

Discussing Sexuality in the English Classroom: Using Bakhtinian Analyses and  
Positioning Theory to Explore Teacher Talk

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Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
In  
Curriculum and Instruction

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February 11, 2013  
Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: English teachers, sexuality, Bakhtin, positioning theory, ethnography

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an examination of the ways English teachers may be complicit in reproducing an abstinence-based sex education discourse in their own classroom practices and discussions of literature. Working from disciplinary research in sex education, sociology, English education, anthropology, and public health, I explore English teachers' experiences in negotiating the effects of, reactions to, and expectations for discussing sexuality, intimacy, and gender in a school community. Using feminist positioning theory and Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and ventriloquism, I explore how teachers approach, grapple with, contribute to, and leverage dominant institutional discourses in their practices, thereby mediating knowledge, possibilities for conversations, and institutional norms. An amalgam of teaching philosophies, methodologies, and political ideologies underscores teachers' voicing patterns and discursive positions, helping to further inform an understanding of how contentious social issues are negotiated in the classroom. The agentic discursive positions teachers take up provide insights into teachers as mediating agents within institutional discourses, but not necessarily as change agents of institutional norms.

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DEDICATION

For my girls

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am sincerely grateful to Amy and Frank for welcoming me into their classrooms and allowing me to become a part of their lives for so many months. It is with a benevolent and empathetic ethos of you both as practitioners and individuals that I have proceeded with this study. Thank you for your honesty, your time, and your insights.

I wish to thank the Ferrytown school community—its principals, its administrative staff, and its students—for their interest, support, hospitality, and especially, for keeping it all real.

This dissertation has benefitted from the intellectual and personal engagement of an exceptionally dynamic dissertation committee. My sincere gratitude belongs always to Carol Brandt, Jim Garrison, Bernice Hausman, Patricia Kelly, and Sara Kajder. While I am responsible for both the assertions and shortcomings of this dissertation, I humbly acknowledge that it is only by standing on the shoulders of these giants that I find myself in so luminous a spot. Thank you.

I am fortunate to have benefitted from two tremendous mentors during this process. Carol: You have challenged and sustained me in countless ways. I am indebted to you as a scholar, a writer, a colleague, and a friend. Thank you for seeing me through. Jim: Your support of this project and in my development has been a true gift. Thank you.

Several scholars have helped me through countless permutations of an ambitious research agenda: Katie Dredger, Jennifer McCloud, Darren Minarik, Megan Sulsberger, Andrea Motto, Stephanie Sebolt, and Laura Boutwell helped me build a foundation for years of inquiry. Inspiration, support, creativity, and plainly fierce smarts have reliably come from beyond the academy: I am forever grateful to Lorraine and Richard Scott, Lori and Tom Daily, Chris and Marie Scott, Robert and Suzanne Scott, Lorraine Hosey, Andrea Dixon, Lindsay and Evan Lally, Chloe and Shamus Hogan, Bohdan Beitz, and not least, Beatrice and Nola Scott.

Beatrice and Nola: I love you with all my heart. With you both, I made it.

Bodie: Thank you for the opulence.

Early chapters of this dissertation were graced by Jennifer McCloud's incredible ethnographic sensibilities and thoughtful comments. Thank you so very much, Jennifer.

And, certainly not least: I am deeply indebted to Katie Dredger, whose constant support, intellectual rigor, positive and creative affect, and gracious soul bolstered my spirit, enlivened my perspectives, stabilized my path, and helped make these pages tangible. Katie: Here's to new beginnings!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Introduction**

In this chapter I introduce the dissertation by briefly recounting the evolution of my research agenda. In the following sections I describe how my teaching experiences and two subsequent pilot studies helped to shape this research project, as well as formulate the research questions I address in this study.

### ***Romeo and Juliet* and Other Teenagers in the Classroom**

Several years ago I was preparing to teach *Romeo and Juliet* to two freshman English classes in Lincoln, Nebraska. Having been immersed in the typical teacher's college paradigm of educational psychology, I viewed my students as individuals on an evolving and dynamic search for identity and self-efficacy, and I formulated my teaching practice accordingly. I was trained to think about my practice within the context of constructivist learning environments, thoughtful and never-stagnating lesson plans, and an attentive teacher affect. I was taught, and I believed, that as a teacher I could have a hand in making high school a meaningful formative experience for my students as they lurched forward into adulthood.

With educational psychology in my "teacher toolbox" and lesson plans in hand, I was intending to use *Romeo and Juliet* as a metanarrative on adolescence: on teenage love, yes; but on the difficulties of navigating a time in life that demands adult-like behavior while simultaneously inhibiting adolescents' equal footing in the adult world. At the time I believed my most difficult barrier to my inspired lesson plans would be helping my students navigate a text written in Early Modern English. I thought that once beyond the "language barrier," the discussions I was hoping to begin and sustain would be

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natural and intuitive. But as so often happens in teaching and learning, it didn't exactly play out that way.

As I began my unit, I quickly found that the hardest part of teaching *Romeo and Juliet* was getting my students to stay on task, for example, at the mention of words like “moist,” or at the suggestion of the act of sex, or even at the notion of human desire. As a mother of two young girls, I was acutely aware of the high value our culture places on sex and sexuality, as well as our relentless positioning of females as highly sexualized and objectified. I assumed that my students would be fairly well versed, for better or worse, in the areas of sex, sexuality, and sexual desire. Indeed, on a daily basis, I witnessed my students both navigating and participating in our sexualized world as it was socially manifest at our school. Students were forever making out in the hallways, enjoying the attention their PDAs (public displays of affection) brought them. My students listened to Rihanna, Soulja Boy, and Snoop Dog, quick to put on a show of “bump and grind” as they were leaving the classroom with the iPods I was supposed to confiscate. They conversed wildly about reality TV shows and who was “doin’ it” with whom. I had students very active in the Gay–Straight Alliance at school, eager to make announcements to the class about upcoming meetings and activities. Pregnant students walked the hallways. I taught cheerleaders who proudly bounced around in tiny skirts on game days, and whose dance routines, choreographed by the drama teacher, were a stunning combination of gymnastic feats and lap dances. And too, I taught *other* female students who dressed in tiny skirts and shirts, who *also* liked to dance suggestively, and yet were so often labeled as “sluts”—the unfairness and hypocrisy was not lost on these young women. Amongst themselves, in front of me, my students talked of stoplight

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parties, cleavage (who had it, who showed it, who's was best), "stiffies," abortions, the clap, rubbers, the pill, who put out, who goes down, who was still a virgin, who was hot, who was not, and on and on. So given all this, why was it that these students were so utterly distracted, giddy, and immature while reading *Shakespeare*?

I didn't have to bring these elements of the text to my students' attention. I didn't have to show them videos of Zeffirelli's beautiful scenes or Leonardo DiCaprio doing what he does. I didn't have to define "maidenhead." Despite the Early Modern English, my classes honed in on the sexual themes immediately, giddily pointing them out. I continued to try and have a critical discussion about issues of obvious importance to my students. But again and again, the conversations didn't go as I had hoped, with the students losing any modicum of control or ability to engage in "official" classroom talk. I quickly lost control of the class and my well-intentioned plans.

Raising my concerns to my sponsoring teacher, who gave me full latitude in the class, I was very frankly advised to abandon my lesson plans, and to avoid, at all costs, any discussions about sexuality with my students as I moved forward. She felt it would be a huge mistake to highlight the sexual themes of *Romeo and Juliet*, and in her twenty-two years of very successful and admirable teaching, she found this particular unit worked best when the students didn't even pick up on these themes. She warned of parent phone calls and angry principals, of stepping on toes, on going "too far." She advised me to stick to the basic themes of the play, to simply expose my students to Shakespeare at this point, teach lessons on iambic pentameter, maybe have them do drawings of the Globe Theatre, and not to dig into these "nuances" of the text. Despite my shock and indignation at her advice, she did respect what I was hoping to accomplish. But she also

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remained firm in her advice. In hindsight, I believe she saw this day as one of those rare and yet poignant “teachable moments”—for me.

In the end, I took my sponsoring teacher’s advice and switched gears. I ended up with some impressive three-dimensional dioramas of the Globe Theatre, with students who felt comfortable enough with Early Modern English to play with it (the Shakespearean Insult Generator was a hit), and with students who quite happily and very seriously acted out one of the best versions of *Romeo and Juliet* I’ve ever seen (complete with their additions of overtly sexual acting performances). But I couldn’t stop thinking about this as a “failed” unit. And I couldn’t stop thinking about the shortcomings of developing a teaching practice purely from within an educational psychology paradigm. The social worlds my students were navigating were far too complex for me to fully appreciate their tasks at school within the limits of a search for identity and self-efficacy. These kids—and my own would be in the same situation in a few years—were up against much more: culture, politics, institutions, fears, performances, expectations, historical perspectives, and so on. How was it that given the opportunity to discuss issues of sexuality in the classroom, after all their talk and behavior and music and socializing around sexuality, the students couldn’t respond? And why was I, as a teacher, encouraged not to think about this?

I was not trained or certified to teach sex education in high school. Yet English teachers are quite aware that themes of sexuality run rampant within school-sanctioned literature. Was I supposed to ignore these topics? Embrace them? Refer curious and insistent students elsewhere? And to what end? And how would my classroom suffer or benefit from it? My teacher training was limited to my students’ cognitive and

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psychological ability and preparedness, and thus fell far short of the reality of navigating the classroom in this way.

The more I taught, read, discussed, observed, and researched, the more the issue became clear: sexuality features heavily on our social horizons, but we don't legitimize this fact in schools. In fact, in many schools, including the Nebraska school I taught in, sex education classes are abstinence-based. Curriculum is severely limited to the science of reproduction and to the potentially deleterious outcomes of sex before marriage, particularly for girls. Students are not given practical information about birth control or STI prevention, and are not encouraged to have critical discussions about their social realities. When I began teaching, I shared a similar assumption with many adults—sex education classes are there to help kids negotiate our sexual world. (As I will discuss in Chapter 2, this is most often not the case.) Further, my teaching experience left me reflecting on a crucial aspect of my practice: How am I, as an English teacher, complicit in perpetuating a school culture that runs so severely counter to my students' social worlds? Are there ethical implications? How do I fail my students—as readers, writers, and critical thinkers—when I do not help them make crucial connections between literature and their life practices? How do I fail myself as an educator when I ignore my own commitment to critical teaching and learning in favor of institutional preferences? As I began my doctoral studies and considered how these questions could be explored beyond classroom practices and methods, I began to question the sex education curriculum via the discourses it creates and reproduces within schools.

### **First Pilot Study: Kathy and Symbolic Violence**

My first pilot study was an extension of my own experience of teaching: How do *other*

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teachers handle discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and the body, particularly in the conservative region of rural Southwest Virginia? This ethnographic study of one English teacher (four interviews, over 30 hours of classroom observations) began with the following research questions: What do teachers *do* when their students start talking about sex in English class? Do students even have these conversations after an abstinence-based sex education paradigm has taught them year after year that school is not the place where their own interest in these topics will be honored? How do teachers know when to encourage, follow, or squash these discussions, particularly in a conservative community? Despite my research questions, this study culminated in an illustration of how caring teachers can be victims of symbolic violence leveraged by schools. For my own research trajectory, this poignant study left me struggling with the implications of teachers becoming subjects of the institutions that employ them.

Kathy, my participant in this study, used much of our interview time as reflections on her practice. While this didn't directly help me in answering my research questions, it did help me think about the ways teachers are socialized into institutionalizing practices present in schools. And in Kathy's case, I began to think about how some of these practices contradicted her own philosophies and approaches to teaching. It also reminded me of the need teachers have, which may often be neglected, to take a step back and talk openly about the challenges and implications of teaching: perhaps this need speaks to the gentle tenacity of institutionalizing practices, and the ways this part of our job can be unsettling.

In this study I focused specifically on how Kathy conflated her inability to help two particular students with her inability to utilize meaningful classroom practices (Scott,

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2012). Each of these students had confided in Kathy with narratives of sexual “deviance”: a female student, with her engagement in prostitution; and a male student, with an exploration of his homosexuality. Kathy felt she couldn’t connect with these students via books they wanted to read or books that may have been helpful or supportive given their lived experiences. Kathy was proud of the fact that students saw her classes as friendly, safe, and supportive environments. But for these two students, Kathy was unable to support their specific interests in reading and writing through sexual topics because their lived experiences were so far outside of the school’s curriculum. She worried, therefore, that these students did not see her classroom as friendly, safe, and supportive, and further, that they felt they didn’t belong—neither in her classroom nor in the school in general. As a teacher who embodied an archetype of caregiver, Kathy couldn’t stand the thought that these students didn’t feel welcome. (The stories didn’t end well—the young woman ran away from home and was never heard from again; the young man was admitted to a psychiatric hospital the following year.) Kathy experienced extreme dissonance in these scenarios because she couldn’t properly place the struggle she faced as a teacher hard-wired to care for the students she felt so close to.

True to the tenets of symbolic violence, however, Kathy misrecognized the real terms of the struggle—not book choice or classroom discussion, but an institutional culture that is disconnected from the home and social lives of students, a culture that privileges heteronormativity and conservative ideologies. Also true to the tenets of symbolic violence, Kathy became complicit in these institutional practices not only by misrecognizing the real problems and focusing her energy away from these areas, but by focusing even more intently on her ethic of care, trying to protect her students from the

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very conversations and questions that could challenge these practices. Her ethic of care actually worked to hide the real injustices of schooling in this case, embedding Kathy and her students firmly within an unjust cycle of expected practices and behaviors at school.

This pilot study helped me begin to see the subtle ways institutionalizing practices and discourses affect teachers and infiltrate their classroom practices. An institutional discourse in public school—in this case, of heteronormativity, and of school as a place to mitigate sexuality rather than to critically discuss it—may have far-reaching implications beyond its point of origin, depending on who takes up the discourse, and how. Both Virginia and Nebraska are states that offer abstinence-based family life classes; I began to wonder about the effects of this type of curricula beyond the family life classroom, and within the school culture at large. But I also wanted to better understand the abstinence-based family life discourse itself, and particularly how family life teachers “interacted” with this institutional discourse. I therefore developed another pilot study designed to illustrate the influence of state educational policies upon teachers, students, and school communities generally.

### **Second Pilot Study: Positioning Sex Education Teachers**

To better understand how teachers can be crafted into institutional subjects, I wanted to study how an institutionalizing discourse, complete with spoken and unspoken rules, becomes established and disseminated by teachers in the first place. To do this, I attended a family-life training workshop run by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) as a participant observer. I collected ethnographic data over several days, interviewing participants and trainers and taking extensive field notes. It was a tremendous experience to watch, first-hand, the creation and dissemination of an institutional discourse among

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VDOE employees, teacher practitioners, and school nurses from across the Commonwealth.

The VDOE stipulates an abstinence-plus paradigm for family life education in Virginia public schools, meaning that abstinence is presented as the most desirable approach to sexuality, and birth control is not taught. Though this curriculum is not mandated, districts wishing to receive state funding to teach family life must adopt this paradigm. The VDOE encourages all new teachers of family life to attend these training workshops, and also encourages seasoned family life teachers to return to these workshops every few years to ensure they are abreast of best practices in the family life classroom. The stated goal of the workshop reads:

The mission of the School Health and Education Partnership conference is to promote coordinated school health and the partnership that exists between school health educators and school health providers. This conference provides an opportunity for participants to learn together and support each other's roles in the school setting. The conference is appropriate for teachers, instructional specialists, administrators, school nurses, health assistants, supervisors of health services, counselors, social workers, parents, community-based educators, and related positions. (Superintendent's Memo #111-10, May 7, 2010)

I discovered in both my observations and collected data that the VDOE worked very hard to garner support for a curriculum that was viewed as ineffective by the teachers who had experience teaching it (Scott, 2013). However, the concern for the ineffectiveness and inappropriateness of the curriculum was stated only informally among family life teachers I interviewed. Teachers positioned themselves and allowed

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themselves to be positioned as passive receivers of knowledge within the workshop dynamic.

The workshop generally served to preposition sex education teachers as institutional subjects prior to beginning a new school year. This prepositioning was connected in part to the discourse of fear widely incited at the workshop: job loss was a risk associated with teaching content that was not a part of the state's abstinence-plus curricula. Therefore, teachers were prepositioned to be compliant educators in delivering contentious content-area subject matter.

The workshop also prepositioned newer teachers within a discourse of discomfort, legitimizing and normalizing a feeling that being uncomfortable teaching sex education was okay, expected, and even supported. Despite veteran teachers' encouragement that discomfort fades with time, the workshop talk and texts normalized this discourse, and provided tangible teaching strategies for addressing this discomfort. These strategies promoted teachers' rights to halt and divert conversations and questions from students.

In summary, the prepositioning of sex education teachers at the workshop suggested to teachers that while they should guard against teaching beyond what is understood to be "uncomfortable" content, the teaching strategies place teachers in control of their classrooms and therefore of their discomfort and their fear. As one state trainer made clear: while teachers can't choose the curriculum, they can choose how much of it to teach, they can "protect" themselves, and they can use the teaching strategies provided to make their jobs easier.

Within the dynamic of the workshop as a professional development experience, teachers were positioned as passive and uncritical consumers of knowledge. As such,

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they were positioned as rubes not impacted by or aware of professional terminology (or its potential misuse in their own practices, or its explicitly leveraged use at the workshop), addled by fear and discomfort in accomplishing their teaching tasks, and uncritical of teaching and learning strategies that not only insult their practices, but their students' intelligence and concerns. Teachers did not challenge this positioning publicly, as the fear they were prepositioned to have in their practices also affected how they navigated the workshop.

This study helped me to better understand how schooling practices can be created and disseminated at the state level, particularly through language use, and then brought into classroom practice by state-trained teachers. The rhetoric of the workshop, with its underlying suggestion that not following the curriculum correctly could result in job loss, left teachers feeling silenced and fearful, as well as docile. There was no rigorous discussion or debate about best practices and classroom methods: these were simply given to teachers, and the expectation was that teachers would follow. And because it was apparent, at least among the participants interviewed, that teachers really do largely follow these guidelines, the teachers themselves become complicit in the schooling practices surrounding family life education in Virginia.

### **Framing the Dissertation Study**

These pilot studies, as well as my personal teaching experiences, have been foundational in helping me formulate the dissertation that follows. In many ways, I have come full circle in this research agenda, returning to thematically similar questions I have asked before. This dissertation, however, represents a more informed approach that simultaneously takes into account the effects of personal beliefs as well as institutional

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power and practices on one's own teaching practice. The aim of this research is to better understand teachers' roles in reproducing and resisting institutional discourses, and in this study, I focus specifically on the often discussion-centered high school English classroom. I have watched students weave through the dissonance of school-based discourses and their own social worlds, and I have experienced firsthand, in my own practice and in my pilot studies, the various ways teachers can be constrained by institutional discourses. I see teachers in a crucial role in classrooms, in positions where they are poised to challenge institutional discourses. I also know—and I did this myself—that teachers do not always embrace this position. I want to better understand why this is, and what the implications are for teachers and for students.

I would like to introduce my research questions with a brief discussion of educational policy as social practice. Educational and curricular policies are often instituted at state and federal levels, and are left for teachers, administrators, students, and parents to enact “on the ground,” in the everyday practices of schooling. Educational policy is “an ongoing process of normative cultural production constituted by diverse actors across diverse social and institutional contexts” (Levinson & Sutton, 2001, p. 1). I see policy as much more than a discursive edict developed by a few stakeholders. Rather, policy is a complex social practice in which people—from policymakers to administrators to teachers to students to parents—respond to “official,” often historical, and always political educational practices set out at local, state, and federal levels. Viewed in this way, educational policy, which includes curricular policy, is a legitimizer, a symbolic expression, an institutional blueprint, an interpretation, an appropriation, an experience, and both a social normalizer and a site of social contestation.

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Though this study foregrounds abstinence-based family life policy and curricula as problematic, it is not a study of this policy and curriculum. Rather, this study considers the ways abstinence-based family life education is socially enacted (and resisted, appropriated, legitimized, normalized) in classrooms *other than* in sex education classrooms. In the sex education classroom, the curricular policy limits discussion to one paradigm. As such, I have argued that family life classrooms are not sites of productive meaning making of sexuality in Virginia because family life educators are trained to divert and foreclose conversations that are not aligned with the abstinence-based policy paradigm (Scott, 2013). If teachers and students are not having constructive conversations about sexuality in sex education classes, where are they having these conversations? Are they having such discussions at all? If these conversations are taking place, how do they play out? Who decides what is said, and under what implicit or explicit boundaries? And what are the intended outcomes?

The Guttmacher Institute (2011b) reports that 36 states require abstinence to be a part of sex education classes, with 26 states requiring that abstinence be stressed, and ten states requiring that abstinence be covered. Further, 18 states mandate sex education curricula stressing that sexual activity occur only within the context of marriage. In these nation-wide policy statistics, there is a clear and dominating presence of the abstinence-based sex education paradigm. And yet, by the age of nineteen, seven out of 10 American teenagers of both genders have had intercourse (Guttmacher Institute, 2011a). The attempts at normalizing abstinence-based approaches to sex education at the institutional level are clearly not resulting in a social appropriation of these policies in the social

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practices of teenagers. Yet, as human beings, teenagers are making their own choices with regard to their sexual practices and experiences.

As a classroom teacher I experienced what these statistics might look like in a school setting: students who may well have been sexually active, who were certainly navigating a social world imbued with sexual content, and yet situated in schools with a sex education curriculum that largely ignored either of these realities. Given that abstinence is a viable but a singular response to teenage sexuality, I have framed this research around my own support for a more comprehensive approach to sex education, one that includes multiple responses to teenage sexuality. Therefore, this study is situated around classroom discussion, which by its very nature contains multiple voices, personalities, identities, positions, and so forth. Specifically, this research examines teachers' roles in facilitating and directing classroom discussion of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the English classroom, a historically discussion-heavy content area as well as one that must readily navigate the recurring themes of sexuality often found in the standard literary canon.

### **Research Questions**

My research examines the ways English teachers talk about sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the classroom. This research project moves beyond the implications of what I see as constrained teacher talk in the abstinence-based sex education classroom in order to understand what happens to teacher talk of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the English classroom, and further, how this talk may affect teaching practices and learning outcomes. I consider tensions created at the local classroom level because of curricular and policy decisions made at state levels under the pressure of national agendas. Such

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understanding is crucial in developing future interventions to the current sex education paradigm in classrooms and schools, as well as productive and transformative partnerships among teachers and administrators at local, state, and national levels.

The English classroom is often seen as a place where teachers encourage student discussion in the context of literature and writing. The goal of this research has been to understand how the English teacher may maintain, displace, and/or subvert dominant discourses of sexuality, gender, and intimacy with her own talk about these subjects in relation to her classroom and curricula. I have constructed this study around the following questions:

1. How do English teachers define sexuality and gender?
2. Do English teachers perceive any implicit or explicit boundaries to talk of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the classroom?
3. How do English teachers respond to these boundaries?

These questions have been constructed in light of the theoretical frameworks and definitions I have used to design, execute, analyze, and write about this research in the coming chapters, described below.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

In Chapter 2 I discuss my theoretical frameworks, highlight key definitions, and provide the literature review that frames and situates this study. After presenting a brief narrative of the study setting and my research methods and design in Chapter 3, I begin to present and discuss data on my participants, Amy and Frank, in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively. In Chapter 4 I present and discuss data that provides the reader with an understanding of Amy's classroom practice, including: how she teaches and why; her goals for her

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students; her motivations to teach, and how these motivations affect her practice; and her challenges, joys, and perspectives as a teacher. In Chapter 5, I present and discuss data collected from field notes and interviews that will provide the reader with an understanding of Frank's classroom practice, including, as with Amy: how and why he teaches; his motivations in teaching; and his challenges, joys, and perspectives.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 with a focus on combining both a Bakhtinian and positioning theory framework. I then present and discuss data collected that specifically addresses how Amy and Frank each negotiate discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in their classrooms. These discussions are organized by my three research questions, which I answer and discuss in turn.

In Chapter 7 I provide an overview of this study, and highlight key points from Chapters 4, 5, and 6 using the both the Bakhtinian and positioning theory frameworks explicated in Chapter 2. These highlights include: the ways Amy's classroom stance as a disciplinarian affects her teaching practice; how the many contradictions present in Frank's classroom stance affect his practice; and the ways Amy and Frank both create and respond to perceived boundaries to discussing sexuality, intimacy, and gender in their classrooms. I then discuss findings and implications that move beyond the answers to my research questions, including a discussion of teachers as change agents, implications for teacher ideologies in the classroom, and a related exploration of teacher identity through figured worlds. I close with suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Theoretical Frameworks and Relevant Literature**

The Bakhtinian theoretical framework used to develop this research project and provide an analytical perspective is described in this chapter. A feminist approach to social positioning theory is also introduced as a theoretical contribution that expands Bakhtinian analysis into a sociocultural discussion. A multidisciplinary review of relevant literature positions this study as a unique contribution to current conversations of sex education, connecting English classrooms and English teachers to the socially contentious debate of sex education in public schools.

#### **Theoretical Frameworks**

As a study of teacher and classroom dialogue and discussion, the main theoretical framework used in this study is Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. Centering on the notion that meaning emerges through dialogue, I use this framework to make sense of how teacher-guided classroom discussions create meaning around sexuality, intimacy, and gender. Feminist theory on discursive positioning situates teachers as discursive agents within an institutional context, and importantly, with the ability to reimagine dominant discourses of sexuality in public schools. Using these theoretical foundations, I implicate content-area teachers as uniquely positioned to resist, challenge, or reproduce dominant discourses of sexuality in public schooling.

**Dialogism.** Bakhtin's theorizing of language is known as much for its lack of systemization as it is for its richness and complexity (Holquist, 1990; Matusov, 2007; Landay, 2004; Morson, 1986). As Landay (2004) notes, Bakhtin's "imprecision" marks a literary richness that encourages repeated readings, challenging scholars to synthesize

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key terms. In this section I draw on the work of Bakhtin and Bakhtinian scholars to develop a working application of Bakhtin's theories of language and discourse—which are centered on literary criticism—that enables a sociocultural usage of these theories in this study. Important to this study are Bakhtin's notions of heteroglossia, dialogism, authoritative and internally persuasive discourse, social languages, and ventriloquation.

Bakhtin's work focuses on the social nature of language: language is alive and moving in multiple directions simultaneously, “in perpetual tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces—the tendency to unify, centralize, fix, formalize, privilege, and create norms, and the tendency to invent, innovate, vary, expand, and specialize” (Landay, 2004, p. 108). Bakhtin uses the term “heteroglossia” to describe these contradictory forces, recognizing that in any given time and place, there are social, historical, and physiological conditions that will ensure that a word used in one place and time will have a different meaning than it would have under other conditions (Holquist, 1981). While heteroglossia conceptualizes language, it is the dialogic nature of language that enables us to understand a heteroglossic world (Holquist, 1981).

For Bakhtin, dialogue is the action of communication with and between voices contextual to time and place (Bakhtin, 1981; Holquist, 2002). As Wertsch (1991, p. 51) notes, “Bakhtin stressed the idea that voices always exist in a social milieu; there is not such a thing as a voice that exists in total isolation from other voices.” Dialogue as a communicative action, then, takes into account a social orientation to speaking as well as a social awareness of meaning. When we speak, we are orienting our speech toward an anticipated response (Landay, 2004). We frame what we say based on who will hear it, what those audiences are likely to be thinking, and how they might reply. In this way,

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dialogism is central to all interactions between speakers. A social awareness of meaning in language takes into account our experiences and interactions in a heteroglossic world. All of the words we speak are partly made up of the words of others via implicit or explicit appropriations of other voices, utterances, texts, histories, contexts, and meanings (Bakhtin, 1986). Thus, the dialogic aspects of language also work to blur the distinctions between speaker and listener and writer and reader, such that meaning is co-created through the action of communication. In this way, dialogue as a social practice is far more dynamic and complex than simple communicative exchanges. At the same time that dialogue characterizes the complexity of our social world, dialogue is also continually subjected to a hegemonic fixing—to a social regulation—through monologic speech.

In contrast to dialogism is monologic speech. Though true monologue is not actually possible within a dialogic framework, Bakhtin (1984, p. 81) recognizes a tendency in certain discourses to take on a monologic form, where one person “who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error.” This type of discourse can often be seen in education, where a teacher is positioned as having the knowledge that must be given to, rather than constructed with, his or her students (cf. banking education, Freire, 1970; see also Mehan’s Initiation-Response-Evaluation structure, 1979). In contrast, dialogic classroom practices can be associated with critical learning pedagogies that support learners, learning, and social change (Freire, 1970; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Giroux & McClaren 1991; McClaren, 1989).

Bakhtin conceptualizes variations of discursive parameters that he refers to as authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse “demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent

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of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). It is a prior discourse—a fixed discourse—that has “already been acknowledged in the past” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). Authoritative discourse represents what Bakhtin calls “centripetal power” in that it organizes other forms of discourse around it (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 343). For example, the abstinence-based family life paradigm is an example of an authoritative discourse in that it is legitimized through policy and curricula, and organizes meaning making and discussion around the allowable and privileged topic of abstinence.

In contrast, internally persuasive discourse is “half ours and half someone else’s” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345); it is creative, productive, representative of a furthering of meaning (rather than interpretation), open rather than indicative of a closed system, and it reveals “new ways to mean” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). Internally persuasive dialogue signals a constructive environment of meaning making, allowing language to be simultaneously social and individual, and therefore become a site of struggle and possibility. Bakhtin believes that language is material, and one has to look at the ways in which people use language in order to better understand social and ideological struggle. It is with this assertion in mind that this study was conducted.

Two other concepts useful to this dissertation are social language and ventriloquation. In Bakhtin’s view, a speaker is always invoking a social language—a discourse contextual to time and place, and of which authoritative and internally persuasive discourses are a part—that shapes the individual’s voice (Wertsch, 1991). Bakhtin (1981, p. 262–263) describes social languages as including “social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of

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generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases).” In a school setting, one can imagine countless social languages in use at any given time, depending on who is using them (teachers, students, administrators, parents) and for what purposes (teaching, learning, disciplining, counseling, socializing, and so on). A speaker engages in ventriloquation when she uses a social language to give a certain “voice”—a personality or point of view (Wertsch, 1991)—to her utterances.

Ventriloquation is the term Bakhtin uses to describe “the process where one voice speaks through another voice or voice type in a social language” (Wertsch, 1991, p. 59). Ventriloquation is a type of voicing by which speakers reveal aspects of their opinions, beliefs, and political and ethical positions (Samuelson, 2009; Wortham, 2001b, 2001c) in a social milieu. When we ventriloquate a social language we are appropriating a voice within that language that positions us socially. Samuelson (2009) notes that ventriloquated speech is not necessarily verbatim, it may not even be real, and it does not always involve a conscious choice on the part of a speaker. But ventriloquated speech does provide evidence of how local language uses and meanings are shaped by larger institutional contexts. Social languages give words, contextualized in time and place, certain meanings. As speakers in a heteroglossic world, we can appropriate these meanings (use them, add to them, make them our own, and so on) when we engage in dialogue with those around us.

Philologists have critiqued educational researchers for “misapplying” Bakhtin’s theories to their work (Matusov, 2007), and I therefore venture carefully into a

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Bakhtinian framework with this dissertation. Matusov (2007) has noted that a major criticism exists around whether a pedagogical environment can continually support a truly collaborative, internally persuasive dynamic. The example cited by the author is the simple math problem,  $2 + 2 = 4$ . How many times can a teacher experience something new when engaging students in learning this content? Bakhtin developed his theories for a deeper understanding of the novel as a literary genre. Western scholars have only recently (1980s) been privy to Bakhtin's work in translation; as Matusov (2007) suggests, the debate is young and promises to be ongoing.

I am particularly interested in utilizing Bakhtin's notions of social languages and ventriloquation in this research because I contend it is possible to connect the social languages teachers ventriloquate in their practices with their own perceptions on "allowable" classroom discourses of sexuality. Such an analysis allows for a discussion of the power and reach of dominant discourses in education. However, as speaking subjects within an institution, teachers are not free to ventriloquate *any* social language. To understand teachers' perceptions of allowable social languages in classrooms, and how those languages can be utilized in the classroom, requires a theoretical appreciation of how individuals take up social languages within an institutional context. As Tsitsipis (2004) notes, to embed Bakhtin's conceptualizations from the novel into a political and sociolinguistic context, a "public sphere" is required in which social agents interact on uneven terms. The classroom as public sphere situates teachers, students, administrators, parents, and community members as social agents with varying amounts of social and political speaking power, all within the institutional and regulatory construct of education. A feminist approach to positioning theory helps to account for the

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institutionally “allowable” social languages teachers may choose to ventriloquate.

Although sexuality discourses are directly mediated by the family life classroom and curricula, this research will help to better understand how these discourses are negotiated beyond that classroom and curricula generally within the public sphere of education.

Teachers’ choices in engaging in these discourses therefore become insightful units of analysis that position teachers as agents who can reproduce, challenge, resist, or subvert dominating discourses of sexuality. In the following section I describe positioning theory within a feminist poststructural framework, then return to a discussion on how I draw from these linguistic and sociocultural frameworks within this study.

**Feminist positioning theory.** Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990, p. 48) define a feminist perspective on positioning as “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly reproduced storylines.” Like Bakhtin’s (1981) conceptualization of dialogue, positioning theory recognizes discourse as a social practice through which meaning is created (Davies & Harré, 1990). When individuals engage in dialogue, they take up subject positions that locate them within that dialogue, providing a vantage point for viewing the world along with an available set of images, metaphors, storylines, and concepts to draw upon discursively. While a subject position is a possibility in known forms of talk, position is what is created in and through talk as speakers and hearers construct a self. The use of positioning enables a focus on the way discourse practices (1) constitute speakers and hearers in certain ways, and (2) provide resources through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions.

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Positioning theory can be located within a feminist poststructuralist framework because it also works to explain the “discontinuities in the production of self with reference to the fact of multiple and contradictory discursive practices and the interpretations of those practices that can be brought into being by speakers and hearers as they engage in conversations” (Davies & Harré 2000, p. 62). While a cohesive definition of “feminist poststructuralism” is not only undesirable but not possible due to its many configurations, many feminists agree that a prominent goal of feminist poststructuralism is to *avoid the finality of definitions and categories* (Butler, 1990; Davies, 2000; Weedon, 1997; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). Through language, we give voice and meaning to individual experiences, and therefore continue to keep the subject-in-process at play. Such a framework is imbued with multiple tensions. Below I briefly describe poststructuralism and feminism and their implications for positioning theory as utilized within this dissertation.

Poststructuralism demands an analysis that transcends the notion that some sort of centered, inner logic can be traced and understood within an institution or structure. To conceive of a coherent structure is to perceive a center that holds the structure together with a core meaning (Joas & Knöbl, 2009). But as Derrida (1968/2008) argues, meaning can only be ascertained when the positive, organizing words and ideas that characterize a structure are understood as *that which they are not*: it is difference that creates meaning. And if these “other than” or “not” terms are necessary in order to define a central meaning, then they are equally as important as any conceived center.

Poststructuralism demands *decentered* analysis of a structure: there is no privileged understanding of what the function of schooling is, for example, nor what

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specific role curricula or educational policies play in the support of that function.

Understanding the function of schooling, and of curricula and policies specifically, is a creative, constructive process of looking at the relationship of many parts of schooling in the context of others, and building up an interpretation of what schooling does in a larger society. In this regard, given the many variables that can be used to create an understanding of the function of schooling, there will never be a definitive answer to this query, as understanding will always be in process and open to countless interpretations.

A related and equally important component of poststructural analysis is the recognition that social institutions are created via discourse (Davies & Harré, 1990; Smith 2005, 2006). We organize our world discursively, which grants us that important ability to produce meaning by comparing the differences among words and ideas. It is discourse that allows for this always-in-process, unstable nature of our world, as well as our ability to interpret (and reinterpret) it. This “open system” of language is socially constructed (Mills, 2004): just as it takes differences among words and ideas to create meaning, it takes the exchange of meaning and ideas among speaking subjects (with different interpretations of meaning) to create and make sense of a heteroglossic world (Bakhtin, 1981). Not only are our world and its structures discursively created and reproduced, but we are discursively created and always changing subjects within our world. Poststructuralism signals a discursive departure from the self as a noun to the self as a verb (as decentered and always in process) (Davies, 2000).

This aspect of poststructuralism—the process of becoming a speaking subject—creates some important tensions to consider. First is the tension involved in becoming a discursive subject: by becoming a speaking subject with agency (e.g., the ability to

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socially construct meaning within a structure), one must become subjected to already existing meanings and discourses, including those perceived to be oppressive or problematic (Davies, 2000, p. 27). We must take up the discourses around us—that is, become positioned by and within already established meanings—in order to understand and, as needed, subvert these discourses. As we begin to explore and test the meanings of discourse, structures, and social practices as discursive agents, we also test the boundaries of our subject roles (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). It is at these boundaries that, as Davies has noted (2000, p. 137), we see the constitutive process of structures, read the texts (or discourses) of our selving, recognize the constitutive power of discourses, look at contradictions between discourses, and play with endless discursive possibilities. To become a discursive agent, then, one must first be aware of and accept her positioning as a discursive subject within an organizing structure. Such deference to subjectivity, however, is complicated by feminism. Before turning toward feminism, it is important to note here that a significant critique of poststructural thought is that its focus on discourses and texts is reductive, and excludes the body (Mohanty, 1988). My emphasis on the power of discourses herein is not to reduce the significance of the body—indeed talk of sexuality, intimacy, and gender require bodily locations—but rather to complicate the role of discourses and texts as part of an arbitrary social system.

