a high school mentor who had been teaching for quite some time. In contrast to her

relationship with her fall mentor, Susan's relationship with her spring mentor was odd, to say the least. It was apparent that Susan was not comfortable with her CTs defensive teaching philosophy. That is, her mentor would advise Susan about how to defend and justify her teaching to others who would question her methods or expertise. Although Susan tried to glean some wisdom from this advice, she did not feel that such a position aligned with her values and teaching philosophy. Additionally, Susan commented on other seemingly inappropriate aspects of their relationship. Inappropriate in the sense that the mentor saw Susan as a "life coach", with which Susan clearly was not comfortable. Unfortunately, Susan did not seem to have the capacity to question her mentor's authority, which demonstrates how power can be leveraged between a mentor and a preservice teacher. I am not suggesting that the mentor intentionally forced Susan to take on something that she was not comfortable with, but what I would suggest is that the mentor exercised his power in a way that prevented him from partnering with Susan in the classroom. Consequently, these power dynamics lead to preservice teachers to be seen as receptacles for the expertise and teaching experience of their mentors. In other words, Susan's mentor only saw her as a student instead of a competent professional. In addition, Susan felt that she could not refuse her mentor's direction to engage with content that she did not feel comfortable with, and, therefore, she had no critical input in forming the content through her own creative capacities, values, and teaching identity.

Kate's fall practicum experience further adds insight into how mentor teachers and preservice teachers' partnerships impact student teachers' perceptions of their own development and teaching identity. Kate's mentor experience was a tale of two mentors, who approached their teaching and partnership with Kate very differently. In the fall, Kate's mentor continued to work with the materials that she had developed and planned well in advance. This approach provided little space for Kate to inquire about her mentor's process and instruction, as well as preventing a sense of ownership of the work she was engaging in. As I said before, this particular portion of the practicum experience does not require student teachers to build their own lessons

or take on lead teaching roles, but there are opportunities for student teachers to begin having conversations with their mentors about how to approach planning and instruction. Kate did not feel confident leaving her fall placement because she did not engage in these conversations with her mentor. Additionally, Kate cited that her relationship with her fall CT was "fine" and they "got along", but there was no personal connection, which is something that could have encouraged Kate to approach her mentor with more questions and wonderings about teaching practice. This is not to say that positive personal relationships are a necessary part of what makes practicum experiences successful for student teachers, generally. For Kate, though, it seemed to be a desirable aspect of her relationship with her mentor, which was on more full display in her spring practicum experience.

Kate reflected on her unique experience of being placed in a humanities classroom with a mentor who had not taught as a content teacher for the past several years. Kate said that her and her mentor were, "kind of in a new space together…not that we were on the same level…[but] we came to the classroom every day not knowing how things would go and we were like, 'that's okay'" (Kate, personal communication, June 24, 2022). This situation is similar to Nancy's placement with a teacher who was not comfortable teaching math (coming from a science background). However, what is interesting to note is that Nancy's mentor passed her discomfort onto Nancy and her desire to be more creative and branch out from the rote, worksheet model they were implementing. Nancy had mild success deviating from this model which correlates with the low level of partnership that Nancy and her mentor developed. However, Kate and her mentor experienced a similar discomfort (Kate's mentor not being a core content teacher for the past eight years), but they engaged with this challenge differently. Kate felt more empowered by the situation because she described her relationship with her mentor as "being on the same level." Kate does acknowledge that her mentor is clearly more seasoned and knowledgeable, but her CT seemed to view Kate as a partner in the classroom rather than an additional adult in the room.

Of all the participants, Kate had the most positive experience working with her CT. Because Kate's CT had been out of the classroom working as a specialist for the past several years, she had reservations about the content, similar to Judy and Nancy's CTs. However, Kate's practicum experience was a close partnership that reflected collaboration, creativity, and mutual exploring of content. Kate was not strong-armed into teaching content that she had little input for, nor was she given the freedom to roam as she explored the curriculum. I am not suggesting that there is a perfect partnership or that all mentor relationships should be exact to Kate's experience, but I think there is some wisdom being modeled in this partnership that can lead to beneficial growth and outcomes for student teachers and mentors.

To conclude this discussion of learning partnerships, which also has implications on how PSTs view their own partnerships and relationships with their students, I want to identify key elements of learning partnerships that impact preservice teacher experiences in practicum spaces. Although these qualities are in no particular order, it appears that having a *personal connection between a CT and a PST* sets the tone for the partnership. Susan and Kate specifically talk about their affinities for their respective mentors. Susan talked about how she was inspired by her CT in the fall and contrasted that experience with her spring placement CT. She said that her later mentor and her, "got along just fine" and indicates there is a lack of personal relationship between the two, which differs greatly from how Susan described and interacted with her initial mentor. Judy and Louis talked about their CTs positively (e.g., values and leadership…so inspiring/she just wanted to give me freedom), but they did not clearly indicate the level to which they connected personally with them. Kate is the only participant who talked about her relationship with her CT at length. It was clearly a partnership that she valued and felt empowered by.

Kate's personal connection with her CT correlates to their *mutual goal of learning and growth*. Kate's CT felt uneasy about transitioning back to the classroom, and my assumption

about this transition is that she was more or less removed from her specialist role and placed in a classroom because of staff shortages. Assuming this is true, there are many reactions to this change of circumstance. Based upon Kate's descriptions of her experience, Kate's mentor postured herself as a non-expert in teaching humanities - recognizing and leaning on Kate's expertise. Their collective disposition of "not knowing how things will turn out" provides an opportunity for both the mentor and mentee to learn and grow from one another. Although their situation prompted such a partnership, the choice to engage in a partnership of mutual respect, learning, and growth had positive impacts on Kate's confidence and competency, which she lacked coming out of her fall placement. Susan, Judy, and Louis all described their mentors positively, but there was a lack of partnership in the sense that their mentors were learning alongside them. In a way, their mentors were positioned as guard rails or experts at the ready to fill PSTs with knowledge and guidance.

As I have done previously, navigating PST-CT relationships can be a bit of a complicated dance. CTs are mentors and experienced teachers, who have developed their own styles of teaching and planning. PSTs are experiencing many things, all-at-once, and can only absorb so much in their brief practicum experiences. Consequently, PSTs may find it difficult to approach their CTs for guidance, wisdom, and critical reflections on practice. For more effective learning partnerships between CTs and PSTs, *communication* and *collaboration* are two more qualities that are closely tied together. Communication is somewhat taken for granted within student teaching experiences. As a novice teacher educator, I assumed that many candidates, who come in with a variety of work and life experiences, have communication skills - and they do for the most part. The point I wish to make about communication between PSTs and CTs is the deliberate function of asking questions toward growth and understanding. I have worked with CTs who are wonderful in asking these types of questions (What did you notice about this lesson? Do you think that students achieved the learning target for the day? What could have been done better?), and they do so in a way that is intentional and thought-provoking. On the

other hand, it is important for student teachers to also communicate their curiosities and ideas in these practicum spaces. For many student teachers I have worked with, it is sometimes intimidating and daunting to focus on particular aspects of their teaching experiences. I liken it to going to Disney World for the first time. Regardless of being an adult or a child, I can only imagine the moment of approaching the theme park and trying to take in all the sights, sounds, and smells all at once. Perhaps the most daunting part of this experience is choosing where to go first and what resources we consult to make that choice. We could have planned in advance and prepared what attractions we wanted to see and in what order would be most efficient. On the other hand, we could have a general idea of what we want to do, but we are also aware of the long waiting lines for certain attractions at the park. Consequently, we could choose to adapt to the busyness of the park on the specific day we are going. In any case, if we are lucky, we would have a seasoned traveler with us to help guide us through the enormity (calamity) that is Disney World. Student teaching can be similar in that student teachers have an idea of what they can expect and plan in advance and how they can adapt to the space. As a teacher educator, I encourage student teachers to go into their practicum school sites before they begin their placements to get a tour of the building, meet their CTs and other teachers, and be introduced to their students. This can help alleviate anxieties and overwhelmed feelings, but it does not remove all barriers to effectively communicate and collaborate with their CTs. Many times, PSTs are unsure of what kinds of questions or conversations they can have with their mentors, which is greatly influenced by the personable aspects of these partnerships between PSTs and CTs.

C*ollaboration* between PSTs and CTs can be complicated and influenced by a variety of factors. It is not my intention identify and sift through these possibilities, but I do want to emphasize the there is a close connection between *communication* and *collaboration*. Judy's experience with her CT was inspiring for Judy because of their shared passion for equity, diversity, and inclusion. From the beginning, social justice was a premiere value for Judy, so it was important for her to see how social justice-oriented teaching actually happens in the

classroom. Although she had an affinity for her CT, Judy expressed a sense of let-down from her spring practicum experience. She said that it was difficult to be a student teacher in her mentor's classroom space because of many overlapping tensions. Judy does talk about moments of collaboration between her and her CT. They collaborated on a unit focused on *Green Card Youth Voices,* where students had conversations and interacted with immigrant narratives written/spoken by students similar in age to them. However, Judy also talked about her CT's disposition among her colleagues saying,

> My CT felt a little bit like she was on an island in terms of planning. Planning things that she was passionate about and actually wanting to do within the classroom. I think everyone in the school to a certain extent was like, in survival mode. It was like, 'Okay, you want to do this big and new thing. That's too overwhelming. (Judy, personal communication, July 6, 2022)

Even though Judy cited an affinity for her mentor and moments where they collaborated, the school culture did not facilitate an environment for more meaningful collaboration and communication (e.g., everyone in the school was in survival mode). Judy and her mentor communicated and collaborated, but it also is apparent that these collaborative efforts were not consistent and some of Judy's initiatives may not have come to fruition (e.g., inquiry-based projects) because of her mentor's preference toward her own passions and interests and whether these "big and new things" created more complications than they were worth.

On the other hand, Kate's experience, which was also in Little Lake Middle School, was filled with *communication* and *collaboration* with her CT. Granted, the circumstances of their partnership required Kate's CT to engage in partnership more earnestly with Kate (e.g., survival mode), but in addition to collaboration Kate was given *freedom to explore* and implement her own ideas into the curriculum. Kate reflected on her experience at Little Lake saying,

> We came to the classroom every day, like, not knowing how things would go and we were like, 'It's okay to just try to get through the day sometimes. It doesn't have to be perfect.' We worked, we planned a lot together for curriculum, but she also let me do a lot of stuff on my own, which was really, really awesome. (Kate, personal communication, June 24, 2022)

This was a stark contrast to her fall placement, and Kate became more confident in her planning and teaching capacities throughout the spring placement. After her fall placement concluded, Kate reflected that the two areas that she felt least confident in were planning and leading whole class lessons. Kate had a *personal connection*, a *mutual goal of learning and growth, communication*, consistent *collaboration* with her CT, and the *freedom to create* and develop her own lessons/ideas. Consequently, Kate was able to grow in the areas that she felt least confident coming into her full-time student teaching semester.

