

Entering the Conversation:

A Novice English Teacher's Approach to Exploring Difference Using Dialogic Pedagogy

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The process of learning to put pedagogical theory into practice in the early-career classroom is a complex endeavor. This ethnographically-derived case study examined what happened when a novice teacher worked from a critical, dialogic stance to explore difference in his secondary English classroom. The theories of dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981) and critical dialogic pedagogy (Fecho, 2011a), together with the transactional theory of reading (Rosenblatt, 1995), framed and guided this study. The study focused on a second-year teacher, employed at a suburban middle school, who had been trained in dialogic pedagogy during his teacher preparation program. Methods included three collaborative planning sessions to design and develop a short story unit for the participant's seventh-grade classes, daily observations of the participant's implementation of those lessons, and participant interviews during the beginning, middle, and final stages of the collaboration. Multiple data sources, including recordings of planning sessions, interview transcripts, classroom observation field notes, and analytical memos were generated and analyzed to establish understandings about how the participant's approach to and implementation of dialogic practice affected his and his students' classroom experiences. These understandings suggested that as a novice teacher learning to manage all of the complexities inherent in a classroom, the participant's efforts to enact a dialogic stance both benefited and complicated his practice. While the understandings generated by this case study are not generalizable to a larger population of novice teachers, the conceptual inferences (Stewart, 2011) offered by the rich description of this single case generated meaningful insight

into the evolutionary process of becoming a dialogic practitioner. This insight offers useful implications for teacher educators seeking to guide teacher candidates towards effective translation of pedagogical theory into successful classroom practice in field placements and early-career classrooms.

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**GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT**

This case study examined what happened when a novice teacher worked from a critical, dialogic stance to explore difference in his secondary English classroom. The study focused on a second-year teacher, employed at a suburban middle school, who had been trained in dialogic pedagogy during his teacher preparation program. Methods included lesson planning sessions, daily observations of the participant's classroom instruction, and participant interviews. Multiple data sources, including recordings of planning sessions, interview transcripts, classroom observation field notes, and analytical memos were generated and analyzed to establish new understandings about how dialogic practice affected his and his students' classroom experiences. These understandings suggested that the participant's efforts to enact a dialogic stance both benefited and complicated his practice. Insights generated by this study offer implications for teacher educators seeking to guide teacher candidates towards the translation of pedagogical theory into successful classroom practice in field placements and early-career classrooms.

## Dedication

To Mom, my very first teacher, for your endless patience, optimism, and encouragement. Your countless cards, letters, phone calls, and Skype dates pulled me the whole way through this program, especially on those (numerous) occasions when I was determined to quit. In the back of my mind, as it has been all my life, is the sound of your voice asking, *Did you do the best you could?* And I am so proud to be able to tell you: Yes, I did. I gave it all I had, and it got me the whole way through to the other side, just like you promised it would. Thank you for supporting me, now and always, and for being the greatest role model and friend I could ever ask for.

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## Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

### The Origin of the Issue

Fourteen years of teaching English instilled in me a robust belief in the power that literature can have in directing readers towards explorations of big questions about the human experience and the responsibilities that accompany teachers who choose to guide those explorations. For the first two years of my career, I focused my energies on learning the most basic aspects of teaching: classroom management, lesson planning, and making sure I covered and assessed students on the curricular materials that I was assigned to teach. My own teacher education program spent little time focused on how to broach the significant social topics that appear in literature, and as a result, I spent little time exploring those topics with my students when I became a teacher. Certainly, there were many social issues present in every piece of literature that I was expected to teach in those first two years—*Othello*, *The Outsiders*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Crucible*, *The Great Gatsby*—but it rarely crossed my mind to use the literature I was teaching as a tool for exploring social issues in ways that might help students acquire the desire and ability to contribute to the greater good of society by developing empathy and understanding both for themselves as well as for those outside their scope of experience.

As a high school teacher, I was required to teach certain texts, and I needed to make sure we read through them and students were assessed on their knowledge of what was between the covers before moving on to the next text. Little time was spent in dialogue with students about the social issues present in those texts. But during my third year of teaching—the first year that I was scheduled to teach freshman English—I was assigned to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Having never read the book myself, I approached my initial study of it with an eye on how I would present it to students. And there it was—the N-word. As a White teacher of majority-

White freshman classes, I panicked. How was I supposed to read this book with my kids when that word appeared on multiple pages? It was not a word that had ever been part of my vocabulary, and I didn't know what to do about it. I wondered how my rural White students would react when they saw and heard that word being used in school. I wondered if, as a White person, I had any right to address the word. I worried that I would be overstepping my authority to directly confront it, but I also worried about the implications of going about that confrontation in a problematic way. In the end, I knew that I certainly couldn't just ignore it. Because of the presence of that word, I knew I didn't have the option to breeze past the racism entrenched in that book; I had to prepare myself to face it head on and help my students to do the same.

With tentative steps, I began planning out ways to explore with my students not only the book itself, but the racist themes and language therein. It is human nature to understand the world most clearly from one's own vantage point in it. Considering the life experiences and ideas of others whose backgrounds differ from our own is a challenge for adults, making it even more difficult for adolescents. There was a definitive disconnect between most of my students' own experiences and their ability to understand the persistent inequalities in the society in which they lived, and I felt like it was my duty to address this disconnect in order for us to meaningfully study this particular work of literature. We had conversations about the N-word before we started reading. We talked about why Harper Lee might have chosen to use this particular word instead of softening the language in her book to make it easier for readers to digest. We discussed the power of language, the language of power, and the reasons why a White person's use of that word is different from usage by a person of Color. It was a shaky beginning, but that single word was the basis for my foray into exploring race, gender, class, and other factors of difference and social injustice with my students as found in the literature I was assigned to teach.

My students responded in many ways to these discussions—sometimes defensively, sometimes appreciatively, sometimes by asking lots of questions—but even through the most negative of class periods, it seemed like these conversations were significant and impactful, maybe even more impactful than the literature itself. I had entered this profession to talk about books and poems and drama with students, but I now found myself drawn towards the big questions about the world and about humanity and about social structures and issues that seemed to appear in every single text that came across my desk. Those questions rarely change, and they are rarely fully answered. But asking them is a fundamental means of more fully understanding ourselves, each other, and the world in which we live. As a direct result of that first encounter with the N-word in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, my classroom focus shifted from teaching literature for its own sake to creating and enacting a pedagogy centered around exploring issues of difference and injustice by using the literature I was assigned to teach. Although I had never heard the phrase “dialogic pedagogy” at this early stage in my career, I was revising my classroom stance into one that encouraged dialogue between and among myself, my students, the texts they were assigned, and the larger culture in which we live.

During that school year and in the years that would follow, evidence of thoughtful student response to the dialogue that was opened and sustained in my classroom helped bolster my own resolve for maintaining the conversations we were having, even when they were difficult or uncomfortable. Thinking alongside students as they approached these questions and made their first attempts at answering them seemed like reason enough to continue these conversations and to learn more about how to make them the central part of my curriculum.

## **Rationale and Significance**

As I began and continued this pedagogical journey, I was often reminded by others that I was an English teacher whose job it was to “teach English” instead of spending time and energy addressing the social issues that I had begun to see as a fundamental aspect of language arts instruction. English teachers are tasked with such a multitude of responsibilities—instructing students in reading, composition, speech, and vocabulary; grading endless piles of tests and papers; building individual relationships with students; staying current on educational trends and practices; satisfying administrators; guiding and managing extracurricular activities; preparing classes for standardized exams—the list of obligations seems to have no end. Adding yet another duty to that list seems like too much to ask of any already-overworked teacher, and my colleagues could not understand why I wanted to spend my time and energy making what they considered to be extra, unnecessary work for myself. Our school was not maniacally test-driven, but my colleagues were much more concerned about raising test scores through their instruction than they were about exploring social injustice through the literature we were all assigned to teach. Test results were measurable, and we were all being held accountable to the scores we helped our students to achieve. To my colleagues, spending instructional time on topics they deemed to be outside the realm of English was a risk too great to consider worthwhile.

Fecho (2001) described an experience with a colleague who questioned his pedagogical approach. He explained, “The inquiry I endeavored to enact with these students seemed to have posed a threat for this teacher. Rather than opening dialogue around issues of race and social injustice, she saw us instead opening a can of worms or Pandora’s box” (p. 10). Fecho’s allusion to Pandora is a useful means of illustrating the rift that began to divide my work from that of my colleagues. In Greek mythology, Pandora was the first woman, created by the gods and covertly

intended as a curse on mankind. Gifted with a box of unknown contents that she was instructed not to open, Pandora succumbed to her own unyielding curiosity and released the contents of the box—all means of evil, harm, and heartache—into the world.

Many modern references to Pandora end at this miscalculated move, and to “open Pandora’s box” is an allusion used to describe an unwise action that unleashes unnecessary difficulty into an otherwise stable situation. But as a longtime teacher of Greek mythology, I have a particular problem with this retelling—the fact that the most significant part of the story is left out. In opening the box, Pandora also released one final element into the world: Hope. Certainly, without opening the box, Pandora would not have committed the egregious offense of allowing negativity to enter the world. But if she had not opened the box, mankind would never have experienced hope for better things to come. Although my colleagues, like Fecho’s, clearly saw the potential negativity that might come from inviting my students to explore issues of social injustice, they missed my intention in redesigning my own pedagogy: Opening up this box of thought and dialogue can lead directly to hope for a more just and equitable future world.

Therefore, my research goals revolve around learning more about how novice teachers who are interested in teaching from a dialogical stance might begin to converse with their students about topics of difference and injustice by using classroom literature as a starting point, especially considering that, like me, these young teachers may not have been prepared to do so by their own teacher education programs, and, like me, those who are so inclined may face criticism from colleagues and administration for doing so. My research seeks to trouble these patterns by exploring the processes by which teachers might look critically at their curricula and begin to enact a dialogic pedagogy by inviting students into dialogue with issues of difference and injustice therein.

## Research Question

In this chapter, I will explicate the theoretical framework I have constructed to support my research exploring the following question: What happens when a novice teacher works from a dialogic stance to explore difference in the secondary English classroom?

### Defining “Difference”

The complexity of human existence, both within the self and in community with others, is rife with variation and diversity. As Fecho and Clifton (2017) explained,

We can say that people live in a clash of cultures. Or we could say people live in a mesh of cultures. Others might call it a hybridity of cultures. Still others, a dovetailing of cultures, or a crush of cultures, or a diversity of cultures. (p. 23)

It is this clash, or this crush, or this diversity to which I refer when I use the word “difference” throughout this research project. As human beings, each of us claims various group memberships, and each of us maintains a sense of self that is both part of and apart from our memberships in those groups. Although some similarities and differences might be easily discernable in a classroom, many are hidden. It is the work of the dialogic educator to invite for exploration the multitude of lived experiences that is present in any classroom as well as to extend that invitation beyond the walls of the classroom. As poet and revolutionary Audre Lorde (1984) said,

Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation. (p. 115)



Dialogism, dialogic pedagogy, and the transactional theory of reading all focus on means of recognizing and exploring those differences with the aim of coming to greater and more accurate understandings of them in anticipation of a more empathetic world. These theories, then, functioned collectively to create the lens through which I viewed all aspects of my research in the undertaking of this study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The creation and maintenance of a classroom where students and teachers alike are welcomed into conversation in order to question assumptions and engage in dialogue with the world as individuals with unique perspectives allows each emerging generation to contribute to the greater good (Fecho, 2001; 2004). Literature can be used as an anchor for these conversations to allow students to come to a better understanding of themselves and their peers as well as to better understand a myriad of life experiences—even those outside the scope of the classroom (Rosenblatt, 1995). Bringing the concepts of dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981) and critical, dialogic pedagogy (Fecho, 2011a; Freire, 1970; Lensmire, 2000; Matusov & Lemke, 2015; Nystrand, 1997; Stewart, 2010) into dialogue with the basic tenets of the transactional theory of reading (Rosenblatt, 1995) offers ways for English teachers and students to understand and begin working to dismantle the systems of injustice that are currently and have historically functioned to maintain inequity in U.S. society. When brought into conversation, these theories create a framework for exploring the use of literature to promote equity and social justice.

For the purposes of my theoretical framework, Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism, paired with its attendant theory of dialogic pedagogy (e.g., Fecho, 2011a), functioned as an overarching lens while the transactional theory of reading (Rosenblatt, 1995) functioned as a further means of scrutiny.

Bakhtin (1981) argued that individuals transacting with words and ideas only generate new understandings within existing frameworks that are already “made up of contradictory opinions, points of view, and value judgments” (p. 281). Bakhtin also posited that in linguistic practice, speakers and listeners engage in constant transactions of tension between the *centripetal* forces of definitive and singular intended meaning and the *centrifugal* forces of individual and often divergent interpretation of that meaning. As Fecho and Clifton (2017) explained, while speakers and listeners often seek “common agreement, or equilibrium” in shared meaning “so that communication can be facilitated,” they also create further tension by “pushing and pulling even upon those shared meanings as they, too, shift in response to the context in which meaning is being made” (Fecho & Clifton, 2017, p. 24).

Tying Bakhtin’s (1981) theory of dialogism to classroom interchanges of language and ideas, Nystrand (1997) posited that all learning, “understood as the expansion of a personally coherent interpretation of information and events,” is dialogic in nature, shaping both instructor and student in the process (p. 73). The active responses of classmates and teachers to each other’s words and ideas function reciprocally to “enrich” the understandings of both speakers and listeners in the co-construction of new or enhanced knowledge (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 281). In the context of dialogic schooling, then, the exchanges and transactions between and among teachers, students, texts, and contexts function to generate new understandings by creating and utilizing the tension that arises between *centripetal* forces, which point to a single intended and accepted meaning and leave no room for dialogue, and *centrifugal* forces, which point to an infinite variety of interpreted meanings and leave no room for shared understanding (Bakhtin, 1981).

Dialogic pedagogy, which stems directly from Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism, is a critical pedagogical stance that embraces the tension inherent in classroom explorations of difference, and it therefore served to encompass the most pressing focus of this study, which was to explore the ways that a novice teacher approached encounters with difference and injustice in the classroom. The transactional theory of reading further enhanced this theoretical lens because of its specific focus on the ways that literature and student transactions with literature play a role in these explorations. Taken together, these theories created a specific lens through which I researched the ways that a teacher might invite and embrace tension while using literature to explore difference and injustice in a secondary, public-school English classroom.

### **The Social Construction of Knowledge**

In the U.S. public school system, students learn both from their teachers and from their peers as they acquire factual knowledge and build sets of skills in various disciplines. Schools, as societal institutions, also function in part to socialize students into the greater society (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Berger and Luckmann (1967) explained that from infancy, a human being “not only interrelates with a particular natural environment, but with a specific cultural and social order, which is mediated to him by the significant others who have charge of him” (p. 66). Schooling is a means by which a society can perpetuate itself, both through the passing on of knowledge and skills and the conveyance of the cultural values and norms of those who work in the field of education, most of whom, in the United States, are members of the mainstream culture (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). In their exploration of the social processes of learning, Berger and Luckmann (1967) explained the means by which social institutions are designed to “control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct” (p. 72). The norms of any given society are passed down through time and between generations by way of societal institutions,

including school, church, and government, as these institutions are most often constructed and maintained by members of the majority culture. As Crotty (1998) explained, “We depend on culture to direct our behavior and organize our experience,” and in reverse of what is sometimes believed, it is not “human thought and behavior that drives culture,” but culture that drives human thought and behavior (p. 53).

This social construction of knowledge and norms via the school system is most often at play in traditional classrooms, where, when left to default, instruction frequently falls back on what Freire (1970) referred to as the *banking model* of education. This model positions the teacher—a representative of the oppressive culture at large—as the sole expert in the classroom whose duty is to disseminate information to students; the students’ job, in turn, is to collect (and later regurgitate) that same information back to the teacher (p. 72). This educational model disempowers students by robbing them of the chance to uniquely contribute to the learning taking place in the classroom while simultaneously replicating and reifying the single accepted cultural narrative that serves to perpetuate the systems of inequality that are present in schools and society. Kincheloe (2005) explained that “teachers are induced...to think of curriculum outside of social context” and to believe that curricular materials and “the instructional process” are “politically neutral”; however, these decisions, actions, and materials often “inscribe the interests of dominant power” on the minds of students while ignoring or silencing the contributions made by individuals and groups outside of that dominant power (p. 61). Thus, the unexplored pedagogy is often one that perpetuates injustice. As Gee (2015) asserted, “no literacy is politically neutral, including the institutionally based literacy of church, state, business, and school that has undergirded the hegemonic process in Western society, and continues to do so”

(p. 44). Without thoughtful interrogation of teaching practices, the political aims of the majority culture are at play in the classroom.

### **Critical Education for Freedom and Democracy**

A focus on the exploration of difference and injustice is a salient means for teachers to further the goals of equity and democracy not only in the school system, but in the greater culture as well. Dewey (1916) explained that “education, in its broadest sense, is the means of...social continuity of life,” and that every individual born into any society begins “immature, helpless, without language, beliefs, ideas, or social standards” (p. 2). The educational system present in that society is one of the key reproducers of the norms and values of it. Education, then, is not solely the vehicle for passing down static knowledge and skills; rather, it is—perhaps more significantly—a means for an “enlightened” or “progressive” culture to pass on those habits of mind and body that will continue to improve society for the generations to come (p. 79). The school system, according to Dewey, is the “chief agency” for potentially creating a better, more just, equitable, and democratic society (p. 20). Teachers, then, have the unique opportunity to work as change agents alongside their students in the pursuit of such a society by designing and maintaining classrooms in which big questions can be asked and explored concerning those habits, norms, and values and what they might mean for students’ present and future lives.

It should be considered, however, that both “unintentional and designed” lessons are being taught in school (Dewey, 1916, p. 10). Some such unintentional lessons—those that are presented in default mode and have been repeated ad infinitum in the U.S. school system without being critically crafted or delivered—often serve to reify cultural narratives that are widely held to be neutral or factual truths, when in reality they are only approximations of mainstream experience and belief. Dewey (1916) asserted that in a democratic educational environment,

inviting a variety of viewpoints and experiences into the classroom is absolutely necessary, “otherwise, the influences which educate some into masters, educate others into slaves” (p. 84). The knowledge and skills provided by a public education cannot be limited to those valued by the mainstream culture; such a narrow transmission of ideas and ideals leaves those outside that mainstream culture without a means of validating their own experiences or contributing to the culture at large.

As things stand, pedagogical approaches to teaching English Language Arts that are limited to instructing students to read and discuss male-authored, Eurocentric texts and learning to write and speak in Standard English are a thinly veiled disguise for “privileging certain types of literacy and certain types of people” (Gee, 2008, p. 67). If one dominant culture holds the most power, it stands to reason that those whose life experiences do not align with the norms of that dominant culture will hold increasingly less power. If educators continue to push the ideologies of the dominant culture—intentionally or otherwise—they will subsequently continue to keep those outside of said culture at the margins of society, lacking the power to fully enter or change it. Certainly, as Delpit (1988) posits, if teachers maintain the status quo and continue to educate all children in the dominant discourse of middle-class White culture and language, they have the capability of transmitting dominant ways of being to non-dominant groups, “making acquiring power easier” for those whose life experience lies outside the dominant culture (p. 283). However, if educators focus instead on shifting the traditional transmission of knowledge into a discourse consisting of a multitude of voices and ways of being, that discourse could have the power to create a more “open space” for young people to become “transformers of [the] world” (Freire, 1973, p. 24; Freire, 1970, p. 60). Obviously, the latter choice would go much further to empower those who have traditionally been kept from positions of power in our

society, chipping away at the historic inequities embedded in U.S. culture. Darling-Hammond (2002) asserted that educators must push back against “the conservative forces in education—that is, viewpoints that conserve an inequitable status quo because it is seen as nonproblematic” if anything is to change (p. 2). Settling for the way things are helps some; working to change the system helps many.

### **Acceptance or Interrogation of “Cultural Models” and “Master Myths”**

In his discussion about social discourse, Gee (2015) explained the concept of the “cultural model,” an often-subconscious belief that one’s own cultural background and life experience is “taken to be typical or normal” (p. 114). Gee (2008) also explained the concept of what he called “master myths,” which are comprised of the “shared assumptions” of a group concerning what is “normal,” “natural” or “commonsense,” although they also function to “hide from us other ways of thinking” (p. 111). In a pedagogical stance that is purposeful and thoughtful concerning difference and injustice, teachers can recognize these existing cultural models and mythical narratives and guide students toward both recognition and interrogation of them. The continued propagation of these models and myths as static, neutral truths fails to recognize their majority-centered focus. The harm of repeating them without critical thought, then, comes in maintaining the systems of inequality already at play as well as in silencing the counternarratives of those outside the majority culture. According to Gee (2015), “The values of mainstream culture are, in fact, often complicit with the oppression of non-mainstream students’ home cultures and other social identities”; however, teachers of literature and language have the opportunity to “allow these conflicts to become part of the instruction” by way of drawing students into dialogue with these narratives and what they might mean to individuals and groups both inside and outside the mainstream (p. 127). Teachers who work specifically with language

and literature, therefore, have the occasion to recognize the assumptions they may have made as a result of their own socialization and to help students to do the same. In this way, teachers of language and literature have the opportunity to guide students towards a more critical understanding of their views of the world, the cultural “truths” they have been taught and have internalized, and how a thorough questioning of all of these ideas can help them understand more about the way mainstream society functions to “limit our perception of differences and of new possibilities” (Gee, 2015, p. 127). Because “the taken-for-granted nature of the figured world...often stands in the way of change” (Gee, 2015, p. 115), cognizance of these mainstream beliefs and practices can go far to break down cultural barriers. It is only once students become familiar with the systems at work in their culture that they can critically think about how best to address them in working towards a more just and equitable world for themselves and their peers to inherit.

### **School (Re)Segregation: A Lost Opportunity for Understanding**

Since the settlement of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, the U.S. public school system has, in theory, been an integrated institution where students of all backgrounds can learn alongside each other with equal access to school resources and scholastic opportunities. Reality, however, demonstrates that most students’ school experiences are often segregated in nature, both by race and by socioeconomic status. As Frankenberg (2017) explained, “public school segregation is rising, and class and racial segregation strongly overlap” (p. 224S). Some school districts are working to more thoroughly integrate and diversify their student bodies through busing programs and the redrawing of district lines, but current research indicates that the daily school experience for the majority of students in this country is one of segregation from peers whose racial and socioeconomic backgrounds differ significantly from their own (Aud, Fox, &



KewalRamani, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Fiel, 2013; Frankenberg, 2017; Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013; Mickelson, 2001). In the past several decades, increasing segregation has worked to isolate students of racial, ethnic, and social class minority groups into classrooms and educational spaces with fewer White, middle-class students, who are in turn grouped into spaces throughout their school day that are dominated by classmates who are also White and middle-class (Fiel, 2013, Frankenberg, 2017, Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013).

Even in schools that are considered “integrated” or “diverse” in terms of race and class, varying degrees of “second-generation segregation” (Mickelson, 2001) work to further separate students by these same factors. According to Kalogrides and Loeb (2013), “Attendance at the same school does not ensure that students from different backgrounds will share classrooms” (p. 304). There are a number of ways that schools have resegregated their student bodies and a number of explanations as to the growth of this trend. One major cause of racial and class isolation is the practice of academic tracking, which “tends to contribute to within-school sorting by race and socioeconomic status” (Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013, p. 304). Tracking has consistently resulted in the placement of White and Asian students in top-level courses, while Black, Native American, and Latinx students have been relegated to the bottom, often even when there is evidence of comparable academic ability with White and Asian peers (Fiel, 2013; Mickelson, 2001; O’Connor, Mueller, Lewis, Rivas-Drake, & Rosenberg, 2011). Thus, a “racially stratified academic hierarchy” not only keeps students of different racial and class backgrounds separated, it also continues to limit the educational opportunities of students of Color and lower-income students, even in “desegregated” schools, especially since novice teachers are more often assigned to instruct these courses (Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013; O’Connor et al., 2011).

Additionally, parent preferences, including the multiple options made available by current school choice programs, are a significant factor in student segregation by race and class (Frankenberg, 2017, Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013). The existence of school choice gives further leverage to middle- and upper-class parents, who have historically had the privilege of being more actively “involved in their children’s education,” to more often “request the most desirable classes for their children”; in light of these requests, “administrators may feel pressure to meet the demands of higher achieving or middle-class students for fear of losing these students to other schools or districts” (Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013, p. 306). As a result, school systems are created and perpetuated with greater “concentration[s] of higher achieving and higher income students in classrooms with higher quality teachers” (Kalogrides & Loeb, 2013, p. 306). Further, while research (e.g., Fiel, 2013) indicates that racial and social class minority families “display a greater preference for integrated schools than do whites,” when these students do gain access to majority-White schools, a significant number of White parents “adapt by finding new avenues of exclusion,” including “fleeing to private schools...charter schools...and whiter districts nearby” (Fiel, 2013, p. 831).

Bonilla-Silva (2003) explained that consistent separation often leads people into an “us versus them” mentality and “impedes the development of empathy” between and among people of varying backgrounds (p. 146). The more contact people have with others who are different from themselves, the more able and willing they are to dismantle the mental walls that have been built through a lack of firsthand knowledge and experience. Thus, the various segregations in the U.S. public school system are, at best, keeping those walls from being broken down and, at worst, aiding in their continued construction. One possible solution to this perennial problem is in teachers’ adoption of a dialogical classroom stance. By focusing on issues of social justice and

inviting students to consider those issues in light of their own lives, teachers have the capacity to guide students towards explorations of the voices and experiences of individuals and groups both inside and outside the classroom.

### **Addressing Unjust Structures: Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers an added lens through which to question the unjust systems functioning in school and society and to work towards changing them by employment of dialogical classroom practices. Understanding the basic tenets of CRT can aid educators in their endeavors into this dialogue with students. In U.S. society, the relationships between and among race, class, gender, and power are intertwined in complicated ways, creating a hegemonic system that undergirds much of U.S. culture. The education system in the United States, as a societal institution, contributes to those discriminatory structures. Critical Race research in the field of education “questions a range of assumptions” concerning the state of the U.S. school system, including the idea that “schools are the great equalizer” as well as investigating the structural systems of discrimination and inequity within the educational system overall (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 279). CRT also “contains an activist dimension” wherein it endeavors to comprehend society as it stands as well as to alter the structures of society in an effort to create more equitable systems for all individuals and groups therein (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). Freire (1973) said that “the normal role of human beings in and with the world is not a passive one” and that all people have the capacity to “intervene in reality in order to change it” (p. 4). Critical Race Theory is not just a means of reading the world, it is also a means of reconstructing it for the greater and more equitable good.

Further, Critical Race Theory posits that human beings’ various identities intersect with each other, sometimes complicating how we experience and understand injustice in unique and

complex ways (Bolgatz, 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Tatum, 1997). CRT's focus on the intersectional experience of every individual, including every individual student, can compel teachers to see their charges as multifaceted human beings with a wide array of viewpoints, skills, and needs. Educators must acknowledge that each student is comprised of multiple identities that work together to create a complete human being and that these multiple identities will help dictate what and how students learn (Nieto, 2002; Tatum, 1997). Teachers can make substantial strides toward equity through the use of a Critical Race lens by offering students a variety of materials, instructional strategies, and educational opportunities so that those myriad identities can be addressed appropriately and students can make meaningful connections between school material and their own life experience.

### **Operationalizing Justice: Dialogism and the Dialogical Classroom**

A wide range of knowledge, insight, and experience is inherently shared between and among students and teachers in classrooms that are constructed dialogically. Stewart (2017) described dialogic pedagogy as “a teaching stance that embraces tension, values questioning, considers multiple perspectives, challenges hierarchical structures, and attends to the mutual shaping that occurs in classrooms when learning is viewed as a process of becoming” (p. 6). In sharp contrast to the standard transmission model of instruction, a dialogic stance on the part of a classroom teacher invites students into the larger conversations occurring in the world in which they live and which therefore affect them directly. Fecho (2004) described a dialogic classroom as one in which teachers work with their students to “constantly seek ways to both connect with them and to help them connect with themselves, one another, and the world around them” (p. 4). Through these connections, teachers can create an atmosphere in which students begin to see

themselves not as passive recipients of static information, but as members of a community that is in need of their unique, active, and positive contribution to it (Fecho, 2004; Shor, 2007).