Within poststructuralist feminism, it is important, for example, that the meaning of “female” and “woman” remain always-in-process and never defined, for it is in this poststructural and indefinite state that women, as an oppressed group, can be liberated from existing patriarchal structures. However, it is also simply not an option for many feminists to accept existing patriarchal, oppressive discourses and become subject to

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them (Alcoff, 1988; Davies, 2000). It is, in fact, an important tenet of many feminists' thinking that a more humanist, controlled experience of the feminine self and of the discursive production of meaning and knowledge is necessary to escape the repression of patriarchy, as it signals agency outside of, and despite of, a structure (Weedon, 1997). Many feminists therefore resist an already established subject role, as it signals a submission to and acceptance of an unbalanced and oppressive structure. Such resistance, however, renders these individuals outside of the structures they wish to change, and minimizes or even obliterates any agency related to those structures.

A similar tension can be appreciated within the context of schooling. It seems that the subjects of education—particularly teachers and students—are best served within the institution when they maintain always-in-process subject positions within and to education (Davies, 2006). (A definitive subject position would suggest stasis—a monologic stance—within the dynamic task of teaching and learning.) Such subjectivity, however, first requires a submission to the institution itself, along with the many policies, rules, testing, curricula, and norms that tend to reduce constructive, dialogic teaching and learning.

The approach to positioning utilized within this dissertation draws on the complexities of a feminist poststructural awareness. Especially important to this dissertation is the primacy given to individual agency within the positioning theory lens. Davies & Harré's (1990) use of positioning theory recognizes speaker agency in that to a certain extent one chooses from the "many and contradictory" discursive practices one can engage in as a speaking person. Analysis within this dissertation proceeds with the understanding that teachers choose from an available speaking repertoire afforded them

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institutionally as they actively engage in the social world of their classrooms. As Davies & Harré (1990, p. 45) note, discourse is an institutionalized use of language that can occur at multiple levels: disciplinary, political, cultural, within small groups, or around specific topics. Discourses also compete with one another, creating “distinct and incompatible versions of reality” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 45). Teachers, then, may be choosing from discourses made available by school, by the community, by unique classrooms and curricula, and so on. A speaker’s “agency” is therefore initially limited by available discourses, but can then be negotiated anew as a speaker constructs a self through available discourses.

Though this research is not concerned specifically with how teachers’ identities emerge through positioning, it does offer a discussion on how teachers’ positioning practices influence their negotiation of discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the classroom.

**Bakhtin and positionality.** Unlike a Foucauldian theoretical framework, which fails to locate a speaking subject with agency, Bakhtin’s dialogism recognizes a speaking subject’s capacity for challenge and meaning making. Feminist positioning theory takes into account the tensions and parameters a speaking subject encounters while challenging dominating discourses and attempting meaning making. Bakhtin’s theories afford an analysis of teacher talk; feminist positioning theory situates that analysis within a larger institutional context. By taking note of the social languages teachers ventriloquate, including *how* teachers ventriloquate social languages (dialogically, monologically, and so on), we can see how teachers position themselves in schools not only as practitioners, but as individuals with political and ethical opinions that mediate classroom discussions

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and local meaning making (Wortham, 2001b, 2001c). Talk “always creates something that has never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable” (Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 119–120). However, institutions such as schools impose limitations on talk. Davies & Harre’s (1990) conceptualization of positionality, in tandem with Bakhtin’s ventriloquation, allows for an analytical lens that prioritizes speaker agency, and yet recognizes that agency occurs within a framework of institutionally allowable discourses. Positionality also recognizes the tension speaking subjects experience within a public sphere, where social and speaking agents are afforded various (more or less powerful) concepts, metaphors, images, and storylines with which to both perceive the world and construct a self within and against the world. Positionality therefore helps to account for the constraints leveraged on talk by institutions, and provides deeper insight into how and why teachers “choose” to ventriloquate certain social languages within the classroom.

An essential task in analysis, then, is to identify participants’ use of ventriloquation. Utilizing a discourse analysis approach, Wortham (2001a) advances the analytic tool of evaluative indexicals as a way to identify ventriloquation in a speaker’s voice. Wortham (2001a, p. 73) notes:

According to Bakhtin, particular expressions or ways of speaking get associated with particular social groups when members of a group habitually speak in that way. Members of every speech community stereotypically associate certain utterances with certain types of people. These indexicals may be lexical items, grammatical constructions, accents, or any of a number of other linguistic patterns. Use of such an indexical marks the speaker as being from the social

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group that characteristically uses that type of utterance, unless other indexes mark the utterance as parody or irony. (p. 73)

Though this study is not a discourse analysis of teacher talk, I will draw on Wortham's (2001a) understanding of evaluative indexicals as a way to identify ventriloquated speech among my participants. Because ventriloquated speech is helpful in identifying participants' opinions, beliefs, politics, and ethics via the social languages that are "voiced" (Samuelson, 2009; Wortham, 2001b, 2001c), we can better understand how teachers position themselves discursively in the classroom around issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender—topics not legitimized in the sex education classroom—using ventriloquation. In using ventriloquation, teachers may "introduce an evaluation of a person, object, or utterance, or they may highlight a main point or point out something that is instructionally significant" (Samuelson, 2009, p. 53). Therefore, identifying ventriloquated speech in a sociocultural analysis of teacher talk may help reveal how teachers negotiate discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender within an institutional context, including whether and how they support, subvert, or challenge dominating discourses with their own discursive positioning. This bricolage of frameworks in application and analysis enables a discussion that may provide insights into the unspoken but tangible discursive "parameters" teachers may perceive, create, and work through, with, or against in their classrooms.

To discern and categorize some of the social languages each participant ventriloquates, I will assess and connect teacher discourses with ventriloquated social languages from both inside the school (for example, student handbooks, standards of learning, and other school-generated materials) and out (popular news and media,

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literature, and the like) as revealed in collected data (see Chapter 3 for methodology).

Given that ventriloquation patterns often belie a speakers' political and ideological beliefs (Samuelson, 2009), and that sex education, and more widely, issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender, often generate polarized political debate (Santelli, 2006), it will also be helpful to draw on Lakoff's (2002) conceptual systems to discern and differentiate among politicized voices in social languages.

As previously described, positionality helps develop an understanding of how the public sphere affords speaking subjects various concepts, metaphors, images, and storylines with which to both perceive the world and construct a self within and against the world. In this way, positionality opens a narrative of power differentials among speakers and the institutions granting speaking "rights." Lakoff (2002) developed "conceptual systems" to better understand conservative and progressive worldviews as "frames" of thinking and talking about the world. Lakoff's conceptual systems, then, help explain *how and why* we choose from among available discourses. The political landscape of the United States reinforces continual polarized debate among conservatives and liberals, offering many forums and opportunities for participation and legitimization. While there are additional positions beyond and within these two belief systems, and while some social contexts welcome certain positions over others, our largely two-party political system validates these views and discourses in a wide array of contexts, including in classrooms.

Lakoff contends that we think by using conceptual systems as normal parts of our thought processes, though these conceptual systems are not immediately accessible to our consciousness. This epistemological orientation to the world is a socialization process—

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we are socialized into the world and into our worldviews by our families, our communities, family socioeconomic status, and experiences. These orientations become a part of our conceptual systems, which are deeply embedded in our unconscious, and therefore become, without our realization, a part of our normal thought processes and modes of validating knowledge and truth.

Lakoff argues that because conservatives and liberals in this country have a difficult time understanding relative conceptual systems from which each side operates, the political discussion in this country is unproductive. I draw on Lakoff's ideas not to attempt to categorize and further polarize social languages my participants ventriloquate, but to better understand the complexity involved in the choices teachers make when negotiating the often highly politically and morally charged discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. Lakoff's conceptual models complement Bakhtin's notions of social languages and ventriloquation and feminist positioning theory in that we use all three to position ourselves discursively as speakers. While Bakhtin's theories aid in understanding a speaker's position in relation to others, and positioning theory locates one's position within an institution, Lakoff's conceptual systems aid in understanding a speaker's position in relation to a deeply embedded worldview that implicates sociocultural thinking and practice.

Lakoff uses the generally accessible metaphor of family type in order to make these conceptual systems available to most people (most people, no matter our worldviews, can relate to a family model), and to better understand at least two major types of political arguments in this country. Central to the politically conservative worldview is the "strict father" family model (Lakoff, 2002), which is categorized

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metaphorically as a traditional nuclear and patriarchal family with a mother as care provider and a father as disciplinarian. This model embraces strict rules for behavior, and contextualizes parental authority as an expression of love. Children become responsible adults via “tough love,” and are taught self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority. Once children are mature, they are on their own and must depend on their acquired self-discipline to survive. This model reinforces the notion that self-reliance gives one authority over one’s own destiny, which parents are not to meddle in. Homosexuality and feminism challenge the monolithic authority of the father, and are therefore seen as threatening; the patriarchal family is the basis for all morality, social arrangements, and politics.

In contrast to the conservative worldview Lakoff (2002) introduces the nurturant parent model. This liberal worldview is characterized by a co-parenting model in which both parents are care providers, and children become responsible and disciplined adults via the nurturing, love, and empathy of both parents and of the community. Children’s obedience originates and is strengthened from love and respect for parents, rather than fear of punishment. This model stresses the importance of social ties and good communication, and questioning is seen as positive. It is important that children learn to have empathy for others, which they learn from their own experiences of being cared for. Personal fulfillment comes by respecting individual values and exploring a range of ideas and options the world offers while being caring and respectful to others. Nurturant parents welcome homosexuality because all citizens deserve equal treatment and empathy; and feminism is not threatening because women are viewed as having equal footing in this family model.

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As Lakoff (2002) notes, his conceptual models are descriptions of two worldviews, but not what worldviews should be. They are forwarded as models of understanding polarized political discourses, and how these discourses can appeal so emotionally to speakers who share similar political worldviews. For this dissertation, these models offer deeper insights into recognizing and understanding ventriloquated speech as related to opposing political stances teachers may take in their classrooms practices. Wortham's (2001a) approach of using evaluative indexicals helps to identify ventriloquated speech, and Lakoff's (2002) conceptual models aid in connecting this speech to particular classroom stances and practices. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I turn toward a few key definitions for this research project, and then present my review of literature.

### **Definitions**

**Dialogue.** Like Freire (1970), I define dialogue as an act of creation, a way of knowing. Dialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship among speakers, where engagement in such a relationship recognizes both an individual and a social process of learning and knowing (Freire & Macedo, 1995). For the purposes of this research, I see dialogue as forming the foundational part of critical knowing. In pedagogical situations, dialogue—which works to ameliorate the “narration sickness” Freire describes as being part of an ailing educational practice—works to solve the teacher–student contradiction found in banking education and instead embraces “hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Freire 1970, p. 71, 72). Though this research is theoretically framed by Bakhtin's notions of dialogue, I use Freire's definition of dialogue as an analytical definition because of its direct implications for education.

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Indeed, as dialogue helps speakers develop knowledge, increased knowledge leads to a heightened sense of awareness, of reflection upon the world and our relationships and subject positions. In the case of the public school classroom, a critical pedagogy lends credence to understanding political, social, and economic inequities, both at the macro level within the world and locally in the micro level of the classroom. Such praxis—reflection and action upon the world with an eye toward transformation (Freire, 1970)—lies at the heart of critical pedagogy and implicates a dialogical epistemology that works to unveil reality.

**Sexuality.** Sexuality is more than a biological/ontological event: it is a social practice for which we have incited a discourse that produces knowledge, categories, and rules for performing sexual subjectivities (Foucault, 1978). As a social construction, sexuality organizes social life. In this way, sexuality is not just the property of an individual, and it does not just indicate a person's sex category or sexual identity. Instead, sexuality itself is a sort of power that exists regardless of our sexual identities or sex categories.

We have over time developed practices, rituals, and discourses that we have allowed to regulate sexuality across individuals, identities, institutions, and social practices (Foucault, 1978). Sexuality refers not just to sex acts and identities, but the meanings associated with these. For example, having a heterosexual identity may seem private and personal. However, we have also conferred onto heterosexuals a number of citizenship rights, including marriage and the ability to carry life and medical insurances for spouses. These citizenship rights tie the private practice of heterosexuality to certain state benefits (Fields & Hirschman, 2007). At the same time, we have eroticized male

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sexual dominance over females, with female submission being seen as desirable (Pascoe, 2007). This eroticization has also worked to link females to certain body types in order to be seen as attractive and desirable to males. In this way, private desire can in fact be part of the mechanisms through which the practices of daily life (in a heterosexual social world) actually foster and uphold inequality between the sexes.

In the context of public schooling, sexuality is an adolescent social practice monitored via sex education curricula. The Guttmacher Institute (2011b) has compiled the following statistics regarding sex education policies in the United States:

- Twenty states and the District of Columbia mandate both sex and HIV education; one state mandates sex education alone, and another 13 states mandate HIV education.
- A total of 37 states require that sex education include abstinence; 26 states require that abstinence be stressed, while 11 states simply require that it be included as part of the instruction.
- Eighteen states and the District of Columbia require that sex education programs include information on contraception; no state requires that it be stressed.
- Thirteen states require that the information presented in sex education classes be medically accurate and factual. However, a recent review of 13 commonly used abstinence-only curricula found that eleven had incorrect, misleading, or distorted information.

The Guttmacher Institute (2011b) recognizes that abstinence, the clearly favored social practice institutionally endorsed by public schooling, is the most commonly taught

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subject in sex education classes in this country. Further, in 2006–2008, most teens aged 15–19 had received formal instruction about STIs (93%), HIV (89%), or abstinence (84%). However, about one-third of teens had not received any formal instruction about contraception; fewer males received this instruction than females (62% vs. 70%). These statistics speak to the social power of sexuality, one clearly regulated by public schools, and couched in a rhetoric of fear that places the onus of contraception, and the implications of pregnancy and sexual practice, mostly on females (see, for example, VDOE, 2009). In this research project, I take into consideration the social power of adolescent sexuality by addressing the ways it is regulated beyond the family life classroom and into other classrooms and content areas.

**Gender.** As with sexuality, I also see gender as socially constructed and therefore dynamic and unstable (Morris, 2000), and separate from a biological/ontological framework. I also see gender as being separate from sexuality. Rubin (1975) separates gender from sexuality by recognizing that within a normative framework of a sex/gender system, gender and sexuality can work to mutually enforce or destabilize the other. That is, one is a man or a woman to the extent that one functions as such within the dominant discourse of heterosexuality; posing a challenge to the dominant discourse can then serve to destabilize either sexuality or gender (Butler, 1990).

Gender is accomplished through day-to-day interactions. We hold each other accountable for “doing gender” correctly in light of heteronormal conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category (Pascoe, 2007). In other words, we are “supposed to” act in ways that line up with our sex category, and we discipline each other to “do” gender “correctly” when we accept normalizing and institutional discourses and

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understandings of gender. This research proceeds with the understanding, then, that gender is an unfixed social discourse and performance that unfolds under the ever-fixing gaze of socially normalized practices, rituals, and discourses.

**Abstinence-plus education.** In addition to explicating the terminology of sexuality and gender, it is also important to explain the abstinence-plus paradigm. The abstinence-plus family life education program in Virginia prioritizes abstinence as a main focus of sex education, which includes the value of family and community living, the benefits of marriage, parenting skills, and adoption as a positive choice in an unwanted pregnancy. It also limits discussion of contraception to efficacy, but very rarely in a practical discussion on usage (VDOE, 2009). As Beshers (2007) notes, the terms typically assigned to sex education curricula in the United States are problematic in their somewhat confusing and often overlapping definitions. Abstinence-plus education is not comprehensive education, which teaches about STI prevention for diverse sexualities and provides information on contraception use and abortion, among other topics. Nor should the abstinence-plus paradigm be confused with the yet more conservative abstinence-only paradigm, which limits discussion on sex and sexuality to abstinence until marriage.

Interestingly, as previously mentioned in discussing my second pilot study, I found that VDOE employees regularly referred to the Commonwealth of Virginia's abstinence-plus paradigm as "comprehensive sex education" (Scott, 2013). Most materials given to family life educators during the workshop I studied also plainly and consistently made this claim. When I queried officials from the Department of Education during a panel discussion, they responded that my concern was one of semantics. VDOE officials stated that Virginia does have an abstinence-plus paradigm; but the Department

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of Education refers to its abstinence-plus curriculum as “comprehensive” because the Commonwealth encourages family life educators to teach *all* (although they don’t have to) of the criteria explicated in the Standards of Learning (SOLs) for an abstinence-based family life curriculum. In this sense, the Commonwealth views its abstinence-plus paradigm as “comprehensive” because it encourages complete pedagogical attention to all SOLs for family life while effectively misleading family life educators in the belief that they are teaching comprehensive sex education (Scott, 2013).

I turn now to a review of literature to further position this study within related multidisciplinary research on abstinence-based family life education, English classrooms as productive sites for sex education, and English teachers as important agents in enabling English classrooms as productive sites.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

**Design of the review.** A review of literature for this study inherently contains a number of challenges. First, upon a review of literature in the fields of English education as well as sex education, it became clear that this study is unique. While such a dearth in the literature affirms the importance of this research, it also means there exists no clear precedents or guidance for framing, conducting, and analyzing this research. The step-wise literature review that follows has been designed to accomplish a number of things. Working from a pyramid metaphor (see Figure 1), the first and broadest step in the literature review provides a base from which to legitimize and contextualize this research. The first section, “Call for Critical Dialogue,” provides the reader with a multidisciplinary review of literature that criticizes the abstinence-based approach to sex education while calling for support for more comprehensive alternatives. The research

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widely supports more informed and critical conversations of adolescent sexuality *at school* as important and necessary interventions.

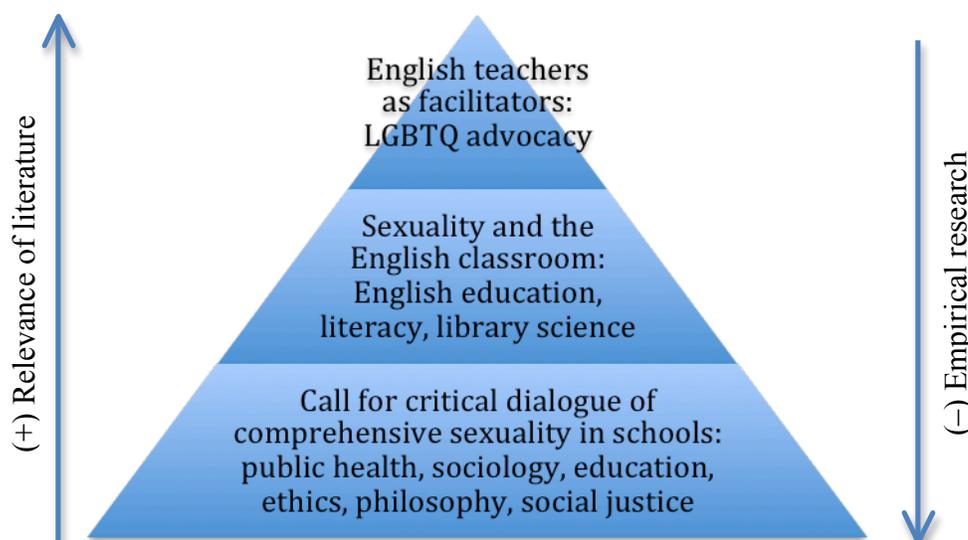
In the next section, I turn specifically to English education research and to the English classroom. This research demonstrates how sexuality is and is not discussed; further implicates English literature and English classrooms as productive sites discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender; and also shows weaknesses in the literature (which consists mostly of anecdotal calls to action). In this middle layer of reviewed literature, the studies are discussed more in depth as they become more relevant to this research project. This part of the literature review confirms there is much anecdotal support for discussion of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the English classroom, but often in the context of providing access to a wide variety of literature and mitigating censorship issues.

In the last and most pertinent section of the literature review pyramid, I discuss existing research that explicitly implicates English teachers in fostering discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. This section represents existing literature in English education that approaches this study in spirit. Many of these studies, however, are also anecdotal, are deprived of a sociocultural context on the difficulties English teachers may face in engaging discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender, and are specifically framed around the challenges of supporting LGBTQ students and literature in the classroom. Despite such limitations, these studies most inform this research because of their focus on English teachers, and therefore form the overall core of this review of literature.

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Using this step-wise multidisciplinary review, I lay the foundation for the research questions asked in this dissertation (discussed more fully in Chapter 3). First, I establish a multidisciplinary call for critical dialogue schools that extends beyond the abstinence-based discourses of sex education. Second, I establish the recognition many English teachers share in viewing the English classroom as a productive site for such discussions. Last, I bring in research privileging English teachers as particularly capable of fostering and facilitating these discussions. A general trend throughout the review is that as studies become increasingly relevant to this research, the studies themselves become less empirical and more anecdotal. Once again, such a trend highlights the need for and the significance of my research within a multidisciplinary scope. The following literature review culminates in the focal inquiry of this research: Can English teachers help fulfill the need for school-based conversations that move beyond the constraints of the abstinence-based sex education discourse?

**Fig. 1. Multidisciplinary Review of Literature**



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**Introduction.** Several themes and gaps are apparent in the literature. First, given the dominant paradigms of abstinence-based education in the United States, existing research makes a substantial call for a critical, school-based discussion of issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender via a more comprehensive approach to sex education. Second, the English classroom represents a productive and accessible site for critical meaning making of issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender, and can represent a legitimate contribution to sexuality curricula. Finally, while great support exists for taking up discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the English classroom, suggestions offered to English teachers in the literature are generally limited to reading lists and a few basic teaching methods and plans. Few researchers discuss the challenges English teachers face in facilitating such discussions, nor how the English teacher herself perceives and/or responds to these challenges.

While the first two themes substantiate school and the English classroom in particular as important sites for critical discussions and for exciting possibilities in sex education, the third theme demonstrates gaps in the research on this important topic, as well as a lack of critical understanding of the role of the teacher in using the English classroom as an alternative site for sex education.

*Call for critical dialogue in public schooling.* With the teenage pregnancy rate rising for the first time in decades (Wind, 2010), some research suggests that this increase correlates to the failed outcomes of years of abstinence-based education in American public schools (Boonstra, 2010). Previous research had predicted this rise with studies on the ineffectiveness of abstinence-based sex education (Kirby, 2007; Bennett & Assefi, 2005; Trenholm et al., 2007). Now more than ever, the call for critical discussions of

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sexuality, intimacy, and gender in public school curriculum has been and continues to be made from multiple fields.

Scholars in psychology argue that adolescents have a right to a school-based critical discourse of desire and erotics (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Allen, 2004). Such discussions are understood as missing from abstinence-based sexuality curricula, and yet are vital to the development of a healthy sexual self (Vergari, 2000; Smith, 2003; Santelli et al., 2006). Relatedly, researchers in public health have championed strong calls for critical dialogues on sexuality, intimacy, and gender in public schools, with substantial research and literature supporting this call. A significant literature review in its own right, highlights from this scholarship include the role of public schools in providing timely and age-appropriate information (Trimble, 2009; Halpern, 2009; Harris & Allgood, 2009), and significantly, the dominant wish of parents for their school-aged children to receive critical and comprehensive sex education at school (Eisenberg et al., 2008; Constantine et al., 2007; Bleakley et al., 2006; Ito et al., 2006).

Researchers from multiple fields take up an ethics stance when calling for critical and comprehensive approaches to sex education. Santelli (2006) argues from a public health and human rights standpoint that governments have a responsibility to inform their citizens about healthy and responsible sexual practices, and that championing an abstinence-based approach to sexuality while withholding information on how to prevent pregnancy and the spread of STIs violates the principals of beneficence (doing good). Similarly, Wiley (2002) argues that abstinence-based curricula place health educators in a position where they are violating both the principals of beneficence and of non-maleficence (doing no harm), given health educators' code of ethics. Lamb (2010) argues

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for the inclusion of ethics in sex education from social, philosophical, and historical viewpoints, which would include discussions of ethics and moralities of the social world, including media, culture, rape, pornography, etc., and be successfully couched in a liberal studies tradition that would include philosophy and history. Elders (2008) argues that Americans' refusal to accept that a majority of adolescents become sexually active before adulthood represents an ethical violation of adolescents' right to knowledge of sexuality, and more importantly, sexual health and prevention. The author also argues that adolescents must be provided with this information well *before* they become sexually active. Similarly, Kelly and Schwartz (2007) argue that abstinence education is a violation of adolescents' reproductive rights. And Fields and Hirschman (2007) argue that abstinence education promotes citizenship rights of heteronormal individuals, thus disenfranchising those who do not identify as heterosexual.

Continuing the ethics argument, an abundance of literature assesses and problematizes the injustices of abstinence-based discourses in schools from a social justice standpoint. Research in sociology, education, and public health contests the maintenance and deployment of any kind of dominating and hegemonic discourse on sexuality in a public school setting that is not congruent with the social and sexual realities of most youth in this country. These adolescent realities include adolescents who pledge to remain abstinent and then fail to do so (Trenholm et al., 2007; Kirby, 2002, 2007); young women grappling with the discourses of resistance, risk, and responsibility (Rose, 2005; Bay-Cheng, Livingston, & Fava, 2011); or those who must navigate such discourses while pregnant (Barton, 2006; Pillow, 2004; Luttrell, 2003).

A significant theme within the social justice position argues explicitly for the

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rights of LGBTQ students who are marginalized by the heteronormal and abstinence-based discourses of sexuality and gender in public schools (Birden, 2005; Pascoe, 2007; Fields, 2008; Weems, 2007; Herr, 1999; Rienzo et al., 2006; Rasmussen, 2006; Mayo, 2004). This expanse of literature, while productive in its scope and disciplinary origins, focuses on the adolescent experience rather than the roles of teachers in challenging or reproducing dominating abstinence and heteronormal discourses of sexuality in schools. These volumes do offer productive sociocultural frameworks for understanding the many social, political, and economic issues that can affect the discussion of diverse sexualities at school. However, this research lacks a contribution to a pedagogical praxis on talk of sexuality, intimacy, and gender that prioritizes teachers' roles in reproducing or resisting dominant discourses of heteronormativity.

Collectively, this body of research resoundingly supports the notion that schools must embrace a comprehensive approach to sex education. Yet this collection of research offers virtually no practical information pertinent to *executing* a pedagogy of critical sex education, nor does it centralize the teacher as having the power to either take up or resist—knowingly or unknowingly—abstinence-based discourses of sexuality, intimacy, and gender.

*English classrooms as productive sites.* Many English teachers and researchers endorse the English classroom as a productive and appropriate site for critical meaning making around issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. Several researchers advocate specifically for the use of young adult (YA) literature to engage students in these critical conversations. Pattee (2006) and Swartz (2003) note the ability of the YA novel to represent a valuable source of information on sexuality and intimacy. Yet, not all YA

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narratives represent medically correct, accurate, or age-appropriate information. Wood (2010) reminds librarians, particularly, of the need to constantly evaluate YA novels for appropriate messaging in such literature, particularly because it is often seen as a viable, often realistic source of information for adolescent consumers. However, Wood (2010) also states that knowing library patrons well is necessary in order to assess what is “appropriate” messaging on sexuality, sexual orientation, and intimacy. A number of authors create a case for making sexuality curricula relevant to adolescent reality *via* literature, writing, and classroom opportunities for discussion and meaning making (Ellis, 2009; Ashcraft, 2008; Schaafsma, Tendero, & Tendero, 1999).

Another theme representative in this literature is the ability for the English content area to support sexual identity development through literature and discussion. Pattee (2006) and Gilbert (2004) specifically see literature as a safe and private place to explore sexual identities. Vetter (2010) also advocates for the use of literature in supporting students’ developing sexual identity work, and encourages teachers to leverage literature as a way to teach critical reading. Moje and MuQaribu (2003) and Pattee (2006) see literature, and young adult literature specifically, as a valuable and meaningful site for sexual identity construction. Many scholars endorse the ability of English literature to engage readers in a critical understanding and negotiation of sexuality in culture and social discourses (Finders, 2000; Ashcraft, 2006, 2003; Emge, 2006; Brunner, 2002; St. Pierre, 1999).

Finally, some scholars argue for the validity in using literature with themes of sexuality as a way to engage students, particularly students disinterested in reading, in literacy (Vetter, 2010; Ashcraft, 2009, 2008, 2006; Luttrell, 2003; Kinder, 1998).

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Because sexuality and its many forms and outcomes (gay, straight, relationships, isolation, pregnancy, abortion, and so on) represent a significant area of adolescent interest, these authors argue that students are more likely to engage in literacy learning and experience academic success when given the options to read and discuss literature imbued with themes of sexuality, intimacy, and gender.

A substantial and productive trend in the literature argues for the use of the English classroom and English literature in discussions of queer identities and experiences. Such discussions, which are not a part of abstinence-based discourses, would represent a poignant challenge to these discourses in public schools. LGBTQ identity and the need for the creation of a new space of understanding in a predominantly heterosexual world are addressed across the entire body of literature (Vetter, 2010; Young, 2009; Gilbert, 2004; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Finders, 2000; Blackburn, 2003; Ressler, 2005; Clark & Blackburn, 2009; Swartz 2003; Parker, 2001; Allan, 1999; Kinder, 1998).

*Responding to the need.* Within the wide range of literature reviewed, most scholars in English education suggest helpful tools for teacher practitioners as far as facilitating discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the English classroom. As researchers make their cases for these discussions, they often provide substantial reading lists inclusive of a range of sexual practices and outcomes (e.g., homosexuality, pregnancy, abortion, rape, HIV prevention and infection, masturbation), as well as suggestions for teaching methods, such as student journaling, open-ended discussions, time and space to “problem-solve” through contentious issues, critical reading techniques, role-playing, popular culture appreciation, school-wide social awareness

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projects, etc. The suggestions are comprehensive and helpful for practitioners, but are largely lacking a sociocultural understanding of what such discussions would mean for teachers. Inquiries into teacher beliefs about sexuality, teacher comfort/discomfort in talking about sexuality, administrator/student/parent/community resistance or support, and the teachers' role in socially resisting or reproducing dominating discourses on sexuality are largely missing. There are a few highlights in the literature that address some of these issues, and I discuss these in the following paragraphs.

The most productive research as far as bringing the role of the teacher into play in discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender is present in the literature supporting LGBTQ discussions in the classroom. Clark and Blackburn (2009) argue that simply including LGBTQ-themed texts in English classrooms and in discussions is not enough: how teachers position students and themselves to texts can either enforce or challenge norms of homophobia and heteronormativity. The authors argue that teachers must refuse to offer alternative texts to students who do not wish to read about LGBTQ issues, requiring all students to engage not just in reading of queer literature but also in discussing it. From a textual standpoint, teachers must choose texts that offer diverse perspectives on diverse sexualities, giving all students a starting place for identification. Further, these texts must not simply be read once a year as part of a unit on diversity. However, teachers must then be careful to facilitate discussions that encourage new meaning making; students can retain their original positions, but must be encouraged to also embrace a more inclusive way of thinking about sexuality.

Blackburn and Buckley (2005) argue that by ignoring or minimizing queer themes in literature, English teachers inadvertently propagate homophobia and marginalization of

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queer sexualities. Further, the authors argue that English teachers fail their heteronormal students pedagogically when ignoring or excluding queer literature by suggesting that heterosexual students have nothing to learn from the LGBTQ experience.

Oftentimes English teachers create their own barriers to what they feel they can talk about. As Sieben and Wallowitz (2009) note, many English teachers avoid controversial topics in the English classroom in order to ensure that their students feel safe and comfortable. While this type of avoidance can be in reaction to any number of perceived constraints, the authors note especially the strength of the “insidious hidden curriculum” as well as fear of “unintended consequences” in reaction to what teachers choose to say or not say, teach or not teach, from students, parents, and administrators (Sieben & Wallowitz, 2009, p. 44).

Ellis (2009) reminds English teachers of the importance of examining our own reading and theorizing practices, and to critically assess how these practices may affect our own interpretations of sexuality and gender. Teachers who can do this for themselves model a reflective stance for their students as readers and interpreters, thus opening up dialogue and possibility in interpretation.

Curwood, Schliesman, and Horning (2009) cite many barriers for English teachers in engaging students in critical discussions of sexuality, including LGBTQ sexualities. These barriers can be external, including school policies, lack of administrative support, lack of collegiate support, and fear of community backlash, as well as internal, such as self-imposed censorship resulting from homophobia or fear of reprisal. The authors also note that local, informal practices for textbook adoption are often quite different from official school policies, but many times teachers are unaware of the official policies until

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a “problem” arises due to local practices. The resulting unpleasantness may make teachers less inclined to adopt texts with controversial themes. Teachers, too, may end up with more questions than with answers when trying to understand official policies, again making the text adoption process seem daunting. Teachers may then be less inclined to address issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender without a text they feel may be appropriate for engaging these types of issues.

Finally, Ashcraft (2009) asserts that a reluctance to talk about issues of sexuality at school is more than a result of teachers “fearing” teen sexuality. Ashcraft (2009) argues that English teachers are reluctant to talk about issues of sexuality in the classroom largely because of how the sex education rhetoric is framed in public discourse. First, it is often argued in terms of biology and public health, with an emphasis on reducing teen pregnancy, preventing disease, and promoting public health—a frame English teachers view as well beyond their area of expertise. This biological and public health framework, often couched in the debate between abstinence-based and comprehensive sexuality, also reduces teen sexuality to science and medicine, divorcing it from intimacy, emotion, and passion—the stuff of literature. Second, Ashcraft (2009) argues that English teachers consume the “taken-for-granted assertion” that education around teen sexuality is controversial by nature. Citing the well-documented research that the majority of parents of school-aged children (94%) support comprehensive sex education in public schools, the author urges English teachers to reject both frames—biology/public health and controversy—and engage a renewed commitment to literacy education via sex- and sexuality-themed literature in the English classroom. Though the author acknowledges that some local communities may indeed present challenges to teachers, she feels that the

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majority of English teachers should feel justified in pursuing discussions of teen sexuality in English classrooms.

### **Significance of the Literature/Rationale for Study**

As previously mentioned, I recognized three themes across an interdisciplinary scope of literature: (1) there exists an urgent call for critical dialogue in public schools around issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender; (2) the English classroom is seen as a productive site for this critical dialogue; and (3) despite much literature suggesting reading lists and classroom methods for facilitating these discussions, little research speaks to the ways in which English teachers themselves decide how to embrace or resist these discussions. The literature that does address this gray area largely is positioned within an inclusive, LGBTQ framework, calling into question teacher stances, reflexivity in practice, and censorship originating from internal and external forces. Much of the research that implicates the English classroom and English teachers in facilitating these discussions is anecdotal: ethnographic research is needed to understand if, and how, in the social and political context of public schooling, English teachers are able to foster and facilitate such discussions.

**Significance of the study.** This project is one of uncovering and naming the not-so-obvious ways English teachers may be constrained by dominating discourses of abstinence-based and heteronormal sexuality in public schooling.

Current literature cites the need for critical dialogue about sexuality and intimacy with regard to adolescent sexual health, as well as the need for more comprehensive approaches to sex education in public schools. While much literature discusses the damaging implications of abstinence-based sex education from numerous perspectives,

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no analyses confront the implications this curricula has for *teachers* and their professional practices, the constraints it creates across content areas, nor its function as a part of cultural reproduction at multiple points of foci. Relatedly, there is a body of literature suggesting that young adult novels could serve as a source of information, context, and vocabulary for adolescent sexuality. Unfortunately this literature largely avoids a critical appraisal of the difficulties in adopting such texts in the classroom, the difficulties in having such conversations in a public school, and most importantly, what it looks like when English teachers attempt a discussion of sexuality, intimacy, and gender based on literature.

This research addresses each of these identified gaps in the literature, adding complexity to the discussions around teacher practice, teacher agency, the need for comprehensive sex education in public schools, and the validity of such a curricula in other content areas. This study assesses the practices teachers use to explore the simultaneous empowerment and constraints leveraged upon, vied for, or resisted via teacher talk on sexuality, intimacy, and gender amidst a normalized authoritative discourse within public school. This research can offer new insights into creative approaches to comprehensive sex education in public schools, as well as add to discussions of social reproduction by specifically considering the role of the teacher negotiating dominant institutional discourses.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Study Setting and Research Methodology**

In this research I use an ethnographic approach to document and better understand how two English teachers from the same school negotiate classroom discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. In the following sections I present the design of the study, describe the study setting, and present the research methodology used in this project.

#### **Study Design**

**Ethnography.** Ethnography necessitates writing about the *culture* of groups of people, not simply about people. Humans are defined by the fact that we “make, transmit, share, modify, reject, and recreate cultural patterns”; ethnographers begin and end their work by focusing on and interpreting these patterns and traits (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 25). With this research I assess the cultural practices of teachers in relation to discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the English classroom. These cultural practices may be influenced by any number of factors, including family life policy, school culture, personal beliefs, classroom practices, teaching philosophies, community values, and the like.

Ethnography is used not only as the methodology in this research to gain a better understanding of what factors compel teachers toward certain discursive positions, but as an epistemological approach to understanding teachers’ practices through an interpretive lens. Ethnography is a way of knowing: it is a way of understanding research, and is not simply an approach to conducting research. Ethnography as epistemology necessitates learning, from participants, what counts as knowledge within their lived worlds and daily lives. As such, it is an iterative practice and represents an attempt at understanding an

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ongoing and unfolding cultural and social experience of which the researcher becomes a part.

**Study site: Context and access.** This research study was conducted in a small-town high school in rural Southwestern Virginia. I will describe the City of Ferrytown and Ferrytown High (both pseudonyms) in detail in the subsequent section on study setting; this section presents the context and rationale for conducting this dissertation at Ferrytown.