Louis also had opportunities to *explore and create* within his full-time practicum semester. Although he does not specifically talk about the impact of such freedom on his confidence and growth, having freedom to explore and create within that practicum space allowed Louis to engage with his own preference of learning - practicing the theory and constantly testing and retesting.

PST and CT partnerships are complex relationships that are unpredictable and do not always lead to mutually beneficial outcomes. However, I believe that these relationships can in fact be mutually beneficial partnerships if PSTs and CTs can embrace these qualities of learning partnerships (in no particular order of significance): *personal connection*, *mutual goal of growth and learning, communication, collaboration*, and *freedom to explore and create*. I acknowledge that relationships between mentors and their student teachers can be complicated and very particular to the personalities and dispositions within these relationships. Through the accounts of these participants, it is clear that the school culture/environment has great

implications on their capacity to work together as partners. I also acknowledge that there are assumed and communicated expectations about what the roles of student teachers and mentors ought to be. These place-based factors (practicum site and university site) will be discussed more in-depth in the next chapter.

Building on the learning partnerships that exist or exist to less of an extent, it is important to consider how these learning partnerships impact or are reflected in the relationships that preservice teachers form with their students. These impacts can be seen through how preservice teachers talk about their roles as teachers. In doing so, it is interesting to what extent these participants explicitly talk about the roles of students in connection with their roles as teachers.

The connection between learning partnerships (PSTs and CTs) with the relationships and roles between teachers and students is not concrete, at least in the sense that there is no explicit example of a participant who has a limited partnership with their mentor and therefore does not make room for partnerships with students. Such an analysis may not be productive anyway given the complexity of each participant's placement and dispositions, as well as the dispositions of their mentors and students. What can be useful to think about is: How do participants' ideas about teaching? How do their roles as teachers map onto the roles of their students? What are participants communicating, either intentionally or unintentionally, to their students through these sometimes-assumptive roles?

Judy shared about a fundamental shift in her thinking in regard to her role in the classroom. As a young student, Judy was not interested nor felt she needed to have close relationships with her teachers. She described herself as a very curious learner, but it is clear that her focus, as a student, was on satisfying her curiosity - as opposed to her social or emotional needs which may have been satisfied through other social spheres (e.g., home, family, peer groups, extra-curricular activities). To Judy, the classroom was a distinct place of learning

and learning to be more independent. Shifting to “the other side of the desk”, Judy has reflected on the inequalities in education, her own privileges, and roles of teachers in the classroom. Consequently, Judy, as a teacher, wants to assume more responsibility in “setting the tone” of the classroom. What is of interest in this idea is her explicit role as the adult in the room (i.e., setting the tone for the class). Although she also notes that her role entails identifying “the stakeholders” in a classroom community and finding ways to bring them in, the role of students in her classroom is much less explicit. The implied role, whether intentional or not, is that students need an adult role model. If students are in the care of a responsible adult who wants to include them as an active participant in the classroom, students should oblige and trust that caring adult.

Susan, like Judy, has reflected on her own experiences and privileges to better understand how inequalities exist throughout educational institutions. This reflective process is most apparent when she talks about her fall practicum experience at Stone Prairie Middle School, where there is diverse representation of students (racial, socioeconomics, neurodiversity, gender/sex identity). It is at Stone Prairie where Susan has a formative moment in articulating her role as a teacher. She described a physical fight that broke out between two of her students. Instinctively, she physically intervened, which led to a student making physical contact with her - knocking off her face mask in the process. Susan was less concerned about her safety and more concerned about the safety of students, especially the two students fighting each other. From that moment, Susan reflected on how she felt “obligated” to create a “communal, safe environment where kids can open up…and feel safe” (Susan, personal communication, December 6, 2021)

Another noteworthy result of Susan’s ideas about her role as a teacher relates to her view of students. Susan holds high expectations for students and sometimes referred to her students as adults (i.e., “you should act like an adult”). She noted that students would brush off this

statement with a laugh and retorted “we’re not adults.” I will not assume or imply what Susan believes an adult should be or whether 12-year-olds are or are not considered adults. What I am curious about is whether these middle school students are capable of certain adult behaviors that would reinforce Susan’s desire to maintain a safe and open classroom. When thinking back to this particular placement, Susan constantly reflected on the challenges of addressing diverse student needs in her classroom. There is no doubt that students need a safe and open classroom alongside caring adults. However, Susan and Judy see their role as a teacher involving responsibility and obligation to establish a classroom community. Although they both are very focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, they talk about their explicit roles as teachers but not enough about what students are doing or are capable of doing to contribute to building positive, safe, and open classroom communities. They both wish to create safe spaces where they can respond effectively to students, but to what degree and in what ways are students actively contributing to these classroom spaces? In what ways can this safe space be co-constructed? In what ways can 12-year-olds with special and high needs contribute and take ownership of co-constructing a safe, community space? Without these explicit roles of students, there is an unintentional shift of power and advocacy away from students. Even though the role of a teacher is positively motivated (e.g., to keep students safe), students do not have an active role, and therefore lack power, in co-constructing spaces that meet their specific needs. This is significant given the participants’ earlier commitments and values (social justice, equity, inclusion, collaboration, and building positive learning communities).

Despite his self-described practicality, Louis is among the most idealistic of participants. Louis talks about his perceptions of teaching through bold, almost whimsical, imagination (“learning should be an adventure, something to be taken up”). He has had quite a journey from a disenfranchised, high school student to a plucky preservice teacher. Louis’ enthusiasm and gentle nature certainly have helped him to relate to students, communicating a genuine interest in meaningfully including them in the classroom. During our second interview session, he

described learning with his students as a metaphorical hike, journeying alongside students but providing different paths to get to the same end point - allowing them to experience their own paths but achieving the same goals. He also used the imagery of a campfire to illustrate the communal and profound aspects of discussion and collaboration that he would like to see in his own classroom. It is evident that Louis favors collaborative learning environments. He sees the value in the books and literature that he has come to love, and he wants to share that love of learning with his students in very explicit ways. This desire is influenced by his own experiences with teachers who did not provide such an explicit connection between the literature he was given to read earlier in his schooling career and the lived experiences of the modern world. Simply, no one had taken the time to share the potentially meaningful outcomes of reading classic literature adequately and honestly in English language arts classrooms. Louis takes this realization further by incorporating the texts and contexts that are relevant to students.

I was surprised to hear that Louis struggled in the beginning of his full-time placement. His struggles were not related to his teaching capabilities or his earnest interest in students' lives. His struggles were rooted in a briefly altered perception of what teaching ought to be, which consequently led him to take on a teaching identity that was contrary to ways he had previously viewed and talked about teaching. Part of this temporary shift in teaching perception relates to being in a high school setting. He said, "I just felt like there was a higher demand…that I should be this more professional, organized, more clinical kind of person. [That was] my first impression of being in the space" (Louis, personal communication, June 13, 2022). For Louis, being a high school teacher carried with it a sense of "higher demand" or some sort of rigor that was not present or expected in his middle school placement. I can appreciate this perception, and I think it is worth sitting with it for a moment.

Louis struggled in the beginning of his full-time placement for a variety of reasons, reasons that are fairly typical for transitioning from part-time teaching practicum (more

responsibility, increased workload, more hours spent in the classroom, and etc.), but Louis cited that he was influenced to shift his perception of teaching because of his CT's style of teaching and students' responses to Louis' attempts to "rock the boat." Louis' CT structured her teaching through independent work time. She did engage in instruction, but Louis specifically seemed impacted by his mentor's predominant use of independent work time in the classroom (giving students tasks and time to complete tasks), which is contrary to Louis' vision of his own classroom as a collaborative space. The other observation he made related to the attitudes of his students. When he did attempt to do something unorthodox, out-of-the-ordinary ("rocking the boat"), student reactions were often less than enthusiastic. I can imagine that Louis was disappointed that students would rather engage with rote, independent work, which runs contrary to Louis' belief in building relationships and community with students. I am curious as to what degree this moment that Louis described is an example of how school communicates dominant, status quo expectations. Students do not learn compliance in this way. They learn it because school teaches them how to be compliant. By high school, many students are fairly compliant and can manage the high school space because they have an idea of what behaviors will get them what they want, whether it be success or intentional failure to avoid responsibility. Teachers are part of this system, and, ironically, Louis attempts to be more professional by "acting" in a certain way that would be perceived as professional and fulfills students' expectations of their teachers. This is ironic because the very behavior that Louis believes leads to professional demeanor is the very behavior that both feeds the system of compliance for students (and teachers) and does not foster any benefit for authentic learning in the classroom. This perception is not surprising given the "trust me" attitude of teachers during his secondary experiences. I find it increasingly interesting that learning and education are somehow compared to or likened to factory structures, means of production, and bottom lines. Louis' initial pursuit of professionalism led to reifying the means of production and a focus on production, as opposed to learning and critical thinking.

Louis also cited other issues that were causes for concern early in the semester (e.g., threats of violence), which disrupted his interactions with students as well as created a more tense atmosphere in which to try and develop positive relationships with students. Putting together the school environment and the nuances of transitioning to a very different classroom community, Louis perceived his role, as a teacher, as achieving efficiency and the assumed role of students was that they expected that efficiency to come from their teachers and were compliant with activities that support a rote method of learning (trust me and you will learn). Eventually, Louis built relationships with students after the early disruptions ebbed and allowed him the time he needed to get to know them, to be comfortable in the classroom. It was not until Louis started building these relationships and attending to the humanity of students through these early school "crises" that he realized that his teaching was not student-centered but privileging a systematic approach to teaching and learning, which, not surprisingly, he described as incompatible with his values.

As a brief aside, I do wish to acknowledge respect for Louis' mentor. I was not able to observe this classroom space, nor am I familiar with the teaching style and pedagogy of Louis' mentor. I am grateful that she allowed Louis the freedom to explore his own teaching style and philosophy, while providing critical and productive feedback/guidance. It is not my intention to suggest, in any way, that Louis' mentor is not an effective teacher. I believe that her approach reflects her style and attends to the needs of her students in the school in which she teaches. My analysis of Louis' brief shift in his role as a teacher lies solely with his perspective and his development. The systematic aspect of my analysis is not a direct critique of Independence High School or its teachers. Although there are implications for such an analysis on school systems, my focus is how Louis grappled with what he perceived to be a machine-like system. What also contributes to this systematic view is the continual application of COVID mitigation and recovery policies.