Shor (1996) described this pedagogical practice as one in which the teacher takes an “interrogative” rather than a “declarative” role in the classroom—that is, the teacher asks questions of students, offering them opportunities to think deeply, answer thoughtfully, and subsequently ask further questions of the teacher, of each other, of class materials, and of the world around them (p. 42). Instead of relying on the traditional practice of “feeding” students information and later asking them to recall that same information in the way it was presented to them, teachers who implement dialogic pedagogy invite their students to help determine the course of events and discussions that take place in class, making instructional time truly student-centered while simultaneously addressing the needs and interests of the particular students in each class. Teachers practicing dialogic pedagogy spend classroom time “ask[ing] authentic questions and engag[ing] their students in substantive conversations” about the materials and topics they are exploring in class (Nystrand, 1997, p. 106).

Certainly, many English teachers have mandated content that needs to be covered over the course of a semester or a school year, but dialogic practice and direct instruction of content are not mutually exclusive. Nystrand (1997) explained that “the nature of literature makes it particularly suitable for dialogic instruction” (p. 105). Further, “learning how to read and fully experience literature involves personal response,” and a dialogical classroom is one in which students are invited to personally experience and respond to the literature they read (Nystrand, 1997, p. 106). Dialogue is a pragmatic means of subject matter instruction; by implementing dialogical classroom practices, teachers address course content through active student choice, participation and engagement. Fecho (2011a) described the fundamental undertaking of a

dialogical pedagogy as “engaging in a living conversation with the students, the content, the texts, and the contexts of a classroom” (p. 105). In a dialogical classroom, students are invited to think critically about and make meaning of every aspect of themselves, their classmates, and the larger world.

### **Tension in the Dialogical Classroom**

Fecho (2004) described the ways that dialogic classroom practice inherently veers into tense territory for most teachers who opt to undertake such a stance, explaining that “there are few, if any, incentives for teachers to take risks and to investigate topics of controversy” (p. 88). Lensmire (2000) likewise acknowledged the “conflict and risk” that are essential elements of the “complicated business” of authentic dialogue in classroom settings (p. 70). In fact, the presence, acknowledgement, and welcoming of tension is a key component of dialogic pedagogy (Fecho, 2011a; Lensmire, 2000; Nystrand, 1997; Stewart, 2017). Nystrand (1997) described dialogic classroom discourse as that which is “continually structured by tension, even conflict, between the conversants, between self and other, as one voice ‘refracts’ another” (p. 8).

However, Fecho (2004) also explained that the practice of leaning in towards the tension that accompanies dialogic practice in explorations of sensitive and significant issues with students can propel both students and teachers to “new heights of understanding” (p. 88). In adopting dialogic practices and embracing the tension that comes directly as a result, teachers can come to view and comprehend their students as individuals while simultaneously helping to direct them towards an active role in their own learning and their own lives, both in the classroom and in the community (Fecho, 2004; Shor, 1996; Shor, 2007). As Freire (1973) tells us, “dialogue awakens an awareness,” and it is through classroom dialogue that students can develop their own awareness of how they might take an active role in building and re-building

their worlds (p. 127). Teachers of literature, then, can offer their students unique opportunities to embrace and grow from the tensions that come from classroom transactions with and about literature. Such occasions can broaden student cognizance of the multitude of lived realities occurring simultaneously in the world in which they live and stimulate both an interest in and a desire to work towards a more just and equitable society.

### **Dialogue Between Worlds: Transactional Experiences in the Classroom**

Sharing personal and educational space with peers of diverse backgrounds in a dialogical classroom can lead students in the direction of a more empathetic and equitable society through firsthand relationships and cultivated understanding, but the segregated climate of the U.S. school system often restricts such encounters, within classrooms as well as within school curricula. Ladson-Billings (1998) explained that as things currently stand, “the official school curriculum [is] a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (p. 18). The most commonly used books in English classrooms across the country are largely written by White male authors, and teachers often have little choice in the texts they can use in class (Applebee, 1992). But English teachers, according to Rosenblatt (1995), are often “shortsighted” of the opportunities they have to introduce students to “the experiences of human beings in their diverse personal and social relations” through works of literature (pp. 4, 5). Regardless of whether teachers are charged with teaching a rigid series of specific texts or if they are granted complete autonomy over their curricula, the “substance” of literature is “everything that human beings have thought or felt or created” (p. 5). Therefore, English teachers in any classroom have the distinct opportunity to explore with their students some facet of the human experience every time they read and talk together, leading to deeper understanding of self and other.

Rosenblatt's (1995) transactional theory of reading—that is, the “to-and-fro spiral” (p. 26) that occurs when a reader encounters a text and changes and is changed by that text—can offer a myriad of opportunities to introduce students to stories from and about a wide variety of authors and characters beyond those present in the classroom. Rather than positioning the teacher as the knowledge-bearer whose expert and studied opinions on various works of literature is to be taken as unequivocal truth, the transactional theory of reading posits that all readers come to each new text carrying the sum of their life experiences along with them. In this way, no two readers ever read the same text; rather, the text and the individual are “continually being affected by what the other has contributed” (p. 26). Readers, then, are not merely passive receptacles of knowledge about the “facts” of literature but active experts on their own literary experiences, which can be shared dialogically with peers and teachers, leading everyone to a more robust understanding of the possibilities contained within the pages at hand.

Exposure to this variety in viewpoints and experiences can start and sustain the conversation about the issues of difference and injustice that are present in both literary works and in the world at large. According to Rosenblatt (1995), the issues faced by individuals in society, as members of various identity groups, “are illuminated through literature” (p. 255). In probing those “innumerable questions” (p. 255) about humanity and society as they appear in literature, teachers and students can come to greater understandings about life experiences very different from their own. It is in coming to these understandings that people begin to feel the need to take action in their world. Whether the works of literature studied in a classroom are contemporary and multicultural or canonical and Eurocentric, social injustice is perennially imbedded in the stories people tell, and it is the privilege of teachers of literature to guide their students towards listening and responding to those stories in order to “nourish the impetus



toward more fruitful modes of behavior” (p. 261) that could create a more equitable and just society.

### **Summary**

Kinloch (2012) recalled speaking with her students in New York on the day of the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007. In reaction to the horror developing as she and her students watched the news, one student looked to her, explaining sadly the conclusion to which she had come while the tragedy unfolded before her: that we as human beings need to learn how to love one another, “even if we don’t know each other that much or at all” (p. 118). To this end, educators are summoned to the highest of callings. It is essential for us to help our students look at themselves and determine who they will become. It is essential for us to help our students look at each other and learn to appreciate both their similarities and their differences. It is essential for us to help our students look at the world and work together to better it. We must work to “disrupt” the “established” ways of reading the word and the world that adhere to the status quo of inequality (Lewis & Ketter, 2008, p. 305). As Lewis, Ketter, and Fabos (2001) explained, if educators do not work with students to “interrogate” the structures of power and privilege that exist in society, “there is little hope for educational reform” (p. 319). And without educational reform, there is little hope for the reformation of other discriminatory and inequitable structures in society. In the end, English teachers have both the good fortune and the personal responsibility to help their students learn to read their world with a critical eye as it stands today, and to determine how they might change it for the better tomorrow.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

Explorations of social issues in the classroom can be a challenge for any teacher. This challenge becomes even more pronounced when exploring sensitive issues of identity and injustice, including race, class, gender, and sexuality, in public school classrooms with students who may never have engaged in formal and sustained consideration of these topics in a school setting. In their work discussing the importance of and challenges associated with exploring difference, Fecho and Clifton (2017) noted that “people need real ways of dialoguing across difference with their selves and with others, and they need ways of navigating complexity, uncertainty, and conflict that are productive” (pp. 5-6). The approach that an English teacher adopts towards students, course materials, and instructional practices can have a profound effect on how well these explorations function in classroom settings and how successfully they are welcomed by students. Fecho and Amatucci (2008) explained that English teachers have unique opportunities to invite their students into these explorations in meaningful ways when they choose to shift their instruction away from literacy education’s traditional focus of reading and writing as “discrete skills to enable future employment” and instead begin to view “all transactions with texts” in the classroom as a means of “providing learners with a range of ways to scrutinize their lives and the lives of others” (p. 7). Espousing this dialogical stance in the classroom can be a salient means of undertaking explorations of identity and injustice with students.

This chapter will provide an overview of current empirical studies that relate to the constructs of identity and difference as addressed in classroom or classroom-like settings. I will outline several studies that focus on literary explorations of race and racism in the classroom. I

will then present several studies focused on classroom explorations of social class as considered through the lens of classroom texts. Finally, I will present several studies exploring the concepts of gender and sexuality in the English classroom. These studies will aid in the illustration of common trends that appear to traverse much of the current research concerning how teachers invite students into the larger dialogue about identity and difference in academic settings.

I will follow these studies by presenting research that discusses issues that teachers may face when attempting to teach for social justice in an era of standardization as well as theoretical and empirical literature concerning dialogic pedagogy, which may be instrumental in mitigating these difficulties. Taken together, the research presented here offers significant considerations of the experiences of teachers who have previously undertaken the type of research I planned to conduct as well as providing a scope and purpose for my own study, which will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

### **Race and Racism in Classroom Literature**

Although race and racism are common themes in countless classroom texts, these topics are often not fully addressed in public school classrooms. Warren (2014) explained that most White people in the United States tend to “avoid discussions of race or minimize its significance in our culture” and that “for many, it is considered impolite, if not symbolically violent, to engage in explicit conversations about race” (p. 109). Most of the White female labor force that makes up more than three-quarters of all secondary English Language Arts teachers in this country, as members of the racial majority, have likely been taught that race is not a topic for polite conversation (Ketter & Lewis, 2001; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Likewise, with the White student population also making up the largest racial group in many schools, it is highly likely that many students enter classrooms with similar notions about discussing race and racism

(Nieto, 1996; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). As Toni Morrison (1992) explained a quarter century ago, “the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture” (pp. 9-10). The fact that so many teachers and students have had little to no experience talking about race and racism in open forums, coupled with the fact that so many were taught that ignoring the existence of race and racism might be the most helpful way to approach the topics, makes Warren’s (2014) reminder that “without a sustained, forthright interrogation of race and racism, little progress is to be made in reducing racial inequalities” (p. 109) a significant one. The following several studies will highlight common themes generated by my reading of current empirical literature concerning how the topics of race and racism have been explored in classroom settings.

### **Whiteness in the Critical Classroom**

Broaching the topics of race and racism with students of any background is not an easy task. One of the greatest challenges in teaching about race and racism—even grounded in the literature in which these topics appear—is the negative reactions from White students that often result. Part of Trainor’s (2002) report on her ethnographic research in high school and university settings focused on two students whose varied responses to discussions about race and racism were representative of the larger numbers of students with whom she has worked. Both students were White, but their responses to discussions about race in history and literature were polarized. The male student resisted talk about race, claiming defensively that he felt he was personally being blamed for the injustices about which the class read and talked, and he “wanted no part of it” (p. 642). He explained his personal feelings of being able to identify with the White characters in the books the class read, who were often depicted as “the bad guys,” and the “guilt by association” that he felt angered him (p. 643). His negative responses and defensive stance

towards dialogue on these topics, paired with his “vexed attempts to map himself onto the text in a positive and palatable way” led to his own “misreadings” or “simplified, resistant readings” of the works studied in class (pp. 644, 643). In these ways, this student’s negative reactions to classroom readings concerning race and racism match up with those of other researchers (e.g., DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014) who studied White students’ responses to classroom explorations of race and racism.

The female student described by Trainor (2002) took a different approach to her study and understanding of the texts read in class, often stepping up as “the leader in challenging the more conservative comments made by other students” (p. 645). While this student was able to articulate the ways that some of her “values and habits” as a White, middle-class member of U.S. society may work to retain hegemonic social structures, she also believed that calling those values into question was not a direct attack on herself personally. However, although she was able to “acknowledge whites’ role historically in oppression and domination,” her own “disavowal” of Whiteness left her without a pressing need to move to action, since she did not view herself as a part of the problem of systemic racism (p. 646). Trainor concluded that teachers must be vigilant about allowing student viewpoints to surface and be explored in the classroom, regardless of how disagreeable they may seem, in order to give students the chance to critically examine them. As she stated, “By creating rhetorical frames that demonize whiteness and white students, we may do more harm than good, may inadvertently perpetuate, even create, the very values we seek to unravel in our teaching” (p. 647). This study illustrates a common theme throughout research completed on this topic: The negative or unproductive White student responses to texts and dialogue about race and racism and the need to address and question all

student responses in order to guide students towards critical examination of their own and their classmates' ideas and experiences.

In their work with a group of undergraduate students, DiAngelo and Sensoy (2014) noted that the White students with whom they worked were especially prone to feelings of defensiveness, anger, fear, guilt, or other conflicting emotions when discussing the topics of race and racism. Moreover, the authors discussed the ways that these White students described their feelings in the classroom in terms of violence towards themselves, which caused them to choose not to speak out of fear for their own emotional safety. As a direct result of White student reactions like those described in this study, many teachers make it a goal to provide a classroom atmosphere that is safe for students to discuss sensitive issues. DiAngelo and Sensoy, however, noted that although likely well-intentioned, research demonstrates that the “safe spaces” being cultivated in classrooms are often designed specifically, if subconsciously, for White students and their particular needs, which calls into question whether or not these students are being appropriately challenged by what is, by its very nature, a challenging topic. DiAngelo and Sensoy also explained that “while there are many problematic dynamics in cross-race discussions affecting all students in various ways, guidelines for safety are usually driven in anticipation of White responses” so that White students will feel comfortable enough to freely share their ideas and experiences (p. 105). Further, instructors often assume that “what feels safe for Whites is presumed to feel safe for people of Color,” but this is also a problematic thought pattern, being that “for many students and instructors of Color the classroom is a hostile space virtually all of the time, and especially so when the topic addressed is race” (p. 105).

Another significant challenge for teachers is learning how to be sensitive to the needs of students of Color in their classrooms while they discuss race and racism. As DiAngelo and

Sensoy (2014) explained, an attempt to cultivate “safety” for all students involved in discussions about race and racism through the use of “universalized procedural guidelines” may actually “block students of Color from naming the racial violence they experience on a daily basis, as well as the racial violence they may experience in the discussion itself” (pp. 105-106). This study highlights the problematic nature of teachers’ endeavors to create safe spaces for White students, which often happens subconsciously. In creating such spaces, teachers perpetuate the silencing of students of Color, which defeats the purpose of the dialogue. The experiences of White students and the experiences of students of Color in any given classroom will likely be quite different, and attention must be paid to maintain the equal comfort—or even the equal discomfort—of all students.

### **Avoidance of Conflict**

Even teachers whose goal it is to explore sensitive topics in the classroom sometimes employ teacher moves that result in an avoidance of the conflict inherent in those explorations. Thomas (2015) found varying approaches to the topics of race and racism as it appeared in classroom literature in her study in a high school setting with two teachers (one White and one African-American), though the overall outcomes in the two classrooms she studied were similar. First, in his determination to give his students some autonomy over their own learning, the African-American teacher gave his students a choice as to what text they would like to read as a class. He strongly advocated for them to choose *The Color of Water*, a book by James McBride that deals heavily and explicitly in themes of race and racism. Thomas explained this teacher’s dilemma: “He wanted to value the interests and perspectives of his students” by giving them autonomy to choose their own text, but he also felt the need to advocate for “texts that he believed were important for them to read” (p. 163). In the end, the students chose instead to read

Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* after complaining about their own "racial fatigue," claiming that they "always read books about race" and wanted a reprieve from those conversations (p. 161).

The White teacher in Thomas's (2015) study chose to assign *Dangerous Minds* without giving the class a choice about their next text. The students raised some objections to "the bad word" included in the text (that is, the N-word), but this particular teacher "helped her students understand the rationale for the shared ethical position that educated people in the United States were expected to hold about 'that word'" (p. 166). Her students, perhaps as a direct result of these types of conversations, were "careful in their approach" to these discussions, and they "ventriloquized" their teacher's ideas about the topics of race and racism (p. 166). Thomas notes, however, that "none of the students of color spoke at length" regarding these particular themes (p. 166). Although the students took particular care to avoid using the actual N-word and talked a great deal about the word in the context of the text at hand, the instructor and the class "tacitly mandated colormuteness within classroom instruction" in order to "avert conflict" in the classroom (p. 168). Although both of the teachers in Thomas's study made valiant attempts to productively talk about issues of race and racism in their respective classrooms, both teachers used "silence and evasion" during "particularly tense moments" in class (p. 171). As Thomas explained, "silence and evasion can be used to avoid racial conflict, but risk limiting further discussion" (p. 168). This study demonstrates another central theme in research concerning explorations of race and racism in the literature classroom: When teachers are faced with the choice to engage in tense conversations and experiences (or, as Fecho (2011a) would call them, moments of "wobble"), teachers often shut down or back out of the conversation altogether in



order to preserve their own and their students' (perceived) comfort rather than embracing the tension to move forward towards new shared understandings.

### **Overall Challenges in Exploring Race**

Education can often be uncomfortable, and if teachers attempt to alleviate that discomfort when discussing sensitive topics, critical thought is often diminished. It is essential that teachers attempting these conversations consider the comfort of all students, not just those in the cultural majority. Indeed, many White students in the early stages of delving into dialogue about race and racism feel personally attacked or blamed for the events in the texts they are reading, leading them to disengage or react with anger. Similarly, as Trainor (2002) explains, there is serious difficulty for teachers of White students concerning “how to represent those who are positioned, because of the spaces they occupy in a hierarchically ordered social terrain, as the antagonists in the quest for social justice” (p. 633). Without careful planning—and sometimes even in spite of careful planning—on the part of the teacher, White students often feel attacked and even victimized during their initial forays into the topics of race and racism, as though they themselves are being blamed for the acts of discrimination or violence as portrayed in the texts they are assigned to read and subsequently discuss, while students of Color feel silenced in what they perceive as an unsafe space to share their thoughts and experiences (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2014; Trainor, 2002). It is essential, then, for teachers who choose to open a classroom dialogue concerning the topics of race and racism to do so after much careful thought and planning and in consideration of all students' needs in order to more clearly and accurately guide students towards an understanding of these constructs in relation to their own lives.

## **Gender and Sexuality in Classroom Literature**

Gender and sexuality are also significant factors of identity and difference for students to explore in their reading of classroom texts. Blackburn and Clark (2011) made the claim that “most schools are at least heterosexist if not outright homophobic” (p. 223), hence the need for educators to devote classroom space to the thoughtful exploration of the issues of gender and sexuality, including the hegemonic structures already present in both the classroom and society at large that serve to normalize heterosexism. In terms of dialogue about sexuality, one pressing concern is that even though a majority of teachers claim to “hold positive, sympathetic views toward LGBT students and issues,” research simultaneously suggests that “few teachers...are willing to take action, either in terms of advocating for changes in school policy or in terms of making authentic changes to what and how they teach” (Thein, 2013, p. 169). Teachers have the opportunity, however, to create affirming and open spaces for dialogue within their classrooms for students to explore the sensitive topics of gender and sexuality if they commit to careful, critical thought about texts, classroom behaviors, and their own verbal discourse. This section will examine several studies with a focus on how teachers have approached these topics with students and the outcomes they experienced.

### **Subconscious Reinforcement of Gender Norms**

Teachers who hope to productively address topics of difference and injustice in the classroom must remain cognizant of the ways their words and actions might subconsciously reinforce social norms if they are not critically considered. Macaluso (2016) described the ways that critical educators often believe the literary canon adheres to mainstream cultural norms, and that only by “challeng[ing] and destabiliz[ing]” these texts can teachers help students to consider and question the narratives being supplied by them (p. 15). His study focused on one classroom

teacher, self-described as “a Marxist critic” who employed both Marxist criticism and feminist criticism in his classroom and in his approach to canonical literature, which he viewed as a means to push back against the dominant narratives presented therein (p. 17). When interviewed, Macaluso’s participant claimed that he would like to use more multicultural texts in his classroom, but the process to get new books approved was rather difficult, so this study focused on his approach to *The Great Gatsby*.

Macaluso (2016) noted that rather than focusing significant time on gender issues in the novel, as he claimed he was in the habit of doing, this participant instead spent more time focusing on issues of social class, which he described as an issue that still “plays a huge role” in U.S. culture (p. 17). When he did address issues of gender in the novel, this teacher often tied the issues of gender and class together in his explanations about how the women in *The Great Gatsby* were held back by “few options” or “certain expectations” as a result of their intersectional experience in the world (p. 19). Macaluso explained that this teacher, likely unknowingly, reinforced various patriarchal, masculinist, and heteronormative discourses throughout his unit on *The Great Gatsby*. In the moments of “joviality” that peppered his lessons, this teacher chose a path that “privilege[ed] one perspective over another (masculinity)” while also “reaffirm[ing] problematic and normative ways of being” (p. 22). This particular teacher grounded his own understanding of canonical work in the Marxist and feminist theories to which he subscribed, but in his sometimes-careless approach with his students and in an effort to keep them engaged and entertained, he unconsciously reified “assumptions of heterosexuality and essentialist qualities of being a ‘man’ or ‘woman’” throughout his pedagogical moves (p. 22). Macaluso noted that there is considerable energy spent choosing texts that give voice to multiple speakers, but text choice is not the only factor that needs to be considered in teaching

for social justice in the English classroom. Instead, this study illustrates how significant the need is for teachers to also make careful choices about “the *how* of what is being taught” (emphasis added) and to take a critical look at their own internalized beliefs and values in order to avoid subconsciously disseminating those values in the classroom (p. 22).

### **Teacher Attitudes and Classroom Behaviors**

It is not unusual for a disconnect to exist between teachers’ desire for and their actual classroom practices concerning the enactment of an anti-oppressive pedagogy. Thein’s (2013) study researched the reasons that a group of 20 in-service and pre-service language arts teachers reading and discussing literature “by and about people from historically underrepresented or disenfranchised groups,” including texts related to a variety of identity factors such as social class, gender, and sexuality, chose not to address LGBTQ+ issues in their own classrooms (p. 170). Page (2017) conducted a related but much larger study that included 577 respondents from around the United States. Both of these studies focused on teacher attitudes towards implementing LGBTQ+-themed texts and discussions in their own classrooms. The vast majority of the individuals in these studies who supplied their demographic information concerning race, class, and sexual orientation fit into the culturally powerful majorities of White, middle-class, and straight, which aligns with the basic demographics of English teachers in the United States (Snyder & Dillow, 2015).

Both Thein (2013) and Page (2017) found similar results in their respective studies in terms of reported teacher attitudes concerning themes of LGBTQ+ issues: The majority of participants claimed positive personal attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community and claimed to feel comfortable teaching LGBTQ+-themed literature and/or making recommendations of said books to students; however, most participants did not actively utilize such texts or discussions in

their own classrooms. Page found that less than half of the teacher respondents in her study reported “actually integrating this literature” into classroom curricula, and that “few teachers reported explicitly teaching about sexual orientation or gender or including these topics in whole-class activities” (p. 4). In short, Thein (2013), whose study resulted in similar findings, explained that the majority of teachers “claim an anti-stance but resist ally-work” (p. 172).

Thein (2013) also found that teachers often ignored portions of texts that dealt with issues of sexuality or sexual identity, and they asked the same of their students when these concepts arose in the classroom. Data from Thein’s study indicated that regardless of location in the country or grade level taught, most of the teachers reported their opinion that “LGBT texts could not or should not be taught in language arts classrooms” even though these same teachers claimed to have “neutral or positive stances” concerning people and experiences in the LGBTQ+ community (p. 172). Reasons that teachers in both Thein’s and Page’s (2017) studies refused to approach these issues in their own real or hypothetical classrooms included the belief that teaching about sex and sexuality is not the job of an English teacher, and possibly not the job of a school; the fear that colleagues, parents, community members or administrators would disapprove; the opinion that students would not be able to maturely handle such content; or the sentiment that doing so would “cause more harm than good” by “distracting students from exploring literary merits” (Thein, 2013, p. 175) of texts written by or about homosexual authors and characters. Many participants in both studies claimed that although they would be open to exploring such texts with students, they felt unprepared by their teacher education programs or prior teaching and life experience to do so. These studies illustrated a common theme across the United States: English teachers may feel better equipped to approach discussions of texts that contain thematic elements of sex and sexuality if they were prepared ahead of time in their

teacher education programs, but even many of those who claim alliance with the LGBTQ+ community currently have significant personal and professional issues with addressing these topics in the classroom.

### **Finding Success in Elective Spaces**

Several studies illustrated the possibilities for success in studying gender and sexuality with students through the use of literature. Blackburn and Clark (2011) undertook a book club focused on texts that contained or revolved around LGBTQ+ characters with members of a local Gay-Straight Alliance group across a span of three years. This club met in a safe space (an LGBTQ+ youth center, complete with a locked door and a rule that nobody over the age of 21 was able to enter without an accompanying under-21-year-old) in order to ensure the comfort of the group. Over the course of their three-year book club, the group explored 24 different texts, many of which dealt directly with LGBTQ+ issues. The participants, all of whom self-identified as members or allies of the LGBTQ+ community, discussed texts in ways that created solidarity between and among members as well as helped straight allies in the club to more clearly understand the life experiences of both the characters about whom they read and their LGBTQ+ book club colleagues. The authors noted, however, that even in this inclusive group, “instances of reinforcing heteronormativity” as well as reification of gender norms cropped up repeatedly by club members, most often when students attempted to normalize the experiences of LGBTQ+ people by comparing them to straight people, thereby “universalizing” their unique experiences in the world (pp. 235, 236). This study concluded that even members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies, having internalized the culture in which they live, can often unknowingly and without attempts at oppression, further marginalize people and groups on the outskirts of the straight, cisgender cultural majority (p. 247). However, the authors contended

that “putting complementary and competing discourses in conversation with each other...provides opportunities for conflicts, resulting in ruptures releasing potential and promise for change” (p. 248) and remained steadfast in their belief that these fractured and imperfect attempts towards understanding are a means of progress.

Helmer’s (2016) study took place in a high school English classroom with students in an elective Gay and Lesbian Literature course that was taught by an “out” lesbian teacher who had designed the curriculum and had been teaching the course since 2002. Although high school students are often assumed to be “too immature and unable to think deeply and in complex ways about sexuality and gender,” the positivity and functionality of this classroom indicated that “students are indeed able to perform such complex intellectual...work” with careful planning and guidance from an invested teacher (p. 45). The course led students through a variety of texts, including novels and various media, and it allowed them to question and discuss the ways that gender and sexuality are portrayed in story and in culture. Students used critical literacy practices to read new texts and question familiar ones, coming to various conclusions about the ways that popular media and literature send both overt and subliminal messages about norms concerning gender and sexuality.

The Gay and Lesbian Literature course, like the after-school book club created and researched by Blackburn and Clark (2011), was filled with students who specifically wanted to read and discuss literature written by and about members of the LGBTQ+ community. In this affirming atmosphere, lessons and discussions that broached the topics of gender, sex, and sexuality may have been quite different from those in a classroom filled with students who are required to take a particular English course. However, as Helmer (2016) explained, “Schools as micro-social environments are sites where social identities around gender and sexuality are

developed and negotiated, and normative notions of masculinity and femininity are practiced, actively produced or contested” (p. 38). This course was among the most popular in the entire school and was always filled to capacity, which indicates that many students want to learn how to address these facets of identity and difference. These two studies demonstrate that when students have a dedicated space and a teacher who is devoted to creating and sharing meaningful dialogical experiences with them concerning sensitive issues like gender and sexuality, many students are willing and able to do so in a mature and thoughtful way. It is in adolescence that many people begin thinking about the concepts of gender and sexuality, and providing students with opportunities to navigate these complicated ideas with each other, with their classroom texts, and with more experienced peers can be helpful means for students to come to a more thorough understanding of their own ideas and experiences while simultaneously stretching their own thinking towards the experiences of others.