I conducted my first pilot study at Ferrytown High after having considerable difficulty gaining access to regional schools. Many K–12 schools in the Southwestern Virginia region are frequently utilized as study sites by two large research universities, and are therefore rightfully cautious and conservative in providing access to researchers. Further, in gaining access for my pilot study, I experienced a fair amount of resistance from administrators and teachers who were uncomfortable participating in a project implicating discussions of sexuality. Having already established trusting relationships with one English teacher at Ferrytown High and with the Ferrytown High principal, I kept these established relationships open in the hope this dissertation project would be welcomed in the future.

Given the contentious nature of my work—studying discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the English classroom—it was especially important to maintain and continually build upon the relationships I had at Ferrytown in order for this study to take place. Even while conducting my first pilot study, I had frequent conversations with Kathy, my teacher participant, about my dissertation. As an admired teacher at Ferrytown, her participation in my pilot was significant. Afterward, her continued support

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for my ongoing research agenda helped to make continued access to Ferrytown possible.

While she was not able to participate in this particular study, Kathy was instrumental in helping me to gain access to Amy and Frank, two of her colleagues who eventually agreed to work with me during this project.

Given my experience with my pilot study, I knew Ferrytown High was the ideal setting for conducting the project. Though a small school community, Ferrytown High is rife with social and political complexity. The school size and student population make it possible for all teachers to get to know all students quite well. I wondered how close-knit student–teacher relationships may affect the ways teachers negotiate their classroom discussions. Similarly, the small district of Ferrytown City Schools meant that most of the students at Ferrytown had been attending school with the same peers since kindergarten, for better or worse. I wondered, too, if students who knew each other since early childhood might be more open to discussion of potentially contentious issues in the classroom. Perhaps these historical relationships would foreclose contentious in-class discussions. But these qualities (and more, as discussed in the upcoming section on the study setting), along with my previous access to and relationships with teachers and administrators, made Ferrytown High the ideal site for this particular project.

When the time came to begin conducting fieldwork in January 2011, I was given immediate access to Ferrytown High by the head principal, Mr. Winters. Having contacted him through e-mail with the approved IRB protocol materials, Mr. Winters remembered my name, and forwarded his acceptance of my proposal to all the English teachers at Ferrytown. Though my project was initially met with disinterest, Kathy, the participant from my first pilot study, openly supported my research endeavor by

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frequently encouraging the other English teachers to participate. While this process was less than smooth despite my previous access and contacts, after several weeks two English teachers—Amy and Frank—finally agreed to participate.

**Project timeline.** Upon agreeing to participate in the research study, Amy and Frank immediately welcomed me into their classrooms so that I could begin observations. I spent two to three days per week at Ferrytown High, from February 16 – May 6, 2011, observing Amy’s and Frank’s classes. Each participant gave me open access to all of their classes, so I chose my observation schedule based on the widest variety of courses offered between the two participants, as well as my ability to commute to Ferrytown. Table 1 highlights the courses I observed, and the units taught during my observations. Despite the immediate welcome I received by both teachers once they agreed to participate, it took several weeks for each of them to sign the IRB consent form and to agree to interviews. I suspect they were “testing the waters” a bit to see how much of a commitment I was asking of them. Although I had planned for three interviews, each participant agreed to four interviews, as the conversations we had were far more comprehensive and involved than the three-interview protocol I had originally planned. In spite of the initial hesitation to consent to interviews, each participant ultimately expressed enjoyment of the interview process, which was based upon the attached interview protocol (see Appendix A).

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**Table 1. Courses and Curriculum Units Observed**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Courses Observed</b>	<b>Curriculum Units Observed per Course</b>
Amy	Advanced English Nine (freshmen)	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i> ; short stories
	General English Twelve (seniors)	<i>The Lord of the Flies</i> ; ballads; <i>MacBeth</i>
Frank	Advanced Placement English (juniors and seniors)	Poetry; conducting research; MLA style and writing research papers
	General English Eleven (juniors)	<i>Death of a Salesman</i> ; Realism in literature; short stories; writing research papers

**Study Setting: Historical and Community Contexts**

The City of Ferrytown is located within the Blue Ridge Mountain Range in southwestern Virginia. A small city of just under 16,500 residents as reported by 2010 census data, Ferrytown had humble beginnings in the 1760s as a small settlement positioned in the curve of a wide river. Settlers heading West could be ferried across the river here, and also welcomed the settlement as a stop for fresh water, and eventually, a tavern, a general store, and the services of a blacksmith. With the arrival of the rail system in the 1850s, Ferrytown quickly became an important shipping depot for points north and east.

The boom of the coal and mining industries in West Virginia in the 1860s spiked a substantial population growth regionally. Major companies began developing the land in and around Ferrytown for housing and commerce, which in turned helped to support and sustain increasing coal shipments from West Virginia to points east and north. Industry boomed with an iron foundry, brick works, lumber companies, a knitting mill, and a stone quarry, boosting Ferrytown’s population to 5,000 residents by 1892. The population continued to grow steadily over the next several decades, with industry and

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manufacturing stabilizing most of the growth. In 1913, Ferrytown was chosen by the state legislature as the site for the state normal school, which is now Ferrytown University. In the 1930s, the federal government recognized Ferrytown as an ideal region for major manufacturing, and in the early 1940s, a weapons-manufacturing arsenal was established, drawing even larger numbers of residents during the wartime economy. Housing for workers at the arsenal was built in certain areas of Ferrytown, and this housing remains populated today by blue-collar workers and ethnic minorities in the area. Manufacturing industries continue to employ 10% of Ferrytown's labor force today.

Social statistics of Ferrytown depict a working-class year-round population, punctuated by a sizable student population at Ferrytown University. The roughly 9,000 students attending Ferrytown University make up more than half of Ferrytown's population of 16,500 residents. The importance of the university to Ferrytown's economic livelihood today is reflected in the 2010 census data, citing education and other social services as providing employment to 32% of Ferrytown's residents.

Roughly 25% of adult Ferrytown residents (25 years and older) have earned a high school diploma as the highest level of educational attainment. Another 22% of the population has earned a bachelor's degree, and just under 13% have earned a Master's degree. The majority of Ferrytown residents self-identify as white (87%), with 8% of residents identifying as black, another 2% as black and white, 2% as Hispanic, and slightly less than 1% as Asian American. Median household income in 2010 was just under \$30,000. Even though 7% of families and 30% of the population live below the poverty line, including 11% of those under age 18 and 9% of those ages 65 or over, these

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numbers can misrepresent the socioeconomics of the area due to the relatively large adult student population at the university.

Ferrytown High School enrolls 456 students, and shares a building with Ferrytown Middle School, which enrolls 246 students in grades seven and eight. Ferrytown also has two elementary schools, with a combined enrollment of approximately 800 students in grades K–6. Politically, Ferrytown residents' voting patterns represent national trends, with voters in the city voting largely Democratic in 2008 elections, and largely Republican in 2004 elections. Again, the student population of Ferrytown University may impact this data.

Though not supported statistically, Ferrytown has been locally described as a socially and politically conservative city, with those associated with the university representing the area's more liberal residents. Amy and Frank, the teacher participants in this study, both described Ferrytown as largely socially conservative, with Amy self-identifying as "arch-conservative" and Frank self-identifying as politically and socially liberal. The participant in my first pilot study at Ferrytown described the school and the area as "extremely conservative," and both librarians at the Ferrytown City Library also described Ferrytown residents as primarily conservative. In fact, during an informal personal communication, one librarian explained her surprise when in 2009, several Ferrytown church congregations assembled in the library parking lot with picket signs to protest the library's offering of a free Tarot card reading as a community event. Representatives from the churches criticized the small event as "against the community's values."

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### **Research Methodology**

In an effort to allay the “mystique” of ethnography within educational research, including the propensity for researchers in education to conflate “ethnographic” or “qualitative” methods with “ethnography,” I follow Wolcott (1999) in differentiating between conducting and producing an ethnography. Conducting ethnographic research necessitates experiencing and collecting a body of data originating in the social world. Producing an ethnography requires a social and cultural approach to transform the field experience into a completed account—in other words, producing an ethnography requires and interpretation of cultural practices seen in the field (Wolcott, 1999).

**Conducting ethnography: Processes and techniques.** In conducting this ethnography I was situated in the field as a participant observer, itself both a position and a method of data collection involving watching, listening, asking questions, and collecting artifacts (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Over the course of my time in the field I utilized two ethnographic research methods—participant observation and participant interviews—to collect primary data. Participant observation enabled the collection of extensive field notes, relevant school and community artifacts, and reflections and generative thoughts in my research journal. Participant interviews generated audio files of interviews, transcripts of the audio files, and reflections and generative thoughts in my research journal.

***Participant observation.*** In this research study I was positioned to embrace the nexus between active participant and passive observer in both classrooms. Each participant legitimized my presence in each classroom by introducing me to the students and explaining (loosely) my presence. Neither teacher explicitly mentioned to the

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students that I was there to study how teachers negotiate discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. Amy and Frank each understood that I hoped to observe, but also that I was certified to teach high school English, and was happy to help them in any way, including grading, making copies, and teaching. Amy made it clear that she wanted me to observe only. Frank welcomed me to teach, though ultimately he felt he didn't have the time for this to happen, citing strain in preparing students for state standardized tests.

I observed Amy and Frank during the winter and spring quarters, when teachers were preparing students for state standardized tests, AP tests, and senior graduation. Despite the busy time of year, both teachers made an effort to frequently engage me in classroom talk, taking the time to further acknowledge my presence and legitimacy in the classroom. Sometimes I was brought into academic discussions; more often, I saw my presence leveraged as another adult appealing to students for better behavior, acknowledging the importance of studying, discussing the nuances of writing a research paper, and the like. For these reasons, I saw myself as neither an active nor passive observer.

While at Ferrytown I was continually generating field notes as frequently as possible, though the type of field notes themselves varied greatly due to my participant-observer role. All field notes were handwritten in a notebook, as I didn't want the presence of a laptop or the noise of furious typing to be distracting to teachers or students. I followed Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) suggestions for taking ethnographic field notes that coincide with researching dynamic social environments. On days when the teachers enlisted me in active class participation, for example, field notes

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took the form of jottings that were then “written up” after leaving Ferrytown. Following is an example of a jotting and how it was written up later in the day:

Jotting:

M1: My b says colored. Racist?

M2: offensive

M1: niggers?

MS2: Pref. negro, colored is off. That’s gay. (data from field notes, 3/9/11)

Write up:

Sitting in the back of A’s classroom during ballad presentations. A asked me to check that students have given minimum requirements for ballad presentations while she works individually with students not presenting. A gave me a rubric to check off: reads ballad; type of meter; explains meter. While I do this, two male students are talking quietly in front of me about their ballads.

White male student to black male student: My ballad’s about black people, but it calls them colored. Isn’t that racist?

Black male student: Dude, that’s so offensive.

WMS: (laughing) Is it as bad as niggers?

BMS: (laughing) No. Colored people is offensive. Negroes would be better than niggers. Colored people is gay. (field notes, 3/10/11)

Note that in my write up, I did not use quotation marks, as I couldn’t be certain I had the dialogue exchange written up exactly as it unfolded. However, because I immediately wrote up my field note jottings while my memory was fresh later that same day, I was able to still capture the rich description of this exchange.

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Other days, the teachers didn't involve me in classroom discussions or goings-on at all, and therefore my field notes contained rich details. As a body of data, my field notes ranged from highly detailed, word-for-word accounts of classroom dialogue, to summaries of discussions and observations written after the fact. Regarding the former: when possible, I chose to record word-for-word discussions and discursive exchanges between teachers and students in order to capture the richness of these exchanges. With this choice, I traded macro-level perspective for micro-level and accurate discursive accounts. Following is an example of detailed classroom dialogue recorded while observing, and how it was written up later in the day to include more detail:

Dialogue:

F.: Ok. Let us begin. P. 826, E. D. poem. It's a lil diff. It's interesting.

F.S.: At literal level, wom is walking to sea with her dog. It can symbolize nature being dang., and can also symb either sexuality or death when it says *No man . . . too*, this means climax (v. cracks).

F.: Well. What did u think about it, Chloe?

C: "It has lots of symbolism. It's like a puzzle, w/ diff ways of looking at it. I prob wouldn't have thought of nature and sexuality if we didn't look it up. I would have just thought about death, b/c E. D. writes a lot about death (data from field notes, 4/4/11)

Write up:

Frank: "Ok. Let us begin. Page 826, the Emily Dickenson poem. It's a little different. It's interesting."

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Female student [presenting]: “At the literal level, a woman is walking to the sea with her dog. It can symbolize nature being dangerous, and can also symbolize either sexuality or death when it says *No man moved me till the tide went past my simple shoe, and past my apron and my belt, and past my bodice too*, this means climax [student’s voice cracks]. . . .”

[Other students in class are quietly whispering and laughing.]

Frank: “Well. What did you think about it, Chloe?”

Chloe: “It has lots of symbolism. It’s like a puzzle, with different ways of looking at it. I probably wouldn’t have thought of nature and sexuality if we didn’t look it up. I would have just thought about death, because Emily Dickenson writes a lot about death.

(Note: Frank told me after class that he had given the students presenting on this poem an “outside resource,” what sounds like a book on analyzing poetry, to help them figure out this poem and to present.) (field notes, 4/4/11)

My research journal was a part of my field notebook where I recorded additional kinds of data than I normally recorded while taking field notes. In this journal I recorded emotions, participant affect, notes on the classroom settings, and notes on my role/presence in the classroom—things that I often did not have time to write while recording verbatim classroom discussions, for example, or while conducting interviews. Following is an excerpt from my research journal:

I think today was a positive one with Frank. He seemed really pleased that my presence had what he called a “positive influence” on his second period class. He thinks they are behaving better when I’m there, and says that it makes it easier for

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him when the kids are better behaved. He hasn't included me in classroom discussions before like he did today, too, which is great. But I have to now pay better attention and need to be ready to contribute. My role is going to have to shift more toward participation, maybe. (research journal, 2/25/11)

Finally, as a participant observer, I had hoped to collect teacher and student artifacts such as worksheets, handouts, examples of student writing, tests, and the like. I did collect a few worksheets and handouts, but mostly there were no extra copies of these materials available. Further, both participants felt that they did not want to copy examples of student writing for my records without parental consent. Because I had IRB approval to interact with teachers only, I did not pursue this further. I did, however, collect institutional artifacts such as the student dress code and student code of conduct.

**Interviews.** Teacher interviews were another primary mode of data collection. Each teacher participant agreed to four one-on-one interviews at times and locations convenient for them. These interviews all took place in each participant's classroom, during plan periods. As previously noted, I had planned for three interviews per participant, but after the second interview it became clear we would not cover the entire interview protocol in three interviews (see Appendix A). I was especially pleased to conduct a fourth interview because Amy and Frank both told me they enjoyed having the interviews as a time to reflect on and think about issues they don't normally discuss. Further, our deviation from my planned protocol highlighted the richness of the conversations that unfolded during the interviews.

Interviews were recorded with two devices: a laptop computer equipped with Audacity, an audio recording software program, and a hand-held audio recorder. I used

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two modes of recording during interviews in the event of a recording malfunction.

Interviews were then transcribed in their entirety, generating a new iteration of data in the texted form of transcripts. While the transcripts were then analyzed as a primary data source, I am aware that a first iteration of analysis occurred in the transcription process (Davies, 2008; Emerson et al. 1995; St. Pierre, 1997). The transcription process itself therefore generated a tertiary data type in the form of analytical memos and entries into my researcher's journal. Because I wanted to ensure that I was doing the analysis that comes with the interpretation and judgment necessary for transforming an audio text to a printed text, I did all of the transcribing myself, noting nontextual markers such as long pauses, laughter, audible bodily gestures (e.g., banging a fist on a desk), and vocal tones and volume.

I designed the interview protocol to contain three semi-structured interviews to serve the following purposes:

- The first interview was to provide an opportunity for the participant to share her or his own history as a teacher, including teacher training and education, duration of teaching profession, certifications, etc.
- The second interview was an opportunity for the participant to talk about herself or himself in the present as a teaching professional: personal and professional thoughts about courses being taught, the relative successes and challenges of these courses, the school generally, the community at large, etc.
- The final interview was to serve as an opportunity for the participant to talk about herself or himself in the future: future directions, hopes,

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aspirations within education and beyond, and thoughts on moving forward with their professional practice.

The fourth interview was used as additional time to more fully address questions asked during the first three interviews. While all interviews were designed to understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants, they were also a forum for participants to talk generally about their professional practices, their students, their working environment, and their joys and challenges in teaching.

**Producing ethnography: Reflexivity, analysis, and ethics.** As Wolcott (1999) notes, it is in the process of analysis and writing that the collected materials become ethnographic in nature: the ethnographer pulls together the fieldwork experience in such a way that the data is at once a description of a social group as well as a cultural interpretation of how the group's social behavior makes sense to those involved.

**Reflexivity.** In Chapter 1 I described my evolution as a teacher and researcher in coming to this research project. As such, in the production of this ethnography, I have worked carefully to conduct genuinely reflexive ethnographic research that recognizes my role—my position—in its explication. My previous teaching and research experiences, my choice in theoretical frameworks, and my definition of key terms collectively represent my positionality as a researcher. I also believe, however, that despite the way I have reflexively conducted and produced the project (Davies, 2008), this research can still assume a social reality independent of my knowledge of it, a social reality that can be helpful to practicing teachers.

**Data analysis.** To analyze my data I used a constant-comparative approach to data analysis (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), which requires the analyst to systematically

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read through and analyze collected data in multiple iterations in order to identify patterns and themes across the body of data. The constant-comparative method requires the researcher to engage in “systematic cognitive process involving comparing, contrasting, looking for linkages, similarities, and differences, and finding sequences, co-occurrences, and absences (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Before beginning formal analysis, I typed up all field notes and researcher journal entries, and transcribed all interviews. Because of the iterative nature of my analytical approach, I began forming reactions, questions, and hunches as I “translated” hand-written field notes and audio files into Word documents. These reactions were also recorded as analytic memos, which I describe later in this section. In the following paragraphs I describe the formal steps to my analysis.

In the first step of analysis, I read through the body of collected data in a line-by-line reading, openly assigning codes to chunks of data (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). This open coding began at the outset of data collection, and continued throughout the analysis process and into the writing stage (see Appendix B for codes and definitions). This first step of analysis engages the researcher in a systematic process involving comparing, contrasting, looking for similarities, linkages, and absences across data chunks (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). I developed (and defined) codes of everyday categories at the outset of data collection and throughout collection and analysis (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Codes were simply inserted into the data files, and tracked in an Excel spreadsheet.

As Strauss and Corbin (1998) note, this type of microanalysis, while systematic, is not rigid. Rather, it is a “free flowing” and “creative” process in which analysts move quickly back and forth across data types and in response to the unfolding analysis

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(Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 58). Using this constant-comparative approach, then, necessitates a return to all previous instances of one type of code to see how earlier analyses respond to later, newer insights in coding. For example, one code may at first have one meaning; over time, however, this meaning can change as more and more iterations of analysis unfold. The code “discipline,” for example, was first defined as “Management of student behavior in class.” Later, this code’s definition was changed to “Ways teachers constrain organic classroom culture, habits, discussion, behaviors, etc.” Once data “chunking” was complete, I moved on to the second step of analysis, which was to identify patterns across codes.

In the second step, codes were holistically assessed for categories of relation, or patterns (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010). Though this analysis was the “second” step, it was not completed in one assessment, but rather, was an ongoing process that began with the open coding process and extended into the writing stage. Identifying patterns moves the analysis from concrete “things” to more abstracted classes of things that are related to one another in different ways. Pattern-level analysis is shown in Appendix C. For example, codes that collectively represented how teachers understand the community of Ferrytown, including general community culture and values, the ways the culture and values of the community are represented in the classroom and school, and the ways teachers may support, resist, or interact with the Ferrytown community include: community culture; relationship with community; relationship with parents; teaching philosophy; intimate insight; personal position; political ideology; likes; dislikes; teachers: censorship; teachers: constraint; teachers: social practice; relationship with

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students; social language; and school involvement. Patterns were tracked in Excel, and data chunks forming each pattern were highlighted in the files with an assigned color.

In the third level of analysis, groups of patterns, or structures (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) were identified that are related to or associated with one another. As patterns came together in structures, an overall picture of the data was revealed. The structural levels of analysis are explicated in Appendices D and E. Throughout the analytic process, data were triangulated through the constant comparison of micro- and macro-level codes, through analytical memos, and finally, through the actual production of the ethnographic case through the process of writing. Structures were created by cutting and pasting patterned data from one file into another, and tracking relationships among these patterns in an outline format.

Analytic memos (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) were generated throughout data collection and analysis. These memos represented my own analytical thinking, emerging ideas, critical reactions, and ongoing questions that were instrumental in my understanding of the vast and complicated body of data I collected. Analytic memos were particularly helpful throughout my analysis, which was cyclical in nature and worked to capture the richness of the data in its social context.

Finally, I see the textual production of this paper—writing—as a fourth level of analysis, the actual production site of this ethnography. As Richardson and St. Pierre (1997, p. 965) note: “The ethnographic life is not separable from the Self. Who we are and what we can be—what we can study, how we can write about that which we study—are tied to how a knowledge system that disciplines itself and its members and to its methods for claiming authority over both the subject matter and its members.” As an

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ethnographic researcher, I am epistemologically fused to this project, and this fusion can be seen in the fourth level of analysis that occurred between assessing the outlines of emergent themes and the actual writing of this dissertation. There is not a one-to-one correlation, for example, in data highlighted in the appendices, and the headings or even flow of Chapters 4, 5, and 6, in which I present and discuss this data. My own *writing through* the chunks, patterns, and structures encapsulates the fourth level of analysis in a narrative format that connects analyzed data back to reviewed literature and the theoretical frameworks used to approach this dissertation.

***Ethical dilemmas.*** Ethics is a serious part of my research and ethical commitments on my behalf to both participants remain a crucial part of my approach to conducting and producing ethnographic research. I have been and continue to be conscious that my research asked participants to consider often personal and wide-ranging perspectives. Further, talking about issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender often situated participants in positions of reflective and/or active discomfort by encouraging conversations that were not necessarily a part of their everyday experiences. With this awareness came a number of responsibilities as a researcher that I am sensitive to in this project. All identifying information has been masked in this study. All names have been changed, including names of students my participants used in interviews and in class discussions reflected in my field notes. Participants were provided with an overview of research aims and goals before deciding to participate in either interviews or observations. Interview outlines were provided to participants before they agreed to and signed the participant consent form. The participant consent form detailed participants' rights to anonymity, their rights to withdraw at any time during the study, their rights to

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review all data related to their participation in the study, and their rights to perform audit checks on data related to my study.

In the chapters that follow, I have chosen to present a chapter each on Amy and Frank to provide readers with insights into each participant's classroom practices, including: how Amy and Frank each teach, and why; what their goals are for their students; what their motivations are for teaching, and how these motivations affect their teaching practices; teaching philosophies; and challenges, joys, and perspectives. Separate chapters for each participant are essential in order to provide a solid foundation for understanding the nuances of each teacher's practice, and how these nuance are implicated in the choices made when discussing issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender (described in Chapter 6).

In the succeeding chapters, I present the ways two different teachers in the same school and community negotiate the same tensions in their practice. Therefore, it is essential for readers to truly "get to know" each participant in order to better appreciate the ways each teacher resists, supports, or subverts dominant institutional discourses.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Amy's Teaching Practice**

This chapter contains data from field notes and interviews that describe Amy's teaching practice, including how she teaches and why, her goals for her students, and her joys, challenges, and perspectives. In the following sections, Amy's teaching practice is described within emergent themes of discipline, politics and personal involvement, and outside challenges to Amy's classroom. All of these characteristics inform Chapter 6, in which I discuss how Amy's teaching practice may reproduce, challenge, or subvert dominant norms of sexuality at Ferrytown High given my observations of how she negotiates discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender.

### **Invoking Discipline: Classroom Management, Students' Bodies, and Teaching Practices**

Amy Winn is a teacher who commands attention. Though petite, Amy is a hefty woman in her early sixties who consistently teaches with an open door and a loud voice with a commanding Southern accent. Her classroom sits in the middle of the small second floor at Ferrytown High, and on any given day you can hear Amy teaching from either end of the corridor. The twang in her sharp Southern accent seems to reverberate through the hall despite the padding offered by the brown, industrial-looking carpeting throughout the second floor. When Amy laughs, she laughs heartily, and it is infectious. When she is angry, her emotion is palpable. Amy is also very blunt: she says what is on her mind, making neither apologies nor qualifications. Despite her own "larger than life" demeanor, Amy insists on complete quiet from her students. Her students, however, never seem to be quiet enough to her satisfaction. Ironically, Amy's constant demands for quiet involve

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her own endless reproaches and correctives that seem to blend seamlessly into her lessons, her teaching methods, and her practice. In this section, I discuss several ways this veteran teacher of forty-six years infuses her classroom practice with various types of discipline.

**Discipline as classroom management.** Classroom discipline features heavily in Amy's teaching practice. While many teachers see discipline and classroom management as separate issues—discipline is related to student behavior and classroom management describes the ways things are done in a classroom—Amy uses discipline *as* classroom management. Discipline serves as a foundation to the daily practices of her classroom, and both Amy and her students participate in these practices as part of the culture of the classroom. Despite her commanding presence, Amy's students appear comfortable engaging in a “daily discipline dance” with their teacher, matching her insistence for raised hands, silence, neatly written homework, desks in straight rows, and respect with talking out of turn, disruption, tardiness, theatrics, and excessive bathroom breaks. Amy's approach to discipline can be both direct and forceful as well as subtle and subversive. For example, Amy scolded her overly talkative advanced freshman students one day by yelling: “QUI-ET! I'm going to keep you in here and make you late for your next class unless you can shut those mouths” (field notes, 3/16/11). Yet Amy can also quiet a classroom with a stern stare or a pause in her speech (silence is a stark contrast to her normally loud and boisterous verbal style, and is enough to grab her students' attention). Another more subtle disciplining technique Amy uses often is to indirectly “insult” her students. In the following example, Amy suggests that unacceptable behavior is related to a character flaw:

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Amy: “Why are you guys talking when I’m talking?”

Male student: “I don’t know.”

Amy: “Well neither do I, it’s just mental problems I guess.” (field notes, 3/16/11)

In another example, Amy says to her students: “People, there is something wrong with you all, and you are going to be sorry if you keep yabbering. Now get busy” (field notes, 2/25/11).

Amy’s thoughts on discipline featured heavily throughout our interviews. As department head of the Ferrytown English Department, she has fired teachers in the past who couldn’t “keep discipline” (interview 3, 4/27/11). Amy also feels that the high attrition rate of new teachers is mostly due to their inability to discipline effectively and consistently (interview 3, 4/27/11). She sees discipline as an essential part of teaching, and an aspect of the job that must be handled well if one is to be a successful teacher with positive academic outcomes for students.

**Bodily discipline: Student dress and gender performance.** Amy manages her classroom with a heavy disciplinarian stance in order to achieve a classroom environment she feels is conducive to teaching and learning. Amy favors a quiet, orderly classroom with students who are attentive to the lessons and show deference to her. She works tirelessly toward establishing and maintaining this type of classroom environment on multiple levels, including actively disciplining students’ dress and gender performances. Also observed was that Amy inconsistently leverages clothing and gender discipline among male and female students.

Amy very publicly disciplines male students who are in violation of Ferrytown’s dress code. For example, one morning Amy’s General English 12 class was participating

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in a pre-graduation event for seniors in the auditorium. When Amy caught a glimpse of a male student wearing white, low-slung skinny jeans, Amy yelled across the auditorium: “Young man! Your pants are in violation of the pants rule. Any lower and I’d have to see your underwear. In fact, I do see your underwear!” (field notes, 3/4/11). The student instantly received negative attention from his jeering and laughing peers while Amy continued her public scolding.

In contrast, young women who violated the dress code were disciplined privately and discreetly. I observed Amy often “correcting” her female students’ dress in hushed conversations at her desk or right outside the classroom door in the hall (field notes, 2/27/11). Or, she would get a female student’s attention, and then make a subtle motion to “adjust” a low-cut or revealing top, or to cover up bra straps (field notes, 3/25/11). Amy’s disciplining of female students did not draw any attention to the girls’ dress, while her very public disciplining of male students drew much attention. Further, while Amy very consistently corrected female students on their dress, she quite often ignored male students “in violation of the pants rule” when they were wearing low-slung, very *baggy* pants that revealed their underwear.

The inconsistencies in Amy’s disciplining of male and female students with regard to dress reinforce normative gender performances. Males wearing baggy jeans very low on the hips were most often not corrected; yet skinny-cut, form-revealing white jeans low on the hips garnered extremely public admonition. While not corroborated with interview data, I wondered if Amy found the form-fitting, more feminine cut of the skinny jeans more worthy of disciplinary action because they were so far outside the “standard” dress of the majority of males at Ferrytown, who wear very baggy jeans very

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low on their hips. Likewise, Amy's private, subtle, and consistent disciplining of female dress, which suggested to her students that they should demurely adjust their clothing, signaled Amy's stance that females should not draw public attention to their bodies.

Amy's very consistent disciplining of her female students with regard to dress reinforced the notion of an ever-present "social gaze" on female students' bodies.

In other inconsistencies in Amy's gendered discipline practice, I was highly aware of the instances when Amy chose *not* to discipline. I observed that Amy chose not to engage in gender discipline when doing so would interrupt student displays of conventional gender practices. For instance, Amy insists that students keep their hands, books, pens, pencils, and the like to themselves, and will separate students who can't follow this rule. Yet, girls were allowed to braid and comb each other's hair during class, engaging in a public, feminine, and "nurturing" practice. Similarly, I observed two freshman male students engaged in a prolonged punching exchange during a *Romeo and Juliet* video. Amy watched their game passively, choosing not to discipline them. From my vantage point, I could see how most boys in the class were watching them (and not the video) with amusement, rubbing the same spots on their own bodies to show their awareness and empathy. These two students were engaged in a male performance of burgeoning masculinity, demonstrating both their strength and stoicism for the entire class, a display Amy left alone (field notes, 2/17/11).

**Discipline as teaching practice: Methods in Amy's classroom.** Amy is aware that her disciplinary stance affects how her students view her as a teacher. She noted:

I think that most of my students like me ok but I'm not running a popularity contest. And I have to do like I have to do, and I am sure that there's some who

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do not [like it] very much. . . . I've had some students take it out in my classroom because of this, that, or the other. I can be pretty abrupt sometimes and I can be pretty, I can be a little harsh, and uh, you know, I'm sorry, I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, but yes we have rules on what has to be done and I have to have the work in at a certain time and it's nothing personal. (interview 2, 4/6/11)

Amy is aware that her disciplinary approach can be “abrupt” and “harsh,” but she focuses heavily on discipline in her professional practice because she sees it as an essential component in fulfilling her job requirements, necessary in order to meet the “rules on what has to be done” and to “have the work in at a certain time.” In fact, because Amy sees student discipline as necessary for success in teaching, discipline also informs her methodological stance.

I observed that the emphasis Amy places on student behavior and regulation carries over into how Amy goes about teaching her courses. Amy describes her teaching methods as “old-fashioned and conservative,” and takes a utilitarian approach to teaching, stating: “I'm a pragmatist. I'm not going to beat my head against the wall. . . . [A] year or so of experience would show you that. And if you're a sensible person you'd go on from there” (interview 3, 4/27/11). When asked about her philosophy of teaching, Amy responded:

My overall philosophy of teaching is to perpetrate the great truths of our culture, and give children an opportunity to not only learn these things but also to question and grow, but all of these things have to take place in a structured environment. I do not like classrooms where people are going wild. . . . My philosophy does embrace a lot of the Socratic method, I'm big on questions and answers. . . . And

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correctness . . . I think it's my duty to talk about the correct form to be used in writing and speaking and you know all of that. Just to pass on great important information and great truths. (interview 4, 5/6/11)

Amy organizes her teaching practice around “correctness,” which implicates student behavior as well as the intellectual exchange between Amy and her students. I observed the bulk of intellectual classroom exchange to be highly regulated and stylized—what I call “verbal fill-in-the-blanks.” These exchanges reflect Amy’s insistence on discipline, stressing her belief in the importance of a structured classroom environment. Most formal classroom interactions in Amy’s classes are very consistent in structure. The predominant form of intellectual exchange is a check for “correct” understanding, where Amy asks the students pointed questions with discernibly right or wrong answers. For example, during a unit on *Macbeth*:

Amy: “In scene 1, it’s who on stage?”

Students: “Three witches.”

In a unit on *Romeo and Juliet*:

Amy: “So yesterday Romeo jumped over the wall, into what?”

Students: “Juliet’s garden.”

And in a unit on *Lord of the Flies*:

Amy: “What are the animals the boys found on the island?”

Students: “Pigs.”

With this question and answer methodology, it is very easy for Amy to discern if students are grasping basic details of the readings, enabling her to assess the “intellectual discipline” of her students. Amy takes a similar approach to teaching poetry, which is

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more about form than content: “I like poetry [and] I’m really into poetic terms, poetic devices, being able to pick them out and you know [laughing]. I can’t just say, Enjoy! For me it’s always the rules, because that’s my very nature” (interview 1, 4/1/11).

This type of teaching is reinforced by the worksheets Amy has students complete. Amy usually distributes one worksheet per chapter or scene for each book or play students are reading. Amy’s worksheets are written in cursive, with ruler-lined “blanks” for answers, and are heavily photocopied. By her own estimation, Amy has been photocopying these same worksheets for many years. In fact, Amy stated that all she really needs to teach are students and a copy machine. Following are the first five-worksheet questions Amy distributed to General English 12 students for chapters 1 and 2 of *Lord of the Flies* (worksheet collected 3/25/11):

1. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ were the first two boys to be seen on the island.
2. What happened to the plane? (2 things) \_\_\_\_\_
3. Why can’t Piggy run and swim? \_\_\_\_\_
4. When Ralph \_\_\_\_\_, boys of all sizes began to come out of the jungle.
5. The twins were named \_\_\_\_\_.

Amy encourages her students to keep their worksheets on their desks during class and especially while students are reading aloud, which is a common occurrence in her classroom. Amy explained that the Ferrytown English Department encourages students to keep the very large and heavy hardcover literature texts in her classroom in order to keep track of them. While this strategy allows the school to have better control of textbooks, it

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also necessitates that class time often be used for reading from the texts, and that classrooms be used as textbook storage areas. Though students are encouraged to bring novels home during novel units, I often observed chapters of novels being read aloud in class as well. Although Amy issues a textbook to each student at the beginning of the year, she allows students to stack their books on the floor of the classroom just below the chalkboard at the front of the room. When students come to class, they simply take a book from this pile.

Amy's students are very reliant on this "controlled" and "stylized" approach to learning, though they at times try to resist it. One day a female student was reading Lady Macbeth's monologue aloud when Amy interrupted her to ask: "Who is Lady Macbeth talking to?" A male student raised his hand in response to Amy's question, but rather than answer it, gave a very good synopsis of the scene generally. Amy responded, "Well, it's something like that. But this is her monologue, people. She's talking to herself. That's the answer to number 18 [of the worksheet]" (field notes, 2/25/11).

In fact, students are so accustomed to this teaching method that at times it interferes with Amy's bids for more open-ended discussion. During one in-class reading of *Macbeth*, Amy stopped a student while he was reading aloud:

Amy: "Look at this folks. Sometimes when guys get nervous, they get really anxious. And this is what we have now. And no offense, guys, but when you get nervous you get agitated. Did you notice that? Because the girls notice that. And they don't get mad or anything, but they just know that's the way it is. It's normal. Don't you think?"

[Silence.]

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Female student: “Can we answer some [study] questions now?”

Male student, who is reading Macbeth’s part: “Can’t we just keep reading?”

Amy: “No, we need to answer some questions” (field notes, 3/16/11).

In this exchange Amy’s bid to get students involved with an open-ended discussion is met with student resistance. One student resists Amy’s discussion bid in a request to keep reading, while another resists by leveraging worksheet questions in lieu of a discussion, which as a favored teaching strategy, Amy pursues. In another example, Amy attempts a conversation with her Advanced English 9 students while reading the short story “The Necklace”:

Amy: “Would you like it if your wife was having fun and looking beautiful and you just go home to your room to sleep?”

Male student: “I don’t know I’m not married” (field notes, 2/25/11).

In this exchange, we can see how accustomed students are to Amy’s verbal fill-in-the-blank questioning style: in fact, the male student co-opts her pragmatic question and answer approach to resist engaging in a conversation with her. This exchange could also suggest a classroom power play made tangible because of Amy’s disciplinary practice and her classroom management preferences: when Amy initiates a discussion, her students often resist it. If they initiate a discussion, she will often resist. However, discussion is still a viable feature in Amy’s classroom under certain circumstances. As will be shown in the next section, Amy’s bids for discussion are more successful when leveraged with political and ideological discussions than with discussions about literature.

Discipline is an important aspect of teaching for Amy, and it manifests most

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prominently in her approach to classroom management, a gendered approach to disciplining students' bodies, and in Amy's methodological approaches to teaching. Amy is aware that her emphasis on discipline can be hard for some students, but feels that discipline is an integral aspect of successful teaching and learning in the classroom. Interestingly, despite such a varied emphasis on discipline, I also observed that Amy never commanded total discipline. Further, I noted that her teaching methods also undermined teaching and learning in that students seemed reliant on her "verbal-fill-in-the-blank" strategies, which often foreclosed open classroom discussion. As I will discuss in the next section, however, Amy and her students have much more open classroom discussions when engaging in discussions of politics and values.