To be fair, I did not explicitly ask participants about what students can or should do to contribute within classroom spaces. It is not my intention to fabricate a deficit-mindedness among these participants or any preservice teacher who implies students' roles in the classroom through their conceptions of teachers' roles. If that were the case, I, undoubtedly, would have to put myself on trial. So, why talk about student roles as part of this analysis if it was not a specific topic during the interview process?

Incorporating student roles into this discussion is a result of my iterative interpretation process. I did not all of a sudden arrive at a moment thinking, "I should have asked about what students are doing in these participants' classroom," or "I completely forgot to include student roles in that part of the process." Students are not an afterthought or a convenient way to move my work forward. Through an iterative process of analyzing and coding each interview from each participant, multiple times, I noticed moments of silence, or perhaps more appropriately they can be referred to as the unspoken - aspects of our articulations that are assumed or purposely hidden. I began to understand that there are unspoken elements in participants' articulations about what they are doing, and would like to do, in their classrooms. Whether they are providing a safe space, teaching with energy, crafting creative lessons that relevantly engage students' assets and backgrounds, or finding ways to build trust through relationships with students (or all of the above), it is much clearer for these participants as to what they, as teachers, are doing to achieve these objectives. What is not as clear is how students are involved in these processes.

I am not certain if participants would have answered more explicitly about students' roles in their classroom if pressed to do so. However, all of the participants talked about building relationships with students as a highlight of their practicum experiences. Anna recalled a student with whom she built relationships through better understanding the student's preferred pronouns. Louis talked about not being able to fully engage academically with

students until he was able to at least remember their names. Susan loved her middle school placement and sought to create a safe environment that honored the diversity and values of her students. Judy, who did not see much value in building relationships with teachers as a middle/high school student, developed a greater appreciation for the power and joy of connecting more personally with students, which has influenced her to build learning communities that recognize and honor the humanity of students. Nancy is driven by her commitment to content competence, and her practicum experiences informed how to bridge her own commitments and values to the social and intellectual needs of students in relevant and practical ways. Kate relished opportunities to know more about her students and made herself available to connect personally with students to address their needs before expecting them to perform academically in the classroom. Needless to say, these participants care about students. There is no question as to the high value they place on students and the relationships they form with them.

What I am curious about is the connection between the roles of teachers and the roles of students. For example, if teachers are committed to being culturally responsive educators and building an environment that students are always welcome to contribute in a safe, trusting learning community, then the teacher must know their students' interests, abilities, and capacities. The teacher takes this knowledge of students and develops "relevant" curriculum and materials to address those interests, abilities, and capacities of students. The teacher delivers the content to students. However, what are the students doing or what is their role in this hypothetical learning community? The teacher's role is doing something for students (learning about them, teaching them, keeping them engaged and safe). To put it another way, students' roles are to interact with the teacher, answer the teacher's questions, and complete classroom activities. Students are compliant members of a learning community who see themselves in the materials they are learning about. What is not happening, at least not in a clear or explicit way, is how students are actually part of the learning community. How are students actively creating

curriculum that reflects their cultural and linguistic diversity in connection with opportunities to learn about others and the critical awareness to talk about them together? Furthermore, the role of the teacher needs to be assessed in relation to what students are or are not doing. If students are compliant members of a learning community (i.e., completing tasks and answering questions prompted by the teacher) is the teacher's objective to cultivate an environment based on compliance? I would certainly hope that the response to such a reflexive question would be a resounding, "No!" Hopefully this response would lead to reimagining the relationship between the roles of the teacher and the roles of their students. This is not easy work, and it is an evolving process, but what happens when teachers start explicitly articulating what students are actively doing in the classroom in connection with their roles as teachers?

As I conclude this section of interpretation, I want to move to how these participants are talking about criticality and intellectualism. Similar to their ideas around learning partnerships, roles of teachers, and roles of students, participants imagine their teaching and classroom communities in terms of what they hope students will be able to do beyond obtaining skills. The way they talk about these outcomes for students can be analyzed through criticality and intellectualism. Before looking at the analysis of participant's hopeful outcomes for their students and classrooms, it is important to define criticality and intellectualism within the theoretical framework that has been previously established and continues to bear on the analysis of these participants' interviews.

Muhammad (2020) builds on the foundation of culturally relevant pedagogy through her Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy framework with the added consideration of how literacy and excellence in the histories of Black Americans can be both honored and be a model for excellence and academic freedom in today's classrooms. One element of this framework that helps to shape my theoretical framing and language around teaching is criticality. "Criticality is the capacity to read, write, and think in ways of understanding power, privilege, social justice,

and oppression, particularly for populations who have been historically marginalized in the world" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 120). At face value, criticality covers a lot of ground. Muhammad (2020) describes criticality in its modes of operation (read, write, think) across various structures and contexts (power, privilege, social justice, and oppression) for a particular group of people (historically marginalized populations). If such an understanding of criticality covers so much ideological territory, how can teachers engage with criticality? Muhammad (2020) breaks down criticality into practical, manageable expectations/actions.

- Criticality calls for teachers and students to understand the ideologies and perspectives of marginalized communities and their ways of knowing and experiencing the world.
- Criticality helps students assume responsibility for the ways in which they process information - to avoid being passive consumers of knowledge and information.
- Criticality helps students read the world with a critical eye, refusing to accept unexamined information as factual or true. (Muhammad, 2020, p. 122)

Muhammad's conception of criticality is a helpful tool for analysis of preservice teachers' motivations and purposes in their teaching practices. Examining how preservice teachers think about and imagine criticality in their classrooms provides insight into how they view their roles, the roles of their students, their values as social justice/anti-racist educators, and how they construct meaningful, humanizing curriculum with their students.

Muhammad (2020) identifies intellect/intellectualism as one of the most important components of her framework. I am sure that all of the elements of her framework (criticality, intellect, skills, and identity) inherently work together, but what I have found to be interesting is the relationship between criticality and intellect. She defines intellect as "what we learn or understand about various topics, concepts, and paradigms. It is the understanding, enhancement, and exercising of mental power and capacities that allow one to better

understand and critique the world. Therefore, intelligence is connected to action" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 104). If criticality comprises the work of uncovering and identifying systems of oppression, then intellect is the action that attends to and finds solutions to further expose, disrupt, and/or dismantle these oppressive systems. It seems reasonable to say that criticality and intellect require the other in order to facilitate educational endeavors that empower students, and teachers, with language, tools, cooperative enterprise, and means to express their critical reading of the world. This is similar to Freire's vision of the relationship between the oppressed and oppressor. The oppressor needs the oppressed to become more aware of their power and privilege, while the oppressed need the oppressor as a model of their limits - that is they need to be reminded of how power and privilege can quickly turn the oppressed into the oppressor. For Freire, the oppressed and the oppressor need the other in order to move away from oppression and towards real emancipation. To summarize, intellectualism is the leveraging of skills, not the skills themselves, to move toward better understandings of the world and find solutions to issues that hinder joy and justice to exist for all people, especially for those who have been historically marginalized and who continue to be seen as less than human. Criticality and intellectualism work best when they are packaged together. Criticality is being able to identify issues. Intellectualism is the set of actions that find solutions to those issues.

So, how do participants talk about criticality and intellectualism? Before deciding to become a teacher, Anna worked in a variety of jobs in the pharmaceutical industry. Throughout her interviews, she talked about the competitive nature of the private sector, which definitely created tension for Anna as to whether she wanted to continue working in that environment. Because of her work experience, Anna drew connections to how school communicates to students that being competitive is desirable, which contradicts with culturally responsive efforts to be collaborative and learn collectively. For Anna, her goal is to ensure that she does not perpetuate competitiveness among her students. She personally reflected on her journey to college to access more social and financial mobility saying,

> I was one of those gifted and talented students growing up, and it has taken a lot to try to unlearn that. What did I really do? Apart from having my degree, and I went to a decent school. But do I feel like I know any more than anyone else? No. In fact, I feel like I know less, because I feel like I got rushed through school to try to get as much AP credits as possible. So, I didn't have to pay as much for college, and I could graduate early, which I did. I did all that. But it wasn't worth it. (Anna, personal communication, June 9, 2022)

In our first interview session, Anna drew on several cases of confronting racism and elitism, observing it being imposed on others. She felt a deep resentment that people of color and immigrants/refugees were dehumanized for no other reason than their perceived differences and potential for deviance. She carries this experience with her in her practicum experiences.

It is clear that Anna recognizes inequities and injustice in and outside of school. She understands that there are ways that our society is not accommodating to people with particular and special needs. Anna further demonstrates her capacity for criticality when she modified a project for a student who was completely disinterested in the aim of the project (how does climate change affect wildlife?). Anna recollected that,

> I was like, 'Well, I know for a fact that this student isn't going to want to do this because he really doesn't care about wildlife.' So instead, I was like, 'Okay, well, how does climate change affect this group of people?' Because I want him to be able to make the connection that climate change affects people who are in lower socioeconomic statuses, people who are typically marginalized, it makes them worse than people who are better off/not marginalized, ex cetera. (Anna, personal communication, June 9, 2022)

Anna recognized that there was an opportunity for this student to engage in critical work that would be more appealing to his interests without sacrificing the critical nature of the project (how climate change impacts our world). She could have modified the project to remove the criticality piece and focus entirely on the topic of climate change itself (e.g., identifying different

types of climate change). However, Anna understood the importance of engaging with climate change's global impact, but she needed to make that global impact smaller and more particular to this student. Anna did not share about how this project turned out for this student, but I would presume that it was effective because she committed to implement this type of critical project in her own classroom for all students, as opposed to a modified version for a select few.

Of all the participants, Judy consistently talked about social justice and developed her consciousness around how social justice is implemented, as well as ways that it can be better. Her commitment to social justice is unquestionable, but a discouraging aspect of her experience relates to the opportunities she had to implement her values in the classroom. During her fall and spring placements, it seemed that there were limitations that prevented her from experimenting with her practice and pedagogy. Her fall placement in a sheltered ESL classroom gave her opportunities to think about the benefits and limitations of sheltered classrooms for newcomers and emergent English language learners. In the spring, Judy was paired with a social justice-oriented mentor and had opportunities to examine how school policies - even well-intentioned - can negatively impact the students that the policies are trying to benefit (removing punitive policy for tardiness). In both experiences, Judy continued to reflect through the lens of her social justice values. Her disposition as a learner and her educational experiences demonstrate Judy's capacity for critical thinking, examining her environments, and imagining how to implement change. Much of Judy's experiences with criticality related to her own experiences and reading of the world. She did not seem to have quality opportunities to engage with students in criticality and intellectualism.