### **Social Class in Classroom Literature**

Social class is an additional facet of difference that English teachers can explore with their students through classroom literature. Socioeconomic status and social hierarchies related to class are often uncomfortable to address, but as bell hooks noted, “Class matters. Race and gender can be used as screens to deflect attention away from the harsh realities class politics exposes....[But] it is impossible to talk meaningfully about ending racism without talking about class” (p. 7). One of the most significant ways that English Language Arts teachers can help to dismantle existing mental hierarchies concerning social class and to disrupt internalized notions concerning life chances and meritocracy with their students is by “integrating social class and marginalized perspectives into curriculum” (Jones & Vagle, 2013, p. 130). Jones and Vagle (2013) emphasized that “a careful social and ecological analysis of systems, contexts, and



policies” (p. 131) at work in the larger society on the part of all teachers would be a helpful means of considering ways that social class structures play into hegemonic cultural barriers before and while working with students who will undoubtedly come from a variety of class backgrounds. This section will discuss the major findings of several studies focused on English instruction concerning issues of social class in and through literature.

### **Means of Self-Preservation and Self-Defense**

Research concerning the exploration of social class in literature offers insight into how students’ own social class standing might affect their experiences in the classroom. Hartman (2006) conducted a study of the female students in two working- and middle-class high school classrooms exploring literary works containing characters of varying social status, and she found a distinctive pattern of wealthier students contributing to classroom discussions while less wealthy students remained silent, often because they self-reportedly lacked the confidence to counter their classmates’ ideas and opinions. These same working-class students often came to their teacher for extra help during non-class time rather than asking their questions aloud while class was in session. Hartman hypothesized that these students also saw their teacher as an omniscient authority figure who could guide them towards the correct answers and interpretations of the texts they were studying in class, thereby helping them to succeed academically, rather than asserting their own ideas in assignments and discussions. In contrast, the middle-class students viewed their teacher as a good “facilitator” during class discussions and as someone who pushed their thinking rather than the person who knew all the correct answers (p. 96).

A number of working-class students confessed their own fears of answering incorrectly or looking “wrong” or “foolish” in front of teachers and classmates (p. 97). Hartman (2006)

explained that her analysis “revealed that these working-class girls saw literacy and education as a way to ‘get ahead in the world,’ and in order to succeed, they believed it was in their best interests to remain safely silent” (p. 97). Further, she posited that “overall, the working-class girls had internalized that academic success meant silencing their own voices in favor of the status quo” (p. 100). The working-class girls in Hartman’s study admitted that “in general, they did not often relate to the literature or the characters [in the texts they studied], largely because they could not see themselves in what they read” (p. 103). Although the class did study some literary works that included lower-income female characters, many of the girls in this study rejected connections to these characters, seeing them as “insignificant,” “pathetic,” living undesirable lives, or lacking goals to improve their own situations (p. 104). They also rejected the notion that hegemonic structures are still at work that serve to hold back both female and lower-class individuals from reaching the goals they set for themselves through no fault of their own, believing instead that if they remained “Good Girls” and “Good Students” who did not make waves in the classroom, they would undoubtedly become successful adults (p. 111).

In Thein, Guise, and Sloan’s (2012) study of a high school that served a population of students with varied social class backgrounds, a group of sophomore English students participated in a literature circle studying Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard out of Carolina* as chosen by the students. In contrast to Hartman’s (2006) study, Thein, Guise, and Sloan (2012) found that it was a girl from a working-class background whose voice was the strongest and most “authoritative” concerning both the discussions of the novel and the behaviors and interpretations of her classmates (p. 230). The authors described this student’s behavior as “confrontational” and “angry” (p. 230), explaining that she “firmly characterized” the lower-class family in the novel as “upstanding, loving, and appropriate,” which the authors attributed to this student’s

“perception that her family’s values were unfairly judged based solely on finances” (p. 231). Thein, Guise and Sloan theorized that this student’s strident defense of the characters in the novel was “a form of self-preservation,” considering how closely she related to them (p. 236). By authoritatively asserting her ideas and opinions about the characters and events in the novel, she was able to cut other students off at the pass where they otherwise might have voiced their own judgment of characters to whom she could so closely relate. Conversely, another student in the class often voiced her opinions that the events, behaviors, and characters in the novel were “weird” or “funny”; the authors asserted that this distancing may have been a result of this particular student trying maintain an appearance as middle-class, rather than become associated with the lower-class family in the story (p. 238). The wealthiest student in the group “neither identified” with the family in the novel “nor saw them as normal”; he instead voiced a confusion about where in history this family lived, as their life experience was so markedly different from his own (p. 240). His viewpoints and contributions, in turn, were largely ignored, silenced, or contradicted by the other, less wealthy students in his group. In these ways, the students discussed the novel together while simultaneously upholding their own values and family lifestyles in terms of social class norms.

The authors explained “the need for English teachers and educators to develop strategies for acknowledging and building upon the specific, lived-world understandings of social class that drive students’ identity performances in the classroom” (Thein, Guise, & Sloan, 2012, p. 241). Further, these authors explained that simply choosing a book that broaches the topic of social class does not go far enough in preparing students for fruitful and thoughtful discussion about the complicated, hegemonic class structures at play in the larger society; rather, English teachers “need better instructional strategies for supporting students’ exploration of their own social class

identity performances as well as those in texts” (p. 242) in order to better prepare them for engaging with these concepts as they are presented in literature. Students expected to undertake the significant discussion load that is provided by texts such as the one used in this study need to be presented with critical and purposeful tools that will help them to unpack and examine the complex ideas inherent therein. English teachers, therefore, need more explicit instruction themselves, before they step into their own classrooms, on how to productively engage students in these discussions, and attention must be paid specifically to topics involving social class rather than the overarching concept of “diversity” as is often presented in teacher education programs and professional development sessions (p. 244). As Thein, Guise and Sloan explained, “Many students in the United States rarely [have] the opportunity in school settings to talk about social class and the impact that class structures and hierarchies [have] on their identities and the identities of those around them” (p. 216). The cause of this exclusion from classroom discussion and critical study may likely be a result of the fact that class is often significantly less visible than other identity factors. Although so few studies were available concerning how the topic of social class is explored in the English classroom, these several studies indicate both the variety of potential responses from students—often dependent on the students’ own socioeconomic backgrounds—as well as the importance of offering students a variety of texts and classroom experiences in which they can locate and learn more about themselves as well as learn to think critically about others.

### **Patterns in Classroom Explorations of Difference**

I noticed several distinct patterns in the existing literature concerning how teachers have approached topics of injustice, identity, and difference in their classroom endeavors with students. This section will describe the three most prominent patterns: the universalization of

experiences, sporadic attention to topics of difference, and leaning into the discomfort that often arises when these issues are addressed in the classroom.

### **Universalizing Experiences**

The first pattern I noted in the research concerning teacher approaches to the topics of identity and difference within classroom literature is the tendency on the part of educators to equate the struggles of individuals of all identities as “universal.” For example, Trainor (2008) discusses how the “We’re all the same inside, skin color doesn’t matter” lesson that so many White individuals receive over the course of their youth is a problematic approach in the classroom that detracts from what could otherwise be productive thinking and conversing about the specific lived experiences of people of Color (p. 92). Likewise, Blackburn and Clark (2011) explained that “offering representations of gay and lesbian people that erase differences, making them seem just like straight people, while offering patronizing representations of gay and lesbian people to queer students who, as subjects, are never really allowed to be fully present in classrooms” (p. 223) serves to continue the normalization of heterosexuality and heterosexism already present in the school system.

A number of other researchers (i.e., Bolgatz, 2005; Ketter & Buter, 2004; Lewis, Ketter, & Fabos, 2001; Thein, Beach, & Parks, 2007) explained the harm that may be done by well-meaning teachers who instruct their students to equate all examples of discrimination, prejudice, and unfair treatment. In an attempt to help students more personally understand the experiences of the characters about whom they may be reading in class, some teachers may find themselves guiding students toward “relat[ing] to or empathiz[ing] with unfamiliar characters and situations,” which can “risk simplifying and universalizing complex experiences of discrimination and oppression” (Thein, Beach & Parks, 2007, p. 54). Even within the group of

LGBTQ+ individuals and allies in Blackburn and Clark's (2011) study, the norms of the cultural majority were often reinforced when "participants' talk served to universalize the experiences of queer and straight people by making claims that all people are the same" (p. 235). Blackburn and Clark explained that this "universalizing" discussion pattern, though likely subconscious, serves to reinforce heteronormativity by making characters "sympathetic and relatable" specifically because readers are able to think of them as "just like straight people" without taking into account the characters' and authors' unique experiences as individuals outside the cultural majority (p. 236). Thein, Beach, and Parks (2007) offered an illustration of this universalizing approach, explaining that this practice is similar to asking students to "relate their experiences with a school bully to the experiences of a character who survives slavery" (p. 54). By engaging in this practice, "teachers may do a disservice to students by leaving them with the impression that they can authentically understand situations that they haven't and may never fully experience" (p. 54).

Further, such equations can actually push students away from understanding the experiences of others by creating a pattern of thought wherein students who have overcome relatively minor "oppression" fail to empathize with those whose entire life experiences may be an opposition to systems set up against them. "Invit[ing] students to articulate their own experiences within the framework established by the literary text" may seem like an obvious approach to helping students bridge their gaps of understanding, but if not done carefully, this approach may do more harm than good (Ruzich, 1999, p. 300). Often, the goal of reading literature is to find common themes within the framework of the human experience, but when this is the sole pursuit in the use of texts involving issues of difference and discrimination, much of the significance of the struggles of cultural minorities is lost, reducing the experiences of

individuals and groups who have been marginalized in U.S. society (and elsewhere) to comfortable, “equatable” life experiences for the students studying them. It is not in equating all struggles or helping students to come to the conclusion that all human experience is the same that educators help students to think critically. By “softening” dialogue about difference and discrimination or attempting to neatly package these topics into what both teachers and students might consider more palatable formats, teachers do students of all identities and backgrounds a disservice. Rather, it is through candid discussion, questioning, and transparency that students can learn to think about difference and discrimination in clear and constructive ways.

### **Sporadic Attention to Difference**

Another troublesome pattern that teachers in the available research appeared to follow is that of specifically focusing on issues of difference and authors and historical figures outside the cultural majority only for short, specific periods of time over the course of a semester or school year or solely while reading specific texts that address those topics rather than creating a classroom environment that is centered on exploring culture, identity, and discrimination in a more permanent way (Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Helmer, 2016; Ketter & Buter, 2004). While likely well-intentioned, teachers who only entertain dialogue about issues of difference in short bursts may be setting students up for problematic ideas concerning mainstream literature, as this practice has the likely unintended effect of normalizing texts by and about White, middle-class, heterosexual authors and characters while positioning texts by and about those outside of that mainstream as “other” or “abnormal.” While exploration of these texts through reading, discussion, and writing can often result in student “perspective taking and empathy” for authors and characters outside the cultural majority, without “opportunities to further trouble harmful commonsense knowledge” throughout their high school careers, these understandings can be

“fleeting” (Helmer, 2016, p. 44). It is only through sustained instruction in critical literacy, and not in short units of special attention to particular authors or subject matter, that educators can make a sustainable impact on how students read the world.

### **Leaning into Discomfort**

One step in the direction of successful, fruitful engagement with students is a forthright, frank approach to the topics of racism, gender and sexuality, and social class, even when such an approach seems difficult or uncomfortable. Helmer (2016) described some particular reactions of discomfort from the students in her study, including “silences, hesitations, nervous laughter, and verbal maneuvering” (p. 42), similar to those described by DiAngelo and Sensoy (2014) in their study about classroom discussions of race and racism. As Hartman (2006) argued,

A pedagogy that is based on comfort is not desirable. The very nature of discussing controversial issues, such as social roles, stereotyping, and existing power structures, demands that we become uncomfortable. Only then can we begin to uncover and challenge engrained values and beliefs. (p. 112)

As Helmer (2016) explained, opportunities for students to experience their own discomfort when engaging in dialogue with sensitive or difficult topics can “become important catalysts for learning” (p. 41). Teachers and students alike need to be prepared and welcomed into the space that discomfort allows for pushing boundaries of thought. If their goal is social change through education, teachers must not only work towards creating classrooms that are open for dialogue; they also need to welcome the tension that often accompanies such dialogue. Hartman (2006) found that the teacher in her study regularly avoided tension in her classroom, and that this “avoidance of controversy often served to perpetuate the myth that texts are apolitical and that they reflect universal truths” (p. 112). Because this teacher often shut down discussion when she



felt students were becoming too uncomfortable to continue, students came to understand that adding to that discomfort was a “risky” move that may have negative consequences on their own success in the class (p. 112). Teaching involves the sending of messages, both explicitly and implicitly. Teachers, then, need to develop pedagogical methods that not only present opportunities for students to passively receive information about a variety of life experiences, but to actively engage in their own construction of knowledge alongside their classmates, instructors, and the varied individuals and groups about whom they learn through literature.

### **Novice Teachers and Dialogic Pedagogy**

Much of the literature available concerning how teachers approach topics of difference and injustice through classroom texts involves the work of veteran teachers. Novice teachers are likely to share in the same difficulties that their veteran coworkers experience in enacting dialogic classroom practices while simultaneously navigating the early elements of their careers. Studies illustrate the multitude of issues particular to novice teachers starting their careers; the transition from teacher preparation program to real-world classroom is often fraught with difficulty, especially for new teachers who hope to engage their students in dialogic explorations of difference and injustice.

One of the most immediate and pressing struggles that novice teachers face is learning how to effectively manage a classroom (e.g., Dugas, 2016; Kauffman, 2002). Many new teachers, even those who have undertaken coursework on the subject of classroom management, feel “poorly prepared by their teacher education programs to respond effectively to classroom misbehavior” (Dugas, 2016, p. 20). Further, new teachers also struggle with the demands of addressing national and local standards in order to prepare their students for high-stakes tests while simultaneously engaging them in meaningful explorations of their subject matter (Brown,

Bay-Borelli, & Scott, 2015; Kauffman, 2002; Picower, 2011; Smeaton & Waters, 2013). Picower (2011) discussed ways that teachers are “handcuffed by mandates” in the modern era of standardized education, leading them to feel conflicted in terms of how to introduce curricular materials to their students that could engage them in dialogue about social issues (p. 1106). Studies also report novice teachers’ difficulty learning how to meet and build relationships with other faculty members (Kauffman, 2002; Quinn & Andrews, 2004; Smeaton & Waters, 2013) and seek out and accept guidance from more experienced peers (Kauffman, 2002; Picower, 2011). Ingersoll & Strong (2011) noted that because “the work of teachers is largely done in isolation from colleagues,” building social and professional relationships with coworkers is “especially difficult for new teachers, who, on accepting a position in a school, are often left on their own to succeed or fail within the confines of their own classrooms” (p. 202). This isolation can also lead to difficulty in learning to navigate school policies and procedures as well as simply finding materials and resources within the school (Kauffman, 2002; Quinn & Andrews, 2004).

In her study with new teachers, all of whom she taught throughout their teacher education program, Picower (2011) discussed the ways that these young men and women, like many of their older counterparts, found themselves working in environments whose visions and goals were “antithetical” to the visions and goals of those who want to teach for social justice (p. 1112). Instead of a focus on real dialogue about social issues, the teachers in Picower’s study found themselves grappling with test score requirements and standardized curricula, which serve to “reproduce inequality rather than create environments that engage students in struggles against oppression” (p. 1112). The strictly-monitored practices of standardization ubiquitous in schools today, including a focus on testing and mandated curricula, force many new teachers to feel as if

they need to “surrender” their desires to enact radical change in their classrooms, or else live in fear of being discovered straying from the status quo (p. 1113). As these studies illustrate, adjusting to any new school climate is a difficult and often arduous process, and it is especially challenging for new teachers whose instructional practices and dialogical goals may deviate from the accepted norms of the school in which they find themselves.

### **Working Within and Beyond the Standards**

Curricular mandates often restrict the materials that teachers can choose to utilize in the classroom, but teachers can still approach texts from a dialogic, social-justice-based stance with their students if they carefully consider not only what materials they must teach but the means by which they will approach those materials with their students. Fecho, Falter, and Hong (2016) noted that “there is nothing antithetical regarding standards and dialogical practice. One does not preclude the other. Rich and carefully considered performance standards and rich and carefully considered dialogical practice, in many ways, are mutually enhancing” (p. 100). Even in schools with a decidedly rigid standardization of curricula and focus on test scores, English teachers can choose to adopt a dialogical classroom stance that values not only high academic expectations of students that align directly with school standards, but also a commitment to embracing tension and discomfort and using even mandated classroom texts as a springboard for leading students toward asking and answering questions about themselves, their classmates, and the world.

Singer and Shagoury’s (2006) work is one clear example of a teacher using a dialogical approach and finding success in her classroom in both helping students to meet standards and teaching for social justice. The researchers conducted a study in two of Singer’s freshman English classes as she created and implemented a global literature curriculum with a central focus of social activism. The texts chosen in this study represented a wide variety of voices from

around the world, and students were invited to choose several of their own books based on themes in which they were particularly interested as part of this curriculum. The instructor of the course, as a teacher focused on social justice, was “aware that she teaches within a system that defines success and failure according to particular values, skills, and practices,” and while she “works to teach students literacy skills that are valued in the larger social world, knowing that some types of literacies are valued more than others,” she kept her students and their interests and skills at the forefront of her teaching in order to foster growth, both scholastically and personally (p. 321).

Singer’s class was diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and in-school literacy skill, but all students were encouraged to seek out topics about which they were interested for their work in the course; this classroom’s curriculum was designed with “students’ inquiry questions at the center” (Singer & Shagoury, 2006, p. 320). The varying ways that students learned, thought, experienced, and approached their world were valued and encouraged as they worked. Without naming it specifically, the instructor of this course was intent on creating a dialogical classroom environment where all students could contribute uniquely and equally to the learning taking place; the authors explained that “one of the keys to... success was in the teaching decision to provide students with ownership of their learning while also providing high expectations, clear limits, and support” (p. 322). This study demonstrated how even in standards-driven classrooms, teacher and student autonomy concerning classroom texts and instructional practices can go a long way towards high levels of engagement, empowerment, effort, and, as a result, scholastic success.

## Addressing Gaps in the Literature

The work of a variety of researchers demonstrates the invaluable resource that the English classroom can become in the process of opening up dialogue with students about various forms of identity, difference, and discrimination as portrayed in the texts students are assigned to read. As Helmer (2016) explained, “In particular, English language arts classrooms have been envisioned as transformational spaces in which students can learn sensitivity to diversity and work against stereotypes as they consider perspectives and experiences different from their own” (p. 36). Careful attention to text selection—or, if mandates impede choice in text, careful planning with canonical texts—in tandem with a dedication to creating and sustaining a pedagogical stance that invites students to converse with texts, issues, and each other about sensitive topics can make significant strides in helping students understand the ways that society approaches difference as well as the ways that students might work towards acceptance of those whose identities and life experiences are vastly different from their own.

The literature reviewed in this chapter discussed multiple ways that English teachers have engaged in explorations of injustice, identity, and difference with their students, specifically in the areas of race, gender and sexuality, and social class. Many of the teachers in these studies, in their varied approaches, experienced both measures of successful interaction with students concerning these topics in their classrooms as well as noteworthy difficulties. A significant amount of the available research reported on either the work of veteran teachers already established in their careers or student teachers who are just beginning to grapple with what it will mean to enact a social-justice-oriented pedagogy in their future classrooms. The research I undertook, which will be described in the following chapters, built on this existing literature in several ways. First, my research focused directly on a novice teacher and the ways that he

experienced the beginning processes of planning and implementing lessons that would engage students in explorations of difference through classroom literature. Additionally, my research addressed dialogic pedagogy explicitly, examining the ways that a dialogical stance aided a novice teacher in his development as an educator. Although studies exist that address each of these constructs independently, my research built on the existing literature by linking the experiences of a novice teacher with a focus on the early stages of implementation of dialogic pedagogy in order to more fully explore sensitive topics of difference in the secondary English classroom. The process through which I designed and undertook this research project, including the research methods I utilized to generate multiple data sources and the procedures through which I analyzed those data sources, will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Methodology and Methods**

The purpose of this study was to examine what happened when a novice teacher worked from a dialogic stance to explore difference in his English classroom. This chapter will present my methodological underpinnings, my own positionality as a researcher, the methods by which I undertook this research and how those methods align with my theoretical framework, the means of data analysis that I employed, and the limitations inherent in the study.

#### **Methodology**

The theoretical framework that underpinned this study combined the tenets of dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981), as manifested in a critical, dialogic pedagogical stance (Fecho, 2011a), with a transactional approach towards classroom literature (Rosenblatt, 1995) to create a lens for examining the ways that a novice teacher might guide students towards personal interactions with texts in order to interrogate their own and others' experiences in and beyond the society in which they live. Combined together, these theories functioned as a framework to guide my understanding of what happened when a novice teacher worked from a dialogic stance while exploring difference in his secondary English classroom.

Research designed to engage with educators in order to “bring about social, political, and/or economic change” will likely be qualitative in nature (Hatch, 2002, p. 1). Therefore, I used a qualitative approach—more specifically, an ethnographically-derived case study—to research a single novice teacher planning and implementing dialogical strategies in his classroom in order to engage students in literary explorations of difference. Spradley (1980) explained the goal of ethnographic research as an attempt to “describe the culture of a complex society” (p. 29). Because I sought to understand the complexities of a classroom and its inhabitants as led by

a novice teacher, deriving my research design from an ethnographic stance was a logical choice for my study. Further, Creswell (2007) invited researchers who desire to learn about a phenomenon “bounded in time or place” to use a case study design (p. 96). The study I conducted was indeed so bounded: It began in the planning stages of a unit of instruction and concluded just after its close, once the participant and I were able to reflect on our collaborative experiences and their corresponding implications. Therefore, a case study was an appropriate approach for this study.

Over the course of this research project, I utilized Transactional Analysis (Stewart, 2011). Stewart (2011) explained that Transactional Analysis is especially useful in “small-scale studies with a limited number of participants” as a means of “deep exploration” of the “conceptual inferences” that accompany such research (p. 293). This methodological approach served me well throughout my in-depth study of one novice teacher over the course of his planning and implementation of lessons. This particular combination of methodological approaches aligns directly with the theoretical framework I constructed for use throughout this research project because of their shared focus on the ways that the study of literature can impact both individuals and groups as well as the ways that this impact, paired with both the individual and shared understandings thereof, can influence a classroom full of students with a variety of backgrounds and worldviews.

## **Methods**

For this project, I carried out an ethnographically-derived case study to research a novice English teacher who was in the process of developing a classroom approach based in dialogism. My goal for this study was to develop a clearer picture not only of how teachers might use literature to open a dialogue with their students on sensitive topics, but also how they might work



through the planning of that dialogue based on adoption or further development of a dialogic pedagogical stance. Working through these planning and implementation processes alongside a novice teacher helped me to gain insight into the struggles and successes of enacting such a pedagogy. Creswell (2007) noted that case study research is particularly useful when a researcher “seeks to provide an in-depth understanding” of the lived experiences of one or several participants (p. 74), which was my ultimate goal in conducting this study. Yin (1989) noted that “the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena” and that “the case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 14). Because any classroom is a complex collection of “real-life” individuals and experiences, and because I hoped to seek and create understandings of these complexities as they interacted with each other in an in-depth, holistic manner, a case study was the ideal approach for my research. In the following section, I will outline the various methods that comprised my case study design, including each stage of my research process, each source of data that was generated, and each of the steps that I took to analyze those data sources in order to develop new understandings in response to my research question.

### **Participant Selection**

I employed purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) in order to locate a participant who would be a good fit for my study based on several key criteria. First, this participant would ideally be a graduate of an English Education teacher preparation program designed specifically to immerse its pre-service teachers in both instruction of the tenets of dialogic pedagogical theory as well as practical experiences of their implementation in the classroom. The participant would also be in his or her first few years of teaching in a secondary English Language Arts classroom. Because I wanted to learn more about how a teacher *begins* to enact a social-justice-oriented pedagogy

based in dialogic practice, I needed to locate a teacher who did not already have significant experience in this area. The participant also needed to be an individual who explicitly chose to approach pedagogy with an eye towards social justice. Although I am personally invested in teaching for social justice through dialogic pedagogy, I needed to carefully select a participant who had a similar worldview in order to guarantee that I was not pushing my own agenda on him or her through our collaboration on this research project. And finally, I needed to select a participant who was open to allowing me to be present in his or her classroom on a regular basis and willing to commit to spending time planning, preparing, and implementing lessons as well as reflecting on the planning and implementation process with me as both an observer and a collaborator.

### **Participant Profile**

My first instinct in the participant selection process was to reach out to Mr. Kincaid, who I believed best met all the criteria of an ideal participant for this study and would likely enjoy such a collaboration. Although I was open to working with any novice English teacher trained in dialogic pedagogy for this project, I hoped that Mr. Kincaid would be willing to work with me because of our shared interest in using literature to explore issues of difference with students. Mr. Kincaid's cohort of English Education Master's students matriculated during my tenure in the English Education doctoral program. Mr. Kincaid was a remarkably adept teacher candidate throughout his training program. Although I was not assigned to be his University Supervisor, which kept me from seeing him teach in his field placement classrooms, I was able to watch him teach excellent model lessons to his cohort in the on-campus classes leading up to his field placements, and his class work and field practice was acknowledged as exemplary throughout his entire teacher preparation program. Although he was only 21 years old when he graduated from

his Master's program, Mr. Kincaid demonstrated exceptional skill in his early practice as an English teacher.

After Mr. Kincaid graduated and began teaching at the middle school level, we kept in touch from time to time, and he kept me informed about his teaching experiences with the seventh-grade students with whom he worked. In order to request his participation in this project, I sent a formal email to him outlining the study, the research topic, and the extent of involvement that would be needed from him if he chose to participate, including lesson planning sessions, multiple interviews, and permission to observe in his classroom over several weeks' worth of daily lessons. Mr. Kincaid agreed enthusiastically to these terms. Maxwell (2005) noted that the relationship between a researcher and a participant "can facilitate or hinder" a research project, so I had hoped to work with a participant who would willingly engage with me in this endeavor as a collaborator (p. 83). On the whole, the work that Mr. Kincaid and I endeavored to complete together seemed to function as a true and equal collaboration to which we both contributed and from which we both benefited.

### **Reflexivity**

It is important to note that as is the case for any researcher undertaking any project, my own unique life experiences and worldview undoubtedly influenced the research I carried out during this study, and I took great care to remain cognizant of my own subjectivity and positionality throughout the entire course of the project in order to "consciously attend to the orientations that will shape what I see and what I make of what I see" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 21). Remaining thoughtful about my own personal identity markers and core beliefs provided a more thorough understanding of how these factors may have colored my interpretations and understandings of my research.

## **Identity and Experience**

My life experiences as a White, middle-class woman no doubt had an impact on the ways that I viewed and analyzed the data that was generated throughout the course of this project. Perhaps more notably, however, my own experiences as a veteran teacher and my firsthand experience with and understanding of dialogic pedagogy likely played a role in coloring my viewpoint of what I saw happening in the classroom while Mr. Kincaid was teaching. I often found it quite difficult to watch Mr. Kincaid's instruction without evaluating it; after so many years in my own classroom, I quite naturally considered the differing approaches I would be taking if Mr. Kincaid's classroom were my own. I taught for fourteen years in a majority-White, majority-middle-class public high school, and I had worked to create a style and a focus in my pedagogy that made issues of social justice a central part of my curricula. I am somewhat satisfied with the work I had been doing in my own classroom, but throughout this research project, I found that I needed to keep in mind the fact that it had taken me years to begin this work, and even more years of both successes and failures to hone my practice. In taking up research with a novice teacher, I needed to remain mindful of the difficulties that I had encountered in my long tenure as a teacher so as to be empathetic towards Mr. Kincaid's early-career work in his quest to welcome students into the larger conversation.