### **Political and Personal Involvement in the Classroom**

Roughly six weeks after I began observing Amy teaching in her classroom, she and I sat down for our first interview. During this interview, Amy began to convey her political orientation and its connection to her teaching practice:

You can probably tell that I'm an extreme conservative. And in no way, never, do I want my kids inculcated with anybody's political views, and so therefore I try to be very careful not to inculcate any of mine. And if they come right out and ask me something I'll usually tell them what I think but I'm always very careful to say, listen, this is a free country, and that's a whole thing that makes a world go round, and you know it will not influence my grading of your paper at all. You tell me what you think 'cause that's what you're supposed to be doing now. But even after having said that, I still think that teaching gives one an opportunity to express the importance of character, and values, and things like that. And I do

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probably use my position to make statements about things like that. I feel like it's kind of a duty. It's a duty to hit those kinds of things like values. (interview 1, 4/1/11)

Amy's strong political convictions, and her belief that "teaching gives one an opportunity to express the importance of character and values," intersect with her classroom practices in multiple ways, as discussed in the following subsections.

**Political ideologies in the classroom.** As previously highlighted, Amy and her students infrequently engaged in open-ended discussion of literature. In part, this may be due to students resisting discussion because they are very used to "understanding" literature via Amy's "disciplined" and pragmatic question and answering strategy. Given Amy's tendency to ask low-level questions to check for understanding, students were often observed resisting Amy's bids for more in-depth discussions of the literature. Presenting an additional challenge to open-ended discussion is Amy's need for strict classroom behavior, which privileges silence and reserve on the students' part. Yet, discussion between Amy and her students was much more prolific and free-flowing when discussions were of a political or ideological nature.

Over the course of our interviews, Amy self-identified eleven times as a conservative, two of the eleven as an "arch-conservative." Even though Amy feels that no one should be "inculcating" students with political views, she is not shy about sharing her views with her students:

They [students] know what my political views are. When they ask me, which they always invariably do, I tell them. But I also tell them that it really doesn't matter, and they know too that they can take any stand they want . . . I don't care, as long

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as it's backed up and not full of wild generalizations and things like that. Then I'll probably cut them down. But it's not my place to change someone's or inculcate my political philosophy in someone else's kid. So I try to keep that at a sort of a minimum, because inevitably, we may have more influence than we know. . . .

(interview 2, 4/6/11)

Though Amy is careful to qualify her strong political views, stating that students in her classroom are free to have their own thoughts, can differ in their thinking from her without fear of negative effects on their grades, and simply need to be able to justify their arguments, she is also aware, by her own acknowledgment, that she is teaching a population of students who come largely from conservative families in a conservative community. Of her relationship with the Ferrytown community, Amy states: "I do know mostly everybody in the community, and that's because I taught them [laughing], so. You know, I feel like my relationship with the community's good" (interview 2, 4/6/11). And of the political orientation of Ferrytown citizens, Amy states: "I would say that a lot of people connected with the university might tend to have a little more liberal bent. And a lot of other people in the community are pretty much conservative" (interview 3, 4/27/11).

As Amy noted, she feels that "inculcating" students is not her place in the classroom. And yet, she does share her political views with her students. However, given that Amy also knows her students' families quite well—meaning she likely knows who shares her political views and who doesn't—I don't believe Amy sees her politics in the classroom as problematic or contradictory to her statements.

Rather, Amy sees her viewpoints as largely shared by her students and their

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families. In another interview I asked Amy if she felt that public schools have an obligation to reflect the beliefs of the community around them. She replied:

Oh, YES. I think so. I do not think it would be my business to teach some philosophical ideal or particularly a political idea that would be in opposition to the general feelings of the class. In other words, I don't think that I would have the right to make disparaging comments . . . like creationism is a myth, that's not my business to get into that sort of thing. I think we always need to have respect for the community that the children come from. . . . [I]t's not my business to go against their parents' teachings. . . . Now the only thing that I, may be in opposition to the community I mean, if I don't feel like values are being taught. I certainly don't mind laying them out there. . . . I might be the only person getting some of these things out there to them. (interview 4, 5/6/11)

Amy feels strongly that schools should be supportive of the communities they serve.

While she believes she is careful not to “inculcate” students with her own political views, she also knows the community well enough to know that her views are not likely to be contentious with the views of the majority of her students and their families. She believes that teachers should not be making “disparaging comments” that may be disrespectful to the community, citing one example of such a comment as “creationism is a myth.” Amy likely perceives she is therefore both religiously and politically aligned with the community, which is no doubt helpful as she attends to what she sees as her duty to teach values.

As explained in the previous section, part of Amy's teaching philosophy is to “perpetuate the great truths of our culture.” Amy never elaborated on what (or whose)

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“great truths” she feels she is responsible for in her teaching practice. But she was very particular about her preferences in literature, which, in combination with her conservative political stance, may demonstrate the types of “values” and “great truths” Amy feels compelled to teach:

I’m not the least bit interested in being politically correct, I’m not interested in women’s writing, I’m not interested in minorities’ writing, I couldn’t care less about any of that. I think the important thing is that they should get the greats, Chaucer, Shakespeare, people like that. . . . But the textbook companies . . . are so far out on the limb and to the Left, and picking something they call politically correct, that sometimes the books are so watered-down, and yet they’ve got so much crapola on the edges. . . . (interview 2, 4/6/11)

Though Amy did not elaborate on what “values” and “great truths” she feels compelled to incorporate into her teaching practice, transcript data informs her stance via what is *left out* of her practice (political correctness, women’s literature, ethnic literature) as well as what is a part of her practice (conservative political views and community-centric values).

Not only does Amy infuse her practice with her own political opinions and beliefs, but she also wants her students to learn how to take a political stance. During an interview, Amy told me how she scolded a student for not taking a firm political stance in a paper he wrote about Muslim extremists:

I said, Dave, this was the most washed out little paper I have ever seen in my life! You never even used the word ‘Muslim!’ Who are these people? What are you talking about? And he said [using a baby voice], I know, I just didn’t know what

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to say, I know it was, I know it was, and he wouldn't even go there. I mean he was so afraid of being politically incorrect or saying something that might offend somebody or I don't know what, that he could hardly write a paper at all. And I just, I laughed at him, and I said, COME ON! We gotta say what we gotta say!  
(interview 2, 4/6/11)

As with her gendered approach to disciplining students, which support dominant and normalizing gender practices, Amy's political discussions support certain political and ideological stances despite her wish not to "inculcate" political opinions. Amy's own political stance, her encouragement of her students to take a political stance, and her belief that schools should reinforce the beliefs of the surrounding community normalized a largely conservative political and ideological rhetoric in Amy's classroom. In one example, Amy encourages one General English 12 student to take a stronger political stance, and also doesn't challenge another student's strong conservative stance:

Amy: "You can almost just transform it [*Lord of the Flies*] onto the world today as far as dictatorships."

Male student: "This sounds like communist propaganda to me."

Amy: "So are you saying he's like Gadhafi?"

Male student: "I was just saying that but if you want to take it that far then yeah."

Female student: "More like Obama." (field notes, 3/30/11)

Amy made a bid to the male student to take a stronger stand with his statement, and connect communism to Qadafi. She also left unchallenged the female student's suggested connection between President Obama and communism, leaving that connection to stand as valid.

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Amy's own personal political position aligns well with how she views the political positioning of the Ferrytown community. In this way, Amy experiences no "dissonance" when discussing political issues in her classroom: while she feels it is not okay to inculcate students with her own political views, she knows too that her views are familiar and likely accepted by her students and their families. Amy's strong political stance certainly has ramifications for students who don't share her views, though students' perceptions are not assessed in this study. However, data suggests that Amy may believe she is *not* inculcating her students, as she believes they largely share her political beliefs. Similarly, the "values" Amy feels obligated to teach are likely connected to her political and ideological stance, though these "lessons" are imbued with a moralizing tone, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

I observed a number of discussions that reflected Amy's teaching philosophy of addressing values. Amy may not see herself as inculcating political beliefs in her students, but Amy does take on a moralizing or proselytizing tone in open-ended discussions on values. In the following data, Amy encourages students to take a firm stance in discussions on values, just as with political discussions. But she also "weighs in" when she perceives that students have an alternate values orientation from her own:

Amy: "Can defects in society be traced to defects in individuals? Do you agree or disagree?"

Students: [yelling out] "AGREE!"

Male student: "Because these individuals make up society."

Amy: "Do you have an example?"

Female student: "Lindsay Lohan."

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Amy: "What are you saying?"

Female student: "I think she's a low-life. Because little kids look up to her. Just like Miley Cyrus, and she's a little whore. . . . And Chris Brown he put up naked pictures everywhere. . . ."

Amy: "She [Rihanna] went at him with a high heel, right? And then I heard that after he trashed that room he partied with naked women. . . . Are you all saying there's too much trouble with Hollywood?"

Female student: "She [Lindsay Lohan] smokes salvia."

Amy: "Well maybe that's why she's losing her virtue because she's losing her mind. . . ."

Male student: "I love Charlie Sheen. I want to be just like him."

Another male student: "I like Tiger Woods."

Amy: "It is a little scary that we do admire and want to emulate people like these. It doesn't make us look good. . . ." (field notes, 3/16/11)

In the above data, Amy encourages students to substantiate their opinions with examples, and then uses those examples to infuse a moralistic, values-based orientation to the discussion, reminding students that they should be emulating people with better character. The same occurs in another discussion:

Amy: "Well how do we become a civilized society?"

First female student: "I feel like we crave order naturally."

Second female student: "I think the bad ones go against their parents."

First female student: "Your parents mold you as you go."

Third female student: "People know from right and wrong."

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Amy: “Okay. Where did you get it [knowing from right and wrong]?”

Second female student: “Parents.”

Amy: “And church. Church is a big one, at least for me. I know it’s not for everybody.” (field notes, 3/24/11)

In the above data, Amy infuses the discussion with values by validating both parents and church as moral authorities necessary for civilized society. While the students agreed that parents have an important function in society, Amy reminded students that Church provides an equally important function, despite the notion that the values prioritized by a church may not be shared by all individuals. Again, however, because Amy feels that schools should reflect the beliefs of the communities they serve, and because Amy knows the Ferrytown community so well, she felt free to emphasize the importance of parents’ values and the values taught in church during classroom discussion.

**Personal involvement in the classroom.** Amy demonstrates a deep care for many of her students, though her blunt nature and insistence on discipline often overshadow her caring affect. I observed Amy interact informally and more personally with a number of students, particularly those in her third period General English 12 class. Amy mentioned often how fond she is of the students in this class, stating that while many of these students may not pass and aren’t necessarily college bound, she sometimes feels she has more in common with them than the college-bound students in her other classes. She also spends some extra “downtime” with a few of her third period students due to Ferrytown’s split lunch schedule.

Ferrytown High has two split lunch periods. Students who have first lunch proceed directly to the lunchroom after third period, while those with second lunch spend

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15 minutes in their third period classroom before proceeding to their lunch. During this time in Amy's classroom, four students from her third period class waited with her for second lunch—three females and one male. During this split lunch period, Amy took the time to talk with each student who wanted to chat. Most often these were “public” conversations, with students talking casually with Amy from their desks while she busied herself with grading. Amy was always very kind and attentive to these students, and these students demonstrated their own comfort in these conversations.

During my observations, the group of three female students engaged Amy in a continual personal discussion about dating. While the conversation initially began with the girls and their own dating experiences (one student had told Amy she “partied with a cop” who gave her a sip of beer and was subsequently fired), conversation eventually turned toward Amy, her personal dress, and her own dating experiences:

First female student: “Miss Winn, you should be wearing jeggings this summer.”

Amy: “What are they?”

First female student: “Leggings that look like jeans, like cropped.”

Amy: “Oh, I wouldn't look good in those.”

First female student: “Yeah! You could wear like a long shirt.”

Amy: “Oh no.”

Second female student: “Yeah, Miss Winn, we'll hook you up. You'll have all them hussies ringing your phone off the hook.”

Third female student: “Yeah, you want us to find you a man? We'll find you a man.”

Amy: “Well, yes, ok. No drinking, no smoking, goes to church, likes to cook.”

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First female student: “Do you like muscular men?”

Amy: “You’re not going to find any muscular men my age.”

Third female student: “Yeah, we’ll hook you up, Miz Winn. We’ll go to the Jersey Shore. Some guido. You’ll come back from break like, Haaay-ayy!” (field notes, 3/16/11)

This conversation proceeded steadily from there for the remainder of my observations, with the three girls asking Amy more and more details of who she might like to date, what characteristics she looks for in a man, and what she would like to do on a date. The girls eventually mentioned they had set up a profile for Amy on a free dating Web site, and identified four men that they thought Amy might like. Amy never demonstrated that she was taking the girls’ offers seriously, but she also always humored the girls in this conversation, never avoiding the girls’ conversations or trying to change the subject. Amy very willingly answered any questions they had for her. In an extension to her commitment to teaching values, Amy’s informal and personal interactions with her students served to model what her own, more mature, cautious, and conservative approach to dating might look like.

Amy also took a personal interest in other students she taught. Amy knew that one third-period student, Spencer, has a father who is an alcoholic. In class one day, Amy shared with the students that her father was an alcoholic, telling the students about the ways her father’s drinking habit affected her and her family as she grew up. Later that day in an interview, Amy mentioned how important she thought it was for Spencer that she openly discussed her own experiences with alcoholism:

And if you noticed how Spencer said, yeah, I know exactly what you mean. See,

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my saying that [my father was an alcoholic] could mean all the world to a kid like Spencer. To know that adults feel the same way, and that the way he feels is ok.

(interview 1, 4/1/11)

Amy made it clear several times that she felt it was important for teachers to be able to give students “reality checks” by letting them know that they are not alone in their problems. This is another way Amy demonstrates care for her students, perhaps also reinforcing her belief that she has a duty to teach values.

Patricia was also a focal point of Amy’s attention. Amy mentioned during our last interview that Patricia had stopped coming to school suddenly, but had returned that day. Amy had sought her out to talk with her, and told me about the conversation:

She [Patricia] was a good, good basketball player and all of a sudden that’s over and she’s just not getting it together. And we had a big talk, especially when I found out that she has left home, where she has eight younger siblings . . . and she said I just didn’t think I should ask my mom to do anything more for me. And she, but she is living with a guy who is a big drug seller and, however, it is not a sexual relationship. And she assures me that she is not involved. I said, Patricia, if you lay down with dogs you are going to get fleas, let me tell ya.” And we talked [laughing] about that quite a bit. . . . [A]nd I said . . . Your grades are dropping and you are getting in risk again . . . after we SAVED you so that you could play ball . . . and I said “You can’t let it go now.” She wants to enter the military, but I think her boyfriend broke up with her and she got real upset with that, and he is somewhat older anyway and in the military. . . . [T]he only thing I could really tell her was that, you know, if she got in a situation where she was scared or she was

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worried or she felt overly tempted or whatever it was, to call me. (transcript 4, 5/6/11)

The above transcript data demonstrates that Amy knows about and tries to understand Patricia's personal life. It also demonstrates Amy's willingness to help this student. Amy continued:

You just have to be blunt. This is not a time for pussy-footin' around, you know? I do, I really do, I see her as having so much potential, and I said Patricia, you don't have any idea how many black kids I have seen that have slipped through the cracks. Guys particularly. And you can't. You just can't let it happen.

(interview 4, 5/6/11)

Amy mentioned a number of other third period students she takes a personal interest in, providing guidance on school and personal issues, talking often with their parents, offering extra credit as often as she can. Amy stated:

I would do it for others, but you know, you gotta give me some indications that you want it. And then, but the thing is, you just realize that you can't get everybody. I had to let Andrea go. I'm getting on my last nerve with Shana because she's sitting there today you know like this [crosses arms and puts a pout on her face] and I'm thinking no wonder you don't know what's going on, Shana, you're sitting here like this! (interview 3, 4/27/11)

While Amy's personal involvement with her students stems in part from a caring affect, such involvement may also be motivated by what she sees as her obligation to teach values. Amy's strong political beliefs inform which values Amy feels compelled to teach students. Amy knows her students and their families well, and seems comfortable

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expounding on what she sees as important values that likely align favorably with the general sentiments of the community. Though oftentimes her “discussions” of the literature are constrained by her need for classroom control, I observed Amy very willingly engage her students in free-flowing discussions on topics that provided an opportunity to both encourage political stances among students and to teach values. Additionally, Amy is often very personally involved with her students, and while this personal involvement no doubt is a part of her caring nature, this type of involvement reflects another way Amy infuses values-based guidance and teaching within her professional practice.

Amy feels that a school has a responsibility to reflect the beliefs of the communities it serves, and Amy operates from a position of “safety” in this regard, as she knows, generally speaking, her teaching philosophy and practice are accepted. However, as discussed in the next section, I noticed that at times Amy finds herself outside of this “safety zone,” particularly when dealing with people and situations that originate or extend beyond her classroom door.

### **Outside Challenges to Classroom Control**

Though Amy manages her classroom and teaches her lessons in ways that make sense to her in philosophical, methodological, and political ways, there are times when her approaches go challenged by interactions and influences originating outside her classroom. In the following transcript data, Amy discusses a situation she had with one parent:

I have had some parents who have not liked me, who have told me that I ruined their child’s life because I said he plagiarized on a paper or I was much too strict

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and much too hard and gave too many tests or graded too roughly. I lost one boy this year to the general class because his parent came in and he said that he didn't like it that a lot of my work was hand-written and that his son didn't like to read cursive. And I said well, you know, now isn't that sad. And unfortunately I didn't handle it very well. . . . [A]nd I said well maybe we need to go down and talk to [the principals] about that and get them involved in this. And I did not feel, this is the one time this year that I did not feel that they backed me up as they [the principals] should have because they did remove the boy from my class saying that no doubt it would be an ongoing thing. (interview 2, 4/6/11)

Amy's tight regulation of her classroom is possible because of her relative position of power in her classroom. While Amy's students are comfortable challenging her in her disciplining efforts, there is never any doubt that Amy "runs the show" in her classroom. However, I found that whenever an "outside" challenge to her power or control over her classroom presented itself, Amy seemed quite uncomfortable, reverting to retreat or removal—of herself, the problem, or the person or thing presenting a challenge from her classroom or practice.

**Administrators and parents.** In the above example, Amy chose to take the angry parent and the "problem" of her use of handwritten handouts to the principals' office rather than to deal with the issue on her own. The principals, certainly aware of Amy's methods and usage of photocopied, handwritten worksheets, quizzes, tests, etc., chose to remove the student from her class, knowing it was unlikely for Amy to make a change to this method, which she has used since the beginning of her teaching career.

In redirecting this situation to the principals, Amy was predicting the principals

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would “back her up,” though the situation wasn’t resolved to her satisfaction. Amy discussed the importance of knowing one’s principals well, as Amy sees this knowledge having an impact on what kinds of latitudes teachers can take in their classrooms. In the following interview transcript, Amy discusses how she found out that one of her worksheet questions was pushing limits of acceptability. In a *Lord of the Flies* worksheet, Amy asks the students to name four ways Simon might be seen as a Christlike figure. A student who wasn’t religious took offense to the question, and went to the principal:

[F]ortunately [the principal] backed me up, because what I said to the kid, and you can tell your folks, regardless of what you are, this being a culture with Judeo-Christian background, that is a part of your cultural literacy, the Bible. . . . You know, if we don’t complain about teaching Greek Mythology, we shouldn’t complain about Biblical references. And I said, even if you are an atheist, which his [the student’s] argument was that he was, I said you cannot understand the society in which you live until you are at least pretty cognizant with these values, and to refuse to know them is closed-minded. . . . The principal at that time was someone who was pretty strong, you know, on the “teacher is right.” Sometimes you get principals that are a lot more wishy-washy, and they’re afraid to take on a parent or something like that, and they will take the path of least resistance. So.

You’ve got to know your man and go right along with him. (interview 3, 4/27/11)

After this experience, however, Amy went on to say that she changed the way she asked the question, and that she will no longer actually discuss the question in class, thus removing risk of contention from her classroom. Amy is savvy, knowing the importance of understanding an administrator well enough to know how she or he might “rule” on an

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issue brought forth by a teacher, parent, or student. Amy states:

So, little things come and go, you know, like maybe little misunderstandings with the principals, you feel like this one would be better if maybe he was this way, blah blah blah. But really, all told I can sort of get along with most anyone. And that's me now. I mean I see things other people are saying, but it really doesn't affect me too much because if they just leave me alone and act fairly normal I can still do my thing. (interview 4, 5/6/11)

Amy attempts to preserve her autonomy and sense of “safety” in her classroom by predicting when she can get reinforcement from her administrators on issues that challenge her philosophical and methodological approaches to teaching. As with the opening transcript excerpt in this section, however, an administrator's stance can still sometimes be hard to predict. The same occurs in the transcript excerpt that follows, in which Amy does not get the hoped-for administrative support with position on suggestive dancing at the prom. Rather than challenge the administration on this issue, however, she removes herself from involvement with the prom. Though she used to be in charge of prom, another teacher took it over after Amy broke her leg several years ago. Amy was glad to be relieved from the responsibility, stating:

[I]t was getting kind of a chore for me because I did not approve too much of physical contact on the dance floor and I felt like I didn't get backed up as much as I should have from the administration on that. . . . I noticed this year my name is not even on the list of chaperones, which is good because last year I had a big brouhaha when I went up and said something to the people. . . . I'd just assume not have anything to do with it. Because I really don't want to be connected with

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anything where young girls, in beautiful evening gowns, that cost \$400, with expensive hairdos, are going out there and dancing like streetwalkers. (interview 1, 4/1/11)

In this example the prom represents an institutional power struggle, where Amy firmly disagrees with practices of student dance that are considered acceptable by the school in general. Rather than challenge the administration, Amy removes herself from the situation by no longer participating in the prom. It is also clear that the committee and/or administrators—whoever compiles the list of chaperones—would also rather not have Amy participate. While Amy is fine engaging in struggles over discipline in her classroom, where she's clearly in charge, she is also happy to remove herself from a larger institutional power struggle that perhaps she knows she can't win.

**Student teachers and personal choice books.** Amy also stays away from classroom practices that can invite criticism from beyond her classroom. Amy mentioned that she no longer will host a student teacher in her classroom because she disagrees with the “flowery stuff” new teachers often engage with in their budding teaching practices. Of her last student teacher, Amy states:

[She]was okay, but the problem was, she spent too much time journaling, and talking about how you relate to this book. And she did all the time what I call flowery stuff. . . . If we could have a 360-day school year, heck yes, I could do that too. But we don't have it. And so I don't have time for too much falderal, and I want them to respond. . . . [B]y the time she was finishing the stories, I wasn't sure they really talked about things like plot, and irony, and foreshadowing, and those kinds of things, which we must cover. So THEN, we went on to punctuation

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and capitalization, and I required her to teach it, because after all, I'm, as the supervising teacher it's my business to see that this student teacher is doing well, and her, person from the college came in and told me that [the way I was teaching grammar] had gone out and was no longer the way, and I told her that I was sorry but that was the way I was going to do it, and that as long as Mary Jo was in my room, that's the way she had to do. And after that I refused to take any more student teachers. Because they were very much caught up in that way of doing it, that it had to be, write what you think this story is going to be about. Well now everybody knows that's just a total waste of time. (interview 1, 4/1/11)

This particular student teacher represented a stark contrast to Amy's own approach to teaching. Though Mary Jo's supervisor corroborated that her methods were sound, Amy still felt that Mary Jo's methods were "a total waste of time." In response, Amy no longer has a student teacher in her classroom, removing the possibility that her own practice might be challenged so directly and visibly by another teacher trained to approach his or her profession differently.

In another example of retreat from challenges beyond her control, Amy stated that she no longer allows her students to read personal choice books for book report assignments. Amy used to give her students list of books to choose from and write a report on, but once the school board required a review of this list, Amy stated: "I stopped giving out any more book reports [assignments] after that because I didn't want to bother about it" (interview 3, 4/27/11).

In her classroom, Amy enjoys a relative sense of autonomy, feeling free to imbue her practice with methods that are important to her and also make sense to her.

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Occasionally, however, outside forces intersect with her approaches to teaching or with her ideological positions, challenging Amy's long-established methods. Rather than engage with these challenges, I see Amy pulling away from them: issues that could be resolved in the classroom are taken to the principal; student teachers, who embrace different approaches to teaching, are no longer welcomed in her classroom; rather than getting outside approval for a reading list, Amy no longer asks students to read texts beyond the class texts; and prom, where students are free to conduct themselves in ways Amy disagrees with, is no longer a school event Amy will involve herself in.

### **Discussion: Invoking Discipline Via a Monologic Stance**

The concept of discipline thematically permeates analyses and discussions of Amy in this research: her strong disciplinary stance "organizes" much of her classroom practice. As a general school construct, discipline invokes many binaries, including right and wrong, submission and transgression, good and poor behavior, and positive and negative learning outcomes. Indeed, these binaries reflect the many social, political, and economic goals we have historically relied upon public schooling to support. Some of these goals, according to Spring (2011), include creating a national culture, educating future politicians, individual socialization toward democratic citizenship, developing national unity, reducing crime, and instilling meritocratic ideals within a capitalist economy.

These goals have required an ethic of discipline that has been accepted as a part of the practice of schooling. Readily recognized by students, teachers, administrators, and parents within schools, this ethic of discipline is also a social language that has authoritative characteristics whereby students acquiesce to social practices, evaluations, and knowledge deemed socially acceptable and for the common good. The social

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language of discipline in schooling is powerful; indeed, it is not without nefarious consequences. As a social language of discipline continues to be a characteristic of twenty-first century schooling practices, many scholars focus their inquiry on the role of schools in reinforcing dominant ideologies and recreating social inequalities (Apple, 2000, 2006; Collins, 2009; Schubert, 2006).

Amy's classroom practice is mediated by her ventriloquation, or "speaking through," the social language of discipline. This ventriloquation practice positions Amy in a monologic stance in the classroom where she is the understood leader, expert, counselor, and disciplinarian—the legitimized arbiter of schooling practices in the classroom. In this monologic stance, Amy sees herself as someone in possession of the "truth" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 81), and sees herself in a position to instruct those around her who are ignorant of that truth. Because most transactions in classrooms take place through linguistic interaction (Wells & Arauz, 2006), the social language of discipline, and the monologic binaries it invokes, are an organizing force in Amy's classroom and in her teaching practice generally.

A monologic stance is a relatively easy position for a teacher to take up due to its reductive qualities and the binaries it invokes. A monologic classroom stance reduces teaching and learning to right and wrong, passing and failing, advanced and general courses, and so on. Such a stance is not entirely without difficulties, however. As will be discussed, this monologic stance sets Amy up for discomfort (a poststructural "decenteredness") in interactions reaching or originating beyond her highly controlled classroom, where reductive binaries are not necessarily the norm nor within her ability to control and maintain.

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Amy's monologic classroom stance underscores her requirement of certain types of student acquiescence (i.e., a quiet environment, raised hands, respect when she speaks, adherence to dress codes and other school rules, and so on) in order for the intellectual work of the classroom to successfully unfold. Though Amy conflated a teacher's ability to "keep discipline" as a key factor to success in the teaching profession (interview 3, 4/27/11), total student acquiescence to Amy's discipline requirements seemed constantly just out of reach. Amy was never quite satisfied with student behavior; therefore continually working toward discipline was a primary and ever-present task for her. Ironically, her reliance on discipline for learning to occur may have undermined the very learning she sought to achieve. Certainly, Amy's classroom could look quite different if discipline, and the time spent achieving it, wasn't such a focal point. Instead, however, Amy's insistence on discipline signaled her need for authority and control in the classroom, as well as the "comfort" a monologic stance in the class affords a teacher.

Amy's approach to teaching and learning is also infused with discipline, evidenced by her reliance on worksheets and what I have called "verbal fill-in-the-blank" questioning strategies to check for understanding. Classroom discourse scholars refer generally to such strategies with the acronym IRE—initiation-response-evaluation—in which the teacher asks a question, a student is selected to answer, and the teacher evaluates the student's response (Mehan, 1979). While such techniques can be useful in checking for basic understanding, research suggests that these techniques foreclose higher-level understanding and critical thinking skills. Known as "recitation scripts," such techniques provide little or no opportunity for students to voice their own thoughts or ideas, or respond to those of others (Wells & Arauz, 2006). Amy's students were so

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firmly socialized to Amy's discipline-as-practice teaching methodologies that they often resisted Amy's bids for open-ended discussion of literature. Students "complied" with Amy's disciplined practice stance by wanting "correct" answers to questions and worksheets rather than entering into a dialogic discussion of literature.

Amy's monologic stance allowed her to operate with authority in the "safe zone" of her classroom. At times her monologic stance worked against her, as students often engaged in a classroom power play: when students tried to engage Amy in discussion during class time, she often resisted; when she engaged students, they often resisted. Though her students persisted in challenging her, Amy's position as legitimized leader was never in question. However, beyond the classroom, Amy sometimes experienced challenges to her monologic stance by parents, principals, and student teachers who questioned her methods and her stance. In these scenarios Amy found herself treading unfamiliar ground, where she was invited to engage in a dialogic interaction and experience the opinions, ideas, interpretations, and experiences of others.

Amy's classroom practices were aligned with a social language of discipline, where she felt she had the support of the institution to prioritize discipline on many levels. However, beyond Amy's classroom, she also understood that others may question or not fully agree with her stances or classroom practices. Rather than embrace these situations, Amy's response was often to retreat or to remove herself from these scenarios, minimizing the opportunities for outside forces to "weigh in" on her practice, beliefs, and understandings. Amy was happy to no longer be involved with the prom committee, where others disagreed with her wish to regulate student dance and dress. She was no longer willing to sponsor student teachers, whose presence challenged her with newer

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and perhaps more dynamic teaching methods quite divergent from her own. Amy was careful to only bring issues with parents and students to administrators if she felt confident the administrators would agree with her stance.

Though Amy's discipline practices may have foreclosed many classroom discussions, her very open political positioning as a conservative worked to engage students in discussions of politics, ideology, and religion. Amy and her students were willing to take up discursive subject positions that located them largely within a conservative social language—a discourse Amy identified with and one familiar to her students given the Ferrytown community's ideological landscape. However, these discussions were far from dialogic. Though Amy welcomed other viewpoints in the classroom, encouraging students to take a stand on controversial political and social issues, her pervasive monologic classroom stance, backed by the authoritative, social language of discipline in schooling, legitimized and privileged her own viewpoints. Despite her commitment to reminding students that they were free to have their own thoughts and opinions, Amy's classroom culture was missing a key element necessary for dialogic interaction—a plurality of thought and expression.

Though true monologue is not conceptually possible in Bakhtin's views, dialogism requires more than conversation among people. Dialogic exchange is a "differential exchange" (Holquist, 1990, p. 40), requiring multiple voices to come together, in all competing understandings, meanings, multivoicedness, and experiences, to form new meanings and understandings. Dialogism requires not just multiple voices, but multiple opinions and perspectives. Amy knew that many of her students had been raised in conservative families in Ferrytown, and therefore also understood that students

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were familiar with and very often shared her viewpoints. In these open-ended exchanges, then, Amy was in dialogue with her students only to the extent that she and her students actually had classroom discussions rather than using worksheets and her verbal fill-in-the-blank “discussion” methods. However, rather than creating new understandings of politics and ideologies, these discussions with her students largely served to reinforce existing thoughts and beliefs. While Amy was careful to state that she would never want to “inculcate” any students with her own values (interview 2, 4/6/11; interview 4, 5/6/11), these discussions never deviated far, if at all, from a largely conservative perspective. These were “safe” discussions for both Amy and her students, as the outcomes of these discussions never represented true creative meaning making; rather, conservative viewpoints and discourses were reproduced under the guise of “dialogic” discussion and within the confines of a monologic teaching stance.

Amy felt very strongly that schools have an obligation to reflect the views of the communities they serve (interview 4, 5/6/11). In Amy’s view, her political perspective was welcomed and understood in the classroom, where she knew the students and their parents (many of whom were former students) very well. Amy’s teaching practice mirrored her belief that schools should not represent “dissonance” in the form of what Amy referred to as “disparaging comments . . . like creationism is a myth,” or teaching “some philosophical ideal or particularly a political idea . . . that would be in opposition to the general feelings of the class” (interview 4, 5/6/11). In this way, Amy positioned herself in alignment with the conservative cultural and political norms of the Ferrytown community.

Amy also felt it was her duty to teach “values” and the “great truths of our

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culture” (interview 4, 5/6/11). Because values and “great truths” are highly subjective, and given Amy’s firm conservative convictions, this aspect of her teaching philosophy further positioned her to speak through a social language of conservatism in her classroom. Once again, given the ideological climate of Ferrytown, Amy felt that her speaking rights on conservative “values” and “truths” would be supported by Ferrytown. While Amy taught values and “great truths” in her more open-ended political discussions, her personal involvement with her students was also guided by her ideological convictions. During formal and informal discussions, Amy often leveraged her personal interest and knowledge of students to weigh in on real-life scenarios students may be experiencing, and also to capitalize on these moments in order to teach values.

Though Amy’s conservative ideologies were often presented in blunt statements and observations, it was clear she also cared deeply for her students and their individual well-being. However, her ethic of care was also guided by her monologic classroom stance, in which she *transferred* “truths” and “values” to acquiescing students. Political discussions and the values and “great truths” Amy emphasized were familiar to students in that they were the already understood politics, values, and “great truths” of the Ferrytown community, as Amy saw them. Therefore, there was no dialogic discussion that would have represented multiple views on these issues. Further, for those students, if any, who may have different notions of values and truths, Amy’s position remained monologic, and therefore not hospitable to multiple views.

Amy’s gendered approach to bodily discipline seemed to also be connected to her commitment to teaching values and “great truths.” The differences in public and private disciplining for males and females, as well as her inconsistency in this disciplining,

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reinforced dominant social gender norms, including masculine dress and behavior, and female dress and modesty. Amy was openly and particularly harsh with male students who transgressed normative male practices, while at the same time very lenient with discipline transgressions that reinforced dominant male practices. Female students were often disciplined more privately, especially with dress code infractions. Amy quietly told female students to hide bra straps or cover cleavage, or brought students out to the hall so that they can “fix” their dress while Amy stood by.

Amy’s strong disciplinary stance organizes her classroom practices in multiple ways, affecting her teaching methods, features of her classroom discourse, and the ways she leverages her position as educator to discuss values that reflect her own and what she perceives to be Ferrytown’s conservative political and ideological views. These views are further crystallized in her teaching practice via the ways she enforces both explicit and tacit rules on behavior and student dress. Amy’s disciplinary stance belies a monologic classroom culture that legitimizes Amy’s authority, providing a comfortable and clear position from which to operate within her own classroom. Outside her classroom, challenges to her authority create discomfort and dissonance in the teaching and classroom practices she has accepted. In response, Amy retreats from interactions with others that present a challenge to her classroom culture, authority, and views.

### **Summary**

With this chapter I have introduced Amy’s classroom practice, presenting data describing Amy as a teacher, her methodological and philosophical approaches to teaching, as well as the unique qualities Amy brings to her practice. These qualities include the primacy of discipline in her practice, her political and ideological orientations, her personal capacity

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for attending to her students on individual levels, and her disengagement from challenges that originate beyond her classroom domain. All of these characteristics inform chapter 6, which: (1) contrasts how Amy and Frank position themselves as teachers via the social languages they ventriloquate, and (2) presents and discusses data on how each teacher negotiates discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Frank's Teaching Practice**

In this chapter I present data from field notes and interviews that describe Frank's teaching practice, including how Frank teaches and why, his goals for his students, and his challenges, joys, and perspectives as a teacher. In the following sections, Frank's teaching practice is illuminated within emergent themes of tensions in teaching and avoiding confrontation. These characteristics of Frank's teaching practice, discussed in depth in this chapter, affect how he negotiates discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender as presented in Chapter 6.

### **Tensions in Teaching: Literature, Students, Idealism, Liberalism, and Realities of Teaching**

Frank Garrett is a seasoned teacher of 25 years with soft eyes, kind expressions, and a quiet voice that doesn't seem to match his tall stature. Always wearing a shirt and tie, pressed pants, and casual shoes, Frank exudes patience, comfort, and professionalism as he teaches. Before the start of each of his classes, Frank is at the door to his room, greeting each arriving student with a polite and sincere welcome. I observed Frank to be very constant in his affect—kind, patient, never angry or frustrated with students, and never raising his voice while managing his classroom. Over the course of observations and interviews with Frank, a number of tensions in Frank's teaching practice became highly evident. These tensions unfolded in various ways and across multiple vantage points, demonstrating many types of conflict evident within Frank's teaching career. In this section I discuss how Frank balances his personality, intellectualism, and idealism with the demands and realities of teaching. Frank experiences several dialectics in his

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professional career, and the tensions he experiences are manifest in the interplay between these opposing ideas, beliefs, and practices.

**Emotions and literature/distance from students.** Frank demonstrates a deep appreciation for literature in his teaching practice. In a departure from his standard teaching style, which is reserved and quiet, Frank instantly animates when discussing literature in his classes: his soft eyes twinkle; his voice fills with inflection, substance, and volume; he laughs heartily. Though the curriculum at Ferrytown leaves little room for deviation, Frank delights in describing a wide range of literature beyond this curriculum. During my observations Frank told students about *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* by William Dean Howells, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, "The Open Boat" by Stephen Crane, Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*, and numerous works by Henry James, William Faulkner, Jane Austen, and Ann Radcliffe.