During her fall placement, Judy admitted that she felt a little disconnected from her teaching methods course because she had such a unique experience that the content of her course could not be addressed appropriately. Although she did find ways to modify some of the content and materials from the methods course, Judy was left to further engage in thought

experiments about how social justice could be better realized in her practicum space. Judy appreciated her full-time experience because she was placed with a mentor who shared Judy's social justice commitment and values. However, Judy felt it was difficult to engage with her mentor at times because of her CT's disposition (e.g., passionate self-starter) and isolation from the rest of the faculty. Judy reflected that she did not get many opportunities to put her ideas into practice. However, Judy's capacity for reflection enabled her to continue imagining what a social justice-oriented classroom would be in practice. She highlighted in a reflection about what she hopes to implement in her own classroom.

> One of which is having the ability to have circles in classrooms in my classroom. So, in my student teaching last semester, we started teaching pretty exclusively in our circle, and it was really cool to see students interact with each other that way…I think including the student voice is a non-negotiable for me. So, checking in with students about how things are going, what they want to do next, what questions they have, and incorporating them in decision-making processes when it comes to curriculum and instructional practices…Finding my people in a school space to collaborate with will be really important. And then I think the last piece when it comes to culturally sustaining pedagogy is to develop a practice of sustaining communication with parents and family members in a way that's authentic and not just about potential issues or points for growth in the classroom but also what their goals are for students and what's going well. (Judy, personal communication, July 6, 2022)

Susan was inspired to become a teacher because of the model of her high school teachers. These early mentors exemplified invested, caring, and passionate educators for Susan. Like Judy, Susan was attracted to the social justice focus of the secondary program at Three Lakes University, and her experiences reflected her earnest interest in being an anti-racist, culturally responsive educator. Her fall placement widened her perspective on student needs. It

was not until she worked with students at Stone Prairie that she reflected on students requiring IEPs or language learning curriculum and services because she had never experienced such needs, nor was she closely associated with anyone who would have required additional education services. Instead of being intimidated and overwhelmed by this realization, Susan took full strides to engage with students and learn more about how to accommodate them and modify materials to meet their needs. She relished the diversity and representation of Stone Prairie, as well as the mentorship of her CT.

Even though her full-time practicum presented challenges, Susan found an opportunity to create an extensive lesson that focused on anti-racist children's books. She asked her high school students to engage with these texts (reading them aloud to one another), which offered a variety of representations and pathways to analyze issues of inequity, oppression, and exclusion. Susan took advantage of an opportunity to put into practice the critical mindedness she was developing through a lesson that invited students to participate in these conversations. As a result of the lesson, one of Susan's students asked for a list of the anti-racist books so she could begin purchasing the books for her local community center.

Anna, Judy, and Susan represent the varying degrees to which preservice teachers tend to engage with criticality (i.e., recognizing and actively discussing power, privilege, social justice, and oppression). It is clear that all three participants value social justice and recognize that there are complex, intersecting systems of oppression. What varies is their capacity or opportunities to bring these ideas into the class to share with their students.

- Judy has a passion for social justice, but she did not have many opportunities to meaningfully engage with how social justice can be an active collaboration with students in her own classroom.

- Anna had an opportunity to modify a project to better match the interests of a student, leading her to more seriously consider how to present this type of social justice-oriented project to all students.
- Susan created her own lesson and compiled materials to introduce her students to conversations around anti-racism and oppression, which inspired a student to purchase some of those books for her local community center.

What is important to note is that criticality is present among these participants. Whether they have recognized through their own experiences how inequity, oppression, and exclusion operate, or they seek to engage with others to identify systems of inequity, oppression, and exclusion, there is a range of criticality among these participants. Whether preservice teachers are exploring social justice or are social-justice warriors, the fact that these participants recognize and talk about the presence of inequity, oppression, and exclusion is encouraging. What these participants, and perhaps more broadly for preservice teachers, do not always consider or have opportunities to do alongside criticality is intellectualism. They talk about inequity, oppression, and exclusion (criticality), but what is being done to address it or move beyond it (intellectualism)?

Anna is considering ways to broaden her modified project to all students (climate change and its impacts on certain social/racial groups), but what ways can students turn their learning and understanding from this project to action? How can students not only bring attention to climate change's impact on marginalized groups but also work toward solutions? Judy is passionate about social justice and wants to invite students to discuss and analyze how systems of oppression have existed throughout history. How can students move their understandings of oppressive structures toward exposing, disrupting, and/or dismantling oppressive structures within their own social, cultural, and political communities? Susan successfully implemented a lesson through which students engaged with anti-racist texts to facilitate conversations about

freedom, social justice, and oppression. The lesson inspired a student to purchase these books for a local community center. What are other ways that students can provide access to materials that expose oppressive structures in an effort to disrupt and dismantle dominant ideologies that prevent social justice, equity, and inclusion?

Each participant's understanding of criticality and intellectualism is emerging at this stage of their development. They need opportunities to further explore and test how criticality and intellectualism can exist in their classrooms, as well as how these aspects of their work impact the growth and learning of their students.

Conclusion

When I graduated from my teacher preparation program, I felt confident that I had the skills and knowledge to work with high school students. To inspire them in ways that I did not experience as a youth. To share my knowledge of literature and writing with students. To serve a community in a way that felt professionally and personally meaningful. I imagine many preservice teachers have similar dispositions, expectations, and hopes for the future as I did. Over time and with experience came the still-evolving understanding that teaching is less about who I am as a teacher and more about what students need me to be. Some students were already independent and wanted to acquire content and skills. Other students were completely disinterested in English language arts, but they needed guidance to find their passion and see their worth. Still, others clamored for attention and affirmation – to be seen, to be acknowledged. Every student I had the privilege of teaching needed different things. They needed me to be a mentor, coach, teacher, cheerleader, co-conspirator, empathizer – a caring adult. Over time and with experience, I learned how to be those things in a variety of ways, but I never could learn how to do these things without partnering with my students. Unfortunately, it took me a long time – too long – to understand that I am not teaching *for* students. I am not

teaching *for* a school. I am not teaching even *for* myself. My best teaching is when I see students as learning partners in a learning community that is built on trust. I teach *with* students.

As a teacher educator, I do not expect preservice teachers to be fully equipped to work with students by the end of the programs. What I do hope preservice teachers have at their disposal as they transition to professional teaching are mindsets, tools, and passions to imagine their classrooms beyond what is typical or "normal." I hope that they see their students as more than empty vessels awaiting fulfillment. I hope that they do not see their role as teachers as immutable, even if they hold deep-seated and well-intentioned social justice values. Mostly, I hope preservice teachers come to these realizations more quickly than through my experiences.

Examining the dispositions, expectations, and imagined outcomes of my participant partners reveals important aspects of teacher education/preparation. Examining *dispositions* provides insight into what values, experiences, and ideals have led these participants to seek out teaching and learning within a social-justice oriented program. It is clear that these participants value their own experiences as learners and students, which further informs their realization that not all students have these experiences or privileges. Whether spending a year serving in an urban teaching experience program or coming right out of undergraduate education, these participants are eager to learn what "good teaching" is, but more importantly they are carrying with them their dispositions (values, perspectives, experiences, and ideals). From these values, participants develop their *expectations* of how to be "good" teachers. Whether participants focused mostly on content competence or incorporating social justice into their classrooms, they desired practical ways to approach teaching. Participants expected that they would learn how to teach and see what "good teaching" looks like. It is through these expectations that participants grappled with tensions between theory and practice. Theory is just theory because it resides in our thinking and imagined spaces. Practice is practice because we engage in proximity with

content and people. Theory and practice mutually inform the other, but what brings them together more closely is relationships. If we do not have a connection or a reason to practice or innovate in the first place, theory and practice remain isolated from one another. Some participants had the theory but not the space or opportunity to practice and test the theories. Other participants had opportunities to practice but not opportunities to incorporate their theories and learning (or the practices were at odds with the theory they were learning). Finally, how participants imagined their teaching and future classrooms provided insight on their views of learning partnerships and the roles of teachers and students within these partnerships. All of the participants shared a fundamental value of student-centeredness. Each expressed a desire to focus on students and be culturally responsive, but the ways that they talked about their roles as teachers and their relationships with their mentors left little room for explicit, active inclusion of students. That is, the question - "what are students actively doing to contribute to learning environments and being co-constructors of learning?" – is left without an explicit answer. For most of the participants, the role of their students was not fully articulated or considered.

In the next chapter, I will review the MCRP framework and discuss how these findings affirm and push the boundaries of a pedagogical framework that supports preservice teachers in developing deeper conceptualizations of culturally responsive teaching. I will also acknowledge potential barriers and challenges to achieving this work in teacher preparation and possible ways to move forward in supporting preservice teachers.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The focus of this chapter is to discuss the implications and conclusions of the data interpretations covered in chapter 4. Although some conclusions were made through the interpretations of each thematic vignette (e.g., preservice teachers need opportunities to partner with their mentors and students to fully realize their commitments to social justice, equity, and inclusion), the purpose of this chapter is to explore these conclusions more explicitly and in terms of the research questions that set this research into motion. The following sections will review the theoretical foundations of multiliteracies/literacy and culturally responsive teaching in an effort to speak to how preservice teachers analyze problems of practice and what they draw upon to develop solutions or innovations. The next section discusses what structures or agents are assisting and/or inhibiting participants from engaging in culturally responsive practices through the lens of Deborah Brandt's conception of sponsors of literacy. My hope is to build from Brandt's theory of sponsors of literacy and think about what sponsors of pedagogy could offer for critically examining structures and/or agents that contribute to and limit the pedagogical development of preservice teachers. To conclude the chapter, I wish to accomplish two objectives. First, I wish to spend some time thinking about the limitations and barriers of my research and work with my participant partners, as well as imagining what implications this work has on teaching and research within teacher education. Secondly, I wish to spend time thinking through the characteristics of Multiliterate Culturally Responsive Praxis and what it potentially offers to already existing frameworks around social-justice, equity, and inclusion (i.e., culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and anti-racist pedagogy/teaching).

Multiliteracies

In order to appreciate multiliteracies more fully, it is important to understand and reflect upon long-standing, dominant views of literacy. Traditionally, reading and literacy have often been thought to be interchangeable. Being able to read and doing the act of reading signals proficiency in schools. A student who is reading independently, and does it consistently, reflects a particular kind of student – a kind of student that most teachers "don't have to worry about" (O'Brien, Stewart, & Beach, 2008). Therefore, the focus of teacher attention falls on *struggling readers*. These students, like their "skilled" peers, are a particular kind of student. However, the *struggling reader* is a kind of student that teachers *have* to worry about. Students who *struggle* with reading typically do not perform well on standardized tests and are placed in interventionist environments in an effort to "catch them up" with their *proficient* peers. Reading is a school performance. There are routines, patterns, and expectations to be "good readers." At the elementary level, reading skills and strategies that are taught to young children often involve phrases such as, "what good readers do." At the high school level, certain words and phrases – such as basic, proficient, and advanced/honors – carry certain negative connotations though they are intended to encourage students to perform at improved academic levels.