Additionally, after serving as a cooperating teacher for six different teacher candidates and after several years of employment as a University Supervisor, my first instinct during observations in a young teacher's classroom has become automatic: I evaluate the moves being employed by the teacher and take note of which actions seem to result in successful instruction and which actions might need to be reconsidered in order to become more successful. As a result of my supervisory experiences, I found it difficult to function not as a supervisor or evaluator but

as a non-participatory observer, shifting my focus to look for dialogic elements of instruction and interaction with students and to consider how these elements were working or not working for Mr. Kincaid in his experiences as a novice teacher. I found it both necessary and helpful to continuously remind myself of these goals as I completed daily observations so that I would be able to gather data relating to my original research question rather than allowing myself to thoughtlessly create multiple teacher candidate observation forms full of evaluative notes on how Mr. Kincaid could improve his practice.

### **Grade Level Expectations**

Because my own teaching experience has included very little classroom time with students younger than the high school level, observing Mr. Kincaid's students provided me with a relatively steep learning curve. There were many instances throughout the period of time I spent in Mr. Kincaid's classroom when it seemed that the students were only making shallow or surface-level connections to the materials and topics at hand, and I had quite a bit of difficulty discerning whether or not they were working to their innate potential as seventh graders. I had to remain continuously mindful throughout my observations that the difficulty many of the students seemed to have in deeply exploring the ideas being presented could very likely be attributed, at least in part, to their age and maturity level. I wondered often if I was expecting too much from them, as I have little firsthand understanding of the extent to which seventh graders can meaningfully grasp the complicated and often abstract concepts that they were attempting to explore together. Repeated observations of these young students' awkward forays into larger real-world conversations, which sometimes seemed superficial to a teacher who has spent her entire career working with high school- and college-level students, helped me to consider that the original expectations that I had subconsciously internalized for Mr. Kincaid's students might

have been inappropriate for this age group. Continual reminders to myself of this possibility helped me to eventually begin more closely aligning my expectations with actual student behaviors.

## **Summary**

My own collection of identities, teaching experiences, supervisory opportunities, and internalized expectations for students played a role in the ways that I viewed the multitude of factors operating concurrently in Mr. Kincaid's world on any given day. His instructional methods, his interactions with students, his students' behaviors, and his ideas and opinions were all examined from my specific and unique vantage point throughout the course of this study. Remaining aware of the factors that created this vantage point and keeping a vigilant watch over how they may have influenced my researcher's eye and mind through "constant reflection" on "my own understanding as meaning [was] produced" through research (Vagle, 2009, p. 603) helped me to generate a clearer and more accurate picture of how I sought to learn, how I understood my own learning, and how I chose to share that learning with others.

## **Data Generation**

Multiple sources of data were co-generated with Mr. Kincaid over the course of the research study. An explanation of the research tasks, the data sources that were generated by way of these tasks, and the ways that these research tasks and data sources aligned with my theoretical framework is outlined below.

## **Planning Sessions**

When we met for our first planning meeting to discuss holistic ideas concerning the design of the collection of lessons that would comprise this study, Mr. Kincaid proposed planning an overarching short story unit that would encompass three aspects of difference (race,

gender, and social class) rather than dividing lessons into the discrete mini-unit design that I had originally devised (Planning Meeting 1, 30 August). I agreed to alter my plans in order to accommodate Mr. Kincaid's suggestion, and he requested help choosing short stories that would be useful for exploring these concepts as well as the literary topics for which he was also responsible, including plot, characterization, point of view, conflict, and theme (Email, 27 August). These early conversations assured me that Mr. Kincaid was dedicated to the same goals that I was, namely, using literature to engage his students in exploration of standards-based subject matter as well as explorations of themselves and their worlds.

**Alignment with theoretical framework.** I met with Mr. Kincaid three times in order to plan the lessons that would comprise a short story unit focused on both literary terms as well as three chosen aspects of difference. These workshop meetings, which ran between 60 and 90 minutes each, were audio recorded in order to preserve them in their entirety. The design of the planning sessions aligned directly to my overarching theoretical framework in multiple ways, the first of which being that they were constructed so as to be dialogic in nature. Fecho (2011b) explained that in true dialogue, there can be no belief that "some voices carry more weight than others" (p. 5), and the sessions that I undertook with Mr. Kincaid were executed with this belief in mind in order to create an atmosphere wherein the mutual sharing of ideas and experiences would help us both to choose texts and co-construct lessons that could be implemented to invite students into a similarly egalitarian exploration of ideas. Further, because these planning sessions resulted in mutually agreed-upon texts to be used in classroom instruction, they also aligned closely to the transactional theory of reading. Rosenblatt (1995) explained that in a classroom designed to encourage transactional relationships with texts, the teacher has the "influential" task of choosing those texts based on personal knowledge of his or her particular students (p. 69). The

degree to which students can make personal connections with any text often correlates to how well a teacher can choose appropriate materials to be explored. As Rosenblatt explained, without attention being paid to the alignment of curriculum to student, “even great work will fail. All doors to it are shut” (p. 69). Finally, the process of choosing appropriate texts written by diverse authors and implementing those texts into the classroom aligned with the critical pedagogical approach of incorporating “voices [that] are traditionally excluded from dominant pedagogies” (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015, p. 209) in ways that “acknowledge the central and intersecting roles of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination” (Yosso, 2002, p. 98). Careful selection of texts and careful attention to how to implement those texts into the curriculum can have the power to aid students towards consideration of how difference and injustice historically and currently function in U.S. and world culture. With these factors in mind, the planning sessions I undertook with Mr. Kincaid were constructed around the major tenets of critical dialogic pedagogy and the transactional theory of reading.

**Text selection.** Mr. Kincaid explained his limited knowledge of short stories that might be appropriate for this unit. In order to mitigate this issue, I created an extensive list of texts from which he might choose that could be used for both literary instruction as well as for addressing the particular topics of difference that he was interested in exploring with his students. I emphasized to Mr. Kincaid that because I was a guest in his classroom, wherein he was working with real students who were being held to schoolwide and statewide standards, I would defer to his lead in our co-construction of lessons. He assured me that his school made wide allowances for teacher choice in curricular materials and that even the stories I suggested with which he was not already familiar could be possibilities for inclusion in the unit as he made decisions about which would be the most useful pieces to meet his instructional goals. Although he expressed his



own unfamiliarity with many of the stories I suggested, Mr. Kincaid enthusiastically agreed to teach a number of them over the course of the short story unit (Planning Meeting 1 Notes, 30 August). The collection of stories that I suggested and the categories into which I sorted them to share with Mr. Kincaid are illustrated in Table 1.

*Table 1.* List of suggested texts

<b>Story or Excerpt Title</b>	<b>Story or Excerpt Author</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity/Racism/Immigration</b>	
“How It Feels To Be Colored Me”	Zora Neale Hurston
“Desiree's Baby”	Kate Chopin
“The Pulse of the Land”	Hermel A. Nuyda
“All Summer in a Day”	Ray Bradbury
“Fish Cheeks”	Amy Tan
“Body Ritual Among the Nacirema”	Horace Miner
<b>Gender/Sexuality</b>	
“The Yellow Wallpaper”	Charlotte Perkins Gillman
“I Stand Here Ironing”	Tillie Olsen
“The Story of an Hour”	Kate Chopin
“Girl”	Jamaica Kincaid
“The Diary of Adam and Eve”	Mark Twain
<b>Social Class</b>	
“The Doll's House”	Katherine Mansfield
“The Necklace”	Guy de Maupassant
“Gifts of the Magi”	O. Henry
“The Stolen Party”	Liliana Heker
“Thank You, Ma'am”	Langston Hughes
<i>The House on Mango Street</i> (chapter 1)	Sandra Cisneros

### **Analytical Memos: Planning Sessions**

Directly after each planning session, I wrote analytical memos (Patton, 2002) to record my thoughts concerning the transactions made between myself and Mr. Kincaid throughout our planning time. According to Patton (2002), “recording and tracking analytical insights that occur during data collection is part of fieldwork and the beginning of qualitative analysis” (p. 436). The memos that I wrote after each of these three planning sessions became a means of analyzing the planning sessions themselves as well as an additional data source to include in my overall analysis that helped to guide each of my subsequent research steps. Fecho (2011b) noted that

“writing is a dialogical act from which meaning is generated” (p. 9). In writing analytical memos throughout the course of my research, I was able to keep a careful record of my thoughts as they occurred during and after each interaction with Mr. Kincaid while also adhering to the principle that putting pen to paper is a means of dialogue with my own thoughts and experiences.

### **Classroom Observations**

Hatch (2002) explained that the main purpose of observation is to understand the phenomenon being researched from the viewpoint of the participants in the study, which lends important contextual grounding to any findings created or discovered in a classroom.

Observations conducted in real classroom settings can provide useful physical context to events and practices taking place therein; moreover, specific attention to the “mundane details” of everyday life in a classroom is often remarkably useful when a researcher is attempting to create an overall picture of how procedures, behaviors, materials, and attitudes come together (Angrosino, 2005; Lewis, 2003). Theoretically speaking, the classroom observations I conducted over the course of this research project were a means for me to connect repeatedly to the basic concepts of dialogic pedagogy. As Fecho (2004) noted, “In teaching spaces, things happen. No matter what amount of control, consistency, and management is offered, things happen. And that’s as it should be” (pp. 13-14). Dialogic pedagogy connotes that within the actuality of the classroom, unique construction of meaning about self and subject matter is experienced in exploration of texts and in moments of disequilibrium in thought (e.g., Fecho, 2011a). By being present in Mr. Kincaid’s classroom over the course of several weeks of instruction, I was able to acquire a firsthand account of the ways that he invited his students into dialogue with chosen texts as well as the ways that students engaged in that dialogue and “constantly [transacted] with their environment” (Fecho, 2011a, p. 29). Further, my daily classroom observations directly

coincided with Rosenblatt's (1995) directive to "scrutinize all practices" (p. 66) that occur within a classroom aimed at meaningful transactions with texts. As an outsider and a non-participatory observer in the classroom, I had the distinct opportunity to view the class, the students, the dialogue, and the transactions that occurred from a holistic and systematic perspective, allowing me to construct meaning that could not otherwise be generated from a secondhand retelling of classroom events.

For this study, I began with two baseline classroom observations before the implementation of any co-planned instruction in order to gather a general understanding of the daily operations of Mr. Kincaid's classroom. I then commenced daily classroom observations of three different sections of seventh-grade English students over the course of the short story unit implemented by Mr. Kincaid in order to generate detailed field notes about how the lessons were carried out. According to Hatch (2002), field notes should include "contexts, actions, and conversations" as they take place (p. 77). In my field notes, I carefully recorded events as they unfolded in the classroom, including both teacher and student behaviors and responses.

The observational portion of my research covered a period of nearly six weeks of instruction. These observations allowed me to see the lessons that Mr. Kincaid and I had generated together as they unfolded with actual students on a day-to-day basis. After each day of observation, I wrote an analytical memo describing my overall impressions concerning experiences and events that took place during the class periods I observed. I also used a classroom observation matrix to keep track of various dialogical constructs that occurred in the classroom in a simplified and systematic manner (see Table 2, below). The constructs in this matrix were adapted from Stewart's (2017) description of dialogic pedagogy. The specific, daily instances of dialogic practice that were noted in the observation matrices were coded alongside

all other data sources and used in the process of generating larger themes occurring within Mr. Kincaid’s dialogic practice. I also used these daily memos and these observation matrices to further my thinking about how to best construct subsequent interview protocols. In these ways, my classroom observations and my participant interviews recursively augmented one another and the data that was generated independently from each of these two sources.

*Table 2. Observation matrix*

Observation Matrix: Dialogical Features of Instruction	
Classroom tension is embraced	Classroom tension is rejected
Notes:	
Students’ questions concerning texts and topics seem valued and validated by teacher	Students’ questions concerning texts and topics are ignored or invalidated by teacher
Notes:	
Multiple perspectives on texts or topics are offered, welcomed, and/or considered	A single perspective on texts or topics is asserted; others are dismissed
Notes:	
Students and/or teacher verbalize a challenge to hierarchical structure(s)	Students and/or teacher verbalize an adherence to or value of hierarchical structure(s)
Notes:	

## **Interviews**

In order to contextualize my classroom observations, interviews were a logical next step in my research process (Seidman, 2005). Seidman (2005) noted that although a sizable amount of research is done on the educational systems at work in the United States, only a small fraction of that research is dedicated directly to the perspectives of those imbedded in the system “whose individual and collective experience constitutes schooling” (p. 10). Personal interviews paired with direct observation of teachers, students, and school systems can lead to a more thorough

understanding of the points of view of the participants concerning those observations that are made in the classroom over the course of a lesson or a school day (Hatch, 2002; Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996) notes that interviews, when planned and conducted carefully, can positively impact not only the researcher, who will likely gain tremendous knowledge from the process, but also the participant, who will be afforded the opportunity to talk about his or her viewpoints, ideas, and experiences for an extended period of time to an attentive listener. Although interviews, like every method of research, have limitations and drawbacks, they also have the potential to offer fruitful generation and co-construction of data between researchers and participants.

My focus on understanding a novice teacher's lived experience made interviews a logical choice for data generation. Interviews are a means of eliciting personal narratives, which provide a legitimate, authoritative, and valid means of understanding "what life is like for others" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 48). Furthermore, although I was present in Mr. Kincaid's classroom for daily observations throughout the course of the research project in order to experience and record meaning as it was co-constructed between and among Mr. Kincaid and his students, meaning varies radically from individual to individual, making interviews a salient means of understanding Mr. Kincaid's experiences in planning and instruction. Dialogic pedagogy holds that "through the meshing of response, mutual shaping occurs. Perspectives are deepened, shifted, affirmed, rattled, wobbled, or rethought. We see ourselves, others, our contexts differently" through our verbal interactions (Fecho, 2011b, p. 28). Keeping in mind that the formality and structure of an interview might have a significant bearing on the data that was constructed or collected, and, as Stewart (2011) discussed, the various ways that dialogue during the interview "shapes the process of meaning making" for both researcher and participant (p. 287), I designed interview protocols that were relatively focused but sufficiently open-ended in

order to afford Mr. Kincaid a degree of freedom in his responses. I also made every effort to resolve questions and misunderstandings throughout the interviews as they were conducted (Kvale, 1996; Mishler, 1986), and this continual clarification during the interviews themselves led to more easily and accurately interpreted data. Collectively, these interviews helped me to consider classroom events from Mr. Kincaid's viewpoint as well as to more thoroughly understand his thought processes and behaviors.

Seidman (2013) explained that using a three-part interview design allows for participants to offer substantive background information before the start of the project, discuss the research topic thoroughly during the active phase of the project, and consider the overall experience and the implications thereof after the completion of the project. Deviating slightly from Seidman's model, I designed a plan to conduct a series of interviews over the three distinct phases of my research. The baseline in-person interview, conducted at the start of our work together, was created to help me gather background information about Mr. Kincaid, including his teaching experience and general classroom approach, his comfort level in working with students concerning issues of social injustice and cultural difference, and his knowledge about and experience with dialogic pedagogy. The intermediary interviews were prepared as a series of three written interview protocols, designed for Mr. Kincaid to complete every two weeks throughout our work together in order to generate information about his perceived successes and struggles as well as his perception of student response to the texts and classroom experiences regarding the study thereof. In holding with a dialogic theory of writing, the written interviews completed by Mr. Kincaid served as an additional means of personal reflection, leading to deeper insight and extended meaning-making (e.g., Fecho, 2011b). The nature of the written interviews was such that Mr. Kincaid could complete them at his own pace without the interference that the

physical presence of an interviewer might have on a participant. Further, the written format of these interviews offered Mr. Kincaid the opportunity to reflect on his practice and experience in a concrete way in the timeframe that most suited him, resulting in a more accurate and robust source of data concerning his experience. For the third phase of the study, I planned to conduct a closing interview after the completion of the unit in order to discuss what Mr. Kincaid had learned from the process of the project, focusing on overall impressions of the experience both for himself and for his students.

While I had originally hoped to conduct the two in-person, semi-structured interviews as bookends for this research project and to send the three written interviews to Mr. Kincaid to complete via email at regular two-week increments over the course of the short story unit, time constraints and Mr. Kincaid's personal preferences dictated a change in plans in terms of interview format. Therefore, I conducted an in-person baseline interview at the start of our work together, a second in-person interview that combined the first two written interview protocols into a single interview, a third written interview, and a final written interview. All written interviews were delivered and returned via email. Both verbal interview sessions were audio recorded and transcribed. Although the original arrangement of this series of interviews changed slightly during the research process, the basic design built upon Seidman's (2013) three-part interview process. By conducting an interview at the start of the project, three intermediary interviews throughout the active teaching phase that comprised the bulk of the study, and a final interview at the completion of the unit, I offered Mr. Kincaid multiple ways to make meaning of his experiences and communicate that meaning to me over the course of our collaboration. (See Appendix for interview protocols.)

### **Analytical Memos: Interviews**

Immediately after each interview, I wrote a detailed analytical memo (Patton 2002) to record events and impressions from the interview itself. Interview transcripts provide only a partial picture of participants' reality, but devoid of thorough contexts, they fall even shorter (Mishler, 1986). The entire interview process, then, went hand-in-hand with field notes from classroom observations as well as analytical memos written directly following each interview as a means of creating the most complete picture possible of the inner workings of a classroom through the eyes and the actions of its teacher.

### **Duration of Research Activities**

At the start of our work together, I was apprehensive that my presence would be a disruption in Mr. Kincaid's classroom over the three-week period that I had originally proposed to spend in observation; however, Mr. Kincaid eagerly invited me to conduct a longer observation period than I had originally planned in order to encompass the longer unit we had begun to construct. He also requested that I observe more than one class period per day in order to obtain a more thorough and accurate depiction of both student and teacher experiences in his classroom. Instead of the original proposal of one class period per day for three weeks of mini-units, then, I spent three periods per day—roughly three hours—in Mr. Kincaid's classroom for a total of nearly six weeks, which was the full duration of the longer short story unit that Mr. Kincaid and I designed together. The breakdown of the duration of the project, including all research activities completed in direct contact with Mr. Kincaid, is outlined in Table 3.

*Table 3.* Breakdown of research project contact time

<b>Dates of Contact</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Approximate Contact Time</b>
24 August 2018	Baseline Interview	0.5 hours
30 August 2018	Planning Session 1	1 hour
4 September 2018	Baseline Observation 1	3 hours (three classes)
5 September 2018	Planning Session 2	1 hour



7 September 2018	Baseline Observation 2	3 hours (three classes)
10-14 September 2018	Observations, Week 1	15 hours (9-12 daily; three classes)
17-21 September 2018	Observations, Week 2	15 hours (9-12 daily; three classes)
20 September 2018	Planning Session 3	1.5 hours
24-28 September 2018	Observations, Week 3	14 hours (early dismissal Friday)
1-5 October 2018	Observations, Week 4	14 hours (left early for meeting Thursday)
7 October 2018	Interviews 2 and 3 (changed written interviews 2 and 3 to verbal interview as per participant's preference)	1.5 hours
8-11 October 2018	Observations, Week 5	9 hours (out for illness 10/11; school closed for weather 10/12)
15-18 October 2018	Observations, Week 6	12 hours (unit ended 10/18)
28 October 2018	Interview 4	1.5 hours
9 November 2018	Final Interview (email)	N/A
		Total: approximately 92 hours

### **Researcher's Role**

Though I had assumed that my role as a non-participatory observer in Mr. Kincaid's room would be a passive one, it quickly became apparent that this would not entirely be the case. While I endeavored to create as little disruption as possible by silently taking notes in the corner of the classroom during Mr. Kincaid's instruction, he regularly engaged with me while students were completing individual assignments at their desks as well as between classes. These interactions generated an understanding that while I had anticipated invisibility during my time in the field, Mr. Kincaid viewed me not as a passive observer, but, in many ways, as a resource and a mentor.

Mr. Kincaid's early reliance on me for materials and ideas, which first surfaced during our initial planning meeting, remained intact throughout the course of the unit. On several occasions, Mr. Kincaid contacted me after school hours to request additional texts and materials for lessons that he decided spontaneously to present to students the following day; at other times, he called me over to his desk when I arrived in the morning or between classes to ask for my

opinion and assistance in planning segments of lessons he would be teaching during the following class period (e.g., Daily Observation Notes, 25 September; 1 October; 5 October; 8 October; 9 October; 10 October). Mr. Kincaid also occasionally asked me questions during class in order to gather further understanding of a topic or a piece of literature being discussed or to help answer a student's question about a text or idea. Aside from very brief responses to these questions, I remained silent in my role of observer over the entire course of my stay in Mr. Kincaid's room, and I did not participate in class or offer information about texts unless Mr. Kincaid explicitly asked for it.

I believed Mr. Kincaid's expectation for me to suggest or provide supplementary texts and activity ideas for him to use over the course of the unit to be a fair trade-off for allowing me to utilize his classroom for my research. Because this was only his second year of teaching, the scope of his instructional repertoire was in its early stages, and I was happy to offer ideas when requested. I clarified multiple times that he should in no way feel obligated to use any of my suggestions; instead, I encouraged him to choose the texts, activities, assessments, and instructional tools with which he was most comfortable as we worked together to construct various means of addressing the goals we both had for his classes over the course of the unit.

### **Participant Self-Consciousness**

Multiple times over the course of my observations and interviews, Mr. Kincaid expressed a sense of self-consciousness in my observations of him in his role as a teacher. On one early instance, after sternly telling off-task students to get to work, Mr. Kincaid jokingly said to me, "That's where I laid it down," but he followed this joke up with a comment indicating that he was worried about coming off as "the meanest teacher" in my notes (Baseline Observation 1, 4 September). The following week, Mr. Kincaid expressed his discomfort with me watching him

lecture, seemingly because he believed I would view lecture as a substandard instructional method (Observation Notes, 10 September). On another occasion, after a student outburst in class, Mr. Kincaid leaned over my shoulder as I was taking daily field notes and asked, “Are you making me look bad?” (Observation Notes, 13 September). And on the first day back after school had been closed for inclement weather, Mr. Kincaid did his best to cover two days’ worth of material in each class period in order to make up for the missed day; after two periods of rushing through his lesson plans, he asked me, “Do you like me flying through content? My kids are gonna learn nothing. It’s so embarrassing. Don’t judge me” (Observation Notes, 18 September).

Each of these exchanges intimated to me that Mr. Kincaid was apprehensive about how he would be depicted in my notes, which likely altered his behavior to some degree during planning, instruction, and interactions with students. Although these types of comments became less common the longer I observed in his room, the abundance of them, especially towards the start of my observation period, indicated his self-consciousness with having me observe his instruction. I attempted to assuage his anxiety after each comment and assure him that my role in his classroom was one of observation and not judgment, but I found it understandable that he would want to appear competent while being observed by an instructor and mentor who had played a significant role in his own teacher education experience.

### **Opportunities for Mentoring**

Throughout my time in planning and observing, Mr. Kincaid repeatedly expressed to me a sense of gratitude for the assistance he felt I was offering him. He explained that he often has difficulty in planning lessons carefully; while he feels confident in his ability to formulate overarching instructional ideas and assessments, he feels less competent when it comes to

fleshing out those larger ideas and recording them in a systematic and methodical way to prepare for daily instruction. When we worked together to plan for the short story unit, he articulated his contentment in having opportunities to think through his ideas aloud with me while I took more careful notes, which he would then use to form more coherent and concrete lesson plans for daily use (Planning Meeting 3 Notes, 20 September). During actual classroom instruction, when Mr. Kincaid felt particularly good about his own teaching or interaction with his students, he sought eye contact with me and made a point to discuss with me how well things had gone between or after classes, usually initiating this discussion by asking, “What did you think?” (Observation Notes, 14 September; 19 September; 2 October; 3 October). Each of these interactions, like those noted above, communicated to me that Mr. Kincaid was likely quite self-conscious at having me watch him teach. However, these exchanges, combined with Mr. Kincaid’s reliance on me for resources and ideas and his gratefulness for the help he felt I was offering him in planning and implementing lessons also conveyed to me several unique and significant implications concerning the role that a dialogic mentor might play when paired with a novice dialogic practitioner who is hoping to hone his practice. These implications will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

### **Data Analysis**

As multiple sources of data were co-generated with Mr. Kincaid over the course of this research study, I recursively analyzed each new source in light of each existing source in order to generate overarching understandings from the data as a whole. A detailed explanation of the steps that comprised my analysis of data sources both individually and collectively is outlined below.

## Planning Session Memos

In order to analyze the events that occurred during my planning sessions with Mr. Kincaid, I needed to document both the events themselves as well as my impressions of those events while they were occurring or directly after they occurred. Stewart (2011) described this documentation process as a way for researchers to “enter into dialogue with themselves and their participants’ responses” after each point of contact between researcher and participant (p. 291).

My analysis proceeded as follows:

1. I took extensive notes throughout our conversations as Mr. Kincaid and I planned the lessons that would be implemented in the short story unit.
2. I expanded on these notes about each planning session directly after it took place in order to keep my impressions fresh in my mind, taking special consideration of the ways that Mr. Kincaid addressed or planned for a dialogic stance in his instruction.
3. I catalogued themes that I constructed based on my understanding of Mr. Kincaid’s speech or behavior throughout the course of the planning sessions, and I noted these initial themes for further consideration.
4. I considered and noted the ways that the planning session itself may have influenced how Mr. Kincaid responded to the planning session or the ideas generated therein (Stewart, 2011).
5. Through the lens offered by my theoretical framework, I created an ongoing coding table to keep track of repeated themes, beginning in the planning session stage of data generation and continuing until the final interview. In this way, I created a living document that grew and changed throughout the course of the study as my own understandings grew and changed.

## **Classroom Observation: Field Notes and Analytical Memos**

While in the classroom, it was important for me to document the events that occurred while Mr. Kincaid implemented the lessons that we co-planned. It was challenging to keep note of every event taking place in the classroom, but I utilized the classroom observation matrix (see Table 2) to more quickly and efficiently note when Mr. Kincaid and/or students used a dialogic approach to the texts and topics being addressed in class. This matrix was structured to allow for both acceptances and rejections of opportunities for increased dialogism. Additionally, I proceeded in the following manner to analyze the data generated by my classroom observations:

1. I wrote an analytical or “dialogic” memo (e.g., Stewart, 2011) after each classroom observation that encompassed my overall impressions of the class period, Mr. Kincaid’s instruction, and the students’ responses to that instruction. I noted ways that my own researcher biases and my presence and/or subjectivities might have influenced the class period as it unfolded and as I understood it to unfold.
2. I read back through my field notes directly after each classroom observation, taking note of initial impressions and developing themes.
3. I noted specific data that applied directly to dialogic pedagogy, and I made notes concerning my initial impressions of the ways that dialogic pedagogy was or was not being enacted during a class period.
4. I read through my field notes again in order to take note of any themes that did not pertain to dialogic pedagogy and/or were not included on the classroom observation matrix.
5. I added the themes I noted from classroom observations to the developing coding table, which was revised and augmented as I generated more data with Mr. Kincaid.

## **Interview Transcripts**

1. After each interview with my participant, I wrote an analytical memo that captured any noteworthy, unspoken elements of the interview.
2. I transcribed the audio recording of each in-person interview and created a transcript map that delineated the basic topics of conversation, noting the time at which these topics began and ended.
3. I took notes on the flow of conversation, including the ways that I might have directed our discussion either directly or indirectly, and I employed Transactional Analysis (Stewart, 2011) to attend to “the ways that the dialogue between the researcher and the participant influence[d] the meaning that [was] made during the interview situation” (p. 287).
4. By listening to the recording again and reading back through the transcript map, or by rereading Mr. Kincaid’s responses to written interview questions, I identified themes within the discussion and added these to my preliminary coding table.