Frank truly enjoys literature, and wants to share this enjoyment with students. He readily acknowledges, however, that students don't often feel the same way:

I guess the English major part of me, I see this body of literature that's there, and also the beauty and the pleasure that exists in that art. And I would love to be able to bring students into that world, where they could be like Keats looking into Chapman's Homer, there's the huge Pacific out there, and they can have that feeling, and I'd love to bring that to them. But I [laughing], well, it just doesn't happen very often. Sometimes, a little bit, sometimes. (interview 3, 5/4/11)

Frank is invested in wanting students to experience the pleasures and rewards of learning, and specifically the richness of literature. And like many teachers, Frank is also quite realistic in knowing that this is no easy task. However, I observed that Frank's own

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affinity for literature positively impacted his students in this regard, thanks to the exciting and animated ways Frank tells stories about literature.

Frank is a tremendous storyteller, and many of his students showed a more observable interest in class when Frank told stories from literature rather than simply lecturing using PowerPoint presentations, as he did often. In these moments, Frank's command of literature is palpable, and it is infectious for students. When Frank starts to tell a story, students consistently lift their heads from desks and abandon whispered conversations in order not to miss anything. In the following data, Frank has been giving a lecture on realism, and up to this point, the students had been largely disinterested, neither taking notes nor asking questions. But when Frank switches into what I call his "storytelling mode," the mood of the classroom changes. Frank retells the story line from *The Rise of Silas Lapham* as a way to explain moral dilemmas:

Frank: "In realism writers use characters having a hard time deciding between right and wrong. . . . I'm going to tell you a story from the book *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. I'm not recommending the book to you because I think mostly you'll find it boring, but there's a story in there that represents what a moral dilemma is like in realism. . . . The older daughter's pretty, not a knock out, but she's intelligent, interesting. The younger sister, boy, now she's a knock out. . . . She's not quite as scintillating as the older sister, and she's not dumb, but she's not like her sister in that way. . . . A young man is coming to the house visiting with both sisters. . . . The older sister begins to fall in love with him, but assumes that he's interested in the younger sister. . . ."

Female student: "That sounds like *The Other Boleyn Girl*."

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Frank: “Does it? I haven’t seen that one yet. But yeah, I like Natalie Portman.”

Male students: [laughing] “Yeah! Mr. G! Whoo-hoo!”

Frank: “So the young man ends up coming by the house one day, knowing the younger sister wouldn’t be there, and he proposes to the older sister. . . . And now the older sister’s in a dilemma: if she says no, she’ll be unhappy, he’ll be unhappy, and the sister will be unhappy anyway because he doesn’t love her. If she says yes, they’ll be in love, and the younger sister will be unhappy regardless. . . . So what should she do?”

Male student: “She should not say anything.”

Frank: “Well, that’s a third option [laughing], but what do you think. . . ?”

Female student: “She should marry him.”

The conversation continues, with many students excitedly weighing in on what the older sister should do, and why. Frank then begins talking about moral dilemmas in the work of Stephen Crane.

Female student: “Is he boring?”

Frank: “No, you’ll like him. His most famous work is a story of surviving a shipwreck.”

Female student to female student: “Oh that sounds really good! I’m gonna look for that one.” (field notes, 2/23/11)

I observed Frank having several similar in-class conversations with his students, each engaging previously nonparticipatory students in lively discussions, and each ending with students remarking how much they would like to read the book Frank was talking about, or lamenting that they couldn’t read that particular book in class. When in “storytelling

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mode,” Frank is lighthearted and jovial as he teaches, with students actively engaged in the conversation, experiencing, through Frank’s animation, some of the pleasure and joy of literature that Frank wants to share. In fact, Frank’s students tend to model his affect, becoming more excited when he is more excited. When Frank is in storytelling mode, he engages students in a more personal and intimate conversation that brings the emotions of literature to life and into the tangible classroom experience. Unfortunately, however, Frank more often than not retains an “emotionally removed” stance from which he conducts the “business” of education. Students model this affect as well, becoming observably apathetic when Frank reverts to this more common, impersonal, and formal classroom stance.

In fact, Frank consciously chooses to remain personally and emotionally removed from his students despite their obvious enjoyment of his more engaging, personable, and emotional storytelling mode stance:

I’m not the kind of teacher who, I don’t want to know more about a students’ personal life than I need to, unless that student just really wants for me to know or needs for me to know. . . . I don’t get emotionally involved with students where I’m going to feel toward them like I do to my own kids, where what happens in their life is a huge part of my life. But at the same time, sure, what we do is try to develop them, to my mind, they’re learning to get to a class on time, and have the materials there, and listen, and speak when it’s appropriate and learn not to speak when it’s not appropriate, and know how to speak appropriately in a given situation, and how to listen. I mean to me, that’s helping them develop skills they need for adulthood, and to deal with their angers and emotions that way.

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(interview 3, 5/4/11)

In helping his students “develop skills they need for adulthood,” Frank takes a business-like approach to his teaching practice by refusing to engage in the personal and emotional aspects of teaching adolescents. He sees the practice of education as valuable in helping students learn to appropriately “deal” with their angers and emotions by developing life skills such as time management, organization, respect, and listening. And yet, Frank also wishes for students to share in the “beauty and pleasure” that exists in literature as an art form—an experience that appeals to a wide variety of emotions that exist beyond life skills of time management, organization, and the like. There is a stark contrast between the “functional” experience of education and the emotional experience of art. This particular tension in Frank’s practice—excitement for literature contrasted with an often impersonal distance from students—places Frank in a dialectic in which his teaching affect doesn’t consistently support his own love of literature, let alone foster the type of appreciation in his students he had hoped for. Instead, he undermines the positive impact this appreciation can have on his classroom with his detached approach to teaching. If Frank were consistently able to support students in working through the emotions literature can bring forth—and in modeling this experience consistently for his students—his students may have a more fulfilling and engaging forum for “deal[ing] with their angers and emotions,” both as an experience of art and as a development of life skills. Both may require Frank to remain in a more emotional and personal stance as a teacher than he commonly does, however.

Though Frank asserts he tries to appeal to all of his students when he teaches in order to make teaching and learning more enjoyable for everyone, he goes about it in a

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very detached manner. For example, rather than talking with students about their interests outside of school, Frank makes inferences:

Sometimes [students] write about [their interests and hobbies], sometimes you can hear them talking about it. I may be guilty of stereotyping. I see kids wearing certain t-shirts and so I might extrapolate. If a kid's wearing a NASCAR t-shirt I might extrapolate that he probably likes to fish, too. I'm sure it's not always true [laughing]. (interview 2, 4/4/11)

Though Frank is somewhat aware of his students' interests and lifestyles as a way of connecting with them in the classroom, it is because he is observant of his students and their personalities rather than because he is involved with his students on a more personal level. Frank's distanced affect in this way may serve as a "boundary" to creating the classroom culture he envisioned when becoming a teacher. Frank wants to bring his students into the world of literature and to share an appreciation for literature with his students, and yet it is only during "storytelling mode"—when his emotions for literature run high, when he is personable, open, energetic, and approachable—that students seem to engage. Unfortunately, Frank is not often in "storytelling mode," and most often, his students tend to match his impersonal affect during class with disinterest and low participation.

**Idealism in teaching/realities of teaching.** Frank came to teaching with the excitement that comes with a career choice that feels both right and good, for oneself and for others. After completing his M.A. in literature, Frank wanted to capitalize on his love of literature by pursuing a career teaching English at a community college. Unable to secure that type of work, he accepted a management position in a textiles factory near

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Ferrytown. He was unhappy with the work within a few years, however, and knowing he needed a change, he began pursuing his certification credentials to teach high school English. In addition to his enjoyment of literature, Frank describes his motivation to become a teacher in terms of wanting to make contributions to the world around him. He felt he could contribute to making the school system better, and wanted to “help people . . . rather than work against people” (interview 4, 5/6/11). Further, Frank feels strongly that idealism is a necessary trait in teachers, and that public education would suffer if the profession of teaching did not attract idealistic individuals (interview 4, 5/6/11). While the content area of literature is an enjoyable and satisfying part of Frank’s job, Frank sees teaching as a profession that helps others, and one in which he can use his skills and talent and love for literature to also benefit others through education. Over the course of our interviews together, I began to see that as a teacher Frank experiences real tension in balancing personal enjoyment and a sense of idealism with the realities of teaching in a public school system:

I guess I had the idea I would be able to teach literature, had the opportunity to really get students to enjoy reading, and I knew and understood it, and I guess with a degree of arrogance figured I understood it better than my high school teachers had, and I thought, boy, if I had a high school teacher like me, people would learn to love high school English. I guess I was thinking that would happen. But then I’m teaching low-ability ninth graders and low-ability eleventh graders, and the teachers with more seniority are teaching the high-ability students. And I’m realizing that I’m working with, you need to put a period at the end of a sentence instead of that’s what Shakespeare was talking about [laughing].

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And that was disillusioning. (interview 4, 5/6/11)

While enjoyment of a subject area and wanting to help others were gratifying motivators to pursue a career in teaching, Frank appears challenged by the other, often less “noble,” demands on teachers. For Frank, these demands include working with students who need to master far more basic skills, such as grammar, before learning to love Shakespeare. Though Frank’s appreciation for literature and his idealism sustained him for a number of years as a teacher initially, Frank admits to becoming disillusioned with teaching over time:

[T]he disillusioning part was realizing I wasn’t going to make much of a difference in the students who were there. What they were, whether I was the one in that classroom or whether somebody else was the one in that classroom, or whether, in many cases, whether they even went to school or not. I began to realize that the impact on the student is not as great as I had thought it would be. . . I like to think that there is a positive impact of some sort there. . . . [Do] you know in the movie *To Sir with Love*. . . ? And you know how the movie ends and everything is great and the kids go, “Oh, you’ve improved my life so much.” I don’t know. I don’t know if I consciously ever expected that, but maybe I kinda did, and then you realize that doesn’t happen, it’s not like that. You don’t get that sort of affirmation. (interview 4, 5/6/11)

Though Frank describes a lack of affirmation in this interview data, he does continue to embrace a sense of idealism in his practice. Upon asking Frank about his philosophy of teaching, he responded:

Faith? Faith sounds good [laughing]. . . . I do believe in public education. . . . It

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maintains social mobility. . . . and in English as a field, a discipline, a subject, that helps allow that social mobility and could be used as a barrier, and IS used as a barrier against people. So I see that as the purpose of it, and also to defend freedoms, to understand the texts and be able to read the newspaper and to know the history of the United States and understand the ideas that formed the basis of individual freedom, and also understand the basics of rhetoric and persuasion to be able to defend your rights and to speak in public and to write a letter to the newspaper. (interview 4, 5/6/11)

The above interview transcript demonstrates a great deal about Frank's views of education, including his belief that education has real implications for democracy and social equality. But Frank also suggests in his one-word philosophy of teaching that these positive implications are not often perceivable in the daily practices of teaching and learning. Frank shares this philosophy and belief in education when he works with student teachers in his classroom:

I try to make [student teachers] aware that it's not going to be just this wonderful moment, at seventy minutes into a two-hour movie when suddenly all the students change and realize what you're trying to do and are cooperative, appreciative, and so on. . . . You've got to have faith that you're having more of an impact than what you see, you've got to believe that there's good being done even when you don't see it. And you just gotta keep trying and clinging to and having that faith. (interview 4, 5/6/11)

Frank experiences tension in his idealistic beliefs about education and the realities of teaching, in which a large part of a teacher's day is about supporting development and

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learning that extends far beyond learning to enjoy literature. Further, these efforts, in Frank's experience, can largely go "unnoticed," stressing the importance he places in having faith that he's doing something to make a difference.

**Liberalism in education/caution in teaching.** In an extension of Frank's idealistic beliefs about teaching, Frank sees public education as an important liberal project:

I think public education itself is the product of a liberal mindset. I mean the idea that the government can educate people and make everybody go and get an education whether they want to or not, I think that's pretty much a basic idea of liberalism. . . . As far as the individual teachers go, I, you know, it surprises me sometimes how conservatively teachers think and vote, because I keep telling myself public education's a liberal idea, it's a pretty big social program! That's what you do! (interview 3, 5/4/11)

Given Frank's reasons for entering into the field of teaching as described in earlier sections, it wasn't surprising that Frank described himself politically as "left of center," with the qualifier that he finds himself increasingly "closer to the center" as he gets older. When further describing his reasons for becoming a teacher, which also illuminate his political stance, Frank related the following about his previous employment in the textiles industry:

In that particular job the main way we made money was by reducing the workforce in the plants, and getting more product. Textiles especially then, and it probably still is, is a very labor-intensive job, so having as few people produce as much as possible increases the profits. And I was young and idealistic and

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thought, I felt kind of guilty about spending what abilities I had enriching middle class, upper class stock owners at the expense of marginal workers with low skills and low education. (interview 4, 5/6/11)

Frank's sensitivity to equality and social justice played a role in his developing idealism as he left his previous career for teaching. As mentioned previously, Frank believes that public education offers individuals social mobility, and beyond wanting his students to appreciate literature and pass tests, he does have larger goals for his students:

I'd like to see students be able to work in society where they can get along with other people and get along with the structure society has, obey the law and be productive citizens who can contribute to society and have control of their lives . . . be able to defend themselves in the legal system or political system by being able to read and write, and, understanding the system itself. . . . I think I [contribute to that]. I try, I certainly try to. . . . I mean language skills are really a big part of that. (interview 4, 5/6/11)

While these goals may suggest a modest approach to social mobility afforded by education, Frank also sees schools as places where students can experience individual freedoms. This belief surfaced when I asked Frank if he believes schools have an obligation to reflect the beliefs of the community around them. He responded:

No. No. I think schools have an obligation to enable students to develop their own beliefs, schools have an obligation to allow students the freedom to develop their own beliefs with things that are controversial, and I think schools have an obligation to direct, encourage students in supporting what I think are the basic beliefs of American society—individual freedom, and economic freedom. . . .

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And I don't like to think of it as brainwashing but I think a degree of encouragement toward believing in individual freedom is a good thing for the schools. (interview 3, 5/4/11)

Frank sees schools as operating within a larger sociopolitical construct than the communities they reside in, with an obligation to encourage individual thought and support students in developing individual freedoms. And Frank does not believe students should automatically be encouraged to embrace their community's beliefs, which in the case of Ferrytown, would include largely conservative beliefs. Frank describes Ferrytown as a largely conservative community, aside from the liberal dispositions he sees as being associated with the university: "Generally we're pretty conservative. The liberalism with the university notwithstanding, there just aren't that many permanent residents who are connected with the university. I mean a lot of them are, but those are the secretaries, the groundskeepers, people like that who are the southwest Virginia folks who have been here forever" (interview 3, 5/4/11). Frank also sees the students as "pretty conservative," largely following the political perspectives of their parents (interview 3, 5/4/11). Frank also notes:

The teenagers who want to rebel against their parents will go the other way. And I think teenagers kind of, they want to be pretty tolerant, and I think that's kind of a leftward thing. . . . I do think kind of late adolescence, mid to late adolescence has a tendency to go a little bit that way. (interview 3, 5/4/11)

While Frank recognizes that teenagers often "rebel" against their parents by adopting opposing viewpoints, he assigns this rebellion to adolescence rather than to a sense of burgeoning curiosity or questioning of dominant norms, something in his opinion,

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schools are obliged to support and nourish in their students. At the same time, Frank embraces a cautious stance in facilitating classroom discussions of social issues, discussions that have the power to enable students to develop individual freedoms and independent thinking. In the following interview transcript, Frank describes how he troubled over answering a student's question about race:

I had a student last year . . . she's biracial, and she was talking to [her friends] about race, she said, "Mr. Garrett, what race am I?" I wasn't sure what the others had been saying. And I was thinking, I don't know how to answer that. If I say, you're black, she might not think of herself as black, she might think of herself as biracial. If I said, you're biracial, she might think of herself as white. If I say you're white, then she might think of herself as biracial. And so I said, well, race is a fluid concept. (interview 1, 3/30/11)

In answering this simple but loaded question, Frank demonstrated his awareness and sensitivity to social issues, and his ability to contribute an important perspective to his students' understanding of race. Yet he also indicated later in this same interview how relieved he was that the student didn't pursue her question with him, because race is an issue that makes him uncomfortable. Frank mentioned that "uncomfortable topics" rarely come up in his classroom, reasoning that because he teaches mostly juniors and seniors, they are "pretty well clear on things" and are "socially aware of what's taboo, what's not taboo" (interview 1, 3/30/11). It is unclear whether Frank sees "taboo topics" as being defined by the school, by him, by the community, or by the students themselves. Nonetheless, Frank correlates "uncomfortable topics" with social taboo, and suggests that students are learning when, where, and how to regulate such discussions while at school.

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In avoiding these discussions at school, however, teachers like Frank are not teaching students how to have the appropriate and critical discussions that can fortify public education as an institution that supports the democracy and social equality Frank believes in. Still, Frank mentioned that he views the English classroom as a good place to discuss social issues with students:

[The English classroom]'s a good place for it. I don't do it a lot because I worry that doing much of that I'm not teaching English covering the literature or working on the skills for that. The students enjoy discussing social issues but I don't do as much of it. It's a good place for it. . . . Especially if it's student-driven. If a student has a question or a concern and brings something up and the others add into it, then I definitely always go with that. . . . (interview 3, 5/4/11)

Regardless of whether Frank prefers to avoid discussing social issues with students due to his own discomfort, or sensitivity to social taboo, or out of pressures to prep students for tests and covering the curricula, he mentions he will discuss social issues if students bring them up. The above transcript data suggests that Frank may not bring these issues up himself very often, further speaking to the tension between Frank's liberal and idealist beliefs about public education and his own teaching practices. In addition, Frank's sensitivity to students' own personal stances on any number of social issues may prevent him from having discussions of social issues, as he wants his classroom to be a comfortable environment for all students:

I remember I had a student one time who was . . . an outspoken atheist. And I remember some of her journals . . . about some church activity that was popular among lots of teenagers, and she felt uncomfortable because of her belief system.

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So I can remember always wanting to kind of tread carefully there, but I try to do that with religion anyway. . . . I try to avoid anything that makes students feel uncomfortable and I don't, ah, religion and sexuality are two, well and politics, as far as right-wing particular issues that I try to stay away from. (interview 3, 5/4/11)

Idealism, love of literature, and wanting to help others brought Frank to teaching. And yet, interview data suggests that the realities of teaching can make it difficult for Frank to maintain connections to those motivators. Low-ability students, lack of affirmation, and the drudgery of teaching grammar create tensions for Frank as he tries to maintain idealism in his practice. His one-word teaching philosophy—"faith"—and his willingness to share that philosophy and some of the realities of teaching with his student teachers underscore the tension and disillusionment over time that Frank experiences in his practice.

Frank's beliefs in education as a liberal project, and in school as a place to develop individual freedoms and independent thinking, also do not correlate with his cautious approach to discussions of social issues in his classroom. While Frank is uncomfortable talking about many social issues, he also cites time constraints and student comfort as reasons he often doesn't start these discussions on his own. Frank does care about his students, wanting them to feel welcome and understood at school; but this ethic of care does not extend to the point of mitigating his own discomfort and thus enable him to discuss topics of concern for his students. The next section touches on the ways Frank avoids confrontation in his classroom. It may be that part of Frank's discomfort in facilitating contentious classroom discussions is in response both to avoiding having to

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take disciplinary action with students as well as to the ever-present critics beyond his classroom. As will be evident in Chapter 6, however, Frank does occasionally have discussions about sexuality, intimacy, and gender with his students, but in keeping with his cautious approach, he facilitates these discussions only when he is able to “legitimize” them.

### **Avoiding Confrontation in the English Classroom**

Much of Frank’s teaching practice is centered upon an active avoidance of various types of confrontation in the classroom. As previously discussed, Frank attaches a high value to the intellectual side of teaching, and practices his profession with a commitment to idealism and faith that he is making a difference for his students. However, Frank also negotiates his professional practice from a personally “removed” and passive stance that has various implications for his practice, including student discipline and institutional accountability.

**Patience as classroom management.** Frank’s approach to classroom management is founded on avoiding or at least reducing power struggles between himself and his students. Frank identifies student discipline as a daily challenge for him, and while he describes teaching itself as getting easier over the years, he finds that disciplining students has become more of a struggle. Frank notes that when he has a “difficult class” that requires him to discipline his students, he reminds himself that he’s only five years away from retirement.

It was evident at the outset of observations that Frank prefers to avoid discipline by being extremely patient with his students. During my first observation, after students greeted Frank at the door, they spent the first ten minutes of class socializing and talking.

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The students were so boisterous and intent in their socializing that they paid no attention to Frank, who had been calmly discussing the day's lesson, upcoming quizzes, and an upcoming research project at the podium since the bell rang. Frank simply stood at the podium, talking in a soft but persistent tone, until students "self-settled" into seats and into silent attention. Once this happened, Frank very calmly repeated everything he said, took role, and began teaching (field notes, 2/11/11). Most of Frank's classes I observed began this way, with his AP class often settling more quickly than his General English 11 class. Rather than directly reprimand students for behavior, Frank consistently chooses to allow students the time to self-discipline.

Indeed, due to his gentle demeanor, it's hard to picture Frank involved in a direct confrontation with a student. During my observations, I only twice witnessed Frank directly correcting a student's behavior. In both instances, Frank used directed but still quite gentle admonitions for students to refrain from talking:

Example 1: "Jenny, Jenny, Jenny, be quiet now, ok?" (field notes, 3/16/11)

Example 2: "Ok, Shane, no talking unless you have a question." (field notes, 4/4/11)

Frank has enormous reserves of tolerance for students talking while he's talking. The two admonitions I observed occurred during especially difficult classes for Frank, where students were exceedingly talkative and disrespectful toward him. Generally speaking, however, Frank rarely chose to engage students in struggles over behavior.

Rather, Frank consistently mitigated any power struggles that could arise as a result of disciplining his students. Despite the loss of instruction time, this seemed to work well for Frank. One day a student had earphones in during class. Frank said to this

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student, “I’m pretty sure you’re not supposed to have those.” The student responded that it was “fine” because he wasn’t listening to music. Frank let the student keep the earphones in, but the student put them away just a few minutes later on his own (field notes, 2/23/11). Frank allowed students to share books, hand in homework at the end of the school day instead of during class, talk quietly with friends when finished with assignments, and excuse themselves from class to use the restroom. Girls often braided each other’s hair in his classes, and students were also allowed to surf the Internet after completing work in the computer lab. And yet, each class I observed eventually got underway as the students self-engaged, with students often participating in the class, if not at the very least being quiet and respectful.

Frank’s approach to classroom management could be characterized as slightly unorthodox; and yet, it also works for him and for his students. This approach is problematic, however, within an institution that has established rules. When asked about his own approach to discipline in his classes, Frank instead described the institutional rules and expectations at Ferrytown High:

[T]here are certain rules we try to go by. One of the rules that causes a lot of difficulty is the cell phone. Students love their cell phones and they don’t want to be without their cell phones or be apart from their cell phones, and we of course we don’t want them to be using their cell phones during class. So just, don’t have it out. If we see it, we’ll take it. So as far as rules go, and that’s a good one for the administration to have, but enforcing that rule creates difficulties because, you know, confronting a student, and that sort of thing. We have a fair amount of latitude as far as what we can use as teachers—penalty halls, we can assign

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penalty halls, we can always refer a student to the principal for an extreme problem. (interview 1, 3/30/11)

Frank sees confronting a student as a difficulty, and it is evident in his practice that he's willing to take on the inconvenience of waiting for his students to settle in, and bending a few rules (for example, allowing a student to use earphones) in order for students to self-direct. Indeed, in another sort of tension in his practice, Frank has to balance his own patient and removed stance to classroom discipline with a need to follow the larger rules and regulations of the school, which at times require Frank to abandon his disciplinary preferences. The following is another example of how Frank's disciplinary stance creates problems for him within the institutional context:

I used to use extra credit for good behavior. During each six weeks you have ten points of extra credit that would be worth about two and half points on the final average. And for minor infractions, for being late for class, I'd deduct two points. Uh, this new superintendent, and I still wonder if it's not a misunderstanding, but when I asked about it, it was yeah, this is the way it was, and I couldn't do that anymore. No more extra credit for behavior. Which I still think what she had in mind, some teachers were giving extra credit for students bringing in tissues, to have a classroom supply of tissues, and I think she wanted to eradicate that. I don't think she was thinking about what I'd been doing . . . but I was never sure so I stopped doing that. . . . I'm still kind of adjusting to that, I have to do something to replace that, cause that was my little system that worked well for a long time. (interview 1, 3/30/11)

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Frank's approach to classroom management reflects his recognition that discipline is a difficult aspect of the job. In the above data, for example, Frank chooses the positive reinforcement of giving extra credit for good behavior rather than discipline tactics focused on intervention. Yet, as an institution, Ferrytown disallows the use of extra credit. And despite the clear difference in uses of extra credit in Frank's discipline plan versus the type of extra credit the institution wanted to move away from, Frank finds himself without a suitable plan this is comfortable for his classroom management preferences. Because discipline can never be fully avoided in the classroom, Frank has to find a balance between institutional expectations and his own comfort level and approach to enforcing these expectations.

Sometimes, however, institutional expectations and oversight align well with Frank's practice. For example, Frank appreciates that the high-stakes testing paradigm provides for a detached and objective evaluation of learning. In a discussion of Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOLs, an acronym both for the learning standards in Virginia as well as for the statewide-tests administered for federal reporting purposes), Frank states:

They've [SOLs] made things better in some ways. . . . I can get students to write now more willingly than I could before the SOL test. You tell them they have to write an essay to graduate, and that's that. Before it was, "You've got to pass English to graduate." And it was, "Oh, Mr. Garrett, are you going to do that to me?" So then the onus was on me the English teacher to try and stand in the way of somebody graduating. That's a hard thing to do and verify and do in such a way that you'll get support, and say this child doesn't have the literacy to finish high school. And with the state-mandated test, I can say, "Hey, you know, it's not

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me, it's the test, you have to be able to do this to graduate.” (data from interview 4, 5/6/11)

Frank sees the SOLs as an institutional practice that alleviates the pressure of personal and subjective evaluation, removing him personally from deciding on the success or failure of his students. While teachers are still responsible for preparing students to succeed in high-stakes tests, the SOLs, as Frank sees them, create a larger impetus for students to learn. The tests reinforce students' need to work hard to try and succeed while reducing a type of power struggle between students and teachers.

**Intellectual engagement as classroom management.** I observed Frank teaching his General English 11 classes as well as his AP English classes, noting that his approach to discipline is the same in both classes. However, Frank appreciates that he gets to “use” his Master's degree in English “in the field” when teaching his AP and advanced classes, and concedes that when the students are enjoying the literature, student behavior is not a problem. Though he enjoys teaching his general classes as well, he sites behavioral issues as more prevalent in these classes:

I enjoy the other classes sometimes. . . . And it has more to do with the individual class than it does the subject. Some classes are easy and some classes are difficult. And regular classes, some are just sweet angels who just, with no harshness on my part, listen, and do what I ask them to do, and others, I feel like I can give them all the penalty halls in the world and have them be suspended four or five times and they would still act up in class and horse around. (interview 1, 3/30/11)

In the above interview transcript, Frank connects “difficult classes” with his regular classes, wherein some students insist on “acting up” and “horsing around” regardless of

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the consequences. In all of his classes, however, I observed Frank positively reinforcing particularly interesting and engaging classroom discussions. Working from an additive position, Frank chooses to reinforce the intellectual aspects of reading and discussing literature, rather than making an issue of negative student behaviors. Likewise, his previous approach to student discipline by providing extra credit points for positive behaviors was also an additive take on discipline. In his general classes especially, Frank takes care to show his gratitude to students when classes go well, thanking them outright for discussions, participation, asking questions, and completing homework.

As previously noted, Frank enjoys literature immensely, and his love of the subject is partially what inspired him to be a teacher. However, classroom management is a particular challenge for Frank, and as a result, Frank avoids confrontation in the classroom as much as possible. This avoidance is characterized by a general sense of passivity toward poor student behavior, but also by patience and positive reinforcement of intellectual discussions. The most difficult classes for Frank are those in which his concerns over student behavior dominate class time, and because Frank doesn't care to confront students, these classes make Frank's job less enjoyable. Frank appears happiest in his storytelling mode, and when, in his words, "a class goes well": "students are engaged, the students are interested and are asking questions that go beyond what [he] was thinking of" (interview 1, 3/30/11).

**Choosing books, not contention.** Ferrytown High has mandated texts and curriculum for each grade and ability level in English. Therefore, Frank doesn't often worry that books from the curriculum would be seen as contentious. Though it's been some time, according to Frank, that Ferrytown has adopted new textbooks for English, he

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feels comfortable using whatever texts have been adopted because of Ferrytown's adoption process: "The standard textbook, they're on a list approved by the state for public education. And then we'll go from that list and we usually form committees, and I think for that we bring in a parent and student for approving textbooks. For individual supplemental texts we've done [the same]" (interview 2, 4/4/11).

However, as the AP English teacher and the English coach for Ferrytown's MACC team (Mountain Academic Competition Conference), Frank often has to make some decisions on what books his students will be reading as they prepare for the AP test and for the MACC competitions. (Frank describes MACC as a "local academic competition similar to the Scholastic Bowl." Ferrytown has always done very well in these competitions, and Frank has coached Ferrytown's English team for twenty-four years.) Frank states:

It's not as if I'm going to have my students read *Lady Chatterly's Lover* or something, I mean we're going to be pretty reasonable about it and anticipate the students, but yeah. Aside from that, aside from how individual principals go, no, no, I try to be careful. I try to gauge the class. In my AP class, I did *Beloved* a couple of years ago, and that's a book I would worry about. There's some passages in that book that if somebody took out this particular line or that particular line they could really make a stink about it. So I would try to think about who is going to be in the class. I mean I usually know students and what families they're in, what kind of cultural backgrounds they may have. (interview 2, 4/4/11)

Because Ferrytown is a small school within a small community, Frank has the benefit of

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knowing his students and their families fairly well, and the ability to anticipate the reactions of his students and their families to certain issues. Frank also knows he can talk with colleagues and others about students he may not know well, stating: “And the ones [students] I don’t know, other teachers know, and other families. Older brothers and sisters, things like that” (interview 2, 4/4/11). For an added layer of caution, Frank gives an exception with every assignment, letting students know: “With any assignment I’ll put in there, if you or your parents have any problems with this let me know and I can find an alternate text for you” (interview 2, 4/4/11). Frank is interested in avoiding any issues with parents and his administration, stating: “I try to be careful, as people tend to overreact to things, a student goes home and talks to a parent, there’s always a second-hand thing, they’re not getting it first hand, so I do tend to be careful” (interview 3, 5/4/11).

An important part of Frank’s teaching practice rests in avoiding various types of confrontation in his classroom, whether in his choices with classroom management and student discipline or in ensuring texts used in his classes do not raise controversy from outside the classroom. While Frank’s approach to classroom management is a way to mitigate power struggles between himself and his students, caution with regard to texts serves to mitigate power struggles from beyond the classroom, and is another way Frank works to ensure that all of his students—and him—are comfortable in his classroom.

### **Frank: The Dialogic Dance**

Frank experiences palpable tensions in his teaching that emerge at the intersections of a number of dialectics present in his practice. Three of these tensions were particularly palpable in the data: emotion in literature/distance from students; idealism in

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teaching/realities of teaching; and liberalism in education/caution in teaching. In this section I explore how these tensions and more circulate through and impact Frank's teaching practice.

Frank loves literature, and wants to share this passion with his students. Frank's love for literature animates him in what I've called his "storytelling mode," which often correlates with a positive effect on student participation and engagement. In storytelling mode, Frank speaks through a social language of intellectualism. However, teaching literature is just one aspect of his job. There are many other institutional requirements of his job that Frank feels less of an affinity for. In this large portion of his practice where he must attend to the less desirable aspects of his job, Frank maintains an impersonal, removed, and rather unemotional affect. Students also model this affect, often resulting in classes full of disengaged students.

Idealism and a belief in the power of education brought Frank to teaching. Over time, however, the realities of teaching disengaged and low-ability students, along with the day-to-day challenges of the profession, have disillusioned him. Further, Frank dislikes disciplining students, finding it to be one of the greatest challenges of his job. To avoid having to discipline students, he maintains a passive and patient stance in the classroom, choosing to let students self-regulate rather than to directly discipline them. This process has become tiring for Frank over time, and represents an ongoing challenge in his practice, particularly in the wake of institutional stances on discipline.

Finally, Frank also believes that public education is the key to social mobility and to exploring and expressing personal freedom. However, Frank is extremely cautious and reserved in classroom discussions that would reflect this belief in his practice, and may

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help students explore and express personal freedom. Frank ventriloquated a social language of democracy in education during interviews, although this social language was not necessarily a part of his daily teaching practice. Though Frank believes the English classroom is an ideal place for discussing social issues and controversial topics, Frank indicated three reasons why he often chooses to avoid such discussion: his self-described discomfort with these topics, a desire for students to feel comfortable in his classroom, and pressures to prep students for tests and cover required curriculum.

Frank experiences these tensions in his practice because he is very much “in dialogue” with the world around him, aware of how students, parents, administrators, Ferrytown High, the Ferrytown community, and larger social and political factors infiltrate his experiences as a teacher. In Bakhtin’s dialogism, consciousness is otherness. “Dialogism argues that all meaning is relative in the sense that it comes about only as a result of the relation between two bodies occupying simultaneous but different space, where bodies may be thought of as ranging from the immediacy of our physical bodies, to political bodies and to bodies of ideas in general (ideological)” (Holquist, 1990, p. 21). And: “Dialogism . . . takes it for granted that nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else: dialogism’s master assumption is that there is no figure without a ground” (Holquist, 1990, p. 22). The tensions Frank experiences in his practice are part of his engagement with what it means to be a teacher of English at Ferrytown High.

Frank’s sense of idealism brought him to the teaching profession: he wanted to help others, and also to share “the beauty and the pleasure that exists in [literature]” (interview 3, 5/4/11). His commitment to teaching, along with his one-word teaching

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philosophy—“faith” (interview 4, 5/6/11)—are the foundations of his dialogic teaching practice. Frank doesn’t give up, either on teaching or on his students, despite what he refers to as his disillusionment with teaching over time (interview 4, 5/6/11). And yet, while Frank remains committed to teaching, the tensions that are so much a part of his practice remain a continual challenge; on “hard days” he resorts to reminding himself how close he is to retirement (interview 1, 3/30/11).

The tensions Frank experiences, in all their forms, are his dialogic responses to a number of the social languages of schooling. For example, Frank’s deep love of literature often propels him into what I have called “storytelling mode,” where Frank and his students are actively engaging in the fiction, poetry, and art that Frank appreciates so much. At the same time, Frank must ultimately also “dialogue” with the social languages of standards and curricula at Ferrytown—students must learn grammar, they must prepare for tests, they must learn to do research, understand meter in poetry, define and identify literary devices, and, as Frank notes, “develop skills they need for adulthood” (interview 3, 5/4/11). Frank’s response to these social languages is to attend to all these requirements, though in a less excitable stance than when in storytelling mode and teaching the art he loves. At the same time, Frank does benefit from these social languages. The standards discourse removes him from personally deciding on whether a student passes or fails; and the English curricula legitimize not only books read in class, but his ability to discuss the literature he loves.

Another tension in Frank’s daily experience of teaching is his dialogic engagement with the social language of discipline in schooling. Frank finds discipline to be challenging and uncomfortable; but his role as teacher requires him to negotiate this

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discourse. Frank doesn't like to confront his students directly, and yet he must balance school-wide rules (such as no cell phones), with his own approach to classroom management, which balances the inconvenience of waiting for students to self-engage into class with an avoidance of one-on-one confrontation. He also prefers to embrace positive reinforcement rather than bring attention to negative behaviors, making sure to always praise good discussions rather than highlighting negative behavior. He is careful to reinforce the additive intellectual aspects of class.

Frank engages a notably passive and patient stance in his approach to discipline, which suits his personality. However, this same stance also has led to his exhaustion over time. Just as students mirror his affect when he is in storytelling mode, they also mirror his affect when he is passive, negotiating the demands of the class in step with Frank's own affect. The students' disengagement has muted the idealism he brought to the profession in the first place . . . and onward does the dialogic dance progress.

Frank is very cautious in his classroom not only in not confronting students, but in discussions and book choices as well, as he doesn't want either to create discomfort for students or for himself. Frank prefers to avoid topics such as race, religion, sexuality, and politics, despite his recognition that the English classroom is a good place to discuss such topics. As Sieben and Wallowitz (2009) note, this is a common stance among English teachers who want their students to feel "safe" and "comfortable" in the English classroom by avoiding the discussion of uncomfortable topics. Frank reasons these topics don't come up often, however, because he teaches mostly juniors and seniors who are "socially aware of what's taboo" (interview 1, 3/30/11). Despite the notion that Frank sees schools as places where individuals can experience individual freedom, social

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mobility, and freedom of expression, Frank himself is uncomfortable discussing controversial topics that can provide these experiences for students. Though Frank ventriloquates a social language of social justice in schooling in his interviews, he is unable to match his belief in that social language with supportive classroom practices, perhaps due in part to his dislike of discipline or because of the personal boundaries he has set in place with his students.

Frank has developed strong personal boundaries with his students. Though he operates out of an ethic of care in that he doesn't want his students to feel uncomfortable in his class, he simultaneously does not want to get personally involved with his students. This tension impacts his practice in several ways. Frank's increased personal involvement may actually lead to an increase in student comfort. In turn, students may then be more inclined to engage in sustained interest in the class, which may then increase Frank's job satisfaction by being surrounded by more consistently engaged students.