In the final interview session with participants, I asked them what they thought it meant to be literate or, to put it in a way that is more specific to their expertise, what does it mean to be literate in their content area. My goal with the question was not to define literacy. I was more curious about what their ideas about literacy were and to what extent did they think about literacy existing in their content spaces. Most participants admitted that their understanding of literacy was fairly superficial (i.e., reading and writing). Others expressed ideas about access through literacy. That is, students can access resources and deeper learning by acquiring literacy

skills. Without a basic understanding of reading and writing, participants expressed their ideas about how difficult it would be to access more profound and critical aspects of their respective content. Louis talked about access through literacy by talking about modality. For him, he saw a way for students to utilize and even attain greater proficiency in reading and writing skills through social media and technology-based forms of communication (e.g., Twitter, TikTok, Instagram). Through these mediums, students are more familiar with the "language and cultures" of the platform, therefore, granting access to higher order reading and writing skills, such as critical analysis and identifying and refuting claims through evidence. This topic, alone, would be a fascinating research endeavor, but it is outside of the scope of this current work. My point is that participants are not thinking about literacy in terms of meaning-making processes, at least not fully. They tend to think about literacy in terms of skills and access. I acknowledge the need to have reading and writing skills, but where I diverge from my participant partners is further exploring literacy as a human reckoning of the world.

No matter the intentions or techniques, teaching within a narrow view of literacy can stifle any attempt to meaningfully engage with students. At best, teachers may incorporate some interesting classroom activities but at the expense of responsive, situated learning. In order to widen the literacy lens, it is useful to think about Freire's conception of emancipatory literacy, within which it is crucial to understand the role of dialectical relationships in the process of liberatory education. Understanding how we are situated within constructed social, cultural, and political contexts (dialectics) more deeply allows us to think about our relation to others. Through these relationships with others, we are able to think about how issues of power, privilege, and oppression and distributed and exist among us. From this dialectic reflection, Freire hopes that we move into dialogic spaces, humanizing one another in an effort to be heard,

felt, and seen in a world that may not reflect some and tends to privilege others. It is through this dialectic-to-dialogic process that literacy is more fully realized as a meaning-making process of how we read and rewrite the world (Freire, 1987).

I believe that this liberating partnership between students and teachers is lacking. As I discussed in the previous chapter, most participants spoke very little of how students are playing an active role in the classroom beyond engaging with lessons and community building. It is interesting that most participants were driven to become teachers because of their compassion and commitment to social justice. However, in order to achieve social justice, participants shared, mostly, about what they, as teachers, are doing or are responsible for. They are actively doing things in the classroom to be equitable and inclusive, but how are students active participants in these efforts toward equity and inclusion? Are teachers' actions truly equitable and inclusive if students are not also co-constructing these spaces and opportunities for learning alongside teachers? Then again, one exceptional challenge for such a partnership resides in teachers' capacities to see literacy as more than just skills.

If literacy is more than just reading and writing, what is a framework that moves beyond narrow views of literacy? I think multiliteracies theory more accurately portrays Freire's conception of literacy as meaning-making processes. Concretely defining multiliteracies would be contrary to its very nature of being fluid and based in contextualized processes. However, it may be useful to examine and think about multiliteracies through two intersecting dimensions. One, multiliteracies theory (MT) is a way to account for the evolving, unique system of processes and array of texts (not limited to print) that a person uses to make meaning within a specific context and purpose. Two, MT is a set of value-laden practices that tests, affirms, and refines our processes for meaning making. According to The New London Group (1996),

"multiliteracies also creates a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, *constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes*" (p. 64, emphasis added). Given the technological advancements and unprecedented access to these technological resources (e.g., Internet, virtual meeting platforms, social media, open AI such as ChatGPT), it is tempting to place more value in these texts and tools than the actual process of how people use these resources to read and rewrite the world. Creating connections with text in its various modalities (print, video, audio, etc.) is a complex process that is geared toward specific purposes and contexts. However, to maintain a focus on the processes of meaning making, it is crucial to see texts acting as tools or resources, not as *things* to be highly regarded in and of themselves.

Through my conversations with participants, it is evident that not all participants had opportunities to explore literacy in new ways, alongside their students. So, what would expanded views and experiences with literacy afford preservice teachers? One area of discussion can begin with learning partnerships, which would be supported by Freire's conception of dialectic/dialogic relationships between teachers and students. The existence and quality of learning partnerships between mentors and participants varied, ranging from a co-teaching/planning model to preservice teachers facilitating the classroom leadership of their mentors. Because participants did not go in-depth into their relationships with their mentors (i.e., What worked/did not work between them? What was the quality of mentorship? What daily conversations did they have about teaching?), it is difficult to suggest that these participants, and preservice teachers broadly, would have imagined a closer or different partnership between them and their mentors. Some may feel that their placements are a sort of "luck-of-the-draw" and can lead to quality mentor relationships. It is interesting that among participants' expectations (practicality,

relationship/community building, perceptions of teaching) that relationships with their mentors was not an explicit expectation. Perhaps, there was an implied understanding that any teacher who is a cooperating teacher wanted to do so, and that preservice teachers were guests within their mentors' spaces - such a perspective is often communicated by teacher education programs. Consequently, these participants accepted what they had and tended not to question moments that contradicted with their values.

Susan's full-time experience demonstrates the consequences of a lack of quality learning partnerships. Susan's CT encouraged her to teach a lesson that he, the CT, was, presumably, fond of and felt that students would benefit from. Despite her instincts against teaching the lesson, Susan proceeded to submit to her CT's authority as *the* teacher. Unfortunately, the lesson did not go well, to say the least, leading to Susan to return working with her fall-practicum mentor, while her spring mentor was involved in an administrative review of the lesson and its impact on students. I am curious as to how this scenario could have been different if Susan were in a learning partnership with her mentor. Learning partnerships are not necessarily equal in terms of authority. Mentors do have experiences and expertise to share with their mentees. Mentor teachers are also responsible for their obligations as classroom teachers (i.e., student academic progress), and preservice teachers must respect and act within their mentor's obligations. The point at which a learning partnership would have been helpful in Susan's situation is if Susan felt she could have had a productive conversation about why she did not value the lesson *and* that her mentor would have engaged with her in modifying the lesson after receiving feedback. Without knowing the details of what exactly triggered Susan's reservation about the lesson, I can only assume that the hesitation to engage with the lesson did not involve her unwillingness to teach and be part of the classroom. Rather, I believe that Susan's values

around social justice, equity, and anti-racist teaching did not coincide with the parameters and goals of the lesson. Although the mentor does have ultimate authority to decide what is taught and withheld in the classroom, acting as a learning partner would encourage the mentor to receive his mentee's feedback and discuss how to productively move forward.

This scenario is not about finding a solution to a past problem. This hypothetical rendering of a learning partnership is an attempt to imagine learning partnerships as an earnest part of the classroom and to build connections to how preservice teachers view learning partnerships with their students. Learning partnerships are not exclusive to and between mentor teachers and preservice teachers. Valuing students as learning partners is a crucial aspect of expanding notions of literacy. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, participants talked at length about their responsibilities and obligations as teachers (e.g., to protect, inspire, and care for students). Participants also shared about their values around social justice, equity, and inclusion. Fundamentally, all participants expressed a form of care and compassion that led them to become teachers. Amidst all of these values and talk around perceptions and obligations of teaching/teachers, it is worth noting that the role of students was not an explicit part of participants' expressions in relation to their own roles as teachers. According to participants, much of the onus around making school "feel good", building positive learning communities and academic inspiration is taken up by teachers. How are students actively contributing to building meaningful learning communities? Are students merely passive recipients of altruistic teachers? What are the implications for expanding notions around literacy if learning partnerships are not fostered explicitly between teachers and students? Before addressing these wonderings, it is important, first, to talk about what understandings and experiences around literacy preservice teachers have coming into teacher education. Having this discussion can lead to ideas about what

is reasonable and unreasonable to expect of preservice teachers by the end of their preparation program. Finally, questions around the implications of learning partnerships on views of literacy can be addressed through reimagining secondary literacy instruction in teacher education programs.

As part of their dispositions, participants shared a lot about their own literacy experiences and practices. Louis recalled from a very early age mimicking his father reading large volumes of fantasy novels after coming home from work. Kate referenced her beloved 8th grade teacher many times because this teacher inspired Kate to appreciate literature and not merely digest it in the technical ways that she could already do well. Susan was mildly satisfied with the quality of her education until she was inspired by two of her high school teachers (AP Government and US History) to put content into action (i.e., discussing the power and history of political and social demonstrations and then also participating in local/regional demonstrations) and see the value of genuine personal investment in people (e.g., teachers attending students' extra-curricular activities). For much of Judy's schooling experiences, she approached her learning and life experiences as an intellectual enterprise (e.g., critically asking who sex and gender education is for and who designs it). Although Nancy understands the value of and is engaged in collaboration with others, she personally benefits from independent learning. Anna constantly reflected on her desire to collaborate and create with others, which also relates to her initiative to create support materials for others (e.g., creating visuals to help a coworker navigate technological tools, such as PowerPoint and Excel). Each participant has a particular way of knowing, seeing, and reading the world. They all process their experiences differently through a variety of tools. What is not clear is to what extent these participants, and preservice teachers broadly, think about their literacy practices as part a larger, complex processes of meaning

making. Furthermore, to what degree do these participants, and preservice teachers broadly, think about the literacy lives of their students?

In the previous chapter while introducing *dispositions* as the first thematic vignette, I recounted a moment from a methods class that I taught involving an assignment that prompted student teachers to learn more about the literacy lives of their students - in and out of school contexts. This assignment led students to question the relevance and validity of students' lives outside of the classroom. I reiterate that the difficulty of the assignment was not a result of these students' incapacity nor their disinterest. They genuinely did not understand why they were being asked to explore the literacy of students that did not involve their reading levels and academic interests. Reflecting on this through the eyes of a preservice teacher, I can appreciate the frustration and confusion only because I, as a student teacher, was not thinking about literacy outside of the classroom either. My participant partners reflected on literacy experiences within and outside of school, but what was missing from their fuller understanding was the literacy lives of their students.