## **Analysis Across Data Sources**

Data analysis can and should be an ongoing, recursive process that occurs through every stage of research. Maxwell (2005) explained that analysis of multiple data sources should begin “immediately after finishing the first interview or observation” and continue throughout the entirety of a project (p. 95). Because I had generated multiple data sources over the course of my study, it was important not only to analyze each source, but to compare and contrast my analysis across all sources of data in order to develop a more thorough and robust understanding of that data. Maxwell (2005) also explained that a careful, collective analysis of all data sources reduces the chance that a researcher’s conclusions “will reflect only the systematic biases or limitations

of a specific source or method” while simultaneously offering a “more secure understanding” of the concepts being researched, leading to a higher degree of validity in conclusions (pp. 93, 94).

During the course of this research project, I had the opportunity to allow my various data sources to inform each other as I proceeded. For example, while field notes from classroom observations provided a rich source of data, I also utilized the events as they unfolded in those classroom observations to help determine how they might add to or alter the questions I used in a subsequent interview with Mr. Kincaid. Likewise, I used every opportunity to write analytical memos and field notes during and after planning meetings, observations, and interviews in order to preserve not only the words that were spoken and the actions that were performed, but my impressions of the significance of those words and actions and how all of these factors would help to complete my data picture. These notes, too, helped to provide me with a clearer navigational path as I utilized them to inform and augment interview protocols for use in subsequent interviews with Mr. Kincaid.

### **Coding**

As I proceeded through each of the phases of my research, I generated an ongoing coding dictionary that was altered as new sources of data were added and analyzed in light of each existing data source as well as the major concepts present in the theoretical framework I constructed for this study. I analyzed each piece of data by working mindfully among these theories through the collective lens I had created. I read through all data sources multiple times to begin the initial process of holistic coding (Saldaña, 2009). Through this first overarching round of coding, I generated codes across multiple data sources. I arranged these initial codes into a table and constructed a working definition for each code.



In order to accurately refine these initial codes, I read back through all data sources several more times with the goal of understanding the finer nuances of each bulky holistic code. This process helped me to understand how these original codes could evolve into more accurate reflections of data and further construct and clarify major themes being generated between and among data sources. I reread my data sources, further refined themes, codes, and definitions, and altered my coding dictionary at each juncture of refinement in a cyclical manner until the codes and definitions in my final coding dictionary accurately reflected my understanding of the data from my analysis of all data sources. Through these multiple iterations of refinement, I employed a dialogic lens and practice in my own analysis, examining the mutual shaping that was occurring between and among data sources and myself (Stewart, 2011) in order to refine my initial codes and develop new understandings in direct response to my research question. These codes were developed in an attempt to index dialogic practice in alignment with Stewart (2019), who defines dialogic pedagogy as “an approach to teaching that values questioning, examines context, explores multiple perspectives, challenges hierarchical structures, and views learning as a generative act” (p. 213). My final coding dictionary is illustrated in Table 4.

*Table 4.* Final coding dictionary

Theme	Definition	Code	Definition
Tenets in Practice	Approaches regularly assumed by participant to put dialogic tenets into classroom practice	Relationship Building and Power Shifting	Efforts to forge positive, empowering relationships with students to flatten the traditional student-teacher hierarchy
		Students as Experts	Creation and use of opportunities for students to take up positions as experts over their own knowledge, experience, learning, and demonstrations thereof
		Classroom-to-World Connections	Creation and use of opportunities for students to make meaningful personal connections between class materials and their lives

Dialogic Success	Indications of dialogic practice working to support and enrich the collective classroom experience	Pride	Demonstrations of student pride and ownership over learning and classwork
		Engagement	Evidence of student engagement and participation in classroom endeavors
		Students as Teachers	Opportunities given to and taken by students to use personal knowledge and experience to teach or engage with peers as knowers
		Personal Meaning	Opportunities given to and taken by students to make individual or personal meaning from classroom endeavors
Developmental Dialogism	Indications that dialogic classroom practice or attempts at practice resulted in challenging classroom experiences	Discussion	Conflation of dialogic pedagogy and classroom discussion
		Social Justice Focus	Focus on social justice issues without opportunity for students to engage in dialogue
		Authority	Reluctance to assume classroom authority rooted in attempts to remain dialogic
		Integration	Lack of integration between literary content and real-world application

### **Limitations**

The data generated and analyzed through my research on this project was robust and offers a deep understanding of how a dialogical approach to pedagogy might influence a novice teacher's experience in exploring sensitive subjects with students, but, as is the case with any study, it inherently contains limitations. This study, like all research, was limited in its scope and in its generated understandings by several factors. In the following section, I will pinpoint and illustrate each of these factors, clarify any mitigating action I was able to take to lessen the effects of any of those factors on the understandings generated by the study, and offer suggestions about ways that these factors might be eliminated from similar future research.

## **Scope of Research Design**

As with any case study, the recruitment of and collaboration with a single participant adds an inherent limitation to the new understandings generated throughout this study (e.g., Yin, 1989). Although Mr. Kincaid was an ideal candidate for participation in this research project because of his foundational preparation for dialogic pedagogy through his teacher education program and his clear commitment to addressing and exploring topics of difference through his classroom instruction, the new understandings generated through this study cannot be widely generalized to include a larger population of novice teachers.

The duration of this study also offered a limitation to its generated understandings, as the time I spent in observation of Mr. Kincaid's classes only encompassed a single unit over the course of a single school year. Likewise, during the course of that single unit, I narrowed the scope of my research to focus solely on the practice of the teacher in the classroom and the observable student responses to that teacher's practice rather than also designing additional research activities that would serve to generate further data derived from student classwork, assessments, or interviews, which might have more thoroughly and more specifically guided my interpretations of students' responses to Mr. Kincaid's instruction.

Although a longer or broader study would likely have widened, modified, or augmented the scope of my understandings, I attempted to mitigate the limitation posed by the duration of my research by observing multiple classes over the course of the six-week time period that comprised the observation phase of this project. In this way, I was able to generate data that encompassed three separate sections of the same course over the time I spent in Mr. Kincaid's classroom, resulting in a more robust collection of data artifacts than the observation of a single class would have offered. Broadening the scope of this study in future iterations to include

multiple novice teachers from a variety of teacher preparation program models, multiple grade levels, or multiple school settings and generating data directly with or from students could offer a wider focus that could serve either to substantiate or to alter the understandings that were generated in this initial research. However, it should be noted that this study, though small in scale, did result in the rich description of a single case that will allow for conceptual inferences (Stewart, 2011) that reach beyond the bounds of the study itself (Creswell, 2007).

### **The Novice Factor**

Because this study focused directly on the practice of a relatively new teacher, other impediments to instruction were present in Mr. Kincaid's classroom that were not directly related to the topic being researched. As would likely be the case with most novice teachers, Mr. Kincaid's classroom management skills were in their beginning stages, his familiarity with texts was tenuous, and his skill set for planning effective and engaging lessons was less fully-formed than would be expected from a more experienced teacher. Any combination of these factors likely influenced the degree of perceived success for each lesson, although none of these factors was directly related to the constructs being studied.

My presence as an additional adult in the classroom and my help in co-planning these lessons may have served to mitigate these confounding factors to some degree in this particular setting, but I recognize that other novice teachers who are beginning to plan for similar engagement with students may not have the assistance of a veteran teacher to guide their planning and instruction. However, because this study was specifically designed to focus on a novice teacher and how he experienced the planning and implementation processes of dialogically engaging students with texts on sensitive topics, attention to these factors as they existed in Mr. Kincaid's classroom practice guided me towards a more thorough understanding

of his overall experience and the potential implications thereof. These implications will be addressed in detail in chapter five.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explained the methodological approach that I implemented as I embarked on this research project, the specific methods that I employed throughout the course of my research, and the ways that both my chosen methodology and my chosen methods aligned with the theoretical framework I constructed for use throughout this study. In a similar fashion, I outlined and discussed the sources of data that were generated throughout each stage of my research and the analytical processes through which I examined those data sources. I described Mr. Kincaid, the participant with whom I collaborated on this project, and I addressed my own subjectivity and positionality as a researcher in the context of his classroom, including how my identity and viewpoint may have factored into the understandings that I generated in my efforts to learn more about how Mr. Kincaid's enactment of a dialogic pedagogical stance affected his classroom practice as a novice English teacher. Finally, I addressed several limitations inherent in my research of Mr. Kincaid's classroom practice that should be taken into consideration.

Heath and Street (2008) explained that "classrooms, like all sanctioned sites of formal education, receive their identities, spaces, times, and instructional goals primarily from power sources beyond local participants" (p. 17), and the research project that I have described in this chapter was conducted with this fact in mind. Teachers are only one segment of a classroom that an observer might witness, and regulations and mandates from "above" no doubt dictate how students and teachers talk and create shared meanings in the classroom. Curricular demands, availability of materials, and pacing and structure guidelines all coalesce to create the

environment in which students will or will not participate and in which teachers can or cannot make autonomous choices.

However, I designed this particular study because I wanted to learn more about the ways that, even in this type of environment, a teacher who was invested in dialogic pedagogy could utilize dialogical classroom practices for teaching literature that would help students to personally engage with issues of cultural difference. Thus, the everyday impediments to this process offered by the reality and immediacy of a novice teacher's classroom might actually serve to create a more holistic picture of the experience of a novice dialogic practitioner. The understandings generated by my analyses of the pieces making up that holistic picture will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

This study examined what happened when a novice teacher worked from a dialogic stance as he explored topics of difference with students in his secondary English classroom. As noted in previous chapters, the theoretical framework that I constructed for use in this study combined the overarching lenses of dialogism and critical, dialogic pedagogical theory (Bakhtin, 1981; Fecho, 2004; Fecho, 2011a; Stewart, 2011; Stewart, 2019) with the refining lens of the transactional theory of reading (Rosenblatt, 1995). Principles derived from each of these theories guided my analysis of the participant's practice and informed the understandings I developed through my data analysis methods, which I described in chapter three. Through my analysis of the data, I generated the following overarching understandings: (a) Mr. Kincaid's successful enactment of dialogic classroom practice supported his instructional efforts by heightening students' overall response to instruction and assessment, suggesting that dialogic pedagogy can result in positive and productive learning experiences for both teachers and students, even during explorations of potentially uncomfortable, sensitive, or complex topics; and (b) Some of Mr. Kincaid's attempts to teach dialogically actually worked to complicate his classroom practice rather than support it; however, data suggested that it was Mr. Kincaid's developmental grasp of dialogic theory in practice, and not the dialogic approaches themselves, that hindered his instruction.

### **Overview of Chapter**

To begin this chapter, I must first establish that the participant was indeed teaching from a dialogic stance. In order to do this, I will discuss the specific tenets of dialogic pedagogy to which he adhered throughout his regular classroom practice. I will then describe several means

through which the participant demonstrated his commitment to these dialogic pedagogical tenets through concrete instructional approaches and assignments. Next, I will illustrate the ways that the participant's efforts to teach from a dialogic stance supported his planning and instruction. In particular, I describe ways in which dialogic approaches facilitated his efforts to enrich his students' classroom experiences and enhanced their responses to those experiences. Finally, I will describe the difficulties that the participant experienced in his enactment of dialogic pedagogy, which presented challenges that, at times, caused him to struggle. This description will address the ways that the participant's grasp of dialogic theory and pedagogy appeared to be in their early stages of development, how this emerging understanding of theory in practice was demonstrated in the participant's planning and instruction, and how this developmental level of mastery affected his overall classroom experience, including the unexpected ways that my presence in his classroom may have served him as a novice practitioner. These illustrations of early-career efforts in dialogic pedagogy will be examined through the theoretical framework constructed for use in this study, and those examinations will highlight the ways that the participant's aspirations of fully implementing dialogic practice might point to the potential for his continued development as a dialogic practitioner.

### **Putting Dialogic Theory into Practice**

Mr. Kincaid, as described in the previous chapter, met all of the participant requirements set forth in the design of this study: He was a graduate of an English Education program rooted in dialogic pedagogy, which ensured that he had been trained in dialogic theory and practice; he was in his first few years of teaching in a secondary English Language Arts classroom; he approached pedagogy with an eye towards social justice; and he was open to allowing me to be present in his classroom and willing to work with me as a collaborator on this research project.



However, before I am able to discuss the effects that implementation of dialogic theory and practice had on Mr. Kincaid's classroom experience, I must first establish that he was indeed working from a dialogical stance, validating my purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) of Mr. Kincaid as a participant for this project. As Nystrand (1997) suggested, a cursory overview of a teacher's classroom design and instructional style cannot readily establish dialogic intent or practice; rather, such a determination requires an evaluation of "the extent to which students are assigned challenging and serious epistemic roles requiring them to think, interpret, and generate new understandings" (p. 8). In the following section, I draw upon data generated through classroom observations, field notes, interviews, and analytic memos to illustrate the particular tenets of dialogic pedagogy to which Mr. Kincaid adhered throughout his planning and implementation of lessons. I will then exemplify a variety of concrete instructional practices and procedures that Mr. Kincaid utilized in his classroom in specific alignment of one or more of those tenets.

### **Consistently Demonstrated Adherence to Tenets of Dialogic Pedagogy**

As noted in chapter one, Stewart (2017) described dialogic pedagogy as "a teaching stance that embraces tension, values questioning, considers multiple perspectives, challenges hierarchical structures, and attends to the mutual shaping that occurs in classrooms when learning is viewed as a process of becoming" (p. 6). Throughout my weeks of observation in Mr. Kincaid's classroom, I noted multiple ways that he demonstrated an internalized commitment to dialogic practice with his students in their explorations of difference through the texts that he chose to teach and the means through which he chose to teach them. I recorded each demonstrated example of dialogic enactment on my classroom observation matrix and in my field notes and analytic memos. In my data analysis, these individual demonstrations were coded

under the overarching theme of “Tenets in Practice,” and my holistic analysis of these demonstrations generated three codes regarding the particular tenets that Mr. Kincaid enacted regularly in practice: (a) Relationship Building and Power Shifting, (b) Students as Experts, and (c) Classroom-to-World Connections. These enactments included Mr. Kincaid’s efforts to flatten the traditional classroom hierarchy between himself and his students, his dedication to offering students choice over class activities and assessments, his repeated acknowledgement of students as experts who could teach and learn from each other, and his endeavors to bring classroom activities into conversation with students’ lives.

**Student-teacher relationships and the power shift.** One of Mr. Kincaid’s most closely-held and often-vocalized beliefs about working with students was that it is his role and responsibility as a teacher to cultivate relationships with students through dialogic practice in an effort to flatten the traditional student-teacher classroom hierarchy (Fecho, 2011a; Stewart, 2019). Freire (1970) referred to this shift in power as “break[ing] with the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education” in an effort to resolve “the student-teacher contradiction” (pp. 80, 79). Coded in my analysis as “Relationship Building and Power Shifting,” such instantiations of dialogic theory in practice encompassed Mr. Kincaid’s ongoing efforts to forge positive, empowering relationships with his students that would offer them a degree of ownership over their shared classroom and the learning that took place therein.

Both Mr. Kincaid’s verbal explanations of his commitment to empowering students as well as his active, concentrated endeavors to build and maintain relationships with them functioned as a central means of guiding them towards greater connections with themselves, with each other, and with the materials and ideas they explored in his class. In an interview, Mr. Kincaid explained the philosophy behind his efforts to forge these relationships:

I have to see the students as equal humans. Like, I can't go into those conversations and, first of all, put *my* thoughts on *them*. Second of all, I can't go into those conversations where they just kind of talk and they don't feel heard, because then they're not gonna participate later on. And what that does, is it creates a really interesting relationship with the students I have. Um, because they feel like they can come to me, and they can talk about these things, and I will hear them out. (Interview 2, 71-78)

Mr. Kincaid further articulated his comfort level with giving students more authority over their own voices by explaining that he is “pretty comfortable in a facilitator role” and that “it’s hard to give up that much power for some teachers, but why are we not listening to the students more often?” (Interview 3, 7 October). As these data points suggest, Mr. Kincaid placed value on his students’ voices and ideas, and he invited them into classroom conversations with him as equal contributors. Further, the emphasis Mr. Kincaid placed on actively listening to his students as a means of encouraging engagement in class and fostering individual relationships communicated his desire to develop a shared learning space in his classroom where everyone felt welcome to participate.

Throughout my observation period in Mr. Kincaid’s classroom, I recorded the methods he regularly employed in his facilitation of classroom discussions. Data points throughout my field notes and analytic memos index the ways that he enacted dialogic practice by making a point to actively support students’ contributions in class, often asking questions and making statements throughout his instructional time that encouraged students to think further into their own and their classmates’ ideas (e.g., Daily Observations, 10 September). Regarding his methods for facilitating discussion, Mr. Kincaid explained,

I take notes during the discussions, I respond to the students, but I do act as a facilitator during it. Um, and I tell my students up front: “The only time I’m gonna step in is if you’re talking over someone or you’re trying to present a fact and your fact isn’t correct.” But the students take off with those types of things, just because they finally are like, “Yeah, let me talk about it.” (Baseline Interview, 24 August, 114-119)

In addition to privileging student voice through his facilitation of classroom discussions, Mr. Kincaid was also very proud of his classroom Twitter account, through which he posted ideas and questions from his students for other English educators around the world to respond to. He explained that this practice helps students “feel like their voices are held to a higher platform than just the four walls of my classroom” (Baseline Interview, 24 August, 89-90). By stepping down from the traditional teacher position and leveling himself with his students, and by amplifying students’ voices both within and outside his classroom, Mr. Kincaid established a safe and open environment for students to engage in new or risky explorations of ideas. Through these consistent practices, Mr. Kincaid demonstrated successful enactment of dialogic theory by flattening the traditional student-teacher hierarchy, constructing a foundation of shared classroom power.

**Students as experts.** Mr. Kincaid also demonstrated the enactment of dialogic pedagogy through his repeated acknowledgment of students as experts over their own life experiences, knowledge, and needs. Mr. Kincaid’s belief in student expertise aligned with Fecho’s (2011a) explanation that “students have lives and experiences of worth and...they can transfer that expertise to explorations and discussions” (p. 13). Instances of this practice were coded “Students as Experts” throughout my data analysis and included both Mr. Kincaid’s verbal

explanations of this approach in interviews and during planning sessions as well as my observations of his in-class employment of it.

In our first interview, Mr. Kincaid explained his belief that young people “don’t feel like their voices are being heard by adults or respected by adults” (Baseline Interview, 24 August, 98-99); in a later interview, Mr. Kincaid noted his opinion that “Age shouldn’t always be connected to wisdom” (Written Interview 3, 7 October). Mr. Kincaid’s apparent frustration with the existing hierarchies that privilege adult knowledge and experience over that of children—and teacher wisdom as the unquestioned authority in the classroom—fueled his development of opportunities for students to assume a measure of expertise over their personal and educational experiences and to utilize that expertise to co-construct new knowledge with peers.

In his efforts to enact the dialogic practice of acknowledging his students as experts, Mr. Kincaid regularly encouraged students to make choices for themselves both individually and collectively in his classroom. He often offered students a variety of options in their work on classroom assignments and assessments, giving them autonomy over their learning and their demonstrations of that learning. Further, Mr. Kincaid gave students the option to choose their own seats during class time and to form groups for collaborative endeavors that they believed would work best for them. He also explained that the students had been responsible for creating the classroom rules to which they were held accountable, and he reminded them of this fact on occasions when those student-generated rules were being violated (e.g., Daily Observations, 20 September). Through these actions, Mr. Kincaid enacted dialogic practice by communicating to his students that the knowledge and expertise they had garnered throughout their lives were valuable tools that could and should help shape and direct their own and their peers’ classroom learning experiences.

**Classroom-to-world connections.** Rosenblatt (2005) noted that students, even students as young as those in Mr. Kincaid’s classes, are “already part of the larger world” (p. 3). Mr. Kincaid’s consistent focus in his planning and instruction of bringing the outside world in which his students lived into the classroom aligned directly with this idea, and instances of this practice were coded as “Classroom-to-World Connections.” He noted in our first planning session that the overarching theme in his seventh-grade classes this year was “What I Believe: Opinions, Experiences, and Ideas,” which functioned as a touchstone for all textual explorations he undertook with students (Planning Meeting 1 Notes, 30 August). Data suggested that Mr. Kincaid’s automatic reflex when planning any new lesson was to choose overarching “real-world” topics to explore with students and then to choose classroom texts that would address both those topics as well as major literary concepts that he was required to cover.

During our planning sessions, Mr. Kincaid and I developed a relatively routine schedule for him to employ throughout each week of the short story unit that included one overarching, real-world “big idea,” one major literary concept, two short stories that addressed both that big idea and that literary concept, and several corresponding activities and assessments. Throughout our work together, Mr. Kincaid grew increasingly eager to incorporate more texts and activities into the unit in the hopes of engaging the students with more varied voices and in more varied ways. On multiple occasions, he pulled in news articles concerning the themes that were being addressed in class in order for students to build connections between the classroom texts, the overarching concepts, and the real world (e.g., Observation Notes, 13 September; Observation Notes, 2 October). Although Mr. Kincaid did demonstrate a degree of difficulty in integrating classroom explorations of texts with classroom explorations of real-world topics in simultaneous ways (which will be discussed later in this chapter), his automatic impulse to pair classroom

endeavors with the world outside of school demonstrated his dedication to dialogic practice through his consistent development of opportunities for students to make meaning for themselves that extended beyond a textbook.

### **Concrete Demonstrations of Dialogic Instructional Practices**

As noted above, Mr. Kincaid's approach to planning and instruction demonstrated his overarching ability to teach from a dialogic stance by creating a classroom environment that fostered student empowerment and autonomy. These objectives were evident in a variety of classroom activities, including journaling, independent reading, classroom discussion, and assessment. The following descriptions illustrate the multiple means through which I noted Mr. Kincaid endeavoring to enact dialogic practice in concrete ways over the course of my observation period in his classroom.

**Journaling.** Mr. Kincaid gave students multiple options throughout the short story unit to choose their own writing endeavors. Journals were used in multiple ways; Mr. Kincaid sometimes offered multiple journal prompts for students to choose from or allowed them to free write on topics of their own choice. At other times, journals were utilized as opportunities to personally respond to larger topics at the start of class before engaging with materials or peers. Mr. Kincaid discussed this intentional use of journaling time, explaining his purpose of giving the students a chance to think and write about the big ideas that would be addressed later in class in order to give the students a chance to consider and voice their own ideas on these topics individually and privately before engaging with their classmates or with him (e.g., Daily Observations, 2 October). This individual writing time offered students space to think, implicitly communicating the value of those thoughts and the significance of individual preparation for

participation, as well as occasions to make choices about how and when to share their ideas and experiences ahead of addressing sensitive topics as a whole class (Planning Session 2 Notes).

**Independent reading.** Students were regularly given independent reading time at the start of class several days per week, and they were usually allowed to read anything they chose. Most of the students chose novels from Mr. Kincaid's classroom library or from the school library, which they were allowed to access whenever they needed a new book. Once they had finished one novel, they were given the freedom to choose another novel, non-fiction articles on the educational news website Newsela, materials on the *New York Times* website, a graphic novel, or any other reading material that they thought they might enjoy. I witnessed multiple instances of Mr. Kincaid making book recommendations to individual students (e.g., Daily Observations, 13 September; Observation Notes, 14 September), demonstrating his knowledge of their interests and reading abilities, which Rosenblatt (2005) noted as a vital trait for English teachers to cultivate.

Mr. Kincaid also explained to me that the students took exams based on their independent reading books. When I asked how he would be expected to know all the books well enough to write individual exams for each of them, he explained that he utilized these assessments not to test students' reading comprehension of their independent novels or as reading checks to make sure they were reading, but as a means to assess their understanding of standards-based literary concepts like plot structure and characterization that he had been teaching in class (Baseline Observation 1 Notes, 4 September; Observation Notes, 10 September). The students responded on the assessments with examples from the books they had chosen to read, and Mr. Kincaid was able to use these responses to gauge how well they understood his whole-class lessons on literary concepts. This practice functioned as a seamless method of combining standardized learning



with a dialogic approach, as it tied together standards-based lessons and student choice and invited students to make meaning for themselves and demonstrate new knowledge based on materials and topics that they were interested in (Baseline Observation 1 Notes, 4 September).

**Formal discussion.** At several points over the course of the short story unit, Mr. Kincaid planned a full-class discussion that incorporated the texts and topics he and the students had explored into an extended conversation that functioned to tie those texts and topics to the students' own life experiences. Mr. Kincaid reminded students of the rules before the commencement of each discussion: Only one person should be speaking at any one time; students should push themselves to contribute to the discussion, but they should also remain mindful of others' need to contribute in order to keep themselves from dominating the conversation (which he referred to as "Step up/Step back"); Mr. Kincaid would facilitate the discussion, but he would not assert his own opinions during it; and students should refrain from outside conversations and minimize potential distractions in order to more carefully listen and respond to one another (e.g., Observation Notes, 17 October). By implementing these discussions, setting these ground rules, and serving as facilitator, Mr. Kincaid employed several dialogic practices, including creating opportunities for students to make connections between their lives in his classroom and their lives in the world at large, acknowledging students as experts who could teach and learn from each other, and flattening the student-teacher hierarchy by privileging student voice.

**Final project.** Towards the end of the short story unit, Mr. Kincaid spent some class time introducing students to their options for completing the final project for the unit, which included addressing the ways that students had experienced a societal suppression of one or more of their identities—a nod to the concept of intersectionality (e.g., Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In order to

present his guidelines clearly to the students, Mr. Kincaid uploaded a description and instruction sheet for them to read as he explained the project aloud. He also gave examples of past student work from a related assessment he had implemented the previous year and explained the wide variety of possibilities for each assignment option included on the project description sheet. A number of students asked about options that were not explicitly listed; others asked about how to go about completing options that were listed in ways that might incorporate their own personal interests and experiences. The freedom that Mr. Kincaid gave students to design their own demonstrations of their thinking, learning, and understanding served as another concrete instance of his employment of dialogic practice by providing students with a sense of autonomy and choice (Observation Notes, 1 October).

**Conferences.** After assigning the final project to the students, Mr. Kincaid continued to foster his individual relationships with students and to reinforce their ability to make choices in their own learning by conferencing with them one by one about their project ideas. Throughout the class periods during which he held conferences with students, I heard him repeatedly asking further questions of students' ideas and making suggestions about how they might go about incorporating related concepts from class as they talked through what they were hoping and planning to do for this assessment (Daily Observations, 4 October; 8 October; 10 October). By offering students the freedom to determine how they wanted to share their knowledge and understanding through this final project, and by spending individual time with each student throughout the planning and implementation process, Mr. Kincaid acknowledged his students as experts over their own learning and life experiences, putting his dialogic beliefs about the power of student choice into practical application.

Analysis across data sources, including participant interviews, field notes, and analytical memos, generated evidence that through his words and actions, Mr. Kincaid was indeed working from a dialogic stance in his classroom. The efforts he made to flatten the traditional student-teacher hierarchy, amplify and empower student voices, actively listen and facilitate during discussion, acknowledge students as experts, offer students a degree of autonomy, and create opportunities for students to connect class texts and activities to their lives demonstrated his ability to enact tenets of dialogic pedagogy throughout his instruction. Mr. Kincaid's incorporation of these tenets of dialogic pedagogy into his classroom practices and assignments further verified that he was indeed operating from a dialogic stance in his lesson planning and implementation.

### **Overview of New Understandings: The Evolution of a Dialogic Educator**

As outlined above, Mr. Kincaid was driven by his philosophical dedication to dialogism throughout his approaches to students and to instruction. As a novice practitioner of dialogic pedagogy, Mr. Kincaid demonstrated varying degrees of success in his enactment of dialogic practice in his classroom. On one hand, multiple sources of data indicated that the proficiency he demonstrated in certain aspects of his understanding and implementation of dialogic theory worked to support him in his practice, bolstering his efforts to cultivate a classroom atmosphere that welcomed, empowered, and engaged students while simultaneously offering them opportunities to construct knowledge and make personal meaning through course materials and activities. Conversely, the data also indexed ways that, in these early stages of learning to enact a dialogic pedagogical stance in the classroom, Mr. Kincaid's classroom practice was unsupported, or even complicated, by his developmental understandings and efforts to enact a dialogical stance.