Frank's dance with dialogism is at once honest and problematic. Frank recognizes the social languages that make sense to him, such as intellectualism, liberalism, social justice, and democracy. He also recognizes social languages that are problematic for him and his practice, including the social language of discipline. The standards discourse can be both helpful and problematic: helpful in that Frank can defer to this discourse when questions of a student passing arise; but also problematic in that this social language robs him of time he might otherwise get to spend with students in the pursuit of intellectualism and literature. In his commitment to comfort in his classroom, Frank's embrace of the dialogic leaves him unable to easily find symmetry among his own personality, personal beliefs, classroom practices, and institutional requirements.

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### **Summary**

With this chapter I have highlighted key aspects of Frank's classroom practices. These practices, which include Frank's motivations to teach, his approaches to discipline, his personal sense of idealism, joys and challenges in teaching, and his moderately liberal stance, inform the ways Frank reproduces, challenges, and/or subverts dominant norms of sexuality at Ferrytown High, discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER SIX

**Discussing Sexuality, Intimacy, and Gender in the English Classroom: Using Dialogism and Positioning Theory to Explore Teacher Talk**

Dialogism and positioning theory provide the framework used in this research to evaluate how teachers negotiate discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the classroom.

While dialogism prioritizes speaker agency, positioning theory recognizes that the discursive rights of a speaking subject are mediated by institutionalized discourses (Davies & Harré, 1990), or what Harré et al. (2009, p. 6) refer to as the “local moral domain” that provides speaking “rights” and “duties.” Discourses become institutionalized at the disciplinary, political, cultural, or small-group levels, and can also occur around a specific topic (Davies & Harré, 1990). Positioning theory provides a means to assess the norms of interactions people participate in, including how speaking rights and duties are distributed and often taken for granted (Harré et al. 2009, p. 9). This analysis first considers Amy’s and Frank’s uses of institutionalized discourses of schooling, and how these uses inform their practices. I then look specifically at their uses of discourses around the topic of sexuality. Both examinations are considered within the sociocultural and sociopolitical contexts of Ferrytown High.

This discussion proceeds from two basic notions. First, “positioning” is generally considered a conversational phenomenon, where “conversation” is understood as a form of social interaction that produces social products (Davies & Harré, 1990). This research does not examine the conversations between Amy and Frank and their students per se; rather, the aim is to understand how Amy and Frank approach, contribute, and leverage discourses to begin, mediate, avoid, enhance, and so on the *possibility* of conversations in

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their classrooms. In this research, the social interaction is the classroom teaching observed; the social products are the students themselves, who are in part constituted by the knowledge (discourses) Amy and Frank utilize in the act of teaching. Secondly, this research proceeds from the basic understanding that both Amy and Frank have been “prepositioned” as English educators at Ferrytown. “Prepositioning” describes “implicit/explicit practices implying powers, abilities, or status levels which support ascriptions of duties; and vulnerabilities, incapacitations, social deficits, which, in turn, support rights-ascriptions and claims” (Harré et al. 2009, p. 10). As teachers, Amy and Frank are expected to be leaders in their classrooms and experts in their content area; aware of or at least become familiar with the students and communities they serve (interpersonally, culturally, ideologically); and choose from and take up a myriad of roles (e.g., caretaker, parent, role model, coach, tutor, moral compass, and so on) frequently ascribed to teacher practitioners (Spring, 2011).

As Amy and Frank exercise their speaking rights and duties as teachers, they are choosing from available concepts, metaphors, images, and storylines (Davies & Harré, 1990) afforded them by their positioning as teachers. We can also view these available discourses as the social languages (Bakhtin, 1981) Amy and Frank utilize to create meaning through classroom dialogue. The social languages Amy and Frank ventriloquate, and *how* they do so (e.g., dialogically, monologically), are of particular interest. Recall that a social language is a discourse contextual to time and place that shapes an individual’s utterances; ventriloquation is the use of social languages to voice a personality or point of view (see pp. 20-21 of this dissertation). Such details provide insights into how teachers position themselves as mediating agents with political and

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ethical opinions (Wortham 2001b, 2001c) within the role of the public school teacher.

The ways in which Amy and Frank utilize their roles as teachers and exercise their speaking rights and duties are particularly informative for understanding how they each negotiate socially charged issues in the classroom.

In this chapter, I briefly discuss the social languages Amy and Frank ventriloquate in their practices, as presented in Chapters 4 and 5, within a positioning theory analytic. I then present and discuss data collected that specifically addresses how each participant, positioned as a teacher at Ferrytown High, negotiates discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in their classrooms.

### **Amy and Frank: Contrasting Positions in the English Classroom**

Amy and Frank are palpably different teachers who position themselves within and against different social languages of schooling in their teaching practices. These discursive positions have significant implications for Amy and Frank as teachers, and are helpful to understand prior to an analysis of how each teacher negotiates discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender.

In the “moral landscape” (Harré et al., 2009, p. 9) of Amy’s teaching practice, Amy utilizes key discursive positions based on her ventriloquation of the social languages of discipline and conservatism. Amy’s “speaking through” the social language of discipline—a familiar discourse in the domain of schooling—guides most aspects of her practice: from student conduct and the actual disciplining of students, to expectations for classroom behaviors and norms, to her recitative approach to teaching and learning. Her ventriloquation choice also reinforces her preference to sustain a monologic classroom stance, which further positions her with authority and legitimacy in her

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classroom and in the social landscape of teaching and learning. With this stance, she is constantly concerned with the immediate and physical in her classroom practice: bodily (behavioral and social) control and classroom discipline; recitative teaching strategies; and political discussions that may serve to guide a certain standard of personal behavior.

Amy also chooses to exercise her discursive rights and duties as an educator to teach the “values” and the “great truths of our culture” (interview 4, 5/6/11). She positions herself to do so because she voices a social language of conservatism, which she feels is largely aligned with the ideologies of the students, parents, and culture of Ferrytown High. As Harré et al. (2009, p. 9) note:

‘Positions’ are features of the local moral landscape. People are assigned positions or acquire or even seize positions via a variety of prior implicit and explicit acts which, in the most overtly ‘rational’ positioning acts, are based on personal characteristics, real or imaginary. The upshot could be positive or negative, supporting or denying a claim to a right, demanding or refusing the assignment of a duty. (p. 9)

Amy supports her speaking rights to teach values and truths by stating her belief that schools have an obligation to reflect the views of the communities they serve (interview 4, 5/6/11). In positioning herself as an educator of values and truths, Amy feels she is positively positioned with what she perceives to be the Ferrytown community’s ideologies, and further, that this position is one of her duties as a teacher. It is apparent, however, based on interactions outside Amy’s classroom, that Amy’s monologic and conservative stance may in fact not be as widely accepted institutionally as she had thought. However, outside of her removal from the prom committee, Ferrytown High

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does not interfere in any way to remove or alter what she perceives her speaking rights and duties to be. Amy retains what she views as her positive positioning within Ferrytown High by only going to administrators with issues with which she knows she will have their support. The challenges she experiences that originate from outside her classroom are those she chooses to remove herself from, thus protecting and maintaining her monologic and conservative stance.

Frank's dialogic classroom stance positions him at the intersections of a number of tensions that create tensions for him in his teaching practice. Some of the tension he experiences may be linked to the notion that Frank does not choose to exercise the speaking rights and duties associated with some of the social languages that are important to him in his practice, such as intellectualism, liberalism, social justice, and democracy. As Harré et al. (2009, p. 7) note, explanations of social acts in positioning theory are not achieved through causation, but rather through "meaning relations" between the acts. The authors explain:

If someone is confronted with a popular view on some matter that he or she believes to be mistaken, then that person's agreement with the majority is not caused by 'peer pressure,' but is an act conforming to a local norm of agreeable behavior. It is the meaning of the agreement that explains how it comes to be expressed, and that agreement is not 'caused' in any mindless, robotic way but is, rather, an option that may or may not be exercised by the person in question.

(Harré et al. 2009, p. 7)

The tensions Frank experiences can be attributed to his deference to the local norms of teaching. Frank's deference creates dissonance in his practice, as the discursive rights that

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make sense for Frank as a teacher are not necessarily aligned with the local norms of schooling at Ferrytown. Frank ventriloquates a social language of intellectualism in describing what brought him to teaching, and in what brings him the greatest pleasure in his practice. However, Frank is unable to voice that social language in his practice in a consistent way because other discursive norms of schooling (such as discipline and standards) demand his attention, and indeed, may demand institutional precedence. Compared to what I have called his “storytelling mode,” in which Frank is able to effectively speak through a social language of intellectualism in his classroom, classroom observations show Frank to appear disengaged as he attends to other demands of teaching. One result of this dissonance is that both Frank and his students, who model his affect, are caught in a cycle of disengagement that has exhausted Frank over time.

Similarly, Frank ventriloquated social languages of democracy and social justice in his interviews when speaking about his practice, and yet he did not demonstrate his ability to leverage speaking rights and duties related to these social languages within his practice. Instead, Frank concedes once again to the local norms of schooling at Ferrytown, which include, in his mind, prepping students for tests, helping low-ability students, and developing adolescents into adults. His teaching philosophy of “faith” exhibits this meaning relation nicely: he believes that public schooling can support ideas such as democracy and social justice, and yet, Frank concedes that it is not something he sees or engages. As relayed in an interview, Frank notes: “You’ve got to have faith that you’re having more of an impact than what you see, you’ve got to believe that there’s good being done even when you don’t see it. And you just gotta keep trying and clinging to and having that faith. (interview 4, 5/6/11).

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Relatedly, Frank maintains that he chooses to avoid such topics as race, religion, sexuality, and politics—all topics that can support social languages of democracy and social justice—despite his recognition that the English classroom is a good place to discuss such topics. He cites both his students' and his own comfort in explaining why he prefers not to approach such topics. Choosing not to exercise the speaking rights and duties that accompany the ventriloquation of a social language of democracy and social justice leaves Frank to experience the tension in believing one thing about schooling, but being unable to put it into practice. In Frank's experience, the normative discourses of schooling at Ferrytown do not include social languages of democracy and social justice, thereby positioning Frank with limited discursive rights to attend to these social languages in his practice. The discomfort Frank feels, and wants to protect his students from, is connected to his understanding that certain topics are not supported by Ferrytown. Though social languages of idealism, democracy, and social justice may have brought him to teaching and inform his core beliefs about the power of education, Frank's inability to position himself with discursive rights to support these social languages leave him to feel a great absence in his practice. His lack of discursive rights to these social languages may indicate that these discourses are not prioritized as a part of the local domain at Ferrytown.

However, Frank is able to negotiate social languages that are both problematic for his practice in some areas while making sense in others. In voicing the social language of standards, Frank is conforming to the norms of schooling that negatively affect his consistent ventriloquation of intellectualism in his classroom. He cites test preparation and curricular expectations as interferences with his ability to more frequently engage

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with the intellectual discussions he so enjoys. However, he is also able to leverage the same social language of standards in productive ways in his practice. He exercises his discursive rights to the standards discourse in situations when a student's ability to pass into the next grade is in question, thereby relieving himself of the responsibility of having to pass personal judgment. As Frank notes, he can say to a student or a parent: "Hey, you know, it's not me, it's the test, you have to be able to do this to graduate" (data from interview 4, 5/6/11).

In contrast, Frank does not choose to ventriloquate a social language of discipline in his practice despite it being an accepted discursive practice at Ferrytown. Consequently, he has to strike a balance in his practice as far as his comfort with exerting discursive disciplinary rights, meeting Ferrytown's needs for school-wide rules, and negotiating the fact that his students, who are accustomed to a social language of discipline, expect their teachers to be disciplinarians. Frank feels great dissonance in this area, and his choice to forego his speaking rights and duties related to discipline infiltrates much of his practice.

Amy and Frank are starkly different teachers in many ways. Amy consistently and readily leverages the clear speaking rights she has as a teacher—as an institutional subject of Ferrytown High. In her position, which is monologic and reduces teaching and learning to binary-type thinking, she also experiences much "freedom." She largely feels the school is "on her side" as far as supporting her teaching practices and her choice to exercise her speaking rights to voice a conservative social language in her classroom. In any situation that demonstrates incongruence between the school's positioning and her own, she simply removes herself. Amy positions herself in her classroom to take full

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advantage of her positioning as a teacher, and finds much clarity in her role within the teaching and learning process.

Frank does not leverage his discursive rights in the same way; instead, he “negotiates” these rights and the ways they position him, leaving him also having to negotiate several tensions in his practice. The social languages that make sense to Frank as a teacher may or may not be supported within the local domain of schooling at Ferrytown. Frank’s positioning within his classroom is confounded by the dissonance he experiences and the compromises he makes within his practice. Frank’s positioning as a teacher is not in question; rather, his ability to leverage the speaking rights and duties he personally feels connected to as a teacher are not the same as those supported by Ferrytown. Consequently, Frank’s ideals and personal beliefs about education and about his position as a teacher are not necessarily discursively actionable in his practice—at least, not without further tangible dissonance between Frank and the institution that prepositioned him as a teacher.

With this discussion and analysis in mind, in the following section I present and discuss collected data that reflects how each teacher negotiates topics of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the English classroom.

### **Sexuality, Intimacy, and Gender in the English Classroom**

This section is organized by my research questions, which will be answered in turn via a presentation and discussion of relevant data. First, a brief note: there exists considerable difficulty conducting research around issues of sexuality. Privacy, access, working with and around minors, parents’ rights, and of course institutional and social “rules” conspire to complicate this type of research, particularly in a public school setting. While this

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research aims to untangle some of the complexity regarding the latter, it still requires data that can specifically speak to the research questions at hand. In over 50 hours of observations, topics of sexuality, intimacy, and gender infrequently came up directly in classroom discussions I observed. Data most often presented itself as implicit—for example, Amy’s gendered approach to discipline, or Frank’s stated discomfort in talking about socially contentious issues.

One explanation of the preponderance of implicit over explicit data can be attributed to discussions observed. Pragmatically, the discussions observed as a part of this research were driven by the units taught during those times (see Table 1 in Chapter 3). The most significant direct data collected were in Amy’s Advanced English 9 class in the *Romeo and Juliet* unit, and in Frank’s AP English class during the poetry unit. While comments on sexuality, intimacy, and gender came up at other times (in relation to brief instances in other texts, or in more open-ended discussions generally), these two units provided the richest explicit data.

Chapters 4 and 5 not only describe Amy and Frank’s teaching practices, but they represent an important undertaking in this research: providing essential background information that helps illuminate how and *why* Amy and Frank may negotiate discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in certain ways. As previously explained, Amy’s monologic stance and her adoption of the social language of discipline and conservatism position her in an authoritative stance during discussions in which she feels she has the support of Ferrytown. The (negative) freedom Amy experiences in this position certainly impacts her approaches to and beliefs about discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. Despite Frank’s enjoyment of discussions surrounding literature, Frank does not

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enjoy the same clarity of position that Amy does. Instead, Frank's position in his classroom is a negotiation of tensions in existence between his own ideals and beliefs about teaching and what the Ferrytown school community can and will support. While Amy's position remains clear, Frank's positioning is decidedly more nuanced. This theme continues in the data presented in the following sections.

**How do English teachers define sexuality and gender?** To begin understanding how Amy and Frank negotiate discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the English classroom, it is first necessary to understand what these terms mean to each of them. When I asked Amy to define sexuality and gender, her response, which began with nervous laughter, was: "Sexuality and gender? They don't mean any, I mean, I don't know. I mean it's just, male or female. I'm sorry I don't think in terms of female/female or male/male. It's male/female" (interview 3, 4/27/11). Frank's response to the same question was as follows:

Well I suppose sexuality has to do with biological and human reproduction but of course there's really more to it than that. It's an expression of intimacy. I know there's a huge spectrum of human sexuality. . . . I do see sexuality as probably the highest motivating force human beings have. . . . [G]ender . . . I don't see gender as a male/female division, I think there's a lot in between and a lot of crossover and overlap that way. So I guess, with gender, there's male and there's female, and there's various degrees of shading between the two. And in sexuality it's just a general human drive that expresses itself in a variety of ways. (interview 3, 5/4/11)

Amy's definition of sexuality and gender, like the family life curricula in Virginia

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(VDOE, 2009), is limited to a normalizing linkage of the male/female binary. Amy's definition also invokes her familiar discipline stance: she sees sexuality and gender as "right" only in the male/female biological binary. Conversely, Frank's definitions of sexuality and gender are much more comprehensive, recognizing not just a human drive toward reproduction, but an "expression of intimacy" that can take many forms. Likewise, Frank sees gender as a construct with a lot of "crossover and overlap," with "various degrees of shading" between the commonly understood notions of male and female.

Amy's definitions of sexuality and gender coincide with her monologic classroom stance, as well as certain social languages of schooling—in this case, the social language of Virginia family life curricula, which does not recognize homosexuality. I am not claiming that Amy's definitions imply her ventriloquation of the abstinence-based curricula; rather, that this is yet another instance in which Amy is positioned in alignment with a dominant social language of schooling. Frank's definitions are decidedly more dialogic, representing his embrace of more open meanings that are not readily classifiable by historically accepted binaries. Frank's definitions in part embrace a queer understanding of sexuality and gender, which shifts understanding away from a focus on binaries toward an understanding of how categories are created, supported, and undone (Pascoe, 2007). Conversely, Amy's definitions of sexuality and gender are not only conflated into one definition, but immediately invoke the binaries of male/female. These definitions lay the groundwork for understanding not only how each teacher negotiates discussions of sexuality and intimacy in the classroom, but the types of utterances each teacher uses, and thus the larger social languages invoked during these discussions.

**What are the implicit or explicit boundaries English teachers perceive to talk of sexuality, intimacy, and gender?** One way to understand how Amy and Frank each negotiate discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the classroom is to understand what they each believe they can and cannot or should and should not talk about regarding these topics. In other words, to explore what they believe their speaking rights and duties to be as teachers at Ferrytown High. It is important to remember as well that, as Harré et al. (2009) explain, positioning theory recognizes that there is not a causal relationship between social acts. Rather, positioning theory attempts to understand the meaning relations between social acts. As will be discussed, Amy and Frank often provided very similar answers to this question. However, their individual arrival at similar answers does not mean that they shared the same reasons for having such answers. This research considers each teacher's unique path to understanding boundaries in classroom discussions via an exploration of how the social languages they each ventriloquate position them with discursive rights in their classrooms. Amy and Frank provided direct answers to this research question, which was posed several times in several ways during our conversational interviews. But how this rather "simple" question played out in the social arena of each classroom is more complex.

*Classroom influences.* We returned to this question often in our interviews, as Amy and Frank each conceded they hadn't before thought about how they decide what they can talk about with students on these issues. The first time I posed the question to Amy and Frank, they each responded in similar ways: anecdotally, and with student maturity and discipline as major contingencies in allowable classroom discourse. Amy first responded:

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What did one of my students say? [Pause.] It was a sexual subject. Uh. Oh! I know. The dark-haired girl who is later going to turn out to be Julia is wearing the red sash of the Junior Anti-Sex League, and I don't know, one of my little boys said something silly, and I said, Don't even start this! Because we've got a lot of stuff to talk about in here about all that. And if you can't handle it, you don't belong in here! So I feel like I can talk about anything they bring up as long as they're serious and it can be related back to the literature. (interview 1, 4/1/11)

And Frank's first response:

Years ago, the first year I taught, I had two classes of ninth graders. And we did *Romeo and Juliet*, and we had that old Zeffirelli-directed film and of course there's that scene when Juliet is topless there just for an instant or two. And my fourth period . . . I went ahead and let that play through for them. I just sat in the back and when the scene came . . . two or three of them looked back at me, and I just sat there telling myself, Ok, straight face, straight face, but they were like, Does he know that that's in there? [Laughing.] In my other class I made it a point to show part of the film one day, stop it, and restart it a little past that point the next day. I was certain there would have been overreacting, yelling and screaming, hooting, and hollering. (interview 2, 4/4/11)

In each of these first responses, what immediately came to mind for Amy and Frank was classroom management: a recognition that students' responses to sexuality, intimacy, and gender in literature can run the risk of quickly spiraling an otherwise calm class into chaos. Freud (1961) describes sublimation as the process of redirecting the flow of sexual energy or tension into socially productive endeavors. In each of these examples, Amy and

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Frank are “redirecting” students’ sexual awareness into deference for classroom discipline. From a positioning perspective, however, they have different reasons for doing so. As previously discussed, Amy and Frank have different motivations for wanting to avoid classroom chaos. Amy insists on classroom discipline and her position as a clear authority. She runs her classroom accordingly, working toward and maintaining discipline as necessary for teaching and learning, and speaking through a social language of discipline to do so. Frank dislikes having to discipline and confront his students, and so part of his classroom management is avoiding situations in which discipline becomes necessary.

From a content-area standpoint, Amy and Frank also mentioned that discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender might simply extend beyond their teaching obligations.

Amy noted:

[S]exual promiscuity is a big problem . . . there are a lot of girls that don’t have a lot of self-esteem at this age. . . . I don’t bring these things up because I am not a personal psychological counselor or anything to these kids and I don’t think I, that that’s what I should be doing, I should be teaching English (interview 4, 5/6/11).

And Frank noted:

I mean it’s not something I see as a standard part of language arts curriculum, but at the same time it is something that adolescents are dealing with as they, you know, as these drives come to maturity in their lives and they find ways to deal with them and express them and deal with their own gender issues and things (interview 3, 5/4/11).

In each of these responses, Amy and Frank recognize that sexuality, gender, and

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intimacy are very real concerns for students, but at the same time, believe that these issues are beyond the scope of English teachers. They both concede that as English teachers, they are not necessarily positioned to discuss these topics. And they make this point with predictable adherence to their monologic and dialogic stances. Amy invokes discipline, noting that sexual promiscuity is a problem. At the same time, she states with clarity that she is supposed to teach English, and is not a counselor for students. Frank doesn't see such conversation to be a "standard" part of teaching English, and yet simultaneously recognizes that students are dealing with sexuality, intimacy, and gender issues as tangible aspects of their lives. His ventriloquation of the social languages of intellectualism as well as social justice is evident in this response.

If the norm in schooling is to not discuss such issues in the English classroom, Amy and Frank position themselves differently in their compliance to that norm. Amy's pragmatic response aligns with an expected institutional response—and her monologic positioning within that institution. Frank's dialogic response is centered on what he perceives to be "standard" parts of the English curriculum—the content he is obliged to cover as a part of Virginia's standards of learning. In other words, Frank may concede to this norm because such discussions are not supported by schooling practices at Ferrytown. Personally, however, he appreciates that students are appropriately interested in these topics.

Contrary to the wide support in the literature of English classrooms being productive sites for discussing sexuality, intimacy, and gender (see Chapter 2), Amy and Frank feel differently. In fact, this very dissonance with Amy's and Frank's experiences and the wide support in the literature illustrates the limitations of the literature reviewed:

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it is one thing to suggest that the English classroom is a productive site for these conversations, but it is quite another to understand how to create, conduct, and maintain these conversations in classrooms. Further, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the sociocultural discussions missing from much of this literature are key in understanding Amy and Frank's positions. I therefore turn toward a discussion of how sociocultural forces originating outside Amy and Frank's classroom may influence their perceptions of discussion boundaries in the English classroom.

*Sociocultural influences.* Amy and Frank each mentioned that teachers have to be mindful of trying to anticipate and then respect what the wishes of parents may be regarding classroom discussions of sexuality. Amy noted that unless a discussion comes up in the context of the literature, she doesn't bring up issues of sexuality because "a parent would have a right to that [discussion]" (interview 2, 4/6/11). Similarly, Frank noted:

If the opportunity arises [to discuss sexuality and intimacy] and I feel like I can do it without encroaching on something they need to do with their parents, then I go ahead. . . . I'm pretty conservative, I guess, on what I approach. . . . (interview 3, 5/4/11).

While both Amy and Frank feel that these conversations are valid classroom discussions within the context of literature, the validity is also complicated by a sense of parental deference. Expectedly, Amy's deference proceeds from her monologic and reductive stance, and is voiced via a social language of discipline; Frank's deference positions him as potentially willing to negotiate such discussions via a social language of intellectualism.

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During our interviews both Amy and Frank referenced a teacher in a nearby county who years ago was compelled to leave her job. She had taught, with administration approval, a book in her classes that ultimately prompted a community-wide attack not just on the literature, but on her character and decision making (see Goldwasser, 1997, for a first-person account). After teaching *The Floatplane Notebooks*, a book approved by her principal, this teacher was verbally attacked by a local preacher/radio show personality, who argued publicly that by teaching this book, she was possessed by Satan and was compelling students to be “sex maniacs” (Goldwasser, 1997). Though there is actually little mention of sexuality in the book, the teacher endured months of challenges, ridicule, and criticism by parents, community members, the administration, the school board, and local newspapers. After defending herself, her use of the novel, and the novel itself at a school board hearing, the teacher was no longer able to use the book in her high school classes, and she eventually resigned from her position.

Amy and Frank each referenced this teacher’s experiences when explaining how they make decisions about their classroom discussions and texts, which is to proceed with extreme caution and deference to forces outside the classroom (such as parents). They each realized that if they choose to exercise their speaking rights and duties as teachers around topics of sexuality, intimacy, and gender, they may be infringing on what is considered to be the business of parents, may be subjected to severe criticism, and their jobs may be at risk. Amy’s acceptance of this norm positions her outside of public and administrative scrutiny, which is important to her as she maintains her authoritative stance. As noted previously, Amy’s self-removal from situations that place her authority

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or views in question is evident in other areas of her practice. It is unsurprising, then, that Amy would choose not to jeopardize her authority via her speaking rights and duties on topics that may draw public scrutiny. Frank's willingness to approach these topics with caution embraces his belief that these discussions can be valuable, and can be intellectualized and made appropriate for the English classroom. At the same time, such discussions set up Frank and his students for discomfort, which he works to avoid in his practice. The discomfort again may be contributed to the notion that such discussions simply are not a part of the accepted norms at Ferrytown.

There is a standard curriculum at Ferrytown High, with books and textbooks predetermined by an approval process at Ferrytown. While a preapproved set of texts limits Amy and Frank as far as book choice, it does provide them a safety net in the event of a parent or student contesting a book because of questionable themes. In this way, however, Amy and Frank are both very much aware that teachers can get into trouble because of the books they assign and the discussions they have with their students. Amy noted:

I would be more than a little bit leery about picking a very, very controversial book and requiring everybody to read it. . . . And I do think the textbooks are way too leaning toward women's lit, every racial lit, and what have you. And I'm always with ancient stuff because it has stood the test of time, and plus I think that it's more important for them to get classics (interview 3, 4/27/11).

Amy sticks with her monologic stance: she won't deviate from the "classics," which come with a sort of authoritative discourse historically attached to them. From Amy's viewpoint, using only texts from the literary canon—the "classics"—is one way to feel

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confident that she remains within the boundaries of accepted speaking rights and duties as far as literature goes.

Frank, who not only teaches AP English students but who coaches the English team for the Mountain Academic Competition Conference, works with a much larger list of books than is made available to students through the Ferrytown curriculum. Wary of the potential difficulties teachers can face when working with a wide collection of literature, Frank noted:

I'm not going to teach something that has the f-word in it, I'm not picking something that has any explicit sexuality in it. . . . I mean we're going to be pretty reasonable about it and anticipate the students. . . . I try to be careful. I try to gauge the class. . . . I mean I usually know students and what families they're in, what kind of cultural backgrounds they may have. So I take that into consideration. (interview 2, 4/4/11)

Frank notes in the above transcript that he will try to anticipate how students and their families may react to a certain text. This is a viable possibility due to the fact that Ferrytown High has such a small student population. Still, in Frank's understanding of the boundaries teachers may experience in their classroom discussions and texts, Frank continues to negotiate a tension: he's willing to "take into consideration" students, families, and cultural backgrounds, as well as offer alternative texts for students or parents that contest an assignment. He ventriloquates a social language of democracy in trying to give all students appropriate reading options and opportunities, yet he does this while still positioning himself in a cautious stance in the classroom.

To understand sociocultural nuances that may affect the implicit and explicit

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boundaries Amy and Frank experience in their practices, it is important to recall the social languages each teacher voices in their practices. Amy predictably voices a social language of discipline when discussing implicit and explicit boundaries to her speaking rights and duties. Frank's discursive positioning is more dialogic, voicing social languages of intellectualism and social justice.

Amy and Frank each identified similar influences contributing to boundaries they perceive in negotiating discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender—student maturity, teacher obligations, discipline, parents, community, and administrators. But they voice different social languages, and therefore take up different discursive positions in recognizing these boundaries. These discursive positions, which correspond to different social performances, will influence their responses to these boundaries.

**How do English teachers respond to these boundaries in their talk, teaching practices, and curricula?** A productive way to approach this research question is to think about *who* brings up topics of sexuality, gender, and intimacy: in the data collected, the origin of the talk dictated certain patterns of responses to discursive boundaries discussed above. For example, when students brought up these topics, Amy and Frank each responded by speaking through certain social languages. But when Amy and Frank brought up these topics, the ventriloquation patterns changed.

***Amy: Conditional approaches to sexuality.*** Amy's students, who are used to basic-level reading, are quick to point out mentions of sexuality and intimacy in the text. While her advanced freshman class was reading *Romeo and Juliet* aloud, the male student reading Romeo's part was laughing and giggling as he read words such as "bow butt" and "whore." All the other students in the class were laughing and talking as well, and Amy's

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reaction was to immediately discipline all the students. Though students asked her what all the words meant, Amy resisted most of their questions, stating:

Amy: “Now I’m not going to get into all that other stuff they’re saying.

Remember what we said the other day, Shakespeare people really loved that bawdy stuff. But they are also doing that play on words stuff. Yeah, I’m not going into that—it’s a lot of naughty things, a lot of tomfoolery.”

Male student: “So we don’t need to know it.”

Amy: “No.”

Second male student: “But I want to understand it better.”

Amy: “Now you know the kind of mood these boys are in so you know they’re going to be bawdy and nasty. . . . Nurse is trying to sound all flowery and above her post and educated, and they of course make fun of her. And you know, I can’t hear Romeo because of all the underlying talking in this class. I’m going to keep you in here and make you late for your next class unless you can shut those mouths!” (field notes, 3/15/11)

Representative of much of the data collected in Amy’s classroom, this example shows how Amy ventriloquates the social language of discipline by monologically closing off any discussion of sexuality, despite the students’ interest. Amy also voices a social language of conservatism, imbuing her language with value judgment with words such as “bawdy stuff,” “naughty things,” “tomfoolery,” and “nasty.”

In her General English 12 class, where students were reading and doing presentations on ballads of their choosing, Amy required their presentations to be solely on the characteristics of ballads and conventions such as meter and rhyme, despite the

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consistently sexual narratives inherent in this poetry. Though students often called out to presenters, making comments and jokes on the sexual content of many of the ballads, Amy often resisted the content of both the ballads and the comments in favor of correctness of poetic form and convention, and of course, classroom discipline. In each of these scenarios, Amy resisted both the content of the literature and students' interest in the content in order to stay "on task" and to keep discipline—to stay the course of monologism she relies on, and by ventriloquating the social language of discipline.

Amy's Advanced English 9 students were required to present a project on *Romeo and Juliet* from a list of choices Amy gave them. One female student did a side-by-side translation of Act 2, mentioning "fruit-shaped female genitalia," and launching the class into an uproar. Amy's responded to her students: "See, I didn't explain that as we went along because I know you all talked about that in phys ed." Again, Amy resisted a student's "bid" for discussing sexuality by suggesting that such a discussion had primacy in "phys ed"—the realm of family life curricula—but not in her classroom. In this example, she reminds the students that such discussions are not undertaken in her classroom.

In another example of Amy's resistance in favor of discipline, Amy was introducing the students to the Zeffirelli version of *Romeo and Juliet*, which they were going to be watching in class:

Amy: "You are going to see a naked man, a naked man's backside, and a naked woman, and I'm warning you if you make any comments on that movie then I will turn it off so your classmates will kill you. You will be sitting there and

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thinking, oh yeah, cleavage. No big deal, ok?"

Students, laughing: "We've already seen naked people when we studied Greek mythology."

Amy: "Yes you did. So you've been seeing it all year."

Students: We've been seeing it all our lives, Miss Winn! (field notes, 3/4/11)

Amy's ventriloquation choices are conditional: if students were reacting to themes of sexuality and intimacy, which often coincided with "acting out" in the form of laughing or giggling or some other form of "disrespectful" behavior, Amy simply voices the social language of discipline in order to mitigate students' poor behavior and to resist the themes of sexuality and intimacy. In this way, Amy saw student acquiescence as a necessary condition to addressing these topics in the literature. However, if Amy herself decided to address a theme of intimacy or sexuality from the literature, she leveraged her discursive rights to have a larger discussion on values, ventriloquating not only a language of social discipline but of social conservatism. For example, during one student's ballad presentation, she did address the content of the ballad:

So you see? It's a poem about adultery. . . . She's not going to get into heaven, right? She's an adultress, and she left her baby too! Not good. She said she was sorry but it was too late, too late. (field notes, 2/11/11)

In this example, Amy is not just explaining the ballad, but she adopts a proselytizing tone that passes socially conservative judgment.

In our third interview, Amy noted:

When we talk about the 'Wife of Bath's Tale,' I like to bring a lot of that [sexuality] stuff up. . . . Like I'll say, ok, it says here that the Wife of Bath's first

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husband used to say that braided hair and jewelry and things can be a danger to a woman's chastity. What would you think, Clinton, if you took a girl to the prom and she came down in a little tiny square dress that was an elasticized kind of material? Would you think that was a danger to her chastity and insist that if she's your girl she go up and change or would you feel proud and go run on to the dance with her? And they like to tell me what they think, and then the girls like to tell me what the boys are really thinking, and stuff like that. (interview 3, 4/27/11)

Amy's comfort with her personal involvement with her students positions her with the ability to approach discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender with her students. As in the transcript above, Amy also uses her discursive positioning to leverage a discussion on values. In these instances, Amy is speaking through a social language of conservatism, one she knows is already widely familiar to and accepted by her students and their families. As Sieben and Wallowitz (2009) note, English teachers can often reinforce dominant ideologies in their classrooms by both the formal and informal discussions they choose to have with their students. The authors maintain, for example, that English teachers subtly promote heteronormativity by taking an interest in only their hetero students' love interests. Or, when teachers draw parallels from the text to real-life scenarios by using students as examples who are well known for their heterosexual relationships and behavior. In a similar way, Amy makes subtle suggestions to her students in both her formal and informal classroom talk, suggesting "truths" and "values" that are aligned with socially conservative perspectives.

I asked Amy if she felt her students were comfortable discussing issues of sexuality and intimacy with her. In a response that further substantiates Sieben and

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Wallowitz's (2009) concerns, Amy describes the sorts of topics she and her students often discuss:

Well we talk about babies, you know, pregnancy, and how you feel with pregnancy. . . . [E]ven though I would answer their questions pretty well . . . . mostly I don't have time for that sort of shenanigans. (interview 3, 4/27/11)

Amy will discuss pregnancy and babies, both of which are scenarios related to heterosexuality, and are topics easily infused with lessons on values and "great truths." Yet even then, it is clear Amy's primary concern is with covering the material in a disciplined way, requiring disciplined students and no "shenanigans."

Drawing on her familiar recitative stance, Amy will also respond to issues of sexuality, gender, and intimacy in the text if it is clear that students are misunderstanding the text:

Sometimes we have to talk about those things, like when, for instance, in the 'Wife of Bath's Tale,' and the young girl was walking by along all by herself and this young knight came, and despite of what she said, he took her maidenhead. Well, when I found out that a couple of years ago a number of young girls thought that meant, cut off her head, I had to explain. . . . But I try to avoid that. If no one says anything or asks me anything, then I'll usually just say, he raped the maiden, and then I'll go right on. But if they question that word, then I'll tell them what it means. But, ah, on some things. When it gets really technical like that, I'm not too good with calling everything by its normal name, you know. Ah, I'm more, uh, you know with my granddaughter I'll just use euphemisms. I'm better with euphemisms [laughing]. (interview 3, 4/27/11)

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Interestingly, though Amy privileges her discipline-as-practice recitative stance in her classroom talk, and wants students to command at least a very basic-level understanding of the text, with discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender, Amy prefers to use euphemisms rather than formal terminology. This abandonment of her discipline as practice stance suggests that Amy is really not comfortable having these conversations with her students, particularly in a dialogic fashion. While she will explain the meaning of a word while invoking her monologic classroom positioning, she is less comfortable using sexual terminology (perhaps specifically body parts) when actually having discussions with her students. Also of note is that Amy is willing to revert to the linguistic practices she uses with her granddaughter (who was five at the time of the interview) when discussing sexual terminology with teenagers.

As previously discussed, Amy privileges student discipline as a very important part of her classroom. When understanding how Amy responds to the perceived boundaries to her talk on issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender, I have found that Amy's responses are dependent upon who wants to have the discussion. When students bring up or react to issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the text, how Amy negotiates their prompts are conditional, for example, on student behavior, or ensuring basic-level understanding of the text. If student behavior is poor and disrespectful, Amy voices the social language of discipline and will not respond to their questions. Likewise, when students misunderstand the text, Amy utilizes the social language of discipline—the recitative stance previously discussed—for definitions, stopping short of actual discussions. However, when Amy sees an opportunity to discuss these issues within the context of what she perceives as a legitimate moral domain in her classroom—her duty as

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a teacher to discuss and teach values—Amy will bring these issues up herself, ventriloquating a social language of social conservatism.

***Frank: Legitimizing sexuality through dialogism.*** There were relatively few instances I observed in Frank’s classes—General English 11 and AP English—where Frank explicitly positioned himself to have discussions of sexuality, intimacy, or gender. In the few instances where these themes came up in discussions, however, I observed Frank address them directly, most always ventriloquating a social language of intellectualism, and *despite* his stated discomfort in having such discussions.