Judy gifted me with a wonderful expression that helps me to understand how to better articulate what literacy is and can be. From our first interview session she said,

> I think a big value that I've developed is…just acknowledging that students and teachers and staff have very ***full lives*** outside of the 40 minutes that I might see someone every day, and knowing that people bring that into the classroom…People bring unique experiences and identities to class, and…how can I make my content really relevant and inclusive in a way that students can understand *why* they're learning it" (Judy, personal communication, September 8, 2021, emphasis added).

People have *full lives* outside of school. It seems very simple, a sort of "duh" moment, that people are people outside of contexts and environments that we share. I experienced this as a high school teacher when my students would see me shopping for groceries - shocking how teachers also need food to survive - and they looked at me almost bewildered that I, their teacher, existed in the *real world.*

Of course, our *full lives* encompass more than our habits and locations, but this brings me to the point that teachers need an expanded view of students' literacy lives outside of school to teach and relate to students in meaningful and relevant ways. So, what is involved in establishing this expanded view of literacy for preservice teachers? First, referring to students' capacities to read the world requires terminology that gets away from traditional and narrow views of the technical side of literacy. As I have said several times to this point, the skill of reading is part and parcel of meaning-making processes, but it is necessary to move beyond these technical skills as an objective to measure whether people are intelligible and literate. It is especially paramount to evolve notions of literacy given the technological advancements that provide greater access to and expanded modes of text and communication. However, instead of thinking about this technological expansion as a separate or new literacy in itself, I think it is more helpful to think about expanding literacy toward multiliteracies. Multiliteracies accounts for the evolving, unique system of processes and array of texts (not limited to print) that a person uses to make meaning within a specific context and purpose(s). Moving toward multiliteracies also allows us to think about meaning-making processes as value-laden practices that cyclically test, affirm, and refine our processes to produce meaning. Literacy defines the boundaries of the practices and skills that indicate literacy is happening. Multiliteracies goes beyond these boundaries and fixed ideals to

more fully appreciate the dynamic processes that humanize the ways in which people read, write, and rewrite the world.

Once multiliteracies becomes part of the lexicon of teaching methodology, regardless of content area, what does this renewed notion of literacy offer to preservice teachers? I cannot begin to predict or even suggest with certainty that greater success and improved outcomes will stem from renewed notions around literacy. What multiliteracies makes more possible for preservice teachers is having the language and mindset to explicitly examine literacy in various spaces and contexts (e.g., classrooms, personal lives of students, content areas, schooling expectations). Multiliteracies gives student teachers more language to better grapple with notions of literacy that prevent them from creating meaning-filled, learning partnerships with their students, which opens the possibilities for liberatory learning opportunities in the classroom that take into account the full lives and voices of students.

Before discussing how multiliteracies can further impact imagined outcomes and growth for preservice teachers, I want to acknowledge some considerations about preservice teachers' experiences in teacher education programs. That is, based on the experiences of my participant partners, I want to explore what is reasonable to expect of preservice teachers to understand about literacy in their own lives and through their pedagogy and practice as aspiring educators. One, I believe it is reasonable to afford grace toward preservice teachers. Each of the participants placed an expectation on themselves to perform at a level that is beyond the scope of the program. From my experiences in teacher education as an instructor and supervisor, I have observed some candidates, many of whom already had classroom teaching experience, do very well and have amazing experiences in their practicum spaces. Others struggled to balance the theoretical work of the program with the tensions they experienced in practice, which led to less

than pleasant experiences - much less growth and learning. Most candidates walk away from the program feeling empowered and as equipped as they can be to lead their own classrooms. Much of their understanding of literacy/multiliteracies among all the other learning they acquire from this one-year program will be emergent. The goal of any teacher preparation program is to equip its students with the tools, resources, and practice of leading their own classrooms toward continued growth and development in their pedagogy and practice. As long as they are teachers, they are also lifetime learners. To expect them to perform otherwise is unrealistic and sets preservice teachers on a path of unattainable accomplishments.

Reflecting on former student teachers who struggled through tensions between theory and practice, I want to recognize that it is unreasonable to expect preservice teachers to find solutions for tensions in practice during their practicum work. There seems to be a go-at-it-alone attitude about teaching, especially in secondary contexts. Judy, Louis, and Anna expressed feelings of isolation during their practicum work, for varied reasons. Judy felt that her placement situation was unique, and she was unable to relate to her peers, whose placement experiences were closer to what many candidates would expect of their placement situations (i.e., core subject, inclusive classrooms). Louis, alongside his CT, felt isolated because his mentor was the only teacher who taught a particular level of ELA at the high school. Therefore, their interactions with others were limited because there was no need to collaborate with others in planning and instruction. Anna lacked confidence in approaching her mentor with questions and initiative to lead certain aspects of the classroom that she was confident and excited about. In these situations, candidates tended to push through difficulties but at what expense? Somehow, these participants felt it was incumbent upon them to solve their issues. I am sure they sought counsel from their peers, instructors, and supervisors, but they still felt distant in some way from addressing the issues

they faced. Somehow, preservice teachers are assuming that it is their responsibility to find solutions to tensions that are well beyond the scope of their program and development at the moment. For example, is it reasonable to expect preservice teachers to disrupt policies that inhibit their ability to teach in the classroom? They can certainly participate in this process, but I think it is unreasonable for them to lead these efforts without fully considering the culture, structures, and relationships that exist within the schools where they are placed. I will discuss in more detail these structural challenges and barriers that may limit preservice teachers' capacities and appetites to participate in meaningful experiences in the classroom. What I am not saying is that tensions and problems of practice just need to be avoided and ignored. In fact, these situations benefit greatly from quality learning partnerships that exist between mentors and preservice teachers. Through these partnerships, preservice teachers can engage in an experience alongside a mentor, who can advise and share experiential wisdom, as opposed to carelessly wandering without any support or guidance.

Lastly, but not exhaustively, it is reasonable to encourage preservice teachers to operate within a mindset that balances reflection and action. Although it is unreasonable to expect preservice teachers to solve their own problems of practice, action is limited without reflection. Freire (2018) emphasizes the relationship between critical analysis and action among teachers and students toward "co-intentional" education.

> Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that reality. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. (p. 69)

Freire is not favoring more action or more reflection. Much of his discourse on this topic in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* speaks at length about how leaning toward either extreme of these directions (reflection or action) does not fully lead to liberation. Teachers and students act as partners in efforts to unveil (i.e., reflect) reality and re-create (i.e., action) it. This process requires the interdependence of reflection and action - each working to inform the other. How productive would it be to re-create something we have not fully and collaboratively sought to understand? Conversely, how productive would it be to unveil reality without any meaningful pathway to address what was uncovered?

Thinking about the relationship between reflection and action can address how multiliteracies can further impact preservice teachers' outcomes and growth. I reiterate that reflection and action are interdependent. The balanced effort to reflect and act among preservice teachers is crucial to their development and confidence. It seems unreasonable to expect preservice teachers to act as disrupters of curriculum if the classrooms they are placed in do not have the support and resources (and time) to support such action. I think about Nancy wanting to be a competent math teacher, teaching math in a way that is both accessible and practical. However, she was placed with two teachers (fall and spring) who had very prescribed expectations and content, as well as limited expertise in teaching math content. Nancy had to reflect on her values within these contexts, trying to understand how to make math accessible and practical even within these limiting circumstances. It would not have been fruitful for her to resist these circumstances and fully pursue her interests in creating materials and content that she viewed as beneficial for students. Conversely, Nancy felt a bit stagnant that she could not fully apply the theoretical concepts of her methods courses with the reality of the classroom spaces she was part of. In our interviews, we did not talk about how she would have reworked a lesson

to be more culturally relevant or accessible/practical in alignment with her values. So, I wonder to what degree was Nancy able or prompted to reflect in ways that encouraged her to re-imagine the content and space of her practicum sites. And then to what degree were these re-imaginings worked into real lessons and instructional plans that can be practical in the classroom?

Expanding traditional and narrow views of literacy (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening) toward multiliteracies (i.e., multi-faceted, meaning-making processes through a variety of tools, experiences, and resources) impacts learning partnerships between mentors and preservice teachers *and* teachers and students. Through conversations with participant partners, it is evident that relationships are important. Building community is important. Quality relationships and learning communities can lead to positive outcomes in the classroom. What is still lacking from these relationships and communities is the explicit roles of students and how they are actively contributing to their learning communities. That is not to say that participants did not experience positive outcomes alongside their students. That is not to say that participants did not care about how their students were actively part of their learning communities. What is important about learning partnerships is that teachers and students can be co-constructors of learning opportunities that leverage their assets alongside new knowledge to be discovered. As co-constructors, teacher and student roles are interchangeable. That is, teachers can also be learners, while students can be teachers. However, collaborative partnership between teachers and students cannot be fully realized until teachers and students are able to think about their own literacy practices beyond technical skills to be had and put on display as proof of intelligibility. If teachers lack a framework to see their students' *full lives* beyond literacy, is it reasonable to expect teachers to see their students as active learning partners beyond asking them, "what do you think?" If students lack a framework that allows their *full lives* to be seen in the classroom, is

it reasonable for students to expect to be any more than a vessel to be filled by teachers, even the most intentional and thoughtful teachers?

Multiliteracies is not just an expansion beyond a technocratic view of meaning-making processes. Multiliteracies provides a framework, a language, to critically interrogate the skills, content, resources, and purposes that are present throughout instructional decisions, curriculum, and assessments. Multiliteracies puts the *full lives* of teachers and students together, to dialogue, to exchange, to co-construct meaningful opportunities that contribute to complex, interconnected meaning-making processes.

Toward Multiliterate Culturally Responsive Praxis

Much of the current scholarship on multiliteracies, digital literacies, and new literacy studies can trace their origins to the late 1980s through the early 2000s. During that timeframe, Gloria Ladson-Billings cultivated *culturally relevant pedagogy* through her seminal research on the practices of successful teachers of African American students. She sought practical ways to inform the practices of teachers, regardless of race, and identified three major commonalities among the commitments and beliefs of her study's participants: academic success, cultural competence, sociopolitical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 2014). These three domains allow students to find intellectual growth, celebrate their own cultures in relation to others, and take their learning beyond the classroom walls. Culturally relevant pedagogy acknowledges and celebrates the diverse/unique cultures, languages, and intellectual capacities of students through classroom practice.