Mr. Kincaid's demonstrated strengths and difficulties in his endeavors to teach dialogically, coded respectively in my data analysis as "Dialogic Success" and "Developmental Dialogism," seemed to suggest that the process of becoming a dialogic educator is an evolutionary one: While some understandings and implementations of those understandings might be readily and successfully employed by an early-career dialogic practitioner, others may take more time and experience to fully develop, resulting in both success and struggle in a novice's overall classroom experience.

Recursive analysis of these coded data points generated two overarching understandings in response to my research question: (a) Mr. Kincaid's successful enactment of dialogic classroom practice supported his instructional efforts by heightening students' overall response to instruction and assessment, suggesting that dialogic pedagogy can result in positive and productive learning experiences for both teachers and students, even during explorations of potentially uncomfortable, sensitive, or complex topics; and (b) Some of Mr. Kincaid's attempts to teach dialogically actually worked to complicate his classroom practice rather than support it; however, data suggested that it was Mr. Kincaid's developmental grasp of dialogic theory in practice, and not the dialogic approaches themselves, that hindered his instruction.

In the following section, I will draw upon data analyzed through my theoretical lens to posit and support each of these new understandings, illustrating the ways that Mr. Kincaid's practice indicated his evolving development as a dialogic practitioner and the varied effects that these factors had on his instruction and classroom experience. The potential significance of these understandings will be discussed in chapter five.

## **Dialogic Pedagogy Supporting Classroom Practice**

The data generated in this study of Mr. Kincaid's practice illustrated the ways that his efforts to give students opportunities to work outside the confines of the standard classroom setup resulted in significant shifts in student demeanor and behavior in direct correspondence to these opportunities. In short, students came alive when presented with chances to consider big ideas from new angles, teach and learn from their peers, and draw their own connections between the texts they were studying and their personal life experiences. Data indexing positive student responses to Mr. Kincaid's dialogic efforts, coded as "Dialogic Success" across my data sources, offered indications that dialogic practice was working to enrich both Mr. Kincaid's and his students' collective classroom experience. Analysis of these coded data points across multiple sources of data led to my first overarching understanding: Mr. Kincaid's successful enactment of dialogic classroom practice supported his instructional efforts by heightening students' overall response to instruction and assessment, suggesting that dialogic pedagogy can result in positive and productive learning experiences for both teachers and students, even during explorations of potentially uncomfortable, sensitive, or complex topics.

Mr. Kincaid's enactment of a dialogic stance in his instruction supported his efforts to guide students toward meaningful learning and successful demonstration of that learning. Positive student response to those efforts included an increased sense of pride and ownership over their learning and their work in class; enthusiastic engagement and participation in class activities; mature and earnest acceptance of their roles as knowers and teachers; and thoughtful approaches to opportunities for personal meaning-making. In the following section, I will draw upon data to illustrate the ways that Mr. Kincaid's dialogic practice enhanced learning opportunities for students and the positive ways that students responded to those opportunities.

## **Pride and Ownership**

When given opportunities to make decisions about the direction of their own learning and view themselves as experts over their own experiences and understandings, one noteworthy shift in student demeanor and behavior was that of students taking immense pride in their own individual work. Coded in my data analysis as “Pride,” this shift was most noticeable during a gallery walk that was held towards the end of the short story unit, where students displayed the individual projects that they had chosen to create in order to demonstrate to their classmates their own personal learning as tied to the bigger concepts being addressed in class (Daily Observations, 16 October). Some students created board games to demonstrate their understanding of larger concepts like “stereotype” and “representation.” While the rest of the class rotated around the room to view their classmates’ projects, these students stayed at their tables so they could proudly instruct their classmates as to how to play their board games. Other students actively participating in the gallery walk continuously checked in with the peers examining their work in order to make sure the ideas they were trying to convey were clear. Some of the students who were most visibly proud of their projects were those who regularly completed high-quality work in class, but others were students who rarely appeared engaged in class and usually turned in subpar work. From all students, however, regardless of their typical investment in classwork, the amount of pride and ownership that came along with instructing their classmates was astounding. This overall shift in demeanor was palpable as they showed off their completed projects to their peers. Observation notes from the day of the gallery walk illustrate the “Pride” code in action:

A lot of the students, however, took pride and ownership of their own work. Even students in period 3 whose projects were not exceptional wanted to make sure

their classmates were understanding what they were going for. One student who goofs off every single day kept returning to his table to make sure his classmates were playing his board game properly. He seemed so proud after explaining how to play: “If you need any help, just ask me.” The project itself was not necessarily high-quality work (according to Mr. Kincaid’s grading rubric), but this was the first time I had seen this particular student take any pride in his work in this class. It was like he became a completely different student for the day. (Observation Notes, 16 October)

The instructional choice to create opportunities for students to take up positions as experts capable of sharing with and teaching their peers through their own self-designed demonstrations of understanding seemed to work magic in Mr. Kincaid’s classroom, supporting his instructional efforts. As students were given the opportunity to teach their peers and to make meaning from and with each other, they proudly owned their expertise.

### **Enthusiastic Engagement as Knowers and Teachers**

Another noteworthy way that Mr. Kincaid’s dialogic practice supported his pedagogical goals was in the increased enthusiasm and engagement demonstrated by the students when they were invited to acknowledge themselves as knowers and teachers and were offered opportunities to co-construct new understandings with and from their classmates based on their own existing experiences, knowledge, opinions, and ideas. Coded in my analysis as “Students as Teachers” and “Engagement” respectively, data indexed students’ enthusiastic assumption of the role of knower/teacher and the dramatically increased participation and active engagement that resulted from each of these dialogic classroom opportunities. Several illustrative examples taken directly

from the data are outlined below in order to demonstrate this positive shift in student attitudes and behaviors.

**Students as knowers and teachers in enthusiastic explorations of gender.** Towards the end of September, Mr. Kincaid began more deeply exploring the concepts of gender, gender roles, and gender stereotypes with his classes. To begin one particular class period, students viewed two short videos (an Always #LikeaGirl commercial and a video entitled “Are Boys Affected by Gendered Language?”). Following the videos, these corresponding questions were posed as journal prompts: “Do adults (your parents, teachers...) have different standards for boys vs. girls? Who do you think has it harder? What are some reasons why you believe your opinion? How could you explain it to someone else?” (Daily Observations, 2 October). The students were asked not to talk, but to write. Positioned as experiential experts by these questions, many of them seem almost desperate to discuss their opinions and experiences aloud. However, instead of allowing immediate verbal response, Mr. Kincaid set a timer for ten minutes and played quiet music over the classroom speakers. The students were reminded to write silently, and they did so with marked intensity. Mr. Kincaid then told the students to keep their journals with them instead of packing them away in the closet as usual so they could continue to write in response to the materials they would be reading and thinking about during the remainder of class time, describing their journals as “a safe place to keep [their] thoughts” (Daily Observations, 2 October). He explained that they would be reading several nonfiction articles during the class period that revolved around issues of gender and that they would also be participating in a gallery walk, during which they would be reading some gender-based statistics and facts about women and men in the United States that were posted around the walls of the classroom. Mr. Kincaid seemed intent on students processing the information they were taking in



on an individual basis, and he set up a means for students to continuously respond to what they were learning by directing them to keep their journals in tow as they moved around the room (Daily Observations, 2 October; Observation Notes, 2 October).

In all three classes, the students wrote intently, waiting with great anticipation for the chance to discuss their thoughts and experiences aloud. Mr. Kincaid carefully monitored student behavior throughout the class period so students had space to think, write, and (eventually) talk, and he made a point to completely restrict Chromebook use in order to minimize distractions. During this class period, the students seemed highly invested in the topics and activities supplied for them, and they were given planned space and time to cultivate that investment. Mr. Kincaid's instruction of keeping journals at the ready in order to respond to each new text in writing—"If you need to talk, you need to write it"—made this lesson quietly dialogic, as everyone was allowed, expected, and reminded to continuously reflect on what they were seeing, learning, and thinking about without disrupting anyone else's thought process (Daily Observations, 2 October). As Fecho and Clifton (2017) noted, all human beings "engage the many rich texts of their lives...[by] involving the self in multiple internal and external dialogues, all of which contribute to their being and doing and becoming" (p. 115). While the concept of "dialogue" is often understood as a conversation between two or more individuals, the students silently reading and journaling their way through the gallery walk in Mr. Kincaid's classroom engaged in the sometimes-invisible practice of internal dialogue, wherein they transacted with new information and ideas in light of their own personal life experiences, beliefs, and existing ideas in order to generate new understandings before ever engaging with those of their classmates or their teacher.

Once the students all completed their two nonfiction articles and the gallery walk of statistics and facts, Mr. Kincaid explained that they would be discussing what they read in a very

structured manner, with only one person speaking at a time. Then he welcomed the students to share their ideas, questions, and experiences with each other while he listened as an equal participant. The students spoke to Mr. Kincaid and to their peers with enthusiasm and maturity, building on each other's comments and asking each other clarifying questions. During this discussion period, students were able to share their opinions and ideas with complete freedom; in fact, one female student started things off by claiming that she was not interested in discussing the topic of gender because "it's getting annoying" hearing and talking about "these things all the time" (Daily Observations, 2 October). However, this student then proceeded to remain fully participatory throughout the entirety of the discussion, sharing her ideas and responding to those of her peers, with Mr. Kincaid simply acknowledging and accepting her initial opinion, even in its dissent (e.g., Trainor, 2002), as a contribution to the class discussion.

The majority of students eagerly shared their thoughts and questions about the texts they had just read and written about. Some offered examples of their own gendered experiences. One male student talked about an experience he had on the school bus several years prior, when both he and a female classmate fell out of their seats as the driver took a sharp turn. He explained that while both he and the female student had cried in response, she had gotten much more sympathy than he had, and he was left with the tacit message that boys are not supposed to cry. Another student brought up the concept of gendered pronouns and told a story about being mistaken for a boy as a young child as a result of having a very short haircut. In this way, students continued sharing ideas, illustrating those ideas with experiential examples, and asking questions enthusiastically until the end of the class period. In the last few minutes of the period, Mr. Kincaid told the class that they would be continuing the conversation the following day, which was met with delight from the students, all of whom appeared to have a lot more to say (Daily

Observations, 2 October). This enthusiastic response to the prospect of another day of similar discussion illustrated the heightened engagement of students during class periods when they were acknowledged as knowers and teachers capable of and expected to use their own thoughts and experiences to co-construct new understandings with their classmates.

Before the bell rang, Mr. Kincaid directed the students to take several moments to journal again as a culminating activity. The multiple opportunities for personal reflection created through the intentional use of journals during this class period helped students to think through the concepts being presented in personal ways before sharing their ideas with the group, which seemed to work as an open invitation to the more reserved students in each class. While the “regulars” offered up their responses in their usual participatory way, there were many students sharing ideas and experiences in all three classes who had not yet vocally participated at all up to this point in my observations. Further, setting aside time at the end of the class period for students to respond in writing gave them an opportunity to develop their new understandings and to think in personal ways in light of this exposure to new ideas, questions, and viewpoints while simultaneously giving them the chance to prepare their thoughts for the following day’s continued discussion, which transpired in similar ways.

Mr. Kincaid noted in a subsequent interview that these several class periods were, in his opinion, his greatest success over the course of my observations in his classroom:

I mean, my favorite day was the gender day. The gender day where we had the gallery, the nonfiction pieces....They were also processing a lot that day. And I think it was an important day....Like the way the students [were] conversing with each other. It’s very beautiful to watch grow. I mean, now they’ve gotten to the point where they’re like, “Oh, adding on to this specific person’s point, like, I

think this.” And so they’re doing a really good job of building off of each other.

Um, and hearing each other. (Interview 2, 269-277; 319-323)

Mr. Kincaid remained patient and encouraging with the students throughout these discussions while they made sense of what they had read and related it to their own life experience. He followed the students’ multiple organic tangents throughout the discussion periods in order for their interests and knowledge to dictate the direction of the conversation. The students seemed able to make sense of what they were reading, react to what they were reading with opinions and experiences, and make valiant attempts to bridge gaps in understanding between their own experience and the experiences of others. They demonstrated an ability to stretch their own thinking to encompass topics that were not directly raised by Mr. Kincaid but were tangentially related to the topics at hand. Even though the students were reminded to stay silent throughout portions of these class periods, they were still in dialogue for their entirety. This continuous dialogue with self, peer, text, teacher, and world supported Mr. Kincaid’s instructional experience and resulted in enormous growth in student engagement and participation during class.

**Students as enthusiastic knowers and teachers in formal discussion.** The end-of-unit discussion that tied together all the texts and topics from the entire short story unit was another remarkable demonstration of how Mr. Kincaid’s enactment of dialogic practice worked to support his instruction. As was the case during the discussion about gender, the vast majority of students in every class shared ideas aloud, asked pertinent questions, and built on each other’s knowledge and understanding of the vast array of texts and topics that they had been studying together over the course of the six weeks of the short story unit. Students were visibly engaged in both speaking and listening, and they were more fully participatory in class time than on any

other day in the entirety of the unit. At several points throughout the discussion, in each of the three classes, almost every single student had a hand in the air to answer one of Mr. Kincaid's questions or to respond to a classmate's point. Acknowledged as experts and given an opportunity to learn with and from each other, the students responded enthusiastically, maturely, and attentively throughout the duration of the discussion; when Mr. Kincaid noted at the end of class that this type of discussion format would be repeated throughout the rest of the school year, one student, who was usually silent in class but had been enthusiastically participating in the conversation, responded with an excited, "Oh, good!" (Observation Notes, 17 October). Much like the full-class discussion on gender, this discussion period illustrated the potential degree to which students might engage in learning with and from each other in meaningful ways when given carefully planned, dialogic opportunities to do so as well as how that engagement might be demonstrated through eager class participation, even by the most reserved of students.

### **Opportunities for Personal Meaning-Making**

Throughout the short story unit, as illustrated above, Mr. Kincaid demonstrated his ability to create opportunities for students to learn with and from each other; however, he also demonstrated a desire to design classroom endeavors through which individual students could make their own meaning. In our second interview, Mr. Kincaid articulated his viewpoint concerning the personal, collective, and individual student growth he had been experiencing and observing through his dialogic practice:

There's been a lot of wading through water for me and for some of the students. It has not been—some of the conversations we've had have not been light. Um, because it's the first time these students have had the chance to actually consider the other side....A lot of the people in the class when they were having their

independent conversations were saying, “Well, I never thought of it that way.”

And those are the moments I live for as a teacher. (Interview 2, 7 October, 179-186)

The depth of opportunity for personal meaning-making that Mr. Kincaid offered his students was most clearly illustrated through one student’s approach to the final project. Towards the end of my observation period in Mr. Kincaid’s classroom, he asked me to read an email that was sent to him by one of the students in his class. In the email, this student explained that in her quest to address the final assessment of the short story unit, she found herself reflecting on tragic personal experiences that had developed within her a sense of loss and fear, and she told Mr. Kincaid that the research and work she wanted to do would “haunt [her] for the rest of [her] life” if she did not complete it (Observation Notes, 9 October). Given the opportunity to investigate her own identity and the ways that she had personally experienced parts of that identity being silenced, this student utilized Mr. Kincaid’s final project assignment as a means of intense personal engagement and a quest for new knowledge and self-empowerment. The student’s final iteration of the assignment, a nearly 20-page fictionalized novella, was thoughtfully and thoroughly completed, bringing her a sense of agency over not only her classwork and project grade, but over her own life situation (Personal Email, 19 November). Although not every student completed this final assessment in such a personal way, this student’s claim of ownership over her project demonstrated the potential opportunity for Mr. Kincaid’s students to utilize classwork to ask their own questions, explore the answers they encountered, and make meaning as individuals learning more about themselves and the world around them (Observation Notes, 9 October).

## Summary

As illustrated above, Mr. Kincaid's classroom practice was supported in multiple ways by his efforts to enact a dialogic pedagogy. His efforts to propel his students towards a realization of his pedagogical goals for them, including ownership of their learning; pride in their work; enthusiasm and active engagement with texts, ideas, and each other; a perception of themselves as experts and teachers; and opportunities to make personal meaning for themselves through their classroom endeavors were supported by his dialogic approach to his interactions with students and his dialogic approaches to instruction and assessment. The opportunities during which Mr. Kincaid's students were given choices to make for themselves, respond in personal ways to classroom texts and talk, explore big ideas together, and showcase their own knowledge and expertise had the power to alter the demeanor of individual students as well as the atmosphere of the entire classroom as a whole. During such occasions, the overwhelming majority of students, including even those who regularly engaged in off-task classroom behaviors, carried themselves like young adults engaging in meaningful discourse with peers and teacher alike. When prompted by Mr. Kincaid's dedication to and incorporation of dialogic opportunity in classroom activities and assignments, students tended to operate under the implicit understanding that they were being expected to read, write, think, and talk about big ideas and relate to each other in mature and sophisticated ways—in what Rosenblatt (2005) termed “self-confident interchange” (p. 68). Through their participation in each of these opportunities, the students, as social creatures designed to learn and grow with and from each other, helped to illustrate that a teacher's commitment to dialogic pedagogy and efforts to utilize that commitment to foster meaningful educational endeavors can result in a stimulating and engaging

learning experience for students and teachers, even while exploring potentially uncomfortable, sensitive or complicated ideas.

Committing to a dialogic stance, however, is not a panacea. Learning to teach is difficult, and as discussed in chapter two, the first years of teaching present significant challenges to novice teachers as they learn to navigate all of their new responsibilities, including lesson planning and delivery, classroom and time management, and new relationships with students and colleagues (Brown, Bay-Borelli, & Scott, 2015; Dugas, 2016; Kauffman, 2002; Smeaton & Waters, 2013). The time I spent working with Mr. Kincaid made it clear that he was not immune to these challenges; he, like most new teachers, struggled to manage all of the complex and intertwining aspects of his job while simultaneously learning to enact a particular pedagogy in his practice. As illustrated above, the data suggested that Mr. Kincaid's use of the tenets of dialogic pedagogy did indeed support his efforts to create a classroom culture of engagement and empowerment rather than simple compliance; however, his desire to approach classroom endeavors and interactions from a dialogical stance added an additional layer of complexity for him to navigate, particularly as a novice teacher.

### **Dialogic Practice Under Construction**

Although the previous section outlined Mr. Kincaid's proficient grasp of dialogic theory and practice and how that grasp supported and even enhanced some aspects of his instruction, data analysis also indexed ways that he was still in the developmental stages of learning how best to translate his dialogic beliefs and goals for students into effective classroom practices. Mr. Kincaid's emerging dialogic competence resulted in a degree and type of difficulty in his instruction that cannot be attributed solely to his status as a novice teacher; instead, this difficulty stemmed from his earnest attempts to enact the "particularly risky" stance of a dialogic



practitioner (Fecho, 2011a, p. 114). My analysis of the data established several key issues outside of the expected struggles of a second-year teacher, coded as “Developmental Dialogism,” that functioned to create a more difficult classroom experience for Mr. Kincaid and his students. This analysis led to my second overarching understanding: Some of Mr. Kincaid’s attempts to teach dialogically actually worked to complicate his classroom practice rather than support it; however, data suggested that it was Mr. Kincaid’s developmental grasp of dialogic theory in practice, and not the dialogic approaches themselves, that hindered his instruction. The following sections draw upon the data to explicate the ways that Mr. Kincaid’s developmental attempts to transform his dialogic philosophy into classroom practice, including his conflation of dialogic pedagogy with discussion-based instruction or incorporation of social justice topics, his reluctance to assume a position of authority in his classroom, and his struggles to fully integrate English content with real-world applications, served to complicate his efforts to work towards his pedagogical goals.

### **“Discussion-Based Teaching”**

In our initial interview, I asked Mr. Kincaid to share his understanding of the concept of dialogic pedagogy. Throughout the interview, he discussed his dedication to dialogic practice, including his basic teaching philosophy of “find[ing] stories and learn[ing] from stories just like I’m trying to listen to my students’ stories and learn from their stories” (Baseline Interview, 24 August, 13-15). Echoing Fecho’s (2011a) description of a dialogic classroom as “one in which literacy is used to immerse teacher and students in an ongoing reflective conversation with the texts of their lives” (p. 8), the philosophical approach to classroom practice verbalized by Mr. Kincaid during this opening segment of our first interview clearly points to an approach that is dialogic in nature.

Later in the interview, however, Mr. Kincaid stated, “For me, dialogic pedagogy is basically discussion-based teaching. Um, we do it often—we have different seminars that we have done. Um, last year we did a paideia seminar, which is a lot of fun” (Baseline Interview, 24 August, 107-109). In an attempt to further illustrate his commitment to dialogic practice, Mr. Kincaid also noted that he regularly facilitates a variety of other types of classroom discussions. These explanations left me unsure of his grasp on the general theory of dialogic pedagogy and the intricate ways it is often carried out in the classroom. In my analytical memo from that interview, I noted the following: “I’m wondering if Mr. Kincaid has a bit of a misunderstanding on what dialogic pedagogy is, [since] he talks about how having a discussion-based classroom is ‘his version’ of dialogic pedagogy” (Baseline Interview Notes, 24 August). While dialogic practice will likely incorporate literal, verbal dialogue between and among students and teachers as one mode of constructing new knowledge, it is important to note that not all classroom talk is dialogic, and not all dialogic practice takes the form of whole-group discussion (e.g., Nystrand, 1997; Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Caughlan, & Heintz, 2013).

Mr. Kincaid’s expressed philosophy of seeking dialogue with his students and creating dialogic literary experiences in his classroom whereby he and his students learn with and from both literary and life texts, paired with his subsequent equation of dialogic practice to “discussion-based teaching,” suggests that his understanding of dialogic theory is still in its developmental stages while simultaneously foregrounding his dialogic intentions of fostering opportunities for students to explore ideas together through the regular practice of open discussion. As a result of his conflation of these related but discrete approaches to classroom discourse, Mr. Kincaid’s regular employment of classroom discussion often resulted in a

considerable amount of active student participation, but a limited amount of co-construction of new ideas and understandings.

### **Teaching for Social Justice**

Part of what drew me to Mr. Kincaid as a participant for this research project was his serious commitment to social justice and his determination to bring social justice issues to life in his classroom. I knew from previous conversations that Mr. Kincaid had worked to raise the funds to buy a classroom library full of diverse authors' books. He sponsored a school club centered around racial diversity. He often spoke highly of what he had learned in the Gender and Education course he had taken as part of his teacher preparation program. Mr. Kincaid's seriousness of purpose in calling social hierarchies into question in his classroom aligned with Lewis's (2001) point of view regarding the recognition of schools as "institutions for challenging what is, and initiating new, more critical and more honest understandings of the world" through praxis (p. 804). It was clear that even before we collaborated on this research project, Mr. Kincaid was very invested in issues of social justice and hoped to foster that same investment in his students.

However, multiple instances throughout our work together suggested that Mr. Kincaid believed he was enacting a dialogic stance whenever he brought up issues of race, gender, social class, or other topics of social injustice, regardless of how his students were or were not involved in these lessons. Instances of this conflation were coded as "Social Justice Focus" throughout my data analysis, and they comprised the behaviors through which Mr. Kincaid appeared to unknowingly direct his classroom incorporation of social justice topics *at* students rather than *with* them, as indexed by the data in the following sections.

**Lectures.** On several instances, Mr. Kincaid opened class as usual, then began lecturing on a tangentially-related social justice topic without input from students. One such instance occurred on October 4<sup>th</sup>, when Mr. Kincaid, in his intention of furthering a discussion of gender that the students had been engaged in during the previous day, began talking to the class about the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. He projected a picture onto the interactive whiteboard of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's vantage point while she gave her testimony against Kavanaugh, which was a seat from which she faced a gallery made up entirely of White men. After explaining how and why this event angered him, he told the students that he wanted them to "think about it," then moved on to conferencing with individuals regarding their final project ideas (Observation Notes, 4 October). Students gave little input throughout the lecture, and I noted in my analytical memo for that day that it appeared that Mr. Kincaid was trying unsuccessfully to utilize his viewpoint of these current events to engage students in a continuation of the previous day's discussion of gender.

Another such instance occurred the following day, during the portion of the short story unit that was focused on social class. At the start of this particular period, Mr. Kincaid projected an image on the interactive whiteboard of a comic strip with a picture of a mansion on a hill, a factory, and several small houses. The text read, "The rich get richer, and the poor...get their byproducts." Mr. Kincaid told the students to respond to the image in their journals and to fill in a chart for "rich" and "poor" people as represented in the image in response to the following questions: "Where do people from each group live?" "What is the landscape like in the two areas represented in the cartoon?" "What other objects do you see in each area?"

After writing time, Mr. Kincaid asked the students what they noticed about the image. Students began to share their ideas. After this brief exchange, Mr. Kincaid began asking further

questions: What do the houses in wealthy areas look like? What about stores? What might the schools look like in areas like this? Students shared their ideas, many by positioning rich people as “bad” and poor people as pitiable. This depiction appeared to align with Mr. Kincaid’s views on the matter, which prompted him to continue asking questions, this time as a series of yes-or-no questions seemingly designed for choral response: “Do you think they have a lot of job opportunities up here? Do you think they have...” The students answered “yes” to every question, which seemed to indicate to Mr. Kincaid that they understood what he wanted them to understand. In my analytical memo from that day, I noted my own discomfort during this portion of the lesson:

It really felt odd today to sit and take notes while Mr. Kincaid was talking....It really felt like dictating instead of sharing or developing ideas, and I was uncomfortable while this was happening. The kids seemed to be answering the questions the way he wanted them to, so he kept asking. They were very disconnected from the groups he was talking about, which was interesting. In the other discussions (especially about gender), they identified somehow....Today, when they talked about “rich” people and “poor” people, it seemed like both of those were “other” to them, and they all talked about their ideas in a detached way, since it didn’t appear that they related. (Observation Notes, 5 October)

While students participated to varying degrees in lessons like the ones illustrated above, there was little evidence that they were exploring the ideas being presented; rather, these exchanges suggested Mr. Kincaid’s developmental difficulty in separating exposure to social justice topics from dialogic practice wherein students are given opportunities to generate their own understandings of the topics and concepts at hand.

**Final project creation.** Mr. Kincaid also demonstrated the difficulty he had in separating the concepts of social justice issues and dialogic teaching while we were talking through the format of the identity-based final project for the short story unit. During one planning session for the final project, which was being designed to guide students to illustrate how a particular facet of their own identity had been silenced by the society in which they live, Mr. Kincaid said, “I don’t want to talk about their identity; I want them to talk about—Identity has to be a disability, gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexuality, body image. I don’t want soft-core identity; I want things you can’t change” (Planning Session 3 Notes, 20 September). While Mr. Kincaid was intent on directing students to explore particular parts of their identity—those that he viewed as commonly oppressed or silenced by society—giving students personal choice about how they go about exploring and understanding their own identity lies at the core of dialogic pedagogy.

At the early stages of planning this final assessment, Mr. Kincaid seemed determined to guide students’ understandings of the concept of identity so as to align those understandings and explorations with his own beliefs about social injustice. As this example demonstrates, Mr. Kincaid’s developmental belief that he was satisfying his commitment to teach dialogically by broaching social justice issues in his classroom sometimes hindered him from offering authentic dialogic experiences to his students. While it is likely that dialogic pedagogy will inherently address issues of identity, difference, and social justice as they relate to individual students in a given class, the opposite is not necessarily true: It does not inherently follow that a teacher’s commitment to social justice will result in dialogic classroom practices. By conflating these two ideas, Mr. Kincaid seemed to believe he was comporting himself in a dialogic manner whenever he raised issues of social justice in the classroom, even when he did so through decidedly monologic means. Further, by addressing these issues in ways that kept students from making

their own meaning from them, Mr. Kincaid was unknowingly engaging in what Bakhtin (1981) referred to as “authoritative discourse,” which “demands... unconditional allegiance” rather than “free appropriation and assimilation” of ideas (p. 343). Thus, Mr. Kincaid’s dialogic intention of addressing real-world issues with his students was sometimes thwarted by his one-sided approach, resulting in lost opportunities for students to personally or collectively explore these issues in deep or meaningful ways.