As described earlier, Frank sees maturity and respect as foundational for discussing issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender; but he also doesn’t foreclose student-prompted bids for these discussions if maturity and respect are lacking. Frank also stated he tries to avoid classroom discussions of contentious social issues, which include sexuality, because such discussions make him uncomfortable. As noted, this discomfort may be caused by the fact that such discussions are not normalized at Ferrytown; thus, speaking rights and duties for these discussions are not readily utilized by Frank or his students, causing discomfort for speakers. Additionally, Frank also very much dislikes to discipline students. However, Frank demonstrated his willingness to dialogically negotiate such discussions via a social language of intellectualism.

In the following example, Frank’s General 11 English class was completing a productive conversation on *Death of a Salesman*. Frank was in storytelling mode, and getting ready to show students the movie version of the play:

Frank: “What kind of life has Happy been living out West?”

Female student: “He’s a player.”

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Frank: "Right! What does that mean nowadays?"

Female student: "He dates lots of women, engaged women, women who are higher up than him in his business."

Frank: "Yes. He ruins them before they get married. That probably means he takes away their virginity. I'm reading between the lines here, it never says that explicitly."

[Male students are laughing while Frank gets a video ready to show.]

Frank: "Good discussion, by the way. I appreciate that. I think that went very well."

[Frank goes on to show the movie. During the movie, Biff hugs Happy from behind.] Male student: "Ugh!"

Frank: "That's just a brotherly hug there, nothing unusual about that during that time, really."

Male students: "Yeah right."

[In the movie Bernard says to Biff: "I'm waiting for you in my house, Biff."]

Male students: "Ooooooooo!" (field notes, 3/11/11)

In this transcript the students were largely able to articulate what it meant that Happy was "a player," with only minimal immaturity in the form of some laughter, which required no discipline. Frank positively reinforced the "intellectual" assessment of a sexual theme by the students, and then deflated the homosexual narrative the male students were trying to create during the movie. Beyond ventriloquating intellectualism, Frank is also voicing a learning standard for General English 11, which states: "The student will be able to identify the prevalent themes and characterizations present in American literature, which

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are reflective of the history and culture”

([http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards\\_docs/english/stds9-](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/stds9-12/stds_english11.pdf)

[12/stds\\_english11.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/stds9-12/stds_english11.pdf)). Frank was further able to defuse the students’ immaturity and the creation of homosexual narratives by describing to the students that male affection during the time the movie was made did not necessarily signal homosexuality.

In the next example, Frank voices the same learning standard and the same commitment to intellectualism to talk about issues of sexuality, intimacy, and gender.

Frank states:

If a student has a question, and certainly like with talking about the 1920s, and the change in concepts of femininity and how young women behaved in the 1920s, and with writers being more open about human sexuality, things like that. Yeah, I mean I want to try to make things clear to students. (interview 3, 5/4/11)

Frank’s discursive position is legitimized because of his ability to voice these social languages in having a discussion, for example, on the changing concepts of femininity and human sexuality over time because it can be contextualized amidst changing themes within American literature.

During one of our interviews, Frank described a classroom experience discussing Hemingway’s story “Soldier’s Home.” He was describing to students how the soldier struggled to gather the emotional strength to “engage in ordinary courtship” and “healthy relationships” after being in the army and spending time with prostitutes, when a student expressed her shock:

I remember [the female student] say, ‘Wait a minute! You can’t talk about sex in class!’ And I said, ‘Well why not?’ And she said, ‘You just can’t, can you?’ And I

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said, ‘As long as we talk about it in an adult, mature way, I don’t know of any rules against that.’ (interview 3, 5/4/11)

This interview transcript is poignant for a number of reasons. First, it underscores Frank’s commitment to the intellectual pursuit of understanding literature, and his commitment to ventriloquating that intellectualism. It also demonstrates Frank’s willingness to dialogically negotiate discussions of sexuality with students. Further, this transcript highlights the notion that both teachers and students are aware that the discursive norms at Ferrytown position individuals *without* discursive rights to topics of sexuality. The discomfort connected with contentious discussions that Frank prefers to avoid are a function of this schooling environment and the discourses it stabilizes and excludes, rather than the idea that Frank himself is uncomfortable having these discussions.

Despite what this student demonstrated to be an understood lack of speaking rights on the topic of sexuality in school, Frank indicated that students frequently tried to engage discussions of sexuality nonetheless. When students did try to have these discussions, Frank noted:

I just try to treat it as though I’m looking at them as an adult and we’re just having a mature adult discussion without any snickering or anything about it. I use more formal terminology without using any slang or anything. (interview 3, 5/4/11)

I observed some very interesting discussions in Frank’s AP English class that demonstrated his willingness to dialogically engage with students on topics of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. During one class, his students were discussing Emily Dickenson’s Poem “I Started Early, Took My Dog.” Frank often had his AP students work in small

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groups, and on this particular day, while the whole class had read this poem, one small group was given the task of evaluating the poem and then leading a discussion with the class. The following field notes represent a conversation that spanned a large part of one class, though the notes themselves were limited to free-hand note taking:

Frank: “Ok. Let us begin. Page 826, the Emily Dickenson poem. It’s a little different. It’s interesting.”

Female student [presenting]: “At the literal level, a woman is walking to the sea with her dog. It can symbolize nature being dangerous, and can also symbolize either sexuality or death when it says *No man moved me till the tide when past my shoe and past my apron and my belt and past my bodice too*, this means climax [student’s voice cracks]. . . .”

[Other students in class are quietly whispering and laughing.]

Frank: “Well. What did you think about it, Chloe?”

Chloe: “It has lots of symbolism. It’s like a puzzle, with different ways of looking at it. I probably wouldn’t have thought of nature and sexuality if we didn’t look it up. I would have just thought about death, because Emily Dickenson writes a lot about death.

Frank: “Ok. Ok. So on a surface level, we have a speaker, an I. We’re to assume she’s female from things like an apron and a bodice. And we also know that for Emily Dickenson quite often the speaker in her poem is her. So she goes out, takes the dog. . . . So we have the basement. . . . Mermaids, what do they represent? They represent female beauty, female sexuality.”

Chloe: “It said their presence makes the woman more attractive.”

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Frank: “Right! All those men out there on the sea for years and years without seeing a woman, and they imagine a dolphin or a porpoise to be a woman. . . . The mouse imagery suggests the speaker as being small, weak, and vulnerable. . . .”

Frank: “*No man moved me*. That sounds like a love song, doesn’t it? That certainly suggests something sexual, doesn’t it? ‘*Till the tide went passed*. The tide is engulfing her. . . . If you put that together, it seems to suggest a masculine identity. On one level, she’s wading out into the waves, gets out too far, and she gets frightened of the tide. . . . But there’s the personification of nature as masculine, and then the reference to her clothing and bodice. What are those things, anyway. . . ? Something from the nineteenth century, not like a bra.”

Chloe: “You lace them up, they make you look skinny.”

Frank: “So certainly that suggests sex.”

Frank: “*And made as if he’d eat me up*. *Twilight* novels, right? Young women love those books. You all are perhaps a little too old, the women who like them are younger than you all. Certainly too young to date. . . . But quite literally he will suck the blood from her veins, steal her identity and she’ll die . . . !”

[Students are giggling and whispering.]

Frank: “Ok, I’m taking that too far. I grew up in a family of all boys. I’m raising a daughter, and I’m trying to understand the female way of being. . . . It’s very interesting to me. That idea of total consumption. . . .”

Frank: “Anyway. *Sleeve of a dandelion*. What is that? The stem, how is it like a sleeve. . . ? There’s dew on a dandelion sleeve. Ok. Don’t worry. I’m not going there with that. . . .”

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[There is lots of quiet giggling in the room, though Frank is very serious.]

Frank: “The stutter is suggesting fear, she feels threatened. Well yeah, and of course, when a wave washes up on the beach, you know it has that look. This is the most sexual part of the poem. . . . It’s like that *Twilight* fear and attraction, those conflicting impulses. . . . You know, it’s just gotta be hard being a girl.”

Male student: “I’m glad I’m not a girl.”

Frank: “Ok. Any other thoughts on that?”

[Silence.] (data from field notes, 4/4/11)

I noted in my researcher journal a number of key points about this discussion. First, Frank was very much in his storytelling mode, with animated affect, and visible excitement during discussion. Second, while the entire group was engaged in the discussion through active listening, the discussion was largely between Frank and Chloe, the student from the group assigned to present the poem to the class. I learned later after talking with Frank that he gave the group an “outside source” to help in their interpretation of the poem. This explained Chloe’s presentation to the class, which was imbued with a ventriloquation of that outside source. Frank later conceded, too, that the presenting group likely would not have addressed the themes of sexuality if they had not read about it in an alternative text.

This data highlights not only Frank’s willingness to embrace these types of discussions in his classes, but how he negotiates his perceived boundaries in his talk. Despite his stated discomfort, Frank will discuss these topics, as present in the literature, and in my observations, particularly with his AP students. In doing so, however, Frank very consistently also made what I called “legitimizing comments,” or what Wortham

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(2001) refers to as “evaluative indexicals,” in his discussion. Wortham (2001) explains that evaluative indexicals mark a speaker as being from a certain social group that characteristically uses a certain type of utterance. Frank leverages legitimizing comments in order to ventriloquate social languages that would “support” his position in the class as one with discursive rights to topics sexuality, intimacy, and gender. An example of a legitimizing comment in this transcript is when Frank draws parallels between the experience of the woman in the Dickenson poem and the experience of Bella, the main female character in the popular *Twilight* novels: Frank is leveraging a well-known popular culture reference in order to talk about the notion of sexual consumption, and in his words of the “conflicting impulses” of “fear and attraction.” Because *Twilight* is such a well-known and well-read series for young adults, Frank was able to draw on themes present in that text with themes present in the Dickenson poem as a way to legitimize this class discussion as within the realm of popular discourse and understanding, and thus securing his discursive positioning to have the discussion.

Another example of a legitimizing comment in the above data is Frank’s explanation to the class that he’s raising a daughter, that he grew up in a family of all boys, and he’s therefore trying to understand “the female way of being.” Frank uses these legitimizing comments as a way to explain *why* he’s bringing these points up in class discussion, ventriloquating the social languages of pop culture and parenting in order to demonstrate to his students that these discussion points are valid in multiple contexts. The *Twilight* novels are a cultural phenomenon all of his students would be familiar with, providing an “accepted” platform for classroom discussion. Frank also mentions his interest in this discussion because it’s one way to better understand his daughter and how

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best to raise her: he takes a concerned parent stance, as well as a sort of “ignorant male” stance, in order to suggest that the conversation would be informative to him. He’s interested in the female experience as a father—a natural and “understood” concern. Frank positions himself with speaking rights and duties within these social languages, and demonstrates his willingness to dialogically engage with discourses outside of the Ferrytown norm.

Also of note is the student’s use of legitimizing comments as she discussed the text. Phrases such as “this means,” “if we didn’t look it up,” “I would have just thought,” “it said,” and so on stressed Chloe’s ventriloquation of the “outside text.” Chloe’s use of these phrases alerted Frank and her peers that the comments and interpretation of sexual themes in the poem were valid because they were found in an authoritative source, and were not just her own words. In this way, Chloe was also acknowledging her understood lack of speaking rights and duties on topics of sexuality at school. Such phrases also worked to legitimize—to *enable*—the discussion she had with Frank. Frank had mentioned later that without the outside source, the students would not have had such an interpretation, and therefore, this discussion may not have occurred. In fact, Chloe’s ability to speak through the outside source in her interpretation and discussion may have served not only to begin the discussion, but to enable Frank to “safely” continue on with the discussion during class. Indeed, perhaps Frank gave her the outside source knowing it was necessary *in order to* legitimize a classroom discussion of the poem at all.

Notably, the rest of the students in the class were silent during the discussion, despite Frank’s storytelling mode and the general mood of the class, which was receptive and engaged. I see Chloe’s use of these legitimizing comments, in fact, as a

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ventriloquation of Frank's own voice—that both students and teachers have discursive rights to these topics provided the discussion can be legitimized through the voicing of an authoritative text, an authoritative social position (such as being a father of a female), or a critique of “common-knowledge” pop culture. Further, Frank's penultimate remark in the discussion, “it's just gotta be hard being a girl,” was taken up by the one other response made by another student (not Chloe) in the discussion: “I'm glad I'm not a girl.” While the male student who made this comment may have been voicing Frank's own opinion, this phrase can also be seen as another form of a legitimizing comment, one that essentially “excused” the student from the conversation because of his gender and the “official” declaration made by Frank that it's hard being a girl—something that as a father both fascinates, concerns, and seemingly at times escapes him.

Such discussions came less easily for Frank when he was less clearly able to position himself with legitimized discursive rights to the discussion. In another of his AP classes, Frank was introducing some poems inspired by Greek mythology. He makes the following legitimizing comment before his discussion gets underway: “The problem with teaching the Greeks in the ninth grade is that you can't talk about all the good stuff, and Zeus and all he can do and all his affairs. . . .” (field notes, 4/6/11). With this comment, Frank relays to his students that he's about to begin talking about “all the good stuff,” and that given their age, he expects and hopes the students will be mature and respectful participants in the conversation about to unfold. Frank goes on:

Frank: “So we're going to be reading some Yeats, a poem called “Leda and the Swan.” Can anyone identify what kind of poem it is?”

Multiple students: “A sonnet.”

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Frank: “Right. A sonnet. So Zeus decides to pay Leda a visit, and basically rapes Leda in the form of a swan. All rapes in Greek mythology resulted in a pregnancy. . . .”

[Frank gives some background on Greek and Roman mythology.]

Frank: “See that’s kinda neat, right? If you didn’t know about Zeus, you might be thinking what in the heck are they talking about? And of course it’s rather graphic. . . . I’m not sure how far to go with it either. I’d never read it to the ninth grades. . . . Ok. I’m also woefully underprepared, and I’m not going to get saved by the bell this time. Let’s read this poem aloud, and then this next one, ‘Leda’s Sister and the Geese.’ I’m just not sure how far to go with this.”

[No one volunteers to read the poems, so Frank reads them both back to back.]

Student comment, after last poem: “[Laughing.] *I’ll bet she’s sore!* Oh my god.”

Frank: “Yeah, I thought you’d get a kick out of that. So in the Yeats poem, if you think about the beginning, middle, and end of Zeus’s action, of what it is. . . . The early, the consummation, the aftermath, you can see it if you look at the quatrains. . . . The ending part of it, to put that in the way the editor does [first line of last quatrain is significantly indented]. Well. Can human sexual passion ever anticipate its consequences?”

[Silence.]

Frank: “I guess I’m trying to emphasize why it’s such an interesting poem. What for Zeus is just another fling. . . . And the difference in the language. . . .”

Frank: “Alright, I’m rambling, I’m not really prepared today. . . .” (field notes, 4/6/11)

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Simply reading poetry in school that contains themes of sexuality, intimacy, and gender does not necessarily position teachers (and students) with speaking rights and duties to discuss these topics. As evidenced in this data, Frank's attempts at discussing these poems were marked by awkwardness. While there certainly could have been multiple variables at play, it is evident that Frank did not successfully leverage legitimizing comments in this discussion, and students did not engage in the discussion either. Despite their obvious enjoyment of the second poem, which was meant to be humorous, the students were less engaged in the conversation above as opposed to the previous example. Frank actively relinquished his speaking rights and duties in this instance by stating that he was "woefully underprepared" and he wasn't going to get "saved by the bell." In a stark contrast to the previous data presented, Frank's discussion in this instance was reduced to technical aspects of the literature.

Despite Frank's caution in his classroom—with discussion, with text choice for his AP and MACC students, with ensuring his own as well as his students' comfort, and also with his legitimizing comments, Frank also noted that sometimes he just simply doesn't want to have discussions of sexuality:

I think it's really interesting to get into all the things in literature, and certainly sexual things are, uh, among the most interesting if not the most interesting, and certainly for students, even though they might not always say anything. Um, we're [we teachers are] the same way, I mean [laughing] we're the same way, it's like there's a little chasm there no one clearly wants to cross over [laughing].

(interview 3, 5/4/11)

This data further underscores the notion that both teachers and students are very much

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aware of the lack of institutional speaking rights and norms connected to topics of sexuality in school. Frank's statement is a reminder that students are learning that certain topics create "chasms" at school, and sexuality, gender, and intimacy are among these topics.

Though Frank believes that idealism is an important part of teaching, and that teachers have to have "faith" they are having a positive impact, he experiences difficulty in legitimizing discussions on sensitive and contentious topics. The caution and discomfort within his practice are tangible and very understandable given the lack of institutional support for these discussions. Yet, Frank also demonstrated that he is willing to facilitate intellectual and informative discussions on sexuality, intimacy, and gender. It is important to consider the ramifications, then, of teachers *not* making claims to discursive rights that can support productive conversations with students.

Blackburn and Buckley (2005), for example, discuss the inadvertent ramifications of not engaging students in discussions of LGBTQ themes in literature, noting that when English teachers choose to ignore and mitigate such discussions, they play a role in ensuring dominating discourses are left to stand unchallenged and easily reproduced in the local context of the classroom. When Frank chooses not to engage students in challenging discussions, he is also choosing to limit students' access to critical and challenging thinking—the type of thinking he believes public schools have a duty to foster, for example, in developing personal freedom and engaging with the world.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have discussed data presented in Chapters 4 and 5, using Bakhtinian and positioning theory analyses to better understand Amy and Frank as teachers. Amy's

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ventriloquation of the social language of discipline in schooling positions her in a monologic stance in the classroom, where she is the understood leader, expert, counselor, and disciplinarian. This stance carries over into how she negotiates discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. I observed that such discussions were conditional on who was making the bid for discussion: if students made the bid, Amy required students to have respectful and calm behavior—an expectation they most often resisted. However, most observations of these discussions occurred when Amy made bids for these discussions, particularly when student behavior was not an issue and when she could use these discussions to teach a lesson on “values” or “great truths,” which are important aspects of her personal teaching philosophy. In her classroom discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender, Amy speaks through a social language of conservatism, one that was familiar and largely accepted by her students. Amy’s discussions of sexuality, gender, and intimacy, then, were not such that dominant norms and understandings of such issues were challenged. Rather, Amy reinforced already existing understandings, as well as the conservative social language accepted at Ferrytown High. Given her general perception that she felt aligned with the Ferrytown community ideologically, Amy experienced a fair amount of “freedom” in her classroom discussions, positioning herself as an authority who was doing her duty to attend to the teaching and supporting of conservative social values.

Frank’s tensions in teaching leave him vacillating between his own teaching philosophy and his commitments to idealism and intellectualism in teaching on one hand, the norms expected of him by Ferrytown High on the other. Though Frank has cited discomfort in having contentious discussions, data reflects his willingness to have these

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discussions provided he can leverage legitimizing comments and ventriloquate the social languages necessary to “normalize” a discourse of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the English classroom. Frank’s dialogic stance, while reflecting a sensitivity to the social world around him, remains a difficult position to maintain, as it doesn’t offer Frank definitive classroom practices or methods that can consistently and productively connect his teaching stance within the Ferrytown school community. Frank is willing to negotiate discussions that are not only not “normalized” by the Ferrytown school community, but that, given his perception of Ferrytown as socially conservative, may represent an alternative ideology.

CHAPTER SEVEN

**Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications**

This dissertation began with an autobiographical description of the teaching and learning experiences that led me to this research project. I wondered: How am I, as an English teacher, complicit in perpetuating a school culture that runs so severely counter to my students' social worlds? Are there ethical implications? How do I fail my students—as readers, writers, critical thinkers, and sexual beings—when I do not help them make crucial connections between literature and their life practices? How do I fail myself as an educator when I ignore my own commitment to critical teaching and learning in favor of institutional preferences? I asked these questions as a researcher, a teacher, and a mother of two school-aged girls. These questions not only brought me to this dissertation, but they framed my thinking throughout the dissertation process. I turn now to a brief discussion about how asking such questions have both inspired and complicated this research.

As a teacher, I embrace a pedagogy of “tough love” in my practice. By this I mean that I strive to make my students feel both comfortable and supported in my classroom in order to better challenge them with critical, reflexive, and uncomfortable thinking. I challenge them to understand their own processes of selfhood and the implications for knowledge construction in a pluralistic world. My teaching practice is separated by my disposition as a parent by only a few degrees: I want my girls to be able to understand why and how they view the world as they do, what this means for them and those around them, and most importantly, I want to push them to always be open to reinterpreting knowledge and experience. I've yet to feel satisfied that my daughters are

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exposed to such experiences in public school. As a researcher, then, my parenting and teaching dispositions come very much into play: I want to understand, beyond the trite tirades about standardized testing, canned curricula, shrinking budgets, and overworked/underpaid teachers, why schools and teachers can't, don't, or won't do better by our kids. This pursuit, however, is not without problems and limitations.

I have proceeded with this dissertation having in mind the notion that teachers and students could engage in socially just, comprehensive, critical, empowering, and inclusive discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender—that teachers and students can do “better” than what I personally experienced, and do more than what seems to be a dismal norm as evidenced by the literature review in Chapter 2. I wanted this to be true. This optimism, however, created limitations for this study. Data analysis in all stages was conducted against this idealistic norm I began grasping toward before even beginning my dissertation. Therefore, my interpretations of Amy's and Frank's practices are based in part on my own placement of them within and against my own devised golden standards: a socially just sex education across content areas; teachers unafraid to push against institutional norms; students having a voice in constructing conversations that matter to them. But how do I know that students truly want to discuss sexuality at school? Should I assume that “good teachers” and “institutional status quo” cannot be synonymous? Is sexuality a topic we can reasonably expect all teachers to embrace and handle “well” (whatever that means)? I acknowledge, therefore, that this research and all of its findings have been constructed within and against my own hopes for teaching and learning, as a teacher, a mother, and a researcher.

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Given my own positioning, then, as a social justice ethnographic researcher, the findings in this dissertation have been difficult for me. Though optimistic at the outset (especially for Frank!), this dissertation instead highlights the many ways discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender can be undermined, squelched, or mediated within classroom and institutional discourses and norms. Implications for these findings are discussed in the pages to follow. Yet first, I want to come full circle with the decidedly “dangerous” and emotional qualities of social justice research. This dissertation is at once dismal and fertile ground. Though painfully disheartening as a researcher, a teacher, and a mother, these findings are also moments of exposure not just for institutionalized and normalizing discourses, but for agents (teachers, parents, researchers, students): What will we do now? Will we revert to what we know, to what we have taught ourselves to believe as “just the way things are?” Or will we embrace the discomfort and grapple with our newly found “situated freedom” (Greene, 1988) as we reimagine what is now possible *because of* the constraints we now clearly see?

In the following pages I provide an overview of this dissertation. I then discuss the implications for this research, and close with suggestions for future research both inspired and complicated by this research project.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

In Chapter 1 I described the evolution of this research project, which reflects seven years of inquiry around a general theme: Why don’t we talk about sex in public school classroom discourse? I described my burgeoning interest in this question as I taught high school English and troubled over the clear disconnect between students’ social lives and schooling. As I reflected on my teaching experiences, I contemplated what asking such a

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question might mean for my practice, and for my own commitment to social justice in the classroom.

I also discussed the two pilot studies conducted prior to formulating this larger dissertation project. The first pilot, conducted at Ferrytown High, was an ethnographic study designed to better understand the ways English teachers respond to student-led discussions of sexuality (Scott, 2012). Instead, however, the data led me to an exploration of symbolic violence via a brief case study that highlighted the often subtle ways institutionalizing practices and discourses infiltrate the classrooms and practices of content-area teachers. Using what I called “critical narratives,” I focused specifically on how Kathy, my participant, conflated her inability to help two particular students, who happened to confide in her with narratives of sexual “deviance,” with her inability to help these students via meaningful classroom practices. She felt she couldn’t connect with these students via books they wanted to read or books that may have been helpful for them to read. Kathy experienced extreme dissonance in these scenarios because she couldn’t properly place the struggle she faced as a teacher hard-wired to care for the students she felt so close to.

True to the tenets of symbolic violence, however, Kathy misrecognized the real terms of the struggle: it was not book choice or classroom discussion, but an institutional culture that was disconnected from the home and social lives of students, a culture that privileges heteronormativity and conservative ideologies. Kathy became complicit in these institutional practices not only by misrecognizing the real problems and focusing her energy away from these areas, but by focusing even more intently on her ethic of care, trying to protect her students from the very conversations and questions that could

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challenge and change these practices. Her ethic of care—also a site of symbolic violence because the school does not value such a disposition in the face of standards and testing—actually worked to hide the real injustices of schooling in this case, embedding Kathy and her students firmly within an unjust cycle of expected practices and behaviors at school.

In the second pilot, I conducted a critical ethnographic study of text and talk at a Virginia Department of Education sex educator training workshop to better understand how sex education teachers are institutionally positioned via state-sponsored professional development (Scott, 2013). This study helped me to better understand how schooling practices can be created and disseminated at the state level, particularly through language use. The workshop prepositioned sex education teachers as institutional subjects prior to beginning a new school year. This prepositioning was connected in part to the discourse of fear widely incited at the workshop: job loss was a risk associated with teaching content that was not a part of the state's abstinence-plus curricula. Teachers were prepositioned to be compliant educators in delivering contentious content-area subject matter.

The workshop also prepositioned newer teachers within a discourse of discomfort, legitimizing and normalizing a feeling that being uncomfortable teaching sex education was okay, expected, and even supported. Despite veteran teachers' encouragement that discomfort fades with time, the workshop talk and texts normalized this discourse, and provided tangible strategies for addressing teachers' discomfort. Teaching strategies championed at the workshop promoted teachers' rights to halt and divert conversations and questions from students.

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Within the dynamic of the workshop as a professional development experience, teachers were positioned as passive and uncritical consumers of knowledge. As such, they were positioned as ones not impacted by or aware of professional terminology (or its potential misuse in their own practices, or its explicitly leveraged use at the workshop), addled by fear and discomfort in accomplishing their teaching tasks, and uncritical of teaching and learning strategies that not only insult their practices, but their students' intelligence and concerns. Teachers did not challenge this positioning publicly, as the fear they were prepositioned to have in their practices also affected how they navigated the workshop.

Chapter 2 highlighted my research questions and design, including my theoretical frameworks, key definitions, and review of relevant literature. I posed three questions in this study: (1) How do English teachers define sexuality and gender? (2) Do English teachers perceive any implicit or explicit boundaries to talk of sexuality, intimacy, and gender in the classroom? (3) How do English teachers respond to these boundaries? To set the stage for exploring and answering these questions, and analyzing data collected, I briefly explained Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, including a discussion of heteroglossia, dialogism, authoritative and internally persuasive discourse, social languages, and ventriloquation. I also discussed positioning theory and its relevance to this dissertation: while Bakhtin recognizes a speaking subject with agency, positioning theory considers how a speaker's agency is impacted by institutionally mediated discourses. I then defined the four key terms of dialogue, sexuality, gender, and abstinence-plus education, and how they relate to this research project.

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The literature review in Chapter 2 presented not only the multidisciplinary research this study takes into consideration, but underscores the complexity of my research topics and the uniqueness of this study. Given the lack of research that directly addresses my research questions, I drew from literature in English education, sociology, philosophy, and public health to narrate the terrain of existing scholarship, and locate this dissertation both within and beyond these discussions.

In Chapter 3 I provided a brief narrative on the study setting, and then presented my research methods. I explained the difference between and the connections among conducting and producing an ethnography (Wolcott, 1999). I described the ethnographic processes and techniques utilized to conduct this ethnographic study, including participant observation, interviews, researcher journal, and analytical memos. The production of this research project—the actual writing of the ethnographic experience into this textual account—began (and ended) with a modified constant-comparative approach (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010) to data analysis, in which data were systematically analyzed in multiple and cyclical iterations. Writing through and with the analyzed data represented my final level of analysis, enabling the textual production of this dissertation (Richardson & St. Pierre, 1997).

With Chapter 4 I introduced Amy and her classroom practice, presenting data describing Amy as a teacher, her methodological and philosophical approaches to teaching, as well as the unique qualities Amy brings to her practice. These unique qualities include the primacy of discipline in her practice, her conservative political and ideological orientations, and her personal capacity for attending to her students on individual levels. Amy is a firm disciplinarian and extends this approach to teaching into

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her classroom methods, which call for a high regulation of verbal exchange, except for when discussion is centered on political viewpoints or values. Her commitment to teaching values in her classroom, while a part of her teaching philosophy, does not seem to conflict with her general perceptions of the community, which she categorizes as largely conservative. In these ways, Amy experiences no dissonance with her approaches to teaching in her classroom. Notably, Amy feels free to engage students in political and ideological discussions in which Amy knows she will largely be unchallenged due to consensus. She also actively retreats from discussions and situations originating and/or extending beyond the classroom and in which her methods and ideals are challenged.

In Chapter 5 I introduced Frank and his classroom practices. These practices, which include Frank's motivations to teach, his approaches to discipline, his personal sense of idealism, joys and challenges in teaching, and his moderately liberal stance, are infused with many conflicting tensions. Frank's appreciation for literature engenders an emotional stance in his practice, one I called his "storytelling mode," in which his animation and excitement is palpable and infectious among his students. And yet, Frank doesn't often remain in storytelling mode, more often keeping a distanced affect, which his students model. Frank's distanced affect could be related to his preference to avoid confrontation in the classroom. Frank keeps discipline by being both passive and patient, consciously choosing for students to "come around" to discipline rather than forcing them to adopt acceptable behavior. Relatedly, Frank is very cautious in his classroom, particularly regarding discussion and book choice. He prefers to avoid controversial topics due to his stated discomfort in these discussions, and also because he wants all of his students to feel welcome and comfortable in the class. Yet, he also believes schools

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should be places that foster independent thinking on controversial topics, helping students to develop individual freedoms.

Chapter 6 provided a discussion of data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 with an emphasis on a positioning theory analysis, as well as a presentation and assessment of additional data that helped answer my research questions. Amy's monologic classroom stance is reflected in her ready ventriloquation of the social languages of discipline and conservatism, creating an a priori guide for her practice. Invoking a politically and socially conservative discourse reinforces her authoritative and monologic position, from which she is positioned to teach values and "great truths" to her students. Amy experiences a great amount of "freedom" in her classroom position, as she generally feels that her teaching practices align with the larger social and cultural norms at Ferrytown. However, her experience is one of "negative freedom" (Greene, 1988)—a "freedom from"—born out of a refusal to engage dialogically with situations and people beyond her classroom who might challenge her authority, her views, or her methods. Amy's classroom stance allows her to embrace "the right not to be interfered with or coerced or compelled" (Greene, 1998, p. 16) to do what she doesn't want to do, teach what she doesn't want to teach, embrace viewpoints or even literature that are beyond her comfort zone.

Frank's dialogic classroom stance positions him at the intersections of a number of tensions present in his practice, often making it difficult to develop classroom practices that are free of these tensions. Frank voices many social languages that coincide with his beliefs about education—intellectualism, liberalism, social justice, and democracy. However, in his teaching practice he has a difficult time consistently positioning himself

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within these discourses: the discursive norms of Ferrytown prioritize standards and testing paradigms, student discipline, and social conservatism. Frank is continually caught between his own desires in teaching and the realities of teaching: a dialectic of what is personally desirable in his practice and what is accepted and expected institutionally. Though Frank experiences this dialectic deeply, he appears unable to engage this dialectic in his practice. An engagement of this dialectic includes not only experiencing these constraints but “orienting the self to the possible” (Greene, 1988, p. 5). Frank does not find *possibility* in his dialogic classroom stances; he does not embrace the struggles he experiences such that he is able to see creatively the “relation between freedom and the imagination—the ability to make present what is absent, to summon up a condition that is not yet” (Greene, 1988, p. 16). Instead, Frank is mired in the dissonance present among his own personality, personal beliefs, classroom practices, and institutional requirements.

In Chapter 6 I also presented and discussed data collected that answer the three research questions guiding this study. Amy and Frank each had vastly different answers to the first question, which assessed how each teacher defined sexuality and gender. Amy’s monologic positioning is unwavering as she voices a social language of heteronormativity, reducing sexuality and gender not just to biological sex but to historically defined binaries. Frank’s dialogic stance is also unwavering, as he differentiates between reproduction, desire, and intimacy, appreciating a full spectrum of biological markers and gender practices that move beyond historically defined binaries.

In considering my second question—how do English teachers perceive implicit or explicit boundaries to their talk about sexuality, intimacy, and gender?—I found that

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Amy and Frank provided similar answers, albeit from different positions. Both teachers acknowledged that boundaries of talk within the classroom are mediated by their concerns of classroom management and potential parental, administrative, and community grievances. Amy and Frank both identified student maturity and discipline as major factors in whether they would facilitate such discussions. They each voiced a concern over classroom management, where Amy's main objective was instilling discipline while Frank's wish was to avoid having to discipline. Despite recognizing students' interest in these topics, each teacher conceded that the English classroom may not be the best place for such discussions. Amy voiced a deferment to parents' rights to have those discussions, and also positioned herself in a sort of parenting role in the classroom with her willingness to discuss these topics when she can leverage a lesson on values and morals. Frank voiced a willingness to have these discussions provided they are related to the literature and demonstrate a respect of parents' wishes. These provisions reflect Frank's commitment to student comfort, as well as a sense that a common appreciation of these topics can be reached.

Both teachers referenced a regional scenario in which an English teacher bore school and community reprisal for teaching what was considered to be a controversial text *after* it was read, stating they would take great care in choosing a text in order to avoid a similar scenario. Amy voiced a firm conviction in teaching "classics" as a rationalization to avoid choosing or assigning additional texts. She preferred to use the Ferrytown curriculum exclusively, thus positioning herself in safe alignment with the institution. Frank, who works with AP students and students who compete in an academic contest, has to assign a much broader set of texts. Again, Frank embraces his dialogic

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position by stating that he pays close attention to his students, their families, and their cultural backgrounds in order to ascertain when a text might be seen as problematic.

The boundaries Amy and Frank perceive are informed by the social languages they voice and position themselves within as teachers, underscoring the ways in which they negotiate the social world around them. Amy feels it is her duty to teach values and “truths” that are shared with the Ferrytown community. As Frank mentioned, he knows of no rules against talking about sexuality in the classroom, though he prefers to avoid such conversations, likely because they are not the norm at Ferrytown. As Amy and Frank demonstrate, teachers set boundaries on their own talk in accordance to the ways they perceive and position themselves within their own teaching practices, their schools, and the normalized discourses evident in the school communities they serve.

The third research question assessed how the teachers responded to these perceived boundaries. Amy’s responses were conditional on who was making the bid for discussion: if students made the bid, Amy required students to have respectful and calm behavior before deciding whether to allow the discussion. Amy felt free to make bids for these discussions if student behavior was not an issue, and particularly when she could use these discussions to teach a lesson on “values” or “great truths.” Again, Amy’s socially conservative perspective reinforced what she saw as the dominant views of sexuality, intimacy, and gender at Ferrytown High. Accordingly, Amy felt “free” to engage these conversations when she deemed fit—in both classroom discourse and in her personal conversations with students—as she believed her speaking rights to these conversations were supported in both practice and ideology by the Ferrytown community.

Frank exuded much caution in his approach to such discussions. Despite his stated

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discomfort with the topic of sexuality, data supports Frank's willingness to engage students in conversations on sexuality provided he could legitimize the discussions. To position himself with the discursive rights necessary to "warrant" discussions of sexuality, he voiced social languages such as intellectualism, standards of learning, popular culture, and even parenting. Frank demonstrated the intellectual knowledge, sensitivity, and understanding to handle these topics well. Accordingly, his discomfort was likely not a product of the subject matter itself, but was instead related to the notion that topics of sexuality, intimacy, and gender are not a part of the discursive norms at Ferrytown. A strong indicator that Ferrytown's discursive norms did not include discussion of sexuality, intimacy, and gender was evident in his revelation that *students* perceived that sex was not a topic for school. Though Frank indicated to his students that he wasn't aware of any "rules" against discussing sex at school, his awareness that such discussions were contentious territory were underscored by his belief that the English classroom may not be the best place to have such discussions, and his commitment to sustaining (rather than challenging) what he perceived to be the general position of students and their families on such topics. The larger cultural norms of Ferrytown subtly mediated topics of sexuality, intimacy, and gender, minimizing Frank's discursive classroom position via his inability to voice personally meaningful social languages on these topics.

I now turn to a larger discussion of the findings and implications of this dissertation, and concluding with suggestions for further research.

### **Implications**

There are several implications that extend beyond the asking and answering of my research questions, including a discussion of teachers as change agents, implications for teacher ideologies in the classroom, and a related exploration of teacher identity through figured worlds.

**Teachers as change agents.** This dissertation challenges the well-voiced notion that teachers can be agents of change in their classrooms. Data and analysis instead underscores the ways institutions and cultural norms constrain teacher talk—and therefore, student learning. I have highlighted two very different teachers who believe very different things, engage their practices in very different ways, and yet ultimately produce the same results: dominant norms of sexuality, intimacy, and gender are either explicitly or tacitly enforced. The cultural norms at Ferrytown do not support discourses that would challenge the rhetoric of an abstinence-based discourse. Rather, the existing cultural norms are discursively reproduced. Though Amy and Frank negotiate topics of sexuality, intimacy, and gender from different positions within Ferrytown, the same outcome is evident.