From culturally relevant pedagogy, several iterations have emerged with their particular spin on Ladson-Billings' original formulation. Among these iterations, culturally responsive

teaching (Gay, 2022) focuses on the pedagogy and practice of teachers and preservice teachers. I draw influences from Geneva Gay's conception of culturally responsive teaching, Zaretta Hammond's *Ready for Rigor* framework, and Gholdy Muhammad's *Historically Responsive Literacy* framework. Hammond and Muhammad build their frameworks on the foundation of culturally responsive teaching, focusing on the practical ways that teachers and preservice teachers can meaningfully engage with culturally responsive teaching. By building communities of trust and care that take into account cross-cultural knowledge and communication (Gay, 2022), Hammond and Muhammad both advocate for:

1. Deep relational partnerships between students and teachers that go beyond superficial notions of difference and diversity.
2. Having high expectations for students and providing them with skills and opportunities to leverage their assets and knowledge in pursuit of new knowledge production and discovery.
3. Examining and having productive conversations around issues of power, privilege, social justice, and oppression.

In a previous chapter, I discussed the need to move beyond traditional, narrow views of literacy toward conceptualizations of literacy as multi-faceted, dynamic meaning-making processes. Multiliteracies theory (MT) is a way to account for the evolving, unique system of processes and array of texts (not limited to print) that a person uses to make meaning within a specific context and purpose. Multiliteracies theory sees literacies as value-laden practices that test, affirm, and refine processes for meaning making. I wish to be as explicit as possible as to why multiliteracies theory is necessary to assist preservice teachers in developing deeper conceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching. To work toward this explicit

connection, I will review and summarize the most salient aspects of my interpretation of working with my participant partners. Next, I will discuss what a multiliterate culturally responsive praxis framework would look like in teacher education and also identify ways to continue developing the framework.

The question that I sought to answer through this research was: How do preservice teachers analyze tensions of practice they encounter and what do they draw upon to develop solutions or innovations? From this main question came two related sub-questions.

1) *How are they talking about their practice and what does this say about the processes by which they adapt their teaching?*
2) *What structures or agents are assisting and/or inhibiting preservice teachers from engaging with culturally responsive practice?*

I will discuss the second sub-question later in this chapter, but I wish to sit with this question of how preservice teachers analyze tensions of practice. What is the process by which they make sense of their learning? As enriching as my interviews with participant partners are, I have only a glimpse of these processes among participants. I was not able to observe their practicum teaching. I was not able to observe them in methods/university settings. I was not able to collect artifacts that represent aspects of their experiences. Despite all of these shortcomings, what I have observed and appreciated in my participant partners is their unwavering commitment to their values. As I have said many times to this point, all participants came into the program with compassion for students. They recognized that education is not equal for all. Through their varied experiences as youth, they wanted to do something meaningful. They wanted to share the things that mattered to them with others. Nancy felt it was deeply unfair that students who needed the most support in math did not have access or were provided with the best math teachers. Anna saw school as an escape from her home life, but she thrived in school and found ways to share her knowledge and expertise to help others.

From a very young age, Judy realized that schools were places that did not fully embrace diversity and difference. From this experience, Judy created this idea that school and life should feel good for all people – not just those who have privilege and benefit from oppressive structures. Despite superficial reassurances that honors-level work would benefit him, Louis worked toward understanding that education can be powerful, and that youth need to be shown the explicit connection between education and leading full lives beyond school. Susan was inspired by her teachers who modeled care, compassion, and commitment to change through their interactions with students and visibility in the community. Like Louis, Kate resented being labeled as a "smart" student, but Kate had a teacher who showed her what is possible to do with and pull from literature – stirring in her a passion to pursue and share her love of literature and writing.

It is worth noting that each participant wishes to share something. They want school to feel "good". They want to share their passions and interests. They want to pass on some sort of understanding and wisdom. Teaching is the way they can express their passions, interests, and skills. I perceive this sentiment of sharing as compassion. They experienced the power of learning or something profound came from their experiences as students, and they wish to find ways to carry that through their own practices as teachers. I appreciate this value and them wanting to share their successes and experiences with content with their students.

As they went out into their practicum classrooms, each participant encountered challenges to their compassionate sensibilities. They encountered threats of violence in their school buildings, uncertainties and stresses related to COVID, mentor teacher burnout/disinterest/loss of inspiration, peer and colleague isolation, feelings of incompetence/lacking confidence. Not all participants experienced each of these encounters nor is this list a complete representation of their practicum experiences. In fact, participants continued to reflect and consider their own values in spite of these barriers and challenges.

Why is this observation about participants significant or relevant? Thinking about how preservice teachers talk about their practice reveals something about the processes by which they adapt their teaching. I can appreciate how frustrating and demoralizing it can be for preservice teachers to be in an environment that does not fully embrace their values and enthusiasm. Each of these participants talked about challenges that hindered them from displaying their compassionate sensibilities. For example, Louis felt uncomfortable teaching in a technocratic way. His perception of what he ought to be as a high school teacher greatly hindered his compassionate sensibilities around learning being an adventure and something to be done with students. Initially, Louis felt compelled to teach in a way that reflected the style and preferences of his mentor. Fortunately, his mentor was supportive of Louis and his values, which enabled Louis to begin building better relationships with students as he continued to gradually find ways to "rock the boat", bringing forward his own values into the classroom.

Louis, like the other participants, encountered challenges in exercising his values to the fullest. In Louis' case, he sensed an obligation to be a teacher that even his students seemed to prefer him as ("Just give us the work, Mr. L…we'll be fine"). We did not get a chance to talk about the progression of the semester, but Louis found his footing once he was able to commit to building relationships with his students, starting with remembering all of their names. For Louis, being relational with students was necessary. He did not feel he could teach or be comfortable asking students to do anything if he did not even know their names. Although he did not explicitly say so, this interest in relationship building seems to be in response to the lack of relationships that Louis experienced in his youth with his own teachers. Throughout our interviews, Louis consistently talked about relationships and various ways of metaphorically expressing his conception of education and literacy as a collaborative endeavor. Whether he had tremendous freedom to create and implement his own instructional plans or felt overwhelmed by the theoretical learning in his methods coursework, Louis consistently returned to his values

around explicit, collaborative learning – to share with students the power of education and literacy.

Anna also expressed feeling overwhelmed by the "bajillon" theories and contextual considerations of teachers. Anna did cite specific value in her inclusive education class. She benefitted greatly from learning about the variety of special needs among people (e.g., autism) and even more so from the ways that society or institutions do and do not accommodate for special needs in terms of inclusivity. What I was surprised to see from Anna was that she equates this feeling over being overwhelmed with incompetence or lacking skill in some way. When a student called Anna, "the best teacher they ever had," Anna reacted to this description not in modesty but in self-depreciation (I was only in the class for the half of the year, and they are saying these things…I don't get it). Anna downplayed her capacity to connect with students, but she engaged with students in a way that communicated care and compassion. Another student in her placement was experiencing social-emotional stress, and Anna took the time to talk with this student and worry less about the academic work and focus more on the student's wellbeing. The student was guided to the services and help they needed and, unsurprisingly, began to reengage with academic work. Anna also talked about a student who was struggling to find interest in an environmental science class. Anna discovered that the student did not want to be in the class and had no interest in the environment, wildlife more specifically. Anna responded to the students' disposition by revamping a project about climate change. Instead of focusing on how climate change impacted wildlife, Anna encouraged the student to think about and research about how climate impacts some communities more than others. Introducing a critical eye to this project invigorated interest from the student and further solidified his trust in her as his teacher.

Each participant encountered tensions in practice throughout their experiences in the secondary program. Anna and Louis exemplify the process through which they develop

solutions. I acknowledge that these interviews do not reveal these processes fully, but what I noticed about participants is that no matter what tension or problem they encountered they always thought about solutions in terms of their values. For Louis, he reflected that his high school teaching persona was not working, realizing that it was incompatible with his values (i.e., building relationships and partnerships with his students). For Anna, she was unsure of how to apply theory in her practicum classrooms, but she instinctively (and appropriately) addressed tensions in the classroom through her values (i.e., science is for everyone, and everyone should use science as a way to explore their own curiosities). Judy had difficulty applying social studies methods to her newcomer/sheltered ESL classroom, but she continued to find ways to modify the curriculum and materials in spite of being the only person in her cohort in such a situation through her values (i.e., asking critical questions around curriculum: who is this for? How accessible is this material? What is important to know right now?). Kate lacked confidence coming out of her fall experience because of a lack of personal connection with her CT. However, she developed a quality partnership with her spring teaching mentor, with whom they developed a curriculum that was responsive to their students and not compromising on Kate's values around compassion (i.e., making sure that their social and emotional needs were not overshadowed by their academic work.) Even though Nancy was placed with two teachers who were not fully comfortable teaching math, Nancy continued to work in ways that respected her CTs' dispositions while also finding small opportunities to express her creativity through her values around math competency. Susan's fall placement presented many challenges, but she embraced these challenges and never lost sight of her values while working through these challenges (i.e., being invested in students and their interests, knowing about them, and caring about them in humanizing ways).

Understanding that preservice teachers have their own unique processes by which they develop their values, analyze problems, and develop solutions/innovations, provides insight into the assets and experiences they bring into teacher education programs and how they make sense

of the theoretical and practical learning they do within their preparation programs. So, what do teacher educators do with this understanding or why is it significant in the first place? A question that I have ruminated throughout this research is: *is it reasonable to expect preservice teachers to be culturally responsive educators if they do not experience culturally responsive teaching in their learning experiences?* In other words, in what ways and to what degrees are teacher educators embodying and modeling culturally responsive teaching? How are teacher educators exploring the assets of their students and leveraging them in their courses?

Teacher education is a unique academic space. It is not just about teaching a fixed set of content. Teacher education is about how to convey content that is accessible and meaningful for students with a variety of needs and prior knowledge. Within the secondary program at Three Lakes, there is value placed around culturally responsive teaching and social justice education, which focuses on students' assets and background knowledge – honoring them as knowledge producers and co-constructors of curriculum. How do preservice teachers come to do this work effectively if their own values, dispositions, and expectations are not explicitly part of their teacher preparation experience? How can teacher educators expect preservice teachers to value and incorporate their students' assets and backgrounds if preservice teachers are not afforded opportunities to reflect on and express their assets through teacher education? I believe that identity work is certainly part of the teacher education experience, but to what degree is this identity work actually about preservice teachers' assets and values as opposed to finding ways to instill guilt? I am not suggesting that identity work is only about assets and values. In alignment with the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy, specifically cultural competence, having preservice teachers reflect on and unearth their assets and values presents opportunities to understand other ways of seeing, feeling, reading, and writing the world. How much more powerful would it be for preservice teachers to augment the things that they already know and do well with something that can further help them to explore other ways of knowing and being? How much more powerful would it be for them to realize that certain values they hold can grow

and become more than just their own experiences? How much more powerful would it be for youth to have teachers who can empathize with them and see their students as partners in a classroom?