### **Authoritative Reluctance**

Data also indexed the ways that Mr. Kincaid appeared to pair his dialogic approach with his management of student behavior. A pattern emerged across multiple sources of data indicating Mr. Kincaid’s permissive approach with his students rather than an authoritative one, even when students behaved in unproductive ways. Coded in my analysis as “Authority,” Mr. Kincaid demonstrated his disinclination towards classroom authority in two distinct ways: (a) his lack of redirection of student off-task behavior during class time, and (b) his consistent acceptance of all student responses to inquiry as equally correct or valid. Data illustrating these practices suggest a connection between his dialogic intentions and his reluctance to assume an authoritative stance in his classroom, serving as further illustration of Mr. Kincaid’s developmental stage as a dialogic practitioner.

**Reluctance to redirect.** Mr. Kincaid demonstrated a concerted effort to avoid confrontation with students who were behaving in off-task ways throughout any given class period, most often by ignoring these behaviors as they occurred. Data indexed a multitude of instances during which he appeared reluctant to correct off-task behaviors and that in the rare instances that he did address them, he utilized a computer program to block students who were playing games on their Chromebooks or send them messages on their Chromebook screens

requesting a change in behavior rather than verbally addressing students whose behavior he hoped to alter. On multiple occasions, students whose screens had been locked turned to Mr. Kincaid to react or address the issue, and he behaved as though he did not see or hear them (Baseline Observation 1, 4 September; Baseline Observation 2 Notes, 7 September; Observation Notes, 18 September). These indirect practices made up the bulk of Mr. Kincaid's classroom management approach, allowing him to avoid the discomfort of confrontation with students who were misbehaving.

Mr. Kincaid's most noticeable difficulty managing student behavior occurred during the unstructured segments of each class period, which most often commenced after he had completed active instruction (e.g., Daily Observations, 12 September; Daily Observations, 18 September; Daily Observations, 8 October). Mr. Kincaid usually made himself available at his desk while students were given class time to complete assignments, and aside from his occasional use of the aforementioned computer program to help students regain focus on their work, his reluctance to demand compliance from students kept him from acknowledging or confronting behavior issues as they arose, which resulted in large segments of daily class time being misused by students without redirection (e.g., Baseline Observation 1, 4 September; Baseline Observation 2, 7 September; Daily Observations, 18 September; Observation Notes, 20 September, etc.). As the portion of class dedicated to independent student work time increased in correlation to the number of texts and assignments for which the students became responsible over the course of the unit, student off-task behaviors likewise increased in number and duration.

Although most new teachers cite difficulty with classroom management as one of their most pressing concerns (e.g., Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Melnick & Meister, 2008), Mr. Kincaid's overall philosophy concerning the management of student behavior may be, at least in



part, directly connected to his efforts to maintain a flattened hierarchy between himself and his students and to offer them some degree of ownership over the classroom. His admirable intentions to maintain a democratic classroom environment in which students were empowered as equals, therefore, may have further complicated the difficulties that he, like any novice teacher, had in learning how to keep students on-task during instruction.

**“There’s no right or wrong answer.”** Mr. Kincaid was intent on genuinely affording students opportunities to make meaning for themselves and to co-construct meaning with their classmates. However, like his reluctance to redirect student behavior, his instructional habit of accepting all student participation as equally valid or correct served to complicate his classroom practice. During instruction and discussion, Mr. Kincaid often reassured students both explicitly and implicitly that there were no wrong answers in his classroom (e.g., Daily Observations, 10 September; Daily Observations, 12 September; Daily Observations, 25 September). Although this tactic was usually utilized successfully as a means to encourage student participation, especially when students seemed hesitant to respond to questions or to share experiences and ideas, the repeated assertion that all answers to all questions were equally correct sometimes resulted in a series of rocky foundational understandings of key concepts on which Mr. Kincaid later tried to build.

Mr. Kincaid regularly introduced students to abstract ideas like “identity” and “society” by asking them about their knowledge directly, inviting them to verbally co-construct meanings of these ideas on the spot. Although his intention was likely dialogic in nature by serving as an open invitation for all students to share, teach, and learn with and from each other, their often-chaotic participation and Mr. Kincaid’s overarching acceptance of all responses kept students

from developing a solid grasp of each abstract concept, making it difficult for him to later guide them towards a more complex use of these concepts.

Over the weeks that I spent in Mr. Kincaid's classroom, this emergent confusion continued in a pattern as each new abstract idea was introduced. Mr. Kincaid often began class periods during which students would be exploring a new concept by asking the class to share their existing understandings of that concept. The students' responses usually ran the gamut between aligning with what Mr. Kincaid appeared to be expecting or hoping for and being completely off-base or nonsensical, but no response was ever rejected. The first of these class periods began by Mr. Kincaid asking students what "identity" meant to them. When nobody volunteered an answer, Mr. Kincaid reminded them that there were no wrong answers. Students then began offering responses which varied from several descriptions of physical features, like hair length or height, to one student's response of "An identity could be anything. It could be representing someone. And in math, it's a property" (Daily Observations, 10 September). In a similar fashion, when students were prompted to explain their understandings of the word "normal" by "picturing a normal person" in their minds and then sharing descriptors of that person, their responses ranged from "They go to Starbucks" and "They're a middle-aged White guy" to "She has a blue streak in her hair" and "He's made of glass" (Daily Observations, 25 September). While some student responses demonstrated a lack of understanding and others were likely intended to be funny, Mr. Kincaid neither rejected responses nor built on them in order to help students generate a consensus of solid foundational knowledge of each term before ending the discussion for the day. He most often told the students that they would be returning to their exploration of any given term in the days following its introduction; however, this almost never occurred. Instead, Mr. Kincaid would make attempts to tie multiple concepts together

before students had appeared to fully grasp any one of them. Often, these unstructured attempts to introduce students to new ideas or to make connections between concepts being addressed in class led to visible student confusion, verbalized one day in a third-period student's comment: "I don't understand anything...in this class" (Observation Notes, 5 October). This student's statement validated my own growing perception that although Mr. Kincaid seemed satisfied by introducing his students to abstract concepts—or, as he referred to it, "planting a seed" that would be revisited at a later point (e.g., Daily Observations, 11 September; 20 September; 26 September)—the lack of structured dissections or continual reexaminations of those concepts often resulted in student confusion and missed opportunities for scaffolded, dialogic instruction that would have led to more robust understandings on which to build.

The pattern of broaching new concepts without scaffolding student understandings of those concepts serves to illustrate a pattern of instruction indicative of Mr. Kincaid's developmental stage as a dialogic practitioner: Mr. Kincaid presented an abstract, real-world concept, gave students what he believed to be opportunities to make meaning regarding that concept, deemed all student responses to those opportunities as equally acceptable, then failed to fortify students' nebulous or faulty understandings before his subsequent attempts to build on those understandings in later class periods. Rosenblatt (2005) explained the delicate balance that is necessary for enacting fruitful literary education between accepting all responses to a text and insisting on a single acceptable response:

Recognition that there can be no absolute, single, "correct" reading of a text has sometimes been seen as accepting any reading of a text. Without positing a single, absolutely correct reading, we can still agree on criteria by which to evaluate the

validity of alternative interpretations of a text. The development of such judgment becomes a part of literary education. (p. xix)

By inviting and welcoming varied thoughts and responses to in-class explorations, Mr. Kincaid was attempting to teach dialogically. However, without structured fostering of further or deeper consideration of these topics, students were often unable to develop or demonstrate concrete foundational understandings on which to later build. Mr. Kincaid's practice in these instances could be viewed as attempts to adhere to dialogic theory by empowering student voice and avoiding "authoritative discourse," which stands in direct opposition to personal meaning-making (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). However, in these efforts to engage students in conversations surrounding their explorations of texts and topics, Mr. Kincaid's all-accepting approach to student response often invalidated his dialogic intention to allow students to grow in their own understandings and co-generate new understandings with their classmates.

### **(Dis)integration of Literary and Real-World Topics**

Data suggested that Mr. Kincaid viewed "content focused" and "dialogic" as mutually exclusive, which also indicated his developmental understanding of dialogic pedagogy and served to complicate his practice. For example, as Mr. Kincaid explained during an interview, "I don't aim for the best SOL scores. I need SOL scores to keep me, I guess. To keep my goals for the county. But to me, I'm okay with being...okay at SOLs, but even better with students" (Interview 2, 7 October, 90-93). He spoke often about other teachers in his school whose planning and instruction he viewed as more geared towards content and skill mastery than relationship building, seeming to imply that teachers must align themselves with one goal or the other:

I know some of the teachers on my team have struggled to make more heartfelt connections with [the students] because they are more content-focused. My kids are first. And their lives are first. Content is second. Um, and because of dialogic pedagogy and because of my kids, that part of my teaching is really high up there, if not maybe a little bit higher than content. I also think it's really allowed me to not get dragged down into "this is what figurative language is, this is what plot is." (Interview 2, 7 October, 46-52)

Mr. Kincaid's statement that dialogic teaching should place students' lives "first" and place content "second" indicated that he had constructed a dichotomy between focusing on the content or focusing on students' lives; he seemed to be working from the perspective that it was neither possible nor desirable to focus on both of these factors simultaneously.

Difficulty in integrating literary instruction with explorations of difference may have been an additional result of Mr. Kincaid's belief that effective dialogic English instruction should not directly focus on English content; rather, instruction of English content was what would "keep him" employed while his true classroom focus as a dialogic practitioner should be directed towards social justice issues and other real-world concerns. From a dialogical perspective, however, these elements of teaching and learning should work in tandem to mutually shape one another. Mr. Kincaid's tendency to see the two as mutually exclusive made it difficult for him to fully realize the utility of working from a dialogic stance, which was evident in the divisions he created between the two within his instructional goals. This division of instructional goals, though likely dialogic in its intention, often kept him from seamlessly tying standards-based concepts to real-world constructs in meaningful ways in his instruction and assessment practices.

**Lesson planning.** Mr. Kincaid's brief PowerPoint lesson agendas most often included one or more definitive literary goals (e.g., "Students will be able to: Listen to 'The Monkey's Paw' through an audiobook and understand the plot" or "Students will be able to: Teach a partner what irony means along with some examples") but omitted any specific objectives related to instructional time dedicated to explorations of difference or other real-world topics (Observation Notes, 27 September). Mr. Kincaid demonstrated solid skill in his instruction of the literary terms and concepts he was required to teach, and the students often demonstrated a thorough understanding of these concepts when required. However, his regular efforts to introduce students to more abstract, "real-world" concepts were rarely, if ever, included in his plans in any explicit way, and this apparent lack of integration of these varied topics during planning often resulted in a level of difficulty integrating them in a meaningful way during instruction. Mr. Kincaid usually divided his instructional time between literary topics and explorations of difference in ways that seemed to indicate that his literary instruction would satisfy his administration and allow him permission to move on to real-world explorations rather than finding ways to pull these portions of lessons together into cohesive units of study. I should note that because of the lack of detail in his plans, which he was not required to submit to his administration, I was unable to discern whether he was indeed mentally integrating these concepts while planning for daily instruction and finding difficulty only in their implementation, or if his difficulty in integration during class time stemmed directly from difficulties or omissions during planning (Observation Notes, 27 September). Either way, however, Mr. Kincaid's delivery of fragmented lessons that separated the word and the world into discrete concentrations indicated a disjointed understanding of the need to develop integrated, dialogic connections between literary and real-world concepts, contributing to the complications that

students sometimes had in making connections between the English content Mr. Kincaid taught and the real-world ideas he intended to tie to them.

### **Seeking Support**

Mr. Kincaid's struggles in translating his theoretical beliefs about dialogic pedagogy into classroom practice were further exacerbated by his sense of philosophical isolation from the other faculty members at his school. Mr. Kincaid explained that he often felt alone in his attempts to translate his philosophical beliefs about teaching into classroom practice. During our second interview, Mr. Kincaid discussed the ways that his coworkers seemed to disapprove of his teaching strategies, seemingly without fully comprehending the concept of a dialogic classroom. When I asked Mr. Kincaid what he saw as his hindrances to success, he explained the following:

Hindrance is more about what other teachers think about my teaching. Um, I know if I share some of the stuff that I'm doing in my class, they give me this side-eye of like, "How are you connecting that to any content that you're talking about?"....And so, that becomes a hindrance, though, when teachers aren't familiar with this type of teaching, and aren't comfortable with bringing this into their classroom, and so they are—not jealous of the kind of relationships, but kind of apprehensive about the relationships that I have with the students. So hindrance not on the kids, and not on me, more about what other people look at it.

(Interview 2, 7 October, 62-65; 77-81)

Mr. Kincaid's description of his interactions with colleagues seemed to echo Fecho's (2001) own experience of alienation from coworkers as a direct result of enacting a dialogic approach to teaching and learning. In a paired analysis between data points concerning my unexpected role as

an informal mentor (as discussed in chapter three) and Mr. Kincaid's vocalized concern about how he and his practice were viewed by other teachers in his building, I came to realize that even as a generally confident and successful teacher, Mr. Kincaid was not solely a novice dialogic educator—he was a novice dialogic educator surrounded by more traditional colleagues who did not fully understand or approve of his classroom approach, leaving him with little support from more experienced peers as he attempted to find his footing as a dialogic practitioner.

### **Summary**

As would be expected of any novice dialogic educator, Mr. Kincaid displayed a developmental grasp of dialogic pedagogical theory and the ways that a teacher who is determined to teach from a dialogic stance might translate that theory into actual practice. While Mr. Kincaid's demonstrated mastery of particular dialogic classroom approaches worked to support his instructional experience in some ways, his emerging attempts to carry out other facets of that theory seemed to work against him, complicating his already-challenging practice as a second-year teacher by way of missed or curtailed opportunities for dialogue and co-construction of new understandings with and among students as well as significant, yet uncorrected off-task behavior during instruction.

However, as data suggests, the practices and approaches that caused Mr. Kincaid the greatest degree of struggle in his instruction did not actually appear to be dialogic in nature; rather, these practices and approaches merely seemed to be rooted in his early understandings of how to embrace dialogism in his classroom. As a result, the data does not suggest that dialogic theory or classroom practice hindered his success as a teacher; rather, it suggests that the difficulties he experienced were directly connected to the developmental phase of dialogic enactment in which he found himself. This understanding, then, paired with the sense of isolation



from colleagues that Mr. Kincaid was experiencing, implies a need for extended scaffolding and mentoring for both teacher candidates and novice teachers who are in the beginning stages of learning to translate their theoretical beliefs into classroom practice. These implications will be discussed in chapter five.

### **Conclusion**

The research that I conducted over the course of this study examined what happened when a novice English teacher worked from a dialogic stance to explore topics of difference with his students. This chapter outlined the practices regularly employed by the participant, Mr. Kincaid, to enact and maintain a dialogic stance in his teaching, most notably through shifting the traditional student-teacher power hierarchy to give students ownership over their learning; endeavoring to create a welcoming classroom environment where ideas, experiences, and expertise are shared and valued; and fostering opportunities for students to make connections between the classroom and the world. Having definitively established Mr. Kincaid's dialogic approach to the classroom, I then presented the understandings that I developed as I analyzed the data generated over the course of the study.

Data illustrated key ways that Mr. Kincaid's instructional practice was supported through his efforts to transform his commitment to dialogic pedagogy into classroom action. Positive student response to this action, including an increased sense of pride and ownership of learning, enthusiastic engagement and participation, demonstrated confidence as knowers and teachers, and seized opportunities for personal knowledge construction evidenced the variety of ways that both students' and teacher's classroom experiences were enhanced by Mr. Kincaid's employment of dialogic classroom strategies.

However, data also indexed ways that Mr. Kincaid's efforts to teach from a dialogic stance created further challenges for him to navigate, some of which exacerbated the typical new teacher struggles of planning, instructional implementation, and classroom management. As a novice practitioner of dialogic pedagogy, Mr. Kincaid exhibited an expected degree of difficulty in turning his dialogic aspirations into reality. The data underscore the complexity of translating theoretical orientation into practice (e.g., Barnes & Smagorinsky, 2016; Smagorinsky, Jakubiak, & Moore, 2008; Smagorinsky, Wilson, & Moore, 2011) and serve as a poignant reminder that bringing theory into dialogue with practice (Stewart; 2017; Stewart, 2019) is an evolutionary process that requires mentoring and support.

My existing relationship with Mr. Kincaid as a mentor and teacher and my daily presence in his classroom offered him the facility to ask questions, gather ideas, request materials, and collaborate in planning lessons without fear of judgment. Examinations of the affordances and constraints that arose from Mr. Kincaid's efforts to teach from a dialogic stance paired with the understandings I generated in his classroom in my unique position as a researcher, mentor, veteran dialogic educator, and observer engendered suggestions concerning the ways that teacher educators, administrators, and other stakeholders might better support novice teachers in their ongoing evolution towards competent and consistent dialogic practice. In chapter five, I will discuss the significance and implications of the understandings generated from this study and present potential pathways for better supporting novice teachers.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

This study examined the planning and instructional practices of one novice secondary English teacher in order to investigate what happened when he worked from a dialogic stance while engaging in literary explorations of difference with his students. In the previous chapter, I explicated data from daily observational field notes, participant interviews, planning session notes, and analytical memos to describe the patterns of planning and instruction that occurred throughout the various stages of this research project. I used data to confirm the dialogic pedagogical approach of the study participant, Mr. Kincaid, and to illustrate the ways that his developmental efforts to enact a dialogic pedagogical stance in his classroom both supported and complicated his practice. Data analysis led me to two overarching understandings: (a) Mr. Kincaid's successful enactment of dialogic classroom practice supported his instructional efforts by heightening students' overall response to instruction and assessment, suggesting that dialogic pedagogy can result in positive and productive learning experiences for both teachers and students, even during explorations of potentially uncomfortable, sensitive, or complex topics; and (b) Some of Mr. Kincaid's attempts to teach dialogically actually worked to complicate his classroom practice rather than support it; however, data suggested that it was Mr. Kincaid's developmental grasp of dialogic theory in practice, and not the dialogic approaches themselves, that hindered his instruction.

In this chapter, I will explore the significance of these understandings in order to discuss how the participant's classroom approach and perceptions about dialogic pedagogical theory may have affected his practice. I will also discuss the implications of the meaning I made from this research for teacher educators and other stakeholders interested in guiding preservice and

novice teachers towards successful early-career practice. Finally, I will point to one key area of future research that has the potential to make a significant contribution to the field.

### **Opportunity Breeds Success**

Throughout the duration of this research project, Mr. Kincaid demonstrated his ability to work from a dialogic stance through his instruction and his interactions with students. He worked to develop positive relationships within a classroom environment where everyone felt welcome to speak and listen; he exhibited a determination to allow students to make choices for themselves about their own learning and their demonstrations of that learning; and he found ways to acknowledge his students as experts capable of co-facilitating their classroom experiences. By his intentional and successful focus on these aspects of dialogic pedagogy in practice, Mr. Kincaid created educational opportunities in his classroom that helped his students to flourish.

Mr. Kincaid's pedagogical goals and his desire to promote meaningful learning endeavors for his students were rooted in the larger purpose of "empowering [his] students to become independent thinkers and active citizens" (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013, p. 129). The enriched classroom experiences that resulted from Mr. Kincaid's enactment of dialogic practice align with Reznitskaya and & Gregory's (2013) description of the powerful potential of dialogic teaching:

[Dialogic pedagogy] creates classroom experiences that are authentic, inclusive, and rational. To collaborate with others in a process of shared inquiry, to possess a general argument schema and use it in relevant situations, to hold sophisticated beliefs about the negotiated nature of knowledge, and to be willing to reconsider and reconstruct previously held commitments when encountering good reasons to

do so: These capacities are central not only to academic achievement but also to living a meaningful life and to playing an active role in resolving various controversies that continually arise in a civil society. We can only benefit from helping our teachers and students embrace inquiry dialogue in their classrooms. (p. 129)

A dialogic approach to instruction, while serving to address standardized and subject-specific content, also functions to guide students towards thought and action beyond the walls of the classroom through questioning the society in which they live and working to constructively and actively participate in changing it for the greater good.

The data generated throughout the course of this study demonstrated that successful dialogic practice offers the potential to foster student engagement in individual classrooms while simultaneously preparing those students to meet the world equipped with the capacity to see it, name it, and change it. Teacher preparation programs undergirded by dialogic theory and congruent, student-centered, inquiry-based stances have the capacity to foster that same engagement in teacher candidates who will eventually be prepared to continue this cycle of empowerment in their own classrooms.

Data from interviews and casual conversations with Mr. Kincaid over the course of our work together pointed to a variety of factors from his own teacher education program that he found especially useful in his development as a teacher, including the small size of his cohort, the opportunities for close collaboration with peers to “talk about [their] placement” and “push each other” in their work, and the access he was afforded to the perspectives of other preservice teachers and field placement mentors that helped him to “find holes in stuff [he] didn’t see” (Final Interview, 9 November). Additional data indexed potential methods for building on the

useful structures already in place in Mr. Kincaid's teacher preparation program, including extended opportunities for teacher candidates to work more closely together in dedicated partnerships over the course of student teaching (Final Interview, 9 November). In the following section, I will outline several suggestions for teacher educators working to facilitate the types of success that Mr. Kincaid experienced by using the opportunities he was afforded through his teacher preparation program as a model on which to build.

### **Creating, Maintaining, and Augmenting Communities of Practice**

Although many teachers pinpoint their student teaching experience as the most significant factor in their early development as teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001), Fecho, Falter, and Hong (2016) explained that "teaching in the same classroom every day creates the conditions for a kind of myopia, where the big picture is not always visible" (p. 17). In their single placement classroom, student teachers can become constrained by the "small picture," observing and being offered feedback only by a mentor or mentors whose pedagogical practices have long been established. To remedy this "myopia," research with teacher candidates (e.g., Azano & Stewart, 2016; Cross & Dunn, 2016; Emmer & Stough, 2001; Meyer & Sawyer, 2006) has demonstrated that the facilitation of regular opportunities for cohorts of preservice teachers to continue their peer collaboration over the course of the student teaching semester has proven to be a useful way for teacher educators to continue fostering co-construction of knowledge and understanding about teaching between and among teacher candidates.

As Meyer and Sawyer (2006) acknowledged, the "communities of practice" that are created by bringing teacher candidates together in constructive ways during their early practice "foster independence, peer support, reflectivity, multiple perspectives, and dialogue" (p. 49). Mr. Kincaid's teacher preparation program utilized such an approach through its cohort-model design

and its continual focus on professional growth in community from the beginning of coursework through the end of the final field placement. The majority of Mr. Kincaid's student teaching semester was spent divided into daily contact with his cooperating teacher and students, regular communication with his University Supervisor and course instructors, and weekly interaction with his classmates, who were also learning to teach in their placement classrooms. This collective community of practice incorporated a variety of both preservice and veteran teachers and functioned to broaden the perspectives of each individual collaborator.

Mr. Kincaid's success, attributed in part to a preparation program that fostered an ongoing dialogue among teacher candidates throughout the entirety of their teacher education experience, offers a key implication generated from this study: Teacher educators must build and maintain opportunities for structured and purposeful collaboration among preservice teachers throughout their coursework and their early forays into the classroom in order to foster meaningful professional relationships and opportunities for dialogue that will better prepare teacher candidates for success in their student teaching placements and beyond. Two such opportunities for meaningful collaboration are proposed below.

**Problem posing.** Mr. Kincaid's weekly access to his fellow cohort members during student teaching was beneficial for the moral support it offered each of the teacher candidates in his cohort, but it was also carefully structured in ways designed to address the difficulties that the candidates were experiencing in their early forays into the classroom. Mr. Kincaid's teacher education program referred to these structured weekly class periods as "problem-posing seminars," described by Stewart (2019) as "scaffolded, collaborative discussions of the challenges [teacher candidates] encountered during student teaching" as they learned to translate pedagogical theory into practice for the first time (p. 213). In preparation for these weekly

sessions, teacher candidates in Mr. Kincaid's cohort selected a significant issue they faced in their placement classroom and created a detailed description of that issue to present to classmates. During these sessions, students shared this description and several illustrative artifacts with the rest of the cohort as they sought potential solutions to their problem from the array of viewpoints represented by their fellow student teachers. Teacher candidates took copious notes on the advice offered by classmates, chose what were deemed to be the most appropriate approaches to the problem, employed these suggested strategies in their placement classrooms, and reflected back on the effectiveness of these actions. Through this structured design, teacher candidates were able to seek solutions for the problems they were experiencing, suggest solutions for the problems their classmates were experiencing, and consider the entire cohort's collection of problems and solutions to tuck away for potential future use. Creating similarly-structured collaboration opportunities for students during their field placements would be an ideal way for teacher educators to promote the same moral support, professional co-construction of new knowledge about teaching, and meaningful dialogue among teacher candidates that Mr. Kincaid and his classmates experienced.

Dedicated time and space for student teachers to explain and discuss issues experienced in their placement classrooms with each other offers the potential of helping them to constructively solve their own problems while simultaneously considering and working out solutions to prospective problems they have not yet encountered. By creating means of "easy access to one another" (Feiman-Nemser, 2003, p. 27), and by structuring that access into a format that allows teacher candidates to constructively and systematically address the difficulties they are experiencing in their transitions from student to teacher, the problem-posing seminars that Mr. Kincaid and his classmates experienced offered them the opportunity to learn with and



from each other as they took up their individual practice in unique contexts, allowing classmates' varied experiences, insights, and ideas to help guide them in their own field placements as well as in their own overarching development as educators. Fostering this routine of peer collaboration and reflective practice in preservice teachers has the potential to carry teacher candidates through both their student teaching placements as well as their first few years on the job as they move forward to create and work within peer learning communities in their professional contexts as novice teachers, alleviating some of the isolation that often accompanies the process of learning to teach (Fajet, Bello, Leftwich, Mesler, & Shaver, 2005; Rigelman & Ruben, 2012; Shanks 2016; Wetzal, Hoffman, Roach, & Russell, 2018).

**Lateral mentoring.** The problem-posing seminars detailed above serve as an excellent means of exposing teacher candidates to a myriad of problems and solutions that might arise in a student teacher's or novice teacher's classroom. The co-construction of expertise that occurs both personally and vicariously through the process of problem posing extends student teachers' learning beyond their own classrooms, and it expands their repertoire of techniques and approaches past that of individual developmental processes learned during student teaching. Retaining the established collaborative practice of problem posing among cohorts of teacher candidates and augmenting it by creating opportunities for preservice teachers to observe and reflect on the emerging practice of their peers in the field may have the potential to make such collaboration even more useful.

In my work with Mr. Kincaid, it became apparent very early on that because of our disparate vantage points, his perception of what was happening in his classroom and my perception of what was happening in his classroom were remarkably different. As a novice teacher, Mr. Kincaid was doing his best to manage all aspects of a very boisterous seventh-grade

classroom, including instruction of material, management of behavior, engagement with individual students, organization of paperwork, use of technology, and attendance to various interruptions throughout any given class period. Meanwhile, I had a continual opportunity to reflectively observe the whole classroom, or any specific part thereof, without any of the responsibilities to which Mr. Kincaid was constantly attending. As a result, I realized that I was being afforded a luxury rare to most new or student teachers—the mental bandwidth to note and analyze each issue as it arose and to contemplate solutions for those issues without the accompanying pressure of further classroom responsibility. Finding ways to afford this same luxury to teacher candidates and novice teachers may offer them opportunities to maintain a reflective practice as they learn to manage all the moving parts of a real classroom. The vantage point that I was afforded as an observer in the classroom of a novice teacher learning to enact a dialogic pedagogy could serve as an invaluable educational tool for teacher candidates who are beginning the process of bridging dialogic theory with classroom practice. Therefore, the experiences I had as an observer in Mr. Kincaid’s classroom generated an additional implication: Teacher educators should work to promote the co-construction of knowledge and understanding between and among student teachers by fostering opportunities for lateral mentoring between and among teacher candidates.