Amy explicitly reinforces what I see as an abstinence-based, heteronormal rhetoric with her preference and ability to ventriloquate a conservative social voice in her classroom. A conservative social language resonates with her own ideologies. And because of her firm disciplinary and authoritative classroom position, she also feels it is a part of her job to impart “values” and “great truths” to her students. She believes the values and truths she leverages on sexuality, intimacy, and gender are shared with the larger Ferrytown community. Therefore, an abstinence-based discourse that is the

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cornerstone of abstinence-based sex education is also normalized in Amy's English classes as well.

Frank tacitly reinforces the same abstinence-based discourse despite having more progressive views of human sexuality. Though Frank demonstrated his ability to navigate discussions of sexuality, intimacy, and gender by voicing intellectualism and even Virginia learning standards, the discussions were not without tension. Frank (and his students) knew that with such discussions, they were skirting discursive and perhaps ideological norms at Ferrytown. While Frank was careful to voice what I have called "legitimizing comments" in these discussions in order to make valid claims on his speaking rights to these topics, it was evident that Frank's discomfort and that of his students prevented these discussions from happening often. Without a consistent and dialogic approach to these discussions—similar to Frank's classroom position when he is in his storytelling mode—Frank's efforts do not represent a challenge to abstinence-based discursive norms at Ferrytown.

Institutionalized discourses of schooling have a tremendous positioning effect on classroom teachers. At Ferrytown, typical discourses included discipline, standards, and by Amy and Frank's accounts, social and political conservatism. While discipline and standards may have been more explicit, the social and political conservatism seen as the norm at Ferrytown had more tacit effects on their practices. Amy resonated with a conservative discourse, and enjoyed a fair amount of freedom to leverage this discourse in her classroom. Frank did not resonate with a conservative voice, though he was aware that many of his students did. As a result, Frank was very cautious in his classroom,

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prioritizing student comfort in order to help support their engagement in intellectual discussions, rather than consistently challenging students to explore their beliefs.

Amy and Frank are two very different teachers, with vastly different practices and belief systems, and yet their classrooms produce the same outcome—teaching and learning classroom practices that reinforce dominant discourses of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. This is not surprising with Amy, as her monologic teaching stance invokes unchanging and unchallenging binaries that resonate with her own and her perceptions of students' beliefs and ideologies. Frank's dialogic and tension-ridden teaching practice, on the other hand, embraces many dialectics that would serve to create more liberating teaching and learning experiences and outcomes. Yet, Frank is not able to craft teaching practices that align simultaneously with his own beliefs and the institutional expectations of Ferrytown. Despite his invocation of social justice within his beliefs about public education, Frank is not able to support such goals in his practice.

**Political ideology and classroom teachers.** While designing this research project, I wanted to understand each participants' personal political ideology from three angles: (1) each participant's personal beliefs about sexuality and gender, and of adolescent sex education in public school, both of which are political; (2) each participant's personal identification with political ideology; and (3) each participant's perceptions of the dominant political ideologies circulating within Ferrytown High and the Ferrytown community generally. As Harré and Van Langenhove (2007, p. 397) note: "People can be positioned with regard to the moral orders in which they perform social actions. It is often sufficient to refer to the roles people occupy within a given moral order or to certain institutional aspects of social life to make actions intelligible and to

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understand the positions that people take.” Amy and Frank were performing the social action of teaching within the Ferrytown moral order. Because both the act of teaching and the institution of schooling have political implications, an understanding of the participants’ political ideologies helped to better understand the push and pull of personal beliefs and institutional norms within a classroom environment.

This study has implications for the ways we understand the connections between teachers’ political ideologies, classroom practices, classroom positioning, and dominant discourses. Amy, a social and political conservative, finds it easy to discuss the contentious topics of sexuality, intimacy, and gender with her students when she chooses because she understands that her students and their families are likely to have the same viewpoints on social values. While Amy acknowledges the same boundaries to such discussions as Frank, she also feels enabled to have these discussions in her classroom due to her positioning within the dominant conservative discourse. Amy is an arbiter of conservative social languages, which are internally persuasive for her, and as far as she perceives, her students and their families. Amy therefore explicitly contributes to the social reproduction of conservative social languages in schooling, offering students a strident and unflinching forum for experiencing and taking in this social language.

Frank, a moderate liberal, is extremely cautious in his classroom discussions. This caution extends not only because of the dialogic tensions he embraces and negotiates in his classroom, or because he is aware of a social language of conservatism throughout the Ferrytown community, but may as well be due to his liberal political viewpoints. Rawls (2005) defines political liberalism both in terms of free and equal political justice (justice as fairness) in a democratic society, and in terms of tolerance of divergent religious,

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philosophical, and moral doctrines. Political liberalism, according to Rawls (2005.), addresses three conditions for a fair and stable society, for “constitutional democracy”:

First, the basic structure of society is regulated by a political conception of justice; second, this political conception is the focus of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines; and third, public discussion . . . is conducted in terms of the political conception of justice. (p. 44)

Frank’s acknowledgment that he tries to avoid contentious topics of religion, politics, and sexuality in his classroom in the name of student comfort as well as a common appreciation of contentious topics echoes Rawls’s conception of political liberalism. Frank’s willingness to engage a contentious topic under the assumption that because he knows his students and their families, he can determine a “neutral” level of challenge, of engagement, of comfort—whether it’s an intellectual conversation or not—infers that he is compelled to engage consensus in his classroom. Rawls argues that political liberalism embraces a certain temperament of individual divergent stances in the name of tolerance and stability; Frank puts this same viewpoint into practice in his classroom when he prioritizes student comfort and defers to cultural norms instead of facilitating challenging and difficult discussions.

Yet, Frank is positioned in a school community that does not prioritize nor perhaps even support the voicing of “alternative” social languages with regard to contentious topics. Given the data and analysis presented in this dissertation, it is not clear that any alternative position Frank could adopt would be sufficient to present a challenge to Ferrytown’s norms. What is important to highlight, however, is the notion that despite the fact Frank voiced a liberal ideology with regard to democracy, social

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justice, and liberalism in public schooling, these social languages do not represent a liberatory or agentic classroom stance when: (1) they are not supported by dominant discourses, or (2) an engagement of these discourses in the classroom depends upon comfort and consensus.

As Mouffe (cited in Biesta, 2006) has argued, liberalism attempts to ensure consensus by relegating all pluralism and dissent to the private domain in order to create the conditions for rational consensus. As Biesta (2006, p. 79) notes, the danger of liberalism is that “political participation becomes only open for those who already agree on the rules of the game.” In some ways, Frank’s liberal political ideology also positions him to enjoy an aspect of negative freedom (Greene, 1988)—his freedom from engaging students in contentious classroom discussion due to the fact that, at the very least, the dissonance between his own views and his students’ represents disagreement at the outset. Particularly in light of Frank’s aversion to enforcing student discipline—the likelihood of which may increase with the onset of controversial discussion, particularly given its potential absence at Ferrytown—Frank’s “consensus-building” approach to his practice upholds dominant norms.

By allowing his liberal ideology to affect his teaching stance in this way, Frank’s classroom does not become one that challenges authoritative discourses of schooling, including abstinence-based and heteronormative discourses of sexuality, because he does not confront these topics. Not only does he let such discourses stand unchallenged, he does not teach his students how to recognize and challenge such discourses. In this way, Frank, as a political liberal, who embraces extremely difficult and dialogic tensions in his

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classroom and in his teaching practice, is also an arbiter of conservative norms in his practice with his refusal to engage a plurality of thought.

If Frank were a teacher in a more progressive school and community, Frank's positioning most certainly would be different. In the same way, if Amy were not positioned as she is in the conservative school and community of Ferrytown, her teaching experiences and positionality would also certainly look quite different. Once again, I contend that a sociocultural understanding of the social worlds teachers navigate is another essential focal point for researching and understanding the pervasiveness of dominating discourses. However, the major finding and implication highlighted in this section is the notion that a teacher's political positioning, which includes a response to the perceived political tenor of the school and community in which he or she works, as well as an understanding of how a teacher ventriloquates and is positioned by the social languages of that school and community, offer informative vantage points for further exploration.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This dissertation has implicated dominating discourses and social languages as having the ability to shape practicing teachers. As a teacher, I find this to be an extremely informative way to think about my own practice, and can envision additional research on the power of authoritative discourses and social languages to be highly productive for teachers generally. One suggestion for taking up this type of study, which would also include a component of teacher identity development, is to utilize Holland et al.'s (1998) notion of figured worlds.

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Amy and Frank are participants in the “figured worlds” of their classrooms.

Conceptualized by Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), figured worlds are socially and culturally produced activities and practices by which individuals develop, understand, and reproduce individual identities. While teacher identity development was not a goal of this research, it could be a part of future research on how teachers are shaped by social languages and authoritative discourses of schooling. It is fruitful to think about the following: (1) Amy and Frank are individuals who have been socially and culturally produced in their own figured worlds beyond the classroom; and (2) while their individual identities inform their methodological choices in the classroom, these choices also affect students in a process of social reproduction. Figured worlds are sites of possibility and agency, though they are mediated by intensely complex power relations. This research was primarily concerned with understanding how the discursive choices Amy and Frank make as teachers can affect the interplay of dominant norms of sexuality in the classroom, and how Amy and Frank make these choices given the intermeshed social and political influences acting upon them as teachers. However, it would be fruitful to also understand Amy and Frank as unique and yet socially and culturally produced individuals.

In the figured world of the classroom, and its many dialectics of power (student–teacher; teacher–administration; teacher–parents; parents–students; students–administration; school–community, etc.), Amy’s and Frank’s positions as teachers are formulated and reinforced by how they each choose to accept, reject, and negotiate the power and identities available to them as teachers at Ferrytown High. I see authoritative

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discourses and social languages as part of these institutional powers, which may, as I have suggested previously, both *create* teachers as well as empower or stifle teachers.

Another suggestion for future research is to use positioning theory for a conversational analysis of recorded classroom talk on topics of sexuality, intimacy, and gender. Such a study would provide more direct data on the ways teachers position themselves and students with speaking rights to these topics. Moreover, it would allow for more direct conversations and interventions with teachers related to how they are positioned by the schools in which they work.

Third, the literature review for this project prompted a glaring realization in the field of English education. While this discipline is rich with writing, musings, and anecdotes on teaching in the English classroom, there is a severe lack of sociocultural research being undertaken in the linguistically and politically rich environments of English classrooms. Though sweeping acknowledgment exists touting the freedom and possibility that comes with teaching and learning in the English classroom, the lack of situated research in this classroom context does that freedom and possibility a disservice. Despite the literature cited in Chapter 2 on the call for discussions of sexuality in the English classroom, there is little practical information for practicing teachers. Hundreds of English teachers can suggest, beg, and plead for the English classroom to be used as a site of meaning-making around student sexuality; but without guidelines, explicated challenges, tactics, and discussions that take into account the social and political complexity of utilizing the English classroom in this way, there is little hope we can expect that sense of freedom and possibility to prosper.

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Last, the most productive literature found related to my research questions was centered on the importance of including LGBTQ literature in the English classroom. I completely agree with and support this body of literature. However, I wonder if the recent dearth of literature on sexuality in the English classroom, which seems to have been replaced with a plethora of pleas for queer literature in support of queer identities, was abandoned in the name of an even larger socializing process going on in public schools today. “Sexuality” is vast and complex: it is an experience, a practice, a category, a freedom, a power, an identity, and more. No doubt, it *is* a staggering topic to embrace productively and conclusively in any classroom, let alone do it well. I wonder if the seemingly recent abandonment of the “human sexuality” project for the “queer sexuality” project is signaling an acceptance of this difficulty. Worse, I wonder if, in a heterosexual world, social justice educators find it easier to embrace the “othered” project of queer sexuality and literature. Such a shift not only deflates conversations of sexuality and education, including current contentious debates on sex education curricula in this country, but I fear it may reduce and in some ways sensationalize the queer experience through literature.

For example, given my experiences as Ferrytown, I can see a book with queer themes, such as *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, potentially being easier to accept and consume than the heterosexuality in *The Catcher and the Rye*. The heteronormal discourses at Ferrytown, in my reading, are pervasive enough that *Perks* would be so “othered” it would be seen as not entirely a threat (though I’m sure it would not be a smooth text adoption process). And because the heteronormal discourses are so pervasive, I can imagine a queer student population at Ferrytown being further silenced,

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therefore rendering critical meaning making even less valuable. Similarly, I wonder if some English educators, who pride themselves as social justice educators, may be taking the easy way through “sexuality” by focusing on the queer experience, knowing that such literature *may* only speak to a percentage of the student population, and *may* go critically unconsumed due to a lack of resonance or appreciation. Such a scenario would be even more damaging and delegitimizing for any queer population, worsening the already emotionally detrimental experience of having to navigate an uncaring and unempathetic heteronormative world.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Pioneering work in social reproduction theory presents schools as institutions that reinforce inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/1990). More palatable to teachers and researchers in education, however, is a focus on the recognition that while schools can foster inequality, they can also be sites of struggle, resistance, and subversion (Willis, 1977; Levinson, 2000). Within education, classroom teachers are often seen as individuals with the capacity to transform education. With small and liberating challenges to the classic and problematic schematic of oppressive teaching and learning as outlined by Freire (1970), we teachers feel we must unfailingly believe in the power of education, and in the transformations critical teaching and learning can bring to individuals and society. However, this research suggests that despite their best intentions, teachers are positioned as constrained institutional subjects with far less influence than most teachers’ colleges would have their rising teachers believe.

This is a difficult view to take, but I believe it must be acknowledged at teachers colleges, in educational research, and among both rising teachers and practicing teachers.

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As politicians, policymakers, tax payers, and citizens increasingly look to public schools as the answer (or the cause, as the case may be) of any number of social, political, or economic challenges, it is time we finally start addressing the institution of public schooling pragmatically and realistically. It is time to start a conversation about the difficulties of positioning teachers as change agents when the school house of cards is quite literally stacked against such a stance. Perhaps then we can start engaging the types of conversations that can lead to the reforms, paradigm changes, and interventions necessary to create an increasingly just democracy through education.

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## **Appendix A. Interview Protocol**

### **Interview 1**

- How and when did you decide to become a teacher in your chosen field?
- What type of training did you have before you started teaching?
- How long have you been teaching? How long have you been teaching at this school?
- What is the main subject area you teach?
- What are your certification areas?
- Please talk about the courses and grade levels you teach/have taught currently as well as over the course of your profession.
- What are your favorite classes to teach? Why?
- What do you enjoy most about teaching? Why? Has that changed over the years? Please give examples.
- What are your biggest challenges with regard to teaching? Why? Have these changed over the years? Please give examples.
- How do you negotiate student-led questions or dialogues that make you uncomfortable, for whatever reason? Do you have any stories you'd like to share?
- Is there anything else you'd like to add?

### **Interview 2**

- How would you describe your relationship with your students? The administrators here? Parents? The community?
- What teaching methods best describe your teaching practice?
- How do you think your students would describe you?

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- How would you describe the political environment at your school? Where do you see yourself in this environment?
- How would you describe the political and cultural/social environment in the larger school community? Where do you see yourself in this environment?
- What are some of your favorite units to teach? Why?
- What are your least favorite units to teach? Why?
- How heavily does discussion figure into your classroom? Why? How?
- Can you describe a particularly memorable discussion you have had in one of your classes?
- Do your students ever begin discussion and/or dialogue regarding issues of sexuality and gender? How do you react? How do these discussions and your reactions/their reactions to these discussions impact the climate of your classroom? Do you have any examples to share?
- Please define what “sexuality” and “gender” mean to you.
- Is there anything else you’d like to add?

### **Interview 3**

- How would you describe your overall philosophy of teaching?
- Has this philosophy changed over the years? Do you see it continuing to evolve?
- Are there any things you would like to change about your current position?
- Are there any aspects of the courses you teach you would like to change?
- What are your goals for your students with regard to the courses you teach?

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- Is there anything you would like to change about your teaching practice? Why? How would you go about making those changes? What are obstacles to those changes?
- What are your goals for your students with regard to their general academic careers and life aspirations? How do you see yourself as contributing to those goals and aspirations?
- Do you think dialogue on sexuality and gender has a place in your classroom? Why or why not? Is there a reason you feel the way you do? Can you describe some scenarios that led you to draw this conclusion?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

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**Appendix B. Open Codes and Definitions**

<b>Open Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>
community culture	2/19/11: Relates to the ways students bring their home, religious, personal, ideological selves into the classroom.
gatekeeping: institutional	8/5/11: Any way the school represents difficulty
gatekeeping: teacher	8/5/11: Represents teacher resistance to be open to the outside coming in; change to schedule; fear of more work, etc.
practice: classroom	2/22/11: Illustrates classroom practice generally
practice: institutional	2/22/11: Any practice that is a part of the institutional culture
Amy/Frank: appeal to students	8/5/11: Teacher comment that transcends the typical teacher-student relationship by blurring the power relations between the two; seen as an unprofessional comment that can appeal to the students by being either too friendly, subversive of the teacher-student relationship, coy, etc.
	9/4/11: Comment teacher makes to appeal to students' sensibilities
	12/3/11: Teacher comment uses to gain students' interest; can be attractive to students, and is a way teacher leverages students' sensibilities for increased attention, awareness, participation, etc.
can't be bothered (Amy)	9/17/11: Amy's words, when it seems that certain administrative details are unimportant and not necessary for her to know, despite being related to her job
Amy/Frank: capitalized opportunity	3/4/11: point at classroom discussion where teacher uses literature and/or comment/discussion to make a point about themes around sexuality, intimacy, etc.
Amy/Frank: classroom discussion	8/10/11: instances of classroom discussions with teacher and students
	9/1/11: discussion related to culture of classroom
Amy/Frank: contradiction	8/5/11: highlights contradictions, either verbal, in practice, norms, etc.
Amy/Frank: culture of classroom	2/21/11: demonstrates classroom culture; not just daily practices, but classroom dynamics, personality, etc.
Amy/Frank: dialog with students	3/11/11: How teacher converses with individual students, formally and/or informally in classroom and school settings
Amy/Frank: discipline	2/19/11: Management of student behavior in classroom
	7/23/11: Ways teachers constrain organic classroom culture, habits, discussion, behaviors, etc.
Amy/Frank: discussion event	9/4/11: Large chunks of text that speak to ways teachers make meaning with students
Amy/Frank: dislikes	4/19/11: Teacher dislikes with regard to teaching, school, students, etc.
Amy/Frank: gender	3/1/11: How teachers define gender

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	9/17/11: Anything in teacher comments/practices/methods that demonstrates their personal beliefs about gender
I don't know how she knew (Amy)	4/23/11: Amy's words; when she can't believe that students pick up themes of sexuality on their own; sense of distrust in students; sense that these things are "hidden" in the texts her department sanctions
Amy/Frank: interaction administration	2/25/11: How teachers interact with administrators
Amy/Frank: interaction department	3/3/11: Anything that connotes teachers' relationship with department
Amy/Frank: intimate insight	9/17/11: Anytime teacher says something that might suggest there is more than they are likely willing to tell me; revisit; may pose additional questions
legitimizing comment (Frank)	8/17/11: Comments made that serve to back up/support classroom choices
	10/2/11: Comments Frank makes discussing sexuality with students; seems to "validate" discussions
Amy/Frank: likes	4/19/11: What teachers like with regard to teaching, school, students, etc. job, her students, her school, etc.
Amy/Frank: personal involvement	9/4/11: How teachers handle/negotiate students' personal lives at school
Amy/Frank: personal position	8/5/11: Personal positioning, opinions, beliefs, etc.
pick up slack (Amy)	9/17/11: Amy's words; used to connote when she feels slightly put out by having to take on extra responsibilities; may show the limits of how she approaches her profession with regard to her not having unending energy to do more
play around (Amy)	9/17/11: Amy's words; how she likes to have fun with her students despite the fact that she doesn't want to blur the line of professionalism she values
Amy/Frank: political ideology	3/22/11: Any comments that reflect teachers' political leanings and positionings
pragmatism (Amy)	5/18/11: How Amy embraces total practicality; no romanticism involved, nuts and bolts of situations, people, education
Amy/Frank: relationship with community	4/20/11: Any way teachers explain their relationship with the larger community
Amy/Frank: relationship with parents	4/20/11: Any way teachers interact with parents of students
Amy/Frank: relationship with students	4/20/11: Teachers' personal relationships with students
	8/1/11: How teachers negotiate relationships with students: develop, maintain, resist, etc.
Amy/Frank: response to sexuality in lit	9/4/11: How teachers react/respond/discuss issues of sexuality in the literature

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Amy/Frank: school involvement	3/7/11: Ways teachers are involved with the school generally, such as extra curricular activities, clubs, sports, social events, etc.
Frank: intellectualism	3/7/11: Social language Frank ventriloquates in his practice. The ways he draws on his MA in English and uses that discourse in his high school English classroom.
self removal (Amy)	9/17/11: How Amy removes herself from a situation that she disagrees with and/or perhaps knows she can't win; retreats from engaging with parents, administrators, etc.
Amy/Frank: setting	2/22/11: Anything descriptive of the physical setting in the classroom
Amy/Frank: sexuality	3/1/11: How teachers define sexuality
	9/17/11: How teachers convey beliefs about sexuality to students through discussion; definitions of sexuality; beliefs about sexuality
Amy/Frank: social language	3/6/12: Phrases, metaphors, references to social languages utilized by teachers; represent a language/ideology/idea that teacher may resonate with or resist
Frank: intellectualism	3/7/11: Social language Frank ventriloquates in his practice. The ways he draws on his MA in English and uses that discourse in his high school English classroom.
Frank: social justice	3/9/11: Social language frank ventriloquates in his practice. The ways he voices his believe that schools provide opportunities for students.
Frank: liberalism	3/9/11: Social language Frank ventriloquates in his practice. The ways he voices both his political beliefs, as well as the notion that public schools are founded in and support liberal ideals.
Frank: democracy	3/9/11: Social language Frank ventriloquates in his practice. The ways he voices his opinion that public schools are places of democracy, social mobility, and freedom.
Amy: social conservatism	3/10/11: Social language Amy ventriloquates in her practice. The ways she voices her ideological beliefs in her classroom, and uses her role as teacher to support and teach those beliefs.
Amy: standards	3/10/11: Social language Amy ventriloquates in her practice. The testing standards discourse which Amy voices to support her teaching practice and methods.
Frank: standards	3/10/11: Social language Frank ventriloquates in his practice. For Frank, the testing standards discourse creates both problems and solutions in his practice. Problems: minimizes intellectualism, discussions, and the like. Solutions: helps relieve him of the responsibility to either pass or fail a student: keeps him comfortable.

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Amy: discipline	3/11/11: Social language Amy ventriloquates in her practice. Common language of schooling that Amy finds her practice and methods on, and uses to define/explain/legitimize her choices and her role as teacher.
suspicion of administration (Amy)	9/15/11: Reflects Amy's questioning of practices/people/power outside of her classroom; may suggest her position that she knows best for her students, for the school, etc. because she is the one working most closely with the students; may also reflect her power as department head
Amy/Frank: teacher background	3/13/11: Preparation for teaching, approach to teaching career
Amy/Frank: teaching methods	3/13/11: Anything that reflects methodological approach to teaching practice
Amy/Frank: teaching philosophy	9/17/11: Anything that defines teaching philosophy; approaches to teaching as practice and profession
Amy/Frank: capitalized opportunity	8/5/11: Point at classroom discussion where teacher uses literature and/or comment/discussion to make a point about themes around sexuality, intimacy, etc.
Amy/Frank: missed opportunity	8/5/11: Point where a deeper conversation about sexuality could have taken place in regular classroom discussion but does not
power struggle	8/5/11: Posturing between teacher and researcher
researcher journal	8/5/11: Portions of field notes that are journal entries, reflective, etc.
careful (Frank)	9/26/11: Ways that Frank is careful not to step on anyone's toes, upset anyone, whether students or administrators; how he demonstrates that he wants everyone to be comfortable at school
Amy/Frank: challenges	9/26/11: Any challenges teachers sees to own practice, methods, etc.; coming from students, school, administrators, self, colleagues, anywhere
contradiction (Frank)	8/5/11: Highlights contradictions, either verbal, in practice, norms, etc.
legitimizing comment (Frank)	9/4/11: A comment that clarifies and makes valid another comment; it's a way Frank explains to his students that what he's talking about in the classroom is an intellectual, academic interest, warranting critical discussion. It also means that these comments act as backsteps to covering up/protecting themselves in case the conversation has gone too far. Fear of students misinterpreting what Frank has said.
risky comment (Frank)	9/4/11: When Frank makes a comment in class that may reveal his personal position on an issue; has the risk of being misinterpreted by students. May be considered "outside" of the standard classroom discourse, but is made legitimate by Frank by virtue of being in the conversation
school culture	9/17/11: Illustrates general school culture and practices, etc.

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southern kindness	8/5/11: Represents friendly, southwestern VA social atmosphere--friendly folk
students: comments on sexuality	8/5/11: Student comments made in class that pertain to sexuality
students: dialog with Amy	9/5/11: Students initiate Amy into dialogue
students: dialog with Frank	9/5/11: Students initiate Frank into dialogue
students: leverage library	9/4/11: how students use city library
students: perspectives	8/5/11: Anything students say or do that provide insight to who they are, how they think, etc.
students: resistance	9/5/11: Students resisting classroom practices, which includes directions
students: response to sexuality in lit Amy	9/4/11: How students' in Amy's class respond to issues of sexuality in the lit
students: response to sexuality in lit Frank	9/4/11: How students in Frank's class respond to issues of sexuality in the lit
students: social practice	9/5/11: Categorizes an accepted social practice displayed by students
Amy/Frank: censorship	9/18/11: Any time a teacher feels directly or indirectly censored by administrators, community, or even students
Amy/Frank: constraint	9/27/11: Ways teachers view themselves as constrained
Amy/Frank: resistance	9/5/11: Teacher resists comments made from students
Amy/Frank: social practice	9/5/11: Describes accepted social practices among teachers at school
Amy/Frank: subversion	9/18/11: Teacher working within the systemic parameters to accomplish what s/he wants without breaking established patterns or rules
school rules	3/27/12: Any school-wide rule at Ferrytown evident in conversation, practice, ritual, habit and so on with students and with teachers
dress code	3/27/12: Any time school dress code comes up
students: gender practice	9/6/11: Students engaging in normalized gender practice (heteronormal)
students: physical sexuality	9/6/11: Students engaging in normalized (heteronormal) physical sexuality practices in daily school practices

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### Appendix C. Pattern-Level Analysis

Ferrytown School Culture: Codes that thematically represent of general school culture; not specific to one teacher's experience; offer a general understanding of daily/usual school practices

- Gatekeeping: institutional
- Gatekeeping: teacher
- Practice: classroom
- Practice: institutional
- School culture
- Can't be bothered (Amy)
- Interaction: administration
- Interaction: department
- Personal involvement
- Personal position
- Pick up slack (Amy)
- Political ideology
- Relationship with parents
- Relationship with students
- Setting
- Frank: careful
- Frank: challenges

Ferrytown Community Culture: Codes that thematically represent participants' perceptions of community culture and values; ways in which culture and values of community are represented in the classroom and school

- Community culture
- Amy: relationship with community
- Amy: relationship with parents
- Frank: relationship with community
- Frank: relationship with parents
- Intimate insight
- Personal position
- Political ideology
- Frank: intellectualism
- Frank: liberalism
- Frank: democracy
- Frank: standards
- Amy: discipline
- Amy: social conservatism
- Teachers: censorship
- Teachers: constraint
- Teachers: social practice
- Relationship with students

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- School involvement
- Personal involvement
- Personal position
- Political ideology
- Relationship with community
- Frank: careful
- Setting
- Suspicion of administration

Amy's Teaching Practice: Codes that thematically represent Amy's approach to teaching, including her philosophy, methods, goals, and standards

- Amy: capitalized opportunity
- Amy: teaching philosophy
- Amy: power struggle
- Culture of classroom
- Dialog with students
- Dislikes
- Likes
- Classroom discussion
- Can't be bothered (administrative details)
- Amy: appeal to students
- Amy: discipline
- Amy: social conservatism
- Interaction: administration
- Interaction: department
- Personal involvement
- Personal position
- Pick up slack (Amy)
- Play around (Amy)
- Political ideology
- Pragmatism
- Relationship with parents
- Relationship with students
- Relationship with community
- Setting
- Teacher background
- Teaching methods
- Students: dialog with Amy

Frank's Teaching Practice: Codes that thematically represent Frank's approach to teaching, including his philosophy, methods, goals, and standards

- Frank: teaching philosophy
- Frank: capitalized opportunity

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- Dislikes
- Likes
- Frank: appeal to students
- Culture of classroom
- Classroom discussion
- Contradiction
- Interaction: administration
- Interaction: department
- Intimate insight
- Legitimizing comment
- Personal involvement
- Personal position
- Political ideology
- Relationship with parents
- Relationship with students
- Frank: intellectualism
- Frank: liberalism
- Frank: democracy
- Frank: standards
- Setting
- Teacher background
- Teaching methods
- Frank: careful
- Frank: challenges
- Frank: contradiction
- Students: dialog with Frank

Amy's Classroom Discussion and Dialog Patterns: Codes that are thematically representative of discussion, dialogue, and conversation occurring within Amy's classroom

- Discussion event
- Appeal to students
- Amy: capitalized opportunity
- Amy: teaching philosophy
- Amy: power struggle
- Amy: missed opportunity
- Classroom discussion
- Contradiction
- Culture of classroom
- Dialog with students
- Personal position
- Amy: discipline
- Amy: social conservatism
- Play around (Amy)

## Discussing Sexuality in the English Classroom: Using Bakhtinian Analyses and Positioning Theory to Explore Teacher Talk

- Political ideology
- Pragmatism
- Relationship with students
- Relationship with parents
- Relationship with community
- Response to sexuality in lit
- Sexuality
- Teaching methods
- Students: dialog with Amy

### Frank's Classroom Discussion and Dialog Patterns: Codes that are thematically representative of discussion, dialogue, and conversation occurring within Frank's classroom

- Discussion event
- Frank: appeal to students
- Frank: capitalized opportunity
- Classroom discussion
- Culture of classroom
- Frank: dialog with students
- Intimate insight
- Frank: legitimizing comment
- Relationship with students
- Relationship with parents
- Frank: intellectualism
- Frank: liberalism
- Frank: democracy
- Frank: standards
- Response to sexuality in lit
- Sexuality
- Frank: intellectualism
- Teacher background
- Teaching methods
- Students: dialog with Frank

### Amy's Personal Position in the Classroom:

- Dislikes
- Likes
- Classroom discussion
- Culture of classroom
- Dialog with students
- Intimate insight
- Personal involvement
- Personal position

## Discussing Sexuality in the English Classroom: Using Bakhtinian Analyses and Positioning Theory to Explore Teacher Talk

- Amy: discipline
- Amy: social conservatism
- Play around (Amy)
- Response to sexuality in lit
- Teaching methods

### Frank's Personal Position in the Classroom:

- Dislikes
- Likes
- Contradiction
- Culture of classroom
- Dialog with students
- Intimate insight
- Legitimizing comment
- Personal involvement
- Personal position
- Frank: intellectualism
- Frank: liberalism
- Frank: democracy
- Frank: standards
- Response to sexuality in lit
- Teacher background
- Frank: intellectualism
- Frank: careful
- Frank: challenges
- Frank: contradiction
- Frank: dialog with students
- Frank: discipline

### Sexuality, Intimacy, and Gender in Amy's Classroom:

- Culture of classroom
- Gender
- I don't know how she knew
- Intimate insight
- Personal involvement
- Personal position
- Amy: discipline
- Amy: social conservatism
- Play around (Amy)
- Political ideology
- Response to sexuality in lit
- Sexuality
- Students: comments on sexuality

## Discussing Sexuality in the English Classroom: Using Bakhtinian Analyses and Positioning Theory to Explore Teacher Talk

### Sexuality, Intimacy, and Gender in Frank's Classroom:

- Culture of classroom
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Intimate insight
- Legitimizing comment
- Personal position
- Response to sexuality in lit
- Teacher background
- Frank: intellectualism
- Frank: liberalism
- Frank: democracy
- Frank: careful
- Frank: contradiction
- Frank: dialog with students
- Students: comments on sexuality

## Appendix D. Amy's Teaching Practice: Emergent Themes

### I. Discipline

- a. Classroom discipline
  - i. Successful teaching
    - 1. Disciplined students
      - a. Student behavior
  - ii. Successful teaching
    - 1. Disciplined students
    - 2. Teacher authority in classroom
      - a. Culture of classroom
      - b. Student resistance
        - i. Classroom power struggle
- b. Classroom discipline
  - i. Gendered bodily discipline
    - 1. Males
      - a. Public discipline
      - b. Missing discipline
        - i. Masculinizing practices
    - 2. Females
      - a. Private discipline
- c. Disciplined teaching methods
  - i. Successful teaching
    - 1. Student behavior
    - 2. Pragmatism
  - ii. Successful teaching
    - 1. Limited discussion: literature
      - a. Student expectation
    - 2. Verbal fill-in-blanks
      - a. Student expectation
  - iii. Philosophy of teaching
    - 1. Pragmatism
    - 2. Student behavior

### II. Political and personal involvement in the classroom

- a. Prolific discussion: politics
  - i. No dissonance: teacher or students
    - 1. Student interest
    - 2. Teacher interest
- b. Prolific discussion: politics
  - i. No dissonance: teacher or students
    - 1. Shared views
      - a. Community culture
      - b. Student ideology
      - c. Parent ideology
- c. Personal involvement with students
  - i. Informal talk with students

## Discussing Sexuality in the English Classroom: Using Bakhtinian Analyses and Positioning Theory to Explore Teacher Talk

1. Values
  - a. Teaching philosophy
  - b. Political stance
  - c. No dissonance: teacher or students
    - i. Community culture
    - ii. Student ideology
    - iii. Parent ideology
  - ii. Concern for students
    1. Values
    2. Teaching philosophy
- III. Political and personal involvement beyond the classroom**
  - a. Retreat/removal
    - i. Power struggle originating outside the classroom
      1. Teacher dissonance
        - a. Interaction with administration
          - i. Careful
        - b. Interaction with parents
          - i. Careful
        - c. Student teachers
          - i. Pedagogical/methods struggle
        - d. Personal choice books
          - i. Careful

## Appendix E. Frank's Teaching Practice: Emergent Themes

### I. Tensions in teaching

- a. Emotions in literature/distance from students
  - i. Storytelling mode
    1. Love for literature
      - a. Animation
      - b. Student engagement
      - c. Student modeling
    - ii. Removed classroom stance
      1. Minimal personal involvement
        - a. Missed opportunities
      2. Formal talk
        - a. Lack of emotion
        - b. Student disengagement
        - c. Student modeling
  - b. Idealism in teaching/realities of teaching
    - i. Idealism
      1. Teaching as doing good
        - a. Prioritize people
      2. Education as doing good
        - a. Social mobility
        - b. Economic opportunity
      3. Philosophy of teaching
        - a. Faith
      4. Love for literature
        - a. Intellectualism
        - b. Personal enjoyment
    - ii. Realities of teaching
      1. Dislike: discipline
      2. Disillusionment
      3. Institutional practices
      4. Student disengagement
        - a. Lack of emotion
  - c. Liberalism in education/caution in teaching
    - i. Liberalism
      1. Education as liberal project
        - a. Teaching philosophy
          - i. Faith
      2. Education as doing good
        - a. Social mobility
        - b. Economic opportunity
      3. Student goals
        - a. Functional citizens
        - b. Individual thought

Discussing Sexuality in the English Classroom: Using Bakhtinian Analyses and Positioning Theory to Explore Teacher Talk

- i. Schools not obliged to reflect community beliefs
      - c. Individual freedom
        - i. Life practices
        - ii. Beliefs
      - d. Economic freedom
    - 4. Education as support for individual freedoms
  - ii. Caution in teaching
    - 1. Avoiding “uncomfortable” topics
      - a. Politics
      - b. Religion
      - c. Sexuality
      - d. Race
    - 2. Social taboo
      - a. Defined by students and community
    - 3. English classroom as appropriate for discussion of social topics
      - a. General avoidance of social topics
        - i. Personal discomfort
        - ii. Sensitivity to social taboo
        - iii. Lack of time
        - iv. Commitment to collective student comfort
    - 4. Minimal personal involvement
      - a. Leverage institutional practices
    - 5. Lack of emotion
      - a. Student modeling
      - b. Student disengagement
    - 6. Discussion
      - a. Sensitivity
        - i. Contentious topic
        - ii. Missed opportunity
    - 7. Classroom culture
      - a. Student comfort
      - b. Intellectualism
    - 8. Careful
      - a. Student comfort
      - b. Intellectualism
- II. Avoiding confrontation in the English classroom**
  - a. Patience as classroom management
    - i. Dislike: discipline
      - 1. Discipline as struggle
        - a. Institutional practices/rules
          - i. Personal discomfort
        - b. Dislike: confrontation with students
      - 2. Mitigate power struggle
        - a. Removed classroom stance

## Discussing Sexuality in the English Classroom: Using Bakhtinian Analyses and Positioning Theory to Explore Teacher Talk

- b. Minimal personal involvement
- c. Culture of classroom
  - i. Students: self-regulate
  - ii. Passive stance
- d. Positive reinforcement
- b. Intellectual engagement as classroom management
  - i. Storytelling mode
    - a. Animation
    - b. Student engagement
    - c. Student modeling
  - ii. Classroom culture
    - a. Student comfort
    - b. Intellectualism
- c. Choosing books, not contention
  - i. Curriculum as “safe”
  - ii. Knowledge of students and families
    - 1. Commitment to collective student comfort
  - iii. Alternative assignments
    - 1. Commitment to collective student comfort
  - iv. Classroom culture
    - a. Student comfort
    - b. Intellectualism