I love any chance I get to visit classrooms, which is why I loved being a field supervisor. I loved walking into buildings and feeling the energy of students, hearing their conversations and their laughter. Just in the short walk from the front door to classrooms had no shortage of interesting things and people to observe. I recall one particular observation I conducted some time ago. I was observing one of my preservice teachers, Jesse, and I always appreciated their[14] thoughtfulness and care toward students. They have an older sibling who is a teacher and acts as a mentor of sorts. Nevertheless, Jesse was very comfortable being around students and taking on responsibilities without hesitation. The lesson I was coming to observe was a mini lesson they had created as part of a larger instructional lesson planned by their CT. As I settled in, I was reading over Jesse's lesson plan and came across an interesting observation. As part of the lesson plan template that preservice teachers complete for formal observations, there is a field called "culturally relevant pedagogy". This field prompts PSTs to think about the culturally relevant elements of their lessons. In this field, Jesse wrote that the inclusion of a 60's rock icon was culturally relevant because of his impact on music and his identity as a Black American. I do not remember the lesson in great detail, but I do recall much of my reflective conversation with Jesse about the lesson focusing on why the inclusion of this rock icon was culturally relevant. I was surprised that Jesse reflected on that field as an expression of her panic. When they planned the lesson, Jesse did not really know how it was culturally relevant. Out of panic to complete the template, Jesse wrote about including the icon with some certainty that it was not culturally relevant at all.

[14] I am using their/they pronouns for anonymity.

If culturally responsive pedagogy is already a key component in teacher education curriculum, how do teacher educators work toward more deep conceptions of culturally responsive teaching? Culturally responsive teaching provides authentic purposes and multiple interdisciplinary reasons to be literate in today's world. Literate in the sense that students are achieving high expectations, culturally competence, and developing their socio-political consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014, 2021). However, what makes this literacy valuable and visible? Culturally responsive pedagogy embraces teachers as caring and compassionate partners with students, but it is evident through experiences like Jesse's that culturally responsive pedagogy gets lost in the mix. How does a multiliterate culturally responsive pedagogy address situations like Jesse's?

To reiterate, multiliteracies is not only about skills or the modalities that we use to make sense of the world. In connection with culturally responsive teaching, multiliteracies is purposely thinking about the dynamic, multi-faceted, and evolving literacy lives of students and how to leverage the care and compassion that many preservice teachers already embrace as part of their disposition and values toward meaningful and relevant learning opportunities. Multiliteracies is a way to think more deeply about how content connects with or is distant from the assets and knowledge that students are currently working through.

In Jesse's case, they did not know what elements of their lesson were culturally relevant and went for the low-hanging fruit (i.e., the Black rock icon acts as a form of representation for other Black Americans). If Jesse was encouraged to think about the multiliteracies of their students in relation to the culturally relevant elements of their lesson, they would have interrogated what they knew about students. They would ask about the forms of literacy that students engage with. They would consider students' interests and what are the forms of literacy through which they express themselves or feel most comfortable with. Thinking about multiliteracies would prompt Jesse to think about more than just how students are physically

represented through race or even cultural representations. Multiliteracies in connection with culturally responsive teaching act as interconnected processes toward praxis (reflection and action).

For participant partners, multiliteracies would offer them more earnest reflection to think about the ways that they engage and make sense of content in relation to their students. To put it another way, multiliteracies makes visible the practice and values that students already possess. Making these values and meaning-making processes more visible enables preservice teachers to think about more consciously how content and their instructional decisions will augment and/or conflict with students' ways of knowing, being, and seeing the world. Similarly, multiliteracies encourages teacher educators to make visible and leverage the meaning-making processes and values of preservice teachers to more carefully consider how to develop deeper conceptions of culturally responsive teaching.

Moving Forward

Throughout my research and writing process, I have thought about what hinders and supports preservice teachers in developing deeper conceptualizations of culturally responsive pedagogy. More pertinently to the findings of my research, *what structures or agents are assisting and/or inhibiting preservice teachers from engaging with culturally responsive practice?* There are a number of factors that have contributed to my participant partners' challenges to engage in culturally responsive practices. Rather than trying to name or speculate what these agents and/or structures are, it would be more helpful to think about what "sponsors of literacy" (Brandt, 2009) have been at work and how these gatekeepers of literacy continue to impact efforts to engage in effective teaching practices.

Deborah Brandt (2009) develops sponsors of literacy as a way to "explore economies of literacy and their effects" (p. 26). Sponsors of literacy is defined as "any agents local or distant,

concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way" (p. 25). Brandt (2009) does not specifically define literacy, but she uses literacy in terms of reading and writing practices. She is especially interested in the ways that people use literacy or are forced to use literacy as a means of economic production and proof of production. My goal is not to interrogate her work. Rather, her conception of sponsors around literacy gives me pause to think about how pedagogy is sponsored. That is, if there are agents who regulate, suppress, and even withhold literacy, is it unreasonable to suggest that there are agents who regulate, suppress, and withhold pedagogy and gain advantage by it in some way?

To borrow from Brandt's conception of sponsors of literacy, I want to take a moment and reflect on what sponsors of pedagogy would look like in relation to how preservice teachers are supported and/or inhibited from engaging with culturally responsive practices. Thinking about sponsors of pedagogy expands the conversation around supporting preservice teachers' engagement with culturally responsive pedagogy and can assist in thinking about how current practices are regulating, suppressing, and/or withholding pedagogical knowledge. In the communities of preservice teachers, who would be considered agents of regulating pedagogy? There are two communities in which preservice teachers primarily engage as part of their teacher preparation programming: the university and the practicum classroom. Using Nancy as an example, the university space provides coursework around varying aspects of teacher preparation (e.g., classroom management, inclusive education, teaching math methods, etc.). It is through this coursework that the secondary program builds upon its social justice framework. There are ideals and values being communicated through the teacher education curriculum that aligns with social justice orientations, which dictates the kinds of classes and content that is covered through the program. Consequently, Nancy, as a preservice teacher was expected to demonstrate her capacity to incorporate the values and ideals of the program's coursework through various assessments (e.g., assignments, portfolios, projects, field-based observations,

etc.). In her practicum spaces, Nancy was placed with a mentor with a particular teaching load, experience, education, and values of her own. Nancy's mentor also was charged with piloting a new math curriculum during Nancy's placement semester. Not only was Nancy contending with the demands of her university work, but she was also subjected to the obligations of her mentor. From her methods instructors, she was expected to demonstrate her knowledge and application of culturally responsive pedagogy, while her practicum experience was rooted in piloting a prescribed math curriculum, presumably the math curriculum did not incorporate explicit culturally responsive pedagogy and instead focused on skill building in math. Nancy's access to culturally responsive pedagogy was affected by the expectations of the university and her practicum placement.

Instead of naming various agents or structures that prevented Nancy from fully exploring culturally responsive pedagogy theoretically and practically, thinking about Nancy's experience through the lens of who or what is sponsoring Nancy's access to pedagogy is more useful in interrogating not just the impact on Nancy's growth and develop but also the circumstances that make these barriers to pedagogy possible. Simply saying that there was a conflict of interest between Nancy's methods instructor (wanting see Nancy employ culturally responsive practices) and mentor teacher (wanting Nancy to help facilitate piloting a prescribed math curriculum) does little to advance conversations about how to better support Nancy and identifying ways to create more authentic, collaborative partnerships between universities and local school communities. As a teacher educator, thinking about my role in sponsoring pedagogy can be a potentially powerful way to reimagine how and what I teach, how I support preservice teachers, and how to communicate and partner with mentor teachers.

To further develop this idea of sponsoring pedagogy requires another research project. However, I bring this idea into discussion because there are very complicated relationships that exist throughout teacher education that are not always aligned with one another to support

preservice teachers' access to meaningful opportunities to form quality learning partnerships with their mentors and students. Each participant talked about their roles as teachers and the wonderful things they would do in their own classrooms to create safe, trusting, supportive learning communities for their students. The issue that I have identified previously is that preservice teachers are not explicitly thinking about or talking about the things that students are doing in the classroom to contribute to building these safe, trusting, and supporting learning communities. Essentially, preservice teachers are doing something *for* students instead of *with* students. In this way, preservice teachers are acting as gatekeepers – sponsors – of learning communities. But I suppose this mindset is possible because of the sponsorship that teacher educators, and education broadly, holds over preservice teachers, creating a perpetual cycle of sponsorship.

This gives me pause to think about what I have learned through my participant partners. I have learned that nearly two decades after I completed my own teacher training, preservice teachers today share hopes and challenges that I had as a preservice teacher. I have learned that preservice teachers are incredibly resilient and compassionate. I have learned that I can do more to support preservice teachers and their mentors in forming learning partnerships with one another and with their students. The purpose of this research was to better understand how preservice teachers are conceiving of "good teaching" and what resources or tools they are using to find solutions and innovations. I have learned that preservice teachers bring with them assets, experiences, and compassion that often lead them to teaching as a vocation. My ultimate conclusion is that teacher education needs a framework that encourages preservice teachers to teach within two significant and interconnected ways: 1) honoring and reflecting the cultural and linguistic diversities of their students in their classrooms, 2) understanding literacy not as set of skills but as dynamic, multi-faceted meaning-making processes that take place over various contexts, histories, and texts. Only focusing on culturally relevant ways of teaching prevents teachers from understanding and leveraging students' assets in partnership with

others' assets and new knowledge. Only focusing on expanded notions of literacy limits teachers' capacities to put into action their understandings of meaning-making processes.

Moving forward, I want to explore ways to incorporate multiliteracies theory alongside culturally responsive pedagogy and continue to develop this framework to conceive more deeply of what it means to be a "good" teacher in teacher education. Multiliterate culturally responsive praxis is not only for preservice teachers. It is a framework that urges teacher educators to consider the ways that they are modeling multiliterate culturally responsive practices in their own teaching. That is, how are teacher educators explicitly working *with* the assets, knowledges, values, and beliefs that preservice teachers depend on heavily as their resources for meaning making toward acquiring pedagogy that advocates for caring and compassionate relationships, authentic learning partnerships, and developing critical skills and competencies?

I am grateful to my participant partners: Louis, Kate, Anna, Nancy, Susan, and Judy. Without their willingness to partner in this work, I doubt that my work would be what it is. Surely without them, my imagination to improve my own teaching would be lacking. I am inspired by their ideas and reflections, and I know that students in their classrooms are extremely fortunate to have them as their teachers. I can only hope that I can continue to build partnerships with future preservice teachers who are as reflective, thoughtful, compassionate, and committed to the idea that not only can all students succeed but that all students can succeed without sacrificing their dignities and identities.

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