In assuming the myriad of responsibilities required to run a classroom, teacher candidates and novice teachers can find themselves overwhelmed to the point of losing “their ability to reflect meaningfully on their teaching” (Melnick & Meister, 2008, p. 44). As Fantilli and McDougall (2009) noted, “a beginning teacher has the same responsibility as a teacher with many years of service,” resulting in the expenditure of “a disproportionate amount of time and effort simply to keep their heads above water” (p. 814). The effort that is required to attend to all

of these new responsibilities while simultaneously attempting to navigate the complexity of learning to teach dialogically can easily overwhelm even the most tenacious novice. Creating regular opportunities, like I had in my research of Mr. Kincaid, for student teachers to observe and reflect on their peers' real-world attempts to put their own understandings of dialogic teaching into practice could have the potential to aid in teacher candidates' understandings of and solutions to issues they might also be experiencing through firsthand observations of practice and opportunities to serve as mentors to fellow teacher candidates following these observations. As noted by Le Cornu (2005), peer or lateral mentoring "might seem somewhat of a paradox given that mentoring is normally associated with expert–novice relationships"; however, especially in teacher education programs that are undergirded by dialogic theory, the concept of lateral mentoring makes logical sense as a means to "reconceptualize mentoring as much more of a collaborative or collegial relationship" in an effort to "shift away from the mentor as expert, hierarchical one-way view to a more reciprocal relationship" between and among a community of learners (p. 356). The lateral mentoring that teacher candidates would be able to offer one another throughout the student teaching semester could function as a further means of scaffolding the process of learning to teach as well as creating opportunities to co-construct understandings about teaching in a "flattened hierarchy" environment that contrasts sharply with the traditional evaluative observation process that typically occurs between university personnel and student teachers in field placement classrooms.

One such lateral mentoring method being utilized by in-service teachers, referred to as "lesson study," originated in Japan and has recently been implemented in some schools in the United States over the past several decades (Akiba & Wilkinson, 2016; Perry & Lewis, 2009). This practice, which involves groups of teachers collaboratively developing lesson goals and

corresponding plans, observing one member of the group implementing those goals and plans in a classroom with students, then meeting together after the lesson is taught to discuss the instruction and make suggestions for improvement in subsequent lessons, has been demonstrated to help teachers establish and fortify their professional learning communities, build and develop leadership qualities, and aid in continual knowledge- and skill-building among teachers who participate (Akiba & Wilkinson, 2016; Lewis, Perry, Hurd, & O'Connell, 2006; Perry & Lewis, 2009; Puchner & Taylor, 2006). Employing the basic procedures of lesson study as a means of lateral mentoring over the course of the student teaching semester has the potential to help teacher candidates actively guide each other through some of the difficulties of learning to teach. While traditional school culture in the United States often functions in opposition to collaborative practice between and among teachers, the incorporation of such lateral mentoring processes into teacher education programs has the capacity to normalize the practice of evaluative observation, preparing teacher candidates to remain open to collaboration with and feedback from fellow teachers and maximizing their opportunities to grow, learn, and improve their craft on an ongoing basis throughout their careers.

Trying to enact a particular pedagogical philosophy while simultaneously being held responsible for managing all of the other responsibilities of a classroom is a difficult task, making it logical or even expected for preservice and novice teachers to have trouble successfully navigating all of these factors at the same time. Continued cohort collaboration throughout student teaching, enhanced by opportunities for peer observation and the lateral mentoring that would accompany it, would afford teacher candidates the chance to view firsthand from a spectator's vantage point what learning to teach might look like in reality,

helping student teachers to further refine their practice by reflecting not only on their own classroom experiences, but on each other's as well.

### **Minding the Gaps**

As discussed in chapter four, although Mr. Kincaid was successful in his enactment of dialogic pedagogy in some noteworthy ways, data also indexed ways that he demonstrated some marked difficulties throughout his practice, indicating that he was still developing as a dialogic practitioner. While some of the difficulties that Mr. Kincaid demonstrated in his classroom could easily be attributed to his status as a second-year teacher who was still learning to balance all facets of the classroom, my focus only encompasses the ways that his understanding of dialogic theory and his early attempts at enactment of dialogic pedagogy resulted in specific complications in his classroom practice and led to issues with off-task student behavior and diminished opportunity for co-construction of knowledge and understanding.

One of the most significant factors that inhibited Mr. Kincaid from realizing greater levels of classroom success was the false dichotomy, noted in chapter four, that he had internalized between what Bakhtin (1981) referred to as the *centrifugal* and *centripetal* forces within which successful dialogic practice functions. As Fecho and Clifton (2017) explained, “Being skewed toward either uniformity or individualism is problematic; instead, relatively equal forces pushing and tugging at each other” (p. 24) work in tandem to create the type of tension necessary to enact and maintain a dialogic classroom stance. Working to carefully balance these opposing forces, manifested in educational practice as simultaneously focusing on teaching content and attending to the needs and viewpoints of each individual student, lies at the heart of dialogic pedagogy.

In his effort to resist the *centripetal*, centralizing forces commonly at work in schools (e.g., Fecho, Falther, & Hong, 2016) that push teachers towards a narrow focus for teaching literary content, dictating appropriate behavior, and directing student understanding of texts and concepts, Mr. Kincaid ended up yielding to *centrifugal*, decentralizing forces of positioning relationships with students above teaching content, accepting all behavior as appropriate, and validating all understandings of texts and concepts equally. By seeing the job of a dialogic English practitioner as one in which subject content must be subjugated by students' lives, Mr. Kincaid created an unequal distribution of classroom tensions rather than a healthy balance between the competing forces in the classroom, and his surrender to those *centrifugal* forces led to repetitive, unaddressed off-task behavior as well as varying degrees of student confusion over classroom explorations of texts and concepts. Mr. Kincaid's tenuous grasp of the complexities of dialogic theory points to a significant implication drawn from this study: Teacher educators must endeavor to facilitate a clear and accurate understanding of pedagogical theory and the ways that theory might translate into practice with teacher candidates before they enter their placement classrooms.

Mr. Kincaid's developmental level of understanding concerning the ways that dialogic theory might translate into practice kept him from more quickly or more fully realizing his potential in the classroom. In their research of teachers newly trying out a particular philosophical stance in practice, Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991) described their findings concerning the teachers in their study who attempted to enact the pedagogy without fully comprehending the theory behind it: "We saw several instances of teachers trying to use a practice...but the attempts were weak and ineffectual. These were teachers who, when interviewed, did not express an understanding of the supporting theory" (p. 579). Learning to

enact any particular pedagogical stance while learning to teach is a difficult undertaking, but a robust grasp of the theoretical underpinnings of that stance and numerous opportunities to connect that stance to specific potential instructional practices would go far in preparing teacher candidates for successful classroom implementation. In the following section, I will discuss several potential solutions, derived from Mr. Kincaid's developmental understanding of dialogic theory in practice, that might be undertaken by teacher educators to minimize similar difficulties for future teacher candidates.

### **Bridging Theory and Practice**

Many of the misconceptions that Mr. Kincaid demonstrated in his attempts to enact dialogic classroom practice are similar to those demonstrated by other preservice and novice teachers with whom I have worked in their early efforts to turn their understandings of dialogic theory into active practice. For example, the conception of dialogic pedagogy as synonymous with classroom discussion is not an unusual one for these beginning teachers. The vast majority of teacher candidates I have mentored over the past four years also seem to begin their foundational understanding of dialogic theory in practice as "discussion-based teaching," and it is usually through repeated exposure to the core tenets of the theory, opportunities for extended practical implementation thereof, and constructive and reflective collaboration with more experienced peers that these new teachers come to more intimately understand the complex nature of true classroom dialogue and the ways that dialogic theory extends beyond a teacher's dedication of class time to whole-group discussion.

Mr. Kincaid's status as a novice dialogic practitioner also complicated his efforts to explore topics of difference in ways that invited multiple perspectives into the conversation. As demonstrated in chapter four, Mr. Kincaid often approached issues of diversity and social justice

in ways that foreclosed on divergent perspectives, presenting his own views authoritatively and monologically (Bakhtin, 1981), which inhibited productive dialogue with, between, and among his students. Even veteran practitioners of dialogic pedagogy (e.g., Fecho, 2011a; Fecho, Falter, & Hong, 2016) note the thoughtless ease at which they sometimes find themselves slipping into the monologic practice of sharing their own liberal viewpoints with their students rather than setting up a truly dialogic context for students to explore and respond to those viewpoints in personal ways. Such instruction, though not uncommon, occurs when teachers present their own beliefs as “authoritative discourse” that only supports “*passive* understanding,” which is, in reality, “no understanding at all” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 281, emphasis in original). From a dialogic perspective, this tendency makes sense given the ways in which individuals’ beliefs, cultural contexts, and experiences function as *centripetal* forces (Bakhtin, 1981) that shape the ways they communicate with others. An important suggestion for teacher educators, then, is to expressly address this common pitfall with teacher candidates before they embark on their first field placements and to foster their awareness of the ways that their own efforts to inspire dialogue might actually result in instructional practices that serve to shut down dialogue by privileging one perspective over others.

**Making time for explorations of practice.** Dedicating class time explicitly to thoughtful exploration of instructional techniques and classroom management skills would serve to help teacher candidates think in more concrete ways about how they might plan for or respond to classroom experiences in ways that align with their teaching philosophies. The investigation of case studies, for example, may provide teacher candidates who are not yet in their placement classrooms with “rich, contextualized descriptions of classrooms and behavioral problems” that arise in daily practice (Emmer and Stough, 2001, p. 110). This type of early exploration may



serve to better prepare teacher candidates for a more proactive, rather than reactive, approach to managing student behavior, growth, and learning during student teaching and in the early years of their career (Eisenman, Edwards, & Cushman, 2015).

One potential cause of this lack of dedicated instruction concerning practical application may be the significant amount of course time allotted to an extensive focus on theory without direct connections to reality-based practice (Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2006; Meyer & Sawyer, 2006; Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013). Liston, Whitcomb, and Borko (2006) explained that “the difficulties beginning teachers experience is that the curriculum in university-based teacher preparation programs does not prepare them for the specific tasks they must accomplish”; instead, “teacher preparation programs devote too much attention to theory and not enough to the practical skills of teaching” (p. 352). Theory and practice, however, can and should work in tandem to prepare teacher candidates to more readily meet the challenges of the classroom in constructive ways, offering both a concrete skill set from which to work as well as an ideological foundation for putting that skill set into meaningful practice.

Because dialogic instruction is not “a step-by-step, follow-the-numbers, connect the dots affair” that might “easily be placed in a teacher’s guide” (Fecho, 2011a, p. 58; p. 2), learning how to enact the finer points of this classroom approach is especially complicated. Further, because dictating the “correct” ways to bridge theory and practice runs contrary to the basic tenets of dialogism, offering teacher candidates concrete instructional or managerial methods becomes increasingly difficult. But as Smagorinsky, Rhym, and Moore (2013) noted, “when the theoretical orientation goes unaccompanied by a related set of pedagogical tools, it is sure to fade in the immediate rush and tumble of the school day” for preservice and early-career teachers who hope to translate their theoretical beliefs about teaching and learning into daily classroom

practice (p. 179). Creating and maintaining means of “campus-based ideals” that are “clearly related to concrete activity” (Smagorinsky, Rhym, & Moore, 2013, p. 179) in teacher preparation programs may benefit teacher educators who are working to facilitate this process with teacher candidates.

Certainly, endeavoring to create an all-inclusive instructional or classroom management curriculum, no matter the theoretical approach, would be an exercise in futility; as Fecho, Falter, and Hong (2016) aptly explained, “All teachers...are confronted daily by what seems like a million little questions that require a million little ad hoc and context-based decisions” (p. 20). However, the provision of time and attention devoted explicitly to exploring a variety of dialogic approaches and techniques to address potential classroom experiences, especially before students begin their field placements, could help to alleviate “some of the complexity and immediacy of the classroom that can create difficulties for novice learning” (Emmer and Stough, 2001, p. 110) during student teaching and the early-career years. Such focused efforts might help teacher candidates to more clearly understand how to align their theoretical beliefs with practical strategies, more thoroughly and effectively preparing them for entering the classroom.

**Collaboration between universities and field placements.** Creating stronger partnerships between university programs, field placement schools, and cooperating teachers is another foundational means of more seamlessly aiding teacher candidates to translate theoretical learning into classroom practice on their way to becoming independent dialogic educators. The cooperating teachers who host and mentor teacher candidates during their field experiences are among the greatest influences in the education of student teachers (Lafferty, 2018). However, as Lafferty (2018) explained, “Universities rely on classroom teachers serving as teacher educators yet do not prepare them for that role” (p. 74). The quality of teacher candidates’ experiences in

the field is often dependent on their cooperating teachers' personal philosophies and approaches to mentoring. According to Giebelhaus and Bowman (2002), ensuring that cooperating teachers receive "comprehensive training to effectively assist in the learning of their student teachers" has demonstrated a potential to make "a significant difference in the product that results—the demonstration of effective teaching skills by student teachers" (p. 253). This fact pinpoints another implication for teacher educators: Careful and purposeful selection and preparation of cooperating teachers is necessary to more fully ensure a student teaching environment conducive to teacher candidates' learning about how to enact a dialogic stance in their classroom practice.

As Fecho, Price, and Read (2004) lamented, "preservice teachers...have too few role models to follow" in order to learn how to practice teaching from a non-traditional stance (p. 264). Further, because dialogic pedagogy is an "inherently complex educational practice" (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013, p. 129), even being placed in a field experience classroom with a mentor teacher who subscribes to the theoretical and practical facets of dialogic pedagogy may fall short of providing teacher candidates with a sufficient grasp of how to connect theory and practice; as Jaspers, Meijer, Prins, and Wubbels (2014) pointed out, cooperating teachers "rarely explain why they teach the way they teach" (p. 114). Creating partnerships between the university's teacher education program and the schools in which student teachers will be placed for field experiences would offer the possibility of maintaining a pool of dedicated mentor teachers with and from whom teacher candidates can work and learn as they co-construct their understandings of how to translate their theoretical beliefs into classroom practice. As Giebelhaus and Bowman (2002) noted, "appropriate knowledge and training in the philosophy and goals of the teacher preparation program, in the basic principles and practices of effective mentoring and supervision, and in a framework of effective teaching practice" on the part of

cooperating teachers leads to more effective mentoring and demonstrations of more effective teaching from student teachers (p. 253). Recruitment of cooperating teachers who are willing and able to dedicate themselves to extensive training in their role as teacher educators in the field would make great strides to connect student teachers with mentor teachers who can more efficiently and effectively help them to realize their pedagogical goals.

### **Continued University Support**

As noted in chapter four, Mr. Kincaid seemed to see me not just as a researcher, but as a mentor on whom he could rely for ideas, materials, and general support. In a spontaneous moment during our final collaborative planning meeting for the short story unit, Mr. Kincaid told me, “I don’t know what I’m gonna do when you leave” (Planning Session 3, 20 September). He also spoke repeatedly throughout our work together about the similar ways that he had relied on his mentor teacher—who had also served as his cooperating teacher for his first field experience—since he had begun teaching at the middle school the previous year. Such data points suggest that although Mr. Kincaid demonstrated a noteworthy degree of skill and success in his early enactment of his teaching philosophy and generally appeared confident in his practice, he would likely have benefited from more extensive support from more experienced peers throughout his transition from teacher candidate to independent, novice dialogic practitioner.

Reflecting upon the understanding that was generated during the course of this study that Mr. Kincaid’s expected struggles as a novice teacher were being complicated by his efforts to simultaneously enact a dialogic pedagogical stance, paired with reflections on the ways that he appeared to both need and appreciate the extended mentoring that my presence offered him throughout our collaboration, suggested the importance and utility of continued university

support for teacher candidates as they move into their subsequent roles as novice teachers. Extending the mentorship of university personnel past the university program and into the first few years of teacher candidates' real-world practice could serve to help them find their pedagogical footing and maintain their philosophical beliefs even in the face of opposing viewpoints potentially held by coworkers and school systems. Feiman-Nemser (2001) and Fecho (2000) both advocated for continued university support past teacher candidate graduation and into the first few years of novice teachers' careers in order to construct a bridge between theoretical learning and continued implementation of that learning beyond the attempts made during student teaching to translate understandings of theory into early practice.

The first few years of teaching are often referred to as a “sink or swim” experience (e.g., Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). According to Fantilli and McDougall (2009), “Beginning teachers in difficult situations often feel like failures. Without adequate supports, only the strongest and most determined teachers succeed” (p. 814). Mr. Kincaid’s periodic self-deprecating comments about his own practice—for example, “My kids are gonna learn nothing. It’s so embarrassing. Don’t judge me” (Observation Notes, 18 September)—demonstrated that he was not immune to these expected feelings of ineptitude. It is crucial during the formative early-career years that novice teachers are provided with some form of flotation device in order to keep their heads above water while they learn to navigate all of the complex features of the classroom and school system in which they find themselves employed. In order to help mitigate these expected challenges, some school systems provide new teachers with a formal induction program as a supportive means of acclimation to the school setting. The most useful components of induction programs, including the assignment of a mentor from the same subject area and dedicated time for collaboration between novices and their mentors, have been

shown to help keep new teachers from leaving the profession as well as helping them to more effectively hone their craft (e.g., Ingersoll, 2012; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

However, even though induction programs are more widespread now than ever (Ingersoll, 2012), the existence of an induction program at any given school “does not mean that the novice is receiving the assistance that they really need” (Greenlee & DeDeugd, 2002, p. 72) to find their footing as teachers and put the theoretical knowledge they gained in their teacher preparation programs into practice in their classrooms. Furthermore, mentoring programs designed for novice teachers often serve as reinforcement for “traditional norms and practices rather than promoting more powerful teaching” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1031). Instead, Fecho (2000) asserted that as teacher educators, “we need to think beyond the traditional structures of teacher education and consider ways of working with young teachers” through supplemental means to help to bridge their teacher education programs with their first few years in the classroom (p. 196). As Smith (2011) noted, such bridges could support novice teachers by providing them with a dedicated mentor with teaching experience as well as extensive knowledge about pedagogical theory, which would offer novice teachers “an outside perspective when needed” as well as extra support for early-career teachers attempting to “teach against the grain” (p. 326). Extending the mentoring phase that novice teachers experienced throughout their teacher preparation programs from instructors and supervisors, or what Wetzel, Hoffman, Roach, and Russell (2018) referred to as “scaffolding by like-minded mentor teachers” (p. 89), may serve not only to guide novice teachers like Mr. Kincaid into successful instruction in their early teaching endeavors, but also to support them in working to maintain their theoretical beliefs about teaching and learning and to put those beliefs into practice amid colleagues who may adhere to more traditional forms of instruction in their own classrooms.

### **A Key Suggestion for Future Research**

Reflecting upon the lessons I learned from this research project about what happens when a novice teacher seeks to implement a powerful, yet admittedly complex, pedagogical stance, I see significant value in building upon this study to better inform the field of teacher education while also continuing to extend the ways in which Bakhtin's (1981) work is being applied to the sphere of education. This study provides significant insight into one novice teacher's practice that teacher educators can draw upon to make conceptual inferences (Stewart, 2011) that would inform their own efforts to prepare effective practitioners of student-centered, inquiry-based pedagogies. A new iteration of this study in which student teachers' experiences are explored, documented, and analyzed would offer deeper understanding into the affordances and constraints of the student teaching experience itself and the ways that the process of student teaching functions to bridge theory and practice. Undertaking research with student teachers would make it possible to explore their unique experiences and to amplify their voices in order to better inform and equip teacher educators in their efforts to meet teacher candidates' developmental needs as emerging practitioners of any particular pedagogical stance.

Such research would be an important addition to the field of teacher education because student teaching is a complex collection of experiences about which the field of teacher preparation needs to be better informed. Anderson and Stillman (2011) referred to student teaching as the "black box" of teacher preparation programs, implying that although teacher educators have control over and knowledge about the preparations made prior to student teaching and the outcomes for teacher candidates after completing their student teaching experiences, little is thoroughly understood about how and what preservice teachers learn and experience within the confines of their student teaching field placements (p. 446).

Certainly, such a study would not be without its challenges. This type of research would likely be both time- and labor-intensive, requiring researchers and student teachers who would be willing and able to devote the extended efforts necessary to participate in lengthy periods of classroom observation, interviews, and other methods of data generation. It should also be noted that student teachers choosing to collaborate with researchers in such an undertaking would be voluntarily doing so during what is, by its very nature, one of the most difficult and exhausting experiences in their journey towards teacherhood. However, such research, while undoubtedly demanding in terms of time and energy on the part of both researchers and participants, could potentially offer extra support for student teachers who elect to participate by providing them with opportunities for more extensive mentoring and space for reflection than is usually afforded to preservice teachers during their student teaching semesters.

Careful attention to the design of the study would be necessary to ensure that the collaborative activities between and among researchers, student teachers, and cooperating teachers did not interfere with the already-extensive duties that comprise the student teaching experience. This factor might be mitigated by recruiting cooperating teachers, who would already be present in the placement classroom on a daily basis and are already expecting to act as mentors for their student teachers, to function as co-researchers alongside university personnel. Further, the basic difficulties inherent in such a study might be ameliorated by starting small, with a single case study of a single student teacher and his or her cooperating teacher, and later built upon to incorporate the experiences of multiple student teachers and multiple cooperating teachers using this initial, small-scale case study as a model by which the process of subsequent studies might be streamlined.



Direct and dedicated study of student teachers in their field placement classrooms regarding the ways that they tangibly learn to apply their theoretical philosophies and the resultant effects of those applications on their evolution into novice practitioners could offer useful insights for teacher educators who are committed to instructing and mentoring teacher candidates in theoretical and practical pedagogy. According to Cross and Dunn (2016), “Despite the importance placed on student teaching internships, scholars in the field continue to point out that student teaching has a limited research base” (p. 71). Research with student teachers—the most novice of all teachers—who are still in the earliest stages of their skill-building as dialogic planners and instructors could potentially generate new understandings about ways that teacher preparation programs might build on or adjust their existing approaches in order to more effectively prepare teacher candidates not only for student teaching, but for their first few years in their own classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

The understandings generated by this research project suggest that novice teachers attempting to enact a dialogic classroom stance have the capacity to create unique opportunities to foster learning and growth in students, aiding them to enter larger cultural conversations concerning themselves, each other, the literature they study, and the world around them, and helping them to co-create understandings of each of these real-world elements and how they work together as a whole. However, in order to do this successfully, novice teachers may need more and different types of support throughout their teacher preparation programs and into their early years in their own classrooms than they are commonly offered currently.

Expanded opportunities for support of teacher candidates might come in a multitude of forms. The support offered during field placements could be amplified by more extensive

collaboration with fellow teacher candidates, including structured time for problem posing and lateral mentoring with and from peers who are also learning to become dialogic educators. Recruitment and training of cooperating teachers to more efficiently and effectively mentor students in philosophically-based approaches to classroom practice could also serve as an expanded means of support for teacher candidates as they learn to translate theory into practice. Finally, university personnel might consider extending the support they offer teacher candidates during their educational careers into the early years of their practice in order to more effectively scaffold the experiences of novice teachers in the process of learning how to teach.

Data from this study also suggested that there is a need for more extensive opportunities to learn the intricacies of how dialogic theory can be carried out in actual practice before beginning field placements wherein teacher candidates will be expected to make these concrete connections for themselves on the fly. Because misinterpretation of pedagogical theory carries potential risks that may thwart the fulfillment of instructional goals, working to ensure teacher candidates' thorough and accurate grasp of the theoretical underpinnings that comprise a dialogic pedagogy and explicit attention to explorations of how those underpinnings might translate to classroom practice both before and during the student teaching semester may more fully ensure successful enactment in the early years of teaching.

Learning to navigate all of the complexities of a career in education is difficult to say the least. According to Wetzel, Hoffman, Roach, and Russell (2018), "the first years of teaching can be overwhelming to new teachers and, in the absence of preparation on how to engage in reflective practices, lead them to abandon the preservice preparation and succumb to context and conform" (p. 106). Professionals working in teacher education can help to mitigate these early-career struggles by offering teacher candidates both theoretical and practical experiences

intended to prepare them for balancing the realities of a dialogic classroom. Dedicating extensive focus to the connections between theory and strategy, fostering meaningful dialogue between and among peers and colleagues, and offering concrete opportunities to collaborate with and observe others who are themselves learning to enact a similar pedagogical stance in the classroom might help teacher candidates to more readily develop into better and more effective teachers at the start of their careers.

Teachers like Mr. Kincaid, who ambitiously strive to empower, support, engage, and guide students towards becoming agents of change in the world—teachers who “live for” the moments when students demonstrate their capacity not only to understand concepts, but to understand other points of view (Interview 2, 7 October, 186)—are not effective simply because of their ambition. In fact, the data from this study suggests that Mr. Kincaid’s dialogic ambition sometimes directly complicated his instructional practice. The understandings generated from this study make it clear that further support is necessary for Mr. Kincaid and others in his position to fully realize the worthy pedagogical goals engendered by his dialogic teaching philosophy. Teacher educators can provide that necessary support through the creation and provision of dedicated space for teacher candidates and novice teachers to learn and grow as dialogic practitioners, both during their teacher preparation programs and into their first years of practice. Such support offers the potential to generate more effective dialogic practice in more classrooms and more schools. If we, as teacher educators, believe in the power of education to create a more democratic society, then we have the unique opportunity and responsibility to carefully guide teacher candidates on their journey towards the successful enactment of pedagogical practices in their field placements and early-career classrooms that will enable and empower them—and, by extension, their students—to see, name, and change the world.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Protocols

(Altered as appropriate based on ongoing data generation and analysis)

#### **Baseline Interview Questions:**

- How long have you been teaching? What courses have you taught? What courses are you currently teaching?
- Why do you teach English?
- Can you tell me what a typical day in your classroom might look like?
- How do you choose classroom texts?
- Do you have a lesson plan that you have created that we can look at together? Can you tell me about your lesson-planning process? In what ways have you found success in your approach? In what ways have you struggled?
- Are you familiar with the concept of dialogic pedagogy? If so, could you explain how you use this approach in your classroom?
- Can you tell me about a lesson or unit where you've used the concept of dialogic pedagogy?
- Tell me about a time when you taught with a focus on gender and sexuality.
- Tell me about a time when you taught with a focus on race.
- Tell me about a time when you taught with a focus on social class.
- What is your comfort level in broaching these subjects with your students? Where have you felt successful in these endeavors? Where have you struggled?

### **Reflective Journal Questions (sent via email every two weeks)**

- How do you feel after teaching this segment of the short story unit?
- What did it look like when aspects of your planning and implementation of this segment of the unit worked especially well? Why?
- What did it look like when aspects of your planning and implementation of this segment of the unit were particularly difficult? Why?
- If you were to repeat this segment of the unit in the future, what would you keep the same? What would you change? Why?
- What about taking a dialogical approach to these texts and topics did you feel comfortable with? What worked well from a dialogical standpoint? Why?
- What about taking a dialogical approach to these texts and topics did you feel less comfortable with? What was difficult or unsuccessful in taking a dialogical approach? Why?
- What did you notice about how students responded to this segment of the unit, either in class or in writing or other assigned work?

### **Final Interview Questions**

- Now that you have finished teaching the lessons we planned together, what are your overall impressions of the experience?
- If you were to implement these units into your future teaching, what portions of your plans would you keep? Which would you change? Why?
- Did you learn anything new about teaching for social justice or dialogic pedagogy from this experience?